Research Article / *Araştırma Makalesi*

MAINTENANCE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT AS AN INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE IN THE TURKISH HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY*

Project Manager Emre BULUT ⓘ
GE Healthcare, Türkiye, *(emre.bulut@ge.com)*

Asst. Prof. Çağrı TOPAL ⓘ
Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Türkiye, *(ctopal@metu.edu.tr)*

ABSTRACT

This study examines how projects are successfully conducted and how project management is maintained as an institutional practice within the complex and dynamic environment of the healthcare industry in Turkey where many different actors and departments are involved. The study follows a qualitative case study design with participant observations and in-depth interviews in the sales, service, and project management departments of a major healthcare company in Turkey and analyzes the collected data through grounded theory approaches. It explores the interdependent operation of rules/norms and relations in project management. It highlights the importance of being flexible in the implementation of rules and developing multiple norms acceptable for different departments. It also emphasizes building trust and reciprocity and using conditional positions of dominance. The study shows that creating an informal environment based on inclusive rules/norms and reflecting them in relations through trust/ reciprocity and role reversals are critical for the success of project management. It develops suggestions for companies to improve and ensure the long-term maintenance of project management.

Keywords: *Institutional Work, Institutional Maintenance, Project Management.*

TÜRK SAĞLIK SEKTÖRÜNDE PROJE YÖNETİMİNİN KURUMSAL BİR PRATİK OLARAK MUHAFAZASI

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, farklı pek çok aktörün ve departmanın rol oynadığı, karmaşık ve değişken yapıdaki Türk sağlık sektöründe projelerin nasıl başarılı bir şekilde yürütüldüğünü ve proje yönetiminin kurumsal bir pratik olarak nasıl muhafaza edildiğini incelemektedir. Çalışma örnek olay olarak Türkiye'de sağlık sektöründe faaliyet gösteren en büyük firmalardan birinde, satış, servis ve proje yönetimi departmanlarında yapılan katılımcı gözlemlere ve derinlemesine mülakatlara dayanan nitel bir araştırma tasarımı takip etmekte ve toplanan verileri gömülü kuram yaklaşımlarıyla çözümlemektedir. Çalışma, proje yönetiminde kuralların/normların ve ilişkilerin bağlantılı şekilde kullanılmasını konu edinmektedir. Kuralların uygulanmasında esnekliğin ve değişik departmanlarca kabul görecek çoklu norm sisteminin yanısıra, karşılıklı güvenin ve durumsal güç pozisyonlarının önemine işaret etmektedir. Çalışma, kapsayıcı kurallara/normlara dayanan ve bu kapsayıcılığın karşılıklı güven ve rol değişimleriyle ilişkilere yansımasını sağlayan gayri resmi bir ortamın, proje yönetiminin başarısı için gerekli olduğunu göstermekte, firmaların proje yönetim pratiklerini iyileştirebilmeleri ve uzun dönemde muhafaza edebilmeleri için öneriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kurumsal İş, Kurumsal Muhafaza/Devamlılık, Proje Yönetimi.*

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1. Introduction

This study asks the question of how project management can be successfully performed and continued and how it is maintained as an institutional practice in the complex and dynamic context of healthcare industry in Turkey where many different actors and departments are involved. Past literature shows how rules/norms and relations work as two isolated mechanisms of institutional maintenance but fails to analyze how their coexistence leads to maintenance (Acquier et al., 2018; Bjerregaard & Jonasson, 2014; Collien et al., 2016; Herepath & Kitchener, 2016; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2017). This study explores the interdependent operation of rules/norms and relations in healthcare project management as the general mechanism of institutional maintenance, which is behind its success and continuity. It highlights the importance of being flexible in the implementation of rules and developing multiple norms common for different departments. It also emphasizes building trust and reciprocity and using conditional positions of dominance. In general, the study shows that creating an informal environment based on inclusive rules/norms and reflecting them in relations through trust/reciprocity and role reversals seem to be critical for the success of project management. Formal relationships between departments and with customers, by themselves, cannot maintain project management activity as they are not flexible enough to respond to the complex and dynamic nature of project management. Therefore, the study helps analyze and understand how project management can be continually achieved. Based on the analysis, it develops suggestions for companies to improve and ensure the long-term maintenance of project management.

2. Project Management

Project management is an institutional practice standardized by Project Management Institute (PMI), which was founded in the USA as a nonprofit organization in 1969. According to PMI, "project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result" (PMI, 2017:4). Hence, projects are an activity whose start and end dates are more or less determined (Carpenter, 2011; Heagney, 2016; Knutson & Webster, 2014; Rowe, 2020; Uher & Loosemore, 2004). They are more or less different even when they seem to be standard and classified into certain categories of complexity (Carpenter, 2011; Wysocki, 2019) because their temporal and spatial conditions as well as people involved differ. They also have certain stages from start to end (Carpenter, 2011; Rowe, 2020; Uher & Loosemore, 2004) and are composed of interdependent activities (Knutson & Webster, 2014). Yet, they are mostly part of a general business strategy not stand-alone activities (Kerzner, 2019).

Accordingly, project management is to apply relevant knowledge, skills, tools and systems, and techniques and technologies to complete projects. It is the application of project management processes determined for projects. It enables organizations to execute projects effectively and efficiently (PMI, 2017). There are three general constraints or objectives for all projects, which are cost, quality, and time (Atkins, 1999; Kerzner, 2019; Knutson & Webster, 2014). Although one of these might dominate in different projects, conflicts still arise due to imbalance between them (Knutson & Webster, 2014). Project management is actually to balance these competing constraints or objectives with available resources.

Project management is also a response to the deficiencies of functional structures, which are designed to manage relatively stable, ongoing operations with a clear division

of labor and hierarchical control systems and with a permanent workforce and workplace (Uher & Loosemore, 2004). In contrast, project management is generally designed around a project team composed of professionals with different functional backgrounds. Compared to functional operations, project management is operational for a relatively limited time span and change team members, depending on the changing requirements and evolving stages of projects. Furthermore, it is different from operations as well as technical management (Knutson & Webster, 2014). It combines these with general management while utilizing the management functions of planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling, and leading (Rowe, 2020; Uher & Loosemore, 2004).

Depending on the degree of clarity of project goals and solutions (Wysocki, 2019), project management can be classified as simple or complex. Yet, every project is different. It is an evolving business goal as well as solution that demands ongoing response. Its clients, stakeholders, systems, technologies, and environment might change in supportive or restrictive ways. Client requirements might also change during project execution. In addition, new information regarding different project components emerge as projects evolve (Rowe, 2020). Opportunities and constraints become clearer, allowing better estimates on and modifications in project scope and related activities (Kerzner, 2019). Hence, project management is not a standard tool. It is a flexible approach that must be adapted to and elaborated with changing project conditions and client needs. Still, it should be able to fit in and thus be consistent with the general strategy of clients (Wysocki, 2019).

Project manager is a professional directly responsible for the completion of projects (Knutson & Webster, 2014; Rowe, 2020). She works closely with project clients (Kerzner, 2019). She listens to client needs as well as recommends what and how to do in response. The manager also coordinates and monitors different functional groups within project teams, providing them with necessary resources (Carpenter, 2011) and especially resolving conflicts (Knutson & Webster, 2014). She ensures that team members follow the general direction as well as perform specific tasks of projects. In addition, she manages relations with other project stakeholders, which might be external organizations and functional departments (Heagney, 2016; Rowe, 2020). Finally, she ensures learning to occur from projects and inform other projects (Heagney, 2016). Therefore, project manager should be equipped with both technical and social skills.

In sum, project management refers to an "organized common sense" directed to a project led by a professional manager (Wysocki, 2019:27). It proceeds in line with changes in projects. It is a flexible response to changes in project conditions. Furthermore, it always creates value in the form of a product, service, or result (Kerzner, 2019; Heagney, 2016; Rowe, 2020), which business common sense expects in all projects as a business activity.

2.1. Project Management in the Turkish Healthcare Industry

This study focuses on the practice of project management within the healthcare industry of Turkey by examining a multinational medical system manufacturer company. The company provides diagnostic imaging systems, life care solutions, and information technologies. In the Turkish branch of the company, there are approximately 300 employees. Most of them are employed in the departments of supply chain, sales, and service. Projects are managed by

the healthcare project management (HPM) department under the global supply chain. In the company, there are 6 project managers and a project director. More than 100 projects per year are completed by the HPM department.

The primary responsibility of project managers is to plan and organize projects from the very beginning of an opportunity of selling a healthcare system to handing over the system to customers with the help of other departments (Bulut, 2019). A project starts with pre-sales activities. Together with sales teams, project managers visit hospital sites and make observations regarding system requirements. After the tender is won and the contract is signed, the sales opportunity becomes a solid project. Project managers closely work with other departments, especially sales and service, to monitor site readiness, system delivery, mechanical installation and cabling, commissioning, and application training. Using limited monetary, temporal, and human resources, they try to act as a bridge between customers and other departments and develop a balance between the needs of customers, constraints of departments, and requirements of projects. Project management is based on this logic of balance between different project stakeholders, which is critical for the success of projects and thus healthcare companies.

There are three big companies in the Turkish market (Bulut, 2019). Since they operate internationally, they have to comply with the same international standards. Thus, their organizational structures and associated practices including project management are very similar. The project manager numbers are also similar when compared to market share. The company in this study has approximately 40% market share and is the market leader. Therefore, it can reflect the industry in general in terms of project management as an institutional practice.

The healthcare industry in Turkey is complex. Hospitals vary in size and scope. There are city, state, university, and private hospitals as well as clinics with their own rules, policies, and procedures. Their system needs change and each system as a project has its own requirements. The funding of projects differs as public private partnership (PPP), public finance initiative (PFI), direct purchase, government tender, and leasing with letter of credit (LC), each with a different scope. In addition, conflicts arise between project management and other departments as well as customers, which have their own procedures, practices, and meanings. Their different meaning frameworks make it difficult for project managers to coordinate and communicate with them. Aggressive performance goals set by upper management create further pressure on project managers as well as other departments to complete projects (Bulut, 2019). Also, project management departments are relatively small in comparison to service and sales departments, which have generally more access to limited organizational resources at the expense of project management. Therefore, project management requires ongoing effort for successful completion. As an institutional practice, it needs maintenance work in the face of the complexity of the healthcare industry and conflicts with other departments as well as customers.

3. Institutional Work of Maintenance

Institutional work is the actions of individuals and groups that aim at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutional practices (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009, 2011; Zilber, 2013). Institutional maintenance, which is one of three main types of institutional work, is to support, repair, or recreate the existing norms and practices, which result in continuity and compliance (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The maintenance work

of individuals and groups are sometimes visible and non-routine and sometimes invisible and routine. Every institution needs maintenance in order to survive. In fact, institutional maintenance requires extensive individual or collective effort and often results in modifications in the existing practices although the meaning framework behind those practices is retained. Like institutional creation and disruption, it mainly refers to the interactions of individuals and the effect of those interactions on institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Individuals are considered as institutionally capable and responsible actors to maintain institutions within the constraints of the existing institutions. Institutional work of maintenance thus provides an extended view of agency and actors in relation to institutions and, as a theoretical framework, facilitates the analysis of daily interactions and their patterns, which constitute and reconstitute institutions. Past literature identifies rules/norms and relations as two important mechanisms, which turn those interactions into the work of institutional maintenance.

Rules and norms bring certainty into institutional settings and help actors avoid internal conflicts since they define and reproduce the boundaries of institutional roles and practices (Acquier et al., 2018; Dacin et al., 2010; Greenwood et al., 2002; Heaphy, 2013). They integrate relatively marginal actors into institutional positions and roles (Creed et al., 2010; Grafstrom & Windell, 2012). They help transform those actors into committed institutional members as they shape socialization and training processes (Currie et al., 2012; Zilber, 2002). As they are generally taken for granted, they provide consistency for practices and solutions for daily problems, turning those practices and solutions into routines and rituals easily recognized and adopted by new members (Dacin et al., 2010; McCann et al., 2013). Rules and norms also provide a basis to integrate new rules/norms within their own framework and thus protect their own existence albeit in refined forms (Empson et al., 2013; Herepath & Kitchener, 2016; Malsch & Gendron, 2013). Practical problems resulting in institutional breaches are addressed through some modifications in established rules/norms. Old rules/norms are used to make new, modified ones recognizable and meaningful (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016; Raviola & Norback, 2013). They create a sense of familiarity and trust while preparing institutional actors for new experiences and practices. In fact, the new complements the old (Bjerregaard & Jonasson, 2014). Conflicting rules/norms can also help maintenance especially in professional fields where actors develop different sets of expertise (Chreim et al., 2020; Malsch & Gendron, 2013; McCann et al., 2013; Empson et al., 2013). They highlight and reproduce different meanings and practices of professional actors. Despite differences and/or conflicts, there might be interdependence between those rules/norms, which have to coexist and be maintained for operational effectiveness (Zilber, 2002). Again in professional fields, conflicts arise between professional rules/norms and organizational practices, which are actually disruptions. Disruptions are common due to actors' organizational roles not always aligned with professional rules/norms. In response to institutional disruptions, professionals are mobilized to act and maintain common rules and norms (McCann et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2017).

Institutional relations are also important for maintenance. Even a relation of conflict can lead to maintenance when it is embedded within or revives established meanings (Creed et al., 2010). Conflict can help sustain established, institutional meanings, which might be sidelined by dominant actors and highlighted by subordinate actors. Conflict can also set actor groups with different meanings or opposite interests apart and strengthen their in-group relations

and practices (Malsch & Gendron, 2013; McCann et al., 2013), which results in institutional maintenance of in-group meanings. In-group relations eventually lead to the development of a collective identity, which positions a group as opposed to others and their interests and further encourages disruptive attempts against other groups and reproductive performances within the group (Symon et al., 2008). Disruptive relations with other groups and reproductive relations within the group reconstruct the divide between groups (Lefsrud & Meyer, 2012; Rodner et al., 2020). The divide ensures that especially less powerful groups can protect their norms and practices by preventing an integration or assimilation. However, more powerful groups can have a role in institutional maintenance within a hierarchical or control relationship with the less powerful (Bartram et al., 2020; Collien et al., 2016; Zilber, 2009). Powerful groups direct less powerful ones to use and reproduce established mechanisms, practices, and narratives (Andersson & Gadolin, 2020; Grafstrom & Windell, 2012; Zilber, 2009). They shape the institutional roles of the less powerful to maintain the status quo (Currie et al., 2012). In fact, actors with less power actively participate in institutional maintenance when they are embedded within socio-economically stratified relations (Dacin et al., 2010; Hamann & Bertels, 2018). Sometimes they seek the support of powerful actors especially for the maintenance of relatively new institutions as those powerful actors can counteract other established yet disruptive actors (Styhre, 2013). Hence, institutional maintenance is also a process of negotiation between groups of different degrees of power with various meanings and interests (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016). Groups representing different meanings negotiate to protect their interests and associated practices as well as positions of power. Between groups exploiting different areas of expertise and authority, there emerge short- or long-term coalitions for institutional maintenance (Empson et al., 2013). Similarly, groups can cooperate against institutional disruptions due to some common norms or interests (Heaphy, 2013; McCann et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2017). They might feel obliged to respond to disruptions, which might result in systematic changes if not responded.

Therefore, the literature provides insights into how institutional rules/norms and relations work as a mechanism of institutional maintenance (e.g. Acquier et al., 2018; Bjerregaard & Jonasson, 2014; Collien et al., 2016; Herepath & Kitchener, 2016; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2017). It shows that rules/norms help create certainty and consistency, address conflicts and problems, reproduce boundaries, integrate new rules/norms and actors, routinize practices, and develop common responses. Similarly, it demonstrates that relations help revive established norms, strengthen in-group meanings, develop collective identity, resist assimilation, control others, shape roles, and cooperate around common norms and interests. Yet, the literature analyzes rules/norms and relations as two isolated mechanisms of institutional maintenance. This study asks the question of how rules/norms and relations coexist to work for maintenance. In the context of the Turkish healthcare companies, the study examines how rule/norm- and relation-based mechanisms operate together to maintain project management as an institutional practice. It is also one of the rare studies, which apply the perspective of institutional maintenance work to the Turkish companies (Geyik & Topal, 2020; Topal, 2021).

4. Method

This study was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Board for Human Research at Middle East Technical University, which was dated as December 15, 2017 and numbered as

28620816/557. In line with the approval, all the participants were informed about the study and signed a voluntary consent form.

4.1. Qualitative Case Study

Qualitative approach is appropriate for this study since the aim is to analyze actors' meanings and experiences of project management (Gephart, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Van Maanen, 1998). Qualitative research examines actors' daily interactions and experiences in their natural setting and tries to identify patterns (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Patterns indicate the existence of particular institutional mechanisms, which actually shape both experiences and meanings. Understanding the dynamics of institutional mechanisms generally requires a flexible research design as data collection and analysis go together. Qualitative research facilitates the analysis of institutional mechanisms because it "is often designed at the same time it is being done" (Gephart, 2004:455). New perspectives can also be integrated into the emerging results in qualitative research, leading to rich descriptions and insights.

This is also a case study (Stake, 2000), which focuses on a particular company as a case representing the healthcare industry in Turkey. Case study approach is appropriate in this study because the first author is a project manager in this company and thus very familiar with the company's as well as industry's practices (Stake, 2000). The potential of the company as a case and data source is established with this familiarity (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2000). The company is instrumentally used to understand the practices of project management in the industry and to develop theoretical insights into institutional practices and mechanisms (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is not simply described as an interesting case. Rather, it helps improve our general understanding of an industry-wide practice through an in-depth, well-grounded analysis, which is possible with a focused, case study (Stake, 2000).

4.2. Data

In the focal company, a total of 14 in-depth interviews were conducted with different actors in the departments of sales, service, and project management. There were two sets of questions prepared for project managers and for sales and service departments. Interview questions were open-ended and about daily interactions, conflicts within and outside the company, and ways to achieve goals and maintain the existing order. Each interview was conducted by the first author and took approximately 45 minutes. Along with interviews, which were the main data source, the first author also participated in weekly meetings. Project management department had weekly meetings with service and sales departments. In the meetings with the service, installation and resource allocation issues were discussed while in the meetings with the sales, sales opportunities were the issue. The first author took notes in the meetings. It was observed that the themes emerging in the notes and interviews were very similar. There were also observations of both self and others. Observations over a long period of time helped understand institutional practices and enrich the insights into institutional work of maintenance. Self-observations were especially valuable as the first author was responsible for project management in all city hospitals. City hospitals were giant projects not similar to other healthcare projects. They significantly disrupted the established practices in project management (Garfinkel, 1967). Thus, they shed light on how actors tried to maintain those practices under the pressure and uncertainty created by their huge scale and scope.

Although it was easy to contact the respondents, interviews were not easy to arrange due to conflicting schedules and required time for them. Each interview was rearranged at least two or three times. No further interview request was made more than three times. Hence, the intended interview number could not be reached. In order to enrich the data and analysis, as mentioned, the first author attended weekly meetings within and between departments and observed daily activities. Also, some interview questions were not comprehended by some respondents, some respondents went out of track of the research topic, and some focused on recent incidents in their responses although performing some other activities in their daily work. However, these problems were mostly manageable and no re-interviews were required.

4.3. Analysis

In the analysis, we followed grounded theory approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We started our analysis by examining interview notes around the draft categories formed through interview questions. Interview questions reflected the research focus of the study and thus could be used as general, draft categories in line with theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In general, the notes were reviewed to develop categories, which were refined iteratively until related patterns and thus general mechanisms emerged. In particular, for each interview question, individual answers were placed next to each other to make categories and patterns more visible. This facilitated identifying similarities across different answers, which actually referred to common themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Hence, the answers were examined and common themes within those answers were noted and grouped to develop categories, which were higher order themes and combined similar lower order themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Categories were further refined to identify more general mechanisms, which referred to major themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This examination basically looked at the similarities across the answers to understand patterns and related mechanisms. The purpose of the analysis was actually to identify those general mechanisms, which seemed to turn actors' actions into institutional work of maintenance and facilitate the ongoing existence of project management as an institutional practice. General mechanisms thus emerged directly from the data, which were grouped and categorized around common themes, and were related to the theoretical framework of institutional work. This process helped empirically ground the conceptual model developed in this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In qualitative research, the issues of validity and reliability are addressed differently from quantitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Silverman, 2000). For validity, we made sure that all the data, not some parts that would conveniently result in a model, were thoroughly examined (Silverman, 2000). In this examination, we did not impose theoretical concepts on the data; rather we let the themes emerge and then linked the themes and concepts where possible. For reliability, we used the emerging themes in a consistent manner to identify and group the data (Silverman, 2000). Our procedure was more or less determined to apply to different data pieces. The whole analysis was collectively conducted by both authors through an ongoing exchange of information and interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

5. Findings

The analysis of the data indicates that there are four general mechanisms of institutional maintenance, the first two related to rules/norms and the other two related to relations. Through those mechanisms, actors in different departments coordinate their activities and ensure the continuation of project management practice in its current, successful form. The mechanisms can be depicted as the following:

Mechanisms of institutional maintenance for project management

1. Rule/Norm-based mechanisms

1.1. Flexibility of rules

1.2. Multiplicity of norms

2. Relation-based mechanisms

2.1. Trust and reciprocity

2.2. Conditional dominance

5.1. Rule/Norm-Based Mechanisms

There are two rule/norm-based mechanisms effective in the maintenance of project management as an institutional practice. These mechanisms are flexibility of rules and multiplicity of norms.

5.1.1. Flexibility of Rules

Rules provide a framework for employees' actions. They are a general guide for project management. Yet, rules cannot be followed in detail because they do not completely fit every situation. Many daily disruptions occur during project management process due to the different meanings and needs of departments and customers. The flexible use of rules and procedures lets employees smooth out those disruptions.

"Rules are the tools that lead us. We play according to them. We can take the initiative if we are to succeed in our objective" (Respondent 9, Director of Services).

There are rigid rules that cannot be bent. These rules are supported by mandatory trainings given periodically to employees according to their roles and responsibilities. Compliance, quality, and safety trainings are routinely provided. This ensures that rigid rules are closely observed during project management. In case of non-compliance, the concerned department may decide to stop the work. Stopping the work prevents a faulty or inaccurate result and creates pressure on the party in noncompliance. Employees are actually monitored by the compliance department for rule breaches, which might result in the termination of employment.

"There are indispensable rules which can be considered as skeletal rules and also there are rules that make the things bulky. Compliance with rules is important" (Respondent 2, Project Manager).

There are also flexible rules. Rigid rules are the borders that keep project management within the road. Between those borders there are flexible rules helping project management to change lanes as needs and requirements vary according to different situations, departments, groups, and markets.

"Rules and procedures summarize experiences from the past. Although all of them have reasons, flexibility is required for different regions and needs. Global rules set by a global company may not be suitable for every region. Apart from regional regulations, culture, ways of doing business, and customer expectations can be different" (Respondent 6, Account Manager).

Rigid rules create common frameworks well known by all employees. Thus, they prevent dead-end discussions and save time. For example, if the credit of a customer is not approved by the finance department, the system delivery cannot take place. This is a rigid rule and it is not questioned. Similarly, for MRI system rooms, the company has predetermined standards. In some cases, customers want to build their own rooms and are forced to comply with the standards. In contrast, through flexibility in rules, an open discussion framework emerges, widening the limits of project management and helping find common solutions. Flexibility enables employees to find a solution when the existing rules do not provide an exact answer for their needs or when they do not know how to act in the face of disruptions. For example, after the clinical application training, the project manager should ask for the customer acceptance since every liability has been fulfilled by the company. If the customer has not started yet to scan patients, the customer may not want to sign the acceptance and start the warranty period. In such cases, the project manager has flexibility to wait until the patient scan starts and, by the approval of the finance department, to extend the payment period of the customer.

5.1.2. Multiplicity of Norms

Departments in healthcare companies have different priorities. Departmental members reproduce specific meaning frameworks due to their ongoing interactions such as weekly meetings within their department. For example, the service department is concerned mainly about future service operations while the project management department is occupied with effective installation and project course. Without a common basis of understanding, such departmental orientations increase the possibility of conflict and need for coordination.

"From a departmental point of view, our priorities and perspectives are different. Sales maintains relationships while project management emphasizes technical issues more. Communication needs to be kept alive between departments. We must appear as a single body in front of customers" (Respondent 6, Account Manager).

Despite different priorities, there are also common norms departments more or less share. They include customer satisfaction, safety orientation, and sales achievement. These norms help converge meanings and practices and successfully complete the process of project management. The respondents mention all three norms in every interview.

Customer satisfaction is one of the most important norms. Employees define customers as the center of their actions and believe that customers determine the success. The meaning framework of each department should somehow be related to customers.

"We put the customer in the center of all our operations. If we are like circles, we have customers in the middle. Each customer has different attributes and attitudes; but having a general focus on customer helps address them" (Respondent 10, Director of Services).

Since satisfied customers mean continuity in business, customer experience is crucial for the company and is measured by an independent organization in a survey after project closure. When departments address conflicts with other departments as well as customers during the project, the survey results are generally positive and indicate satisfaction. When departments focus too much on their narrow roles and do not communicate much with others, the results are generally negative. Employees are mostly unaware of a negative situation with customers until the results are available. However, necessary steps are generally taken after the survey to improve customer experience in service operations and future projects.

"Customers determine the success of our whole performance and if they are satisfied, we can establish a long-term relationship" (Respondent 1, Project Manager).

The timely involvement of departments is critical for customer satisfaction. There are procedures such as project initiation notification and pre-order consultation to ensure timely interaction and handover between departments. The sales department involves the project management department at an early stage. Account managers inform project managers about sales opportunities before orders take place and project managers visit customer sites and give feedback to account managers. Project managers also become aware of verbal commitments given to customers by account managers. Hence, potential problems are revealed at a very early stage and conflicts can be resolved without major issues arising between departments. In addition, project managers recognize both customers and their expectations at the pre-sales stage and adjust project requirements accordingly.

"There is shortage of communication with the sales department. We need to be involved in time. The PIN/POC process is important; otherwise, there might arise planning issues" (Respondent 3, Project Manager).

Patient and employee safety is also important for all departments as it is the healthcare industry. Patient safety is to protect patients from errors, injuries, accidents, and infections. This understanding applies as well to employees working in the same environment. The result of an erroneous or incomplete job may be fatal for both patients and employees. In order to avoid such situations, there are rigid rules and procedures. More importantly, every employee is aware of the importance of safety and accept it as a norm not to break.

"Patient safety is very important to us. Although relationships with customers are determined by the contract, sometimes prioritization is made in terms of patient safety and serviceability" (Respondent 9, Director of Services).

Employees are also given environment, health, and safety (EHS) trainings. In addition, accident reports are published and communicated. Trainings and reports help create a common EHS mindset among employees as well as remind them of the requirement of compliance with safety rules and procedures. For example, in the case of customer pressure to complete a task in an unsafe environment, employees can stop the work due to safety concerns.

Sales are another common ground. One of the most important goals is quarterly and yearly sales targets. Especially towards the end of the quarter, departments increase cooperation and put great effort to reach the target. Achieving the sales target creates a positive effect in terms of employee motivation and the credibility of country branch in the region and among global operations. With high credibility, the branch can reduce the lead time of systems and it becomes much easier to find new slots for systems in the factory. When systems arrivals are faster, employees feel more confident to respond to and find solutions for customer problems.

"Sales targets are one of the most important common values that show what the company can achieve as a team. If sales targets are achieved, they have a positive impact on meeting customer expectations, protecting and improving company reputation, contributing to quarterly turnover, and facilitating company activities in the future" (Respondent 7, Account Manager).

For the sales department, sales target pressures may shape practices in ways that seem inconsistent with the norm of patient safety. In the service department, headcount limitations may increase the workload of field engineers at the expense of customer satisfaction. For project managers, budget constraints may create problems in terms of both patient safety and customer satisfaction. However, employees in different departments understand and unite around common norms for the success of project management. They put departmental differences aside with the help of their multiple focuses on customers, safety, and sales and coordinate their activities accordingly. They are aware that the completion and continuation of projects mean sales achieved in a manner that satisfies customers and protects patients and employees.

5.2. Relation-Based Mechanisms

There are two relation-based mechanisms that facilitate the institutional maintenance of project management practice. The mechanisms include trust/reciprocity and conditional dominance.

5.2.1. Trust and Reciprocity

Relations are essential for every project as project management is a fragile practice, in which different departments and customers are involved with their own meanings and priorities. Coordination is intensely needed due to differences in meanings and priorities. If departmental differences can be overcome, coordination with external groups, especially customers, is more likely. In general, daily interactions and communications are needed to coordinate the activities of departments and customers during project management process.

"Priorities can be different. We have weekly meetings and during these meetings, mutual evaluations and prioritization are made for both short-term and long-term activities" (Respondent 9, Director of Services).

Project managers engage in daily communication with customers and give information about projects. They spend significant time mostly in face-to-face meetings and have occasionally social events such as dinners and lunches with customers. They attempt to meet customers' expectations as much as possible. In their relations with customers, they also consider the history of customers including previous projects, loyalty, financial history, and

total amount of sales. In general, project managers try to improve relations and build trust while taking into account the possibility of reciprocity. Problems arising during project course are managed with the help of trust-based, reciprocal relations. While project managers respond to customer needs, which vary with each customer, customers reciprocate and accommodate technical necessities not exactly in line with their needs, continuing to work with the company. This is a kind of emotional lending and borrowing based on trust. Benefits to customers lead to expectations of reciprocity in project managers and eventual return of benefits. As a result of ongoing trust and reciprocity, project managers strengthen their bond and avoid conflicts with customers.

"We do emotional lending to customers. My emotional relationship with customers is more of a relationship of interest. If I help them, they also help me" (Respondent 11, Field Engineer).

To support the environment of trust and reciprocity, companies routinely hire radiology technicians as clinical education specialists to provide application training to customer technicians. Radiology technicians have a lot of experience with customers. They can understand the needs, requests, and questions of customers and shape the training accordingly. Customer technicians, in return, can develop affinity and communicate easily with them when they provide the training. Hence, trust and reciprocity readily emerge between education specialists and customer technicians. Application training becomes much more effective, increasing customer satisfaction and trust.

Trust and reciprocity are more valuable than formal workflows and processes for departments. Trust is the main reference in mutual evaluations among employees of different departments. In an environment of mutual trust and reciprocity, employees can be honest with each other and openly express their ideas. They can communicate and work together effectively to complete projects. Thus, trust speeds up project management process and leads to smooth progress in projects. Employees, already at a certain level of maturity, reciprocate mutual trust. For example, field engineers sometimes cannot complete their job in customer site within the working hours. In such cases, they do not leave the site before making healthcare systems ready for customers and they do not request overtime. They do not let down project managers as well as customers who trust them and are likely to accommodate them in the future.

"I have trust in and respect for others' word in the company. We communicate one-to-one and their trust in me is respected more than workflows" (Respondent 10, Director of Services).

Trust and reciprocity also emerge with planning activities between different departments. Through planning, departments can better understand common and different needs and act accordingly to organize their relations and respond to the needs of one another as well as customers. Employees from different departments meet weekly for planning issues and discuss priorities. The project management department has meetings with the sales to have knowledge about sales opportunities and with the service to arrange project resources. Hence, they continuously relate to other departments, organize interrelated activities, and solve conflicts. These ongoing relations between departments help create and sustain the environment of trust.

"We make mutual evaluations. We prioritize. We have weekly meetings. During these meetings we make short-term and long-term evaluations" (Respondent 9, Director of Services).

Soft skills training also contributes to the development of trust and reciprocity. It aims to improve communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, time management, and teamwork, all of which support the environment of trust and help develop reciprocity among employees. Being skilled in such areas, employees are more likely to protect a common meaning framework and reciprocate actions despite different orientations. Soft skills training thus helps employees complement their technical knowledge with trust-based attitudes and interactions and promotes harmony in relations.

"It is a diversified structure in a multinational company including employees with different cultures. Soft skills training is given a lot and it is put into practice. We try to convince the other side and serve the common purpose" (Respondent 10, Service Department).

5.2.2. Conditional Dominance

The sales and service departments are more established with relatively larger number of employees. They are generally more dominant as opposed to the project management department which has fewer than ten employees. Given that the sales and service have their own meaning frameworks, such a dominance significantly increases their decision-making power. However, this dominance is not a general one due to the critical relation of project managers with customers. The project management department acts as a bridge between the sales and service departments, and customers. Hence, it is possible for this department to dominate other departments by highlighting customer priorities and expectations and get the support of those departments for a successful project completion.

"I think there are no power positions in matrix structure; each unit has indispensables. Prioritization is made according to the customer's conditions. The important thing is the successful completion of the work" (Respondent 8, Senior Field Engineer).

For each department, there are indispensable priorities that must be considered for customer satisfaction. Departments can use such priorities to their advantage and become temporarily dominant in their relations with other departments because customers are the focal point for all departments. Relatively subordinate departments can thus develop dominance over relatively dominant departments. This is conditional dominance or situational dominance acquisition by emphasizing important priorities against dominant actors. For example, project managers can request employees from the service department to work in the weekend if it is requested by customers. The service department is not to work in the weekend; but project managers' conditional dominance forces employees from the service to come and complete the work.

"When the plan is reported to the service department by the project management, the service department does its best to follow this plan although the service is more dominant than the project management" (Respondent 12, Senior Field Engineer).

The project management mostly clashes with the service regarding the use of company resources. They are usually limited resources such as field engineers and equipment required for the installation of healthcare systems. The resources are allocated through the planning of

project course. Still, there might be conflicts between departments in terms of specific actions. In such cases, a common way of solving conflicts is prioritization around customer needs. The project management department highlights those needs, determines the next course of actions in projects, and are allocated necessary resources. Thus, it dominates the service thanks to the norm of customer orientation. In line with the norm, the service department puts great effort to meet the expectations of both project managers and customers. If necessary, the service gets support from other regions. In this way, projects continue without interruption.

"Resources are limited. Mutual assessment between departments is required for a continuous project course" (Respondent 4, Project Manager).

In general, conditional dominance facilitates collective work between employees from different departments. Because all employees use customer priorities as a common meaning framework, they are willing to accept subordinate roles despite their established dominant positions and cooperate for the sake of customers. To respond to customer needs faster, they avoid exercising their power and conflicting with others. Conditional dominance thus helps conflict resolution and project completion by temporarily reversing established relations between departments.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to institutional work literature as it explores the mechanisms of institutional maintenance within the context of healthcare industry and explains how employees from different departments reproduce project management as an institutional practice in healthcare companies. Past literature points out that institutional rules/norms and relations work as a mechanism of institutional maintenance (e.g. Acquier et al., 2018; Bjerregaard & Jonasson, 2014; Collien et al., 2016; Herepath & Kitchener, 2016; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2017). Yet, in the literature, rules/norms and relations are examined without much concern about their coexistence or simultaneous operation in the process of institutional maintenance. This study identifies general mechanisms, through which rules/norms and relations work together towards the maintenance of project management. Institutional actors use rules/norms and relations together to continue project management. In the healthcare industry, flexibility of rules and multiplicity of norms appear to be what make rules/norms effective in institutional work whereas relations emerge as trust/reciprocity and conditional dominance in the process of institutional maintenance.

The study shows that the degree of flexibility of rules shapes the process of maintenance. Similarly, it is the multiplicity of norms, which allows different actors or groups to work in coordination and reproduce the practice of project management. While some rules cannot be bent, others can be bent and flexibly used in line with certain norms, customer orientation being the most important. In fact, customer, safety, and sales orientations are the core, common norms. Depending on the specific situation, actors can emphasize one of these norms to bend rules and respond to the situation. They can quickly develop a common understanding regarding the situation, put rules and norms into practice accordingly, and effectively deal with the specifics of the situation. Although their group or departmental meanings and priorities are different and likely to cause conflicts, their common orientations to customers, safety, and sales support coordination. They can solve conflicts rather easily and keep working on projects as they shift

between multiple norms and implement rules in line with the norm they choose. Hence, actors' choice or role in the maintenance of project management as an institutional practice becomes much more visible.

The study indicates that relations complement the flexible and contextual implementation of rules and norms. Relation of trust and reciprocity forms and reproduces common meanings regarding rules and norms among different departmental actors and thus improve coordination between departments to address customer concerns. Trust and reciprocity let people be flexible and responsive to the demands of other departments and customers. Hence, they help develop an informal environment based especially on customer needs. In this environment, actors do not cross the line generally embedded in rigid rules. However, they can go beyond formal boundaries to do others favors aimed ultimately at satisfying customers, trusting that others reciprocate with similar favors. Like trust and reciprocity, conditional dominance emerges around and highlights the importance of project management practice to satisfy customer needs. Through conditional dominance, project managers can ask other departments to accept role reversals and be more flexible in addressing those needs. Departments shift between norms and bend rules in their relation of power with project managers for the sake of customers. Similar to trust and reciprocity, conditional dominance then helps form and protect an informal environment that supports the successful completion of projects.

Therefore, the study suggests that rules/norms and relations work together towards institutional maintenance. They complement one another. Flexibility of rules and multiplicity of norms create the conditions for and facilitate the operation of relations of trust/reciprocity and conditional dominance, which in turn support the flexible use of and shift between different rules and norms within certain limits. Hence, institutional relations are shaped by the nature of implementation of rules and norms while this implementation depends partly on the degree of mutual trust and acceptability of relative role reversals among actors. Together, rules/norms and relations build an informal environment of coordination, through which project management practice is successfully performed and continued.

In line with the framework of institutional work, the study highlights the agency of different actors, especially project managers. Actors comply strictly with some rules. Yet, they can also bend others. Moreover, they are not bound up with one particular norm. They can change their orientation to other norms rather easily as the situation necessitates. In addition, in their relation with others, actors can use the context to their advantage. They can develop temporary dominance despite their subordinate positions. Hence, actors are not passive recipients of the conditions of project management. They actively contribute to its ongoing existence. Project managers are especially important. They deal with all the issues regarding different hospital types and project requirements, conflicts between project management and other departments, and relative dominance of those departments. Thus, they play a key role in the maintenance of project management as a stable and consistent practice. Their ongoing efforts help reproduce project management practice in the complex and dynamic environment of the healthcare industry.

The study also introduces the concept of conditional dominance. Conditional dominance is subordinate actors' temporary, situational dominance based especially on the priorities of customers. In healthcare companies, customer orientation emerges as a general norm almost

equally important for all departments. When a relatively subordinate department like the project management shows the importance of its operation for customers, it can situationally dominate relatively dominant departments like the sales or service. Conditional dominance can actually be a source of conflict between departments and thus disruption to institutional practices as it reverses established positions of power. The study shows that, on the contrary, conditional dominance is essential in maintaining those practices as it refers to common norms and priorities within a temporary role reversal. Any department can use customer priorities and become temporarily dominant over others even it is generally subordinate.

6.1. Limitations, Future Research, and Managerial Implications

The study has some limitations. First, the researcher collecting the data is the employee of the company examined in this study. Some events in the company thus seemed very ordinary to the researcher and were difficult to interpret since they were part of the researcher's job. Because the researcher was an insider, this situation must have an impact on the interpretation process (Evered & Louis, 1981). The second researcher acted as an outsider to create a balanced perspective as s/he was detached from the setting (Louis & Bartunek, 1992). Still, other perspectives cannot be ruled out entirely despite the attempts to be self-reflexive and use multiple perspectives. Other researchers might develop different interpretations. Also, this research is conducted with a limited number of participants in a particular industry. This brings the concern of whether the results might be different in other settings and raises the question of generalization. However, this study is exploratory and provides an initial perspective open to modification and change. Other organizations in different industries can be examined in future studies to improve this perspective and its degree of generalization.

Based on these limitations, some suggestions can be made for further research on institutional work and maintenance. Firstly, this study should be complemented with quantitative studies using larger samples to test the proposed relationship between institutional maintenance and associated mechanisms. Quantitative studies can help confirm and generalize the proposed relationship and develop a better sense of the effect of general mechanisms on institutional maintenance. The relationship might be modified and reformulated accordingly. Secondly, quantitative as well as qualitative studies can be conducted in other industries. Companies in the healthcare industry do not have manufacturing operations in Turkey. Thus, they largely depend on sales. Industries with manufacturing operations in Turkey might result in the dominance of manufacturing over sales. Depending on the relationship of manufacturing with other departments, conditional dominance may or may not be a factor in institutional maintenance. Thirdly, the size of organizations within an industry can be important. In small local companies in contrast to global corporate companies, training opportunities might be limited. Therefore, training to support rules/norms and relations may be limited or even absent. There might be other activities, for example informal mentoring, which might have an impact on institutional processes. Lastly, new insights can emerge with studies in regions or cultures where relations are more formal and based on task management. In the Turkish context, trust is very important and relations are very informal. Formal, contractual relationships might reveal the effect of some other mechanisms on institutional maintenance.

The study has a number of practical implications for managers and professionals. Firstly, flexibility in the implementation of rules is useful and sometimes necessary for project management. There might be rigid rules in certain issues like safety; however, without some flexibility in especially operational issues, rules might be dysfunctional in a context where many different actors, interests, and needs are involved. Strict compliance with rules might actually be impossible and have negative impact on project management as, with compliance, actors seem to disregard the needs of others including customers. Companies should consider rules as a general framework of negotiation between actors with different interests and needs. Secondly, the existence of multiple norms, which appears to create incoherence within a company, is not always harmful. It actually provides a normative basis for the flexible implementation of rules. The key issue is whether multiple norms are more or less shared by different actors and departments. Companies should encourage interdepartmental relations as much as possible to develop a common understanding on multiple norms critical for the success of project management. Lastly, trust and reciprocity are critical for the success of project management. Project management necessitates close, informal, and long-term relationships even though it usually includes a detailed, formal contract with customers and task-based interactions between departments. Trust and reciprocity encourage actors to be flexible and accommodate emerging needs, which are not always possible to cover in formal contracts and relationships. They greatly facilitate conflict resolution and speed project course. They even lead dominant actors to accept role reversals with subordinate actors so that customer concerns are better addressed. Companies thus should create and sustain an informal environment of trust and reciprocity, not trusting only the power of formal contracts and relationships.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Contribution Statement

The authors contributed to this study equally.

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