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Business Alignment Strategies for Middle East Real Estate Construction Projects

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Ali Chiri

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Business Alignment Strategies for Middle East Real Estate Construction Projects

by

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MBA, University of Manchester, 2011

BS, BAU, 1997

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

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Abstract

In the Middle East real estate industry, 46% of projects fail in terms of strategic dimensions. Based on the dynamic capabilities approach and contingency approach, the purpose of this exploratory multiple case study was to identify the successful strategies project leaders used to improve the alignment of projects with business strategy. Data were collected from 7 Skype semistructured interviews with real estate construction project leaders from 3 real estate organizations ranked among the top 10 in the Middle East. Public organizational documents were used for methodological triangulation. A thematic coding approach was adopted following a nonlinear sequential process that involved four stages: (a) reading and preparing the collected data, (b) coding, (c) abstracting the codes into conceptual categories, and (d) identifying the themes' relationships and patterns and creating a thematic map. The 4 themes identified were the (a) flow of strategy, (b) governance of projects during the development phase, (c) governance of projects during the delivery phase, and (d) measurement of project performance and strategic success. The results confirmed the idiosyncratic nature of the selected contexts and the need to increase some dynamic capabilities' dimensions. The contribution of this study to positive social change includes improved community lifestyle and environmental quality.

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Dedication

To dad; your soul was always there to protect and inspire me...

To mom; you are always keeping me in your prayers and care...

To Racha; no words could describe you, my other half...

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I am ever grateful for the encouragement, support, and guidance from my research committee. Special thanks to Dr. Charlotte Carlstrom, the committee chairperson; you were always there to provide me extensive professional guidance and taught me a great deal about research. Thanks to the second committee member, Dr. Jorge Gaytan, and the university research reviewer, Dr. Scott Burrus, for the good care and significant observations that contributed to the best results of my research. Also, I appreciate and thank Dr. Gail Ferreira for her involvement during the proposal stage.

Nobody was more important to me in the pursuit of this research than my great small family. I wish to thank my loving, supporting, and sacrificing wife Racha; you are the best grace that God has given to me. To the bouquet of my life, Hossein, Reine, and Abdallah; I wish you a prosperous life full of achievements more than what your mom and dad did. Praise to God, all greatness belongs to Him in the heavens and earth, He is Almighty, the All Wise.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Business leaders initiate projects to deliver value for their organizations (Crawford, 2014). However, the successful fulfillment of projects does not necessarily mean achieving the desired business outputs (Vuori, Mutka, Aaltonen, & Artto, 2013). There is a growing interest among scholars and practitioners regarding the importance of linking project outcomes with the business strategy as a prerequisite for project success (Mir & Pinnington, 2014). Leaders interested in this linkage are continuously seeking new ways to manage projects and judge project success using strategies and standards beyond the management of triple constraints of cost, time, and scope (Pitsis, Sankaran, Gudergan, & Clegg, 2014). Functional leaders, such as real estate construction (REC) project leaders, should consider the strategic business priorities (Pinto & Winch, 2015); hence, there is a requirement for practitioners to rethink the implementation of project management exceeding the focus on efficiency, planning, and control of organizational resources (Budayan, Dikmen, & Birgonul, 2014).

Scholars have noted the importance of the link between the value of project's output and business strategy; however, there is still a misunderstanding about this process in the construction industry (Budayan et al., 2014). In this qualitative study, I explored the successful strategies REC project leaders used to improve the alignment of projects with business strategy.

Section 1 begins with an introduction to the background of the problem, the problem and the purpose statement, and the nature and significance of the study. I also present the research and interview questions, as well as the conceptual framework. I also

include the definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and a review of the literature.

Background of the Problem

Many scholars attributed the origin of the projects' problem in general to the understanding that project management does not correspond to the current practice of business strategy (Young, Young, Jordan, & O'Connor, 2012). According to the Pulse of the Profession 2016 report, the strategic initiative failure reached 38% and the economic cost of poor strategy implementation accounted for 12.2 % of the amount spent on projects (Project Management Institute, 2017). Brookes (2014) and Hellström, Ruuska, Wikström, and Jåfs (2013) highlighted that the project failure rates have been high during the past decades. Failures of REC projects affect the competitiveness of organizations, environment, and the general welfare of the community served by these projects (Hjelmbrekke, Hansen, & Lohne, 2015).

Project management conceptual base of models and methodologies remained relatively static despite the increased importance of projects (Svejvig & Andersen, 2015). Traditionally, practitioners used the triple constraints of time, cost, and quality to measure project success; however, project success measures should also include the extent of alignment between projects and business strategies (Awwal, 2014). This requirement of alignment is intense in REC projects due to their volatile and complex nature, which requires appropriate skills of project leaders and a systematic approach to realizing the best project value and outcomes (Mok, Shen, & Yang, 2015). The alignment of complex projects, such as the REC projects, with business strategy is a

driver for strategic project success (Pitsis et al., 2014); hence, it is significant to explore the successful strategies that project leaders used to improve the alignment of REC projects with business strategy.

Problem Statement

Some real estate organizations develop projects without a strong link to organizational goals and business strategy (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015). Strategic dimensions accounted for 46% of projects' failure in the real estate industry in the Middle East (Parker, Parsons, & Isharyanto, 2015). The general business problem is that organizations that adopt only traditional project management practices to develop projects lack alignment between projects and business strategy, which affects the organizations' performance and competitiveness. The specific business problem is that some real estate construction project leaders lack strategies to improve the alignment of projects with business strategy.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the successful strategies real estate construction project leaders used to improve the alignment of projects with business strategy. The population included seven REC project leaders, from three of the top 10 successful real estate organizations (REOs) in the Middle East, who have completed successful projects for their organizations. The REC project leaders possess decision-making authorities and lead the development and management processes of REC projects from inception until closing. The alignment strategies that REC project leaders utilize may increase the performance and competitiveness of their

organizations. This study may result in positive social change by improving the community lifestyle and environmental quality; business leaders of successful REOs tend to use the economic cost savings in socially responsible investments (Khan, Muttakin, & Siddiqui, 2013; Scholtens & Sievänen, 2013).

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative approach for this study. Consistent with Guercini (2014), the qualitative method was suitable because the focus of this study was to explore the participants' description of the actual strategies they used to improve the alignment of REC projects with business strategy. Qualitative researchers explore in-depth phenomena through participants' experiences (Yilmaz, 2013). Researchers adopt a quantitative methodology to measure and analyze relationships and differences among variables based on priori theories (Yilmaz, 2013). The quantitative and mixed method inquiries were not appropriate because I did not seek to examine relationships or differences among variables.

An exploratory multiple case study was appropriate for this research, as the focal point was to explore the processes and mechanisms through which the phenomenon was taking place, in line with the concept of Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, and Robertson (2013). Consistent with Yin (2014), I used a multiple case study design in line with the newness of the explored topic, the exploratory nature of the research question, and the complexity of the phenomenon of alignment between REC projects and business strategy in the three selected cases. Multiple case studies are comparative and constitute a type of evaluative strategy, unlike the single case study (Yin, 2014).

I considered ethnographic, narrative, and phenomenological designs for this study. Ethnographic design is associated with thorough observations exploring the shared patterns of beliefs, language, and behavior within a cultural group (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). In narrative designs, researchers focus on the detailed stories or life experiences of a single event or a series of events for a small number of individuals (Petty et al., 2012). Phenomenological researchers seek to describe the experienced phenomenon from the participants' perspectives (Petty et al., 2012). Ethnographic, narrative, and phenomenological designs were not suitable for this study as the purpose was not to examine (a) the behavior within a cultural group, (b) detailed events, or (c) the essence of experiencing the phenomenon.

Research Question

The following research question served as the guiding element for exploring the specific business problem related to the alignment of REC projects with business strategy: What strategies do REC project leaders use to improve the alignment of REC projects with business strategy?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to align real estate construction projects with your business strategy?
2. What are the organizational key aspects contributing to the alignment of real estate construction projects with business strategies?
3. What are the project management key aspects contributing to the alignment of real estate construction projects with business strategies?

4. How is the concept of alignment shared and communicated throughout the organization?
5. How would you describe the role of real estate construction project leaders in aligning your project with business strategy?
6. What are the key challenges associated with aligning real estate construction projects with business strategy, and how have the challenges been addressed?
7. When alignment fails, what are the common causes?
8. What are other elements that facilitate achieving strategic real estate construction project success?

Conceptual Framework

I used two concepts to frame this study: the dynamic capabilities (DC) model and the contingency approach (CA). Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) founded DC based on the belief that organizations need to systematically anticipate changes and react accordingly in a changing environment. The theorists rooted DC in the resource-based view and extended the concept to emphasize organizational capabilities (Teece et al., 1997). The three dimensions of DC are: (a) sensing, which builds on organizational processes and individual capacities; (b) seizing, or the selection of projects, business models, decision-making protocols, and boundaries; and (c) reconfiguration, which is related to structure, governance, and knowledge management (Eriksson, 2014). Management could use project management (PM) as a DC to align projects with business strategy (Gardiner, 2014). The application of DC includes the internal alignment

between strategy and the organizational structure to achieve competitiveness (Wilden, Gudergan, Nielsen, & Lings, 2013).

The pivotal pioneers of CA, Burns and Stalker (1961), developed CA based on the assumption that organizational structures are not equally effective under different conditions and there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. Researchers use CA to explore the common principles of alignment between two or more organizational issues such as strategies, processes, and structures that affect organizational outcomes (Duncan, 1972). According to Joslin and Müller (2016), the majority of PM studies employed the CA developed by Drazin and Van de Ven (1985). Drazin and Van de Ven developed three different conceptual alignment approaches namely selection, interaction, and systems. The application of CA includes (a) the selection of appropriate PM methods linked to project success, (b) project procedures customized to context, (c) projects with minor and major impacts, (d) leadership styles per project type, and (e) innovation types in business (Joslin & Müller, 2016).

Operational Definitions

Dynamic Capabilities: Dynamic capabilities are the organizational and strategic routines by which business leaders gain, reconfigure, integrate, and release the organizational ordinary capabilities and resources to create a market and match the environmental and economic change (Daniel, Ward, & Franken, 2014).

Program Management: Program management refers to the management of multiple related projects that run in parallel, managed, and controlled in a way to obtain benefits that are not available from managing them individually (Rijke et al., 2014).

Project Governance: Project governance means the higher-level structure in which business leaders set the organizational processes, PM tools, and decision-making models to support the successful delivery of projects (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014).

Project Leader: Project leader is the person responsible for achieving the projects' desired outcomes by bearing the ultimate responsibility for leading and delivering the project (Redick, Reyna, Schaffer, & Toomey, 2014).

Project Management: Project management refers to the processes that project leaders establish to plan, organize, secure, and manage the organizational resources to achieve a successful completion of projects (Fiala, Arlt, & Arltova, 2014).

Project Management Office (PMO): Project management office is an organization layer that business leaders employ to standardize the project, program, and portfolio governance processes and facilitate the methodologies, techniques, tools, sharing of resources, and education and training (Ko, Park, & Kim, 2015).

Project Portfolio Management (PPM): Project portfolio management is a high-level capability in which managers apply a set of tools, techniques, skills, and knowledge, and allocate resources to a collection of programs and projects, or project portfolios, to meet or exceed the desired organization strategy and maximize the success of organizations (Petro & Gardiner, 2015).

Project Strategy: Project strategy is a plan involving the characteristics of the parent organization strategy, several strong stakeholders' views, and the project's specific strategic focus (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014).

Real Estate Construction Project: The preconstruction and the construction phases of mega real estate projects: the large-scale investment projects with budgets over US\$150 million involving a large geographical coverage, huge number of participants, extensive work, and having significant social and economic impact (Mok et al., 2015).

Strategic Alignment: Strategic alignment is the agreement between corporate, business, and functional levels concerning the organizational main goals and the means to achieve them (Alsudiri, Al-Karaghoul, & Eldabi, 2013).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

In this section, I present clear definitions of all assumptions, limitations, delimitations. I clarify these definitions to allow readers to understand my interpretation of the data as advised by Morse and McEvoy (2014). Assumptions, according to Yin (2014), are accepted but not verified facts or truths. While researchers introduce limitations as possible weaknesses and research gaps, defining the delimitation of the multiple case study is about clarifying the boundaries of the explored cases (Yin, 2014).

Assumptions

I had three assumptions regarding this study. I assumed a post-positivist worldview; post-positivists believe that causes determine effects or outcomes (Meehan, 2015). This worldview may imply that generalization is the researcher's aim behind conducting a study (Wahyuni, 2012). Despite generalization, my aim was to transfer the findings relying on Yin's (2014) approach to multiple case study, which is the most cited work for postpositive assumptions in the case study research (Boblin et al., 2013). My second assumption was that the selected participants had a clear rationale and fulfill a

specific purpose related to the researched phenomenon. Study participants shall include the most knowledgeable personnel that possess rich information related to the phenomenon (Morse & McEvoy, 2014; Vohra, 2014). I also assumed that I precisely defined the studied contexts to find answers to the research questions. Case study researchers establish a precise definition of the selected cases (Yin, 2014). I mitigated this risk the last two assumptions by relying on my experience in the real estate industry and my extensive network of mediators in the Middle East.

Limitations

This study included three limitations. Skype semistructured interviews were the main data collection method; hence, the first limitation was access to the Internet. Participants may refuse to contribute to the study due to their Internet and Skype illiteracy (Seitz, 2016). However, participants were professionals who depend on the technology in their day-to-day activities, which may have reduced the selection bias as it was described by Kristensen and Ravn (2015), and Malone, Nicholl, and Tracey (2014).

The second limitation was that the interview questions may not have covered the complete concepts related to the explored phenomenon of strategic alignment. To mitigate this limitation, I relied on the expert review of my research committee members in validating the relevance of the interview questions, which is an efficient practice to ensure the validity of a qualitative inquiry as advised by Anney (2014) and Buers et al. (2014).

The third limitation was subjectivity; I used a triangulation process and reflexive journals to reduce the subjectivity in this study. While using triangulation could mitigate

the risk of participants' subjectivity (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014), using reflexive journals helps to bracket the preconceptions of the researcher (Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

Delimitations

There were four delimitations in this study. One was that the REOs were only in the Middle East. I also eliminated from this study the impact of extreme external conditions such as environmental sustainability, national economy and culture, and political contingencies. I explored the phenomenon of alignment during the preconstruction and the construction phases without addressing other phases of real estate development such as the land acquisition, feasibility study, and operation. I relied on the peer-reviewed research published in specialty journals within 5 years of conducting this study.

Significance of the Study

Project management research has evolved from a technical perspective to an organizational perspective (Pollack & Adler, 2015). Scholars explore the alignment between different organizational levels to enable the design of specific actions and improve the alignment of projects with business strategies (Alsudiri et al., 2013). Researchers exploring contemporary and innovative PM practices can identify the nature of project structures, processes, and social relations that lead to success (Florice, Bonneau, Aubry, & Sergi, 2014).

In addition to the iron triangle--time, cost, and quality--and operational frameworks, REC project leaders can be better equipped if they consider projects strategic dimensions (Cullen & Parker, 2015). This study could be significant to

organizational leaders and practitioners because the results could identify strategies that can increase the likelihood of strategic project success; refocusing project leaders' attention from tools to strategic thinking could increase their organizations' performance and competitiveness (Patanakul & Shenhar, 2012). Emphasizing the significance of alignment to organizational leaders could motivate leaders to support the process of strategic PM and improve the likelihood of strategic project success (Alsudiri et al., 2013).

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings from this study could contribute to successful strategies that can increase REC projects' success rates. Organizations that invest in improving the maturity level in PM have increased their business value (Spalek, 2014). The benefits of successful REC projects include improving the organizational performance and competitiveness by improving systems' effectiveness and efficiency (Fahri, Biesenthal, Pollack, & Sankaran, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2014). Aligning the projects with business strategy has produced a positive effect on organizational performance (Alsudiri et al., 2013).

Implications for Social Change

Real estate construction project success criteria include monetary and materialized aspects and nonmonetary facets such as benefits to the community (Locatelli, Mancini, & Romano, 2014). Real estate construction projects are central elements for effecting social change (Barthel & Vignal, 2014; Jaafar, Nuruddin, & Syed Abu Bakar, 2014); REC projects attract public attention due to their potential for

significantly affecting communities and the environment (Fahri et al., 2015; Kardes, Ozturk, Cavusgil, & Cavusgil, 2013; Othman, 2013; Tan, 2015). Organizational leaders can discover PM's strategies to increase the success rate of REC projects and to positively affect both the organization's internal stakeholders and communities (Alsudiri et al., 2013; Fahri et al., 2015). Better-governed organizations demonstrate increased social responsibility (Sharma & Good, 2013).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

I reviewed literature related to the concepts of alignment between projects and business strategies. I developed the literature review from a variety of databases including (a) Google Scholar linked to Walden University Library, (b) ProQuest Central, (c) Sage Premier. I also searched professional journals including the International Journal of Project Management and the Project Management Institute.

Project management is a science that is not yet settled to the extent that one formula fits all (Pinto & Winch, 2015). The literature review included concepts that, based on my experience in the field, I considered important for the projects' strategic alignment phenomenon. The concepts included the DC and CA conceptual frameworks in addition to (a) alignment, (b) competitive advantage, (c) project, (d) project governance, (e) project, program, and portfolio management (PPPM), (f) PMO, (g) project success, (h) project leadership, (i) strategy, and (j) project strategy. In addition to these focus areas, I used other keywords for scanning the body of literature: *rethinking project management, project value, project team, construction projects, project stakeholders, project efficiency, project effectiveness, complex projects, mega projects,*

project management social impact, project management best practices, and project management maturity.

I located 214 sources; 196 (91.6%) were published within 5 years of the completion date of this study, 190 (88.8%) were peer-reviewed and published within 5 years of the study's completion date. The literature review section contained 104 peer-reviewed journal articles, of which 91 (87.5%) are within five years of the anticipated graduation date of December 2017. More than 85% of the sources were peer-reviewed and published within five years of the Chief Academic Officer approval of this study.

Alignment Conceptual Frameworks

Applying the strategic management theories to PM is possible based on their current feasibility in the strategy management field (Drouin & Jugdev, 2013). While Drouin and Jugdev stated that researchers could adopt several strategic management theories to PM, Parker et al. (2015) indicated the need to combine strategic management theories to improve the success of projects.

I used the DCs model and the CA to frame this study. Strategic management scholars stated that DCs are necessary and important parts of strategic alignment (Rashidirad, Soltani, & Syed, 2013). In addition, strategic alignment is rooted in the modern variations of contingency theory where the strategy is a contingent factor that must align with the organization's internal and external context (Rashidirad et al., 2013).

Dynamic capabilities. As an extension to the resource-based view, Teece et al. (1997) introduced the DC to explain how leaders could sustain their organizations' strategic advantages by the continuous modification of the organizations' resource base

to adapt to dynamic conditions (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014; Medina & Medina, 2015; Nieves & Haller, 2014). Business leaders appreciate the use of resource-based view in their management aspects; the leaders focus on the tangible and intangible resources, capability, and interior structure of the organization (Szymaniec-Mlicka, 2014). In addition to the internal factors of the resource-based view, DC refers to external factors so that leaders can respond to a rapidly changing environment (Drouin & Jugdev, 2013). The DC approach complements the resource-based view; using both concepts allows for changing of processes within organizations (Gajendran, Brewer, Gudergan, & Sankaran, 2013).

Resources and capabilities are interrelated; while the execution of the latter requires certain resources, the effective use of the former depends on certain capabilities (Daniel et al., 2014). The DC approach is an appropriate lens for business leaders to understand and process the change of the underlying organizational capabilities and resources (Daniel et al., 2014). Gardiner (2014) extended this concept and argued that the significance of DC resides in the potential to change routines, resources, and competences (Gardiner, 2014). The DC entail identifiable and specific processes that leaders use when attempting to reconfigure, integrate, gain, and release resources (Nieves & Haller, 2014). Business leaders employ DC to improve the organizational performance, efficiency, effectiveness, speed, and response to environmental changes (Wilden et al., 2013).

Sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring are the three dimensions of DC. Sensing is the process of exploring the environment for threats and opportunities across

technologies and markets; seizing involves the determination and implementation of the opportunities and investments that business leaders expect to succeed; and reconfiguring implies the adjustment of the organizations' operating capabilities, internal resources, and external resources to achieve and sustain the organizations' competitive advantage (Teece et al., 1997). While business leaders require these strategic elements to enable the realignment of the operational capabilities and organizational resources to match changes in the environment (Gajendran et al., 2013), Rashidirad et al. (2013) found that learning, integrating, and coordinating are also important for this alignment process. Learning is the ability of organizations to address the sensed or identified opportunities through proposing new service or product; integrating is the ability of organizations to acquire new knowledge from external resources and integrate this knowledge into new operational capabilities; and coordinating is the organizational ability to govern, orchestrate, and coordinate the resources, tasks, and activities, into the new operational capabilities (Rashidirad et al., 2013).

Over time, DC are the renewal components that connect (a) people management practices; (b) intellectual capital including human, social, and organizational capital; and (c) knowledge management including knowledge transfer, creation, and integration (Medina & Medina, 2015). Hence, to operationalize, utilize, and increase the value of DCs, business leaders must consider the knowledge management activities (Gardiner, 2014). In addition, to enable the development of DC, Gajendran et al. (2013) argued that business leaders need to maintain two routines, cognitive and organizational routines. While cognitive routines include both steady-state and automatic activities,

organizational routines compromise the activities that leaders use to transform the cognitive objectives into organizational actions (Gajendran et al., 2013).

The DCs are the higher order and ultimate organizations' capacities that leader use to obtain long-term value-creation (Killen & Hunt, 2013; Nieves & Haller, 2014; Rashidirad et al., 2013). Daniel et al. (2014), Gardiner (2014), and Killen and Hunt (2013) identified three orders of DCs ascending from ordinary to first-order to second-order; each level of capabilities is a changing agent that influences the consequent lower level. Gardiner (2014) suggested extending the application of DC in project, program, and portfolio management research. While PPPM is an example of first-order capabilities, the adaptation of PPPM is an example of second-order capabilities. Many project leaders use DC for allocating resources and considering the value of the organization's capabilities while seeking alignment with strategy and organization's competitive advantages (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014; Rashidirad et al., 2013).

Contingency approach. Contingency theorists stress the significance of idiosyncratic organizational structures that depend on their context (Joslin & Müller, 2015; Wadongo & Abdel-Kader, 2014). Based on this concept of no "one-size-fits-all," CA has evolved since the publication of the seminal work by Burns and Stalker (1961). A significant number of PM researchers employed the CA developed by Drazin and Van de Ven (1985), who established three conceptual alignment approaches, namely: (a) selection, assuming the context relates to structure; (b) interaction, or the effect of structure and context on performance, and (c) systems, addressing the many contextual factors, performance criteria, and structural alternatives in a holistic way.

The effectiveness of a management system depends on specific contextual and organizational factors (Martinsuo, 2013; Wadongo & Abdel-Kader, 2014). In addition, this effectiveness derives from the alignment of organizational characteristics with the contingencies that reflect the organizational situation (McAdam, Miller, & McSorley, 2016). The strategy is one of these important organizational contingencies (Kaiser, El Arbi, & Ahlemann, 2015; McAdam et al., 2016; Walter, Kellermanns, Floyd, Veiga, & Matherne, 2013); leaders use the strategy to determine the organizational structure's success (Kaiser et al., 2015). While identifying significant contingencies, business leaders need to determine the most effective organizational design that is suitable for aligning the strategy with the organization's contexts (Boer et al., 2015).

A comprehensive view of CA includes many contexts in addition to the focus on the characteristics of the environment; these contingencies include: (a) organizational personal components, (b) organizational functional and staff units' components, and (c) organizational level components (Duncan, 1972). Also, Wadongo and Abdel-Kader (2014) discussed additional important factors including culture, strategy, organizational structure, ownership structure, leadership style, and technology. Organizational performance is the consequence of alignment between these factors or contingencies (Chih & Zwikael, 2015; Deng & Smyth, 2013; Walter et al., 2013).

The CA, according to Joslin and Müller (2015), is applicable for PM research; Boer et al. (2015) and McAdam et al. (2016) argued that CA is useful in areas that lack well-established conceptual frameworks. The application of CA includes (a) the selection of appropriate PM methods linked to project success, (b) project procedures

customized to context, (c) projects with minor and major impacts, (d) leadership styles per project type, and (e) innovation types in business (Joslin & Müller, 2016). The management of projects, according to the CA assumption, should be a response to the characteristics of projects and their business environment (Morris, 2013).

Strategic Alignment

The mutual success of strategy and operational tactics relies on the alignment between both (Parker et al., 2015). This concept applies to PM in that effective projects exceed the execution-oriented minds of project leaders (Samset & Volden, 2016). While most project leaders take the view of middle-management to measure the success of projects, some practitioners address this aspect from a larger and more strategic perspective (Pinto & Winch, 2015). To realize success, project leaders need to align organizational strategy with PM (Pitsis et al., 2014). Business leaders also need to facilitate a role for project leaders in the strategy formulation and execution process (Awwal, 2014). Alsudiri et al. (2013) proposed a framework for linking business strategy to PM. This framework includes (a) strategic planning, (b) project prioritization and selection, (c) PPM (d) PMO, and (e) emergent PM approaches.

Misalignment and the lack of a link between project and business strategy is one of the main reasons behind project failure (Awwal, 2014). Alsudiri et al. (2013) clarified the significance of aligning PM to business strategy, and how understanding the alignment is one of the major challenges to an effective PM process. Both Alsudiri et al. (2013) and Awwal (2014) argued that achieving this alignment reveals new and creative

strategies and allows organizations to gain competitive advantage. Misalignment is a causative factor of wasting financial and human resources (Alsudiri et al., 2013).

Competitive advantage. Business leaders do not see that competitive advantage is about creating value that satisfies the shareholders only; the measured value should include additional attributes such as financial, internal business process, customer satisfaction, learning, and growth indicators (Drouin & Jugdev, 2013). These advantageous competitive attributes are drivers of the configuration of PM systems (Crawford, 2014). To gain organizational competitive advantage, business leaders need to consider PM as a key business process and to execute projects based on well-defined strategic outputs (Awwal, 2014). By aligning project management to business strategy, business leaders increase the probability of improving the organizational performance and achieve a competitive advantage (Alsudiri et al., 2013).

In addition to the connections to business strategy, stakeholders, capacities, resources, knowledge sharing, and project success, business value relates to an organization's DC as drivers for achieving and sustaining organization's competitive advantage (Gardiner, 2014). Hence, to improve productivity, business leaders need to create and use the capabilities that support the other organization's resources including processes, knowledge, information, attributes, and assets (Khalili Shavarini, Salimian, Nazemi, & Alborzi, 2013). Organization's capabilities are the most reliable and enduring bases in any development of competitive strategy (Rashidirad et al., 2013). Competitive advantage imply that business leaders develop the organization's capabilities that are not

easy to imitate (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014). Valuable and hard-to-copy resources and capabilities are the drivers of competitive advantage (Khalili Shavarini et al., 2013).

Business strategy. Traditionally, while business planning is the responsibility of business leaders, projects leaders plan and execute projects (Awwal, 2014; Kaiser et al., 2015). Aligning these two processes could be potential for project success; hence, the involvement of project leaders and team in the formulation of strategy could enhance the integration of these two phases (Alsudiri et al., 2013; Awwal, 2014). Darkow (2015) highlighted the importance of this participative approach of strategy formulation within an increased complexity such as in the real estate market. While business leaders need to provide the necessary training to project leaders to improve their skills in the formulation of strategy (Kaiser et al., 2015), understanding and addressing the concerns of business is very critical to project leaders who need to reframe their role from tactical to strategic by linking between projects and business strategies (Crawford, 2014).

Strategy is an organizational process and a set of important actions that business leaders plan and follow to achieve an organization's mission and to fit the environment (Budayan et al., 2014). While organizations may have similar strategies, the value realization exists by allocating the required resources and an effective implementation using projects and programs as delivery vehicles (Crawford, 2014). Business leaders develop strategies, but they lack impact on the operational level of their organizations (Ansari, Shakeri, & Raddadi, 2015) and proper execution of strategy through projects (Crawford, 2014). Therefore, business leaders shall regard projects as tools to creating

value and vehicles for delivering business objectives to their parent organizations (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014; Hussein, Ahmad, & Zidane, 2015; Killen & Hunt, 2013).

In general, there is a gap between planned business strategy and realized strategy (Mir & Pinnington, 2014). Thirty percent of strategic goals and priorities change every year, which require leaders to cope with this instability (Martinsuo, 2013; Young & Grant, 2015). Hence, increasing consensus on strategy among the organization's decision-makers plays a major role in improving reduced levels of strategic alignment (Walter et al., 2013). Assuming they exert the same efforts, project teams who align their views with organization strategy may achieve better outcomes and performance due to the synergy created through consensus (Ho, Wu, & Wu, 2014).

Project strategy. The narrow definition that projects do not address high-level strategic goals is a driver of misalignment between projects and business strategy (Jonas, Kock, & Gemünden, 2013). While considering strategy, business leaders shall define a project delivery system including project organizational structure, contractual relationships, stakeholders, authorities, and communication protocols (Mesa, Molenaar, & Alarcón, 2016). Besides time, scope, and cost, leaders shall extend projects' goals to include the role of changing, renewing, and covering the shortage of business strategies that are not aligned with the external marketplace (Vuori et al., 2013). In addition, business leaders must not regard projects as a means to execute their strategies only, but also engines that drive new directions for gaining competitive advantage (Awwal, 2014; Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015).

Project strategy is the main missing link between planning and execution of projects (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015). Project leaders do not widely use strategic PM in their practice (Patanakul & Shenhar, 2012). A project team, engaging in day-to-day activities, focuses on operational rather than business aspects (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015). In addition to operational frameworks, project leaders shall possess a knowledge of a range of strategic frameworks (Parker et al., 2015). Structuring corporate PM capability allows practitioners to clarify links between projects and business strategy (Crawford, 2014).

Like the high-level concept of strategy, leaders also need to strategically set projects due to the projects' increasing size and complexity (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014). Leaders shall consider the project's external and internal environment while formulating project strategy (Vuori et al., 2013). Cooke-Davies, Crawford, and Lechler (2009) identified many cases where project strategies are subordinate to business strategies. Where this relation does not exist, project leaders should consider the characteristics and context of their projects while formulating their projects' strategy and selecting an appropriate management approach (Cooke-Davies et al., 2009).

Real Estate Construction Projects

In general, REC projects follow a linear generic development cycle with possible iterations within stages that start from feasibility through concept, design, execution, handing-over, and post-completion (Budayan et al., 2014; Kaiser et al., 2015). The most important input of real estate projects is the construction side of projects (Ren, Folmer, & Van der Vlist, 2014). The output of mega construction project lasts for longer than its

immediate operation time, and the different stakeholders' perception changes with time (Turner & Zolin, 2012). However, the realized benefit of projects after completion is usually less than expected (Locatelli et al., 2014), which implies that business and project leaders need to possess abilities to cope with the evolution of success factors (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015; Mok et al., 2015). Hence, strategizing the projects' front-end is critical for the success of these REC projects (Hellström et al., 2013; Samset & Volden, 2016). Business leaders need to follow a systematic process starting with defining the projects' vision, mission, goals, and strategic objectives (Kardes et al., 2013) followed by building relationships and commitment among key actors as a basis for the development of final governance mechanisms and structures (Hellström et al., 2013).

Alignment of projects with business strategy is a driver for strategic project success (Alsudiri et al., 2013). Attributes of REC projects failure include the over-budget, late completion, and failure to achieve objectives (Davies & Mackenzie, 2014) in addition to a decrease in the general welfare of the community (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015). In contrary, the elements of success in REC projects comprise the efficiency, impact on the team, impact on customers, business success, and preparing for the future (Turner & Zolin, 2012). In turn, the critical success factors of mega construction projects include the leadership, communication, cooperation, stakeholders' management (Badewi, 2016), learning from previous projects (Davies & Mackenzie, 2014; Rijke et al., 2014), and proper project governance (Hellström et al., 2013; Locatelli et al., 2014).

Real estate construction projects have a long record of poor delivery (Brookes, 2014; Hellström et al., 2013). Brookes (2014) attributed this failure to the low efficiency,

lack of a rigorous and structured decision-making process, overestimating the benefits, and underestimating the resources of projects. While Locatelli et al. (2014) argued that the failure of many projects is due to the lack of meeting the requirements of stakeholders including investors and society, underestimating the project features (e.g., contingency and change in quality, costs, delays, specifications, designs, and external environmental factors) is the primary reason behind REC projects poor performance (Kardes et al., 2013).

Real estate construction projects are large, complex, and lengthy projects that involve various stakeholders (Kardes et al., 2013). While complexity is the primary source of large projects poor performance (Parker et al., 2015), entities, claims, and interrelationships of stakeholders are the major source of uncertainty at every project phase (Mok et al., 2015). Per the CA, business leaders need to devote adequate resources to integrate organizational systems together and reduce projects' complexity and stakeholders' uncertainties (Davies & Mackenzie, 2014).

Project Success

The construction industry has a traditional focus on measurable outputs, mainly project efficiency including cost, scope, and time (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015; Serra & Kunc, 2015). Although Badewi (2016) found that project efficiency is a driver for project success, many scholars argued that efficiency is not sufficient to realize project success. For instance, Parker et al. (2015) argued that project failures existed even in well-managed and efficient projects. Similarly, Mir and Pinnington (2014) and Samset and Volden (2016) discussed that meeting project efficiency does not necessarily increase

the success and effectiveness of projects. Awwal (2014), Hjelmbrække et al. (2015), and Parker et al. (2015) concluded that business leaders do not achieve project success by depending on the iron triangle but on their ability to align the PM with their business strategies.

Seventy percent of projects fail strategically due to the lack of a link between the intangible performance and tangible performance (Hjelmbrække, Lædre, & Lohne, 2014). Samset and Volden (2016) approached the concept of strategic success, or failure, by comparing the projects' strategic and tactical performance; while success in strategic terms means meeting conditions of long-term sustainable impact and operational effectiveness, tactical performance includes narrower short-term PM objectives. Hjelmbrække et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of PM in providing strategic success rather than concentrating on traditional approaches.

Badewi (2016) distinguished between PM success and project investment success highlighting the needs of a system thinking mindset to facilitate understanding and managing external and internal environments. Also, Joslin and Müller (2015) and Petro and Gardiner (2015) distinguished between project success and project management success or project efficiency. While practitioners measure the former against the overall objectives of a project, they measure the latter at the end of the project by assessing the efficiency, cost, time, and quality (Joslin & Müller, 2015). Project management success is about fulfilling short-term organizational objectives as opposed to project success that is concerned with long-term goals (Alsudiri et al., 2013). The difference in the factors of success derived from the different set of objectives including project objectives, business

objectives, and social and environment objectives (Rolstadås, Tommelein, Schiefloe, & Ballard, 2014). Hence, business leaders shall assess project success based on both long- and short-term objectives (Badewi, 2016; Mir & Pinnington, 2014).

Project success comprises two components, critical success factors and project success criteria; project leaders use the latter to measure the success or failure of a project and rely on the former to realize project success (Locatelli et al., 2014). Hjelmbrække et al. (2015) discussed that success factors of large projects include the understanding of project mission, project planning based on the expected benefits, setting up the project to deliver certain outputs, and communication among stakeholders. Nevertheless, practitioners face many challenges while defining the success criteria for their projects; these challenges include setting success criteria that are (a) unrealistic, ambiguous and soft, (c) narrow and limited to efficiency, (d) conflicting or competing, (e) alike and equally important, and (f) incomplete (Hussein et al., 2015).

Relying on critical success factors and success criteria is insufficient to measure and achieve project success due to the effect of contextual influences on project success (Rolstadås et al., 2014). Alsudiri et al. (2013) found that PPPM being as DCs is a facilitator of project success and a differentiator of organizational performance. Also, Deng and Smyth (2013) argued that the CA, concerning the alignment of organizational contingencies, is more feasible than the process of identifying critical success factors.

Project leaders face difficulties predicting the benefits realized after the completion of projects, which makes leaders evaluate their project based on either situational and subjective decisions or efficiency measures rather than benefits to

organizations (Serra & Kunc, 2015). With a mindset of projectification, or measuring PM performance, project leaders could limit the effective realization of business benefits (Badewi, 2016). Selecting a limited set of criteria to evaluate PM success may reflect a weak alignment between projects and business strategy (Hussein et al., 2015).

While intangible benefits remain unmeasurable, business leaders could measure tangible project benefits using key performance indicators (KPIs) (Badewi, 2016). Mir and Pinnington (2014) recommended that business leaders take several actions to increase the probability of project success. These actions include (a) developing PM methods to manage projects KPIs and align them with business strategy; (b) considering the various stakeholders' perspectives, short-term benefits, and long-term benefits while designing KPIs; (c) providing a project-related training to the PM team; (d) increasing the visibility and transparency in organization strategy and policies; and (e) investing in PM performance framework, process, and systems (Mir & Pinnington, 2014). However, Serra and Kunc (2015) argued that assessing projects based on KPIs is insufficient as this evaluation lacks a value related component.

To assure a strategic project success, business leaders need to consider additional factors, other than technical tasks and financial indicators, during the planning process (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015). Badewi (2016) advised that leaders create value for their organization through projects by satisfying customers' needs, aligning projects with business strategy, and giving a return on investment. Joslin and Müller (2016), Mir and Pinnington (2014), Samset and Volden (2016) discussed a broader framework linking competitive advantage to project success. The framework includes (a) efficiency, (b)

impact on customers, (c) impact on the team, (d) business success, and (e) preparing for the future.

Benefits to organizations is another important factor that leaders shall use, besides project efficiency and effectiveness, in measuring project success (Alsudiri et al., 2013; Mir & Pinnington, 2014; Serra & Kunc, 2015). Business leaders undertake projects to deliver benefits and create value (Samset & Volden, 2016); leaders realize the benefits of projects and the value of business only when these projects are in operation (Hussein et al., 2015). While benefits are measurable advantages that business leaders seek to achieve a change of the current organization's state by employing PM mechanisms (Badewi, 2016; Serra & Kunc, 2015), a value reflects monetary and non-monetary revenues, and it is a tradeoff between sacrifices and benefits (Voss & Kock, 2013). Value indicators include the shareholders' satisfaction, financial performance, mature internal business process, customers' satisfaction, and organizational learning and growth (Drouin & Jugdev, 2013).

Business and project leaders need, in order to maximize the value of projects, to clearly define the strategic value drivers and the PM system (Cooke-Davies et al., 2009). In addition, project leaders need to implement benefit-realization practices along with other PPPM practices to create value and align project outputs, or benefits, with business strategy (Serra & Kunc, 2015). Too and Weaver (2014) emphasized the central role of value and value-creation in business strategy and organizational success and argued that project governance is required to realize value-creation.

Business leaders often consider mega construction projects, such as REC projects, as programs (Rijke et al., 2014). In managing programs, one of the most important success aspects is the shaping of the interaction between the way leaders develop projects and business goals (Samset & Volden, 2016). However, business leaders often design the program lifecycle using an unclear strategic picture, which increases the difficulty of controlling these phases; hence, adaptive program design and structure are requirements for achieving successful programs (Ritson, Johansen, & Osborne, 2012). Rijke et al. (2014) recommended six attributes of program success including (a) clear program vision, (b) clear priority focus, (c) transparent program planning, (d) program governance involving external and internal stakeholders, (e) appropriate program coordination, and (f) program adaptation and flexibility.

Governance

The role of governance includes regulating the methods and processes used to define the objectives of organizations (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2014). Internal governance mechanisms include roles and responsibilities of management and boards, organizational structures, control systems, reporting and auditing mechanisms, contractual complexity, and lines of communication (Pitsis et al., 2014). There is a considerable potential for bridging the literature of project governance to the literature of organizational governance (Ahola, Ruuska, Artto, & Kujala, 2014).

Besides the elements of organizational governance, Badewi (2016) added three dimensions while defining the governance of projects. These dimensions include (a) strategic direction, (b) integrative management, and (c) holistic control of projects.

Employing a project governance has a central role in resolving competing interests between projects and parent organizations; both entities may have different competing governance models, which leads to a loss of productivity (McGrath & Whitty, 2015). Project governance could take a more systematic form in complex contexts (Locatelli et al., 2014). Locatelli et al. (2014) argued that system governance in complex project environments could play a significant role in transforming the governance concept from project- to system-based management to realize success.

Business leaders set boundaries and rules for project actors to act and produce value for project stakeholders; the aim of setting this governance in the realm of projects is to support aligning project objectives with business strategy, achieving set project objectives, and monitoring performance (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014). While Badewi (2016) identified three interwoven governance concepts namely the governance of projects, project governance, and governmentality, Müller, Pemsel, and Shao (2014) identified organizational enablers of this governance in the realm of projects. The enablers include structural, cultural, technological, and human resource practices that business leaders leverage to facilitate the implementation and sustainability of their organizations' strategic goals (Müller et al., 2014).

Project governance is different than the governance of projects; the former governance is the use of structures of authorities, processes, decision-making models, systems to allocate resources and control or coordinate activities within a project; the latter governance refers to the collective governance of all projects from board of directors' or executive-level's perspectives (Joslin & Müller, 2015; Müller & Lecoivre,

2014; Müller et al., 2014). While business leaders use the project governance to internally control individual projects, they use the governance of projects to select, coordinate, and control projects and portfolios (Badewi, 2016).

Governmentality, in turn, means the management of the values, attitudes, perceptions, and cultures to deliver projects value (Badewi, 2016). Müller et al. (2014) discussed that forms of governmentality vary across organizations; these forms include (a) strict, or process oriented; (b) liberal, or outcome oriented; (c) and neo-liberal, or using values and ideologies of project members. Similar to the concept of leadership in management, governmentality is the human side of governance related to the way leaders or governors exercise control over the governed individuals (Müller, Zhai, Wang, & Shao, 2016). Hence, leaders need to put governmentality of people in place to imply the governance of projects (Müller et al., 2014). The development of mindful individuals is an organizational enabler for governmentality (Müller et al., 2014).

Business leaders employ a project governance body to assure creation of value and alignment of project team with business strategy (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2014). The governance body can take the form of a single executive officer, sponsor, projects leader, PPPM office, or steering committee (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2014; Müller & Lecoivre, 2014). In addition, Killen (2013) argued that leaders of high-performing organizations use portfolio review boards for the decision-making process. A portfolio review board make decisions based on up-to-date information collected through the PPPM (Killen, 2013).

Involvement of steering committee, being a single person or a board of directors, is important during the lifecycle of the project to improve the likelihood of project success (Petro & Gardiner, 2015). The role of steering committee includes setting projects' general and strategic goals, overviewing the overall performance of projects, connecting key stakeholders (Petro & Gardiner, 2015). Alsudiri et al. (2013) discussed that business planning, prioritization of projects, and portfolio management are three processes that fall under the responsibility of board of directors. While the support of steering committee is the most important factor for project success (Davis, 2014), Young et al. (2012) argued that the strategic leadership of projects is a significant way to bridge the discourse between top management and management of projects. Project governance along with the close coordination between business and project leaders are drivers to project success (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2014).

By providing the right project governance, business leaders could meet their organization's strategic goals (Eik-Andresen, Johansen, Landmark, & Sørensen, 2016). Too and Weaver (2014) advised business leaders to consider eight guiding elements for designing an effective project governance system. The elements include (a) portfolio management, for selecting the right projects and terminating the failed ones; (b) project sponsorship, for focusing on project lifecycle and linking between executives and projects leaders; (c) PMOs; (d) projects and program support; (e) ensuring the setup includes the appropriate project organization; (f) defining the level of authority and the decision-making process; and (g) regulating the quality of project outputs (Too & Weaver, 2014).

In general, leaders initiate two main tasks aiming to link project governance to corporate governance. The two tasks include defining objectives of projects, project portfolio, and programs in addition to defining PM capabilities (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014). For executing these two tasks, business leaders employ different organizational structures such as PPPM (Killen & Hunt, 2013). Leaders also could employ PPPM to increase the likelihood of realizing organizational strategy, long-term sustainability, and growth (Gardiner, 2014; Näsholm & Blomquist, 2015).

Leaders need to follow the organizational strategic direction while determining a design of project structure (Müller et al., 2016) and to consider the context volatility while designing a project governance structure (Petro & Gardiner, 2015). Project, program, and portfolio management as DCs are not solely the drivers of organizational performance; business leaders also need an organic and decentralized organizational structure to complement DC (Wilden et al., 2013). Using this type of structure allows for an effective process for seizing opportunities (Wilden et al., 2013). Flexibility of structure, on the other hand, is an organizational enabler for governance of projects (Müller et al., 2014).

Project management. Project management systems are the standards, management structure, and procedures that project leaders use while developing and executing projects (Cooke-Davies et al., 2009). Project management systems have similarities in terms of best practice; however, they are still idiosyncratic and differ in their configuration (Crawford, 2014). Also, a PM approach and leadership style,

according to the contingency school, shall vary according to different types of projects (Turner, Anbari, & Bredillet, 2013).

Project management systems are one of project success factors; however, and despite the development of PM, projects still fail to reach their goals (Joslin & Müller, 2015). At a strategic level, Ingason and Shepherd (2014) also argued that even with an increased focus on alignment and PM standards, projects still fail and there is a need to identify new ideas and systems that practitioners need to use to increase project success rates. Killen and Hunt (2013) argued that leaders of many successful organizations did not employ PM best practices.

Managers at functional levels, including project leaders, shall consider strategic priorities to implement business level strategy properly (Budayan et al., 2014). Business leaders shall establish a process of alignment between PM systems and business strategy, and consider three elements of this process including people, process, and structure (Killen & Hunt, 2013). Budayan et al. (2014) and Cooke-Davies et al. (2009) added the element of policy to this framework. To enable a reliable and consistent creation of value, business leaders shall tailor the requirements of PM system with the differing strategic drivers (Cooke-Davies et al., 2009).

There is no one-fits-all PM methodology; project leaders need to choose the best approach suitable to managing their projects (Abdul Rasid, Wan Ismail, Mohammad, & Long, 2014; Joslin & Müller, 2015; Wysocki, 2014). Business leaders need to categorize projects for two purposes: identifying the requirement to align the projects with strategic business intent and assigning the organizational capabilities required to manage these

projects (Turner et al., 2013). Crawford (2014) discussed that leaders need to align five elements of organizational PM capabilities with business strategy; these elements include spirit, organization, project strategy, process, and tools. Also, the appropriateness of PM lies on the extent project leaders could align project characteristics with the environment, best practices, and project team's competencies (Morris, 2013).

Combining standardized and customized PM practices is significant to increase the chances of project success (Joslin & Müller, 2015). Cooke-Davies et al. (2009) argued that leaders at different organizational levels shall contribute to this process of designing a PM system. Business leaders also shall continuously improve their organizational capabilities in applying PM knowledge areas to move up to a higher maturity level (Abdul Rasid et al., 2014). Abdul Rasid et al. (2014) discussed five levels of PM maturity namely (a) initial process, (b) structured process and standards, (c) organizational standards and institutionalized process, (d) managed process, and (e) optimizing process. As the focus of PM maturity models includes only the explicit codified practices, business leaders need to develop models that include intangible capabilities such as organizational learning (Killen & Hunt, 2013). Mir and Pinnington (2014) recommended that business leaders shall invest in PM performance frameworks to increase the likelihood of achieving project success.

Program management. Program management is one of the important DCs (Davies & Brady, 2016) that business leaders use to prevent fragmentation in decision-making, contribute to a higher-level fine-tuning of project requirements, and coordinate the effective use of organization resources (Rijke et al., 2014). Business leaders often

deal with mega construction projects as programs consisted of multiple components or subprojects (Rijke et al., 2014). Two reasons are behind this classification: programs constitute projects with common strategic similarities (Näsholm & Blomquist, 2015) and program and portfolio management involves a more strategic focus compared to project management (Rijke et al., 2014). Business leaders employ program management to align REC projects to both business strategy and the changing environment (Näsholm & Blomquist, 2015; Turkulainen, Ruuska, Brady, & Artto, 2015). Another purpose for employing program management is to achieve alignment between formulation and implementation of strategy (Ritson et al., 2012).

Although they share the same objectives, program management implies different practices and logic compared to the management of the program sub-projects (Turkulainen et al., 2015). While business leaders, at the very beginning of a program, shall set a global value target and complementarities among the smaller projects (Maniak & Midler, 2014), program leaders need to break down the broad goal of a program and translate it to owners and team of smaller projects (Näsholm & Blomquist, 2015). Program leaders shall organize a comprehensive coordination pattern among smaller projects that have the same goal (Maniak & Midler, 2014).

Program management practices are less mature than PM and PPM (Young, Young, & Romero, 2014). Walenta (2016) discussed the concept of separating program management from project management to achieve a higher level of program management maturity in large organizations. Traditionally, practitioners view that program management corresponds to the efficient management of multiple interrelated projects

(Näsholm & Blomquist, 2015). This view developed beyond the concept of project performance to include the role of value-creation (Rijke et al., 2014). While program management is strategically different than the management of single projects (Dalcher, 2016; Martinsuo & Killen, 2014), Rijke et al. (2014) argued that the strategic focus of program management shall complement the performance focus of PM.

Walenta (2016) identified five differences between program management and PM namely (a) PM do not embrace the concept of benefits, (b) training and education for project leaders lack program management skills, (c) capabilities of successful program leaders differ from those of successful project leader, (d) a project success is measured by deliverables while a program success is assessed by benefits realization, and (e) program leaders are outward oriented while project leaders are more dealing with the inside. To manage programs, leaders need to adopt an approach broader than PM; the approach includes PM views as well as team/leadership view, process-centered view, and strategic/business view (Görög, 2016). In parallel, although leaders use program and PM tools, formal structures, and PMOs, leaders need to allow for flexibility and rapid decision-making process (Näsholm & Blomquist, 2015). Business leaders need to set PM flexible processes that are responsive to the rapid context change (Davies & Mackenzie, 2014).

Portfolio management. With the increasing complexity and number of projects, business leaders need to introduce an organizational layer or a management system to manage a portfolio or multiple projects (Gemünden, Huemann, & Martinsuo, 2013). Project portfolio management is a strategic and dynamic organizational governance that

business leaders employ to manage and organize resources and ensure benefit to organizations (Serra & Kunc, 2015; Voss & Kock, 2013). In addition, leaders employ project portfolio management to align their organization's project portfolio with business strategy (Kaiser et al., 2015; Killen & Hunt, 2013; Voss & Kock, 2013). This system is comprised of several actors including sponsor, project portfolio office, portfolio board, processes, roles, defined governance, culture, and IT systems (Gemünden et al., 2013).

To ensure alignment with strategy, business leaders need to setup a project selection process that is open, consistent, systematic, and balanced (Fiala et al., 2014). Kaiser et al. (2015) argued that the effective strategy implementation and the success of PPM exceed the portfolio selection process, prioritization of project, or the role handled by PMO including resource allocation, planning, and controlling projects. Effective implementation of strategy relies on the alignment between the organizational structure and PPM (Kaiser et al., 2015).

Project portfolio management is a monolithic single DC; business leaders need to identify the components of PPM and use them to adopt combinations and sequences that mostly suit the organization's available resources, existing circumstances, and the changes needed (Daniel et al., 2014). While a selection of PPM style shall be specific to the type of the projects (Martinsuo, 2013), Killen and Hunt (2013) argued that business leaders also need to tailor PPM capabilities to suit their organization's environment and needs over time (Killen & Hunt, 2013). Martinsuo (2013) emphasized the importance of examining project portfolios in their dynamic context.

Project portfolio leaders do not necessarily follow predefined formal rules, but they have their decision-making principles, which affects the performance of portfolios and businesses (Martinsuo, 2013). Business leaders need to find a right balance between the flexibility and the formality of PPM (Killen & Hunt, 2013). To minimize the effect of this selectivity, Too and Weaver (2014) advised project portfolio leaders to balance external turbulence, adapt to their organization's environmental complexity, and apply practices of high performing organizations through personal involvement and proper practices (Too & Weaver, 2014). The proper practices include, (a) prioritization of projects, (b) appropriate business planning, (c) project selection in accordance with business strategy, (d) application of tools to collect and disseminate information about projects, (e) communication of project importance, (f) use of similar reporting metrics for all projects, and (g) face-to-face meetings for decision-making (Too & Weaver, 2014).

Business leaders, by facilitating a responsive and holistic decision-making environment, improve the portfolio resources' performance and agility and ensure organizational flexibility (Killen & Hunt, 2013). Business leaders can view PPM as, besides rational decision-making processes, bargaining, negotiation, and structural reconfiguration (Aubry, 2015). Successful organizations have a PPM systematic approach and a rational decision-making process related the resource allocation, project selection, and management processes (Martinsuo, 2013).

Project portfolio management is a path dependent process affected by the early events or projects; hence, project leader knowledge and competencies are important factors in the development of PPM processes (Killen & Hunt, 2013). Business leaders

need to build on the assessment of managers in different PPM roles to seek for potential improvement in their ability to meet business strategic objectives (Korhonen, Laine, & Martinsuo, 2014). In addition, business leaders need to consider the proactivity of PPM in acquiring external knowledge that is sensitive to a specific environment (Martinsuo, 2013).

To properly assess the effectiveness and success of project portfolios, business leaders need to measure the benefits rather than the deliverables (Petro & Gardiner, 2015). Also, explaining performance based on day-to-day practices is a wrong approach as these practices may be messier than expected (Martinsuo, 2013). Patanakul (2015), in turn, discussed that business leaders could assess the success of a PPM system from process effectiveness, portfolio success, and portfolio-related organizational success. Patanakul identified six attributes of PPM effectiveness, three strategic and three operational. While the strategic attributes include (a) adaptability to internal and external changes, (b) strategic alignment, and (c) expected value of the portfolio, the operational attributes comprise (a) transparency in portfolio decision making, (b) project visibility, and (c) predictability of project delivery.

The PMO is a governance mechanism specific to the management of projects, programs, and portfolios (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014; Fiala et al., 2014; Gardiner, 2014). In a project-based environment, PMO is an intermediate organizational structure that is gaining prominence due to the need of aligning projects and portfolios with business strategic objectives (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014). In addition to the internal alignment, Gardiner (2014) argued that establishing PMOs helps in mediating a dynamic response to

external and internal changes. Although the need for strategic alignment between projects and business strategy is the trigger behind creating PMOs (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014), practitioners in the Middle East regard that possessing such intermediate organizational level is not always feasible to achieve the desired project values (Gardiner, 2014).

Beside the purpose of strategic alignment, leaders also use PMOs to provide process excellence, standardization, and learning (Gardiner, 2014). In a parallel concept, Ko et al. (2015) discussed three PMO functions including strategic, tactical, and operational roles. Wysocki (2014), in turn, identified four reasons for the establishment of a PMO: (a) to develop and adopt formal procedures for managing projects; (b) to provide qualified support and/or execution personnel for projects, (c) to force PM standards and policies; and (d) to recommend and provide training for the execution of the PM function. Hence, facilitating the management of knowledge through various PMO's functions is an important practice (Ko et al., 2015; Martinsuo, 2013).

Responsibilities of PMO's members can range from providing PM supporting functions to the direct management of projects (Too & Weaver, 2014). Similarly, Aubry (2015) discussed two roles of PMO, support and control. Although Aubry (2015) argued that business leaders need to rely on the PMO's supportive role only to improve the performance of business, Müller, Glückler, and Aubry (2013) identified three major PMO's roles for this purpose. The roles include (a) partnering, or facilitating the work of the different project team; (b) servicing, or providing a variety of services including

training, coaching, mentoring of project managers, templates and forms; and (c) controlling or directing the execution of projects.

Business leaders employ PMO to develop and improve PM capabilities (Ko et al., 2015), systems (Cooke-Davies et al., 2009), and maturity (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014). Wysocki (2014) argued that the characteristics of PMO's role differ according to the organizational PM maturity level; Wysocki identified five PM maturity levels where the role of PMO varies from little or no role to the involvement in almost all aspects of organizational activities. Ko et al. (2015) argued that business leaders would possibly enhance project success rates by increasing the PMO's maturity level.

Often by establishing PMO, leaders aim at standardizing PM methodologies (Joslin & Müller, 2015). However, Joslin and Müller (2015) argued that the concept of no one-fits-all implies the customization of PM methodologies. Similarly, Parchami Jalal and Matin Koosha (2015) argued that since organizations have different structural and contextual dimensions, they also have different PMOs structural and functional characteristics. These characteristics include (a) supportiveness of organizational senior managers and their beliefs in portfolio management knowledge, (b) portfolio management structure in an organization, (c) PM processes required by an organization, (d) presence of project leaders in an organization, (e) project size in terms of duration and number of staffs, (f) relation between business strategy and PM development, (g) number of simultaneous projects, and (h) geographical distribution of projects (Parchami Jalal & Matin Koosha, 2015). Joslin and Müller (2015) discussed that experienced PMO leaders introduce flexibility and link both the standardization and the customization of PM

methodologies. Business leaders, in turn, need to adopt a dynamic process to deal with PMO's changes triggered by complexity (Aubry, Richer, & Lavoie-Tremblay, 2014).

Project Leadership

Project leaders need to adopt a leadership style that has an impact on each success criteria of the project (Görög, 2016). To achieve this involvement, project leaders need to start with defining their programs. This action includes (a) defining a strategic charter for projects, obtaining senior management support during all phases, (b) defining why and how to doing a project, (c) setting, in advance, the expectations (d) defining multiple success dimensions for different stakeholders, (e) defining project strategy, including a planned competitive advantage/value and strategic focus, and (f) defining a project's vision and creating the right spirit that will excite the team and support the creation of competitive advantage (Shenhar, 2015).

Strategic project leadership is an important success factor of PMOs (Shenhar, 2015). Müller, Geraldi, and Turner (2012) discussed three leadership competencies dimensions that project leaders require to achieve project success. The dimensions are namely intellectual, managerial, and emotional. Lundy and Morin (2013) discussed the same dimensions and identified additional leadership competencies related to soft skills including (a) good and clear communication, (b) positive commitment in leading the change, (c) structured yet flexible attitude introducing the change, (d) PM knowledge and expertise, (e) transparent strategy with stakeholders, (f) nice to have analysis capability, and (g) critical analysis and judgment a less significant competence.

Project leaders exhibiting interpersonal and intrapersonal competency lead their teams effectively, place their organizations at a competitive position in the market, increase the business value, and sustain growth (Redick et al., 2014). The factors supporting such leadership competencies include (a) self-leadership, (b) managing others, (c) psychological factors, and (d) environmental factors (Redick et al., 2014). As the role of program leaders includes the realization of business strategy, Sohmen and Dimitriou (2015) identified essential core competencies that leaders should possess to achieve program success. The core competencies include (a) possessing a clear vision and communicating it effectively to program team, (b) expert in planning and organization, (c) communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution skills, (c) ethics and ethical values, (d) internal and external stakeholders' management, (e) political understanding, (f) knowledge management, (g) financial management, (h) risk management, and (i) project and process management (Sohmen & Dimitriou, 2015).

Chan and Chan (2005) examined the transformational and transactional leadership styles and highlighted the significance of transformational leadership factors in addition to the contingent reward of the transactional factor in impacting the performance of individuals at different organizational levels. Kissi, Dainty, and Tuuli (2013) also found that portfolio leaders who adopt a transformational leadership style increase their portfolio performance. However, Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015 advised that a leadership style must be peculiar to the project type and variable according to the requirement of each project phase.

While business leaders need to design organizational policies in a way empowering the involvement of project leaders in strategic management activities (Wilden et al., 2013), project leaders who influence their organizations create a positive effect on strategic alignment and PPM effectiveness and success (Petro & Gardiner, 2015). Project leaders need to discover solutions to increase projects success rates and to positively impact the organization's internal stakeholders and community (Fahri et al., 2015). Awwal (2014) advised a two-way communication between business leaders and project leaders, top-down and down-top; while the former communication is a means to clarify the strategic objectives, the latter is a driver of an improved decision-making process required for the optimization of project portfolio. Communication and alignment of interest and objectives among the project stakeholders are the most important drivers of project performance (Mesa et al., 2016). In contrary, poor communication of business objectives presents a threat to the alignment between project and strategy (Alsudiri et al., 2013).

Leaders of REC projects face challenges in identifying stakeholders and their needs and identifying appropriate stakeholders' engagement strategies (Mok et al., 2015). Identifying all major project's stakeholders increases the productivity of the project and organization (Awwal, 2014; Hussein et al., 2015). Project leaders, during the long life of a project, face difficulties to find common ground for many stakeholders that often have competing goals and characteristics (Hellström et al., 2013; Kardes et al., 2013). According to McGrath and Whitty (2015), projects stakeholders may have some common but some differing constraints, assumptions, knowledge, objectives, and boundary

conditions. To succeed, project leaders need to allocate adequate time and effort to identify stakeholders and their perception of success (Awwal, 2014), communicate and clarify business goals, and ensure a transparent flow of information across the organization's levels and stakeholders (Kardes et al., 2013).

Stakeholders, particularly business leaders, are among the most important actors in projects (Morris, 2013). Lack of business leaders' involvement in projects is a driver of projects failure (Petro & Gardiner, 2015). In contrary, the involvement of senior managers in directing projects is significant to achieve success (Davis, 2014). Walenta (2016) argued that the critical success factors of projects are under the control of business leaders rather than project leaders. Hence, business leaders shall moderately involve themselves in the management of projects; an exaggerated business leaders' involvement could have a negative side effect due to over-steering (Martinsuo, 2013).

Creating an organizational learning culture is an important factor in developing a pool of organizational DCs (Nieves & Haller, 2014). Learning, according to Medina and Medina (2015), is also a second-order capability. Nieves and Haller (2014) discussed two types of organizational knowledge, declarative (i.e., concepts, facts or events) or procedural (i.e., routines, processes, and procedures). While the former has an influence on the sensing of organizational capabilities, the latter has an important role in the process of seizing and renewing the organizational resource base (Nieves & Haller, 2014). In project contexts, the evolvement of competence and achieving skills and knowledge occur through learning (Medina & Medina, 2015; Turkulainen et al., 2015).

Hence, leaders need to design a knowledge management system enhancing the access to knowledge sources and the effectiveness of information processing (Wilden et al., 2013).

Transition

In Section 1, I presented the foundation of this study including the problem's background, problem statement, purpose of conducting this study, nature and significance of this study, research and interview questions, introduction to the conceptual frameworks, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and a review of the professional and academic literature. The literature review included an elaboration of the conceptual framework in addition to the concepts related to the alignment of projects with business strategy. In section 2, I include a detailed explanation of the study processes and techniques that are feasible to answer the research question. I also explain the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, data collection, data organization, and data analysis, in addition to the reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present the findings from analyzing and interpreting the collected data.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I present a clear explanation of the research process and structure. The subsections include: the role of the researcher; participants; research method and design; data collection, organization, and analysis; and reliability and validity. I mainly relied on the approach of Yin (2014), the most cited work for postpositive case study assumption (Boblin et al., 2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the successful strategies real estate construction project leaders used to improve the alignment of projects with business strategy. The population included seven REC project leaders from three of the top 10 successful REOs in the Middle East, who have completed successful projects for their organizations. The REC project leaders possessed decision-making authority and led the development and management processes of REC projects from inception until closing. The alignment strategies that REC project leaders utilize may increase the performance and competitiveness of their organizations. This study may result in positive social change by improving the community lifestyle and environmental quality; business leaders of successful REOs tend to use the economic cost savings in socially responsible investments (Khan et al., 2013; Scholtens & Sievänen, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

Honesty and ethics are the core rules upon which I built my role as a researcher. To ensure the protection of the research participants and compliance with ethical research standards, I reviewed the Belmont protocol report and completed the Internet-based

training course provided by the National Institutes of Health for protecting human research participants (see Appendix A). The Belmont report includes three fundamental ethical principles: justice, respect for persons, and beneficence (Brakewood & Poldrack, 2013; Bromley, Mikesell, Jones, & Khodyakov, 2015; Cseko & Tremaine, 2013). These principles include other regions of the world in addition to the United States (Brakewood & Poldrack, 2013). Researching a business problem in the Middle East, I adopted the principles of Belmont report and adhered to the regulations and guidelines of Walden University's IRB.

I started by formulating the research question and selecting the research design that was suitable for exploring the successful strategies REC project leaders used to align the Middle East REC projects with business strategy. My responsibilities included a thorough review of literature exploring the concepts that underlie the phenomenon. I continued by collecting the data from multiple sources such as public organizational documents, interpreting and analyzing them, and presenting the findings and recommendations. I served as the instrument for this qualitative study; qualitative researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, interpretation, and analysis (Cronin, 2014; Roulston & Shelton, 2015; Yilmaz, 2013).

I selected the topic for this study because of my interest in project management and experience in the real estate development and construction industry. I am an architect and a certified project management professional who worked in the field of REC and development for more than 20 years. Although the recruited participants possess extensive experience in the researched area, I did not have any relationship with

the participants. One of my roles, following the concepts of Garcia and Gluesing (2013), was to design this study using cognitively-based methods while understanding the participants' worldviews, perceptions, and actions. One of the challenges in conducting a qualitative research is about avoiding the utilization of the researcher's personal lens in collecting and interpreting the data (Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

Bounded by my role, I detailed a protocol and followed it to guide the data collection process (see Appendix B). Relying on a data collection protocol is an important practice in qualitative inquiries (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Case study researchers need to refer to protocols to guide the data collection phase of their research (Cronin, 2014; De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014). Using structured research procedures help to enhance the validity and reliability of the research approach (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014).

While aspects of subjectivity are indicators of poor research quality (Roulston & Shelton, 2015), the researcher-as-instrument raises concerns regarding bias and can be the greatest threat to the trustworthiness of a study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Unlike the preconception of novice researchers that they do not have biases in collecting data (Roulston & Shelton, 2015), bias is a part of the research (Cronin, 2014). While acknowledging the impact of bias, I recognized my role in mitigating the risk of bias and reducing the concerns of subjectivity throughout the different phases of this research. Qualitative researchers must be responsive to contradictory evidence and unbiased by preconceived notions (Cronin, 2014; Malone et al., 2014).

Bracketing is a practice that qualitative researchers use to suspend their biases, previous experience, or presuppositions (Roulston & Shelton, 2015; Tufford & Newman, 2012). I practiced bracketing, clarified the impetus of the research, unpacked the topic's assumptions and priori commitments, and avoided judging the appropriateness of the situations encountered during the data collection process. I also wrote memos to enrich the ongoing research processes and maintain self-awareness. These reflexive journals included, in line with the guidance of Tufford and Newman (2012), theoretical notes, methodological notes, and observational comments. Through the process of reflexivity, qualitative researchers inform others about the measures taken to reduce the influence of the inquirers' subjectivity (Petty et al., 2012).

Participants

Participants who were eligible to contribute to this study had extensive experience in the real estate development and construction industry and had managed the preconstruction and construction phases of one of the successful projects for one of the three selected organizations. Real estate organizations assign REC project leaders, sometimes called development or delivery project leaders, to lead the development and management processes of REC projects. During the selection of the study contexts, I considered the selection of the REC project leaders who met the participation eligibility criteria. Participants in qualitative research should have knowledge and experience in the field of the research (Anney, 2014; Kristensen & Ravn, 2015; Wahyuni, 2012), have a clear rationale for the study phenomenon, and fulfill a specific purpose related to the researched phenomenon (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014).

The characteristics of the interviewees are important determinants of the quality of the study (Cleary et al., 2014; Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). The context selection also has the same importance (Anney, 2014; Neuman, 2014). While Yin (2014) advised researchers to start with a screening process to identify the possible contexts, Yilmaz (2013) and Yin (2014) stated that purposive sampling is a useful way to identify cases that may produce an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon. I started with an Internet-based screening procedure and purposefully identified the top 10 successful REOs in the Middle East and their successful projects. Identifying the leaders of these successful projects was the next action in the recruitment process.

The recruitment process influences the research results and contributes to the study findings (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). This process is unpredictable, hard to plan (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015), and challenging within studied organizations (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015; Robinson, 2014). I reduced these obstacles by gaining access to potential individuals on LinkedIn using InMail introductions (see Appendix C), either directly or through mediators such as personal and professional networks; the mediators only introduced me to the potential participants without interfering in the recruitment process. When contacted through a well-functioned person with formal and informal position and relationships, potential participants respond positively to the contribution request (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015; Robinson, 2014). The Project Management Institutions on LinkedIn facilitates a broad accessibility to professional candidates with eligible profile and computer literacy, which reduces the selection bias per Kristensen and Ravn (2015) and Malone et al. (2014).

The recruitment process started only after obtaining the approval of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon receiving the initial approval through LinkedIn or from the selected organizations, I approached potential participants by sending them LinkedIn InMail requesting their acceptance for voluntary participation (see Appendix C). The InMail included, in line with the guidance of Rowley (2012), an introduction to my research profile and contacts, an explanation of the research's objectives, benefits to participants, confidentiality measures, and the online interview's schedule and expected time. The InMail also included the nature of interaction and a justification of the participant's selection.

I followed up with telephone calls and social media interactions to develop a relationship and establish rapport with the participants. Social media is an innovative tool to enhance the communication, build rapport, and facilitate the social interaction with participants (Lunnay, Borlagdan, McNaughton, & Ward, 2015). Using Skype interviews makes establishing rapport difficult (Rowley, 2012). Interacting socially with participants reduces cultural barriers, balances power, and facilitates access to information (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). Researchers who establish close contact with participants are likely to elicit honest accounts and develop mutual trust with participants (Brewis, 2014; Klotz, Buckley, & Gavin, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013).

Research Method and Design

The nature of the research question, the philosophical standpoint of the researcher, and the available resources for a study determine the research method (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015; McNulty, Zattoni, & Douglas, 2013; Yin, 2014). I selected a

qualitative approach with a multiple case study design for this study. Postpositivists could utilize some qualitative methods and shall not limit their research to quantitative approaches (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013). To properly apply the qualitative method, it is necessary to understand the methodological debates and discussions in the literature (Dasgupta, 2015; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014; Singh, 2015). In the following subsections, I present this understanding of the methodology followed for this study.

Research Method

Different methods have different ontological and epistemological assumptions (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). For PM research, San Cristóbal, González, Madariaga, López, and Trueba (2016) recommended the use of soft paradigms associated with inductive reasoning, interpretative epistemology, and qualitative exploratory techniques. Project governance and project success studies are mainly conceptual and are supplemented by qualitative inquiry with a limited presence of quantitative approaches (Joslin & Müller, 2016). Qualitative methods are particularly useful to explore governance phenomena (McNulty et al., 2013) and two-thirds of organizational DCs' studies are qualitative (Eriksson, 2014). Consistent with Guercini (2014), I used a qualitative approach to entirely view the researched problem attempting to reduce the gap between practice in management and theories.

I reviewed the quantitative and mixed method approaches and considered using them in this study. Quantitative research is explanatory and confirmatory rather than exploratory and subjective as in the qualitative approach (Cronin, 2014; Dasgupta, 2015).

While quantitative research correlates with “how much” and “how many” questions, qualitative research is appropriate to answering “how, why, and what” questions (Morse & McEvoy, 2014; Westerman, 2014). A quantitative method is suited to a study in which the requirement is to investigate and describe the phenomenon in terms of amounts, quantities, and numbers (Anyan, 2013). Conversely, rather than arriving at statistical and quantified findings or making a systematic comparison, the strength of qualitative research lies in the in-depth and detailed understanding of the participants’ experience (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014; Neuman, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013).

Project governance and project success quantitative studies appear mainly in the information technology industry (Joslin & Müller, 2016). An example of PM quantitative research is Joslin and Müller (2015), who employed a deductive approach to investigate the relationship between PM methodology and project success. However, Joslin and Müller constructed the study variables based on an initial qualitative study, which reflects the need of known constructs before conducting a PM quantitative study (Almutairi, Gardner, & McCarthy, 2014). For this study, my rationale for using a qualitative method was the absence of known variables, the lack of desire to arrive at statistical findings, and the aim to obtain in-depth understandings related to the alignment between project and business strategy.

The rationale for using mixed methods is the complexity of the research question (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014; Yin, 2013) and the inability to utilize quantitative or qualitative methods in isolation in handling the nature of the research topic (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). Although the mixed method

approach is gaining increased popularity in PM research, attempts remain in their initial stages (Aronson, Shenhar, & Patanakul, 2013). The study of Aronson et al. (2013) is an example of the mixed method approach in PM research. In the quantitative phase, Aronson et al. investigated the influence of project spirit on project success. As Aronson et al. found difficulties in investigating the impact of the aspects of project spirits using only empirical data, the authors used an initial qualitative phase.

Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches is a time-consuming method that requires extensive resources (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). Mixed methods are complex approaches that involve and continuously integrate qualitative and quantitative research methods throughout the entire research process (Ramlo, 2016). Mixed methods are primarily quantitative approaches powered by qualitative data collection (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). Mixed method also suits a study when the purpose is to seek various perspectives (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2014), a measurable phenomenon (Compton-Lilly et al., 2015; Singh, 2015), and multiple realities within a single study (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013). Instead of attempting to find multiple realities and measure the alignment's phenomenon, I preferred a qualitative approach seeking to obtain a detailed understanding of strategies used by REC project leaders to successfully align their organizations' REC projects with business strategy.

The qualitative method is inductive, interpretive, and naturalistic (Dasgupta, 2015; Morse & McEvoy, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). In qualitative methods, participants interpret their experiences, construct their world, and attribute a meaning to their experiences (Kahlke, 2014; McNulty et al., 2013). A researcher employing an inductive

approach relies mostly on multiple sources and attempts to develop an in-depth understanding of the particular settings of the phenomenon explored in natural settings rather than laboratory settings (Brinkmann, 2014; Morse & McEvoy, 2014; Neuman, 2014). Using multiple sources data combines both subjective and objective information and enhances data credibility (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014).

Qualitative research is becoming more popular for scholars and practitioners exploring newer dimensions of a phenomenon (Bailey, 2014; Neuman, 2014; Vohra, 2014). Singh (2015) argued that qualitative research is ideal for answering research questions that deal with process, practices, and a new phenomenon such as the alignment between PM and business strategy. The qualitative dimensions are essential in addressing the complexity of large-scale organizations (Singh, 2015) and the increased global digital settings (Guercini, 2014). In turn, advances in technological tools provide broader approaches to the efficacy of qualitative method (Singh, 2015). I utilized the social media and video calls as practical research tools recommended by Lunnay et al. (2015) for researchers to facilitate a complex interaction with eligible participants in real situations.

Research Design

The qualitative method includes a variety of design such as case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative inquiry (Compton-Lilly et al., 2015; Foster, Hays, & Alter, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013). Consistent with Yin (2014), I used an exploratory multiple case study design in line with the nature of the research question, the newness of the explored topic, and the complexity of the phenomenon of alignment between PM and

business strategy. Case study research is one of the most utilized qualitative designs in organizational studies because of the ability to collect an extensive amount of information (Morse & McEvoy, 2014; Vohra, 2014) and the possibility to generate managerially relevant knowledge (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Guercini, 2014). A case study is useful where the phenomenon is contemporary and complex, the body of knowledge is insufficient, and an in-depth exploration is required (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Vohra, 2014; Yin, 2014).

I considered the different qualitative designs; case study research has a higher level of flexibility compared to other qualitative approaches (Hyett et al., 2014). The aim of phenomenologists is to understand individuals from the inside of their subjective experiences and explore the meaning of a phenomenon (Gergen, 2014; Petty et al., 2012). Phenomenology is a human science approach that is compatible with deductive methodologies (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2014) stated two types of phenomenology, descriptive and interpretative. Phenomenologists interpret or describe data to explore the human experience of being or uncover the essence of the phenomenon (Gill, 2014; Petty et al., 2012). Unlike phenomenology where aiming particular experience comes before the data collection phase (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015), the purpose of this multiple case study was to remain exploratory.

The purpose of ethnography is to capture the beliefs, language, and cultural realities of the explored group (Petty et al., 2012; Singh, 2015). Ethnography is a means to interpret the meaning of data without producing a new universal knowledge (Hietanen, Sihvonen, Tikkanen, & Mattila, 2014). In addition, the rationale for using the narrative

design include the exploration of the life experience or detailed stories of events of a small number of participants (Petty et al., 2012). The purpose of using a narrative design is to highlight the character of personal meaning (Gergen, 2014). Rather than capturing cultural realities and exploring the life experience of participants, I employed a holistic multiple case study design attempting to understand the alignment's phenomenon from the experience of participants in line with the concepts of Boblin et al. (2013) and Yin (2014). Consistent with Cronin (2014) and Ates (2013), my purpose was to explore the experience and real situations within the contexts selected for this study.

Alsudiri et al. (2013) used a case study approach exploring the alignment of large PM processes with business strategy. Alsudiri et al. (2013) argued that the small number of attempts researching this phenomenon makes the case study a good approach. For the same reason of the newness of the topic, Patanakul (2015) explored the attributes of effectiveness for project portfolios using a qualitative multiple case study design. The study of Stettina and Hörz (2015) is another example of PM research where the authors utilized a multiple case study approach to allow for collecting rich data while keeping the flexibility of explorative research.

The nature of the research question is the guiding element for the selection among three types of case studies namely descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory (Yin, 2014). Descriptive and explanatory case study approaches are appropriate where the purpose is to convince readers that the phenomenon is relevant or why it takes place (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). In turn, the exploratory case study approach suits the "what" type research questions (Yin, 2014) associated with unknown variables (Almutairi et al., 2014).

Therefore, I designed an exploratory multiple case study attempting to understand what are the strategies used by the REC project leaders facilitating the alignment phenomenon to take place within the context of the selected organizations.

I acknowledged the inquirer's subjectivity in qualitative inquiry; however, my postpositivist worldview necessitated me to remain as objective as possible reducing my impact on the data as argued by Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015). Using a case study approach facilitates this objectivity (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014) and improves rigor in collecting and analyzing data (Dasgupta, 2015; Grosseohme, 2014). The types of single cases include the contexts critical to test a theory, unique, extreme, or revelatory cases (Yin, 2014). Contrary to the single case design, comparing multiple cases enable to confirm the idiosyncrasy or replication among the cases (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Consistent with Yin (2014), I used a multiple case design allowing for comparative and evaluative strategy among the selected organizations.

A significant factor in the design of multiple case study is the identification of sample size based on the concept of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015; Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2015). Data reach saturation when there is no possibility to reveal new data, themes, and coding, and when there is a possibility to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used in-depth interviews and multiple sources to reach data saturation and strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. In-depth interviews are feasible ways to collect rich and useful data, a requirement of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Using triangulation enhances the reliability of the findings and facilitates the attainment of data saturation

(Vohra, 2014). Qualitative researchers obtain additional and thick data through member checking interviews, which also facilitates reaching data saturation (Koelsch, 2013). In addition, I followed a two-part sampling process to realize data saturation as detailed in the following subsection.

Population and Sampling

The population for this multiple case study included seven REC project leaders from three REOs in the Middle East. Rather than representing a population, the purpose of sampling in qualitative research is to understand the depth, variation, and complexity of contexts surrounding the phenomenon (Gentles et al., 2015). The selection of suitable cases is an important phase for ensuring the credibility of a study (Elo et al., 2014). Researchers using an iterative sample selection method improve the credibility and validity of the content analysis (Robinson, 2014). I followed Robinson's four-point approach to sampling and alter the process until realizing a practical and theoretical relevance behind the selected sample. The four-point approach includes defining the sample, selecting a sampling strategy, deciding upon the sample size, and sourcing the sample (Robinson, 2014).

Case study researchers establish a precise definition of studied contexts and unit of analysis (Yin, 2013; Yin, 2015), and assume that they will potentially use the selected cases to find answers to the research questions (Gentles et al., 2015; Uprichard, 2013; Yin, 2014). The unit of analysis in this study was the successful REO ranked among the top 10 in the Middle East. I started with identifying the top 10 successful REOs and their

respective successful REC projects. The cases' screening process extended to include the identification of project leaders who developed and delivered the identified projects.

Purposive sampling means the selection of the participants who meet certain eligibility criteria (Gentles et al., 2015). I purposefully selected the participants who have developed and managed one of the identified REC projects for the selected REOs. Participants also must possess extensive experience in REC and building industries in the Middle East. Based on my experience in the PM and real estate development market, I assumed that the selected leaders must have a clear rationale and fulfill a specific purpose related to the researched phenomenon. Participants shall include the most knowledgeable personnel that possess rich information related to the phenomenon (Morse & McEvoy, 2014; Vohra, 2014). Based on the researchers' experience in the studied field and the priori theoretical understanding of the topic, qualitative researchers assume that certain categories of the individuals may better describe the phenomenon under study (Robinson, 2014).

Rather than sampling, Yin (2014) argued that replication is the main logic underlying the use of multiple case study. Yin (2014) uses the term "selection" and recommends researchers to avoid referring to any kind of sampling that misleads others into thinking that the cases reflect a statistical generalization for the population. Consistent with Gentles et al. (2015) and Yin (2014), I used a non-random and a careful way of selecting the potential cases seeking information-rich contexts that may lead to generalizing the theoretical propositions. This purposive sampling was the main selection strategy for this study. Purposive sampling is the most commonly used

selection method in qualitative research (Anney, 2014; Gentles et al., 2015; Petty et al., 2012).

Deciding upon the sample size was an important step in my approach to sampling. The appropriateness of sample size is a significant factor in ensuring the credibility of the study (Elo et al., 2014). In the absence of scientific methods and for practical reasons, qualitative researchers predict a sample size in advance of fieldwork (Hagaman & Wutich, 2016; Kristensen & Ravn, 2015; Malterud et al., 2015). Judging a sample size shall be based on assessing the complexity of contexts and the feasibility of the study resources (Elo et al., 2014; Kasim & Al-Gahuri, 2015). Also, the size of the sample is proportional to the homogeneity of the participants (Kasim & Al-Gahuri, 2015; Robinson, 2014). I judged the sample size based on assessing the complexity of contexts, the feasibility of the study resources, and the degree participants' homogeneity.

According to the above argument, I selected an initial sample of three cases with two participants each. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), six interviews are satisfactory to reach data saturation. As opposed to the quantitative research, the requirement of rich and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in qualitative research has a significant role in reducing the sample size (Gentles et al., 2015; Yilmaz, 2013). While researchers who select fewer than four cases limit the benefits of multiple case study (Gentles et al., 2015), selecting six to 10 participants offers a convincing support for the initial set of propositions (Yin, 2014). While exploring the experience of two participants from the same organization may predict similar results, having six participants from three organizations may lead to contrasting results, as the PM systems

are idiosyncratic and differ in their configuration (Crawford, 2014). According to Yin (2014), two to four cases are literal replication and six to 10 cases are theoretical replication due to anticipated reason.

Researchers rely on the concept of saturation to determine the final sample size and improve the quality of a research (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gentles et al., 2015; Malterud et al., 2015). Data become saturated when the researcher assumes that replication is possible (Anney, 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, 2015) and when redundancy is not a driver for additional information, themes, and concepts (Hagaman & Wutich, 2016; Kasim & Al-Gahuri, 2015; Robinson, 2014). Cleary et al., (2014) recommended that researchers start a preliminary analysis after each interview to determine the optimal sample size based on the concept of saturation. I conducted a preliminary analysis after each interview and continuously evaluated the sample size during the research process. Besides the initial purposive sampling, Petty et al. (2012) recommended utilizing snowball sampling as a secondary strategy to realize data saturation. I requested the interviewees to nominate other participants for potential sourcing. Researchers who follow a two-part recruitment process may discover additional cases, optimize the sample size, and realize data saturation (Robinson, 2014).

Sampling and saturation are two predecessors of thoroughness as a criterion of validity in qualitative research (Elo et al., 2014). In addition to these predecessors, I also facilitated the collection of thorough information through proper planning of Skype interview settings. I used the online interviews because of (a) the ease and cost efficiency (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013; Seitz, 2016) and (b) the effectiveness of this interview

type in small populations (Cachia & Millward, 2011). Compared to face-to-face interviews, Skype interviewing offers participants a greater flexibility regarding the selection of appropriate interview settings (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014). I used this advantage to facilitate additional requests and accommodate for receiving other data sources from participants during the interview. Researchers conducting proper online in-depth interviews and allowing for triangulation strengthen the trustworthiness of research findings (Curasi, 2001).

Ethical Research

One of the research basics is to maintain an ethical approach (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Ethics is one of the criteria for excellent qualitative research (McNulty et al., 2013). At the inception of each study, it is significant to develop an ethical research vocabulary and apply it throughout the research stages (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). According to Barker (2013), the typology of research ethics protocols includes five dimensions namely informed consent, avoidance of harm, privacy and confidentiality, protection of vulnerable groups, and the principle of benevolence. I conducted this research in compliance with these basic concepts of ethical research.

The Belmont report and IRBs' practices constitute a foundation of the research ethic proposals in the USA (Boyd et al., 2013; Bromley et al., 2015). The Belmont report outlines three fundamental ethical principles namely justice, respect for persons, and beneficence (Brakewood & Poldrack, 2013; Bromley et al., 2015; Cseko & Tremaine, 2013). Obtaining the university's IRB approval is mandatory before entering the practice

settings to collect data (Hammersley, 2015; Sangster-Gormley, 2013; Wahyuni, 2012).

The IRB approves to collect data based on critical factors. The factors include a research design allowing (a) a minimized risk to participants, (b) a reasonable risk compared to the anticipated benefits, (c) an equitable selection of participants, (d) attaining and properly documenting consent forms, (e) ensuring the interviewees' safety, privacy, and confidentiality, and (f) protecting vulnerable participants (Cseko & Tremaine, 2013).

The Walden University IRB's approval number is 07-26-17-0528247 and will expire on July 25, 2018.

Consistent with Robinson (2014), I considered the ethical sensitivity during the sampling stage and employed my ethical skills to inform the participants about the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, what participation entails, and how confidentiality will be protected. I sent initial LinkedIn InMails to potential participants introducing my profile and contacts, an explanation of the research's objectives, benefits to participants, confidentiality measures, schedule and time of the interview, and the non-incentive nature of participation (see Appendix C). The purpose of these emails was to request voluntary participations after obtaining the IRB approval. Voluntariness is a significant characteristic of research interview (Jansen, 2015; Robinson, 2014). Also, it is important to inform the participants about the justification of selecting them in addition to the nature of the interaction with them (Cleary et al., 2014).

Informed consent is another important characteristic of the research interview (Jansen, 2015). Upon receiving the IRB approval and before conducting the interview, I emailed the informed consent to participants who needed to acknowledge, consent, and

email it back; the purpose was to clarify to the interviewees the different aspects of the research (see Appendix D for email and Appendix E for consent form). Informed consents need to include the identity of the researcher, the objective and nature of the study, and the role and rights of participants (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). I followed the practice recommended by Deakin and Wakefield (2013) and Mealer and Jones (2014): researchers shall ensure to start the interview by reading a short scripted paragraph that includes the headlines of the informed consent signed by the participants and received electronically. Participants have the right to withdraw their contribution at any time before publishing the research (Almutairi et al., 2014; Jansen, 2015). The withdrawal from a Skype interview could be easier compared to the face-to-face environment because of the distance separating the interviewer from the interviewee (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Janghorban et al., 2014).

Consistent with Lunnay et al. (2015), I took various measures to ensure respect, integrity, and beneficence. First, I recognized the essential role of participants in generating the study's outputs and ensured that interviewees understand this role. Second, I empowered the interviewee and gave them control over the research material. Participants chose between video or audio interview at their convenient time. Third, I conducted the interview in an isolated sound room and took the necessary measures to protect the privacy of participants during the interview.

Protecting the confidentiality of the interviewees is a basic ethical rule in qualitative research (Almutairi et al., 2014; Wahyuni, 2012). While the recording of the interview was necessary to transcribe the data, the interviewees were aware that instead

of using real names I coded all names during the recording time. I used also identifiers in the different sections of this study. The codes of the real estate organizations were Case 1, 2, and 3. The identifier of participants were P#-C# (i.e., P1-C1, P2-C1, P3-C1, P4-C2, P5-C2, P6-C3, and P7-C3). To protect the right of the participants, I encrypted and safely stored the collected data, correspondences, and documents electronically and will continue storing them for five years before deleting them permanently. Secure storage is an essential practice to protect the confidentiality and rights of participants (Lunnay et al., 2015; Mealer & Jones, 2014; Wahyuni, 2012).

Employing the advanced technologies and the social media such as LinkedIn to target the sample would create additional ethics issues (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013; Lunnay et al., 2015). Ethical boundaries become unclear when professional information interfere with personal information obtained from LinkedIn (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013). To avoid this confusion, Lunnay et al. (2015) advised researchers to rely on the traditional ethical principles. Hence, I used the traditional ethical principles as a feasible framework to improve the ethical conduct affected by using the social media for targeting the participants and communicating with them.

Deakin and Wakefield (2013) and Redlich-Amirav (2014) stated that harm could be a result of confusing or reporting the participants' virtual identity as public identity. While I educated the participants about protecting their privacy, I requested them to identify their public and private information published on their LinkedIn profile; I restricted myself to using the public information only. The participants were required to give their verbal approval for using any of the publicly published materials on their

LinkedIn profiles. Also, I showed my intention to remove the LinkedIn connections established for the sole purpose of the research. Participants who were part of my LinkedIn professional network before participation had the choice to disconnect or remain connected after the interview.

The benefits of ethical research span to include participants and society as a whole (Brakewood & Poldrack, 2013). Upon completing this study, I shared a summary of the findings with the participants to optimize the participants' benefits. The findings from this study identified the successful strategies that could increase REC projects' success rates and improve environmental quality. However, any advantages do not justify any potential burden to participants (Almutairi et al., 2014; Lunnay et al., 2015). Although REC project leaders were nonvulnerable professional aging 18 years and older, I did not expose them to any risk, physical harm, or emotional harm. Mealer and Jones (2014) argued that Skype interviews could limit the participants' emotional distress. The preservation of participants' moral rights is a vital aspect of the interview process (Almutairi et al., 2014).

Data Collection

The aim of conducting a qualitative inquiry is to provide an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences (Curasi, 2001; Yilmaz, 2013). The strategy to address credibility and trustworthiness starts with the selection of the appropriate data collection method (Elo et al., 2014). In the following section, I present the instrument and technique used for collecting the data for this qualitative multiple case

study and exploring the phenomenon of alignment between REC projects and business strategy.

Data Collection Instrument

Qualitative researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Roulston & Shelton, 2015; Yilmaz, 2013). For this multiple case study, I served as the primary instrument for collecting the data related to the explored phenomenon from multiple pieces of evidence. Data collection sources of case studies include but not limited to interviews, observations, documentation, and questionnaires (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Vohra, 2014; Yin, 2014). Interviews are a way to enable participants to think and talk about their experiences and understandings (Anyan, 2013); structured, unstructured, and semistructured interview's forms are the predominant data collection method in qualitative research (Petty et al., 2012; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). In-depth semistructured interviews are appropriate to collect data for case study research (Gentles et al., 2015). I used semistructured Skype interviews as the primary data collection method in addition to public organizational documents as the second source. According to Yin (2014) using a multiple source of data augments the evidence from interviews.

I used a protocol to guide the data collection phase allowing for a uniform collection of data. The protocol included seven guiding sections namely (a) establishing a Skype connection, (b) before starting the recording, (c) opening statement, (d) the start of recording, (e) the interview questions, (f) ending the interview, and (g) member checking (see Appendix B). Consistent with the postpositivism assumption, developing a clear data collection protocol is a significant practice in qualitative inquiries (Hyett et al.,

2014). Protocols are essential guides advised for multiple case study research (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014). I continued referring to the protocol during the data interpretation and member checking process, a practice advised by Cronin (2014) and Sangster-Gormley (2013). Qualitative researchers using protocols could become less distracted by interesting but irrelevant views related to explored concepts (Neuman, 2014).

A postpositivist approach to case study involves conducting member checks to reduce the role of subjectivity (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015); participants review the researcher's interpretation of interviews data to ensure a proper reflection of their personal experience (Anney, 2014; Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). I suspended biases by writing reflexive journals during the data collection process. Clear reflection on self-preconceptions reduces subjectivity and increases the reliability and validity of the research (Kasim & Al-Gahuri, 2015).

I relied on the data collection protocol, multiple data sources, and member checking process to enhance the validity and reliability of the data collection instrument. While committing to a structured protocol helps to enhance the validity and reliability of the research approach (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014), collecting data from multiple sources is an essential process advised by Yin (2014) to increase the quality of multiple case studies. Member checking is the most important approach used to enhance credibility and dependability of the data collection instrument (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Neuman, 2014).

I considered an exploratory or pilot phases as processes to validate the data collection instrument (Hyett et al., 2014). However, I did not conduct a pilot study but rather depended on the expert review of my research committee members in validating the relevance of the interview questions and logistics. The expert review process is an efficient practice to ensure the validity of the qualitative inquiry (Anney, 2014; Buers et al., 2014).

Data Collection Technique

Three logistical stages separated the interviews from the purposive selection of eligible participants who possess extensive experiences in REC and building industries. The stages followed the IRB approval and included (a) initial invitations (see Appendix C), (b) phone calls, and social media interactions to develop relationship and rapport with the interviewees; (c) email invitations (see Appendix D) attaching the consent form (see Appendix E). In line with these stages, I developed a protocol constituting a structured array of flexible factors. While using a structured protocol enables the researchers to remain central to the research process (Roulston & Shelton, 2015), protocol flexibility is an enabler for the introduction of thick data (Harland, 2014; Morse & McEvoy, 2014), which is a basic concept required to facilitate the transferability of the findings (Anney, 2014). Cronin (2014), Neuman (2014), and Yin (2014) advised that protocols shall contain subjects related to the instrument, general rules, and procedures. In addition to the advised subjects, Appendix B, Data Collection Protocol, included a section customized for the member checking process per each participant.

After the initial phone call, I continued developing a moderate rapport with the participants throughout the member checking process. Moderate rapport is desirable to avoid any negative effect of over rapport (Anney, 2014). In addition to developing and following a data collection protocol, an interviewer needs to establish rapport and mutual trust and maintain control to balance the power that interviewees possess during the collection of data (Anyan, 2013; Cachia & Millward, 2011; Yilmaz, 2013).

Data collection flexibility is a characteristic of open-ended semistructured interviews (Anyan, 2013; Morse & McEvoy, 2014) and a requirement of inductive qualitative inquiries (Elo et al., 2014). To help guide the conversation, I designed semistructured interviews with a few predetermined areas of interests allowing for flexible prompts. By conducting semistructured interviews, I obtained all possible information while giving the participants the freedom to illustrate concepts. I also requested the participants to provide the organizational public documentary evidence supporting the participants' arguments. Interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes covering eight open-ended questions as detailed previously in the subsection of Interview Questions and included in the protocol (Appendix B). Attempting to achieve data saturation, I followed up with probes and requested additional public documents during the interview and the member checking process.

I used Skype to conduct online interviews, and Amolto call recording software along with an additional external recording device to record the interview audio. Missing important nonverbal cues could be one disadvantage of online interviews (Curasi, 2001; Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013; Seitz, 2016). However, case study researchers

underutilize the collection of nonverbal cues (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013) and benefit from the semistructured interviews as a flexible medium of communication that is viable to collect in-depth data (Anyan, 2013; Morse & McEvoy, 2014). Seitz (2016) identified additional disadvantages of Skype interviewing including inaudible segments and dropped or paused calls. I mitigated this risk by confirming a stable internet connection.

Skype interviewing advantages include logistical conveniences, reduced cost, and accessibility to a large population (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Janghorban et al., 2014). The interviewees and the interviewer both benefit from the increased flexibility of Skype video and audio features (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). Participants perceive that online interviews are less demanding and do not require the same effort and time compared to face-to-face interviews (Cachia & Millward, 2011). When participants prefer the audio option, Skype interviewing becomes similar to telephone interviewing that is an acceptable method of qualitative data collection (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Morse & McEvoy, 2014). Another advantage of Skype and telephone interviews is the possibility to reducing the influence of interviewer on interviewees, and consequently the potential researcher's bias (Rowley, 2012).

Also, online participants may allow for easier member checking (Curasi, 2001). Following each interview, I emailed my interpretation of the collected data to the participants requesting a short interview to discuss the accuracy of the interpretation. The participants had the option to validate the data interpretation, answer additional questions, and provide additional documents through email replies. Qualitative researchers use the

member checking process to validate the data interpretation (Morse & McEvoy, 2014; Koelsch, 2013), increase the confidence in the robustness of the findings (Boblin et al., 2013), and enhance the credibility of qualitative study (Anney, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013).

Mitigating the researcher's personal worldview is crucial during the collection and analysis of data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Consistent with Yilmaz (2013), I bracketed my points of view and biases to avoid any judgment about the appropriateness of the situations in which I was involved. One process of bracketing involves writing reflexive journals including theoretical, methodological, and observational notes (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I developed a reflexive document by taking notes during and right after the interviews. To facilitate taking notes during the data collection process, I prepared a journal format that contained a checklist including the theory-generated themes (see Appendix B). I used this journal to assess the influence of my background, interests, and perceptions of the research process including the phases of data collection and data analysis. Together with the data interpretation prepared during the member checking process, I used the reflexive journal to conduct a preliminary analysis of each case as detailed in the Data Analysis subsection.

Collecting data from interviews and documentary evidence increases the richness of case study evidence (Boblin et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). These identified multiple sources of data formed the basis of the methodological triangulation in this study. Qualitative researchers use a triangulation strategy to challenge the key patterns and themes, seek an explanation of data linkage, and understand the topics discussed by the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Data Organization Technique

The management of raw data is critical to the success of the analysis stage (Wahyuni, 2012). Raw data includes rich textual transcripts, documents, and reflective journals and notes (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). I organized and prepared the multiple data sources forming the case study database to facilitate the effectiveness of the triangulation process. Developing a case study database enhances the reliability of the research (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). I formed the multiple case study database by creating an electronic folder for each case (i.e., CASE-1, CASE-2, and CASE-3). Each case's folder included all the corresponding, recordings, transcripts, reflexive notes, and documents respective to the case. I used the file numbers P#-C#-REC# identifying the interview recording, P#-C#-TRANS# identifying the transcripts, P#-C#-DOC# identifying the documents, P#-C#-REF# identifying the reflexive journal and interview protocol, and P#-C#-CON# identifying the informed consent. I also used an internal and an external hard drive to store the data for five years before deleting them permanently.

The use of a safe and password-protected computer is a critical requirement to store the raw data (Mealer & Jones, 2014). Considering the ethical research requirements, I encrypted and safely stored the collected data electronically under the cases' correspondent folders. The initial step of preparing the data started with transcribing the interviews and labeling the data using a manually verified Dragon® transcription solutions. I used the following coding identifiers: P1-C1, P2-C1, P3-C1, etc., for the study participants, and C#D# for the documents where C# identifies the case number and D# identifies the respective document number. Then, as a result of the

member checking process, I incorporated the changes to the interviews' transcripts and documents. Then, I uploaded the transcripts, documents, reflexive notes to ATLAS.ti for coding and analysis. I encrypted and safely stored the ATLAS.ti's Database files for five years before deleting them permanently. In the following subsection, I present the detailed data analysis phase.

Data Analysis

De Massis and Kotlar (2014) and Cronin (2014) advised, while conducting a qualitative research, to follow an iterative approach overlapping the data collection with the data analysis. Performing a preliminary analysis during data collection allows for making a real-time judgment related to data saturation and sample size (Yilmaz, 2013). I conducted a preliminary analysis relying on the reflexive notes taken during the interviews and on my interpretation of data validated by the member checks. Categorization and abstraction become feasible upon achieving data saturation; however, the iterative process may involve risk related to treating the data sources independently (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014); I carefully considered this risk during data manipulation activities.

I analyzed the collected interviews data and documents and reviewed the reflexive notes to confirm the findings. Cope (2013) and Yin (2015) advised researchers to include a coverage of their self-reflection in the final reporting. In addition to acquiring a comprehensive view of the phenomenon, collecting data from multiple sources allows determining the level of data consistency (Cope, 2013; Singh, 2015). As a distinguishing characteristic of case study, using triangulation assist in identifying the convergence of

findings (Yin, 2014). Anney (2014) suggested that triangulation and reflexive journals are good practices to achieve confirmability of qualitative inquiry. Multiple sources increase the rigor and credibility of the qualitative research (Yilmaz, 2013). The advantage of using multiple sources in case study research lies in the ability to integrate subjective and objective information (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). This integration is particularly important in PM research where the project leaders' perception affects the selection of PM tools (Pinto & Winch, 2015).

A systematic analysis reflects the strength of case study in the reader's point of view (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Thematic, content, and constant comparison are three methods of data analysis (Petty et al., 2012). Although there is no particular method of analysis associated with multiple case study, thematic analysis is commonly used (Petty et al., 2012). I adopted a thematic coding approach by comparing words and phrases that lead to the recognition and development of themes.

I followed a nonlinear sequential process that involved four stages to analyze the multiple sources' data. Consistent with De Massis and Kotlar (2014) and Petty et al. (2012), the stages are (a) reading the collected data multiple times and preparing the data in order to better understand the phenomenon explored, (b) coding or allocating labels to interview transcripts (c) abstracting the codes from interviews and documents into conceptual categories or themes, and (d) identifying the themes' relationships and patterns and creating a thematic map confirmed by triangulation. Guided by the research question, I manually started the first stage by cleaning, reading, condensing and simplifying the collected materials. Thorough preparation before starting the data

collection and analysis improves the trustworthiness of the thematic analysis (Elo et al., 2014).

While I was in charge of building up the analysis, I used ATLAS.ti package to facilitate the completion of the remaining three stages. Interviews took between 45-60 minutes, which led to an increased number of transcript's pages. When dealing with a large amount of data, using ATLAS.ti facilitates the analysis and brings rigor to the data analysis (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Rowley, 2012). Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin (2015) noted a significant presence of qualitative data analysis software in the stages of data management and data analysis. Many qualitative researchers use Nvivo or ATLAS.ti software to store and manage the collected data (Rowley, 2012). These packages are practical tools used for qualitative data analysis (Neuman, 2014; Odena, 2013; Rowley, 2012).

With the assistance of ATLAS.ti, I organized the text, searched for keywords, coded the text, and compared and displayed codes and themes, to ensure a systematic examination of the concepts. Compared to the traditional data analysis methods, using ATLAS.ti have several advantages namely (a) aiding the researchers' memory, (b) facilitating the search and the identification of quotations, (c) reducing the data management time, and (d) grouping, linking, and categorizing the codes (Odena, 2013). I used ATLAS.ti features including (a) text search, (b) open and in-vivo coding, (c) word crunchers to calculate the frequencies of words, and (d) creating network views. Using these features helps to address dependability and confirmability of the collected data (Houghton et al., 2013).

The second stage of analysis started with uploading the prepared materials to Atlas.ti and classifying them under families corresponding to each case. Consistent with Saldaña (2015), I began the first cycle of coding by identifying words, phrases, and paragraphs in each case; the second cycle included the reconfiguration of codes and the description of their meanings. In the third stage, I grouped the codes that correspond to the same meaning under themes by using the super code option of ATLAS.ti. Consistent with Marshall and Rossman (2016), I classified the codes under two categories, either matching with the theory-generated codes derived from the literature, or in-vivo codes emerging from the collected data. Successful coding ties the data collected to the theory (Yin, 2014). Practicing an open coding strategy allows for the emergence of themes and patterns (Yilmaz, 2013). In qualitative research, coding constitutes the primary conceptual task, and patterns constitute the major findings (Neuman, 2014).

The fourth stage included aggregating the themes, identifying the patterns of each case, comparing and matching the themes and patterns across the studied cases, and confirming the convergence of findings by checking the documentary evidence and reflexive notes. Yin (2014) identified five data analysis techniques including (a) pattern matching, (b) time series, (c) explanation building, (d) logic modeling, and (a) cross-case synthesis. To contextualize the data, I identified links, connections, and patterns among the main and emerged themes. The analysis included a within-case explanation and a cross-cases comparison (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Pattern matching is an appropriate approach that enhances the validity of case study research (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Qualitative data analysis is associated with the researcher's experience (Guercini, 2014). Hence, it is significant to reflect on what kind of information one should identify as key themes (Rowley, 2012). I focused on the strategies, processes, key aspects, challenges, and influencing factors encountered by the leaders of the selected organizations or used for the purpose of aligning the management of REC projects with business strategy. I explored the role of REC project leaders' experiences in achieving this alignment. Consistent with Tufford and Newman (2012), I used my reflexive notes during the analysis stage to bracket my preconceptions and avoid categorizing or filtering the participants' responses through my experience. Spending time on reflexivity reduces bias and increases the trustworthiness of the research (Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

Reliability and Validity

The difference between the philosophical assumptions of quantitative versus qualitative research also reflects on the evaluation of the research quality between the two methods (Yilmaz, 2013). While quantitative researchers measure the research quality, qualitative researchers judge the trustworthiness and ensure the rigor of qualitative research (Grossoehme, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). Trustworthiness corresponds to the concept of making the findings attractive to the readers (Elo, et al., 2014).

The qualitative concepts of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability correspond to the quantitative criteria of reliability, internal validity, generalizability, and objectivity respectively (Anney, 2014; Reilly, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013). I use two subsections to discuss the quality of the research including both reliability and

validity. The former includes the criterion of dependability and the latter includes the criteria of credibility, transferability, and confirmability in addition to authenticity.

Reliability

Qualitative researchers must carefully consider the key dependability issue of biases and errors in their studies (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). In line with Yilmaz's (2013) advice to qualitative researchers, my role was to plan and identify the processes, strategies, methods, and procedures and apply them to conduct the research. The extent of understanding the effectiveness of these processes indicates the level of research dependability (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). In Section 2, I presented a detailed explanation of the research design and process. Adopting such practice facilitates future replications and increase the dependability of results (Wahyuni, 2012). Reliability is the extent to which other researchers could use the same steps and arrive at similar results of the case study (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Morse & McEvoy, 2014).

To address the dependability of this research, I followed three main strategies including triangulation, member checking, and expert review process. I collected and analyzed the data from multiple sources including Skype interviews and public organizational documents. I also confirmed the findings by comparing them with the reflexive notes. Conducting proper online in-depth interviews and using triangulation strengthen the dependability of the research findings (Anney, 2014; Curasi, 2001). In addition, using member checks is a significant process enhancing the credibility of qualitative study (Anney, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). Following each interview, I provided the participant with an interpretation of the interview data and requested the interviewee to

validate the interpretation. I also relied on my research community's expert review to ensure the reliability of the qualitative inquiry, a practice advised by Anney (2014) and Buers et al. (2014). Consistent with De Massis and Kotlar (2014), I used three additional strategies to address reliability and dependability. The strategies included (a) using a structured multiple case study protocol for clarifying the research procedures (b) preparing the data to increase transparency, and (c) developing a case study database.

Validity

The participants involved in a qualitative study decide the trueness and the credibility of the study (Wahyuni, 2012; Yilmaz, 2013). To increase the level of credibility, I used (a) protocol to systematically collect data, (b) triangulation to collect data from multiple sources, and (c) member checks to obtain thick data and achieve saturation. Systematic data collection and triangulation strengthen the credibility of qualitative findings (Curasi, 2001; Yilmaz, 2013). Member checking is a fundamental technique used to increase the confidence in the robustness of the findings, strengthen the credibility, and enhance the accuracy of qualitative research (Anney, 2014; Morse & McEvoy, 2014; Neuman, 2014).

The appropriateness of sample size is another important factor for ensuring the credibility of the study (Elo et al., 2014). I followed an iterative four-point approach including defining the sample, selecting a sampling strategy, deciding upon the sample size, and sourcing the sample. Using an iterative sample selection method improve the credibility and validity of the analysis (Robinson, 2014).

Readers and future researchers determine the transferability of a study based on the ability to transfer the findings to other similar settings (Anney, 2014; Neuman, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). My role was to employ research strategies facilitating this transferability. Consistent with Yilmaz (2013), the strategies included the selection of appropriate sample and adequate sample size. I used a purposive sampling strategy recruiting experienced REC project leaders. Using a purposive sampling strategy ensures the collection of thick and descriptive data that reflect a range of experiences (Anney, 2014; Boblin et al., 2013; Morse & McEvoy, 2014). Also, I used semistructured interviews and established rapport and mutual trust with the participants to encourage them to share their thick data, rich description, and thorough information, which facilitated the transferability according to Anney (2014), Morse and McEvoy (2014), and Yilmaz (2013).

Confirmability denotes to the degree to which others can confirm that the findings reflect the experiences of interviewed participants rather than the bias of the researcher (Petty et al., 2012; Wahyuni, 2012). The key concept in confirmability is to choose an appropriate set of operational measures (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). I relied on multiple sources and member checks to address the confirmability of findings. While conducting member checks is an important practice for reducing the role of subjectivity (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015), using triangulation combines both subjective and objective information and enhances confirmability (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014).

Adequate sampling and data saturation are requirements to achieve thoroughness (Cope, 2013). Also, rich and saturated data are one of the predeterminants of trustworthiness (Elo, et al., 2014). I used purposive sampling as the primary selection

strategy followed by snowball sampling as the secondary sampling strategy. After each interview, I started a preliminary analysis and continuously evaluated the sample size until assuming the saturation of data. Qualitative researchers rely on the concept of saturation to improve the quality of the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gentles et al., 2015; Malterud et al., 2015).

Authenticity is an additional criterion important to develop the trustworthiness of the qualitative research (Cope, 2013; Elo et al., 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). Attempting to increase the study authenticity, I equally considered the various experiences of participants, attempted to raise the participants' consciousness and ability to educate themselves, and encouraged decision-making and empowerment. I also used triangulation, member checks, and Skype interviews to realize the authenticity of this qualitative inquiry. Triangulation is a helpful way to verify the authenticity of data collected from participants (Yilmaz, 2013). Member checking process is the preeminent and a significant way to ensure authenticity (Reilly, 2013). Compared to face-to-face, Skype interviews could increase the authenticity of the findings (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013; Janghorban et al., 2014).

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I presented a detailed explanation of the study processes and techniques that are feasible to answer the research question while enhancing the trustworthiness of the research. I started by highlighting the purpose of the study and my role as a researcher during the research process. I explained the reasoning behind selecting a qualitative multiple case study, the contexts selections, and the strategy of

selecting the REC project leaders to participate in this study. I reserved a significant space discussing the research ethic and my role in protecting the participants. I also included in Section 2 a detailed description of the data collection, organization, and analysis phase. I explained the elements and processes of case study protocol, informed consent, semistructured interviews, reflexive journal, experts' review, triangulation, member checking, data preparation, coding, and pattern matching. In addition, I clarified the significance of these processes in enhancing the reliability and validity of this research. In section 3, I present the findings from analyzing the collected data. The findings include the research contribution to professional practice, implication to social change, and recommendations for action and future study, in addition to reflections and conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In Section 3, I present the analysis of the collected data. I also present the findings related to the literature review and conceptual framework. Section 3 includes an introduction, presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for actions, recommendations for further research, and reflections. The section ends with a summary and my conclusions.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the successful strategies REC project leaders used to improve the alignment of projects with business strategy. Achieving this alignment allows organizations to gain competitive advantage (Alsudiri et al., 2013; Awwal, 2014). Scholars noted an increased concern for linking project outputs with business strategy (Budayan et al., 2014); in this study, I aimed to identify strategies used by REC project leaders from three of the top 10 REOs in the Middle East. I used a purposive sampling as the main recruitment strategy and then used a secondary snowball sampling strategy to recruit seven participants. I collected data using semistructured Skype interviews with eight open-ended questions. The participants supplied public documents as secondary data sources.

I analyzed the data and identified four themes: (a) flow of strategy, (b) governance of projects during the development phase, (c) governance of projects during the delivery phase, and (d) measurement of project performance and strategic success. These themes included insights into the internal organizational aspects in each phase of the REC projects phases starting from the formulation of the strategy until the final

delivery phase. The themes highlighted the strategies that the participants used through the identified phases.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do REC project leaders use to improve the alignment of REC projects with business strategy? Using LinkedIn, I identified 63 potential participants from seven organizations selected from the top 10 REOs in the Middle East. I recruited three project leaders responsible for the construction, or delivery, phase of large REC projects for three organizations. The participants stated that the development phase is the most critical phase of the REC project lifecycle; hence, I used a snowball strategy and recruited three additional project leaders responsible for the development phase within the same organizations. For the first organization only, I approached a senior-role manager through a mediator and interviewed the participant to ensure data saturation. I used identifiers to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees and their organizations. The codes of the REOs are Case 1, 2, and 3 for the first, second and third organizations respectively. The identifiers of participants are P1-C1, P2-C1, and P3-C1 for Case 1; P4-C2 and P5-C2 for Case 2, and P6-C3 and P7-C3 for Case 3.

I analyzed the data and identified 85 codes (see Appendix F) and abstracted them into four conceptual categories including the flow of strategy, the governance systems for the development and the delivery phases, and measuring performance and success. Figure 1 is a thematic map identifying the relationships between the themes; all themes have two-directional connections except a single direction from Theme 1 to Theme 2 and

a weak relationship between Theme 1 and Theme 3. In addition to the four identified themes, the analysis included a within-case explanation and a cross-case comparison.

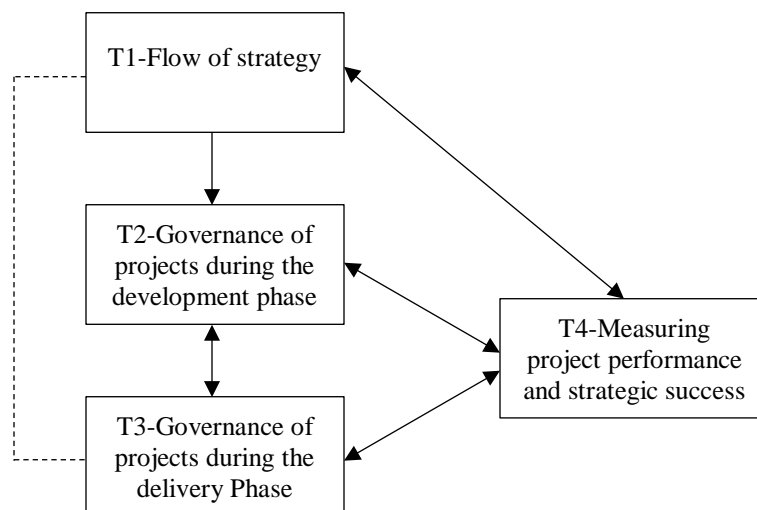


Figure 1. Thematic map: Strategic alignment – Middle East REOs.

Consistent with Crawford (2014), the within-case explanations showed similar patterns with one exception related to the KPIs opinions' divide within each case and across the three cases. The cross-cases comparison revealed the idiosyncrasy of the cases, which confirmed the assumption I made based on the CA and PM literature. In cases where the case study researcher predicts the patterns before the collection of data, a pattern matching technique is relevant for exploratory research (Yin, 2014). Table 1 includes the identified patterns according to each theme in addition to similarities, partial similarities, and difference of patterns across the three cases. In general, there are differences or partial similarities in the identified patterns.

Table 1

Patterns Cross-Cases Comparison: Strategic Alignment - Middle East REOs

Patterns	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Theme 1: The Flow of Strategy			
Mission	Difference	Similarity	Similarity
Strategy formulation	Partial similarity	Partial similarity	Difference
Understanding and transferring strategy	Similarity	Similarity	Similarity
Executing strategy	Difference	Partial similarity	Difference
Theme 2: The Governance of Projects			
During the Development Phase			
Organizational structure	Difference	Partial similarity	Partial similarity
Front-end phase	Similarity	Similarity	Similarity
Process and procedures	Difference	Similarity	Similarity
Information systems	Partial similarity	Similarity	Similarity
Approval process	Difference	Difference	Difference
Theme 3: The Governance of Projects			
During the Delivery Phase			
Processes and procedures	Difference	Difference	Difference
Information systems	Partial similarity	Partial similarity	Partial similarity
Reporting process	Similarity	Similarity	Similarity
PMO, PMC, and PM methodology	Partial similarity	Partial similarity	Difference
Theme 4: Measuring Project Performance and Strategic Success			
Perception of success	Difference	Difference	Difference
KPIs	Partial similarity	Partial similarity	Partial similarity

Theme 1: The Flow of Strategy

The first theme emerging from the interviews was the flow of business strategy starting from the vision and mission of the organizations, then the strategy formulation, transferring and understanding strategy, and ending with the execution of strategy.

Participants identified the strategy headlines of their organizations while discussing the processes they follow during the project lifecycle. Alsudiri et al. (2013) argued that, in the presence of aligned processes, the strategic elements such as vision, mission, goals, objectives, and values feed the portfolio elements from a large perspective and PM

elements from a narrower perspective. Participants of Case 2 and Case 3 identified the community and regional development as the missions of their organizations. P4-C2 considered that the driver of Case 2 projects is the value that the organization offers to the community. P5-C2, similarly indicated that the organization leaders develop projects to offer a premium lifestyle and to change the concept of real estate development toward a positive social transformation. According to P6-C3, “one of the organization objectives is to contribute to the development of the region where we operate.” P2-C1 and P3-C1 gave two other reasons for developing projects: political and commercial.

When discussing the role of organization layers in the formulation of business strategy, there was a consensus that the top management in all organizations leads the formulation process; however, the lower organization levels have different roles among the cases. In case 1, P3-C1 indicated that “each stage of the strategy formulation has different depth; while the first stage is completed by the top management, the second stage is where we detail that strategy.” Senior management in Case 2 has an advisory role; P4-C2 stated, “we are part of this formulation process. The top management, for example, gives the directors a potential idea to study it and advise on what options we can do.” The strategy, in Case 3, is formulated by “the top management and the strategy department” (P6-C3).

The answer of the Case 3 participant was identical to the traditional view discussed by Awwal (2014) and Kaiser et al. (2015); that is, business planning is the responsibility of business leaders while projects leaders only plan and execute the projects. While the business leaders in Case 1 limited the role of development project

leaders to detailing strategy, the development project leaders in Case 2 played an advisory role in formulating the strategy. Aligning the processes of strategy formulation and project planning is important for project success (Alsudiri et al., 2013; Awwal, 2014). Also, Awwal (2014) advised business leaders to facilitate a role for project leaders in the strategy formulation process.

The extent of understanding the strategy varies among the different organization functions, but all participants supported the concept that the medium and low layers do not possess a complete understanding of their organizations' strategic intent. P2-C1 posited,

At certain points, the political intents are not officially communicated, but there are many indicators that tell you the intent of developing the project.

Communicating the strategy does not have any impact because, at the lower level, they focus on the normal policies and procedures to execute the project. You don't need an official communication to achieve that; what has been communicated for the execution communication is enough.

P1-C1 had a different opinion related to communicating the strategy as "sharing information about the entire strategy in general and the specific aspects of the project is very important for the alignment." P4-C2 shared the same view and stated that "having the entire team knowing the target of the company and portfolio will improve the alignment of the individual projects with business strategy." However, P4-C2 expressed, "the top management does not necessarily convey the strategic message to everyone in the organizations due to competition with rivals." While P4-C2 posited that the

development department have some strategy understanding due to their advisory role, P4-C2 said,

The delivery teams focus on their area and tasks without knowing the reason behind this business, the need of this business, and why do we need to complete this business. Our role as the development department is to make them understand the other sides of business and to brief them about the business strategy and goals.

Additionally, P6-C3 explained that the company stakeholders follow a business plan, and “starting from the top level going down, you need to have clear objectives that you study them well before you decide and agree on them. These objectives should be communicated with lower levels to get them to buy in.” P7-C3 added the notion of informal communication related to transferring the strategy from the top management throughout the lower levels. “On a daily basis, the directors informally convey to their subordinates the strategy of the company formulated by the chief officers and chief executive officer” (P7-C3).

P2-C1 is among those leaders who, according to Pinto and Winch (2015), take the view of the middle-management related to understanding the strategy. On the contrary, Pinto and Winch discussed that fewer practitioners address this aspect from a larger and more strategic perspective; P1-C1, P4-C2, P5-C2, P6-C3, and P7-C3 supported this concept. While understanding the strategy reduces the gap between the planned and realized strategy (Mir & Pinnington, 2014), understanding the alignment is one of the significant challenges to an effective PM process (Alsudiri et al., 2013). One of the

success factors of large projects is the understanding of project mission (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015). Reframing their role from tactical to strategic, project leaders need to link between projects and business strategies and critically understand and address the concerns of business (Crawford, 2014).

Two participants discussed the transfer of the strategy to the external stakeholders. P1-C1 stated, “the top management has relationships and connections with the consultancy firms and contractors in the region, and they do transfer the strategy of the organization to these stakeholders in their meetings with them.” P4-C2 explained, “we as the employer brief the external stakeholders about the milestones and vision, when this has to be completed, and what to accomplish.” According to Vuori et al. (2013), it is significant for business leaders to consider the external environment while formulating the strategy. As external stakeholders represent an important factor of the external environment, and wherever there is a gap between business strategy and project strategy, project leaders should consider clarifying the business strategy to external stakeholders (Cooke-Davies et al., 2009). Lundy and Morin (2013) posited that sharing transparent strategy with stakeholders is a significant dimension of leadership competencies.

Executing strategy follows similar paths in the three organizations. While the employees of Case 1 follow the internal processes, procedures, and project plans that are enough to execute the business strategy (P2-C1), the business plan, master plan, and master schedule are the guiding elements for Case 3 strategy execution (P6-C3; P7-C3). The strategy execution of Case 2 is a combination of the elements used in the other two

cases. P4-C2 indicated that the operation department leads the process of collaboration between all stakeholders to execute business strategy. Based on the understanding of project mission, Hjelmbrække et al. (2015) discussed that the success factors of large projects include project planning, setting up the project to deliver certain outputs, and the communication among stakeholders.

For the external stakeholders, P1-C1 stated, “the contract is the guiding line.” P4-C2 highlighted the need for good partners to execute strategy; “we are not designers, contractors, project managers, and consultants. So, good partners are a key requirement to successfully deliver our company strategy” (P4-C2). P6-C3 indicated that there is no contradiction between our business strategy and the external stakeholders’ strategy and objectives. P6-C3 added,

They are into complimentary nature; because when we hire them, we agree with them on the main objectives we are looking for. Example, when we hire the design consultants, we give them our design brief, our mix plan, the global master plan, the construction budget, and the timeframe to adhere to them.

In the three cases, the participants showed a tendency to devoting the adequate resources to reduce the stakeholders’ uncertainties, which is in line with the recommendation of Davies and Mackenzie (2014). According to Mok et al. (2015), the interrelationships of stakeholders is a major source of uncertainty at every project phase. In Case 3, building relationships and commitment among key actors was consistent with the recommendations of Hellström et al. (2013) as a requirement to facilitate forming the proper governance mechanisms and structures.

Theme 2: The Governance of Projects During the Development Phase

The participants' main discussion centered around the governance of projects during the lifecycle of the projects. Theme 2 includes this governance during the development phase before to the delivery or execution of the project. The participants discussed their organizational structure in addition to the importance of the development and approval processes and procedures.

Case 1, according to P1-C1, is a functional organization consisted of business units including the contracts, control, legal, risk, administration and human resources, finance, and operations. According to P2-C1, the operations unit includes (a) the technical department; (b) regional departments that deliver the projects in the different locations; and (c) the business and operation department. The latter includes divisions such as the development analysis, information management, development operations, development and business support, and marketing division. The operations department runs the development and delivery processes (P1-C1; P2-C1; P3-C1). P3-C1 posited that weak functional leaders might create a problem if they don't understand the objectives of the business.

Case 2 is a matrix organization (P4-C2) consisting (a) the operations department including development, business development, and PM; (b) technical and corporate support including human resources, legal and contracts, quality assurance, enterprise resource planning (ERP), and information technology; (c) marketing and sales; and (d) finance (P5-C2). In this structure, P4-C2 asserted,

We have the operations department responsible for the project's lifecycle; the development director is responsible for all phases of development supported by the functional department. At the delivery stage, the project chief, manager, or director, and their functions play an important role delivering the project monitored by the development team.

Case 3 is also a matrix organization. According to P6-C3, the organization structure includes "the development division that is the core business of the company, the asset management division, the operations division, the strategy division and the corporate division that includes finance, accounting, human resources, information technology, and all the support team services." P6-C3 posited that the problem of the two-boss matrix is that, "although the development team controls the entire development phase, it is formed from different departments and division; even that they work with the development director, they also have to report to their line managers and directors. I don't see that this system is the best."

All participants highly emphasized that the development process is the most important phase of the project lifecycle. At least one participant of each organization highlighted the high importance of the planning phase. P3-C1 discussed that the proper planning is essential as, "in the absence of sound planning, we have to continuously introduce changes during the lifecycle of a project." P4-C2 shared the same view and the need to "understand how to plan the business segments from day one and what to complete in the first, second, and third phases." Also, P5-C2 highlighted that "the planning or the front-end phase is a very important phase to make sure that the project

will reach the desired output and the target of business at the end of the project.” P7-C3 indicated that “the most important phase is the project's front-end including the master plan, the phasing, selecting the contractor, and conducting the feasibility study; if we don't have an effective front-end then we will have a high probability of project's failure.”

The participants appreciated the role of the information systems in facilitating the implementation of the processes and, consequently, the alignment of the projects with business strategy. P2-C1 asserted, “the processes and procedures and the project management information systems are imbedded in the stage-gate system.” However, P2-C1 posited, “the feasibility of the project management information system relates to the maturity level and the knowledge of the stakeholders in addition to the culture; this is not the case in some locations where we lack expertise and infrastructure to do it properly.” Case 2 has an advanced ERP system linking the entire organization in addition to a PM information system. For operations; utilizing ERP facilitates the implementation of three primary processes including, the development, tender process, and PM; the tasks are transferred automatically to the concerned individuals for information and actions (P4-C2; P5-C2). Case 3, in turn, has both ERP and a document control system (P6-C3; P7-C3).

Contrary to Ren et al. (2014), the participants identified that the most critical input of the real estate project is the development phase not the construction side of the project. Also, in keeping with the conclusion of Hellström et al. (2013) and Samset and Volden (2016), the participants emphasized the significance of strategizing the project front-end for the success of their organizations REC projects. While participants

identified their organizations' project governance, they highlighted the importance of having a system governance to facilitate the application of the project governance. In complex project environments, the system governance could play a significant role in transforming the governance concept from project- to system-based management to realize success (Locatelli et al., 2014). Investing in organizations' and PM's information systems, according to Badewi (2016), is a factor of project success as there is a need for a system thinking mindset to facilitate the understanding and the management of the internal and external environments.

In Case 1 and 2, following a set of processes and procedures is a key aspect for the alignment between projects and business strategy (P2-C1; P4-C2). Participants of Case 1 and 2 had the same concept of following the process and procedures but with a difference related to the extent of flexibility. P2-C1 explained that "the company follows a standard policy, procedures, and development lifecycle that are kept reviewed and improved on a daily basis benefitting from the lessons learned from previous projects and bringing together all internal stakeholders without missing any components." P1-C1 added, "as the top management operates from the headquarter in another country, it is highly recommended to follow a standard and logical process." P2-C1 had a different opinion arguing that rigid processes and procedures are a challenge for the company as "the set of rules are not flexible enough to accommodate for the changes in different locations." In Case 2, while P5-C2 highlighted the notion of flexible procedures as a feature for coping with the complexity of large real estate construction projects and the dynamic nature of the market, P4-C2 elaborated,

These processes are being continuously updated to keep with the recent market changes; they are clear processes, well-known, when to start and when to finish considering the hierarchy and the decision-making structure, who is doing what, and everyone knows what to do. What links the processes together is the logical sequence; we need to focus on the internal processes, respect them and keep them updated.

According to P6-C3, the business plan in Case 3 is:

The guiding document that describes how the project or the development will be starting and ending with an exit strategy. This business plan is a part of the overall annual, three years or five years plan of the company. This is formulated in a more detailed way in a business case; the business case includes all the details required to develop the project.

Although P6-C3 and P7-C3 considered that transferring a clear business plan to smaller business cases is a key aspect contributing to the alignment process, P6-C3 posited, “having clearer than the available processes, will take away a lot of the hustles for some people who are a bit confused or not mature enough to make decisions.”

The literature was supportive of the business leaders’ needs to create and use the cases’ capabilities that support the organizations’ resources including the processes (Almarri & Gardiner, 2014; Khalili Shavarini et al., 2013). The three organizations follow a linear generic development cycle with possible iterations identical to the concept discussed by Budayan et al. (2014) and Kaiser et al. (2015). The findings were in line with the concept of Biesenthal and Wilden (2014) that business leaders set the boundaries

and rules for project actors to monitor performance, support aligning the project objectives with business strategy, and achieve set project objectives. In Case 2, the standard processes' flexibility was an additional feature facilitating a quick response to internal and external changes. This concept is in parallel with the recommendations of Davies and Mackenzie (2014) and Näsholm and Blomquist (2015) who advised business leaders to allow for flexibility and rapid decision-making process. In keeping with the assertion of Davies and Mackenzie (2014) and Rijke et al. (2014), the leaders of Case 1 and 2 learned from previous lessons to improve the governance and success of the projects.

Participants from each case shared particular experiences and identified the approval systems and their role within this process. P2-C1 discussed the applied stage-gate system clarifying that,

We have six stages including initiation, feasibility study, planning stage, design, construction, and operation stage. Through different committees such as the investment, finance, design, etc., the top management is the authority who approves to move through stages. Each department develops its role in the project and reports to the management committee, or board, for approval. Each stage has a delegation of authority, scope, and budget; when a stage is finalized, a report goes to the committee, they review it and decide whether to move or to stop or maybe some changes.

When the project is in the delivery stage, P1-C1 stated, "the projects committee is responsible to discuss and evaluate the change, present it to top management, and seek

their approval.” P1-C1 added, “the committee role is very effective in improving the alignment, but the long process becomes an obstacle obstructing the efficiency of the projects.” In addition to the role of committees, P4-C2 extended the appreciation to include the effectiveness of the vertical hierarchy of the decision-making process followed in Case 2. Participant P4-C2 asserted,

We have a built-in system where information goes automatically to the concerned party for approval; that concerned party is usually the top management and committees following the authority matrix. For instance, there are committees for the design brief, the master planning, the feasibility, and the design concept. Usually, the development director schedules a meeting with committees through the committee secretary who organizes all the matters related to the approval procedure.

The chief executive officer and the divisions’ chief officers form the investment committee in Case 3. According to P6-C3, “the role of the committee is to monitor the progress, make the main decisions, approve new opportunities, and deviations due to many reasons including the market changes; they meet every 15 days to make this kind of decisions.” In turn, P7-C3 said, “while the top management meets to make major decisions, approving tasks such as the schematic design, for example, happens through workshops that include all stakeholders.” Also, according to P6-C3, “the development directors come and meet monthly with the top management and present the progress of their developments in terms of budget, progress on site, sales and marketing, etc.; the top management instructs for further actions based on their review of the progress report.”

Concerning the governance body, the opinions of the three organizations' participants were in accordance with the relative literature. According to Petro and Gardiner (2015), the involvement of steering committee is important during the lifecycle of the project to improve the likelihood of project success. P2-C1 and P6-C3 added the notion of communication to the proper project governance. This concept, according to Hellström et al. (2013) and Locatelli et al. (2014), is one of the success factors of large projects. P3-C1 discussed that "the top management involvement in every and each aspect of the project reduces the project's efficiency." This concept is in line with the recommendation of Martinsuo (2013). While Davis (2014) highlighted the importance of top management involvement, Martinsuo (2013) advised a moderate involvement as the exaggeration could have a negative side effect due to over-steering.

The leaders of Case 1 adopted a stage-gate system consisted of six stages. Cooper (2014) developed the stage-gate concept based on five stages. Although following the system has a positive impact on the conception, development, and launch of new products, the system is accused of its linearity, rigidity, increased controllability, financially-based, bureaucracy, and inability to handle dynamic projects (Cooper, 2014). P2-C1 emphasized the concept of rigidity and bureaucracy.

Theme 3: The Governance of Projects During the Delivery Phase

Another highly emphasized theme was the governance of projects within the three cases during the project delivery stage. The PM information systems and the ERPs adopted by the organizations for the development process applies also to this phase. According to P4-C2,

The development team has a monitoring role in the execution process. We follow the means of technology and communicate decisions on site. And, we utilize ERP related to the site work. Everyone including the project leader, the project team, and the external stakeholders feed this system.

In Case 3, most of the coordination happens informally; however, the delivery team uses the PM system to register the decisions and actions formally. According to P1-C1, “the system that has been put in place provides enough information to the top management facilitating the decision-making process.” After the transfer of project from the development department, the delivery team of Case 3 uses both formal and informal communications to manage and perform the execution activities. Also, participant P2-C1 asserted, “our PM system is effective, but this level of effectiveness may not be achieved in remote locations due to the culture, maturity of users, and the available infrastructure.”

The issue of remote locations in Case 1 exceeds the effectiveness of PM systems to include the processes and procedures also. P2-C1 expressed,

Although the financial authority may change depending on the size of the investment; the methodology of executing the project still depends on the standard policy and procedure for having a better control; having flexibility and tailoring the procedure to fit the remote locations helps to improve the alignment between the execution of projects and business strategy.

Although P1-C1 expressed positive opinion related to the available standardized procedure, the participant’s particular concern was the non-efficient “paperwork” and the length of the process related to approving the emerging changes. The participants of

Case 2 and 3 did not express the same concern related to the remote locations; while Case 3 operates in one country only where the delivery team uses specific business cases as guiding elements (P6-C3; P7-C3), P4-C2 highlighted that, “standard but flexible processes are important for the alignment process as, when we go international, it is difficult to exactly apply the same processes as different locations have their own codes, standards, regulations, and matrix.”

The discussions related to the process, procedures, and PM information system had the same typicality and continuity of these systems discussed in theme 2. All the arguments reflected an idiosyncratic nature of the organizations consistent with Crawford (2014) who viewed that, although PM practices could be similar, PM systems are still idiosyncratic and differ in their configuration. The participants also emphasized the internal and external stakeholders’ competencies, the means of communication, and the reporting process.

The participants highlighted the importance of stakeholders’ competencies in this stage. In Case 1 and 2 the participants carefully considered the selection, development, and motivation of external and internal stakeholders (P1-C1; P4-C2); this process, according to P2-C1 becomes more sensitive in less mature markets due to the difference in culture and the scarce availability of skilled resources. For Case 3, P6-C3 expressed,

You cannot have a dream team; there is always some weaknesses somewhere, but it is the role of project leader to bridge the gap depending on his own experience and to create a kind of a team spirit to help each other and cover the possible

shortfalls, to lead by example, to improve the contribution and collaboration, and to motivate the team.

Each case has a standard reporting process followed in all projects. According to P1-C1, “the project leader needs to report to the contract department in all phases as the contract department is the link between the project and the committee. The project leader does not approach the committee directly except in informal way.” In Case 2, according to P4-C2, “we use the same business language in both projects in terms of reporting the financial ratios, master planning components, targets, and progresses.” Discussing the auditing process, P4-C2 said, “the company conducts periodical audits to ensure that the policies and procedures are being strictly followed.” P4-C2 added,

The auditing department audits each year’s activities during the following year, so 2016, for instance, is being audited in 2017. If we have 300 projects, we receive 300 reports, and we have to respond to the audit report and provide a mitigation plan for the non-conformances.

To measure the performance on the level of individual project, P7-C3 indicated, We have weekly meetings and a monthly progress report that includes the contractual finish day, the manpower target, quality performance, sales, marketing, and development information, in addition to the KPI reports of all the departments. All projects are measured similarly to have apple to apple comparison.

On the level of the project portfolio, P6-C3 explained, “we have a monthly follow up. In this monthly meeting, all running developments are being discussed in turns of fulfilling their objectives on a monthly and quarterly basis.”

In Case 1 and 2, the participants discussed their roles in using the learning to facilitate the evolvement of the competences, achieving the skills, and knowledge; Medina and Medina (2015) and Turkulainen et al. (2015) presented the same concept. Also, Morris (2013) argued that the appropriateness of project leaders’ methodology lies in the extent those leaders could align the project characteristics with project team’s competencies, the environment, and best practices. Too and Weaver (2014) identified the elements of proper project leadership practices; the participants also identified three of them namely (a) communicating the project importance, (b) using similar reporting metrics for all projects, and (c) face-to-face meetings for decision-making. Consistent with Müller et al. (2012), P1-C1 and P6-C3 posited that the intellectual, managerial, and emotional dimensions are significant elements of leadership competency. Contrary to Turner et al. (2013), each participant follows the same leadership style regardless the type of the project. However, the classification of large REC projects could arguably be the same as they mainly follow a linear generic development cycle.

The PMOs exist in the project delivery structure of each case. In Case 1, the PMO is an external organization that includes project, construction, and development management entities led by the organization’s project director and a few individuals. According to P1-C1, the organization’s internal team and external PMO manage the contractors, designers, and consultants. Managed by a project director, a project

assistance, and a control officer, an external PMO controls the project delivery in Case 2; however, according to P4-C2, “the company divisions manage the procurement and design with a smaller role given to the PMO.” In Case 3, according to P6-3, “during the construction phase, the PMC or project management consultant will be managing the entire construction phase led by one client representative and supported by a central organizational PMO.”

Among the three cases, the PMOs differ regarding the followed PM methodology. In Case 1, the members of PMOs recruited from PM firms follow their organizations’ relative PM methodologies. However, P2-C1 stated, “usually, the project management consultants lead using the normal standard international practices of project management; these standards are modified a little bit to suit our requirements as the client.” P3-C1 posited that “sometimes when a certain project management methodology is being followed without considering the business requirements, it affects negatively the alignment of the project with strategy.” P1-C1 shared the same concept but raised concerns related to a possible conflict of interest because of the followed structure and the two-boss system. Although the priority of external PMOs members is to realize their organizations strategies, P1-C1 asserted, “my role as a project director is to reduce the gap and redirect the PMO to follow the strategy of the project.” P1-C1 added a dimension related to the project efficiency; P1-C1 said, “if the leader loses control over the PMO then the project failure chances increase in terms of efficiency.” However, participant P2-C1 doubted a flexible role of project leader in Case 1 and asserted, “the project manager is not authorized to choose his own methodology in rigid organizations.”

In addition, P2-C1 claimed that “the project management office is a challenge that may negatively affect the alignment process unless you train them for a long time.” P4-C2 elaborated this concept and explained that the PMOs are service providers who have the know-how, but they may lack knowledge of the organization business process and, hence,

We need to train them and spend three to six months in order to get them to our expectations and to let them understand what exactly they need to do; otherwise, they will follow the typical PM methods, but sometimes this will not be sufficient to fulfill our requirements.

Participant P5-C2 asserted,

It is very important to understand their background and interview the PMO members and especially the leaders, because these guys have their own structure, but they must outsource when they get the job. We, as the employer, brief them about the vision, milestones, scope, and timeframe; it is part of the PMO role to achieve that to make sure that the project is aligned with business strategy and directions; flexibility of PM methodology plays a positive role in this alignment.

The members of internal PMO in Case 3 follow the PM international standard methodology. P6-C3 indicated that regardless the importance of projects, all projects follow their relative project plans. P6-C3 added, “the same methodology will apply in terms of cost, time, and control. We don't have customized procedures and processes in place, but we follow the international project management methodology.”

Participant P7-C3 shared the same concept and discussed the role of the project leaders;

The project manager on site follows the same methodology as a baseline but has some flexibility in the execution of the project where he applies his experience and skills to improve the conditions of the project. Our role is to ensure that PMCs have the required individuals' skills but following our standards and methodology.

According to P7-C3, the internal PMO is an effective enabler of the improvement of alignment between the project and business strategy. Too and Weaver (2014) advised to consider eight guiding elements for designing an effective project governance system; among those elements and during the delivery stage of the projects, the leaders of the three cases defined the level of authority and the decision-making process and employed PMOs. While in Case 1 and 2 the PMOs are external, the two offices differ regarding their responsibilities and the followed PM methodology. In Case 3, the PMO office is centrally supporting all projects, controlling the PM consultant assigned for each project, and following the PM international methodology. These findings were in line with the concept of Parchami Jalal and Matin Koosha (2015) who argued that since organizations have different structural and contextual dimensions, they also have different PMOs structural and functional characteristics.

Participants of Case 1 are among the practitioners in the Middle East who believe, according to Gardiner (2014), that possessing such intermediate organizational level is not always feasible to achieve the desired project values. One of the reasons behind case

1 participants' opinion could be that the PMO is external and their role is limited to the role described by Wysocki (2014) that is (a) to develop and adopt formal procedures for managing projects; (b) to provide qualified support and/or execution personnel for projects, and (c) to force PM standards and policies.

Joslin and Müller (2015) argued that leaders establish PMOs aiming to standardize the PM methodology; however, experienced PMO leaders introduce flexibility and link the standardization to the customization of PM methodologies (Joslin & Müller, 2015). Consistent with the latter concept and although the PMOs in Case 2 are also external, P5-C2 considered that employing PMOs along with flexible PM methodology are significant factors for the alignment between projects and business strategy. Establishing PMOs helps in mediating a dynamic response to external and internal changes (Gardiner, 2014). Also, participants of Case 3 highlighted the notion of flexibility and the role of PMO in improving the alignment between projects and business strategy. The PMO in Case 3 is an internal layer of the organization. In similar situations, the role of central PMO exceeds the project support to include enabling the strategic alignment between projects and business strategy (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014).

Theme 4: Measuring Project Performance and Strategic Success

This theme revealed the different participants' opinions on how they and their organizations measure the projects strategic success. The participants also discussed the way the project leaders and their organizations measure and monitor the performance of individuals and projects. The importance of this theme lies in finding a link between the

measurement of project performance and success on the one side, and the alignment phenomenon on the other.

When discussing the perception of internal stakeholders, the general opinion was that the meaning of project success differs across different organizational levels.

According to the P2-C1,

At a higher level, those people know the strategy and measure the success based on the extent to which the strategy is delivered. At a lower level, it is a project; achieving the technical aspects of the project execution is achieving the strategy put for these projects.

P3-C1 elaborated, “a business department, for example, would accept an extension of the project time if it would increase the value of the investment; in contrary, the control department measures the success of the project by meeting their original schedule.” P3-C1 added, “seeing the project above the ground is the success of people, while the success of the project is the success of the portfolio, achieving the business intent, the vision and image of the company, and profitability.” Similarly, for Case 2, P4-C2 discussed that the project delivery team’s main goal is to execute the project plan where the strategy is translated to milestones. P4-C2 added, “this is there understanding, but sometimes they need to consider other sides of the business known by other departments such as the development department.” P4-C2 gave an example of a landmark developed by the participant’s organization: “the delivery team followed the project strategy, but we know from day one that the organization strategy was built aiming the success of the entire surroundings including the tower.” For Case 3, P6-C3

indicated, “the project manager who is residing on site look to the success of the execution, but on the development level, the view is more comprehensive.”

Following the top-down direction of the three cases’ hierarchies, measuring the project success descends from strategic to projectification mindset. Measuring PM performance could limit the effective realization of business benefits (Badewi, 2016). Also, limiting the success criteria to PM success may reflect a weak alignment between projects and business strategy (Hussein et al., 2015). Considering the success of the studied cases, the method of measuring the success of projects at the level of project delivery has no negative consequence on the alignment phenomenon; this reasoning supports the view of participants that the development and planning phases possess a higher importance in REC projects compared to the delivery phases in contrary to the concept of Ren et al. (2014).

When comparing the project management success with the project success, the participants’ answers revealed different opinions. Participants of Case 1 considered both successes are important depending on the type of projects. They also considered that short- and long-term success are equally important. P1-C1 reported, “it is important to complete the project in accordance with time, budget, and quality, but it is also important to satisfy the customer at the end of commercial projects.” According to P2-C1, measuring success depends on the category of the project. P2-C1 gave an example differentiating between the projects’ categories:

Some are commercially driven, and the others are politically driven, and that is why you end up with having this differentiation between project success in

principle versus the PM methodology success; so, in my opinion, both successes are important depending on the type of the project.

In contrary, participants of Case 2 considered that achieving the project success is more essential than the PM success. The participants also measure the project efficiency on the short-term while they measure the portfolio success on the long-term. P4-C2 referred to the same example of the iconic project: “the project got delayed with additional cost, but once the project was finished we completed a significant tower that increased the valuation of the surrounding projects.” The opinion of P5-C2 was, “an inefficient project as a component of the program could be the cause of reducing the program efficiency, but it has a minor effect on decreasing the alignment between the entire program and business strategy.”

In Case 3, the participants argued that the short-term PM success is equally important to the long-term project success. P6-C3 explained,

Regardless the aim behind building a project, achieving the target of the business plan is a success by itself. The target includes a part related to the project efficiency measures as well as another part related to the project contribution to the value of the company and its social plan.

P7-C3 posited that the efficiency and effectiveness of the project possess equal importance:

Alignment is achieved when the master plan, the milestones, and the budget are according to the guidelines of each project. When the project is efficient, for

people on site and on the control side, the alignment between the project and strategy is improved.

Practitioners measure the project success against the overall objectives of the project, and they measure the PM success at the end of the project by assessing the efficiency, cost, time, and quality (Joslin & Müller, 2015). In general, the participants of Case 1 and 3 had similar opinions regarding the equal importance of short-term PM success and long-term project success. The only difference is that the concept of Case 1 participants is conditionally related to the commercially driven projects; in noncommercial or political objective project, PM success has a negligible value. The value of Case 1 organization reflects monetary and nonmonetary revenues. In similar cases, Voss and Kock (2013) argued that the organizational value is a tradeoff between sacrifices and benefits; the answers of Case 1 participants presented similar situations.

Participants of Case 2 had a different opinion than the participants of the other two cases. Logically, the opinions of Case 2 participants do not stem from competing backgrounds as one is responsible of the development tasks while the other resides on site. Case 2 participants believe that the short-term PM success is not necessarily important compared to the long-term project success. This divide also reflects on the literature of project success. While Badewi (2016) advised business leaders to assess the project success based on both long- and short-term objectives, Samset and Volden (2016) discussed that meeting project efficiency does not necessarily increase the projects' effectiveness and success. Referring to concept of Rolstadås et al. (2014), the reasons for

this divide could be because each organization has a different set of objectives including project objective, business objectives, and social and environment objectives.

Although all participants indicated that they follow a system setting and monitoring the KPIs, the participants of each case adopted counter opinions, either KPIs are significant or insignificant for the alignment phenomenon. P2-C1 asserted that the system is significant for improving the alignment between projects and business strategy; P2-C1 explained the reasons behind his concepts,

We have two KPIs systems, one for individuals and the other for projects. The board set the major objectives and departments break them down to set their own objectives. Then, these objectives are translated to KPIs; achieving these KPIs lead to achieving the alignment.

In contrary, P1-C1 the participant of Case 1 argued,

The top management continuously changes the target during the year resulting in inefficient KPIs. Key performance indicators are used to reward the team; I don't see an added value for the KPIs about the success of projects and the alignment with business strategy.

Supporting the same concept, participant P3-C1 argued, “sometimes the KPI process creates a problem as everyone is trying to reach his target without considering others’ KPIs that are more important to achieve success; having cross-functional KPIs could be a solution for this potential issue.”

Sharing the same opinion, P4-C2 argued that using KPIs is not a driver for improving the alignment. The KPI is becoming more of a trend,” participant P4-C2 revealed, “for the

last five years we were using KPIs, but now the company is moving to a more advanced method of measuring the performance where individuals set their objectives and evaluate their achievements.” On the counter side, within Case 2 also, P5-C2 asserted, “the KPI procedure is a very important aspect of the alignment process; they are monitored by the top management to ensure that each department works toward achieving their targets.”

The same divide existed in Case 3. P6-C3 expressed,

Although we have two KPIs, for staff and departments, the KPIs are more of performance indicators and not project related; they are used to make sure that each member is performing professionally. For example, a development manager is not handling only one project, so the KPI is general and does not reflect a specific business plan for one of the projects.

In contrary, P7-C3 favored the opinion that KPIs are drivers for the alignment. P7-C3 believes, “the KPIs contribute to the alignment process as they help to improve the performance and the well-being of individuals who will be happy when achieving their targets.”

Tying the opinions related to KPIs with the above conclusion related to the measurement of success is significant to understand the findings related to the KPIs. Participants of Case 1 and 3 considered that both values are equally important, the tangible monetary and the intangible nonmonetary values. Projecting this on the KPIs, the participants of Case 1 and 3 should also appreciate the KPIs as indicators of tangible performance. According to Badewi (2016), business leaders could measure tangible project benefits using KPIs while intangible benefits remain unmeasurable. However, the

participants' opinions highlighted a horizontal divide within each case; while one participant in each case considered that the KPIs are important to the alignment process, the other had a different opinion.

Assessing the projects based on KPIs is insufficient as this evaluation lacks a value related component (Serra & Kunc, 2015). However, Drouin and Jugdev (2013) identified some values required for gaining competitive advantage. These values include but not limited to the financial aspects, internal business process, and learning and growth; employing a KPI system facilitates the measurement of all these values. This conclusion could present one of the explanations related to the opinions' divide. While the leaders of Case 2 started to implement a new KPI system, many participants of this study proposed solutions to resolve the issues of the KPI process. Mir and Pinnington (2014) recommended taking several actions to increase the effectiveness of KPI system. These actions include developing the system to align the KPIs with business strategy and considering the various stakeholders' perspectives while designing the KPIs.

Connecting Findings to Conceptual Frameworks

As recommended by Parker et al. (2015), to combine strategic management theories in PM research, I framed this study using the DCs model and the CA. Project leaders, according to CA, must align their organizational processes and structure with the organizational context including technology, culture, size, task, and environment (Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985). Also, business leaders need to identify significant contingencies, such as business strategy, and determine the most effective organizational design that is suitable for aligning the strategy with the organization's contexts (Boer et al., 2015). As

their core business and main task is the development of real estate projects, the three organizations have similarities in following a linear generic development cycle where the pre-construction teams are basically and physically located in their headquarters; however, the leaders of these organizations employed different structures, processes, and systems to manage and execute their organizations' tasks. While the variation of the three organization is narrow at the strategy formulation level, the gap becomes deeper as we move down the phases' levels; the gap is moderate at the development stage and expands at the project delivery stage.

Case 1 and 2 operate in different countries in the Middle East; because of their contexts, their leaders employed external PMOs to manage the delivery of their organizations' projects. In contrary, Case 3 is present in one country only; because of size and location, the leaders established a centralized PMO supported by external consultants at each job location. In addition to the difference in processes, structures, and leadership style, each organization follows a different PM methodology. Based on this concept of no "one-size-fits-all," the contingency theorists stress the significance of idiosyncratic organizational structures and processes that depend on their contexts (Joslin & Müller, 2015; Wadongo & Abdel-Kader, 2014). This idiosyncrasy, according to the contingency school, exceeds the organizational aspects to include also PM aspects such as methodology and leadership style (Turner et al., 2013). While relying on the findings could justify the differences in structures and processes among the studied contexts, the justification of different leadership styles and PM methodologies has no solid ground in

the absence of detailed definition of REC; this study lacked a detailed comparison between the type of projects executed by each organization.

As enablers of the alignment between projects and business strategy, the dimensions of DC include sensing, seizing, reconfiguring (Teece et al., 1997), learning, integrating, and coordinating (Rashidirad et al., 2013). While evidence of most of these dimensions exists in the three cases, the dimensions of reconfiguring, learning, and integrating were almost absent in some cases. In Case 1, having a rigid organization limited the reconfiguration or the adjustment of the organization's operating capabilities and internal resources especially in remote locations. Also, the organization's leaders did not use the knowledge acquired from external resources or integrate them in new operational capabilities. Although the leaders of Case 1 learned from previous lessons to update the organization's processes, they rarely transferred this learning to lower levels due to geographical, infrastructure, and cultural concerns.

This integration happened in Case 2 where the organization joined with reputable PM firms and customized the PMO's procedures using the latest technologies in the field (P4-C2; P5-C2); however, this customization is a company- not project-based. Although the leaders introduced a flexibility in the processes and methodologies to reduce the uncertainty of the complex projects, this feature was not enough to allow the leaders to add the dynamic characteristic to the projects of the organization. In contrary, Case 3 is a dynamic organization because the leaders respond to the market changes by modifying the project plan originally customized for each project; they also use a centralized PMO as a DC supporting the delivery's stakeholders and increasing the alignment between the

internal divisions and the delivery team. According to Gardiner (2014), the significance of DCs approach resides in the potential to change routines, resources, and competences. Without this dynamic feature, the leaders abandon an important factor distinguishing DC from the resource-based view. According to Szymaniec-Mlicka (2014), business leaders adopt a resource-based view focusing on the tangible and intangible resources, capability, and interior structure of the organization without considering the external environment.

Applications to Professional Practice

Successful project leaders do not necessarily depend on the traditional factors of time, cost, and quality; they need to use strategies enabling them to align their projects with business strategy (Awwal, 2014). The focus of this study was to present practical applications for improving the alignment between projects and business strategies. The practical applications exist in the overall alignment process used by the project leaders during two phases of large REC projects, the development and delivery phases.

Applications include strategies for improving the understanding of business strategy in addition to the optimization of organizational performance and competitiveness through improving the governance systems, the development and delivery process and methodologies, the organization's DCs, and the measurement of success.

The real estate development process starts from the formulation of the business strategy and lasts for longer than its immediate operation time (Turner & Zolin, 2012); hence, the development and delivery phases are integrated into the entire organizational system. The practical application includes strategies for building successful organizational models allowing the project leaders to exert their influence over business

leaders to apply cognitive models and solutions for improving the alignment between project and business strategy. Project leaders could influence the business leaders to change and renew the business strategy and its realization processes (Vuori et al., 2013). Project leaders who influence their organizations create a positive effect on strategic alignment and PPM effectiveness and success (Petro & Gardiner, 2015).

These findings provide cognitive evidence on the importance of involving the project leaders in the formulation of strategy; project leaders could use the evidence accounting for a comprehensive role in the formulation process. Vision, mission, goals, objectives, and values are strategic elements that feed the portfolio elements that, in turn, feed the PM elements from a narrower perspective. Understanding this concept is crucial for the development and delivery leaders; the former should ensure that the project front-end includes the proper planning that reflects the strategic elements of the organization. Aligning the processes of strategy formulation and project planning implies facilitating a role, for project leaders, that exceeds the detailing and advising to include the strategy formulation process (Awwal, 2014).

The participants discussed strategies for building a dynamic project governance system, which presents guiding lines for business and project leaders while designing the governance system. A proper project governance supported by information systems is an essential aspect of the alignment between projects and business strategy. Organizations are idiosyncratic; business leaders design the most effective governance body, processes, and organizational structure that are suitable for aligning the strategy with the organizational contexts (Boer et al., 2015); however, business leaders need to allow for

flexibility and rapid decision-making processes to manage the complexity of large size and long duration projects (Näsholm & Blomquist, 2015). Gardiner (2014) advised an advanced move toward a dynamic organization where business leaders employ DC such as PPPM that are significant to change routines, resources, and competences.

Using the findings could also contribute to changing the mindset of project leader into more strategic focus. Consequent to their significant role, development leaders possess additional exposure to business strategy compared to their peer delivery leaders; hence, the development project leaders will learn to address the planning aspect from a broader and more strategic perspective (Pinto & Winch, 2015). In addition to aligning the planning with the organization's objectives, the development project leaders will acquire knowledge for setting up their projects to deliver certain outputs and to communicate these outputs with the external and internal stakeholders (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015). One of the critical dimensions of leadership competencies is their ability to transparently share the strategy with stakeholders (Lundy & Morin, 2013).

Referring to the findings of this study, project leaders could learn new ways for adapting their concepts related to measuring the project success for better alignment with business strategies. The role of internal stakeholders responsible for the construction phase is also significant as these stakeholders are accountable for delivering the end-product or project. Hence, the leaders of the development and delivery stages will learn strategies to design a project strategy introducing a link between the development and delivery phases (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015). Also, the project delivery team will understand the importance of focusing on the operational and tactical activities without

ignoring the strategic business aspects (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2015). To ensure alignment between projects and business strategy, this study highlighted the importance of measuring the short- and long-term project success; leaders will learn to measure the success based on the efficiency of projects and the value offered to the business (Alsudiri et al., 2013). Learning will include practical actions for leaders to balance a tradeoff between sacrifices and benefits to increase the monetary and non-monetary values of the organization (Voss & Kock, 2013). Moreover, business leaders employ a KPIs system considering the measurement of performance not related to individuals only, but includes business segments and projects.

The findings of this study include solutions for enhancing the role of PMO. Wilden et al. (2013) advised business leaders to design an organic and decentralized organizational structure to complement the DC of PMO. Business leaders should not limit the role of PMO's members to supporting the development and construction activities; additional roles include mediating a proactive response to external and internal changes (Gardiner, 2014) and enabling the strategic alignment between projects and business strategy (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014); the strategies include employing an internal centralized PMO with flexible PM methodologies to facilitate these additional roles.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of the study included insights into the successful strategies project leaders used to increase the alignment of projects with business strategies, which positively affects the organizations' performance and competitiveness. Using the

strategies outlined in the findings, business and project leaders could increase the success rate of REC projects and positively affect both the organization's internal stakeholders and communities. Real estate construction project success includes nonmonetary facets such as the benefits to the community (Locatelli et al., 2014) and positive social change (Barthel & Vignal, 2014; Jaafar et al., 2014).

Creating social change became more common, and organizations hold a great promise in initiating this change (Sharma & Good, 2013). The real estate sector has the potential and experience to support governments in achieving the environmental objectives (Othman, 2013). The findings of this study highlighted that leaders of REOs in the Middle East possess an increased social awareness and attempt to improve their communities' lifestyle. Business leaders who adopt strategies for improving the alignment of large REC projects with business strategy could save around 11% of the projects' economic cost (Hasse & Bekker, 2016), and use the saving to achieve community benefits such as better environment (Sharma & Good, 2013).

Recommendations for Action

The participants of this study identified many available strategies to align REC projects with business strategy. The participants also recommended additional actions for business and project leaders to optimize the existing alignment in their organizations. Table 2 includes these recommendations grouped under the identified themes. Along with the strategies identified in the findings, I consolidated the participants' recommendations to form four additional aspects that business and project leaders of

Middle East REO could use to improve the alignment between REC projects and business strategies.

Table 2

Participants Recommendations Per Theme: Strategic Alignment – Middle East REO's

	Case 1			Case 2		Case 3	
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Theme 1: The Flow of Strategy							
Involvement of lower level in strategy formulation						X	X
Involvement of individuals who have the know-how in strategy formulation				X			
Have clear objectives communicated with the lower levels	X					X	
Theme 2: The Governance of Projects During the Development Phase							
Reducing the layers of processes and procedures					X		
Improving timeline to execute the process				X			
Focus, respect, and keep updating the internal processes				X			
Adding flexibility to the processes and procedures		X					
To add more clarity to the processes and procedures						X	
To have more clarity on the decision-making process						X	
Introduce smaller committee at the lower level to improve the approval process	X						
Theme 3: The Governance of Projects During the Delivery Phase							
The proper selection and training of internal and external stakeholders				X	X		
Flexible processes and procedures		X					
Theme 4: Measuring Project Performance and Strategic Success							
Cross-functional KPIs			X				
Down-up KPI							X

Starting from theme 1, I recommend that business leaders set clear objectives and communicate them to all stakeholders. Business leaders also need to involve all stakeholders including the development and delivery team in the formulation of business strategy. Ritson et al. (2012) recommended business leaders to avoid using unclear strategic picture while designing the program's lifecycle; hence, business leaders need to involve knowledgeable and competent project leaders in developing adaptive programs and structure to achieve the business strategy. Sharing a transparent strategy with stakeholders is a significant dimension of leadership competencies (Lundy & Morin, 2013). Executing projects based on well-defined strategic outputs is a critical factor for gaining the organizational competitive advantage (Awwal, 2014).

Derived from the participants' opinions related to theme 2, the recommendations for business leaders include (a) improving the efficiency of process and procedures by reducing their timelines, (b) improving the effectiveness of processes by adding clarity, flexibility, and continuous updates, and (c) improve the decision-making process by adding additional independent committees at the lower organizational levels. According to Alsudiri et al. (2013) and Daniel et al. (2014), business leaders shall adopt a DCs approach to understand the resources to change, update, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organizational processes. Project leaders could improve the productivity by using the capabilities that support the other organization's resources including processes, information, knowledge, and assets (Khalili Shavarini et al., 2013). Finding the right balance between the flexibility and the formality of the processes is important to achieve success (Killen & Hunt, 2013). The attributes of success also

include clear priorities' focus, clear vision, and transparent planning (Rijke et al., 2014). Also, possessing and communicating a clear vision is an essential core competency of project leaders (Sohmen & Dimitriou, 2015).

For theme 3, I recommend that business and project leaders select the external stakeholders properly. Project leaders also need to introduce flexibility to the PM methodology to address the complexity of projects. To drive performance, Mesa et al. (2016) recommended that project leaders align their organizations' interests and objectives with the external stakeholders. Devoting adequate resources to integrate the organizational systems together, business leaders could reduce the projects' complexity and stakeholders' uncertainties (Davies & Mackenzie, 2014). Resources include the proper selection and training of external stakeholders to perform their responsibilities. Communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution skills, in addition to internal and external stakeholders' management are essential core competencies of project leaders (Sohmen & Dimitriou, 2015). Also, project leaders need to respond to the complexity and rapid context change by setting PM flexible processes (Davies & Mackenzie, 2014).

Concerning the measurement of performance and success, the recommendation related to theme 4 is about the need for business leaders to improve the KPI process to cover the performance of individuals, organizational divisions, and projects. Increasing the project success, one of the actions that project leaders need to take is the development of projects' KPIs aligned with business strategy (Mir & Pinnington, 2014). Mir and Pinnington (2014) link this action to the consideration of the various stakeholders' perspectives including individuals and business divisions. Also, to link competitive

advantage to project success, Samset and Volden (2016) discussed a broader framework consisting of five factors namely (a) impact on customers, (b) impact on teams, (c) efficiency, (d) business success, and (e) preparing for the future. I recommend that business and project leaders update the KPIs' system to include these factors.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study might provide the first academic opportunity to explore the phenomenon of alignment between projects and business strategy of REOs in the Middle East. Scholars and practitioners are increasingly accepting the concept of alignment that examines the organizational relationship between strategies, management methodologies, and structure (Herazo, Lizarralde, & Paquin, 2012). The first recommendation for further research includes a quantitative approach examining the relationships between variables identified in the findings of this study.

This study has three limitations, namely (a) accessibility to the Internet, (b) the interview questions may not have covered the complete concepts of alignment, and (c) subjectivity. To address the first two limitations, another recommendation for further research could include a single case study exploring the alignment phenomenon in one of the selected contexts by using this research as a pilot study in addition to collecting data from individuals, groups, and observations. The third recommendation for further research combines the two first recommendations to address all limitations of this study; a mixed method approach for studying the alignment of REC projects with business strategy in the Middle East by identifying the variables based on a single REO case study

and examining the relationships among these variables. According to Aronson et al. (2013), the mixed method approach is gaining increased popularity in PM research.

Reflections

I summarize my experience within the DBA Doctoral Study process as the transformation from the status of identifying a phenomenon into an integrated case of awareness of the phenomenon's merits. Based on my experience in the field of REC projects, I recognized the importance of aligning the projects with business strategy in increasing the value of REOs. Following the best methodologies of conducting the literature review and the qualitative case study research adapted and extended my understanding related to the best practices used to improve this process of alignment.

To allow for this transformation and additional learning, bracketing the preconceptions was essential to avoid distorting the actual picture of the phenomenon of alignment. Clearly, I conveyed this message to the participants at the beginning of each interview. I also suspended biases by writing clear reflections on self-preconceptions to reduce the subjectivity and increase the reliability and validity of this research. Moreover, identifying the interview questions before conducting the literature review was a significant practice to avoid following a path defined by the literature preconceptions; using this practice allowed participants to discuss their experiences only.

After completing this study, the main change to my thinking was the start of the evolution process from a traditional PM into a strategic view of managing projects. Although the echo frequency of the alignment terminology on practitioners hearing is low, the participants elaborated by giving many examples where the alignment was

essential in contrary to the traditional measurement of the PM success. Adding these learnings, patterns, and examples to my library ignited the evolution process that should last way beyond presenting the findings of this research.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Scholars and practitioners have a growing interest in the importance of linking project outcomes with the business strategy as a prerequisite for project success. This study presented insights into how some real estate organizations leaders achieved this alignment. I identified the top 10 real estate organization in the Middle East. Seven leaders from three of these cases shared their experiences related to the successful strategies they used to improve the alignment of projects with business strategy.

Conducting an exploratory multiple case study, I identified the themes and patterns in the three cases. The patterns presented the idiosyncratic nature of these organizations and the absence of one-size-fits-all project management methodology across the three cases, which confirmed that leaders adopted a contingency approach. Also, to optimize the role of dynamic organizational capabilities, the findings suggested the need to increase the dimensions of reconfiguring, learning and integrating especially for organizations that operate in more than one country in the Middle East.

The findings guided business and projects leaders for practical applications they could use during two phases of large REC projects, the development and delivery phases. Applications included strategies for improving the understanding of business strategy, optimizing the organizational performance and competitiveness, improving the governance systems, the process and methodologies, building and improving dynamic

capabilities, and measuring project success. Also, the contribution of this study to positive social change included improving environmental quality and community lifestyle.

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Appendix A: NIH Certificate of Completion



Appendix B: Data Collection Protocol Guide

Organization #	Case #	Participant	Date	Folder Name	File Name
ORG-_____	CASE-__	SP-_____		Case-_____	CASE__-REF__

1. Establishing a Skype Connection:

- Please be advised that the voice recording has not yet started
- Please confirm that you have no connection issues. (Thank you)
- Please advise whenever you notice that the connection becomes poor. (Thank you)
- If you are not happy with the video call, I will establish a Skype voice call only. Anyway, there is no video recording, the interview will be voice recorded only. (Thank you for selecting _____ call interview)

2. Before Starting the Recording:

- Thank you for accepting to participate in this research. Please note that I am establishing this call in an isolated sound room and taking all the necessary measures to protect your privacy
- Measures to ensure privacy include using case numbers instead of organization name, and participant identifiers in place of your name. Your case number is _____ and your identifier is SP _____
- The interviews will be transcribed and analyzed without any indication to your organization or to your name
- The recording and transcript will be saved for five years and then deleted permanently
- The length of this interview will be between 45 to 60 minutes
- You have the right to terminate this interview whenever you require
- Also, you have the right to request ignoring any statement you will give during the interview. Any request will be seriously executed.

- Before starting, I would appreciate if you confirm that you have read and agreed the consent form consisted of the identity of the researcher, the background and the objective and nature of the study, interview procedures and time, the voluntary nature of the study, risks and benefits of participating to the study, compensation, confidentiality, and contacts and questions. _____ (Thank you for your confirmation)
- I restrict myself to using the public information only posted in your LinkedIn profile. Please identify the personal or any information that I should not collect from your LinkedIn profile: _____
- Do you have any question before starting?

3. Opening Statement:

The purpose of this study is to explore the successful strategies real estate construction project leaders use to improve the alignment of real estate construction projects with business strategy. As one of the participants, I selected you to contribute based on your extensive experience in the real estate development and construction industry, and since you have managed one of the real estate construction projects for one of the organizations in the Middle East selected as a case for this study. I selected the project alignment's topic based on my interest in project management and experience in the real estate development and construction industry. However, during this interview, I will bracket my points of view and biases to avoid any judgment and allow you to share the thick and rich description related to your experience in the phenomenon of projects alignment. The alignment strategies that real estate construction project leaders utilize may increase the performance and competitiveness of their organizations; business leaders tend to use the economic cost savings in socially responsible. The contribution of this study to positive social change may result in improved environmental quality.

4. The Start of Recording:

- I will now start recording. (start the recorders)

- Today is_____ This case number is_____, the participant Initial is SP
- There are eight interview questions; however, the primary research question is: what strategies do real estate construction project leaders use to improve the alignment of real estate construction projects with business strategy?

5. The Interview questions

1. What strategies do you use to align real estate construction projects with your business strategy?

<u>Reflections and Observations</u>		<u>Probe Questions</u>
<u>Theoretical Notes</u>	<u>Methodological notes</u>	<u>Public Documents</u> CASE__DOC__ Name: CASE__DOC__ Name:

2. What are the organizational key aspects contributing to the alignment of real estate construction projects with business strategies?

<u>Reflections and Observations</u>	<u>Probe Questions</u>
-------------------------------------	------------------------

<u>Theoretical Notes</u>	<u>Methodological notes</u>	<u>Public Documents</u> CASE__DOC__ Name: CASE__DOC__ Name:
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3. What are the project management key aspects contributing to the alignment of real estate construction projects with business strategies?

<u>Reflections and Observations</u>		<u>Probe Questions</u>
<u>Theoretical Notes</u>	<u>Methodological notes</u>	<u>Public Documents</u> CASE__DOC__ Name: CASE__DOC__ Name:

4. How is the concept of alignment shared and communicated throughout the organization?

<u>Reflections and Observations</u>		<u>Probe Questions</u>
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<u>Theoretical Notes</u>	<u>Methodological notes</u>	<u>Public Documents</u> CASE__DOC__ Name: CASE__DOC__ Name:
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5. How would you describe the role of real estate construction project leaders in aligning real estate construction projects with business strategy?

<u>Reflections and Observations</u>		<u>Probe Questions</u>
<u>Theoretical Notes</u>	<u>Methodological notes</u>	<u>Public Documents</u> CASE__DOC__ Name: CASE__DOC__ Name:

6. What are the key challenges associated with aligning real estate construction projects with business strategy, and how have the challenges been addressed?

<u>Reflections and Observations</u>		<u>Probe Questions</u>
-------------------------------------	--	------------------------

<u>Theoretical Notes</u>	<u>Methodological notes</u>	<u>Public Documents</u> CASE__DOC__ Name: CASE__DOC__ Name:
--------------------------	-----------------------------	---

7. When alignment fails, what are the common causes?

<u>Reflections and Observations</u>		<u>Probe Questions</u>
<u>Theoretical Notes</u>	<u>Methodological notes</u>	<u>Public Documents</u> CASE__DOC__ Name: CASE__DOC__ Name:

8. What are other elements that facilitate achieving strategic real estate construction project success?

<u>Reflections and Observations</u>		<u>Probe Questions</u>
-------------------------------------	--	------------------------

<u>Theoretical Notes</u>	<u>Methodological notes</u>	<u>Public Documents</u>
		CASE__DOC__ Name: CASE__DOC__ Name:

6. Ending the Interview:

Thank you for your contribution. I will now stop the voice recording. I would appreciate you share the documents as agreed. You could either email the documents or just upload them to any cloud application you desire. In turn, I will transcribe the recording and email to you my interpretation of the interview data to ensure a proper reflection of your personal experience. A short interview may be required for this process.

7. Member Checking:

Date: _____

Email:

Interview:

Transcript #: CASE__-TRANS__

Additional Probe Questions

Additional Reference for Snowball Sampling (you will not be notified about the participation or nonparticipation of potential participants): _____

Additional Public Documents:

Appendix C: LinkedIn InMail Introduction

Direct InMail

Dear [Name],

My name is Ali Chiri, and I am currently a doctoral candidate in Business Administration—Project Management at Walden University, USA. I came across your profile while searching LinkedIn® for research potential participants who possess extensive experience in the real estate development and construction industry, have managed one of the real estate construction projects completed in the Middle East for one of the top tier organizations selected for this study. In case you confirm that you have at least a similar experience and if you are interested in participating in this research, it would be my pleasure to send you an email including a consent form for your kind acceptance?

Participation in the interviews will be voluntary and no incentive will be offered to participants. Participants have the right to withdraw their contribution during the interview or at any time before publishing the research. Consistent with Walden University confidentiality measures, yours and your organization's privacy and information will be protected. Skype video or audio interviews will last between 45 to 60 minutes covering eight open-ended questions with additional probes if necessary.

If you decide to participate, please accept adding me to your LinkedIn network and provide your email address and your phone number allowing me to call to discuss further the details of participation, explain the requirement accept the consent form that dictates your rights during the process, and discuss the interview schedule and time or any other concern you may have. In case you prefer to contact me, my email address ■

■■■■■■ At the end of the study, I will share with you a summary of the findings of the research.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ali Chiri (Walden University Doctoral Candidate)

InMail Through Mediator

Dear [Name],

My name is Ali Chiri, and I am currently a doctoral candidate in Business Administration—Project Management at Walden University, USA. I would appreciate you introduce me to your contact [Name] as she/he might be a potential participant in my doctoral research due to possessing an extensive experience in the real estate development and construction industry. For ethical consideration, I would appreciate you do not directly ask your contact [Name] if she/he would participate in my study; the final selection of participants will be confidential and you will not be notified about the participation or nonparticipation of Mr./Mrs. [Name].

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ali Chiri (Walden University Doctoral Candidate)

Appendix D: Email to Participants with Attached Consent Form

Dear [Name],

Thank for considering the participation in my doctoral research. My Name is Ali Chiri, and I am a professional project manager and real estate developer with more than 20 years of experience in the Middle and North America. I am currently pursuing a Doctorate of Business Administration—Project Management at Walden University, USA. My doctoral study title is Business Alignment Strategies for Middle East Real Estate Construction Projects. Attached is a consent form related to my study; if you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words, “I consent.”

Ali Chiri – [REDACTED]
(Walden University Doctoral Candidate)

Appendix E: Consent Form

Consent Form

Project Title: Business Alignment Strategies for Middle East Real Estate Construction Projects

Dear [Name]

You are invited to take part in a research study exploring the successful strategies real estate construction project leaders use to improve the alignment of real estate projects with business strategy. The researcher's name is Ali Chiri, a doctoral candidate at Walden University. The researcher selected the project alignment's topic based on the researcher's interest in project management and experience in the real estate development and construction industry, but this study is separate from that role. You are invited to participate in this study based on your extensive experience in the building development and construction industry, and since you have managed at least one of the real estate construction projects completed in the Middle East and successfully aligned the project with business strategy.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to explore the successful strategies real estate construction project leaders use to improve the alignment of real estate construction projects with business strategy. The population will include at least six real estate construction project leaders, from three real estate organizations in the Middle East, who have successfully completed one project for the selected organizations. The alignment strategies that real estate construction project leaders utilize may increase the performance and competitiveness of their organizations; business leaders tend to use the economic cost savings in socially responsible investments. The contribution of this study to positive social change may result in improved environmental quality.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to voluntarily participate in a Skype video or audio interview that will last between 45 and 60 minutes. The researcher will start the interview with a brief introduction to ensure you understand the

purpose of the study and the measures taken to protect yours and your organization privacy and information, in addition to explaining the interview procedure. Eight interview questions will be asked followed by additional probes if required. The interview will be audio recorded to facilitate future data analysis and interpretation. After transcribing the interview sound recording, the researcher will share with you the interpretation to ensure the accuracy of collected data. The participant will need approximately 10 to 15 minutes to check and revise/approve the researcher's interpretation of interview data. The researcher will be requesting documents which are generally or routinely made available to the public; this type of public documents will enrich the research findings, and deciding to share the public documents will be solely made by the participant. The below questions are examples of the type of the questions that will be asked during the interview:

- What strategies do you use to align real estate construction projects with your business strategy?
- What are the organizational key aspects contributing to the alignment of real estate construction projects with business strategies?
- What are the project management key aspects contributing to the alignment of real estate construction projects with business strategies?
- How is the concept of alignment shared and communicated throughout the organization?

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Without reason, you have the right to withdraw your contribution, rescind your responses, stop anytime without a permission, or change your responses during the interview or at any time before publishing the research without any penalty. You may also refuse to answer any question that you are not comfortable with, or you simply do not want to answer.

Risks and Benefits of Participating to this Study

Participating in this study will not expose any risk to your organization, you, or your career. This study may benefit organizations and project leaders by sharing how to increase the alignment between real estate projects and business strategy and, therefore,

increase the performance and competitiveness of organizations. Organizations and project leaders may discover project management strategies to increase the success rate of their projects and consequently improve their individual competitiveness and wellbeing.

Compensation

The researcher will not offer any compensation or incentives to the participant.

Confidentiality and Privacy

The researcher guarantees to provide complete confidentiality. No email addresses, phone numbers, personal information, or information about the participation will be shared with any person or organization. While researcher will not use any personal information published by the participants in the social media, the researcher will not use the public material without the prior verbal approval of participants. Also, the researcher show intention to remove the LinkedIn connections established for the sole purpose of the research. Participants who were part of the researcher's LinkedIn® professional network before participation shall advise the choice to disconnect or remain connected after the interview.

During the interview, the researcher will conduct the interview in an isolated sound room and take the necessary measures to protect the privacy of the participant. Instead of using the participant and their organization's identities, the researcher will use identifiers during the interview sound recording, transcription, and data analysis and interpretation. The researcher will encrypt and safely store the collected data electronically for five years before deleting them permanently. The collected data will be used for the research study only. Any collected data will be destroyed immediately upon the participant's withdrawal request.

Contacts and Questions

In case the participant has any questions before or after the interview, the Researcher, Ali Chiri, could be contacted by calling [REDACTED]. The email address is [REDACTED]. To talk privately about the participant's rights, the participant could call the Walden University representative, [REDACTED].

Walden University's approval number for this study is 07-26-17-0528247 and it expires on July 25, 2018. Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Obtaining your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words, "I consent."

Thank you for participating in the doctoral study

Sincerely,

Ali Chiri

Doctoral Candidate

Walden University, School of Management and Technology

Appendix F: Codes Distribution

	Case 1			Case 2		Case 3	
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Theme 1: The Flow of Strategy							
Value to Community				X			
Premium lifestyle					X		
Changing the concept of real estate					X		
Commercial		X	X				
Political		X	X				
Contribution to the region						X	
Top Management formulate the overall business strategy. Advisory role of senior management				X			
Upper level strategy by top management. Strategy details by lower levels			X				
Strategy by top management and strategy department						X	
Business segment interpret that strategy is politically driven		X					
Business segments understanding the strategy improve the alignment	X			X		X	
Business segments understanding the strategy do not improve the alignment		X					
The top management formally transfer portions of strategy to the development team through meetings				X			
The development team formally transfer the strategy they know to the delivery team and internal stakeholders through master plan and documentations				X			
Directors of each departments informally transfer the strategy to their teams							X
The delivery team transfer the strategy to the PMO and external stakeholders during the execution phase				X			
Top management transfer the strategy to external stakeholders	X						
Following the internal processes, procedures, and project plan are enough to execute the strategy		X		X			
Following the business plan, masterplan and master schedule				X	X		X
Led by the operations department all stakeholders collaborate to execute the business and master plan.				X			
Need good partners or external stakeholders for a successful execution of strategy					X		
For external stakeholders, the contract is the guideline to execute business strategy	X						
External stakeholders play a complementary role to internal stakeholders in executing the strategy						X	

	Case 1			Case 2		Case 3	
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Theme 2: The Governance of Projects During the Development Phase							
Matrix structure with functional support – the operation department leads the entire process – the development director leads the development and monitor the delivery process				X	X		
Balanced matrix structure						X	X
Functional Structure – the development department runs the development process and the development department monitor the execution process	X	X	X				
Balanced matrix is not the right structure						X	
Functional structure – problem with weak decision leaders			X				
Continuously updated processes and procedures based on the lesson learned from the completed projects		X		X			
Standard processes and procedures linked in a logical sequence	X	X		X			
Standard but flexible processes and procedures coping with the dynamic market					X		
Each project follows a specific business plan as guiding document for the alignment process						X	X
Effective and smooth ERP and project information systems				X	X	X	X
Processes and procedures are key aspects for the alignment		X		X			
Proper front-end planning phase is an important aspect for the alignment			X	X	X		X
The role of systems is to facilitate the implementation of the processes and procedures					X		
Approval by committees and top management through formal meetings that include the development department and concerned stakeholders				X			
Clear hierarchy of decision-making process following an authority matrix				X			
Stage gate process for approving six different phases that have different delegation of authorities		X					
Top management approves the committees report consisting the objectives of each department		X					
Top management approves the committees report evaluating changes during the delivery phase	X						
The Investment committee consisted of COs and the CEO set the objectives approve the tasks, the reports of divisions, and the changes						X	X
Smaller decisions are made on the level of medium management through workshops							X

	Case 1			Case 2		Case 3	
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Theme 3: The Governance of Projects During the Delivery Phase							
Project delivery team and external stakeholders use a project management system that facilitates the implementation of processes and procedures				X	X		
Proper project management systems but the effectiveness is related to the maturity of users ERP with informal meetings		X					X
All locations follow the same standard processes and procedures with some flexibility to cope with the local regulations and the dynamic environment				X	X		
Following the processes and procedures is important for the alignment					X		
Standard processes and procedures may not be totally applied in different locations	X	X					
Flexible process and procedures tailored for specific locations help improving the alignment – with some restrictions		X					
Standard reporting process	X			X	X	X	X
Effective auditing process				X	X		
The proper selection of the delivery external stakeholders is a key aspect in aligning the project with business strategy					X	X	
Paperwork and a long process for approving variation is a challenge for the delivery process	X						
Led by internal PMC, each project follows a specific business plan as guiding document for the alignment process						X	X
Building the internal delivery team is important	X	X		X	X	X	
Supervised by a few organization representatives, the external PMC manage the delivery stage by following the organizations processes and internal PM methodology with flexibility				X	X		
Supervised by a few organization representatives, the external PMO manage the delivery stage by following the PMO own procedures with some modifications according to each project	X	X					
The conflict between the external and internal processes and PM methodology could reduce the alignment	X		X				
Internal PMO supporting all projects and external project management company for each project following the international PM methodology						X	X
Flexible processes and procedures are key aspect for improving the alignment					X		
Standard processes and PM methodology are good tools to improve the alignment		X					
Effective process selecting and training the external PMO				X	X		

	Case 1			Case 2		Case 3	
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
External PMO role is to ensure alignment with business strategy transferred through the organization delivery team				X			
The project leader role is important to control the external PMO	X			X			
Internal PMO is effective to improve the alignment							X
Theme 4: Measuring Project Performance and Strategic Success							
Every organizational level perceive success according to their functional role		X	X	X		X	
Completing the project is a success for the people who delivered it but the success of the project is the success of the entire portfolio			X				
Achievement for delivery team is the extent the project plan is met		X			X		X
Short-term success is not necessary to be important – long-term success is very important					X	X	
Project efficiency success measured on the short-term but portfolio success is measured on the long-term					X	X	X
Shot- and long-term success are both important						X	X
Short-term success and long-term success are important	X						
PM and project success are both important depending on whether the project is commercial or political	X	X					
Success factors: triple constraints and customer satisfaction	X						
Success is measured by the extent the project complies with and achieve the business plan						X	
KPI has no value for the alignment process	X			X		X	
The organization is starting a new KPI system – individuals set their own objectives and justify their performance				X			
Training is based on the KPI requirements				X			
Periodically monitored	X				X		
KPI important for the alignment		X			X		X
KPI only for HR evaluation	X						
Two KPI systems for individuals and for projects		X					
Two KPI systems for individuals and for departments							X
KPI may create conflict			X				