

Master's Programme in Management and International Business

Micromanagement in the careers of prominent leaders

Micromanagement habits of Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, and Jeff Bezos examined

Sampsa Rapeli

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Author	Sampsa Rapeli		
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Abstract

Micromanagement is a commonly evoked concept, yet one which has received very little academic attention. Existing studies tend to view it as a negative phenomenon, locating the causes of micromanagement in the psychological issues of the micromanager. Regardless, many prominent and successful managers have had reputations as micromanagers, and a small but growing literature on the potential advantages of micromanagement has also emerged.

The objective of this thesis is to explore the contradiction between bad reputation of micromanagement on the one hand, and its association with prominent managers on the other hand. This thesis is an extensive, multiple case-study on the managerial careers of three famous micromanagers: Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, and Jeff Bezos, conducted through a content analysis on multiple book sources on the cases' careers. Through this investigation I hope to understand better the role played by micromanagement in their managerial careers, and whether they used micromanagement in the ways suggested by the literature on the potential advantages of micromanagement.

My findings suggest that the cases used micromanagement to solidify their control over their companies, impart their vision on them, and as a managerial tool in product development. Unlike what was suggested in prior literature on the potential uses for micromanagement, the cases primarily used micromanagement in active ways. They also micromanaged compulsively, as suggested by academic studies on the harmful consequences of micromanagement.

Keywords micromanagement, Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, leadership, product development, vision

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1. Introduction

"The negative impact of micromanagement permeates to at least four areas: (1) the organisation, (2) the micromanagee, (3) the micromanager, and (4) the customer." (Chambers, 2004, p. 19)

"Micromanaging dents your team's morale by establishing a tone of mistrust - and limits your team's capacity to grow." (Knight, 2015)

"A micromanager can be much more than a nuisance in today's complex organization... [The micromanager] seriously damages the productivity of the organization and, over the long run, may jeopardize the organization's survival." (White, 2010)

Micromanagement has a bad reputation. The above quotations express some of the harms and ills that have been ascribed to follow from it. While exactly how it is defined varies, it is commonly considered to take place when a manager or a leader guides a subordinate excessively, monitors or snoops on them disturbingly, or reaches over their own position to do their subordinates' work. In other research, micromanagement has been associated with employee disengagement (Bielaszka-DuVernay, 2008) and lack of employee initiative (Wright, 2000), and found to be the least desirable quality for a manager to have (Irani-Williams, 2020). Indeed, in common usage the term is also a negative one. While what counts as micromanagement varies from person to person, it is almost universally used as a disparaging term. To accuse that one is being micromanaged is to say that one is being managed badly.

Yet, despite the awful reputation micromanagement has, it is also a managerial quality that is associated with many successful managers. A quick search finds micromanagement associated with Elon Musk (Vistage, 2019), Jack Welch (Hollon, 2016), Larry Ellison (Miller, 2023) as well as Steve Jobs, Mickey Drexler, and Jeff Bezos (Finkelstein, 2014) – all examples of successful, self-made managers. Furthermore, in the popular media micromanagement is associated with such heroic figures not as an incidental flaw, but as a defining managerial trait: they succeeded because they were micromanagers. This is the quaint paradox that inspires this study.

1.1 Research gap and research questions

It is not an exaggeration to say that the research gap around micromanagement is enormous. While there are studies on the concept, they are few and far between, and little conversation takes place between them. In practice, almost any study on micromanagement in almost any context would advance the academic understanding on the concept. However, the sparse research around micromanagement also means that it is fruitful ground for a qualitative study, which explores the concept without preconceptions or without seeking to prove a theory, with the intention of producing new insights useful for theory-generation (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, pp. 5-6). This is the starting point of this thesis, which takes the form of a qualitative case-study on the topic of micromanagement.

Specifically, inspired by the paradox described earlier, between bad reputation of micromanagement on the one hand, and its association with some very successful managers on the other hand, this study focuses on three famous micromanagers. It is an extensive, multiple case study on the managerial careers of Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, and Jeff Bezos. These are all famous micromanagers, yet there exists no academic research on how they used micromanagement in their careers and whether and how micromanagement contributed to their

successes. This is a clear research gap that this thesis intends to fill. Given the difficulty of acquiring primary data on the cases, this study relies on secondary data on them, with data sources being biographical and management books on the cases.

While the academic discourse around micromanagement is poor, it is not non-existent. Much of it starts from the assumption that micromanagement is harmful, should be avoided, and is a mistake from the manager. Hence the conversation tends to focus on how to avoid micromanagement and just how bad it is. There is, however, a small but growing literature that takes a more positive view on the phenomenon. It views micromanagement as a practical tool like any other that a manager can use to achieve their objectives. There are no empirical studies on the topic of the advantages of micromanagement, however, and most of the articles on it amount to little more than wish-lists of situations in which micromanagement could be useful, with only theoretical arguments behind each use case. This is another research gap that this thesis will look at. Since there are suggestions for potential uses of micromanagement, an explorative case study on successful micromanagers should be able to investigate whether these suggestions are on the right track or whether they are only wishful thinking.

There are thus two related aspects of the phenomenon of micromanagement that this study is interested in, and as a result also two research questions. These are:

Research question 1: "How did the cases use micromanagement in their careers?"

Research question 2: "Did the cases use micromanagement in ways that line up with the potential uses for micromanagement suggested by previous literature?"

The first research question explores micromanagement in general. How did the cases of Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, and Jeff Bezos use micromanagement in practice. The purpose of this question is to explore the phenomenon without preconceptions and see what kind of insights might be generated through a thorough study.

The second question relates to the previous literature in light of the results. There are various suggestions for potential uses of micromanagement, but no qualitative or quantitative investigations on them have been conducted. This study will also comment on whether these suggestions are reasonable given the results of this thesis, and whether the burgeoning literature on advantages of micromanagement is on the right track.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis will be the following. In this **introduction** section there follows a brief introduction to the cases. After that there will be a **literature review**, in which I first go through various definitions found in literature for micromanagement and synthesise a suitable one for this thesis. After this I will go through literature that focuses on the disadvantages of micromanagement, empirical literature on micromanagement that studies it quantitatively and in practical contexts, and then literature, both popular and academic, that focuses on potential advantages of micromanagement. Afterwards, I will briefly go through some potential theoretical connections between micromanagement and various theoretical frameworks. This will be followed by a **methodology** sections, explaining the research design and method, as well as ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of the study. After this, I will go through the **results** of the study, which will be arranged according to the different themes that came up during the data analysis. The **discussion** part that follows will further analyse the results, bringing them together in a few overarching topics, and tying them to previous literature exploring the phenomenon. This will also allow me to directly answer the two research

questions. Finally, there will be a **conclusion** section, which will summarize the results, as well as go over the practical or managerial implications of this study, its limitations, and suggest avenues for future research that came up during this study.

1.3 Introduction to the cases

For basic details of my cases biographies, I rely on publicly available articles on them from the Encyclopaedia Britannica. For Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, and Jeff Bezos, respectively, these will be Crowther (2024), Levy (2024), and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024). Unless specifically referenced otherwise, all the information will be from these sources.

Walt Disney:

Walt Disney (1901-1966) was an American founder of the Walt Disney Studios, as well as motion-picture and television producer. Born to a working-class family and raised in Kansas City, Missouri, he moved to California with his brother Roy in 1923 to pursue a career in animated films, setting up his own studio in 1927. He achieved success as a pioneer in adding sound to animated cartoons, releasing the first sound cartoon and the first Mickey Mouse film *Steamboat Willie* in 1928. Disney's film studio grew rapidly in the late 1920s and 1930s and with it Walt Disney's ambitions. His studio released the first feature-length animated film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937, after a gruelling three-year development process. Famous for his paternalistic and micromanaging attitude towards his employees, Disney had his share of setbacks as well. His early collaborator Ub Iwerks left his studio in 1928 due to personal conflicts, and in 1941 a strike in the studio led many of the top animators to resign. In the 1950s Walt Disney's attention shifted away from animations, and he began to plan a huge amusement park to be built near Los Angeles. Opening in 1955, the first Disneyland became a famous tourist attraction and a showcase for Disney products. Disney's last years were spent with obsession over yet another project, the EPCOT or the Experimental Prototype Community of

Tomorrow, a planned city that Disney intended to build to solve problems of urbanisation in the contemporary America (Mosley, 1985). Walt Disney's early death in 1966 put an end to the project at the planning stage, yet his legacy remains in the characters he created as well as the company he formed, the Walt Disney Studios, now simply known as Disney.

Steve Jobs:

Steve Jobs (1955-2011) was an American founder of the Apple Computer, Inc, as well as the now defunct computer company NeXT Inc and a former CEO of Pixar. Raised by adoptive parents in Cupertino, California, Jobs was an eclectic character who dropped out of college, and worked as a video game designer for Atari, before leaving for a pilgrimage in India. Afterwards Jobs founded the computer company Apple, together with Steve Wozniak in 1977. The company achieved rapid success with the computer Apple II, released in the same year. Afterwards, Jobs became convinced that the future of computers lay in machines with graphical user interface, and idea he pursued as the head Macintosh project in Apple. The first Macintosh computers were released to great fanfare in 1978, yet as a result of disappointing sales, Jobs was soon forced out of the company. He spent the next decade with a new computer firm he found, NeXT Inc, as well as working as a CEO of Pixar, a computer graphics firm that produced the first full-length computer-animated feature film, Toy Story, in 1995. In 1996 Jobs rejoined Apple, becoming its CEO again officially in 2000. Jobs remained the CEO of Apple until his death in 2011, releasing several revolutionary products in rapid succession: the new computer model iMac in 1998, music player iTunes and a portable MP3 player iPod in 2001, the smartphone iPhone in 2007, and the tablet iPad in 2010. Famous for his micromanagement and often nasty way of treating his employees, Jobs was also known for his irresistible charisma and design acumen.

Jeff Bezos:

Jeff Bezos (born 1964) is an American entrepreneur, and a founder of the e-commerce firm Amazon and the aerospace firm Blue Origin. Born in New Mexico, Bezos studied computer science in the Princeton University, graduating in 1986. After working as an investment banker for several years, Bezos resigned in 1994 to open a virtual bookstore. Operating from his garage, Amazon.inc sold its first book in July 1995. Amazon soon became a dominant player in e-commerce and branched into CDs and Videos in 1998. The company became rapidly famous yet ran into financial trouble after the dot.com stock market bubble burst in 2000 (Stone, 2013, p. 130). Unlike many other internet firms, the company survived the dot.com crash and reached profitability in 2002 (Stone, 2013, p. 171), and soon continued to diversify, adding consumer products, apparel, hardware, and jewellery, among other things, to its offerings. In 2007 the company released the reading tablet Kindle, and in 2010 moved into entertainment business with the opening of Amazon Studios. Perhaps the most successful venture of the company was the introduction of Amazon Web Services (AWS) in 2006, which soon became the largest cloud-computing service in the world. Aside from Amazon, Bezos has found time to found an aerospace company, Blue Origin, in 2000, as well as acquire newspaper The Washington Post in 2013. A famous micromanager, Jeff Bezos is the only one of the cases still alive, though no longer the CEO of Amazon, having stepped down in 2021.

2. Literature review

In this section I will first go through various definitions of micromanagement suggested by the academic literature and synthesise from them an appropriate definition for this thesis. After that, I will discuss articles expounding the various disadvantages and negative consequences of micromanagement, as well as empirical studies that have been conducted on the topic. Afterwards, I will look at suggestions found in both academic literature and popular media on the possible advantages of micromanagement. These are sparser and more disconnected from the academic discourse but form the starting point of the research question of how micromanagement has been used by cases. I will also look at two different theoretical frameworks, the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory that focuses on dyads between managers and employees, and the job resources-demands theory that focuses on job engagement, to see if they could be used to further illuminate the concept of micromanagement. Finally, I will look at some of the existing research and literature on the management habits of the three case studies, and the connections found between them and micromanagement.

2.1 Definition of micromanagement

While micromanagement is a concept that sees widespread usage, there is no universally agreed definition for it. In a seminal work on micromanagement, Harry Chambers notes that: "Nobody wants to be micromanaged, and certainly no one wants to be a micromanager. Everyone knows micromanagement is bad, but they can't actually define it" (2004, p. 11). While the number of publications on the topic has greatly expanded in the twenty years following this quote, no single, universally agreed on definition has emerged. Chambers himself went on to define the term in the following way:

"[Micromanagement] is the perception of inappropriate interference in someone else's activities, responsibilities, decision making, and authority... Micromanagement is the excessive, unwanted, counterproductive interference and disruption of people and things."
(ibid, p. 16)

While extensive and helpful, this definition also showcases a common flaw found in many definitions of micromanagement: it is normative. Micromanagement, viewed in this way, is by definition inappropriate, unwanted, and excessive. However, since this thesis is interested in also studying the benefits of micromanagement, or at least acknowledges the possibility that it is sometimes beneficial, a normative definition will not do. A normative definition might cause us to miss interference that is not seen as excessive or unwanted, but which would otherwise be close or intensive enough to be viewed as micromanagement.

As there is no commonly accepted definition, literature supplies us numerous definitions, which focus in varying degrees on the normative and descriptive facets of micromanagement. The quotations below express some of them:

"Micromanagement now commonly refers to the control of an enterprise in every particular and to the smallest detail, with the effect of obstructing progress and neglecting broader, higher-level policy issues." (White, 2010)

"In its purest form, micro management means to manage things closely; to evaluate under close scrutiny; to manage a small portion of a larger process." (Wright, 2016)

"Simplistically, micromanagement can be defined as evaluating processes or people closely."
(Delgado, Strauss, Ortega, 2015)

"As commonly used, micromanagement refers to inappropriately close observation and control of a subordinate's work by a manager." (Barishansky, 2015)

Four common themes emerge from these definitions. 1) Micromanagement applies to both processes and people, 2) it is conducted by the management, 3) micromanagement refers to close scrutiny or evaluation, and 4) micromanagement carries a normative connotation of unwanted or deleterious. While it would be tempting to discard the normative element entirely, this would make identifying micromanagement problematic. How close would the control of processes and people have to be for it count as micromanagement? The solution adopted here is to define micromanagement as notably close control, meaning close enough for employees or outside observers to identify it as abnormal or uncommon. This does not entirely avoid the problem, as it is possible that beneficial micromanagement is less likely to be noticed than counterproductive micromanagement. However, given the scope of this thesis, this is the best we can do to avoid the problem caused by normativity in the definition of micromanagement. Hence, micromanagement will be defined in this thesis as: "notably close managerial control of people and processes."

2.3 Literature on the disadvantages of micromanagement

The seminal work on the identification and the harm of micromanagement is a work by Chambers (2004), and thus deserves a thorough look at the start. In his book *My Way or the Highway: The Micromanagement Survival Guide*, Chambers (ibid) defines micromanagement as any managerial behaviour that results in interference with performance and efficiency of processes. While such a normatively negative definition goes against what I adopted here in the previous section, the thought process behind is solid. Without a clear definition, it otherwise becomes difficult to distinguish micromanagement from what is merely harmless monitoring.

By defining micromanagement as the behaviour that impairs performance, Chambers arrives at a clear-cut definition, and for the purpose of exploring the dark sides of micromanagement, this suffices.

The book identifies five defining traits of a micromanager: they place their self-interest above all else, they control and manipulate their subordinates time, they require elaborate approval processes, and they establish dysfunctional monitoring and reporting requirements. Importantly, Chambers draws a distinction between micromanagement and abusive management. While both are noxious types of management, micromanagement is not done out of malice - the micromanager cannot help himself and is in fact trying to help those he is micromanaging (ibid).

According to Chambers, micromanagement can result from both organizational culture and personal traits. In the first case the micromanagement tends to originate from the behaviour of the top executives, which then percolates down the organization hierarchy to the middle managers. Hierarchy itself can also play a part in creating micromanagement, in cases when managers have too little to do or too little to manage, and as a result, they obsessively manage what little subordinates or processes they have under them. However, Chambers pays much more attention to the second way micromanagement can originate, the personal factors. In his telling, micromanagement is a matter with an individual, a kind of a personality flaw. It originates from fear and anxiety from the managers part, which causes them to obsess over processes under them so that everything goes exactly how they envision them. It is reinforced by comfort, in the sense that micromanagement becomes a comforting ritual for the manager, or a way of dealing with uncertainties. Finally, micromanagement both gives rise and feeds from confusion. The micromanager loses sight of what is appropriate management and what is not, what they should pay attention and what not to, and as a result they pay attention to too many things. In this way micromanagement is seen as arising from fear, comfort, and confusion (ibid).

Later commentators have followed the path set by Chambers but identified more precisely the harms done by micromanagement. Bielaszka-DuVernay (2008), for example, focuses on the damage done to employee engagement by micromanagement. They begin by noting the temptations of micromanagement, as close attention to subordinates' work does often reveal much to improve. However, in the long run micromanagement leads to disengagement, which is defined here as a state of distance from one's work, where the employee puts in time but only minimal effort. Micromanagement signals employees that the manager does not trust their work, and this results in disengagement and massive productivity losses caused by it.

Similarly, Wright (2000) locates the harmful effects of micromanagement in how it removes personal autonomy from the employees. They define micromanagement more neutrally, as managing things closely, or evaluating under close scrutiny. They also recognize that micromanagement can be useful in limited circumstances, such as when doing repetitive, menial work. However, in the long run micromanagement proves harmful, as it harms the personal initiative of the workers and reduces them to drones that can only do what they have been tasked to do. Unlike Chambers (2004), Wright considers micromanagement to originate not in psychological factors but in managerial practice. He locates it in excessive focus on the methods the work is performed with over the results. As such his suggestions to avoid micromanagement are to refocus on the results, to reduce the number of goals given to employees, and for managers to take the role of a coach or advisor over an overt boss.

Finally, another often cited article on the harms of micromanagement is supplied by White (2010), who defines micromanagement as the control of an enterprise to the smallest detail, with harmful consequences to performance and higher level decision-making. Like Chambers (2004), White locates the cause of micromanagement in psychological factors, arguing that it is akin to compulsive, behavioural disorder. However, he also notes that management structure can contribute to it, in case of managers that have little to manage, and thus overmanage their

meagre responsibilities. The symptoms of micromanagement include overseeing workers too closely, supervising particular projects excessively and taking on too many of them, obsessing over trivial details, and creating deadlines for the sake of deadlines. While in the short-term micromanaging behaviour can be effective and increase results, over the long term its problems far outweigh any potential gains. Specifically, White focuses on the effect it has on the workforce, as micromanagement causes attrition in skilled, autonomous workers, who are over time replaced with workers that can bear with, or even need to be micromanaged.

While the works surveyed here do not aspire to any general theory of micromanagement, there are several communalities between them. Specifically, most of the works imply what we could call the “psychological theory of micromanagement”. The main tenet of this tacitly implied theory, or a set of shared background assumptions, is that micromanagement is not a valid style of management, but rather a managerial mistake that is committed because of psychological or behavioural flaws of the manager. Another key tenet of this theory is that micromanagement either has no benefits or only short-term benefits. The theory also approaches micromanagement from the employees' point of view, as the harmful effects of micromanagement are accrued through its effects on the workforce. Micromanagement is also viewed as a continuous practice, rather than something the micromanager can turn on or off.

A good recent example of the psychological theory of micromanagement is provided by DiGangi (2023), who approaches micromanagement through his position as a neuropsychologist. They rephrase micromanagement as the use of "command energy," which is defined by an emotional signalling that things should go as the manager is commanding. Echoing Chambers (2004), they note that the reliance on command energy stems from anxiety and lack of confidence from the manager's part, which is soothed by trying to control the behaviour of one's subordinates to the maximum. Naturally, the use of command energy leads to exclusively harmful consequences, and the cure for it lies in self-reflection, in the manager realizing their micromanaging habits and the awful results that arise from it. These arguments

capture the essence of the psychological theory of micromanagement, which is the most prevalent view on the topic expressed in the literature.

2.4 Empirical literature on micromanagement

While theoretical literature on micromanagement is quite sparse and unstructured, even less common are empirical studies on the topic at the ground level. Two specific industries in which some studies have been conducted, however, are the IT sector and the healthcare sector, perhaps because both are fertile ground for micromanagement and perceptions of it. In the case of healthcare sector, this is because of the traditionally high authority possessed by the more veteran practitioners, and in case of the IT-sector because the work in the sector is often quite autonomous and micromanagement is thus found particularly chafing.

The healthcare sector is the only sector in which a full-fledged literature review has been conducted on employee experiences on micromanagement. This was conducted by Lee et al. (2023) on clinical supervision doctor trainees. Their study reviews 12 articles on the topic, in the manner of a scoping review, with their sources mainly focused on the United States. The study focused on the causes and consequences of micromanagement, its definition in the clinical supervision context, as well as potential solutions to avoid it. The key takeaways were that micromanagement in the clinical supervision context was mostly associated with scrutinizing, or excessive control, and feelings of domination. The reviewed articles mainly blamed micromanagement on the behavioural or personality factors of the supervisors over any structural factors, and hence the proposed solutions also focused on self-reflection and training of the managers. The main consequence of micromanagement was found to be hindered professional development of the trainees, leading to issues with learning and development.

In the IT-sector, several studies have studied the topic from the employees' point of view. Firstly, Dhingra studied Indian IT-sector employees' perceptions of micromanagement through a questionnaire study (2015). In the study 250 employees in Fortune 500 companies, selected through convenience sampling, were asked to rank statements on the presence of micromanagement, as well as its advantages and disadvantages, from 1 to 5, with 1 standing for strong disagreement, and 5 for strong agreement. Micromanagement was found to be very common, and its disadvantages were ranked to be slightly stronger than its advantages (mean answer of 3.45 versus 2.77). According to the study, micromanagement was seen as helpful when working with people new to industry and in finishing the work on time, while it was also seen as resulting in high level of interference, teamwork issues, restricted innovation, slow workflow, and ineffectual employee development.

A similar study was also conducted by Irani-Williams et al. on the IT-employees of a Fortune 100 company in Australia (2020). Their study was similarly a questionnaire study, with 168 responses gathered, that ranked statements from 1 to 7, according to the answerer's agreement with it. This study similarly found micromanagement to be very common in the IT-sector and furthermore identified it as the worst possible supervisor trait according to the employees. The study also identified an antecedent for perceptions of micromanagement, as the supervisors that were viewed as competent were least likely to be perceived as micromanagers. The study also came to rather similar conclusion on the possible advantages of micromanagement: it was found to be helpful when an employee is new to the job, when they preferred to be micromanaged, and when the supervisor was perceived to have specific expertise.

2.5 Advantages of micromanagement

While there is already some empirical research on the disadvantages of micromanagement, only a few scattered suggestions exist for its advantages. That this is so is not surprising. For

one, the negative connotations associated with the term micromanagement make it hard to study, in the sense that any reflections on it might primarily draw on negative experiences. And if the starting point of research is to study negative experiences, as is often the case with research on micromanagement, the possible positives of the management style might never come up. This is especially the case if micromanagement is studied from the employees' perspective, as it possible that the benefits of micromanagement accrue only to the organization or its management, and the management style remains undesirable to the employees. Regardless, some suggestions have been made for the possible benefits of micromanagement, both in popular media and in academic research. In case of the possible benefits of micromanagement, popular media seems more receptive and more ready to suggest them. As such I'll start the survey with a selection of popular media articles on the topic.

2.5.1 Popular media articles on the advantages of micromanagement

Finkelstein, in an article for the BBC (2014), takes a typical route to the topic by noting how several famous managers have been described as micromanagers (their examples being Steve Jobs, Mickey Drexler, and Jeff Bezos). Finkelstein notes that these managers were strategic micromanagers, micromanaging their employees when necessary, but not compulsively. According to her, micromanagement is useful for two reasons: 1) to ensure that the micromanager's vision for the organization is being followed, and 2) to share the micromanager's expertise with the team or employees being micromanaged. She also notes that while micromanagement is thought to be opposed to delegation, a strategic micromanager is capable of doing both. This already diverges from the approach taken in the works surveyed in the previous section, where micromanagement was seen to be persistent, compulsive trait in managers.

A similar approach is taken by Hong (2018), who in a web article claims to have been influenced by the micromanagement habits of Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos, and Bill Gates. He notes that micromanagement was crucial in getting his own startup running, which was an operation in which every detail mattered, and not even the least of things could go wrong. Micromanagement, as such, would be useful in managing operations with little leeway for failure, where success would come down to smallest details. He also notes that for micromanagement to succeed, it must be paired by discipline by the micromanager. The micromanager must work harder than their employees, be personally accountable to the team, and be upfront about why micromanagement is necessary.

Finally, Angelovska (2018) goes further than the previous articles and claims that micromanagement is a generally effective management style. While the articles surveyed previously saw micromanagement as useful in limited circumstances, she presents it as universally useful, with the caveat that it is disliked by employees, but valued by the organization's leaders. She lists seven advantages that micromanagers have, and which are valued by CEOs: 1) being highly engaged with their teams, 2) being better able to prevent mistakes, 3) being interested in getting the best result out of their team members, 4) emphasising more with their team members, 5) being more aware of when and to whom to delegate, 6) being able to work with different personality styles, and 7) being able to iteratively improve any department of work. The list is long, and somewhat implausible, but it does demonstrate that there are numerous angles from which to approach potential approaches to micromanagement.

In summary, what all these articles have in common is that they view micromanagement as a choice. In this they contravene what I described earlier as the "psychological theory of micromanagement," which views it as an uncontrollable compulsion. They also suggest that micromanagement is not just about not delegating, pointing out rightfully that a manager can both be an avid delegator and a micromanager. As for the benefits of micromanagement,

numerous suggestions are made in the popular media surveyed, but I will consider to them more deeply after looking at academic literature on the topic as well.

2.5.2 Academic literature on the advantages of micromanagement

While there are numerous popular media articles on the potential advantages of micromanagement, there is a paucity of academic research on the topic. What little studies there are tend to be mere lists of potential advantages, while empirical studies on the topic are entirely absent. That being said, these studies have their merit, as they represent first steps towards a more comprehensive theory of micromanagement. Even if untested, they identify potential uses for micromanagement, which can later be tested for validity. This is also how they will be used in this thesis, as the use cases they suggest will be used as initial categories or codes under which results will be categorized.

Perhaps the most comprehensive list of potential uses for micromanagement is suggested by Delgado, Strauss, and Ortega (2015). In the article the authors define micromanagement as evaluating processes and people closely, a definition very similar to one adopted here. While acknowledging that micromanagement has its disadvantages, namely reducing morale and employee engagement over the long term, the authors regardless find six use cases in which micromanagement can be appropriate. These are: 1) when the strategy of the organization is changing, 2) a new endeavour is starting, 3) a new employee is initiated, 4) when an employee or a leader fails to perform, 5) serious complaints or errors are occurring, and, 6) a division is having consistently poor results. Importantly, the authors make a distinction between proactive and reactive micromanagement. The former referring to micromanagement that seeks to identify and deal with problems before they become pressing, and latter being akin to firefighting once problems have already occurred. They also note that effective micromanagement feels like one is not being micromanaged, which is perhaps one reason for

the practice's bad reputation, as it might be associated mainly with micromanagement badly executed or inappropriately sustained.

A similar "wish-list" or a list of tentative use cases for micromanagement is put forward by Mishra, Rajkumar, and Mishra (2019). The authors of the article look at micromanagement much like the Angelovska's article covered earlier, that is, from the point of view of the organization or its leadership. As such it ignores any concerns about employee morale or engagement, and views micromanagement instead as a technique for managing employee performance. Appropriately, the authors define micromanagement as paying minute attention to details and taking control of people and processes. The authors suggest a long list of use cases with this in mind. Micromanagement may be used when: a new assignment is introduced, employee is new or underperforming, critical decisions need to be made, serious complaints or delays have occurred, organization is changing its strategy, or small issues need to be fixed.

Finally, Sidhu (2012) provides an article that looks deeply into a single use case of micromanagement: project management, which is defined here as a temporary assignment with the manager taking sole responsibility of the results. The article identifies three situations in which micromanagement could be fruitfully applied in this context: when the project struggles to deliver on its objectives, when stakeholders are concerned with the results, or when the team is apathetic. In all of these cases the project is running into difficulties and micromanagement could be used to gain additional control over the processes and results and improve their efficiency. Perhaps most interesting suggestion here is the last use case, that of micromanagement used to improve employee engagement, as it goes against the suggestions made earlier that micromanagement is harmful for engagement. Sidhu instead suggests that not only can micromanagement be necessary to manage already disengaged employees, but it can also help to re-engage them, for example by micromanaging the employee's training, or trying to engage them by bouncing off ideas off them or trying to find out their specialities and expertise.

2.5.3 Compilation of previous literature's suggestions of use cases

Having thus considered what advantages or potential use-cases are found for micromanagement in both popular and academic literature, we can compile these into a list that includes unique suggestions from each source. Some of the suggestions appear in several sources, and I follow here a policy that puts the suggestion under the earliest paper containing it. For example, several suggestions were shared between Delgado, Strauss, and Ortega's (2015) article and Mishra, Rajkumar, and Mishra's (2019) article. As the former appeared earlier than the latter, the shared suggestions are shown as originating from the former. The following table contains the list of unique suggestions. I have also marked whether the suggestion originated from the popular or the academic literature's side.

Table 1. Previous literature on potential uses for micromanagement

Suggestion	Source	Type of source
1. The strategy of the organization is changing	Delgado et al (2015)	Academic
2. A new endeavour is starting	Delgado et al (2015)	Academic
3. A new employee is initiated	Delgado et al (2015)	Academic
4. An employee or a leader fails to perform	Delgado et al (2015)	Academic
5. Serious complaints have occurred	Delgado et al (2015)	Academic
6. A division is having consistently bad results	Delgado et al (2015)	Academic
7. Critical decisions need to be made	Mishra et al (2019)	Academic
8. Small issues need to be fixed	Mishra et al (2019)	Academic
9. Stakeholders are anxious	Sidhu (2012)	Academic
10. A project fails to meet its deadlines	Sidhu (2012)	Academic
11. Ensuring micromanagers vision is being followed	Finkelstein (2014)	Popular
12. Sharing micromanager's expertise	Finkelstein (2014)	Popular
13. When success requires every detail being correct	Hong (2018)	Popular
14. As a way of knowing/leading the division better	Angelovska (2018)	Popular

2.6 Tacit theories of micromanagement

Having now gotten an overview of previous literature on the potential advantages of micromanagement, I will look this literature collectively, and consider how it compares with the previous literature that focused on the disadvantages of micromanagement. As was the case earlier with works on the disadvantages of micromanagement, the works surveyed in this section do not form or follow an over theory. Regardless, it is clear that they look at the phenomenon from a different viewpoint, and as such we can construct a tacit or implied theory based on them that can stand in opposition to the psychological theory of micromanagement constructed earlier. Let us call the new theory the practical theory of micromanagement, for its focus is on the practical use cases of micromanagement.

In comparison to the psychological theory of micromanagement, the practical one claims that micromanagement is a valid managerial choice, which is adopted in order to reach some managerial goal and can be turned on and off by the micromanager. Unlike the psychological theory, it also claims that micromanagement has at least short-term benefits and is often beneficial for longer term as well. Though micromanagement's harms are acknowledged, the focus is on the situations in which the gains outweigh the harms. The focus of the theory is also different, as where the psychological theory focuses on the employee experience and results on the workforce, the practical theory starts from the managerial objectives, and employee experience is viewed through this lens. I summarise the differences in focus in the table 2. below. Note that the tacit theories are not meant to fit all the works surveyed and individual authors often contradict one or more aspects of the theory they fall into. However, when considered together, the works under the tacit theories mostly share each of the aspects of the theory. The table shows the features of both theories, the psychological theory, which is evident in the negative literature on micromanagement, and the practical one, which is evident in the literature that looks at the phenomenon more positively.

Table 2. Tacit theories of micromanagement

Aspect of micromanagement	Psychological theory	Practical theory
Cause	Manager's psychological issues	Practical managerial goal
Validity as a managerial style	Not valid	Valid
Possible benefits	None, or only short-term	Both short-term and long-term
Harms versus benefits	Harms always outweigh gains	Gains at least sometimes outweigh harms
Consistency	Constant, cannot be turned off by the micromanager	Strategic, can be turned off in favour of delegation
Focus	Employee experience	Managerial goals

2.7 Theoretical connections

As mentioned previously, academic literature on micromanagement is sparse and scattered, and as a result articles treating it rarely link their arguments on theoretical frameworks or higher-level theories of management. While articles on micromanagement do refer to each other, the resulting discourse is severely lacking in theories and frameworks that could connect micromanagement to other areas of the study of management. Regardless, I will suggest here some theoretical perspectives that could be adopted for studying micromanagement. The requirement for such a perspective is that it can help to analyse both disadvantages and advantages of micromanagement and elucidate why it is sometimes helpful and at other times harmful. With that in mind, I will briefly look at micromanagement from the point of view of the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, and the job resources-demands theory of work engagement.

2.7.1 Leader-member exchange theory

The one exception to the above-mentioned lack of theoretical connections is the LMX theory, which is mentioned in the articles by Irani-Williams et al (2020) and White (2010) as a fruitful perspective for analysing micromanagement. The LMX theory is a conceptual framework that analyses the relationship between leaders and followers, or managers and employees. It focuses on the dyad, or the relationship between the individual leader and the individual follower, rather than the traits of the leader per se, or the functioning of the whole team.

The theory originates from an article by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) that established the key principles of the LMX theory. These include the dyad as the focal point of analysis, which is conceived as a continuous interaction between the leader and the follower. The dyad is also unique between the leader and the follower, so that in a case of a manager of a team for example, the manager will have a unique dyad with each of the team members. The dyad is furthermore conceived as an exchange, where the followers follow because they receive something from the leader and vice versa. Analysing leadership through the LMX framework then means analysing the exchange going on in different dyads, the quality of the exchanges, and the problems occurring in them.

Bringing this into the context of micromanagement, micromanagement can be seen as a dysfunctional dyad. A follower that is frustrated by micromanagement doesn't receive their due in the exchange, whether it be in the form of trust, autonomy, or respect for their competence. Similarly, the leader feels they are not receiving their due, or their mistrust of their followers make them expect that they will not receive it were they to delegate or ease up on the micromanagement (Leana, 1987). On the other hand, the LMX perspective might also help us see how and when micromanagement could be helpful. In case of a new employee, for example,

the dyad will naturally be different from the dyad between the leader and the more experienced employees. The new employee will expect to be micromanaged to a high degree, as well as expect less favourable exchange with the leader. In case of a strategic shift in the organization, or when serious errors have occurred, the leader might have to shift to micromanagement mode, but this might be unpopular with their followers, as they are used to more favourable exchange relationship. In this way, LMX theory and its terminology can be used to bring clarity to analysis of micromanagement.

2.7.2 Job resources-demands theory of work engagement

Another theoretical perspective that could be adopted to understand micromanagement is to focus on its effect on work engagement. We may recall the point made by Bielaszka-DuVernay (2008) on micromanagement's deleterious effect on work engagement. This can be substantiated with a theory of work engagement, and for that I rely here on the job resources-demands theory proposed by Bakker (2011).

In Bakker's theory (*ibid*), work engagement is defined as workers being fully connected with their work roles, as well as being dedicated and immersed in their work activities. Seen in this way, work engagement involves both high work pleasure and high activation, or in other words, it involves both short- and long-term satisfaction gained from the work, and sustained focus on it. As for how workers may reach a state of high work engagement, it occurs when job resources outweigh job demands. The former is defined as factors that facilitate work tasks and support personal growth, such as autonomy, peer support, and trusty work routines, while the latter consists of factors that make the work more difficult and hinder personal development, such as the sheer difficulty of work tasks, or relationship issues between the manager and the workers. Finally, Bakker identifies four reasons why engaged workers perform better than non-engaged workers. Firstly, they experience positive emotions more often, which broadens people's

thought-action repertoire, making them more innovative and attentive. Secondly, they have better health, and can sustain in their careers. Engaged workers also create their own job resources, leading to a virtuous cycle of engagement. Finally, engagement is also contagious, in that seeing other workers be highly engaged is likely to motivate their peers as well.

Again, this theoretical perspective can be applied to understand micromanagement better. In case of deleterious micromanagement, it can be viewed as a job demand, or a factor that hinders work performance as well as workers' professional development. We can also take note of Bakker's point that one advantage of work engagement is the broadened thought-action repertoire. One way to understand micromanagement harms is that it does the opposite, as being constantly told what to do will reduce personal initiative and workers' interest in acting autonomously. On the other hand, in the cases where micromanagement might be helpful, such as when training a new employee, it can be seen to be a resource instead. In such cases it facilitates unfamiliar work tasks and enables further development. The theory might also suggest use cases for micromanagement beyond simply training new employees or training old employees in new tasks. We can consider a situation where the manager's involvement remains a resource for the workers for a longer period of time, such as when the manager possesses exceptional expertise or a skill in some area, and the sharing of the skill facilitates the job and provides insight and development for the workers, despite being otherwise seen as micromanagement.

2.8 Existing literature on the cases

Aside from studying what micromanagement is, and what are its disadvantages and advantages, my preliminary literature review also touched on the micromanaging habits the three cases, Walt Disney, Jeff Bezos, and Steve Jobs, and these results will be examined here. I will not be using the articles detailed here as data sources in the results section, to keep the data from each

case unified and equal in type, but works cited here will offer some initial codes for analysing the results, as well as be brought up in the discussion section later.

2.8.1 Walt Disney

The first and oldest of my cases is Walt Disney (1901-1966), the founder of the entertainment giant Disney (Crowther, 2024). While publicly cultivating an affable image, Walt Disney was also known as a micromanaging and autocratic leader.

To begin with the potential source of Walt Disney's micromanagement habits, Barnes (2022) in a study on the management style of Walt Disney and his followers, derives Disney's micromanaging style from the scientific management school of thought of Frederick Taylor, which was popular at the time of the company's founding. In the Taylorist management theory, workers are closely monitored, and their tasks are defined and controlled to the utmost. Job specialization is high, and managers assign very specific tasks to workers, with little regard for autonomy or personal initiative. This corresponds strongly with the various definitions of micromanagement, for example with the Chambers' definition involving manipulation of time and establishing monitoring and reporting regimes (2004). Barnes notes that this management style continued with Disney's immediate successor Michael Eisner, and so an argument can be made that the micromanagement practices of Walt Disney were more of a matter of company policy, and less of a personality quirk of Disney himself.

An opposite view, however, is taken by Croce (1991) who analysed Walt Disney's management from the point of view of his personal history and personality. In Croce's view, Disney's micromanagement stemmed from his total commitment to the business. Disney committed all his energy to the running of the company, supervising all its activities and often sleeping in the office. As the company grew, rather than change his habits, Disney kept the total control, in

order to maintain his personal vision of the company and its products. Croce puts much of this down to Disney's personal talent. While a talented animator, he was even more talented editor, having the ability "to look at a draft series of sketches for a cartoon and spot what parts needed more drama and where the narrative had gone on too long" (p. 93). His micromanagement thus stemmed from perfectionism and desire to improve his employees work to his utmost ability. This personality focused view is also corroborated by Liotopoulos (2023), who adds that as he aged Disney became more and more controlling and autocratic, just as his successes grew. The literature on Walt Disney's management style thus offers, on the first glance, evidence both for the view that his micromanagement was an intentional management style, as well as for the view that it represented a flaw or an obsession in his character.

2.8.2 Jeff Bezos

The second case is Jeff Bezos (b. 1964), the founder of the technology conglomerate Amazon (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). Like many other top technology executives of the contemporary times, he is known as a micromanager.

Bezos's managing habits are said to inspire both fear and awe, and as was the case with Disney, are claimed to derive from the personal vision he has for his companies (Dutt, 2018). These habits include plain micromanagement. A clear anecdote is offered by a former employee (Yegge, 2011), who notes that a particular target of Bezos' micromanagement was the front page of the Amazon store. While the company at the time employed top human-computer interaction experts, Bezos habitually vetoed their proposals, and preferred to work personally on the web design of the storefront, eventually leading numerous employees, included among them the former Chief Scientist of Apple, Larry Tesler, to leave the company.

Another, more theoretically driven view is offered by Schein (2017), who interestingly locates the micromanaging practices of Bezos in the scientific management school of Taylor as well. Schein points to what Bezos' calls the culture of metrics, or monitoring and measuring everything, including worker productivity, as inspired by the scientific management tradition. A commonality with Taylorism is also the high turnover at Bezos' company Amazon. In Taylorism workers were subjected to high productivity demands, and those who failed were ruthlessly laid off. A similar pattern of high demands and high turnover is present at all levels of Amazon. A crucial difference between scientific management as seen with Disney and with Bezos, however, is that in contradiction with the Taylorist view, Amazon encourages workers to come up and develop new ideas (ibid). This autonomy was not present at Disney, and Walt Disney himself was in the habit of taking the credit of whatever ideas his employees came up with (Liotopoulos 2023).

2.8.3 Steve Jobs

The final case study in this thesis will be perhaps the most famous micromanager of recent times: Steve Jobs (1955-2011) (Levy, 2024). There are numerous anecdotes and examples of his micromanaging tendencies. According to Mui (2016), he was a corporate autocrat who made every critical decision for Apple, but also many relatively trivial ones. He frequently involved himself with product design, such as opining on the layout of Apple stores, but also busied himself with the design of Apple headquarters' shuttle buses, the food offered in Apple's cafeteria, and similar micro level matters.

Unlike with Disney and Bezos, there is less or no research that links Jobs' micromanagement to any organized or theoretical principle. However, correspondingly more literature exists that links it with his visionary nature. An article by Jobs's official biographer Isaacson (2011) is exemplary in this respect. Isaacson links Jobs' compulsion for control to his success with

product design, claiming that he was always looking for elegant, almost perfect products. Similarly, Jobs' autocratic management practices are excused with the results Jobs produced at Apple. That being said, Isaacson admits that both Jobs' autocratic and micromanaging tendencies might have been unnecessary, that similar success could have been had with less pain inflicted on his employees. However, for Isaacson these aspects are ultimately linked with Jobs' personality, and hence inseparable from his visionary nature. Interestingly, this matches well with one of Chambers' theories on the origin of micromanagement (2004): that it results from the manager thinking that they always know best.

3. Methodology

In this section I will go through the research design and data collection aspects of the study, as well as the underlying assumptions and the rationale for the design choices. First, there will be a subsection on the methods used, which outlines the research design. Then I will go through the data collection, or what data was used in this study and how it was acquired. In practice this means the choice of book sources, and how data was gathered from them. Following that there will be a data analysis section, which details how the data was analysed. Finally, there will be a section on the ethical considerations and the methodological limitations.

To begin with a brief summary, owing to the focus of the study, I have chosen to conduct a qualitative, multiple-case study that is extensive, and follows the standard assumptions and underpinnings of the qualitative tradition. The data analysis was be conducted as thematic analysis (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, pp. 128-129), where the data was first coded and then organized into themes. Since micromanagement is an understudied topic that is lacking in clear definitions and theoretical frameworks, my study is explorative. It seeks to increase our understanding of the phenomenon of micromanagement and help in future theory-generation, rather than to prove a theory, and this is the overarching rationale for all my methodological choices.

3.1 Research design and method

Perhaps the most important question to be solved in deciding on the research methodology is the choice between quantitative or qualitative approach. For this study, I chose to follow the qualitative tradition. This is because qualitative tradition is particularly good for studying concepts and phenomena that are understudied and nebulous (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005).

Micromanagement is just this kind of phenomena, as could be seen in the prior literature review section. The literature on micromanagement lacks even a shared definition of, and there is a lack of any established theoretical frameworks, which could then supply variables and interesting research questions for a quantitative study. Instead, the study of micromanagement is at a point where more interesting insights on it should be produced through explorative studies, which could then down the road produce theories and empirically provable questions. As such a qualitative approach is appropriate for this study. The data used in this study also suggests a qualitative approach, since the data from biographical and management books is by nature complex and multi-faceted and is difficult to organize in clear numerical variables. Even if this could be done, much of the nuance in the data would be lost. By using a qualitative approach, the richness of the data becomes a resource instead.

The philosophical assumptions and underpinnings in this study follow those generally used in qualitative studies as well. Ontologically this study assumes subjectivity. By this I mean that I take seriously the subjective and context and perspective-dependant experiences of people (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008) and assume that they say something about really existing phenomena out in the world. To give a practical example from this study itself, when people relate their experiences of being micromanaged in the data, I assume that this is precisely what micromanagement is. There is no place to ask the question whether they really experienced micromanagement or were micromanaged, as the subjective feeling of micromanagement is what we are looking for.

Epistemologically the study also follows the common tradition of qualitative research, in that it follows social constructionism. In social constructionism reality is taken to be constructed of subjective and shared meanings, and the researcher is part of the observation process (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). This contrasts with the positivism often associated with quantitative studies, in which reality is taken to be constructed of objective facts, which are revealed through empirical research. Again, the data used in my study suggests that social constructivism is

better fit to the study than positivism. I use secondary, biographical data, produced originally through interviews and content analysis. The data is thus socially constructed to begin with and is even more so after the micromanagement focused data analysis conducted in this study. Subjectivity and social constructionism are also common underlying assumptions in qualitative research, and as my study is a rather conventional qualitative study, they fit it very well.

The specific method I have chosen to adopt here is the case study. Case studies involve constructing a single or multiple cases, and the research questions are related to understanding or solving the cases (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). In this study, there are three cases, the micromanagement habits of Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, and Jeff Bezos. The cases were selected through theoretical and convenience sampling. Theoretical sampling was used in the sense that I wanted to choose leaders or managers that were known micromanagers and as such would definitely yield insights on the use or misuse of micromanagement. Convenience sampling was used in the sense that there had to be a lot of data available about the micromanagement habits of the cases, which demanded that I choose cases that are prominent in the public and famous for their micromanagement. For this reason, I chose these three prominent managers as my cases. There was also the additional consideration that the cases should not be too similar to each other, and that they should represent different time periods and different industries. The cases don't entirely fulfil this criterion, in the sense that Jeff Bezos and Steve Jobs represent the same industry (technology), but differences between the two (such as precise time period and management style), and the addition of Walt Disney, who represents an entirely different industry (entertainment) and a different time period, makes the cases different enough for each of them to yield some new insight.

To return to the topic of case studies, the advantage of this research method is that case studies can be used to present complex issues in an accessible and readily understandable format (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), and the method is particularly good for addressing issues that are difficult to study with quantitative methodologies (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005). In this

study both conditions are fulfilled. The topic of micromanagement is complex, and due to lack of studies surrounding it, hard to grasp. For similar reasons it is also difficult to study quantitatively. Eisenhardt (1989) also notes that case studies are suitable for studying new research areas, where not much is yet known about the topic. While micromanagement is not an unknown phenomenon, it certainly an understudied phenomenon, and much of the research surrounding it treats it at a rather rudimentary level. Considering this, case study is the best method for studying the topic and is thus adopted here.

Regarding the type of case study conducted here, Stoecker (1991) makes a distinction between intensive and extensive case study. The intensive type is interested in understanding the cases themselves and diving deep into them. Extensive case study, on the other hand, aims at using the cases to study a particular topic or a theoretical construct. An extensive case study uses the cases instrumentally, to learn something about a phenomenon through them (Stake 1995). My study follows the extensive approach, as my interest is not in cases themselves, which is to say not in Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, or Jeff Bezos, or in their successes or failures, but in what can be learned about micromanagement through them. It is also for a similar reason that I chose to do three cases. Yin (2002, p. 53) notes that a multiple case study makes the results more valid and generalizable, as we can be more certain that any particular results are due to phenomenon under study, and not just the peculiarities of a single case.

In my study I look at three different prominent leaders, with the justification that this will make it less likely that the micromanagement lessons we learn from the cases are unique to the cases and inapplicable to other contexts. Using three cases also allowed me to look at different types of leaders involved in different industries and time periods. Walt Disney's career, for example, started in the 1920s, and took place in the entertainment and recreation industry. Steve Jobs, on the other hand, started his career in the 1970s, and worked in the technology industry. Jeff Bezos worked similarly in the technology industry, but also in the aerospace and retail industries. Looking at such disparate leaders, the results are thus more generalizable.

Finally, aside of a case study, my thesis here takes the form of a content analysis. This means that, as opposed to an interview study or an observational study, the data was derived from an existing documentation or content, in this case biographical and management books on the three cases. The choice to do a content analysis study was necessitated by the nature of the cases. Two of the cases, Walt Disney and Steve Jobs, being dead, interviewing them was out of question, and in any case interviewing any of the cases would have been too difficult or impossible to arrange, owing their position and tight schedules. Content analysis does come with its own issues though, as it meant that all the data used in this study is secondary, and I get only an outsiders view of what the leaders themselves thought about their micromanagement habits. However, I felt that the cases were so interesting from a theoretical point, or regarding what they could tell us about micromanagement, that the study was still worthwhile despite this.

3.2 Data collection

For the data sources on the cases, I used books, specifically biographical and management case study books. The choice to use book sources was because those gave the richest possible data on the cases micromanagement habits. Initial literature review suggested that there were also some scientific articles on the topic, as well as some popular media articles that were specifically about the micromanagement habits of the cases, but those were sparse and few, and rarely went beyond surface level analysis. Using other types of sources would have also been problematic, in that most of article sources had an agenda to them: often to prove that micromanagement was a valid management style, and hence their neutrality was questionable regarding the topic. Using biographical and management case study book sources gave me rich data with numerous data points on micromanagement, that was furthermore reasonably neutral towards the topic. Since the cases were famous figures of much interest to the public, such book sources were also easy to find.

To find the book sources used, I first used convenience sampling to produce a list of possible sources, based on the availability of sources in Aalto academic databases, as well as local library system. I chose two book sources for each case, to increase the credibility of the data. The book sources used are shown in the figure below. Apart from the second book source for Jeff Bezos, which I read in Finnish, all the books were in the original language, English. The quotations from the books, however, are all sourced from the original English versions.

Table 3. Book sources for the data

Case:	Book name:	Author:	Publication year:	Type:
Walt Disney	Walt Disney – The biography	Neal Gabler	2006	Biographical
Walt Disney	The Real Walt Disney	Leonard Mosley	1985	Biographical
Steve Jobs	Steve Jobs	Walter Isaacson	2011	Biographical
Steve Jobs	The Steve Jobs Way – iLeadership for a New Generation	Jay Elliot	2011	Management
Jeff Bezos	The Everything Store – Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon	Brad Stone	2013	Management / Biographical
Jeff Bezos	One Click – Jeff Bezos and the rise of Amazon.com	Richard Brandt	2012	Management

Data points were produced from the book sources by marking down passages that contained information on micromanagement. I was rather liberal in choosing passages, as only the data analysis step later on would prove whether the passage was truly relevant or not for answering the research questions. The number of data points that ended up being considered relevant is shown in Table 4. below.

Table 4. The number of data points from each book source

Case:	Book name:	Number of data points used:
Walt Disney	Walt Disney – The biography	28
Walt Disney	The Real Walt Disney	14
Steve Jobs	Steve Jobs	17
Steve Jobs	The Steve Jobs Way – iLeadership for a New Generation	9
Jeff Bezos	The Everything Store – Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon	18
Jeff Bezos	One Click – Jeff Bezos and the rise of Amazon.com	5

It should be noted that the number of data points does not necessarily correspond to the quality of the data obtained, nor does it tell us anything about the micromanagement habits of the cases. It is shown here only to illustrate the data collection process.

The data took form of passages ranging in length from one sentence to up to a page. Given that the number of data points obtained was manageable, no programs were used to organize or collect the data, aside from a word document that contained all the passages arranged according to their source, and later according to the codes they were assigned to.

3.3 Data analysis

Following the data gathering stage, the data had to be analysed determine its content and importance. For data analysis stage, I used the thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns emerging from qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Specifically, I followed the guidelines set by Braun and Clarke (2006), in which I first familiarized myself with the data (i.e. read the book sources carefully), generated codes from the data, identified themes from the codes, and analysed and named the themes.

I used an abductive method to generate the codes, that is a mix of both inductive and deductive methods (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, pp. 128-129). First, already while reading the book sources I noted down insightful passages to be coded and thought about their potential codes and thematic significance. Secondly, after the data points had been collected, I came up with a set of codes based on the prior literature review, in a deductive manner. This was related to my second research question of whether the ways the cases used micromanagement corresponded with prior suggestions to micromanagement's potential use cases in the literature. These deductive codes were thus theoretically provided and prior to analysis. However, since my first research question of how the cases used micromanagement, was more explorative, I also came up inductively with a second set of codes that emerged from the data itself. In effect, the first set of codes was deductive and supplied by theory prior to analysis, while the second set of codes was inductive and emerged later in the data analysis stage. This back-and-forth method

of going between theory and data amounted to an abductive process. It should be emphasized here again, however, that my thesis is explorative. Thus, even if the first set of codes was produced deductively and was supplied by theory, the thesis is not meant to prove any theories, only to investigate whether the emerging literature on micromanagement is on the right track.

The codes used in the data analysis stage are summarized next in Table 5., where I've also indicated whether the code was originally theory-supplied (stage 1) or emerged from the data (stage 2). The table also shows how many passages fit each code, although again, it is important to note that the number of fitting passages carries no analytical importance.

Table 5. The names of the data analysis codes, the stage in which they were added, and the number of corresponding passages.

Code:	Stage	Number of passages
1. Compulsive micromanagement	1	22
2. Restraint from micromanagement	1	13
3. Applying expertise	1	9
4. Imparting vision	1	11
5. Iterative improvement	1	17
6. Changing strategy	1	1
7. Initiating new employees	1	0
8. Failure to perform	1	0
9. In response to serious errors	1	9
10. In response to low performance	1	0
11. Initiating new assignment	1	0
12. Project management: bad results	1	3
13. Project management: stakeholder anxiety	1	0
14. Product development	2	24
15. Micromanagerial oversight	2	12
16. Theory-based micromanagement	2	1
17. Bad effects of micromanagement: management	2	6
18. Bad effects of micromanagement: people	2	15

After the data analysis stage, I conducted the thematic analysis on the data points. This consisted of three stages: identification of themes, naming of the themes, and analysis of the results (Clarke & Braun, 2006). The identification and naming of the themes steps were entirely inductive. The analysis of the themes follows in the results and discussion chapters of this thesis.

3.4 Ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study

Awareness of ethical questions is critical in all research, and if significant ethical issues arise, the researcher should do their utmost to resolve them. In this particular study, main ethical issues have to do with the treatment of the cases. All data used in this study is secondary and is available freely in the public domain. Thus, neither consent nor anonymization is an issue in this study.

That being said, ethical treatment of the cases is still something I've strived to keep in mind. The main issues here are to treat the cases with respect, on the one hand, and on the other, to not glorify the cases' actions needlessly. The first one is an issue since micromanagement can be a sensitive topic, in that it is unpleasant behaviour that can be seen as dysfunctional. To address this, I've tried to keep the discussion neutral, and avoided characterising the cases beyond what is directly written in the source material. Treating the cases means not including any unnecessary interpretations on the cases' character traits, motivations, or aims. The second issue is the direct opposite of this, and springs from the cases' fame and status. There is a temptation in business writing in glorifying leadership, especially when it has led to success, as is the case with all my case studies. Thus, there was a need to be attentive not to produce hagiographic writing that only sees success in the cases actions and minimizes their failures or weaknesses. Again, the solution to this was to refer as much as possible to the source material

and use direct quotations from them make my points. There is obviously the danger that the source material itself might have one of these issues, but I hope the danger is mitigated by using multiple sources on each of the cases.

Finally, there is the issue of trustworthiness of the study. Since the thesis relies on thematic analysis, which in turn depends on heavily on the author's interpretation, it is important to keep the issue of the thesis' trustworthiness in mind and work to improve it as much as possible. I rely here on the work by Nowell et al. (2017), which lays down four attributes of trustworthiness for a thematic analysis study. The first one is credibility, which concerns the fit between the author's claims and the views audience or readers will form on the study. In the case of this study, it again comes down to referring to data studiously in arguing for my claims.

Secondly, there is the transferability of the study, which refers to whether the results can be transferred from the cases to similar situations (*ibid*). In this thesis, an obvious issue regarding transferability is that the cases were all top executives of major companies and thus a question arises whether whatever we learn from the cases can be transferred to more mundane contexts. The answer to this will have to be two-fold. Firstly, that I believe there are enough universal truths about leadership, that lessons learned about the very top rank leadership are generally applicable to other contexts, such as middle management, project management, etc., as well. Obviously the this depends on the particular points I make in the discussion, but this should be generally true. Secondly, I argue that even if some of the results are not generalizable beyond executive leadership positions, it is still worth researching them, as though the context may be rarefied, it is indubitably important and persistent.

The third aspect of trustworthiness is dependability, or whether the research process is logical, traceable, and well documented (*ibid*). In the case of this study, this is best achieved by an extensive methodology section, as well as thorough illustration of the data used in the study. In

this way the research process for this thesis is transparent and the reader can be assured of its dependability. Finally, there is a question of confirmability, or whether the authors' interpretations are supported and derived from the data (ibid). Again, the way confirmability has been ensured in this study is by including extensive quotations from the data sources and illustrating the research data as much as possible. By keeping these four aspects of trustworthiness in mind, and striving to address them, I've hoped to ensure that this study is as trustworthy as possible.

4. Results

In this section I will first go through the final step of the data analysis, which was arranging the coded data into themes. This resulted in four themes, which will then be opened up separate sections one by one. I will through unused codes, codes unassigned to any theme, and finally conclude with a brief discussion on how the results compare with previous research.

To directly continue the discussion on data analysis, after assigning the data points to codes, I divided the codes themselves into themes. Four themes from the data: 1) visionary micromanagement, 2) micromanagement in product development, 3) compulsive micromanagement, and 4) adverse consequences of micromanagement. Most of the codes fell under these themes, although there were some codes that stood individually, as well as some codes, mostly those supplied by prior literature, that were not used at all. In this results section I will go through each of the themes, one by one by, opening them up and explaining the linkages between the codes assigned to them. The Table 6. below summarizes the themes, showing which codes belong to which theme. The number of the codes refer to their numbering shown in Table 5.

Table 6. Emergent themes and codes left unassigned or unused.

Theme / Category:	Codes:
1. Visionary micromanagement	3, 4, 6, 15
2. Micromanagement and product development	5, 12, 14, 19
3. Compulsive micromanagement	1
4. Adverse effects of micromanagement	17, 18
Unassigned codes	2, 16
Unused codes	7, 8, 10, 11, 13

4.1 Visionary micromanagement

The first theme that emerges from the data is that of visionary micromanagement. What this means is that the cases used micromanagement to ensure that their vision for the company was present in all decisions, major or minor. The codes associated with this theme were: 3) applying expertise, 4) imparting vision, 6) changing strategy (a rare code), and 15) micromanagerial oversight. The applying expertise code refers to instances when the case used their own professional expertise to guide, inform, or overrule decisions made by their subordinates. The imparting vision code refers to instances where the cases were mentioned to have micromanaged in order to impart their vision on their subordinates' decisions or activities. The changing strategy code refers to data points involving micromanagement in strategy change context, and finally, the micromanagerial oversight code refers to miscellaneous instances where the cases micromanaged to oversee and supervise decisions belonging to lower levels of hierarchy. Altogether, these codes are tied as being examples of vision-motivated micromanagement. A line in Neal Gabler's biography (2006) on Walt Disney captures the point of the theme succinctly:

[Speaking of Walt Disney's control over the studio] *"And yet even though Walt could neither animate, nor write, nor direct, he was the undisputed power at the studio, not only in the sense that he was the boss but also in the more important sense that his sensibility governed everything the studio produced."* (Gabler, 2006, p. 206)

All the cases were founders of their own businesses (Disney in the case of Walt Disney, Apple in the case of Steve Jobs, and Amazon in the case of Jeff Bezos), and it came through clearly from the data that their micromanagement was a form of control meant to ensure that the

companies retained or realized their exceptional natures as intended by the cases. In all of the cases, this demanded attention to detail to exactly how the companies operated, aimed at ensuring that the companies's products, managerial practices, and/or employees never lost the spirit or vision that the founders intended for them. The sensibility of Walt Disney, spoken of in the above quotation, is one example of such a vision. In the case of Jeff Bezos, the vision, at least initially, was focus on customer experience:

"Bezos was obsessed with the customer experience, and anyone who didn't have the same single-minded focus bore the brunt of his considerable temper." (Stone, 2013, p. 144.)

To use another quotation, Bezos himself claimed that: "[At Amazon] *we are genuinely customer-centric, we are genuinely long-term oriented, and we genuinely like to invent.*" (Stone, 2013, p. 24; not used as a data point.)

While we can certainly be sceptical how much of this is genuinely substantiated by managerial practices at Amazon, the focus on vision, on customer experience, certainly comes through from both book sources on Bezos.

In the case of Steve Jobs, the vision came down to product design, with which Jobs remained actively involved throughout his career at Apple. This is attested by this quotation by Elliott (2011) on his experience with Jobs and his relationship with the Apple products:

"When I joined Apple, Steve had already come to a keen understanding that people become motivated when their manager or leader makes a direct, active, personal connection to the product. He found that's the best way to inspire others." (Elliott and Simon, 2011, p. 74)

However, what makes visionary micromanagement a case of micromanagement is the need, attested in the data, by the cases to supervise every decision in the organization, rather than focus on imparting the vision merely in the big, strategic decisions. Thus, we hear a veteran director at the Walt Disney, Ben Shapsteen, recall:

“Sharpsteen believed that Walt’s forte was the supervision of his business –every bit of it– and in the feeling that everything that was done, every drawing that was made, was the result of his guidance.” (Gabler, 2006, p. 210)

Isaacson (2011) makes a similar point regarding Steve Jobs, observing of the management structures at Apple that:

“Jobs did not organize Apple into semiautonomous divisions; he closely controlled all of his teams and pushed them to work as one cohesive and flexible company, with one profit-and-loss bottom line.” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 408.)

The implication is that Apple was able to work as a cohesive company not only because it had no semiautonomous divisions, but because there was a central pillar (Jobs) that controlled and micromanaged all the functions of the company. Another name this theme could have had is supervisory micromanagement, as what the data suggests is that all the cases used micromanagement to supervise their entire companies, in order to maximise their own control over them and mould the companies’ culture and practices as they willed. I ended up naming the theme visionary micromanagement however, to emphasize the purpose of the micromanagement behaviour here, which was to ensure that the vision the cases had in their companies were realized down to the most in-depth detail.

Finally, an important facet of this theme, which we will see repeated in other themes, is that the visionary micromanagement did not remain constant, nor was it consistently applied throughout the organization. Rather, the cases often focused on some particular aspect of their businesses, a particular goal, or a particular project, to which they devoted their energies. Thus, we hear for example from Brandt (2012) how according to long time Amazon executive Peri Hartman, it was a large advantage for Amazon that Bezos initially focused on strategic thinking and looking at the big picture, rather than micromanaging day-to-day details:

“The fact that Bezos focused on envisioning and realizing the big picture rather than getting bogged down in programming details was a significant advantage for Amazon. Hartman believes that because of this, the company was able to grow and pursue different ideas.” (Brandt, 2012, p. 173)

However, once it became clear that Amazon had to reach profitability quickly after the dot-com bubble crash, we hear how Bezos then turned his micromanaging eye on the financials of the different departments:

“Each business unit had to review their budget weekly with [Bezos]. Each manager had to create their budget with precise and accurately timed sales revenue targets.” (Brandt, 2012, p. 131)

In the case of Walt Disney, his micromanagement during the growth years of the company (approximately late 1920s to late 1940s) was focused on details of animation work itself, and so we hear of the directing of the feature film Snow White (1937):

“And once done, nothing was too small for correction. Watching a sweatbox of an early scene animated by Eric Larson, Walt noted of a dwarf, ‘his fanny in the last half of scene is too high,’ and ‘Have hummingbird make four pick-ups instead of six.’” (Gabler, 2011, p. 246)

However, once the Walt Disney company had grown large and prominent, with numerous cartoon films in development at once, Disney’s focus shifted on supervising the large details instead:

“[Speaking of his role at the studio] He admitted that he was essentially a strategist now, the first and last resort, rather than a hands-on producer.” (ibid, p. 539)

In the two examples above about Bezos and Disney we see opposing movements. In case of Bezos, he initially focused on supervising the large picture, and moved when needed on supervising smaller details, while in the case of Disney, we hear him initially zooming on minor details of animation, and then focus on strategic decisions. However, in both cases the micromanaging instinct is redirected according to the demands of the company’s situation.

4.2 Product development

The second theme that emerged from the coded data was that of product development. By this I mean here micromanagement was applied for or used in the context of developing a product or a service. The codes that were gathered under this theme were iterative improvement, micromanagement in response to serious errors, project management in case of bad results or outside pressures, and product development. The product development code was the most common code in the entire data set, with 24 data points coded with it, and is directly connected to the theme. Iterative improvement code was also connected to this theme, for the simple

reason that almost all iterative improvement coded passages were also coded for product development, and even those that weren't, were thematically linked with it (e.g. in context related to product development, but not about any particular product). The deductive, theory-sourced codes of project management and in response to serious errors similarly occurred in product management context, but ended up being hardly used, for reasons that will be discussed further in the discussion section.

As mentioned above, the code for product development was the most common code for the data, and the book sources abounded with anecdotes about the cases' interest on the finer details of their products and the effort they put in developing them. Thus, we hear for example of Walt Disney's habits of minutely examining his animators' work:

"In what we called a "Sweat-Box" (a no-ventilation projection room), we animators would sit behind Walt and the director of the picture, nervously waiting for Walt's critique. Walt was very harsh and direct if he did not like what he saw. He knew what he wanted and we respected his judgement." (Mosley, 1985, p. 181-182)

The other biographer, Gabler, similarly mentions Disney's examinations repeatedly:

"This strengthening of his control seemed to energize Walt; he loved to pore over the Leica reels... After a cartoon was finished and previewed, Walt often ordered the staff back into the sweatbox for improvements." (Gabler, 2011, p. 169)

The other cases similarly spent much effort and time in ensuring their companies important products were developed according to their standard. We hear of Steve Jobs and the iPhone development that:

“But of course Steve wasn’t the passive exec sitting in his office and waiting for the team to show up with a finished product. As you would expect... his involvement in the iPod’s development was close and constant.” (Elliot, 2011, p. 172)

Based on the above passage, a question might emerge of what defines micromanagement in this context, or otherwise, at what point does attention paid to product management become an example of micromanagement? My interpretation process in this case followed from the definition of micromanagement arrived at earlier, which was that it is notably close managerial control of people and processes. Walt Disney’s examinations at the “sweat-box” are thus instances of micromanagement, because they are mentioned repeatedly in the sources, and the tone in which the primary sources discuss focuses on how exceptionally close the attention Walt Disney paid to the animation process was. In this case I also accepted as micromanagement instances where the cases spent effort on minor details of product development that was far removed from their own position. An example of this would be Steve Jobs’s obsession on typography recalled by the early Apple CEO Mike Markkula:

“Markkula and some others could never quite appreciate Jobs’s obsession with typography. ‘His knowledge of fonts was remarkable, and he kept insisting on having great ones,’ Markkula recalled.” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 31)

I also adopted a quite broad definition of a “product” in this case. Essentially any project that resulted in a product, service, item, or a practice fell under this category. This is because the manner in which micromanagement was applied was similar in each situation, and the subject this thesis is interested in is the practice of micromanagement, rather than product development process itself.

In the data there were interestingly numerous parallels between the cases, in which the cases took interest in similar products, parts of the product, or approached the products similarly. For example, we hear how both Jeff Bezos and Steve Jobs obsessed about the packaging of their products. First, we hear of the effort put by Bezos's on the boxes of Amazon's jewellery section:

"For months Bezos was consumed by the design of the elegant wooden jewellery box that Amazon would use. 'The box was everything to him,' says Randy Miller. 'He wanted it to be as iconic as Tiffany's.'" (Stone, 2013, p. 230)

And then of similar effort exerted by Jobs on the packaging of the Macintosh computers:

"People do judge a book by its cover, so for the box of the Macintosh, Jobs chose a full-color design and kept trying to make it look better, 'He got the guys to redo it fifty times,' recalled Alain Rossman, a member of the Mac team." (Isaacson, 2011, p. 134)

Another noteworthy parallel is the effort put by Disney and Jobs to the main headquarters building of their companies. Disney was particularly involved in the design of the Disney Studios buildings in Burbank Studios in California, into which the company moved in 1939 (Gabler, 2006, pp. 322-325):

"No less than Snow White, this was his dream. 'Walt planned out very carefully,' recalled Ben Sharpsteen. 'He planned out the buildings, he made mock-ups of the units on the ground with the old studio and called anybody in that wanted to contribute with ideas...'" (Gabler, 2006, p. 288)

Similar effort was exerted by Steve Jobs on the design of the Pixar Studios headquarters, during the time when he was Jobs was the company president, to which the Pixar moved in 2000 (Isaacson, 2011, pp. 430-432):

“Jobs obsessed over every aspect of the new building, from the overall concept to the tiniest detail regarding materials and construction. ‘Steve had this firm belief that the right kind of building can do great things for a culture,’ said Pixar’s president Ed Catmull. Jobs controlled the creation of the building as if he were a director sweating each scene of a film. ‘The Pixar building was Steve’s own movie,’ [Pixar founder] Lasseter said.” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 430)

That being said, there were differences in the way the cases approached product development. Both Walt Disney and Steve Jobs appeared at times to be fully consumed by their projects, with the data rife with anecdotes of how they obsessed over the product details for extensive amount of time. Jeff Bezos, by contrast, appeared to focus more on the general management of the company, and spend time micromanaging product development decisions on the side. To caricature the difference, Disney and Jobs acted at times like full time product developers or designers, while Bezos would devote only limited to micromanage his pet projects. To illustrate the difference, we can consider the following passages. First, on Disney’s involvement with Disneyland design:

“And then there was Walt Disney trudging over the site in a straw hat and loud sport shirt, as in the old days, ordering the workers about, alternatively hurrying them up and slowing them down, willing the property to conform to his dream. ‘He walked over every inch of Disneyland,’ [veteran animator] Ward Kimball said, ‘telling them to move a fence little more to the left because you couldn’t see the boat as it came ‘round the corner.’” (Gabler, 2006, p. 525)

And then on Bezos involvement with the Amazon's Mechanical Turk project, which sourced freelance labour over the internet on project basis:

“[The Mechanical Turk] was considered a Jeff project, which meant that the product manager met with Bezos every few weeks and received a constant stream of email from the CEO, usually containing extraordinarily detailed recommendations and frequently arriving at late at night.”
(Stone, 2013, p. 273)

The difference between the passages is illustrative of the different approaches between Disney and Jobs on the one hand, and Bezos on the other, with the latter staying further removed from the actual product development process compared to the former. Though all three habitually micromanaged the development of individual products, Disney and Jobs did so more as designers or ultimate judges of design, while Bezos remained more removed from the hands-on process of product development.

4.3 Compulsive micromanagement

The third team that emerged from the data was compulsive micromanagement. This theme contained only one code, the namesake compulsive micromanagement code, and is something of a miscellaneous category. It includes mentions of the cases' micromanagerial behaviour untied to any other theme, psychological observations by the biographers related to origins of the cases' behaviour, as well as mentions of the cases' habits that could clearly be labelled micromanagement. Though this theme contains only one code, compulsive micromanagement, that code was the second most common code in the data, with 22 data points under it, and it covered all the cases equally and throughout their careers. As such it was clear from the data

that all of the cases were in fact compulsive micromanagers, and this deserved to be treated on a thematic level.

Perhaps the clearest example of compulsive, or at least constant micromanagement by the cases was their habit of walk-in management, or prowling their employees workspaces, looking for something to supervise and comment on. This was something all the cases practiced. We hear of Walt Disney, that:

“...Walt Disney was an inveterate snooper; wandering round the studio at night after everybody left, riffling through papers on desks, opening drawers, reading letters or going through the contents of cubbyholes to find out what his staff were up to.” (Mosley, 1985, p. 228-229)

Of Steve Jobs:

“In the early days especially, it sometimes seemed that everyone working on a Steve project had horror stories to share about Steve’s level of concern with the decisions being made. On the first Mac, he was a walk-around manager in the extreme. It was a small enough team – not more than about a hundred people at its peak, and that included the business side, publications, marketing, and all the rest. But he would be at your desk or in your cubicle with alarming regularity, wanting to Monday-morning-quarterback just about every decision you had made since his last visit.” (Elliot, 2011, p. 24)

And finally of Jeff Bezos:

“Whenever Jeff Bezos roamed a FC [Fulfilment Center, an Amazon logistics hub] or his own Seattle headquarters, he looked for defects - flaws in the company's systems or even its corporate culture. On an otherwise regular weekday morning in 2003, for example, Bezos walked into an Amazon conference room and was taken aback. Mounted on the wall, in a corner of the room, was a newly installed television meant for video presentations to employees. A TC in a conference room did not by itself seem controversial, yet Bezos was not pleased.” (Stone, 2013, p. 214)

There is no evidence in the data that the cases ever questioned or let go of these habits, or considered them harmful enough to change.

Another, common strand in the theme was psychologising by the writers on the nature of the cases that caused controlling behaviour. These claims are something we should take with a grain of salt, as it is a common practice in biographical writing and not rooted in any psychological science. Regardless, I included such passages as data points, as they were clearly related to micromanagement, and as we saw in the literature review, much of the academic literature on the topic also considers micromanagement behaviour to originate from psychological issues. The controlling nature, in particular, was something that came up often. Thus, we hear of Walt Disney:

“Walt harbored two impulses that often warred: the go-getting impulse to succeed, which could be certified by money and recognition, and the deeper psychological impulse to control, which could be only satisfied by making his films exactly as he wanted to make them without interference.” (Gabler, 2006, p. 97)

Similarly, Isaacson makes the following comment on what happened after Jobs returned to Apple after his time in Pixar:

“...Soon much of Silicon Valley knew that Jobs was quietly wresting power from [the Apple CEO at the time] Amelio. It was not so much a Machiavellian power play as it was Jobs being Jobs. Wanting control was ingrained in his nature.” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 309)

The book's sources on Bezos, perhaps because the subject is still alive, generally refrained from commenting on his psychological make-up or nature, yet otherwise the general tone of treatment was the same: any excessively controlling actions were treated as being part of his nature.

4.4 Adverse consequences of micromanagement

The final theme that emerged from the data was the adverse effects of micromanagement. This theme is somewhat self-evident: it covers all the instances in the data where micromanagement is mentioned or implied to have caused harm to the cases' organizations, hindered effective management, or damaged employee morale. There are two codes that are collected under this theme: deleterious effects of micromanagement on people, and deleterious effects of micromanagement on company management, corresponding to whether the micromanagement was considered to have harmed the employee morale, or to have hindered the companies on a structural level. In the initial plan of this thesis, I had intended to ignore data on adverse effects of micromanagement and instead focus on the advantages of it. Yet in practice this proved unworkable, as the question "how did the cases use micromanagement in their careers?" cannot be satisfactorily answered without also considering the dark sides of micromanagement. Furthermore, the literature review made it clear that there is a stark divide between arguments against micromanagement, which rely on what I dubbed the "psychological theory of micromanagement", and the arguments in favour of it, which rely on what can be called the "practical theory of micromanagement". As a result, it is only by considering both the benefits

and the adverse effects of micromanagement that it becomes possible to link the results to the prior theories in a comprehensive manner. Hence there was a clear need to also collect data on the adverse consequences of the cases' micromanagement habits.

To start with the code for deleterious effects of micromanagement on company management, Gabler (2006) links them with the struggles Walt Disney had with managing his company after it had grown to large size in the 1930s:

“Employees had always complained that Walt seldom provided clear guidelines and had no real chain of command.” (Gabler, 2006, p. 417)

“But the biggest complaint against Walt was that he had an aversion to organization - organization that was absolutely necessary now that the studio had grown and bureaucratic discipline had to be imposed. ...He wound up either absenting himself entirely and letting issues be resolved by default only to return at the end of the process and overrule what others had decided, or more likely, micromanaging every detail to the point where, according to one soundman, Walt even knew the entire inventory of studio equipment.” (ibid, p. 417-418)

The point is clearly made, that Walt Disney's drive for micromanagement hindered the overall management of his company, and whatever was the cause of it, it also made it difficult for him to delegate authority or to establish a chain of command that in any form side-stepped his own supervision.

No similar points are made of Steve Jobs or Jeff Bezos, although it is notable that the Jobs was removed from his first stint (1976-1985) as the Apple CEO by the board of directors (Isaacson,

2011, pp. 198-199; not used as a data point); an event that we might connect to Jobs' struggles grow into a manager of a large company at the time.

There is, however, is an interesting parallel that emerges from the data that straddles the two codes of deleterious effects of micromanagement on people and on management in the data. All the cases ran their companies in both dictatorial and micromanagerial manner, in the sense that they concentrated decision-making on their own person, and interfered on every decision, large or small, that they could. In all three cases there occurred an attempt by outsiders to force the cases share their managerial responsibility with others, in order to better manage their companies, and in all three cases the power-sharing arrangement failed due to the controlling nature of the cases.

In the case of Walt Disney, the power-sharing arrangement was between Disney, and the General Manager John Reeder and Vice President Fred Leahy, who were appointed by the company board to help Disney manage the company (Gabler, 2006, pp. 419-420; not used as a data point) in the late 1940s. Yet we see the arrangement fail due to Disney's reluctance to share any power in the company with outsiders:

“Walt didn't fire his new managers, but they were soon dangling, just as all of Walt's managers had dangled, not knowing exactly where their authority let off and Walt's began.” (Gabler, 2006, p. 421)

In the case of Steve Jobs, the outsider with whom Jobs proved unable to share power was Apple CEO Gil Amelio, whom he ousted shortly after returning to Apple after his years at Pixar and NeXT (Isaacson, 2011, pp. 316-317; not used as a data point).

Finally, in the case of Bezos, the power sharing arrangement involved him and Joe Galli, who briefly stinted as the Chief Operating Officer of Amazon (1999-2000). Stone notes of his tenure at Amazon that:

“Though Bezos had drawn the new organizational structure himself, he kept his hands firmly on Amazon’s steering wheel throughout Galli’s tenure, voicing detailed opinions about everything from acquisitions to minute changes in the appearance of the home page.” (Stone, 2013, p. 121)

Now it is entirely possible that the management of the companies was better off with power being concentrated in the cases’ hands, rather than being dispersed among more actors. However, in each of these instances, a power-sharing arrangement was suggested by the company board to improve the management of the company, and it was the controlling drive of the cases that caused it to fail. Thus, whether the arrangements were a good idea in the first place is up to debate, while why they failed is not, as it is directly linked to the cases controlling and micromanagerial tendencies.

When it comes to the second code, deleterious effects of micromanagement on people, instances of it were difficult to isolate from the data. Micromanagement in this context was linked to many other bad managerial habits or personality issues the cases had. All of the cases were, to a greater or lesser degree, difficult people to work with. As managers they were insensitive, demanding, and at times tyrannical towards their employees, and the book sources contained numerous passages detailing this. However, merely being an unpleasant manager to work with does not equate with micromanagement. Yet a common issue was that when the data mentioned personnel issues the cases had in their companies, it was often difficult to parse whether the issues were caused by micromanagement, or merely by the cases treating their employees badly. To give an example, if the data mentioned that a key subordinate left a case’s

company because they had had enough of working with the case, was it because they had been micromanaged, or because the case was otherwise despotic towards his employees? The solution I adopted here was to be strict with the data, where I only counted as data points those instances where micromanagement was explicitly mentioned, or the passage contained clear descriptions of micromanagement. The disadvantage of this approach is that it likely underestimates the personnel issues the cases had because of their micromanagement, yet there were enough instances that we get a clear sense of the issues that did arise in their careers.

Isaacson supplies a typical example, from 1984 when Apple opened a new factory in California, which led to a veteran manager at Apple quitting the company:

“When Jobs decided to build a state-of-the-art factory in Fremont to manufacture Macintosh, his aesthetic passions and controlling nature kicked into high gear. He wanted the machinery to be painted in bright hues, like the Apple logo, but he spent so much time going over paint chips that Apple’s manufacturing director, Matt Carter, finally just installed them in their usual beige and gray. When Jobs took a tour, he ordered that the machines be repainted in the bright colors he wanted. Gray objected; this was precision equipment, and repainting the machines could cause problems. He turned out to be right... Finally Carter quit. “It took so much energy to fight him, and it was usually over something so pointless that finally I had enough,” he recalled.” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 182)

Similarly, Gabler notes of the annoyances Walt Disney’s micromanagement caused to his key animator Ub Iwerks:

“[Iwerks] bristled when Walt would visit his animation table at night and rearrange the drawings on the exposure sheets, even though Iwerks had already timed them. And he bristled when, after he had roughed out a scene for The Skeleton Dance, Walt insisted that he give it to

an “in-betweenner”, or novice animator, to complete, believing that Iwerk’s time was too valuable to have him fully animate everything.” (Gabler, 2006, p. 143)

Iwerks would later leave Disney to work for a competitor, an event that severely shook Walt Disney (Mosley, 1985, pp. 125-126; not used as a data point).

Similarly, the data sources contain numerous passages of key employees leaving the cases’ companies due to personal differences or distaste of managerial practices, such as in Disney’s case during the strike at Walt Disney Company in 1941 (Gabler, 2006, pp. 377-378; not used as a data point), or in Bezos’s case shortly after the dot.com bubble (Stone, 2013, pp. 166-167; not used as a data point). Apart from some exceptions, such as the situation with Ub Iwerks detailed earlier, these examples are not definitely linked to micromanagement or the controlling nature of the cases. Taken together, however, a reasonably clear line connects attrition of key employees to controlling nature of the cases’ and their micromanagement tendencies.

4.5 Unassigned and unused codes

Apart from the four themes covered above, there were also several codes that couldn't be quite assigned to themes, or which went unused. The unassigned codes were not connected to any themes either because they yielded too little data or contravened the four themes that emerged without ultimately challenging them. As for the codes that went unused, they were mainly codes that were derived from prior academical work on the potential advantages of micromanagement. These were suggestions of when micromanagement could be fruitfully applied, but evidence for which was absent in the data.

The two codes that were unassigned were theory-based micromanagement and restraint from the micromanagement. The former of these was derived from initial research on the cases themselves (sections 2.8.1-2.8.3 in this thesis), where several papers suggested a connection between the cases micromanagement and scientific management theory. There was only one data point that fell under this code, a minor remark by Walt Disney on psychological basis of his management techniques (Gabler, 2006, p. 354), which was obviously too little to form a theme. It should, however, be kept in mind that since the data sources were not management science books on the cases, absence of evidence here should not be taken to be evidence of absence. It is possible that there is indeed a link between scientific management and the cases' micromanagement, but this thesis found no evidence for it.

As for the second unassigned code, that was the restraint from micromanagement code. I thought it important to also record data points where it was clearly mentioned that the cases refrained from the usual micromanagement, to serve as a counterpoint for the code in which their micromanagement was seen to be compulsive. However, there were clearly fewer of the former instances when compared to the latter (13 data points on restraint compared to 22 on compulsion), and as such it did not seem fitting to form a theme around restraint from micromanagement, given that there was already a contravening one. Regardless, these data points will be useful in the discussion section, when I go over the psychological vs practical theory of micromanagement discussion. It should also be emphasised that while I did not elevate this code to the level of a theme, some of the instances where the cases refrained from micromanagement were very notable. An example from Walt Disney's case would be Disney's hands-free approach to his company's merchandise business, which was a major source of revenue, but one to which he paid very little attention to, as is evident from the following passage:

“Though Walt often micromanaged his studio, he never interfered with [Disney's merchandise chief Kay] Kamen, and Kamen had repaid the trust by following a policy as simple as Walt's

own. *“The prestige and dignity of the name Walt Disney had to be maintained,” he wrote a merchandising representative.*” (Gabler, 2006, p. 472)

Similarly, Steve Jobs was able to refrain himself from micromanaging as the owner and CEO of the computer graphics company Pixar:

“Jobs reveled in the earnest playfulness of moviemaking and got passionate about the algorithms that enabled moviemaking... But he was able to restrain himself from trying to control the creative process. It was at Pixar that he learned to let other creative people flourish and take the lead.” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 426)

Finally, as for the unused codes, they were micromanagement when initiating new employees, in response to subordinates' failure to perform, in response to low performance, when initiating a new assignment, and project management in the context of outside pressures. The last one here was unused because the project management codes, which were derived from previous research, was unused and sidelined for the product development code. The other unused codes were similarly derived from previous research, where they featured as suggestions for potential use cases for micromanagement. Part of the reason why these codes went unused would be because the suggestions they were based on envisioned a different kind of leader, most likely a middle-management leader with intimate connection to their subordinates, as opposed to top-level manager or a CEO that the cases actually were. However, the complete absence of data points corresponding to these cases suggests more than that, as we will see in the discussion section.

4.6 Comparison of results with previous research

Finally, in preparation for the discussion section, it is worth looking at the results side to side with previous research. In particular, this thesis is interested whether the results match up with the suggestions for potential uses for micromanagement we find in previous research. In the literature review section, I compiled a list of potential uses cases derived from literature, and we can compare the results of my content analyses with the list. The results are displayed in the following table:

Table 7. Suggestions for potential use cases for micromanagement derived from previous literature and their presence in the data

Suggestion	Source	Present in data
1. The strategy of the organization is changing	Delgado et al (2015)	x
2. A new endeavour is starting	Delgado et al (2015)	x
3. A new employee is initiated	Delgado et al (2015)	
4. An employee or a leader fails to perform	Delgado et al (2015)	
5. Serious complaints have occurred	Delgado et al (2015)	
6. A division is having consistently bad results	Delgado et al (2015)	
7. Critical decisions need to be made	Mishra et al (2019)	x
8. Small issues need to be fixed	Mishra et al (2019)	x
9. Stakeholders are anxious	Sidhu (2012)	
10. A project fails to meet its deadlines	Sidhu (2012)	
11. Ensuring micromanagers vision is being followed	Finkelstein (2014)	x
12. Sharing micromanager's expertise	Finkelstein (2014)	x
13. When success requires every detail being correct	Hong (2018)	x
14. As a way of knowing/leading division better	(Angelovska (2018)	x

The table mostly follows the Table 5. from earlier, but in addition now includes whether we find evidence for the suggestion in the data. In compiling this table, I was quite generous with the attribution, opting to interpret that a suggestion was present if such an interpretation was at all feasible. For example, even though no data point specifically mentioned that a case micromanaged in response to strategy of their organization changing, if there was a situation that could be interpreted that way, it was included as present in data. For this example, a situation like that was for example the launching of Disneyworld by Walt Disney, which was

never framed explicitly as a strategic chance for the Walt Disney Company, but which in practice amounted to one.

As can be seen, all the suggestions that derive from popular media articles (suggestions 11-14) were evident in the data, while numerous suggestions from academic articles were not. However, it should be cautioned here that the fact that there was no evidence for a particular suggestion in the data does not mean that the cases never micromanaged in this context, only that no trace of it could be found in the data. Thus, any conclusion that could be drawn from this table should be treated with caution.

5. Discussion

Having overviewed the results of the content analysis in the previous section, I move next on to the discussion of what the results tell about the phenomenon of micromanagement, and what can be learned from the cases. To begin with, the results indicate that the cases deserve their reputation as micromanagers, and that their micromanaging habits were similar enough to yield unified results that apply to all of them and potentially to other managers in similar positions. The structure of this section is such that I will first go through three key aspects of the cases' micromanagement habits that emerged from the data. Then I will briefly discuss how the results link with the theoretical connections I tried to draw in the literature review section, between micromanagement and the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, and the job resources-demands theory of work engagement. Finally, I will compare the results with the previous literature on micromanagement, by analysing them in the light of the two frameworks I proposed that emerge from prior discussions on micromanagement, those of psychological and practical theories of micromanagement. This discussion will allow me to answer the research questions of this thesis. There were two of these, and they were:

Research question 1: "How did the cases use micromanagement in their careers?"

Research question 2: "Did the cases use micromanagement in ways that line up with the potential uses for micromanagement suggested by previous literature?"

The discussion of the key themes emerging from the results and of the theoretical connections allow me to answer the first question. The discussion of the results in the light of previous literature and of the psychological and practical theories of micromanagement allow me to

answer the second one. Finally, this section will close with a brief conclusion that summarizes the results of this thesis and what it tells us about the phenomenon of micromanagement.

5.1 Discussion of key results

In the results section the data were organized under four themes: visionary micromanagement, product development, compulsive micromanagement, and adverse effects of micromanagement. However, discussing each theme individually would be redundant at this point, as the results section already showcased contents of the themes. Instead, I draw here three key ideas that emerge from the results. Firstly, the cases used micromanagement as means of achieving total control of their organizations and thus to impart their own vision on their companies. Secondly, the cases used micromanagement consistently to ensure product development and design was up to the standards demanded by them. Thirdly, micromanagement by the cases was informed by their personal expertise, and this also lessened its impact on those they micromanaged.

5.1.1 Total control management

The first lesson on micromanagement that emerges from the data is that the cases used micromanagement as a tool to achieve total, personal control of their organizations. They used micromanagement to impart their vision, values, and ways of working on the organization, and monitored that these were being followed by micromanaging their employees. They did these both in an instinctive, improvised manner, as when conducting walk-around management, as well as by establishing management structures that allowed them to micromanage their organizations, and by resisting attempts by the company boards to restructure the companies' management to be less amenable to micromanagement.

The goal and the result of the cases' total, personal control of their organization was to impart their personal vision on the organizations they led. This is most obvious from the theme of visionary management outlined earlier in the results section. The cases all founded unique, or at least exceptional companies. Given the reputations of Disney, Apple, and Amazon, this seems like a reasonable assessment. In case of Disney, the exceptionalness arose from the quality of their animated works, which Disney himself constantly monitored and micromanaged. In the case of Jobs, it was the union of design and technology, and the focus on user experience, which was obtained by the continuous micromanagement by Jobs on the development of key products. In case of Bezos, exceptionalness arose firstly from the idea of a universal internet marketplace, a category in which Amazon was the first, as well as the focus on customer experience, through which Amazon acquired competitive advantage over its competitors.

The cases used micromanagement, or the threat or impact of micromanagement in two distinct ways to achieve total control of their companies. Firstly, they micromanaged in a classic way, by paying extreme attention on the micro-level actions of their subordinates, critiquing them, suggesting improvements, and intervening whenever things were done against their wishes. Secondly, the cases all structured their companies in a way that allowed for their micromanagement to go unchallenged or maximized its use.

Regarding the first point, it is clear from the results that the cases were all walk-around managers. What this means is that they busied themselves by following what their subordinates were doing, beyond the needs of their station, and intervened whenever they saw something unnecessary. While there were already several examples of walk-around management in the results section, we can consider here in depth a typical example that we already saw earlier, from the Jeff Bezos case:

“Whenever Jeff Bezos roamed a FC or his own Seattle headquarters, he looked for defects - flaws in the company's systems or even its corporate culture. On an otherwise regular weekday morning in 2003, for example, Bezos walked into an Amazon conference room and was taken aback. Mounted on the wall, in a corner of the room, was a newly installed television meant for video presentations to employees. A TC in a conference room did not by itself seem controversial, yet Bezos was not pleased.” (Stone, 2013, p. 214)

What’s happening here is that the case (Bezos) is walking around his organization’s headquarters, looking for flaws in the company’s practices that would go against his vision for the company. In this case, the issue with a telecaster was that Bezos wished for meetings to be held in person at Amazon, to ensure that they were really necessary (ibid, p. 214). The instant intervention to have it removed was meant to correct the little detail that went against Bezos’ vision for the company. The data is full of situations like this, in which the cases intervene with trivial details to ensure their organizations run just as they envision.

However, if the cases’ micromanagement only manifested in such little actions, we might suspect that their micromanagement was ultimately ineffective, and might amount only to a form of obsession by the cases without a larger purpose. Yet, aside from micromanaging little details, the cases also structured their companies to be easier to micromanage and opposed attempts to decentralize power.

In case of Steve Jobs, this is most obvious, as we hear from Isaacson how structured Apple in a centralized way, in which he himself controlled all teams:

“Jobs did not organize Apple into semiautonomous divisions; he closely controlled all of his teams and pushed them to work as one cohesive and flexible company, with one profit-and-loss bottom line.” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 408)

By overseeing all the key teams, his intervention in little details could cover the company comprehensively.

With Jeff Bezos, we hear of several of his attempts control all the key parts of Amazon and micromanage it more effectively. A prominent example was a brief period in 2002 when he reorganized Amazon’s teams in what he called ‘two-pizza teams’ (Stone, 2013, p. 212-214). This meant reducing the size of the teams to such that could be fed with two pizzas (an expression that captured the ideal size of a team according to Bezos), and ordering all of them to come with a ‘fitness function.’ This would an algorithm that captured their goal and expressed their results in a quantified manner, and which would be posted publicly and for all employees to see. Aside from improving efficiency, this would allow Bezos to monitor all the teams in Amazon simultaneously, by looking at the results of their fitness function over time and focus his micromanagement on the teams that underperformed. While the effort was ultimately unsuccessful and soon abandoned, it showcases various attempts that appear in the data of Bezos’ attempts to micromanage his company more comprehensively.

The case of Walt Disney is something of an exception here, however. While Disney was just as much of a walk-around manager as the other two, there are few mentions of him attempting to organize the Disney Studios in a way more amenable to micromanagement, after the company grew too big for one person to manage in the traditional way. There is, however, evidence Disney struggled with the issue (Mosley, 1985, p. 264), trying to micromanage the entirety of his company the old-fashioned way even after the company had grown too big for this. This

does mean that while we may consider Disney to have sought just as total control over his organization as the other cases, he was considerably less successful with it.

Regarding, the relationship between the cases micromanagement and their general management practices, it is notable that, as mentioned in the results section already, all the cases faced outside pressure to reform their companies' management to be more decentralized. In case of Disney, this event was the appointment forced by the company board of a general manager and a vice president in the late 1940s (Gabler, 2006, pp. 419-420; not used as a data point). In case of Jobs, it was the power struggle with the then Apple CEO Gil Amelio (Isaacson, 2011, pp. 198-199; not used as a data point), and in the case of Bezos, it was the power-sharing arrangement between him and a new Chief Operating Officer Joe Galli in 1999-2000 (Stone, 2013, p. 121). In all of these events, the cases were initially amenable to sharing power, yet ultimately the attempts to decentralize the companies failed, as the cases proved unable to relinquish any power. They all sought a total control over their companies, down to least details, and thus challenged the authority of their temporary peers to the point that these left powerless. It is thus clear that the managerial style of all the cases demanded total control, and micromanagement of the least details was a crucial part of this.

Finally, we may note with interest that this idea of using micromanagement to achieve total and personal control of an organization cannot be found in any previous academic treatment of micromanagement. In case of literature on the advantages of micromanagement, this is mostly because it tends to focus on micromanagement by middle management, or by team leaders, rather than executive micromanagement. Regardless, we may note that at least in theory a middle manager could emulate Disney, Jobs, and Bezos here, and attempt impart their personal vision on their team through micromanagement. In literature critical of micromanagement, we do find a suggestion by Chambers (2004) that micromanagement is infectious, and tends to percolate down an organization, so that a micromanager will make their subordinates also micromanage their subordinates. There was no evidence in the data of this happening, however,

as there was no evidence or mention of the cases subordinates being micromanagers themselves, or micromanagement being a more general issue in their companies.

5.1.2 Micromanagement in product development

The second key lesson that emerges from the data is that many of the data points on micromanagement relate to product development. By product development I mean here situations where the cases micromanaged the development process of new products, notably and beyond their station, and in order to ensure that even the smallest details were done according to their wishes. The cases micromanaged a variety of products or projects, but all did so consistently throughout their careers. This ties to previous literature on micromanagement, in which we find suggestion that micromanagement could be used in project management context (Sidhu, 2012), yet the results do not entirely conform to this, and in any case the hierarchical position of the cases makes the term product development more apt than project management. The results suggest that the cases' insistence of micromanaging product development led in many cases to exceptional results which could not have been achieved without their micromanagerial oversight. However, data also supplied exceptions to this: situations where the micromanagement did not lead to desired results, as well as many situations where similar results were achieved despite the absence of micromanagement.

It should be noted here immediately that I used the same criteria for determining what counts as micromanagement in product development as in the results section. That is to say, I defined as micromanagement actions that were noted as people in the context as excessively or unusually close to people or processes. Secondly, I took into account the cases' hierarchical position. They were all top-level executives of their companies. Thus, managerial oversight that would not have been micromanagement by team leaders would be micromanagement if done by them, because by their station they should have been more removed from low-level

processes than simple team leaders or middle-management personnel. A few examples should make this clear, both of which relate to the development of Disneyland by Walt Disney:

“As in the old days, when he had been constantly ‘plussing’ the animations, he was never satisfied. ‘The first scheme you had, Walt would completely tear apart,’ [Disneyland art director] Mavin Davis said. ‘Eventually you would come up with something better. He wanted to see every idea that you could possibly have before he settled on something.’ Davis remembered a time when he had drawn a layout for an attraction and Walt had come in at night, just as he used to do with his animators, and taken it home with him. When Davis arrived at his desk the next morning, he found a sheet of tracing paper on which Walt had redrawn the entire attraction. ‘Here, quit fooling around and draw it the way it should be,’ he ordered Davis.” (Gabler, 2006, p. 496)

“‘Look, the things that’s going to make Disneyland unique and different,’ [Disney] insisted, ‘is the detail. If we lose the detail, we lose it all.’” (ibid, p. 527)

These citations capture both the purpose of micromanaging in product development process and its distinctive features. The purpose of it was to ensure that the details of the product were up to the cases' standard, expressed here as the features that would make Disneyland unique and different from other amusement parks. The means was the micromanagerial attention paid to the details of the cases' employees' work, which in the first quotation is found to be notably close by the people in the context, as well as which is clearly out of place considering Disney's hierarchical position. Although his position is that of the president of the whole Walt Disney Company, in the citation we see him spend his time micromanaging designs of individual attractions.

These quotations also showcase another facet of the product development theme: the definition of a “product” used here is quite broad. Aside from products as physical goods (the iPhone, iPad, Amazon Kindle) or virtual goods (the movie Snow White, Amazon Prime Service), product includes any kind of project that resulted in a business value proposition or venture, such as Disneyland, or even Disney later obsession, the experimental city EPCOT (Gabler, 2006, pp. 609-611; not used as a data point). The category also included products or projects where only part of the process received the cases’ micromanagerial attention. An example of such partial interested would be Amazon’s web-based jewellery business, where Bezos’ micromanagement seems to have focused specifically on the packaging of the product (Stone, 2013, p. 230). The cases were thus selective of their involvement in product development process. Only some projects or products received their attention, and sometimes they lavished their micromanagerial attention to only certain parts of the product. This tendency to micromanage product development process, however, was constant. It was present at the start of each of the cases’ careers and was maintained consistently and to the end.

While the idea of utilizing micromanagement in product development is not found in previous literature, it does share a connection with the thesis of Sidhu (2012), that micromanagement could be a useful technique for a project manager. After all, a product development is type of a project, and a manager of a product development team is a type of a project manager. Thus, we might have expected to see the cases use micromanagement in the way Sidhu suggested it could be used in project management context. However, there were several reasons why this theoretical connection proved to be a false one, and the cases' micromanagement habits did not fit Sidhu's suggestions. Some of these had to do with the differences between Sidhu's conception of a project manager and the features of the cases, and others with the micromanagement habits of the cases.

The most obvious issue with this theoretical connection was that while the cases involved themselves with managing product development, they never acted in the position of a project

manager but were rather executive-tier managers. The fit is thus tenuous from the start. The cases had no managers to which they were themselves accountable to and could instead wield dictatorial authority (even if at times they were constrained by the Board or by investors' moods). They also micromanaged several teams or products simultaneously, and those teams also had their own team managers in addition to being overseen by the cases. Yet, perhaps more importantly, the way the cases utilized micromanagement was different to what Sidhu theorised. In his paper, Sidhu considered micromanagement a reactionary tool: it should be used when the projects ran into trouble, either due to poor results or pressure from stakeholders. But according to data of this thesis, the cases used micromanagement in product development context consistently and actively. They micromanaged not to deal with bad results, but to actively and consistently get better result. There was no evidence that they micromanaged more when the product development process was in trouble, compared to when it was proceeding successfully.

As a result, this thesis found no evidence that micromanagement could be used in project management context the way Sidhu suggested. This, combined with the fact that the cases' micromanagement occurred consistently in product development context, rather than more generally in project management context, also meant that looking at the results from project management viewpoint made little sense. It is for this reason also that I abandoned the project management codes that were derived from Sidhu's article in the data gathering stage and added the product development code instead. The actual data fit that better, compared to trying to fit data points into project management codes.

There remains one last important aspect of this theme to discuss, namely whether the micromanagement was worth it and the cases' micromanagement yielded them some advantage in the product management domain. The short answer is yes, but with the provision that there are also numerous examples of the cases' companies launching successful, even revolutionary products without the micromanagement of the cases. The data strongly suggest that there were

several products or projects that benefited from the cases' micromanagement, yet no clear instances where their micromanagement harmed product development in a decisive way. As such the cases' micromanagement seems to have been broadly successful product development managerial technique.

As an example of a successful use of micromanagement in this context, the development of the feature film *Snow White* involved heavy micromanagement by Disney (Gabler, 2006, p. 213-276; numerous data points within this range), and led to a successful, even revolutionary product, as *Snow White* was the first feature-length animated film and led to a honorary Oscar being awarded to Disney (ibid, 277-278). Another example from Disney case is Disneyland, in which Disney's insistent micromanagement ensured that the park was a pristine enough experience to compare favourably with the amusement parks of the day and thus directly led its success (ibid, p. 527). In the case of Steve Jobs, micromanagement had a clearly favourable effect on the development of all the major products after his reinstalment as the Apple CEO in 2000. His micromanagement on the development of Apple Stores, for instance is mentioned positively by both Isaacson (2011, p. 375-375) and Elliot and Simon (2011, p. 25). However, the data also supplies examples where similar success was achieved without the cases' micromanagement. For example, we hear of the development of Amazon Web Services:

"[Head of Amazon's IT infrastructure Chris Pinkham] later said that solitude was beneficial, as it allowed a comfortable distance from Amazon's intrusive CEO. 'I spent most of my time trying to hide from Bezos.' Pinkham says. 'He was a fun guy to talk to but you did not want to be his pet project. He would love it to distraction.'" (Stone, 2013, p. 267)

Similarly, we hear that Steve Jobs largely refrained from micromanaging during his time as the CEO of Pixar (Isaacson, 2011, p. 426), yet this did not stop Pixar from developing several revolutionary products and growing into a major player in the field of animation. The

conclusion thus seems to be that micromanagement was a useful technique for the cases in the product development domain, but that the existence of examples of similar success without it makes it hard to disentangle its exact impact.

5.1.3 Expert micromanagement

The third lesson that emerges from the data is that when the cases micromanaged, they acted as experts, or micromanaged from the position of superior knowledge or acumen. Their micromanagement was not random or motivated by personal anxieties (even if these might have existed in the background) but arose from desire to correct small details according to their expertise. This ties up with previous literature, which suggests that micromanagement is sometimes seen a good thing, when pursued by a competent manager. The results seem to corroborate this, although the special features of the cases might make the results difficult to generalize.

By expert micromanagement, I refer to here situations when the cases were acknowledged by their subordinates to possess the necessary expertise or insight to correct the micro-level details they were micromanaging. An example would be the directorial micromanagement of Walt Disney when producing Disney's animated films, or Steve Jobs micromanaging the design of the Apple Stores. Regarding the latter, we hear for example of the visit by Jobs to a prototype Apple Store:

"And there he was: Steve Jobs himself, come to inspect the tiles, with four or five people trailing him. Steve was not pleased. The tiling had looked fine when it was first laid but as soon as customers started walking across it, large, ugly splotches had begun to appear. Instead of making the place look classy, the tile created a dumpy, uncared-for look... Steve wasn't just dissatisfied, he was furious, fuming, ordering it be done over." (Elliot, 2011, p. 25)

Here we see Jobs micromanaging by interfering with minor design details, yet his points are accepted, and tiles are changed because of the trust in company on his design expertise. There are numerous similar examples in the data, where the cases' micromanagement is motivated by superior expertise, and it also tempers the inappropriateness of their actions as micromanagement. To put it simply, the cases micromanage because they *did* know it better, and this made their subordinates more likely to accept the micromanagement as appropriate while also ensuring that the results of their micromanagement were good.

This seems like an obvious thesis, that micromanagement is good when backed by expertise, but it's worth pointing out here because it goes against much of the previous literature on micromanagement. As we saw in the section on the literature on the disadvantages of micromanagement, much of it views micromanagement as arising from personal psychological issues and be a form of obsessive behaviour motivated by fear (see for instance White 2010 and DiGangi, 2023). However, the results here suggest that micromanagement at least sometimes arises from genuine expertise, where the micromanager is motivated by their ability to drive genuine improvements on micro-level decisions.

The idea of expert micromanagement also ties up to previous literature in another way. The paper by Ireni-Williams et al. (2020) that was reviewed earlier suggested that micromanagement was sometimes accepted as appropriate by employees when the micromanager was viewed as competent. The data of this thesis supports this, as there were numerous data points in which subordinates of the cases praised them for their micromanaging ways. This does not mean their micromanagement was entirely positive, as there were also numerous data points that implied that they were difficult managers to work with for the same reason, but it does suggest that the negative effects of micromanagement are reduced when the micromanager is able to draw on their expertise to ensure the positive impact of their micromanagement.

Furthermore, many of the articles on micromanagement's potential advantages suggest that it should be utilized in situations when the micromanager has expert knowledge, even if temporary, over the subordinate. For example micromanagement could be used when a new employee is being initiated or when a new endeavour is starting or a new strategy is being put into place (Delgado, Ortega, and Strauss 2015). In all of these situations, the manager possesses knowledge the subordinate does not, such as understanding of the role of the team or department, or the fine details of the new endeavour or strategy. Micromanagement from a position of an expertise could thus be more generally appropriate as well.

However, while the results of this thesis suggest that micromanagement can be a positive management style when applied by a leader with specific expertise, we can question the generalizability of the results. The cases were after all top-level executives, and exceptional ones at that. To put it another way, the type of micromanagement that is successful when pursued by Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, or Jeff Bezos, might not be successful when pursued by any other manager. This a general issue with all of the results of this thesis, but perhaps particularly valid when it comes to results that rely on the exceptional acumen or understanding of the cases. There is also the issue that both business and biographical writing can sometimes be selective, so that it is possible that the data overrepresents the success the cases had with micromanagement and underrepresents data on situations where their expertise fell flat. Given these worries, the conclusion I draw here is perhaps more muted than the data would allow.

To summarize then: the cases micromanagement was generally successful because of the specific expertise they possessed. This suggests that micromanagement can be a useful technique when applied by an expert manager, although whether this is enough to make micromanagement overall a positive managerial style is unclear and would depend on the circumstances.

5.2 Theoretical connections

Two theoretical frameworks that could be used to analyse the phenomenon of micromanagement were brought up in the literature review section: the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory and the job resources-demands theory of work engagement. The former theory, originating from the work of Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) analyses relationships between leaders and subordinates through the focus on dyad, or the relationship between individual subordinate and their leader, which is unique to each pair. In this context, micromanagement could be viewed as a dysfunctional dyad, where the leader does not trust their subordinates, and the dyad is not fair to the subordinate. The other theory, the job resources-demands theory (Bakker, 2011), focused on individual employees work engagement, by analysing what resources and demands they encountered at their work. Micromanagement in this context could then be viewed as a strong additional demand that harms work engagement, or perhaps in some contexts as a resource, such as when a manager initiates a new employee to their job.

Looking at the LMX theory first, it must be immediately admitted that the theory proves a bad fit for this thesis. This is not because the theory is unsuitable to analysing micromanagement, but because of the special features of the cases. Firstly, all of the cases micromanaged people above the heads of their direct superiors. In case of Walt Disney, for example, the data mentions of him micromanaging animators, who already had a team leader, above that leader's head. This makes the concept of a dyad between the leader and a subordinate already rather hazy. To compound this issue, all the cases micromanaged several teams simultaneously, making the dyad relationship weak. Finally, the data simply did not focus on relationships between the cases and individual employees, making it difficult to obtain enough data points relating to any single dyad (or depending on the data source, to dyads at all).

That being said, the three key lessons discussed earlier in this section offer at least some directions to how micromanagement could be studied in the future from the LMX theory perspective. The idea of expertise micromanagement in particular could be studied from a dyad perspective, as it is a case of the leader offering something to the subordinate (expert guidance) while still also imposing a cost to their relationship in the form of the unpleasantness of micromanagement. There is also the matter of trust, where some data points suggested that micromanagement by the cases was felt to indicate lack of trust, but at the other points it was seen as a way of caring for the employees. However, as mentioned already, the data used in this thesis does not allow me to theorize further from the LMX perspective. This theoretical connection was thus something of a false start, although one that could still hold promise.

The same issues that make the theoretical connection with the LMX theory tenuous also trouble the job resources-demands perspective. Quite naturally, most of the data focuses on the actions of the cases as top-level managers, and it is only on passing that the job engagement of their employees is mentioned. At times this is suggested to be excellent (see for instance Gabler, 2006, pp. 134-145; not used as a data point) and at times awful (Gabler, 2006, pp. 325-326; not used as a data point), but it is difficult to clarify exactly how big of a role the cases' micromanagement plays in either case. Again, given the limitations of the data, all that can be said about this perspective is that the results suggest potential further areas of exploration. The concept of expert micromanagement could again be studied further from this perspective, by looking at whether it serves as a type of resource that makes employees work easier and more engaging. For example, it may be hypothesised that if the work is particularly difficult or challenging, having a manager that's capable of always offering an expert opinion would make it easier and thus more engaging, even if it took the form of micromanagement. However, by and large it must be said that this theoretical connection too proves a dead-end for this thesis, given the peculiarities of the cases and the lack of fitting data.

5.3 Answering the first research question

The discussion in this section, as well as in the results section, allows me now to answer the first research question. It was the following:

Research question 1: "How did the cases use micromanagement in their careers?"

The three cases examined in this thesis, Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, and Jeff Bezos, used micromanagement to achieve total control of their companies, and to ensure key products or projects conformed to their wishes in smallest detail. They possessed unique or exceptional expertise related to their products or businesses, and micromanaged to share it, which both allowed their micromanagement to achieve its aims and lessened its impact on their subordinates. While they had the ability to refrain from micromanagement when needed, they regardless micromanaged compulsively, and their micromanagement damaged employee morale or engagement.

The micromanagement habits of the three cases are a complex topic, and this thesis could only analyse it to some extent. However, the three key aspects of it that came up in this thesis were micromanagement as a tool to achieve total control management, as a means of refine product development, and micromanagement pursued from vantage point of expertise. These three aspects capture the parts of micromanagement that were most salient to the research question and are also understudied by previous literature on micromanagement.

5.4 Previous literature on micromanagement

Having now answered the first research question, I can move on to the second one. The second research question dealt with the relationship between the results of this thesis, and previous literature on micromanagement, specifically what previous research had to say about possible advantages or use cases of micromanagement.

To start answering this question, I use as the starting point the Table 7. from the results section, which lists the suggestions for potential uses for micromanagement derived from previous literature, and whether there was evidence for any of them in the data. I also draw on the suggestion we find from Delgado, Ortega, and Strauss (2015), of dividing uses cases of micromanagement into proactive or reactive ones. Reactive micromanagement refers to situations where it was engaged in because of some fault or error in organization's results, while proactive micromanagement refers to micromanagement engaged in to achieve some positive change or to avoid some error from happening in the future. Some of the potential uses could be both, e.g. the first category, where micromanagement is suggested to be utilized when the strategy of the organization is changing, as micromanagement could be applied in advance to proactively change the strategy, or reactively when the process of changing strategy has run into trouble. In these uses I have marked the suggestion as both proactive and reactive. The table below shows the list of previously compiled suggestions, and whether they were proactive and reactive, and whether they were present in the data or not:

Table 8. Suggestion for potential uses cases derived from previous literature, in comparison with the results

Suggestion	Proactive	Reactive	Present in data
1. The strategy of the organization is changing	X	X	X
2. A new endeavour is starting	X	X	X
3. A new employee is initiated	.	X	.
4. An employee or a leader fails to perform	.	X	.
5. Serious complaints have occurred	.	X	.
6. A division is having consistently bad results	.	X	.
7. Critical decisions need to be made	.	X	X
8. Small issues need to be fixed	.	X	X
9. Stakeholders are anxious	.	X	.
10. A project fails to meet its deadlines	.	.	.
11. Ensuring micromanagers vision is being followed	X	.	X
12. Sharing micromanager's expertise	X	.	X
13. When success requires every detail being correct	X	.	X
14. As a way of knowing/leading division better	X	.	X

As can be seen from the Table 8., all the suggestions that were reactive were evident in the data, while many of the reactive suggestions were absent. This is indeed in line with the results, as the cases primarily used micromanagement not because something had gone wrong in their organizations, but rather to actively create the kind of organizations they envisioned: organizations in which they had total control over details and which followed their vision to slightest detail. Similarly, when it came to products or projects, there was no evidence of the cases resorting to micromanagement in response to errors or mistakes. Rather, micromanagement was part of their managerial style that actively sought to ensure every detail of the project was correct. While some purely reactive uses were also found in the data, none of them represented situations where the cases began to micromanage because as a reaction to something. Thus, for example when the cases micromanaged in response to small errors that had to be fixed (suggestion 8), they did not begin to micromanage specifically for this reason, rather their managerial style was consistently micromanagerial, and hence a situation like this was approached the same way as any other, through micromanagement.

Interestingly, the results also indicate that suggestions from popular media articles (suggestions 11-14) were prominently present in the data than suggestions from academic literature (suggestions 1-10). Indeed, the two suggestions from Finkelstein (2014), of using micromanagement to share the micromanagers expertise and spread his vision, correspond very closely to overall results of this thesis. In a sense this is not surprising, as two of the cases he used, Jeff Bezos and Steve Jobs, were also cases in this study. One explanation for this could be that successful, proactive micromanagement is something only some leaders can succeed in, and hence it would be more likely to be picked up by popular media, which is naturally interested in exceptional cases, over academic literature that looks for general trends. Thus, we should be cautious with generalizing the results away from the cases studied here, until the topic is studied further.

Finally, this thesis also discovered several use cases for micromanagement that were not mentioned in the previous literature. Namely, the use of micromanagement for product development purposes was unanticipated, as was the use of micromanagement as a way of achieving total control of an organization. The latter is similar to using micromanagement as a way to spread an organization's values, but yet also subtly different, as it pertains not only to values but also the scope and means of managerial control. These two uses, in product development and total control management, represent this thesis's original contribution to the "uses of micromanagement" literature.

Overall, I can conclude the results from this study corroborate suggestions for active use cases for micromanagement, while less evidence was found for reactive use cases. The results also follow more closely suggestions from popular media than academic research, suggesting that future research should study active uses of micromanagement more.

5.5 Practical vs psychological theories of micromanagement

In the literature review section, I also drew a distinction between the practical and psychological theories of micromanagement, which were found to be tacitly behind the views on micromanagement found in academic research. The former was present in articles looking for advantages of micromanagement, while the latter was present in the studies studying the disadvantages and harmful consequences of micromanagement. In general, the psychological theory considered micromanagement to be a form of psychological weakness from the part of micromanager, which was also compulsively applied and resulted only or mainly in negative consequences. In comparison, the practical theory viewed micromanagement as a practical tool that could be turned on and off and which could yield net benefits. I can now compare the results from this thesis with both these approaches. The Table 9. shows the result side by side with the two different theories. The thesis results were not applicable to every aspect of micromanagement that the theories differed in, and where not applicable, I indicate it with an “X”.

Table 9. Tacit theories of micromanagement, in comparison with the results

Aspect of micromanagement	Psychological theory	Practical theory	Results
Cause	Manager's psychological issues	Practical managerial goal	Both practical goals and compulsive behaviour
Validity as a managerial style	Not valid	Valid	X
Possible benefits	None, or only short-term	Both short-term and long-term	Both short-term and long-term
Harms versus benefits	Harms always outweigh gains	Benefits at least sometimes outweigh harms	Debatable, hesitantly on the positive side
Consistency	Constant, cannot be turned off by the micromanager	Strategic, can be turned off in favour of delegation	Strategic, sometimes turned off
Focus	Employee experience	Managerial goals	X

The side-by-side comparison indicates that the results lean closer to the practical theory's side. The cases micromanaged compulsively, yet also with a clear purpose in mind and in order to achieve managerial goals. There were clear long-term benefits to their organizations, especially in developing exceptional products. Yet the cases' micromanagement also harmed their organizations, leading to loss of talented employees, and in case of Walt Disney, difficulties to managing his company after it had grown large. Finally, while the cases micromanaged consistently throughout their careers, they did not micromanage constantly, and were able to turn their micromanagement off when needed. All three cases were capable of delegating and

turning off their micromanagement, contrary to the assumptions of the psychological theory, even if they did not always have the wisdom to do so.

The practical theory thus describes the cases' micromanagement habits more closely, even if it paints too positive picture of micromanagement's consequences and ignores the potential psychological compulsion that it is associated with. As such, the results of this thesis suggest that much of previous literature on micromanagement is too negative and founded on unjustified background assumptions on the practice and consequences of the phenomenon.

5.6 Answering the second research questions

Having now discussed how the results compare with the previous literature, both academic and popular, I am able to answer the second research question of this thesis. The second research question was:

Research question 2: "Did the cases use micromanagement in ways that line up with the potential uses for micromanagement suggested by previous literature?"

This thesis's results indicate that the cases used micromanagement in ways that correspond to previous literature's suggestions for the active uses of it. Micromanagement was also used reactively, but there was less evidence for this, and the cases' micromanagement was not linked to any temporary situation but was rather constant and proactive. The results are thus more in line with the active side of suggestions, found commonly in popular media articles, than the reactive suggestions found commonly in academic literature. This thesis also found that the cases used micromanagement in ways that were not anticipated by the literature, in particular

they used it for managing product development, and as a tool for achieving total control of their organizations.

I also compared the results with the tacit theories that were identified to form the basis of previous literature on micromanagement, and formed the background assumptions through which it was studied. The results suggest that there is some truth to both psychological and practical theories of micromanagement, but that the practical side is overall closer to the truth, and the psychological theory can be considered overly negative regarding the adverse consequences and benefits of micromanagement.

6. Conclusion

In this section I will conclude the thesis, by first summarizing its place in the discussion around micromanagement, its research questions and the method, and the results obtained. After that I will discuss briefly some of the practical implications the results have, and the limitations of the study. Then, as is customary, I will sketch some suggestions for future research that this exploratory study on micromanagement might inspire.

6.1 Research Summary

The starting point of this study was that micromanagement is an interesting and understudied topic. It is both a commonplace concept, in the sense that any manager or employee will understand what it refers to, but also one that is scarcely studied, as there exists only a rudimentary discourse around micromanagement and very few empirical studies. What few studies there are tend mostly to focus on the negatives of the phenomenon, taking as their background assumption what I termed in thesis the "psychological theory" of micromanagement. Regardless, there exist also a spattering of academic studies that attempt to look at micromanagement more positively, and in the popular media there are numerous examples of famous managers who are called micromanagers, and indeed whose success is at least partially ascribed to their micromanagement habits. This curious contradiction, between a decried managerial style on the one hand, and popular adoration for selected micromanagers on the other hand, inspired this thesis.

The justification of this thesis was to explore this contradiction and to produce new insights on micromanagement in the process. The current discourse on micromanagement offered no clues why some of the most famous and successful managers would be micromanagers. Though there

were some studies on the possible advantages of micromanagement, such as Delgado, Strauss, and Ortega (2015), even these tended to proscribe it in very limited set of circumstances. These studies did, however, come with a different set of background assumptions, which I named in this thesis the "practical theory" of micromanagement. By studying famous micromanagers, I could discover how they used their micromanagement, whether it played a part in their successes, and whether the nascent literature on the advantages of micromanagement was on the right track. Furthermore, by studying successful, executive-level micromanagers, I could study a group previously unstudied in the context of micromanagement.

The methodology of this study was that of a qualitative study. This choice was based on the fact that micromanagement is an understudied topic, and hence new insights regarding on it are still needed, as well as group being studied. Famous micromanagers are a rarefied group, and I choice three examples to study, Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, and Steve Bezos. The method of this study was thus a multiple-case study, which was suggested by Yin (2002) as a suitable method for studying a phenomenon in depth, while still acquiring results that generalizable and valid outside the cases themselves. I studied the cases via content analysis, using as my data sources management and biographical works on the cases, two for each. This restricted the data to secondary data, but allowed for rich data, and in any case primary data on the cases would have been impossible to come by.

There were two research questions for this study. The first asked how the cases used micromanagement in their careers, while the second one sought to find out how the results compared with suggestions from previous literature on how micromanagement could be used.

Research question 1: "How did the cases use micromanagement in their careers?"

Research question 2: "Did the cases use micromanagement in ways that line up with the potential uses for micromanagement suggested by previous literature?"

Regarding the first research question, this thesis found that the cases had a complex relationship with micromanagement. They all micromanaged compulsively, and this had an often ruinous effect on employee morale and engagement. However, they all also derived several advantages from their micromanagement and used it in a directed way. Specifically, they micromanaged to achieve total control of their organizations and to enforce their vision on their companies and employees. They structured the management of their companies to make it easier to micromanage the entirety of them, and resisted attempts to decentralize managerial power. They micromanaged their pet projects or products down to smallest details and ensured that every detail of them was according to their wishes, which led to creation of several successful, even revolutionary products. They possessed specialist expertise in the areas they micromanaged, contributing to their success.

Regarding the second research question, this thesis found that the cases micromanaged in active ways, contrary to most of previous research on micromanagement. Rather than using micromanagement to reactively correct issues that arose, the cases micromanaged to actively shape their companies and products according to their wishes. This is in line with several suggestions from the popular media, particularly those by Finkelstein (2014), that micromanagement can be used to spread company vision and share expertise. This thesis also found that the cases used micromanagement more in line with the practical theory. The cases micromanaged with practical benefits in mind, were often able to refrain from micromanagement when needed, and derived distinct benefits from it. This is according to the practical theory. However, the cases micromanaged compulsively, as suggested by the psychological theory. All in all, this thesis suggests that much of the existing literature takes too dim a view on micromanagement, viewing it as a bane of effective management, while in fact it can often be an effective managerial tool.

6.2 Practical implications

While this thesis was an explorative study on an understudied topic, micromanagement is a common feature in workplaces, and thus there are number of practical implications to the results of this study. The most obvious takeaway here is perhaps the least interesting. It is that micromanagement can be an effective leadership style when pursued by an exceptional executive. However, the cases were all unique characters, and the success they had with micromanagement might be difficult for other managers, no matter how talented, to replicate. More important practical implications would be the role of micromanagement can play in product development, and the role of personal expertise in successful application of micromanagement. Finally, while this thesis focused on the advantages of micromanagement, its dark sides also came up, and these should be impressed again here in the conclusion.

The most valuable practical contribution of this thesis is the potential use of micromanagement in product development context. All of the cases micromanaged their products or projects consistently, and consistently got good results out of it. While it is possible that some of this success is down to the exceptional qualities of the cases, their approach to product development should be replicable by others too. The cases micromanaged their products to the smallest details and maintained absolute authority over product or project decisions. They were also highly involved in the process, taking interest in every step on the way. This combination of unconstrained decision-making authority, focus on details, and personal engagement in product development is something that can be learned from the cases to improve product development process. It might be micromanagement, and in practice it might be a very demanding combination from the manager, but at least the cases made it work.

Related to this, however, is also the need to micromanage from a position of expertise. While the cases might have micromanaged compulsively, and whatever the psychological basis for their habit might have been, they always had something to contribute when they micromanaged. Walt Disney was able to share his directorial vision through micromanagement, Steve Jobs his design acumen, and Jeff Bezos his insight on e-commerce and customer experience. While in academic literature on micromanagement it is often theorised that the micromanager acts out of fear or suspicion towards their subordinates, in my case studies the cases micromanaged because they had something to contribute to their subordinates work and did so from the basis of personal expertise on the topic (though the process of micromanagement was still often unpleasant). This is something any manager should keep in mind. While micromanagement might sometimes be effective, it must be engaged in from the position of true expertise in the context.

Finally, it is fitting to close this section with a remark on the dark sides of micromanagement. This thesis arrived at a conclusion that cases used micromanagement generally effectively, and it played a helpful part in their managerial careers. However, it was not without its cost. There were numerous data points detailing the cost of micromanagement on their companies. Capable employees abandoned them because they could not bear the micromanagement, micromanagement sapped the engagement of others, and conflict arose between the cases and the board of directors of their companies. The cases also micromanaged compulsively. They might have used micromanagement purposefully, yet they also did so without moderation. As such this thesis recommends micromanagement only hesitantly, and in limited circumstances.

6.3 Limitations

Given the lack of prior research on micromanagement and the haziness of the concept, this thesis was an explorative multiple-case study that aimed at approaching the phenomenon from

a new angle and generating new insights for future studies. As such, many limitations apply to the results of the study. First of all, this study relied entirely on secondary data, with somewhat limited number of data sources. There was a limited number of cases as well, and furthermore the cases were about very specific, rarefied kind of manager, executive of a major international company. These three aspects, the type of data, the type of cases, and the number of cases form the major limitations of this thesis.

The most obvious limitation of this study was the type of data used. I used a total of 6 books, consisting of both management and biographical books on the cases, as data sources. This meant all the data used was secondary. The choice to rely on secondary data was based on practical reasons: acquiring primary data on the cases would have been impossible given their status, and while data used was secondary, it was also plentiful, allowing me to acquire thorough understanding of the cases' management style and micromanagerial habits. The use of secondary data does mean that the data is not entirely reliable. It is entirely possible that the data focuses on some aspects of the cases' managerial habits over others, downplays their weaknesses, or overvalues their personal contribution to their companies' successes. The use of secondary data also made it impossible to ask targeted follow up questions, which limited how deep the analysis could go. However, the use of several, extensive data sources per case alleviated these issues somewhat. The fact that the cases were all famous micromanagers also helped, as it was clear that all the data sources were also interested in discussing the dark sides of the cases' characters, which included their often unpleasant management style.

When it comes to the study of micromanagement generally, the case study approach adopted here also forms a limitation to the conclusions that can be drawn. This thesis included multiple cases, as I was interested in the phenomenon they exhibited, micromanagement, rather than the cases themselves. Regardless, there were only three cases studied here, and thus the results can only be generalized in a limited manner. The low number of cases means that while this thesis was able to produce new insights on micromanagement, its results prove nothing about

micromanagement, or apply to all micromanagers in general. The type of cases used is also a severe limitation. The cases were all executive level managers of major international companies – an exclusive group. Furthermore, even among their type group, my cases were even more exceptional, as they all formed their own companies, made them major players in their respective fields, and oversaw the creation of several revolutionary products. This made them good subjects for studying the advantages of micromanagement, but it might also mean that their success in using micromanagement could be very hard to replicate.

6.4 Suggestions for future research

As an exploratory study, a large part of the justification for this thesis was to produce new ideas and insights on micromanagement that could then be studied afterwards. With this in mind, there are numerous perspectives that can be taken on this study's results that would yield interesting research topics.

Firstly, this thesis has shed light how the cases used micromanagement in the product development context. The results regarding it were very clear, but ultimately this thesis did not focus on it, being rather a case study on the general micromanagement habits of the cases. As such there could be more to learn from targeted case studies on the topic. To give an example, a single case study on the development of the iPhone (from Steve Jobs case) the movie Snow White (from Walt Disney case), or say, Amazon Prime scheme (from Jeff Bezos case) could illuminate precisely how the cases used micromanagement in these contexts, what were the issues that arose regarding it, and what were the advantages gained.

Another promising avenue for future research could be to look at effective micromanagement from the employees' perspective. Some studies have already been conducted that look at the

experience of employees being micromanaged empirically, for example by Lee et al. (2023), Dhingra (2015), and Irani-Williams et al. (2020). However, these studies either begin from the starting point that micromanagement is undesirable for employees, or are interested in finding out whether it is so. This study suggests that micromanagement can play a productive role in an organization, and as such empirical studies from this starting point are also needed. The research topics for these could include trying to find antecedents to successful micromanagement, whether successful cases of micromanagement are found as unpleasant by employees or as unsuccessful ones, or whether micromanagement is more successful as an active or reactive managerial tool.

Finally, a very notable aspect of this thesis is that it focused on prominent, top-level executive managers. This had the obvious consequence that the results aren't necessarily generalizable to micromanagers in general, as the cases might have had too many unique features distinguishing them. An obvious topic for future studies could thus be to conduct case studies on lower level managers with a penchant for micromanagement. Both successful and unsuccessful cases of micromanagement could be considered, the former to learn whether the insights learned about micromanagement in this thesis apply to all micromanagers, and the latter to find out what are the common pitfalls a micromanager falls into. Studying large numbers of micromanaging managers could also yield interesting results, as studying lower-level managers would allow data sets large enough to conduct quantitative research on the topic. In any case it is clear that there remains much more to study in the phenomenon of micromanagement, and that there are many directions for future research one could look for, based on the insights of this study.

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