

ephemera

theory & politics in organization

© ephemera 2009
ISSN 1473-2866
www.ephemeraweb.org
volume 9(2): 78-194

volume 9, number 2 (may 2009)

editorial

- Project management behind the façade* 78
Svetlana Cicmil, Damian Hodgson, Monica Lindgren,
and Johann Packendorff

articles

- Stop whining, start doing! Identity conflict in project
managed software production* 93
Peter Case and Erik Piñeiro

- Pull yourselves together, guys! A gendered critique
of project manager's ethics in a public sector context* 113
Lucia Crevani and Thomas Shinozaki Lennerfors

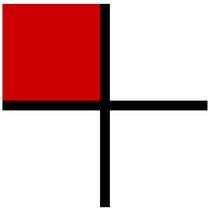
- The imagined user in projects: Articulating
competing discourses of space and knowledge work* 131
Chris Ivory and Neil Alderman

- Struggling to 'fit in': On belonging and the ethics
of sharing in project teams* 149
Manuela Nocker

notes

- Who is colonizing whom? Intertwined identities in
product development projects* 168
Thomas Andersson and Mikael Wickelgren

- Towards a (more) critical and social constructionist
approach to New Product Development projects* 182
Beata Segercrantz



Project management behind the façade*

Svetlana Cicmil, Damian Hodgson, Monica Lindgren and Johann Packendorff

We are having lunch with Eve, senior project manager at a well-known IT consultancy. Eve describes herself as ‘the kind of woman who likes to work’, and goes on to tell us about her professional career. With a master’s degree in computer science, she was employed as a COBOL programmer for a large consulting firm for seven and a half years, during which she became increasingly involved in project management. Over time, she found the consulting firm too big, and paradoxically, made a move to an even bigger government authority. She started out in smaller projects, but then became project leader for an ‘incredible project – big as hell’ with 16 team members and a large budget.

The big project broke her; she worked 65 hours and 6 days every week for a long period. ‘And I guess that was about the third time that I did not have any friends left. You don’t have that if you never leave the workplace. Saturday was my day off, all other days I worked.’ A recruitment consultant searching for an experienced project manager contacted her, and she left at once: since then, she has led projects, translated international methodologies for systems development and implemented new project management models that she found in other consulting firms.

Eve is 42 years old and lives alone in an apartment downtown. She has several hobbies such as reading, photography and opera, but when she works, she is not thinking about anything else. ‘The men who can accept that are not easy to find’, she jokes. She also feels that there is nothing strange anymore about living alone. ‘But I hate this idea that just because you don’t have a family, you don’t have the right to a private life outside work! Even if you do not have a family, you must still find a balance in life. You are a housewife yourself, there is no one else taking care of things.’

She thinks that the media image of IT work is not an attractive one – ‘working 12 hours a day and sleeping at the office is not a decent life’. She also feels that women are good at coordinating things, which makes them suitable for project management, but they must also be able to ‘hit upwards’ (i.e. fight for the interests of the project against other

* We are indebted to numerous friends and colleagues for their assistance and support in preparing this special issue. Special thanks to Alf Rehn, Bent Meier Sørensen and Chris Land for your commitment and encouragement!

managers). A 'decent life' is also something that the individual has to fight for, Eve says. She thinks that it is becoming increasingly normal for fathers to leave and to declare that they need fixed work hours due to family obligations. Where she now works, most consultants do not have families; Eve tells us about a woman who always left early in order to pick up her ten-year old son from school, and says that it was hard to understand the need for that level of care when the child is of that age. Stressed project leaders, who need people that can work around the clock and do what it takes to hit the deadline, cannot easily accommodate this required flexibility

When Eve herself composes a project team she wants the most competent consultants for each task, but in practice, she has to employ those available at the time. It does not matter if they are tired after previous projects; the only excuse for not working is planned vacations. Working in a project is an 'outburst', she says; you lead a group for a couple of months and then it is over. It is always stressful at the end, and she thinks that this is unavoidable. She also goes on to new tasks without any real respite; 'first there is a party, then there is a day off, and then you go on to the next project. Anyone who could come up with a medicine that would allow people to disconnect from work in their free time would end up very rich.'

Eve's story is of course unique, but illustrates many of the consequences of a life within and between projects; consequences which have little place in the authorised accounts of projectification and project management. In this special issue, we hope to tell another story of life behind the carefully-constructed façades of project management.

The rationalist façade of project management

Despite a conspicuous absence of solid evidence, it is repeatedly claimed that the use of projects as a form of work has been on the increase for decades (Ekstedt et al., 1999 Morris and Pinto, 2004). Projects, i.e. the handling of unique, complex tasks through temporary, decoupled activities, have always had a place in the history of mankind. For thousands of years, participation in various kinds of project has been a complement to the eternal struggle for food and a roof over one's head. Constructing pyramids, discovering the New World, crowding the shores of Dunkirk with Allied soldiers; the history books are full of unique, complex undertakings limited in time and scope. Not surprisingly, the abundance of normative literature on project management justifies its existence by reference to the need of mankind to succeed with such large, radical, history-making endeavours.

In the annals of Project Management, the evolution of the discipline is thus illustrated through a sequence of megaprojects. Large construction projects such as the Hoover Dam in the 1930's were among the first to be managed through modern principles of project administration. The Manhattan Project – successfully delivered in 1945 to the detriment of hundreds of thousands of civilians inhabiting Hiroshima and Nagasaki – is often quoted to be the source of important insights into how to manage complex development processes despite the very narrow time-span available. Likewise, the invention of network planning has been attributed to the Polaris mobile submarine-launched ballistic missile project that was initiated as a response to the Soviet Sputnik

satellite launch in 1957. Since then, mankind has continued to marvel at the organization of path-breaking large-scale endeavours such as NASA's Apollo Program, The Channel Tunnel, the Human Genome Project, the Beijing Olympic Games and the Palm Islands in Dubai.

Such staggering megaprojects are, of course, just the plaster and stucco on the façade of project management. The increased interest in projects and project management during recent decades has its roots in notions of modern society characterised by standardisation, large-scale operations and bureaucracy. The emerging industrialism of the 19th century acquired legitimacy from the way products were made accessible to the common man: low prices from economies of scale from the standardization of products. Frederick W. Taylor and others added the necessity of standardizing work on these products and specializing workers to fit the industrialist agenda: if machines are more efficient than humans, then humans should work like machines. Although this reasoning came to pervade society as a whole, projects were still important as distinct work environments on two counts; (1) investments providing the basis for mass production (such as railways, factories, steel mills etc.) required project management skills for their implementation, and (2) the life-cycles of products, organizational structures and technologies all became shorter and shorter, thus highlighting the need for projects as instruments for achieving continuous improvement and innovation (Kanter, 1983; Kreiner, 1992). The efficiency of mass production is dependent upon isolation from the environment and protection against heretical ideas from within; disturbances and free-thinking are shifted to temporary work settings for further exploration. Thus, if industrialism in the guise of mass production can be said to require stability and inertia in production systems, project management can be seen as a way of evoking change and renewal in these systems (Kreiner, 1992).

Not surprisingly, the project form came to emerge as an alternative to standardised, large-scale bureaucracies. Where the latter was built on repetition, stability and ongoing concern, the former emphasised uniqueness, change and temporariness. From such a dichotomous position, the notion of 'good' and 'bad' was not far-fetched; constructing the project form as the long-wanted alternative to ineffective, rigid, boring bureaucracies, as a haven of goal-focused work, creativity and newness. Both practitioner and academic discourses have hailed the project form as a vital economic and social process on which the emerging 'knowledge economy' relies heavily (Frame 1994; Briner and Hastings, 1994; Cleland and Ireland, 2002; Meredith and Mantel, 2003). Three key characteristics of modern organisations and society are typically cited in the rise of the project form; rapidly changing environments and markets, the increasing complexity of products and services and the corresponding knowledge intensity in production processes. Not only are projects considered suitable ways to control endeavours in a turbulent environment (Ekstedt et al., 1999), but more importantly, they are regarded as the appropriate way to stimulate a learning environment and enhance creativity so as to deliver complex products (Hobday, 2000). Recent literature has highlighted the importance of project-based organizing in the processes of information sharing and knowledge management in organizations (Silver, 2000; De Fillippi, 2001). In this context, project management has been promoted as a powerful and widely-applicable vehicle for integrating diverse functions of an organization, enabling the efficient, timely, and effective accomplishment of goals

through the concentration of flexible, autonomous, and knowledgeable individuals in temporary teams, sold on the premise that it enables ‘Controllability *and* Adventure’ (Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm, 2002). Project management and projects have seemingly been accepted by many both within and outside the field as natural, self-evident, and indispensable.

Bureaucratic operations	Project operations
Repeated process or product, reliance on tradition and rules of thumb.	New process or product, active analysis and planning required.
Several goals, often conflicting. Implies fragmentation and sub-optimization.	One single and unambiguous goal, which shall serve as a common ground and as a motivator.
Continuous going concern. Always the possibility for trial-and-error.	Exists only once, for a limited time.
Homogenous, specialised work teams consisting of similar people with a common history.	Heterogeneous, cross-functional work teams, consisting of specialists recruited for the task at hand.
Well-established routines and systems in place to coordinate work, such as division of labour, areas of responsibility, administrative support systems and regulating policies.	Routines and systems must be created for the task at hand. Organizational procedures built through the project plan by the project manager.
Predictable reality in terms of activities, costs and performance. Reliance on previous experiences and ‘best practice’.	Activities, costs and performance characterised by a high degree of operational risk. All projects must be ‘planned from scratch’ and the project manager must be ready to adapt to the situation at hand.
Permanent organizational structure with established organizational units. High visibility, high influence, owns resources.	Outside the permanent organizational structure, does not own its resources.
Confirms established practices. Built upon a well-identified knowledge base and a non-disputed function in the organization.	Changes established practices. Problems are solved in new ways instead of taking existing solutions for granted.
Supports status quo. Protects established routines against external impulses.	Upsets status quo. A project that did not effect any change anywhere is a failure.

Table 1: The dichotomisation of bureaucracies and projects. Adapted from Lindgren and Packendorff (2008), based on Graham (1989) and Pinto (1996).

It is thus not surprising to find that the project form is increasingly being applied to any kind of task in any kind of environment. From having been the natural way of administering complex megaprojects in construction, weapon systems development and high-tech innovation, the project form has spread into new occupations, new organizations, new applications and new societal sectors. The business-minded engineer portrayed in Gaddis (1959) as the archetype of the emerging cadre of project managers now finds his colleagues among businesspeople, consultants, theatre directors,

government officials, social workers and university researchers; at the same time all sorts of activities, from legal work to reconstructive surgery to urban regeneration are redefined as 'projects'. The rapidly growing professional associations for project managers count members from all sectors of society, and project management tools are being used in all kinds of organizational settings. For example, the project has become a key theme in corporate restructuring, a vehicle for (IT-enabled) organizational change, the basic format for social change (if there are hopes for funding from the European Union, World Bank or similar bodies, that is) and a form of employment in contemporary job markets. Moreover, inter-organizational arrangements such as joint ventures, alliances, and temporary collaborations are also often organized and explicitly labelled as projects. This elasticity of the project enables a certain depoliticisation of the activities contained within it; thus 'describing every accomplishment with a nominal grammar that is the grammar of the project erases the difference between a capitalist project and a humdrum creation... Utterly different things can be assimilated to the term 'project': opening a new factory, closing one, carrying out a reengineering project, putting on a play. Each of them is a project, and they all involve the same heroism' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 11).

In addition to this development, the project also tends to become the dominating way of organizing operations in many industries. An increasing number of organizations are identified as 'project-based', i.e. organizations where almost all operations are organized as projects and where permanent structures fill the function of administrative support (cf. Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006; Nandhakumar, 2002; Whitley, 2006). In these project-based structures, the classic characteristics of unique projects are maintained at the same time as new permanent structures for project portfolio management are instituted to secure managerial control. Project-based work has thus become a part of the wave of new organizational forms that has entered most industries during the last decades (cf. Clegg and Courpasson, 2004; Gill, 2002; Hodgson, 2004; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006). In many major corporations, the development towards project-based structures has been seen as inevitable, natural and desirable (Söderlund and Tell, 2009).

Following the proliferation of project-based organizations and project-based work, there are claims that project management requires a distinct set of competencies. If the project is such a special work form, then projects should be manned and managed by specialists. The main global actors in the area, such as the professional associations Project Management Institute (PMI), the Association for Project Management (APM) and the International Project Management Association (IPMA) began to create international project management standards in the late 1980's, i.e. structured bodies of knowledge outlining the competences and detailing the methodologies needed to master the challenge of being a project manager. Today, these organizations offer a range of professional certifications for different levels of experience and different specialities within the field. In order to be certified, candidates must demonstrate both theoretical knowledge based on the standards, and for higher levels of certification, documented practical experience of project work. As an increasing number of corporations require these certifications from their project managers, project management can be said to be in a deliberate and rapid 'professionalization project' (Hodgson, 2002, 2007).

What therefore are the characteristics of the knowledge base to which the supposed project management profession owes its distinctiveness and expert status? Given the above characterisation of projects as a progressive and alternative way of working, it appears on one level paradoxical that the normative toolbox of Project Management originates from the very same conceptual and ideological foundations as Fordist mass manufacturing. Systems Theory is generally quoted as the foundation of the discipline (Morris, 1994), as projects are seen both as functional parts of greater organizational circumstances and as complex activity systems in their own right. The project task is typically supposed to be clearly defined and unambiguous, given as a marching order to the project manager by a more or less remote 'sponsor' or 'owner'. By viewing the task as something externally given, the efforts of the project manager can be directed towards the efficient use of resources and techniques.

Having defined the task and the various goals restricting the work of the project team, conventional Project Management wisdom is then to construct a Work Breakdown Structure (WBS). The aim of the WBS is to identify the activities (or work packages) that have to be performed in order to achieve the goal. The WBS serves the same purpose as specialization and division of labour in mass production planning: to assign different tasks to different people by identifying controllable action sequences.

Having broken down the project into its parts, other techniques derived from general Operations Analysis are available to construct a project plan that, if properly followed, will deliver the desired outcomes. Among them we find simple visualisation techniques such as Gantt charts and network planning methods, along with numerous tools for risk analysis, budgeting, management control, auditing, decision making, and so forth. While this traditional core of the field has indeed met serious challenges over the years - such as the need to coordinate projects within project portfolios, the managerial and motivational aspects often referred to as the 'human side of projects', or the unavoidable impact of external complexity on the internal project process - the response remains the same; to construct new, even better, rational tools to ensure project success.

Cracks in the façade: A discipline in crisis?

It is at this point, however, that the paradox of project management as a powerful and generalisable solution to the acknowledged challenges of the new economic and social era becomes apparent. Contemporary studies of project performance continue to indicate the disparity between the creation of a mature and robust body of project management know-how and the effectiveness of its application (Williams, 1999; Atkinson, 1999; Morris et al., 2000). Recent public reports incessantly publicise the frequent cost overruns, delays, and under-performance in terms of quality and user satisfaction which mark out contemporary projects (e.g., Morris and Hough, 1993; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Flyvbjerg et al., 2003). The litany of high-profile project debacles has provided a recurrent theme over the last two decades, encompassing Denver Airport, the Jubilee Line extension to the London Underground, the Scottish Parliament and already many predict a similar story for the 2012 London Olympics and other *grands projets* of our times. Evidence of poor project performance can be found across industries and

across the many types of project (e.g. Standish Group, 2006; Bowen et al., 1994; Winch, 1996).

A growing body of literature, as well as a growing body of empirical evidence and the voices of numerous practitioners indicate that accepting and applying these widely promoted project management 'good practice' standards does not eliminate project failures, nor does it guarantee project success (Williams, 2004). On the contrary, a number of studies within the field of project management suggest that it is the use of project management, or a certain conception of project management, as a methodology for organisational innovation and change which is at the heart of project failures (Currie, 1994; Thomas, 2000; Maylor, 2001; Geraldi et al., 2008). Thus Clarke (1999) questions the value of project management as a vehicle of change, arguing instead that standardised project management often is itself the cause of project overload, cultural clashes, and engenders individual resistance to imposed procedures and practice. Specifically, it is argued that 'the wish to avoid inefficiency, and to dominate uncertainty and risks, bureaucratises the project work and changes the function of project managers from a manager of creativity, change and risk to a manager of paper and forms, and consequently, the traditional project management discipline may be harmful for projects, if followed blindly' (Geraldi et al., 2008: 588). In such (not untypical) circumstances, the selfsame principles of structured project management methodology are simultaneously the major causes of failure.

Project failure rates tend to be fiercely contested, and we would also be sceptical of easy attributions of 'success' and 'failure'; as Fincham suggests, these accounts can be seen as *narratives* whereby 'through a kind of social labelling events are formulated into evolving 'stories' that evoke either status or stigma' (Fincham, 2002: 1). Equally, one might argue that the subject of project failure may be as under-theorized as it is conspicuous, an unbearable trauma of a success-focused field, carefully avoided by researchers and practitioners alike (Lindahl and Rehn, 2007). The wider consequences of project failures, however, in terms of the human cost borne by those employed in the project, including the project manager her/himself, and the impact on all those affected by the project, tend to go unnoticed, unreported and often suppressed. This is reflective of a general failure to take on board the social complexity of project environments when creating key performance indicators against which projects are evaluated and approved. As indicated by numerous reports in the public domain about the implications and consequences for multiple communities affected by important major projects (e.g. the Three Gorges Dam, Shell's Sakhalin 2 oil and gas project, the 2012 Olympics), economic measures tend to dominate decision making processes and to marginalise values, interests and risks related to health, safety, well-being, the environment and long-term possibilities for collaboration and sustainable development.

Ironically, however, part of the current high profile of project management stems from the widely publicised instances of project management failure, particularly in public sector-related projects and in IS/IT. A long-standing international debate about the formulation of the various bodies of knowledge, regarding the boundaries of the subject area, its purpose, practical application, and relationship with other aspects of organisational and managerial reality (Wideman, 1995; Morris et al., 2000; Koskela and Howell, 2002; Meredith and Mantel, 2003, among others) has been driven by the aim of

radically examining the intellectual foundation of project management, thus tackling the perceived root of the problems. With notable exceptions, such as the Rethinking Project Management initiative (Winter et al., 2006), there remains a tendency in the field to assume that the basic framework of project management is compelling and essentially sound, and to see failings in project management as normal in a maturing field, and soon to be ironed out through more complex and elaborate modelling of project planning and monitoring problems and solutions, including an increased reliance on IS/IT and software based tools (see, for example, Young, 2003; Maylor, 2003; Meredith and Mantel, 2003). Despite the increased sophistication of these models and the proliferation of project management text-books, consultancy support and governmental policies, it is still unclear to what extent these complex tools are being actually used by practitioners.

Other attempts to move the field forward (Söderlund, 2005; Winter et al., 2006) include research on projects as vehicles for individual and organisational learning (e.g. Prencipe and Tell, 2001, Newell et al., 2006), research which adopts a knowledge management perspective (e.g. Kasvi et al., 2003; Bresnen et al., 2004) and work informed by familiar aspects of occupational psychology such as leadership and personality (e.g. Shenhar, 2004). Another attempt to broaden the agenda is the political analysis of projects as organisational and social arrangements (Pinto, 1996; Buchanan and Badham, 1999), a precursor of which is Taggart and Silbey's (1986) world-weary 'political' development cycle of projects, which replaces the 4 stages of the traditional, linear Project Life Cycle PLC (*Conception, Planning, Execution/Control and Closure*) with an alternative life-cycle whose stages include *Wild enthusiasm; Disillusionment; Total confusion; Search for the guilty; Punishment of the innocent and Promotion of non-participants*. Such political perspectives on projects tend to suggest the need for a wider picture which considers what goes on in the social construction of projects and project management by focusing on who and which agendas are included in or excluded from decision-making processes (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Marshall and Rollinson, 2004). Particularly influential here is the Scandinavian School of Project Studies (Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm, 2002) which moves beyond traditional understandings of projects and their management, positing among other things the conceptualisation of projects as temporary organisations (Lundin and Söderholm, 1995, Packendorff, 1995) and the recognition of the historically-embedded nature of projects (Kreiner, 1995; Engwall, 2003).

While recognising the advances made in these various directions, we would suggest that the problem is far more deeply rooted in the fundamental principles upon which the field of project management has been established. More widely, however, we need to address the wider consequences of the contemporary project management discourse which tend to languish either disregarded or explicitly and implicitly suppressed.

Making projects critical: Looking behind and beyond the façade

The papers included in this special issue were first presented at a series of workshops organised by the guest editors, stemming from a chance encounter at a presentation at the 2001 Critical Management Studies conference in Manchester. The result was the

first of a series of workshops under the heading 'Making Projects Critical' whose original aim was simply to bring together diverse writings and observations by scholars and practitioners 'located' in different 'zones of belonging' (fields such as sociology, politics, organisation behaviour, operations management, project management, NPD, IT, construction). Over time, a more substantial agenda emerged; to draw upon wider and more critical intellectual resources than the instrumental rationality, quantitative and positivist methodologies and technicist solutions which have been traditionally brought to bear in attempts to understand and control the project form of organising. The broad range of themes addressed in past MPC workshops include issues of power and domination in project settings, ethics and moral responsibility within projects, tensions between standardisation and creativity in project organisations, the limits to projectification and the dysfunctions of project rationality. Other work presented and debated in these workshops has related to critical analyses of issues of leadership, management competencies and the ongoing professionalisation of project.

So much for the intellectual mission of the MPC movement. At the same time, however, we were collectively very conscious of the significant block of practitioners and indeed academics who had built up what stands as project management theory and practice, and the combination of interest, suspicion, irritation and encouragement felt towards these new arrivals on the crowded shores of project management. In particular, part of the aim of MPC was to enable a reimagining of the project manager role; much of what currently stands as project management theory and commonplace prescription continues to emphasise the role of project managers as 'implementers', whose role and responsibility is merely to address issues of control (time and cost) and content (planned scope of work). This position, we felt, explicitly and deliberately marginalises and suppresses their wider potential role as competent social, political and ethical actors, and equally reduces the accountability of these actors for the consequences of projects to a narrowly performative set of criteria, writing out many of the most dubious impacts of both effective and ineffective project management. Concerns about this limited and inadequate conception of the project manager are shared by many in the practitioner community; to cite one; 'Practitioners, in particular we as project managers, are well advised to rid ourselves of the constricting historical background of a mechanistic world image and rationalism.' (Balck, 1994: 2).

From the beginning, we were very conscious of the danger of introducing and pursuing a disengaged, self-fulfilling, and predominantly intellectual exercise. It has been important to resist the temptation of disengaging with the project management mainstream. While, on the one hand, it would allow us to avoid what might be challenging encounters, it would, on the other, destroy any hope of making a difference to what projects are and what project managers do or do not do. In line with notions of a 'mature politics' (Grey, 2005) or indeed, a 'critical performativity' (Spicer et al., 2009), our task was therefore twofold: to build a community of critical researchers working on projects and project management who collectively could articulate alternative understandings of priorities, and at the same time confidently enter into a dialogue with the mainstream researchers and practitioners. From the start, mainstream researchers have been invited to come and participate in the MPC workshops; at the same time our ambition has been to sharpen and strengthen the critical approach to projects and project management as they appear in contemporary environments. Isolation is not helpful to

anyone, although inclusivity poses its own challenges of rejection, compromise, incorporation and the effective neutralisation of any critical intent.

Such a situation is laden by tensions: on the one hand, we are loyal to our intellectual critical commitment but, at the same time, we are developing a collegiate network which includes our mainstream colleagues and friends. As a result, the dynamics and divisions in this arena are not black and white. Through the interaction in these forums, we have also observed the construction of identities on both sides, as critical alternatives are promoted and tested in relation to mainstream work in the field while mainstream researchers and practitioners are invited to engage with critical ideas without feeling threatened or obliged to defend their mainstream commitment.

Six windows in the façade: The papers in this special issue

Given the above characterisation of the background and ambitions of critical project research, we are pleased to introduce the six papers comprising this special issue of *ephemera*. As ‘windows in the façade of project management’ they all contribute new insights into the realities of project work practice and new theoretical outlooks that can inspire future critical research on these practices.

In the first article, ‘Stop whining, start doing! Identity conflict in project managed software production’, Peter Case and Erik Piñeiro enter the highly structured world of software development and IT project management. By following conversations in online discussion forums, they are able to show the identity conflicts between project management and the programming profession. Project managers are portrayed in the conversations as representatives of the need for structure and effectiveness, which stands in stark contrast to the technological aesthetics and sense of professionalism by which the programmers define themselves. Case and Piñeiro thereby contribute to our understanding of how the strong performative aspect of project management differs from other professional identity bases and how these differences materialise in resistance, dissent and conflict among those to be ‘project managed’.

In pursuit of an understanding of how the notion of business ethics is constructed in a project-based setting, Lucia Crevani and Thomas Shinozaki Lennerfors take us behind the facades of the Swedish Road Administration (SRA) in their article ‘Pull yourselves together, guys! A gendered critique of project manager’s ethics in a public sector context’. The SRA, one of the main buyers of construction work in Sweden, has a history of awareness of ethical problems but the view of ethics differs significantly between the different project managers interviewed. The authors build upon a feminist critique of ethics in their analysis, where ethical norms are seen as constructed in a local context and intertwined with the reproduction of traditional masculinities and femininities in practical project management. In a local context as dominated by masculine norms such as the SRA, the traditional emphasis on integrity, independence, impartiality, and impersonality is evident in the narratives as the legitimate way to achieve ‘ethically correct’ relations to contractors. Female project managers described both themselves and their view of ethics as deviant, although several of the traditional femininities referred to – such as caring for the contractors – were also a part of the

male respondents' narratives. Through their analysis, Crevani and Shinozaki Lennerfors thus deepen our understanding of how the ethical dimension of project management is locally constructed in a highly gendered setting.

In 'The imagined user in projects: Articulating competing discourses of space and knowledge work', Chris Ivory and Neil Alderman take their point of departure in the traditional notion of users as influential stakeholders in projects. Through a qualitative study of how senior managers in a university setting present their arguments for a radical shift in office design, they present an alternative image of the user as imagined and as a rhetorical device. Users, they conclude, are invoked by the managers as beneficiaries of the new office designs, but no one is actually interested in their opinions, let alone their professional experiences of academic work. Arguments in favour of the new design are presented as rational, enlightened and contemporary, while arguments against are downplayed as egoistic, parochial and unsubstantiated. Ivory and Alderman thus show us the irrationalities and hypocrisies behind the facades of supposedly rational decision processes in projects – where the powerful user demanding his right can instead be seen as a powerless vehicle for managers in search of legitimacy.

Team building and leadership is another core theme of established project management texts, often referring back to general models of motivation and situational leadership. In contrast to mainstream representations of team-working in projects, team building techniques and the predictability of structure, Manuela Nocker brings up the process and outcomes of 'identity construction' through a narrative approach in her article 'Struggling to 'fit in': On belonging and the ethics of sharing in project teams'. Nocker places her reading of the narratives as 'the desire and capacity of individuals and groups to negotiate new forms of belonging – many of which are disconnected from more familiar attachments to territory, geography, or polity' (Croucher, 2004: 35-36). By looking at the various modes of belonging, Nocker deepens our understanding of how the relationship between self, others, and 'otherness' is constituted whilst simultaneously creating an ethical imagination into project work. The politics of belonging becomes visible, and through this analysis reveals its practical implications.

In the first of two research notes in this special issue, Thomas Andersson and Mikael Wickelgren take the trend towards 'projectification' of work life as the point of departure in a discussion on the basis of identity construction in 'Who is colonizing whom? Intertwined identities in product development projects'. With reference to the heavy workload in project-based settings such as corporate New Product Development, they claim that professions may become less important as bases of identification. Instead, processes of identity construction also 'involve the *product* itself, the product development *project* and the *brand of the company* that produces the product'. Focusing on the discourses of project management as an identity-shaping construction of managerialism, they discuss the impact of project management on individual lives in terms of colonization. Through their professional passion for the product and their loyalty to the company, employees allow the project management discourse to colonize their lives in general.

In the second note, 'Towards a (more) critical and social constructionist approach to New Product Development projects', Beata Segercrantz also finds her way through the rationalist facades of New Product Development. Criticizing the dominating tendency of NPD researchers and practitioners for being overly concerned with simplistic normative models guiding the product development process, she points at an implicit 'ontology of being' where NPD projects are looked upon as reified entities in need of managerial control. Instead, Segercrantz suggests an 'ontology of becoming' as an alternative perspective upon New Product Development, whereby 'attention is shifted to the heterogeneous emergence and becoming of projects in and through which discourse, social practices and subjectivities are dynamically produced'. Through this suggestion, she opens up promising future avenues for research on NPD projects.

Here, then, we leave our readers to reflect and act upon the research presented here and its practical consequences for individuals, organizations and societies. Our articles and notes, our 'windows in the façade', will hopefully let some enlightenment in. Some may become (temporarily) blinded – but that is always preferable to becoming 'just another brick in the wall', isn't it? Let the deconstruction start!

references

- Atkinson, R. (1999) 'Project management: cost, time and quality, two best guesses and a phenomenon, its time to accept other success criteria', *International Journal of Project Management*, 17(6): 337-42.
- Balck, H. (1994) 'Projects as elements of a new industrial pattern: a division of project management', in D.I. Cleland and R. Gareis (eds) *Global Project Management Handbook*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Boltanski, L. and E. Chiapello (2005) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Verso.
- Bowen, H.K. (1994) *The Perpetual Enterprise Machine: Seven Keys to Corporate Renewal through Successful Product and Process Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bowen, H. L., K. B. Clark, C. A. Holloway and S. C. Wheelwright (Eds.) (1994) *The Perpetual Enterprise Machine: Seven Keys to Corporate Renewal through Successful Product and Process Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bresnen, M., A. Goussevskaia and J. Swan (2004) 'Embedding new management knowledge in project-based organizations', *Organization Studies*, 25(9): 1535-1555.
- Briner, W. and C. Hastings (1994) 'The role of projects in the strategy process', in D.I. Cleland and R. Gareis (eds) *Global Project Management Handbook*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Buchanan, D. A. and R.J. Badham (1999) *Power, Politics, and Organizational Change: Winning the Turf Game*. London: Sage.
- Cicmil, S. and D.E. Hodgson (2006) 'New possibilities for project management theory: a critical engagement', *Project Management Journal*, 37(3): 111-122.
- Clarke, A. (1999) 'A practical use of key success factors to improve the effectiveness of project management.' *International Journal of Project Management*, 17(3): 139-145.
- Clegg, S. and D. Courpasson (2004) 'Political hybrids: Tocquevillean views on project organizations', *Journal of Management Studies*, 41(4): 525-47.
- Cleland, D.I. and L.R. Ireland (2002) *Project Management: Strategic Design and Implementation* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Croucher, S. (2004) *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Currie, W. (1994) 'The strategic management of a large scale it project in the financial services sector.' *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 9(1): 19-29.
- DeFillippi, R. J. (2001) 'Introduction: project-based learning, reflective practices and learning outcomes', *Management Learning*, 32(1): 5-10.

- Ekstedt, E., R.A. Lundin, A. Söderholm and H. Wirdenius (1999) *Neo-Industrial Organising: Renewal by Action and Knowledge Formation in a Project-Intensive Economy*. London: Routledge.
- Engwall, M. (2003) 'No project is an island: linking projects to history and context', *Research Policy*, 32(5): 789-808.
- Fincham, R. (2002) 'Narratives of success and failure in systems development', *British Journal of Management*, 13(1): 1-14.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2001) *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again*. Oxford: Cambridge University Press.
- Flyvbjerg, B., W. Rothengatter and N. Bruzelius (2003) *Megaprojects and Risk: An Anatomy of Ambition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Frame, J.D. (1994) *The New Project Management: Tools for an Age of Rapid Change, Corporate Reengineering, and Other Business Realities*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gaddis, P.O. (1959) 'The project manager', *Harvard Business Review*, 37(3): 89-97.
- Geraldi, J.G., J.R. Turner, H. Maylor, A. Söderholm, M. Hobday and T. Brady, T. (2008) 'Innovation in project management: voices of researchers', *International Journal of Project Management*, 26(5): 586-589.
- Gill, R. (2002) 'Cool, creative and egalitarian? exploring gender in project-based new media work in Europe', *Information, Communication & Society*, 5(1): 70-89.
- Graham, R.J. (1989) *Project Management as if People Mattered*. Bala Cynwyd: Primavera Systems.
- Grey, C. (2005) 'Critical management studies: towards a more mature politics', in D. Howcroft and E.M. Trauth (eds) *Handbook of Critical Information Systems Research*. London: Edward Elgar.
- Hobday, M. (2000) 'The project-based organisation: an ideal form for managing complex products and systems?', *Research Policy*, 29(7/8): 871-893.
- Hodgson, D.E. (2002) "'Know your customer': marketing, governmentality and the 'new consumer' of financial services", *Management Decision*, 40(4): 318-328.
- Hodgson, D.E. (2004) 'Project work: the legacy of bureaucratic control in the post-bureaucratic organization', *Organization*, 11(1): 81-100.
- Hodgson, D.E. (2007) 'The new professionals: professionalisation and the struggle for occupational control in the field of project management', in D. Muzio, S. Ackroyd, and J.F. Chanlat (eds) *Redirections in the Study of Expert Labour: Medicine, Law and Management Consultancy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Kanter, R. M. (1983) *The Change Masters: Corporate Entrepreneurs at Work*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Kasvi, J.J., M. Vartiainen, and M. Hailikari (2003) 'Managing knowledge and knowledge competences in projects and project organizations', *International Journal of Project Management*, 21(8): 571-582.
- Koskela, L. and Howell, G. (2002) 'The underlying theory of project management is obsolete', in the proceedings of *Project Management Institute Research Conference*, PMI, Seattle, WA.
- Kreiner, K. (1992) 'The postmodern epoch of organization theory', *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 22(2): 37-52.
- Kreiner, K. (1995) 'In search of relevance: project management in drifting environments', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11(4): 335-346.
- Lindahl, M. and A. Rehn (2007) 'Towards a theory of project failure'. *International Journal of Management Concepts and Philosophy*, 2(3): 246-254.
- Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2006) 'What's new in new forms of organizing? on the construction of gender in project-based work', *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(4): 841-866.
- Lindgren, M. and Packendorff, J. (2008) 'Från projektarbete till projektintensivt arbete: människan och projektarbetets institutionalisering' [From project work to project-based work: the individual and the institutionalization of projects], in T. Stjernberg, J. Söderlund and E. Wikström (eds) *Projektliv: Villkor för uthållig projektverksamhet*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Lundin, R. A. and Söderholm, A. (1995) 'A theory of the temporary organization', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11(4): 437-455.

- Marshall, N. and Rollinson, J. (2004) 'Maybe Bacon had a point: the politics of interpretation in collective sensemaking', *British Journal of Management*, 15(S1): 71-86.
- Maylor, H. (2001) 'Beyond the Gantt chart: project management moving on', *European Management Journal*, 19(1): 92-100.
- Maylor H. (2003) *Project Management* (3rd Edition). London: Financial Times/Prentice Hall.
- Meredith, J. R. and S.J. Mantel (2003), *Project Management: A Managerial Approach*, 5th ed. Hoboken: Wiley.
- Morris, P. W. G. (1994) *The Management of Projects*. London: Thomas Telford.
- Morris, P.W.G. and G.H. Hough (1993) *The Anatomy of Major Projects: A Study of the Reality of Project Management*. London: Wiley.
- Morris, P.W.G. and J.K. Pinto (eds) (2004) *The Wiley Guide to Managing Projects*. New York: Wiley.
- Morris, P.W.G., M.B. Patel, and S.H. Wearne (2000) 'Research into revising the APM project management body of knowledge', *International Journal of Project Management*, 18(3): 155-164.
- Nandhakumar, J. (2002) 'Managing time in a software factory: temporal and spatial organization of IS development activities', *Information Society*, 18(4): 251-262.
- Newell, S., M. Bresnen, L. Edelman, H. Scarbrough and J. Swan (2006) 'Sharing knowledge across projects: limits to ICT-led project review practices', *Management Learning*, 37(2): 167-185.
- Packendorff, J. (1995) 'Inquiring into the temporary organization: new directions for project management research', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11(4): 319-333.
- Pinto, J.K. (1996) *Power and Politics in Project Management*. Sylva: Project Management Institute.
- Prencipe, A. and F. Tell (2001) 'Inter-project learning: processes and outcomes of knowledge codification in project-based firms', *Research Policy*, 30(9): 1373-1394.
- Sahlin-Andersson, K. and A. Söderholm (eds) (2002) *Beyond Project Management: New Perspectives on the Temporary-Permanent Dilemma*. Copenhagen: Liber.
- Shenhar, A.J. (2004) 'Strategic Project LEADERSHIP(R): toward a strategic approach to project management', *R & D Management*, 34(5): 569-578.
- Silver, C.A. (2000) 'Where technology and knowledge meet', *Journal of Business Strategy*, 21(Nov/Dec): 28-33.
- Spicer, A., M. Alvesson, and D. Kärreman (2009) 'Critical performativity: the unfinished business of critical management studies', *Human Relations*, 62(4): 537-560.
- Söderlund, J. (2005) 'What project management really is about: alternative perspectives on the role and practice of project management', *International Journal of Technology Management*, 32(3-4): 371-387.
- Söderlund, J. and F. Tell (2009) 'The P-form organization and the dynamics of project competence: project epochs in Asea/ABB, 1950-2000', *International Journal of Project Management*, 27(2): 101-112.
- Standish Group (2006) *Chaos Report*. Rockville: Standish Group International.
- Taggart, W. M. and V. Silbey (1986) *Informational Systems: People and Computers in Organisations*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Thomas, J. (2000) 'Making sense of project management', in R.A. Lundin and F. Hartman (eds) *Projects as Business Constituents and Guiding Motives*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Press.
- Whitley, R. (2006) 'Project-based firms: new organizational form or variations on a theme?', *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 15(1): 77-99.
- Wideman, R.M. (1995) 'Criteria for a project-management body of knowledge', *International Journal of Project Management*, 13(2): 71-75.
- Williams, T. (1999) 'The need for new paradigms for complex projects', *International Journal of Project Management*, 17(5): 269-273.
- Williams, T. (2004) 'Assessing and building on the underlying theory of project management in the light of badly over-run projects', paper presented at *PMI Research Conference*, London, UK.
- Winch, G. (1996) 'Thirty years of project management—what have we learned?', in *British Academy of Management Conference Proceedings*, Aston Business School, Birmingham, UK.

Winter, M., C. Smith, P.W.G. Morris and S. Cicmil (2006) 'Directions for future research in project management: the main findings of a UK government-funded research network', *International Journal of Project Management*, 24(8): 638-649.

Young, T.L. (2003) *The Handbook of Project Management: A Practical Guide to Effective Policies and Procedures*. London: Kogan Page.

the editors

Svetlana Cicmil is Reader in Global Operations at Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, Bristol. In most general terms, her research is founded in a processual-relational approach to the complexity of projects focusing on the paradox of control and individual and collective experiences of unpredictability and change in project work. In addition, Svetlana is interested in the phronesis-centred approach to the ethics of managerial actions in project environments.

E-mail: svetlana.cicmil@uwe.ac.uk

Damian Hodgson is senior lecturer in Organisational Analysis at Manchester Business School, the University of Manchester. His research focuses on the control of project work and processes of projectification.

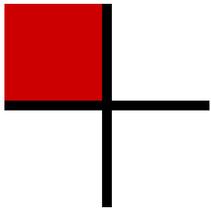
E-mail: damian.hodgson@mbs.ac.uk

Monica Lindgren is associate professor in Business Administration at the School of Industrial Engineering and Management at the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm. Her research is focused on issues of identity, gender, project work, entrepreneurial processes and leadership, studied from constructionist and critical theory perspectives.

E-mail: monica.lindgren@indek.kth.se

Johann Packendorff is associate professor in Industrial Economics and Management at the School of Industrial Engineering and Management at the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm. His research is focused on critical and constructionist perspectives on issues relating to project work, entrepreneurship, and leadership.

E-mail: johann.packendorff@indek.kth.se



Stop whining, start doing! Identity conflict in project managed software production*

Peter Case and Erik Piñeiro

abstract

In this article we explore the relationship between software developers and IT project managers as expressed through narrative exchanges in an on-line discussion forum. We interrogate a naturalistic data set to show how the conflict between IT professionals and their immediate managers (project managers) is manifest through the identity work that they engage in. To this end, the article draws attention to strategies of resistance and dissent expressed in the narratives of software developers, contrasting these with the performative expectations espoused by project managers. The purpose is to contribute to a critique of project management stemming from the grassroots experience of those involved in its co-construction. While it is difficult to be precise about the demographics of the community studied (given the anonymity of bulletin board forums), the views of several hundred participants are represented in the discussion threads analysed. In response to the performative environments and disciplines of project management, programmers make recourse to performative strategies (in an Austinian sense) that preserve their status, sense of professional identity and organizational power. The aesthetics of programming appear to play an important part in the expression of programmers' identity; aesthetics which contrast, and are in conflict with, different forms of performative aesthetics present in the identity work of project managers.

Introduction

The encounter between workers and management has been subjected to a wide range of intellectual and academic analysis within organization studies. Accounts of the relationship range from texts that espouse functionalist visions of organization (inter alia, Daft, 1995; Donaldson, 1996; Schein, 1985) which seek to downplay or occlude the role of conflict through to Marxist-informed Labour Process and radical structural theories in which conflict is understood to be integral to industrial relations (Burawoy, 1979; Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Edwards, 1986; Thompson and McHugh 1995, Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995). In the last two decades or so, organization studies has been subject to a post-structural turn (Burrell 1988, 1998; Cooper 1989; Hassard and

* A previous version of this article was presented at the 'Making Projects Critical 4' conference, 31st March - 1st April 2008, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden. The authors wish to thank the organizers, guest editors and anonymous reviewers of *ephemera* for comments on the original paper and to acknowledge questions and observations from delegates which helped refine the argument.

Parker, 1993; Chia, 1996, 1998) which has introduced a new set of analytical tools with which to undertake the dynamics of the employment relation. Debates between proponents of more orthodox Labour Process accounts of worker/management relations, which understand conflict in terms of fundamental differences of vested class interest, and those of post-structuralists of varying complexion, who propose subtler and more fluid interpretations, have been hotly pursued (Knights and Willmott, 1989; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995; Thompson and Smith, 2000-1; Knights, 2001; O'Doherty, forthcoming; O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001a, 2001b; Friedman, 2004).

In this article we seek to make a modest contribution to such debates by attending empirically to the manifestation of conflict between software developers (with a focus on coders – or programmers – as opposed to system architects, analysts, etc.) and project managers, who most often are their immediate superiors in the corporate hierarchy. Our study also attempts to augment the existing organization studies literature concerned with knowledge worker identity (Alvesson, 2004; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Alvesson and Willmott, 2004; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2001), focussing particularly on the co-construction of identity conflict. The narrative data that we explore seems to speak to accounts which could be interpreted as representing key aspects of the structuralist account of employment relationships while, simultaneously also being open to post-structural interpretation of power dynamics. One of the key elements in the argument put forward in this article is the particular nature of the relation between programmers and project managers. This particularity revolves around: 1) the difference in the nature of their professional knowledge; and 2) the symbiotic relationship between project management and IT systems.

Knowledge and academic status

According to structuralist accounts, worker/management conflict is understood to result from opposed *interests* which are ontologically grounded in a reality of socio-economic class division. Put in crude terms, according to this approach managers (as the actual or symbolic owners of the means of production) want to get as much out of workers for as little pay as possible and workers, by contrast, want maximum pay for minimum effort. While not speaking directly to the *ontological reality* (or otherwise) of this structural relationship, as we shall see shortly, analysis of our narrative data set offers some support to the idea that worker/management conflict is subjectively and inter-subjectively expressed in terms of this duality. The relationship between project managers and programmers in an IT context, however, introduces subtleties and differences that demand a more nuanced interpretation than a sheerly structuralist or critical realist (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000, 2004) account provides. Employment relationships within IT projects bring with them anomalies that are not present in other contexts. Firstly, for example, IT project managers do not need (and often do not have) educational credentials that exceed those of programmers. Secondly, project managers do not need (and often do not have and cannot aspire to) the technical knowledge of programmers. These conditions give rise to a certain view among programmers about the 'real' power relationship between both parties; a view that places programmers (in their own minds at least) *above* managers in terms of organizational status (Piñeiro and Case, 2008). This we trust will become evident when we examine the narrative data, but

before proceeding to our analysis, we need to offer some further remarks on the particular complexity of organizational relationships that result from the meeting of project management and information technology.

Project management and information technology

Over the past fifty years or so IT has insinuated itself into just about every aspect of the social order in developed capitalist economies to the point where life, as we know it, would be inconceivable or, indeed, impossible in practical terms without its facilitation. Perhaps slightly less pervasive, but increasingly ubiquitous in (post)modern life is ‘project management’.

Rather like the word ‘strategy’, the concept of the ‘project’ has permeated everyday organizational discourse, stretching its standardized meaning. Everything, from the most complex multidisciplinary endeavour, such as, developing a \$48bn International Space Station, through to organizing a children’s birthday party becomes, in everyday parlance at least, ‘a project’. This may be, in part, due to the fact that the noun form of the word ‘project’ in English has a longer and more stable legacy than one might think. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word project finds etymological origins in the Latin *prōiectum* meaning ‘projecting structure’ (2nd c. A.D.) and *prōiectus*, the ‘fact of extending beyond a surface or edge’ – a spatial connotation which, in the intervening years, has become a *temporal* one. The word migrates to English from Middle French and takes on the meaning of ‘plan’ from *proiect* or *projet*. So by the 15th Century it already acquires a relatively stable meaning as ‘[a] plan, draft, scheme, or table of something; a tabulated statement; a design or pattern according to which something is made’. Its meaning as, ‘[a] planned or proposed undertaking; a scheme, a proposal; a purpose, an objective’ also enjoys a lengthy heritage dating back to the 16th Century. Compounds such as ‘project engineer’ and ‘project management’ are, as one might expect, more recent semantic innovations dating only to the beginning decades of the 20th Century. The *OED* defines project management as, ‘[t]he theory, practice, or occupation of managing projects’ and ‘the group of people in charge of a project’ (*OED* online), the first recorded use being in the *Nevada State Journal* of July 1913.

So what? Should we view the ubiquity of project- and PM-speak as a harmless consequence of (a) historical contingencies of English language development, and (b) its natural and pragmatic extension into other areas of modern life? Or, alternatively, may there be more sinister and compromising implications of this ubiquity and the movement toward a projectification of organizational life? We are certainly not trying to play the role of semantic policemen with respect to language use, but we do think that some reflection on the casuistic stretching of the term and the connotation of its applications in the workplace do warrant some critical attention. In our teaching, we sometimes give MBA students an exercise that entails avoiding use of the word ‘strategy’ in their workplace communication for one working day. Invariably, they report on the difficulty – if not the downright impossibility – of avoiding the term. Similarly, one might experiment with trying not to use the word ‘project’ for a day and see what happens. This little exercise would serve to show just how prevalent the

‘projectification’ of work is in contemporary organizations and give some indication of how the project mentality feeds its way, subconsciously, into a particular construction and interpretation of the world. In short, if one rejects simple correspondence theory and assumes that language plays more than a neutral role in discursively *producing* the social world, there are certain power effects (Foucault 1980) of this seemingly innocuous seven-letter word that we would do well to pay attention to. By thinking in terms of projects and enacting them, we constitute the world in a particular way and embrace a taken-for-granted epistemology and ontology; we embrace a certain way of *knowing* and *being* in the world. Projectification entails, in Foucauldian terms, certain forms of objectivisation and subjectivisation (Florence, 1994) and we shall be concerned in the empirical section of this article to examine how these microphysics give rise to identity conflicts in IT settings.

The development of management and organization science in the last century and a half, or so, has been coupled closely with the evolution of engineering and associated technologies. It is not our place here to fully review the particular history of PM or to offer a detailed critique of its body of knowledge. This has been comprehensively and admirably addressed by others (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006; Hodgson, 2002, 2004; Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006) and mere rehearsal of the same points would serve no useful purpose. We would, however, like to make a few remarks on the relationship between engineering technologies and PM since this is directly pertinent to the study we wish to report on below. Shenhav (1999) has made a study of the genealogy of management, arguing that it was engineers in the early part of the 20th Century who ‘manufactured management’ by effectively creating space between ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ to be occupied by a new professional class. Shenhav’s is one of the latest contributions to organization studies that have attempted to draw attention to the historical relationship between the evolution of engineering disciplines and the corresponding need to position employees within a rational matrix (Grint 1991; Jacques 1996). Most famously, of course, the genesis of 20th Century management is often accorded to the engineering-inspired manifestos of F.W. Taylor and his drive to develop *The Principles of Scientific Management* (Taylor, 1986 [1911]).

Throughout its history, organization theory has drawn metaphors and imagery from the latest scientific developments in order to help rationalize and make prescriptive sense of management practices. While not wishing to promote a case for technological determinism, as such, there is an undeniable correspondence between scientific and engineering innovation and management thinking. With particular respect to PM, it seems to us that the representational and calculative possibilities that are embodied in IT have been instrumental (both literally and metaphorically) to the emergence of PM’s disciplines, its body of knowledge and its set of professional practices. Put simply, PM in its current form would not be feasible without the supporting information technology. The suite of computer programs and spreadsheets that are now the stock in trade of PM – one thinks of software provided by the likes of Microsoft and Primavera to support

PM methodologies: Earned Value Analysis, CPA methodologies and so forth – has given particular form to managerial fantasies, idealism and control aspirations.¹

So this is the point at which our two ubiquities meet. IT is, we suggest, a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for the contemporary development and direction of PM methodologies. Both IT and PM are intimately intertwined in a kind of symbiosis. The skills and efforts of computer programmers are necessary to the creation of software that now facilitates the professional work of project managers, while, simultaneously, PM methodology is absolutely integral to the development of functioning software packages. This gives rise to a fascinating and complex set of relationships between the respective disciplines of IT programming and PM, some dimensions of which we shall explore through the empirical study presented below.

Data set and method

Building on earlier work (Case and Piñeiro, 2006; Piñeiro and Case, 2008), the empirical foundation of this study lies on naturalistic data derived from an on-line computer programmer discussion forum (www Slashdot.org). We have been visiting and researching the *Slashdot* website periodically for the past five years or so, over which time we have become familiar with both the form and content of bulletin board exchanges. The forum initiates about twelve discussions each day, with subsequent exchanges typically lasting anywhere between a couple of days to a week. The discussion threads we have chosen to study for the purposes of this article draw from threads concerned with ‘the aesthetics of coding’ and ‘project management for programmers’ since these contain particularly clear insights into the relationship between programmers, project managers and the PM environment. Bulletin board discussions had already ended by the time we drew on them for analytical purposes and we intentionally made no effort to engage in or to influence on-line exchanges.

The participants, who in most discussions are invariably programmers or other ‘techie’ IT professionals, may enter the discussion as members of *Slashdot*, in which case their on-line identities are available; or they may access it anonymously, in which case they appear on-line under the shared name of ‘Anonymous Coward’. Furthermore, there is nothing that prevents a participant from having several on-line identities. However, *Slashdot* is not an ‘identity laboratory’ forum (Bruckman, 1992). Unlike other more chat-focused on-line ‘hang-outs’ and virtual social networks, this is not a place to meet and get to know people. Its design does not allow for chat and picture exchange; topics of discussion rarely touch upon personal subjects and there is a moderation system in place that has a sobering effect on the discussions. So even if there are cases of ‘flamebaits’ and ‘trolls’ (names given to entries whose goal is to provoke and / or mislead), the discussions can safely be assumed to present us with the participants’

¹ This accelerated proliferation of both phenomena (IT and PM) has urged a number of authors to express concern about (1) IT (Angell, 2000; Webster, 2001), and (2) the trend toward the so called projectification of society (see Cicmil & Hodgson 2006:5-6 for review of this critique), worried that PM is taking over our lives with effects that are not always benign.

earnest opinions, and thus with a rich picture of the diversity of programmers' attitudes and sensibilities.

The language of *Slashdot* is English, and the great majority of its participants are native English speakers – even if not always very careful with their mother tongue. A good deal of those participating in the discussions we have studied live in the US – our own crude, experience-based estimate is that about 80% are either US citizens or US workers. So even if there are opinions from programmers from other countries (particularly in those discussions that deal with, for instance, Australian issues), most of the entries originate in the US. It can therefore be said that the material is representative of US programmers, taking into account the heterogeneity of opinions expressed on the themes we explore. At any rate, the question of nationality only makes itself present in very specific discussions, such as those dealing with outsourcing or policy subjects (Piñeiro and Case, 2008).

Analytical tools

In analysing the narrative exchanges of the *Slashdot* community we have found it useful to make recourse to the theoretical notion of 'performativity'. There are two broad patterns emergent in our data that lend themselves to interpretation through two corresponding dimensions of this concept. Firstly there are performative acts (Austin, 1976) on the part of programmers in their talk about the aesthetics of coding that enable them to enact identity and membership. Secondly, there is a *performative commercial context* (Lyotard, 1984) within which they work, often mediated by PM methodologies. The PM context is almost invariably perceived to be a constraining force on the proper pursuit of the programming art. As they provide an analytical fulcrum for the interpretation of our data, we shall elaborate briefly on both these aspects of performativity.

1. Discursive performances

The concept of the performative was first introduced into the philosophical lexicon by John Austin and subsequently taken up by one of his students, John Searle as the basis for a broader programme of enquiry known as speech act theory (Austin, 1976; Searle, 1977). Post-structuralist thinkers (Derrida, 1977; Butler, 1990, 1993; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) have also experimented with and developed Austin's original ideas. Speech acts and performatives have value, we contend, in understanding and representing the socially constructed world of the *Slashdot* programmers that we studied. Programmers interacting online in the *Slashdot* forum are *doing things* in their narrative exchanges. They are bringing about social effects through their displays of technical bravado, expressions of aesthetic preference and espousals of dissent, resistance and subversion.

In our data, the conflict between IT programmers and Project Managers does not always take the form of overt disputes between the parties. Often the respective parties – programmers and project managers – are not engaged in direct debate with each other

but are, instead, contributing to a general thread of some sort. It is in the emergent composite exchange that they make disparaging and critical remarks about the ‘other’.

2. Performativity as the optimisation of input to output

We have so far dealt with only one side of the ‘performativity’ equation that we wish to employ, namely, that pertaining to the social effects of narrative performatives. For the other part of the equation we draw on Lyotard’s critique of the role of knowledge in post-industrial societies (Lyotard, 1984). According to Lyotard, the episteme of modern science which found legitimacy in grand narratives of progress and emancipation – totalising stories that gave meaning to local narratives and practices – is being systematically eroded within post-industrial societies by the advancement of information-driven technologies. The search for Truth is replaced by a search for the Efficient under what Lyotard (1984: 111) terms the ‘principle of optimal performance’. Lyotard theorises this new basis of knowledge – the optimisation of input to output – as *performativity* (1984: 112). One consequence of post-industrial technology’s privileging of the ends of action over its means is that knowledge ceases to be a valid end in itself. Knowledge is assessed economically not by its truth-value, but by its *exchange-value*. Knowledge is produced to be sold.

The conflict between programmers and managers presented below hinges on a double application of the concept of Lyotardian performativity. Firstly, it is used to highlight antagonism. Programmers are clearly conscious of the forces of performativity intruding into and shaping their working lives. They articulate an explicit concern that their efforts, which they conceive of as artistry or craftsmanship, are all too often compromised by the tight resource constraints and disciplinary requirements of the PM environment. Managers take the opposite side, accusing programmers of ‘whining’ instead of doing what must be done to move the project forward. Secondly, both sides struggle to impose their own characteristic knowledge as the truly performative one. This double use of ‘performativity’ constitutes the themes along which programmers and managers structure their identities, in opposition to each other: aesthetic versus performance concerns and technical versus managerial knowledge.

Empirical observations

Conflict from the programmers’ perspective

The performance of ‘programmer’ identity is context-dependent and different faces are presented to different audiences. In certain instances programmers will express an interest in meeting deadlines and getting products ready for market but, as we shall see, when responding to the perceived performativity of PM discipline those same programmers will present a very different aspect of identity; one that is far more concerned with program quality and elegance. Our data indicate that the figure of the manager, in general, and of the project manager (often the direct superior), in particular, act as crucial foils in the construction of ‘techie’ identity.

The extracts below have been selected to demonstrate the double application of ‘performativity’ by programmers to construct identities *in opposition* to project

managers. As mentioned above, this oppositional relation in our data set manifests around two main themes: ‘Code Aesthetics’ and ‘Technical Knowledge’.

Code aesthetics

This line of identity construction is predicated on the notion that code is worthy of attention for its own sake. Coding is a realm of human creation which celebrates the ethic of *gras artis gras*. It allows for personal styles and aesthetic convictions that offer programmers great satisfaction and that, in the eyes of the programmers, deserve respect. Managers are often accused of both failing to understand the aesthetic dimension of the coding art as well as not treating it with due respect.²

Often Slashdotters explicitly define themselves as ‘computer geeks’, ‘hackers’ and ‘code jockeys’, terms whose radicalism or ‘cool-ness’ contrast with submissive tenor of words like ‘worker’, ‘programmer’ or ‘employee’ which might also be used to describe their roles. This process of identification, self-presentation and affiliation is common in many of the exchanges either as a performative subtext or as part of the manifest communication. Consider, for instance, the following posting by MikeFM:³

software is like building w/ toothpicks (Score:2)
by MikeFM (12491) on Wednesday September 05, @12:59AM (#2254465)

[...] I like to write beautiful code.. as I imagine most real programmers do.. us geeks that live, breath, and dream in code.. but in real life there usually is not enough time or resources given to manage to write really well planned out code. This is why Microsoft sucks and a popular motto is ‘When it’s done!’ among the truly geeky programming houses and why open source will eventually kill most commercial software.

MikeFM is here engaged in a micro-sociological process of expressing identification – ‘us geeks’ – and rehearsing key elements of a hacker credo. These elements are discussed at length in Pekka Himanen’s account of the ethos and life-worlds of computer hackers entitled, *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age* (Himanen, 2001). In this work Himanen identifies a set of characteristics and ethics that, he contends, mark hackers apart as a subculture, as follows: (a) hackers are passionate about their endeavours and are motivated by what they take to be the intrinsic value and craft in their work; (b) hackers are ambivalent toward – if not on occasion outright suspicious of – money and the commercial exploitation of computer systems and applications; and, (c) hackers are committed to ‘facilitating access to

² Programming aesthetics are more complex than we have space to address here. For a more detailed treatment see Piñero (2003) and Case & Piñero (2006). To make the main point briefly, a program that offers *exactly* the same function to the user can be written in a myriad of ways, allowing programmers great degrees of stylistic and structural freedom. Matters of style and structure are sometimes debated by *Slashdot* programmers and strong preferences expressed regarding: (1) the use or otherwise of comments in coding; (2) the use of indentation; (3) whether minimalism or, indeed deliberate obfuscation, is preferable to more extensive, discursive or literate forms of coding. There is also the direct issue of aesthetic ideals, with ‘clean code’, ‘simple code’, ‘tight code’ and ‘structured code’ being contested topics.

³ This and all subsequent abstracts are presented as they appear on the *Slashdot* bulletin board. For the sake of authenticity, we reproduce spelling, grammatical and syntactical errors wherever they appear in the original.

information and to computer resources' (2001: 51) such that access to resources should, ideally, be free of charge.

Mike FM's remark '[...] us geeks that live, breath and dream in code' may sound to us non-geeks like an over-reaction but it can be better appreciated considering Himanen's first – and perhaps most important – element of the hacker ethic, which contrasts the hacker's unique orientation to work with the concept of the Protestant work ethic propounded by Weber (1976). Unlike many workers who find their work dull and alienating, hackers are passionate about their endeavours and are motivated by what they take to be the intrinsic value and craft in their work. They are often willing to work long hours (in their spare time or for employers) on projects that they deem worthy of their efforts⁴.

In addition, MikeFM states a preference for, and alludes to, the superiority of open source code, that is, systems and applications that are worked on free of charge by a self-selecting community of programmers. We also see evinced in MikeFM's posting a common hacker refrain, namely, 'Microsoft bashing'. It is almost obligatory to 'hate' Microsoft and be committed to open source, if one is to be a proper hacker. Accordingly, Microsoft is cast as a central villain and scapegoated by the Slashdot programming community on a routine basis in their exchanges. Rightly or wrongly, this company is seen as representing the antipathy of the hacker ethic and, as such, it plays an important iconic role in the identity work of those who wish to affiliate with other 'serious programmers'.

According to many Slashdotters, 'quality' is always a secondary consideration for project managers. What matters is simply shipping the goods on time and according to budget. In line with the hacker ethic, such constraints are perceived as a huge and compromising imposition on the aesthetic ideals of programmers who wish to produce high quality code. Accordingly, the actions and alleged values of villainous project managers are perceived as a direct threat to the individual and collective identity of members of the programming community. The following narrative by an anonymous Slashdotter illustrates well the manner in which programmers feel constrained and how they give vent to their frustrations by finding fault with the organizational conditions under which they work:

⁴ Himanen's assertion that we are witnessing the emergence of a new 'work ethic' within hackerdom is both a touch ostentatious and romantic. The willingness of hackers to work above and beyond contract is indicative of a widespread shift in contemporary economies from what Etzioni (1961) refers to as 'utilitarian' forms of employment contract toward 'normative' involvement. Cederström and Grassman (2008) offer a more cynical and critical interpretation of the rise of 'neo-normative' organizational control suggesting that certain IT employers (e.g., Google) seduce 'techie' employees by providing a playful working environment within which their actual contractual employment conditions become invisible. This is a variation on the 'false consciousness' argument which would maintain that IT workers are blind to the way in which their labour is actually being exploited by employers. Whether persuasive or not, it remains the case that programmers have contributed significantly to the development of software, such as, the architecture of the Internet, which has accelerated the development of flexible information capitalism; a development which is at the very least ambivalent from the point of view of the Hacker Ethic. True, the Internet facilitates the exchange of software products (cracked or otherwise) free of charge but it also enables capitalist organizations to make profit on the sale of commercially produced and, in some cases, 'open source' software.

software manager managing bridge architects... (Score:1, Insightful)
by Anonymous Coward on Tuesday September 04, @05:20PM (#2253011)

manager -> we need to ship this bridge in 3 months.
engineer -> yes, but it's really big and really important
manager -> yes, but it has to ship in 3 months.
engineer -> so how much weight does it need to support?
manager -> i dunno, I'll let you know in 2.9 months.
engineer -> what is it bridging?
manager -> why all these stupid questions, start building.
engineer -> I should do an architectural drawing first.
manager -> why bother, here's some metal, start slapping it together. Remember it ships in 2 months.
engineer -> I thought you said 3 months?
manager -> oh didn't I tell you, we heard a rumour that a competitor will be shipping their bridge in 2.5 months, so we have to beat them.
continue forever.
the reason there is no internal beauty is we (engineers) aren't given any time to build quality (although the argument could be made that the only way to build on schedule is by building quality). The other problem is, bugs actually translate into lucrative support contracts for most enterprise software vendors. Why improve quality? there is no revenue stream there. [...]

In the following narrative, Greyfox places emphasis on the antagonistic relationship between the programmer and the project manager to whom s/he reports (beauty vs. deadline):

Oh Yeah... (Score:2)
by Greyfox (87712) on Tuesday September 04, @05:11PM (#2252945)

Try telling your manager sometime that you want to redesign a piece of code because 'It's aesthetically displeasing' or because 'The design sucks.' He'll laugh you out of the office and quite possibly the company. Nevermind that you were right or that your redesign would drastically improve maintainability and probably speed things up. Managers don't want good code. They want code that you can squat and shit as quickly as possible because the only metric they look at is the deadline. It may not smell good. It may self destruct in a few months. It will certainly keep your team in 'fireman mode' for the rest of the time they're at the company, but by God it made the deadline and that's all that counts. [...]

There are important self-presentational aspects (Goffman, 1959, 1967) to the *Slashdot* exchanges as epitomized by Greyfox's put down of computer illiterate or, at least, computer-incompetent project managers who believe that programming language architecture will in itself produce effective software design. Contributors to the *Slashdot* forums routinely use their narratives to establish their own programming credentials and prowess, MikeFM's 'us geeks that live, breath and dream in code' being an extreme case. Which brings us to the second main theme of programmer identity construction: technical knowledge.

Technical knowledge

This line of identity construction is based on the predicate that (project) managers do not know what an IT system actually is. Such alleged ignorance extends not only to the programming side of things but also to more 'managerial' aspects such as the roots of bugs and why low-quality software requires far more long term maintenance than well constructed programmes (and hence incurs further costs for the company). Moreover,

according to this attributional predicate, managers are oblivious to the principles that result in high-quality software, and, more generally, to what decisions are in the best interests of the company.

Quite independently of Anonymous Coward, MikeFM uses a similarly powerful construction metaphor to illustrate the manner in which commercial pressures prompt project managers to adopt short-term palliative solutions to software design problems:

software is like building w/ toothpicks (Score:2) by MikeFM (12491) on Wednesday September 05, @12:59AM (#2254465)

I think in the book 'The Hacker and the Ants' there is a quote along the line of programming being like building out of toothpicks carefully glued together and if just one toothpick is out of place the whole thing comes crumbling down [...].

The issue of the (project) managers' ignorance can become very loaded when it comes to the subject of outsourcing. It is demeaning for programmers to find themselves being laid-off by managers who, in their view, do not have the competence to make such decisions. The following quote is extracted from a discussion about IT off-shoring:

Maybe it's time for the technocratic war to begin. (Score:5, Interesting) by Anonymous Coward on Friday December 19, @12:14PM (#7764834)

The managers and CEOs of this country have no idea about how to make router connection [*sic*] or how to correct a line of code in their payroll systems.

I'm on call 24x7x365 while the CEO sleeps.

The none [*sic*] technical types need to understand where info power resides.

Here are some further entries that illustrate the way in which claims about technical knowledge are used to bolster programmer identity and deride the ignorance of project managers:

I couldn't disagree more... (Score:4, Insightful) by gustar (125316) on Friday June 21, @08:46AM (#3742810)

[...] Over the course of my career I have dealt with legions of formal 'project managers', (folks who are pure project managers lacking any technical background) and I have yet to realize any value in my interactions with any of them, beyond the occasional willingness to record meeting minutes.

To date I have found them to be glorified secretaries, whose primary tactic is to latch on to knowledgeable people and not only drain information but actually get them to perform the real tasks of project management, such as scheduling and resource estimation [...]

The digitally self-styled 192939495969798999 describes how PM can wreck the fun aspects of programming by making decisions on the basis of resource constraints rather than 'scientific research':

Welcome to programming (Score:3, Informative) by 192939495969798999 (58312) <info@devinmoor[]om ['e.c' in gap]> on Friday June 21, @06:34AM (#3742415)

I think it's important for people to read this and realize that the PM is the reason that programming sucks 9 times out of 10 in the professional world. As much fun as it would ever be, the PM can

wreck it by having no concept of reality. I don't much care if the PM doesn't understand exactly HOW to implement things, but it's been my experience (most recently as a lead programmer at a small outfit) that the PM will make decisions based on the immediate costs, rather than any solid scientific research [...]

AppyPappy introduces a very colourful metaphor to characterize the condition of the technically neutered project manager. Again, attributions of lack of technical knowledge are used to malign PM:

Nope (Score:4, Insightful) by AppyPappy (64817) on Friday June 21 2002, @07:30AM (#3742566)

Programming skills and management skills are mutually-exclusive. I've always found project managers to be hired as programmers who were later found to be lousy programmers. [...]

So far we have sought to analyse the way in which programmers construct their identity in opposition to the perceived constraints of environments governed by PM disciplines and the incompetence of project managers. What, then, of project manager identities? How do these compare and contrast with those of programmers in the *Slashdot* forum?

Conflict from the project managers' perspective

Slashdot is not generally a good place to look for managers' opinions. Programmers are much more common participants in bulletin board exchanges and the general tone of exchange is, as Himmanen's hacker ethic suggests, highly critical of management values. However, the discussion entitled 'Project Management for Programmers?' opened up the door to views other than those of programmers. Unlike other *Slashdot* exchanges, this one lies at the cusp of technical programming and managerial identity. For some *Slashdot*ters, there is an actual or – in normative terms – necessary overlap between project management and technical development roles. In other words, according to many *Slashdot* techies, project managers should be technically competent programmers in order to do their job properly. For other discussants, it is necessary to maintain a clear distinction between the skills and responsibilities of technical development, on the one hand, and those of project manager, on the other.

Rather unusually, because of the potential overlap of technical and managerial roles, both the 'technical' and 'management' perspectives are represented in the exchange. This stands in marked contrast to many discussion threads where technical concerns and perspectives enjoy an exclusive monopoly and management is generally a dirty word. The 'Project Management for Programmers?' thread begins with a question from a programmer – welshdave – who claims to have encountered resistance to his being promoted to a project management role by senior managers who feel threatened by his technical expertise. As s/he frames the question: 'Has anyone else found the barrier to project management is their technical knowledge. How did you get past it?'

In parallel to the discussion of programmer identity above, the extracts below have been selected to demonstrate the double application of 'performativity' by project managers to construct identities *in opposition* to those of programmers. This oppositional relation in our data set manifests around two main themes: 'Performance concerns' and 'PM Knowledge'.

Performance

This line of identity construction for project managers is based on the predicate that programmers are lazy, and that they hide behind technical buzzwords to avoid work⁵. The talk about the elegance of code and such is simply a way to avoid doing the practical work of getting properly functioning software to the customer on time and within budget.

In the following extract, smoon expresses exasperation at the constant ‘whining’ of programmers regarding resource constraints. Developing a seemingly apolitical position of rapprochement, s/he advocates a middle ground on which project manager and programmer can meet cordially. Here we see an assertion of the unitarist conception of management according to which conflict is both dysfunctional and unnecessary:

Stop whining, start doing. (Score:5, Insightful) by smoon (16873) on Friday June 21, @06:36AM (#3742421)

[...] As a [project] manager I get very tired of hearing about the programmers, sysadmins, etc. complaining that such-and-such can't be done, or otherwise blocking progress. Much more often than not things that 'can't be done' just require a re-statement of the problem and some creative application of simple ideas [...]

In the following entry, PinglePongle highlights directly the antagonism felt by project managers from programmers and stresses, in emotive and personal terms, the PM priority for getting things done:

Project Managers don't need to be techies... (Score:5, Insightful) by PinglePongle (8734) on Friday June 21, @06:58AM (#3742478)

[...] The attitude of most of the posts in this subject has been ‘huh, we’re 200 times smarter than those idiots running the project, they’re so stupid they couldn’t blah blah blah’. Hey, if you’re so smart, it’s your job to use that intelligence to move the project forward, not whine about how what a bad job everyone else is doing.

PM knowledge

This line of identity construction involves project managers making claims about PM knowledge that run counter to the attributions of programmers. Just as programmers claim that project managers are ignorant of the technical knowledge necessary to produce high quality code, so project managers claim that programmers lack the technical knowledge required to manage projects effectively. While project managers acknowledge that programmers have narrow technical knowledge they are alleged to be ignorant about a fundamental business imperative: the process of getting functioning software to the customer in timely and financially viable way.

⁵ There are distinct overtones here of Douglas McGregor’s ‘Theory X and Theory Y’ account of managerial personality (McGregor, 1960). According to Theory X, workers are lazy, do not share the organization’s goals, cannot be trusted and require close supervision. By contrast, Theory Y managers assume that employees are mature, self-disciplining, self-motivated and needing little direct organizational control. Project managers in the exchange we analyse seem to express Theory X assumptions.

In a seemingly frustrated mood, Thunderheart begins his/her posting with a bold assertion: 'engineers are NOT project managers'. To conflate the respective skill sets, s/he maintains, is to court disaster and should be avoided. This entry is typical of several postings that celebrate the technical demands and professional competency required of project managers. It seems to be an expression of the PM's annoyance with being portrayed by the *Slashdot* community as technically incompetent. Here is an emotionally charged plea on the part of a project manager to have his or her skills acknowledged by techies as being every bit as technically demanding and professionally challenging as those of the programmer:

Engineers are NOT Project Managers (Score:3, Insightful) by Thunderheart (574412) on Friday June 21, @08:12AM (#3742673)

Whether its IT, Municipal drafting Electrical or whatever, Engineers (regardless of how long they have 'managed' projects) are NOT Project Managers. You frustrate the hell out of me. I've been a Professional Project Manager for years and an Amateur computer geek. The thing that always stuck in my craw is the assumption that just because a person knows an Engineering Discipline that they automatically know how to manage projects. Project Management is a complex discipline and to manage projects well takes a solid educational background in that arena. It is a skill set unto itself. Document Controls, managing Gaant charts and schedules and (especially) managing the 'people' end of things takes a great deal of effort to excel at. But NOOOOOO, Engineers always assume that because they can conceive a project, they MUST be able to manage it, and it always ends up as a grand jitterbug called, 'Crisis Management' [...]

In a more measured and rational tone, rsmah makes a very similar point about the difference between PM and programming skill sets. PM has, as it were, an extraverted orientation toward the wider organization and business requirements while programmers, by necessity, have a more introverted focus on architecture and coding:

Don't mix management and architecture (Score:5, Insightful) by rsmah (518909) <.~moc.xobop.ta.hamr.> on Friday June 21, @06:38AM (#3742429)

The problem your firm seems to be facing is that you are mixing project management with system design/architecture. What's the difference you ask? Project management is the process of resource allocation, scheduling, budgeting and task tracking. System design/architecture is the process of figuring out what should be built and how it should be structured internally.

Good project managers need a different set of skills than system architects. Project managers think in terms of timelines, tasks and dollars. Architects think in terms of system components, their interactions, user requirements and technology. While there are some people who can do both well, they are quite rare as they require fairly different ways of thinking.

Like Thunderheart and rsmah in the previous extracts, bons argues that the solution to the original question posed by welshdave is to acknowledge the difference between the programmer and the project manager. The suggestion that a programmer should attend courses by the Project Management Institute (the dominant professional project management body in the USA) reaffirms the idea that there are fundamental things that programmers do not know.

Get certified and go to the local PMI meetings (Score:4, Informative) by bons (119581) on Friday June 21, @06:42AM (#3742440)

PMI [pmi.org] has all you need to know about certification and there are PMI meetings just about everywhere [google.com]. Attend a few of those and you'll either be networked enough to improve things or fins [*sic*] a better job.

Fnkmaster also emphasises the lack of business awareness of programmers and the need, therefore for PM and Technical Project Manager [TPM] roles:

Re:Oh Please! (Score:5, Informative) by Fnkmaster (89084) on Friday June 21, @08:59AM (#3742869)

This is pure trash. The fact is that most programmers don't and don't really care to understand much about the business. That's exactly the reason that you need technical leads or TPMs who understand both the business requirements and enough of technology to make reasonable trade-off decisions, and either work closely with a business-oriented PM/requirements person, or have excellent rapport with upper-management (i.e. have their trust – not be perceived as a lying technology person).

The following extract gives explicit form to the body of knowledge that constitutes the IT project management role. Once again, in this identity claim there seems to be some exasperation that programmers do not appreciate what PM entails:

It's not as easy as it looks (Score:5, Informative) by James Youngman (3732) on Friday June 21, @06:59AM (#3742480) Homepage

There's much more to successful project management than there appears, particularly when the PM is also managing the relationship with an external client. It's the PM's job to make the client happy and (usually) deliver a profit. In a software context, this normally means delivering some software that works [...]

As a technical person, skills that you will need to gain in order to be a successful PM will include

- * Understanding the business context and business drivers
- * Managing client relationships (even for internal clients)
- * Estimating and planning skills
- * Tracking progress against plan – and taking appropriate action (pay attention to this one!)
- * An understanding of what timescales are realistic. For example, is it realistic to estimate design:code:test in the ratio 3:2:1? (answer: no).
- * Understand that you need to make it possible for the client to change their mind half-way through
- * Delegation skills (you can't do it all yourself, you know!) and motivational skills (i.e. understand the kinds of things you can / can't ask of people).
- * Risk analysis/mitigation
- * Personal organisation and time management
- * (In some shops) Project accounting skills

Also, don't underestimate how much work this is. [...]

Finally, terrapyn promotes a unitarist vision of organizational performativity which, as with previous extracts, emphasises the *difference* between PM and technical coding roles:

Re:Consider it an advantage... (Score:5, Insightful) by terrapyn (259226) on Friday June 21, @07:23AM (#3742546)

I think the biggest contributor to project failures I have seen is the attitude you are expressing. The project manager has a distinct role that is NOT 'database designer', 'programmer' or other technical function, but which instead is focused on the coordination and communication among the team members and with outside parties (clients, management, users, finance, etc.) in order to JOINTLY build and execute a plan.

In these project manager narratives that stress the need for technical PM knowledge necessary to expedite the role (which, differs from that of the programmer), we find certain resonances and parallels with the aesthetic concerns that programmers express about the production of code. Project managers speak of having 'skills', of how you can 'excel' at managing projects or how you must build 'excellent' relations. The idea that project managers must be able to make 'reasonable trade-off decisions' is suggestive of how PM might also be conceived of as a craft or art which somehow *exceeds* its bureaucratic functionality. In our, admittedly small, data set we even found the management equivalent of 'ugly' code: 'jitterbug Crisis Management'. Perhaps the performative ideals of PM and the 'contemplative' and artistic ideals of hackers share much more than what might appear at first sight. In one sense, therefore, we might understand the conflict between programmers and project managers as representing, in part at least, a conflict of incompatible aesthetics. This may not be so surprising if we acknowledge that the ethics and politics of employment relations cannot be easily parcelled out from aesthetic concerns. To reflect on identity conflict in terms of its aesthetic dimension in a work domain that might usually be thought to be mundane and anti-aesthetic could, as our analysis suggests, shed fresh light on IT workplace relationships.

Conclusions

The relationship between project managers and software programmers that emerges from our analysis of the *Slashdot* exchanges has several dimensions. Firstly, there is an antagonistic quality to conflicting identity claims with opposition to project management being one of the fundamental aspects of programmer identity construction. Programmers represent themselves as (1) more knowledgeable (both technically and in general) than project managers; and (2) initiated insofar as they understand the intrinsic value of code and what makes for high quality software production. Project managers represent themselves as (1) more knowledgeable than programmers insofar as they understand fundamental aspects of software production, particularly with respect to business constraints, which programmers routinely ignore; and (2) action-focused, as opposed to programmers who simply 'whine' about how complex and difficult things are.

Secondly, there is a collaborative dimension to the relationship between programmers and project managers. These two groups are compelled into practical everyday collaboration by exogenous market forces and business imperatives. In order to keep their jobs they have to work together to produce functioning software.

Thirdly, there is an apparent parity between the two groups, resulting from their technical proximity, despite their unequal position in the organizational hierarchy. As common semantics imply, project *managers* are, by bureaucratic designation, positioned higher up the corporate ladder than programmers, but as managers of relatively low rank, they are very close to and heavily dependent on programmers. The dependence is reinforced by the fact that software programmers hold advanced technical knowledge that project managers often lack. This parity between the groups is illustrated by the way in which ‘technical knowledge’ is mobilized by both in order to represent their identities vis-à-vis the other. Furthermore, it is interesting to note how the aesthetic sensitivities programmers express for code have an implicit equivalent within project manager narratives.

Analysing the relationship between programmers and project managers in high-tech environments enables us to shed new light on workplace conflict. Here we find various members of the organisation possessing unique skills and knowledge, making specialized and mutually interdependent contributions to production and hence being similarly indispensable. We have attempted to show how this indispensability – even more pronounced in our case due to the close hierarchical proximity of project managers and programmers – does not minimise the antagonism between groups. The strong antagonism we have presented is, however, limited to the verbal realm, and is, in our data, mostly exhibited not in direct disputes *between* the groups but through discussions *within* the groups. For the most part, it appears that the respective parties talk past each other.

There is clear evidence from our data that participants in the *Slashdot* discussions – particularly the programmers – demonstrate a conscious awareness of what might reasonably be construed as a divergence of interest between management and workers. In other words, programmers make recourse to a vocabulary of motives that *instantiates* the orthodox Labour Process view of workplace conflict and resistance. Perceived *differences* between ‘worker’, ‘manager’ and resulting ‘conflict of interest’ are discursive resources that both programmers and project managers call upon in the co-construction of their workplace relationships. However, as we have argued elsewhere (Piñeiro 2003), programmers often openly espouse and adopt the same ultimate goals as managers: they claim that their concern about the elegance of code does yield better functioning, less ‘buggy’ and, eventually, more profitable software products. The divergence of interest that both parties keenly publicize lies not so much in an opposed view of the common goal at hand as in alternative ways to achieve it. For programmers, ‘organizational goals’ can be met through effective and elegant software production, while, for project managers, the solution resides in ‘better management’ (in the form of closer control, team working and the discipline of project management itself). What is important from our point of view, then, is that these displays of divergent interest and managerial rhetoric that seek to de-politicize organization through espoused visions of collective action are situated and expressed in localized micro-narratives. In other words, conflict is, as it were, an etic signifier that we, as analysts, use to condense and summarize features of the local co-creation and discursive production of organization. From this interpretative position, identity performances of the sort we have been concerned with in this article play a *constitutive* role in the production, expression and maintenance of workplace conflicts within IT environments.

Apart from the consequences it might have for daily collaboration, which our narrative data do not permit us to comment on, the antagonism we have seen plays a central role in the simultaneous creation and expression of identities. The conflict between two different discourses materialises in the continuous performative work through which identities are created, adopted and expressed in relation to a designated 'other' – be it project manager or programmer. Programmers and project managers in the software industry are, as discussed in the introduction, connected through a complex series of dependencies, making it practically impossible to claim that conflicts in this case are based on an underlying asymmetrical relation.

Conflict there is, however, and what we show in the excerpts above is its discursive (re)production and *enactment* through forms of narrative. Whether or not conflict derives from the kind of claims made by critical realists and Labour Process theorists about the underlying ontological *structures* of social relations within post-industrial societies remains a metaphysical question for this particular article. The principal contribution we wish to make resides in trying to reveal the *pragmatic* dynamics of identity conflict as peculiarly manifest in hi-tech, project-managed, settings. Where there is close technical proximity between managers and those they manage, the signification of 'programmer' and 'manager' carries forceful performative effects. It is the narrative source and expression of such organizational effects that we have sought to explore and theorise in this article.

references

- Ackroyd, S. and S. Fleetwood (eds) (2000) *Realist Perspectives of Business and Organization*. London: Routledge.
- Ackroyd, S. and S. Fleetwood (eds) (2004) *Critical Realist Applications in Organisation and Management Studies*, London: Routledge.
- Alvesson, M. (2004) *Knowledge Work and Knowledge Intensive Firms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Alvesson, M. and D. Kärreman (2007) 'Unraveling HRM: identity, ceremony, and control in a management consulting firm', *Organization Science*, 18(4): 711-723.
- Alvesson, M. and H. Willmott (2004) 'Identity regulation as organizational control: producing the appropriate individual', in M.J. Hatch and M. Schultz (eds) *Organizational Identity: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Angell, I. (2000) *The New Barbarian Manifesto: How to Survive in the Information Age*. London: Kogan Page.
- Austin, J.L. (1976) *How to Do Things With Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bruckman, A. (1992) 'Identity workshop: emergent social and psychological phenomena in text-based virtual reality', [<ftp://ftp.cc.gatech.edu/pub/people/asb/papers/identity-workshop.rtf>], visited 27 April 2008.
- Burawoy, M. (1979) *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labour Process Under Monopoly Capitalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Burrell, G. (1988) 'Modernism, post modernism and organizational analysis 2: the contribution of Michel Foucault', *Organization Studies*, 9(2): 221-235.
- Burrell, G. (1998) *Pandemonium: Towards a Retro-Organization Theory*, London: Sage.
- Burrell, G. and Morgan, G. (1979) *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*, London: Heinemann.
- Butler, J. (1990) 'Performative acts and gender constitution: an essay in phenomenology and feminist theory', in S-E. Case (ed.) *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, Ed., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

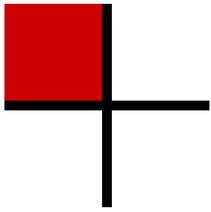
- Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, London: Routledge.
- Case, P. and E. Piñeiro (2006) 'Aesthetics, performativity and resistance in the narratives of a computer programming community', *Human Relations*, 59(6): 753-782.
- Cederström, C. and R. Grassman (2008) 'The masochistic reflexive turn', *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 8(1): 41-57.
- Chia, R. (1996) *Organizational Analysis as Deconstructive Practice*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Chia, R. (ed.) (1998) *In the Realm of Organization: Essays for Robert Cooper*. London: Routledge.
- Cicmil, S. and D.E. Hodgson (2006) 'Making projects critical: an introduction', in D.E. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*, London: Routledge.
- Cooper, R. (1989) 'Modernism, post modernism and organizational analysis 3: the contribution of Jacques Derrida', *Organization Studies*, 10(4): 479-502.
- Daft, R.L. (1995) *Organization Theory and Design*, 5th edition. St. Paul MN: West Publishing.
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1988) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Athlone Press.
- Derrida, J. (1977) *Limited Inc*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Donaldson, L. (1996) *For Positivist Organization Theory: Proving the Hard Core*. London: Sage.
- Edwards, P. (1986) *Conflict at Work: A Materialist Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Etzioni, A. (1961) *A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations*. London: Free Press.
- Florence, M. (1994) 'Foucault, Michel, 1926-', in G. Gutting (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Brighton: Harvester.
- Friedman, A. (2004) 'Strawmanning and labour process analysis', *Sociology*, 38(3): 573-591.
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1967) *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. New York: Doubleday.
- Grint, K. (1991) *The Sociology of Work: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hassard, J. and M. Parker (eds) (1993) *Postmodernism and Organizations*. London: Sage.
- Himanen, P. (2001) *The New Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age*. London: Vintage.
- Hodgson, D.E. (2002) 'Disciplining the professional: the case of project management', *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(7): 803-21.
- Hodgson, D.E. (2004) 'Project teams: the legacy of bureaucratic control in the post-bureaucratic organisation', *Organization*, 11(1): 81-100.
- Hodgson, D.E. and S. Cicmil (2006) 'Are projects real? the PMBOK and the legitimation of project management knowledge', in D.E. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*, London: Routledge.
- Jacques, R. (1996) *Manufacturing the Employee: Management Knowledge from the 19th to 21st Centuries*. London: Sage.
- Kärreman, D. and M. Alvesson (2001) 'Making newspapers: conversational identity at work', *Organization Studies*, 22(1): 59-89.
- Knights, D. (2001) 'Hanging out the dirty washing', *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 30(4): 68-84.
- Knights, D. and Willmott, H. (1989) 'Power and subjectivity at work: from degradation to subjugation in social relations', *Sociology*, 23(4): 975-995.
- Lindgren, M. and J. Packendorff (2006) 'Projects and prisons', in D.E. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*, London: Routledge.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press.
- McGregor, D. (1960) *The Human Side of Enterprise*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- O'Doherty, D. (forthcoming) 'Retrieving the 'missing subject' in labour process analysis: towards emancipation and praxis', in Alvesson, M., Bridgman and H. Willmott (eds) *Handbook of Critical Management Studies*. Oxford: Oxford.

- O'Doherty, D. and H. Willmott (2001a) 'The question of subjectivity and the labour process', *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 30(4): 112-132.
- O'Doherty, D. and H. Willmott (2001b) 'Debating labour process theory: the issue of subjectivity and the relevance of poststructuralism', *Sociology*, 35(2): 457-76.
- Oxford English Dictionary* [Online <http://www.oed.com/>, visited 28 March 2008.]
- Piñeiro, E. (2003) *The Aesthetics of Code*. Stockholm, Arvinus Förlag.
- Piñeiro, E. and P. Case (2008) 'Outsourcing in high-tech corporations: voices of dissent, resistance and complicity in a computer programming community', in D. Jemielniak and J. Kociatkiewicz (eds) *Management Practices in High-Tech Environments*, Hershey PA: IGI Global.
- Schein, E.H. (1985) *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Searle, J. (1977) *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, London: Cambridge University Press.
- Shenhav, Y.A. (1999) *Manufacturing Rationality: The Engineering Foundations of the Managerial Revolution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, F.W. (1986 [1911]) *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Easton PA: Hive Publishing.
- Thompson, P. and S. Ackroyd (1995) 'All quiet on the workplace front? a critique of recent trends in British industrial sociology', *Sociology*, 29(4): 615-33.
- Thompson, P. and D. McHugh (1995) *Work Organizations: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd edition. London: Macmillan.
- Thompson, P. and C. Smith (2000-1) 'Follow the redbrick road: reflections on pathways and out of the labor process debate', *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 30(4): 40-67.
- Weber, M. (1976) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons, 2nd ed., London: Allen and Unwin.
- Webster, F. (ed.) (2001) *Culture and Politics in the Information Age*. London: Routledge.

the authors

Peter Case is Professor of Organization Studies, Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, and Director of the Bristol Centre for Leadership and Organizational Ethics. He served as chairperson of the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism from 2002-7 and is general co-editor of *Culture & Organization*.
E-mail: Peter.Case@uwe.ac.uk

Erik Piñeiro is a researcher at the School of Technology and Health, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm. He recently returned from a postdoc at the Scandinavian Consortium for Organizational Research at Stanford University. He was previously with the Department of Industrial Economics and Management at the Royal Institute of Technology.
E-mail: erikp@kth.se



Pull yourselves together, guys! A gendered critique of project managers' ethics in a public sector context

Lucia Crevani and Thomas Shinozaki Lennerfors

abstract

Project management is omnipresent, but the growth of project management practices and discourses has suffered – and is still suffering – from a lack of ethical reflection. Moreover, most of the existing literature on project management ethics aims at universality and generalised frameworks. We take a critical stance to such ambitions and draw upon a tradition of thought that relates ethics intrinsically to community practices. We therefore present a rich account of an empirical case, that of the Swedish Road Administration (SRA), where the context –the public sector, the construction industry, the project managers relying on external suppliers – is extremely important in order to understand how ethics is constructed. Drawing on critical perspectives on projects and gender, as well as on feminist ethics, we read the empirical material and show how ethics is constructed in complex and sometimes contradictory and surprising ways. We show how being (or seeming to be) in control becomes a central issue, at the same time as the traditional dichotomy of a masculine ethics versus a feminine ‘ethics of caring’ is problematic as such constructs are fluid and intertwined.

Introduction

From the genesis of contemporary project management, which is often traced back to large military projects in the USA in the 1940s and 50s, project management has spread across many sectors and countries, becoming a legitimate way of organising work in many different situations (Blomquist and Söderholm, 2002). However, the growth of project management practices and discourses continues to suffer from a certain lack of reflection with regards to the ethics of project management. The fields of technology ethics and business ethics have gained importance following the increasing predominance of technology in society and the growing scope of the private sector, respectively, while the same has not occurred in the field of project management. Talk on project management ethics is scarce, even though project management talk is omnipresent. Critical reflection and analysis on how project management ethics is constructed in specific contexts is extremely important because of the increasing influence of project management discourse and practices in a growing number of areas. Moreover, prescriptive and functionalist voices, constructing project management as a general profession, have come to dominate the field. A critical stance is therefore needed in order to bring up an important issue, ethics, and to problematize it without

falling into normativism and universalism. In this paper, we will make an attempt to start filling this lacuna.

Looking at the construction industry in Sweden, the empirical setting of this article, it is striking that the entire industry endures the notoriety of low ethical standards. Therefore, an industry-wide effort to improve the ethical standards was initiated in 2002 (SOU, 2002) – an effort that involved actors from both the public and private sector and resulted in the report ‘Pull yourselves together, guys!’ – ‘*Skärpning gubbar!*’ in Swedish. While there have thus been animated discussions on ethical problems among practitioners, such issues have only been scantily researched.

Most of the existing literature on project management ethics aims at universality and a general framework of project management ethics. The Project Management Institute (PMI), responsible for the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK)¹, has a code of conduct which may serve as a starting point for ethical discussions in projects (PMI, 2006). The PMI code is a normative text with no ambition of presenting critical research on project management ethics and it might be quite unfair to subject it to critique from non-practitioners. However, PMI remains to be the institution conveying opinions held by leading practitioners in this rapidly expanding profession (Hodgson and Cicmil, 2007). We claim that the universalism underlying this code of conduct does not capture the complexities of project management ethics. On the other hand, there is a stream of literature that builds on the philosophical tradition of applied ethics, where rather simplified takes of different strands of ethical theories (e.g. utilitarian, rights-based, deontological theories) are condensed to a set of tools that might be helpful for understanding the ethical dimension of a project (Helgadóttir, 2007). The critique against this tradition is that such tools are detached from project practices, a critique thus similar to the critique against the universalist ethics expressed through standard documents such as PMI’s PMBOK: understanding ethical practices requires an understanding of context and local circumstances.

To further this line of critique, we will draw on a tradition of thought that relates ethics to community practices. A main source of inspiration is the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, whose series of books has argued against any possibility of giving rational explanations to ethical beliefs outside a community or a tradition (MacIntyre, 1985, 1988, 1990). What is labelled ‘rational’ or ‘ethical’ only makes sense within a particular community with its own tradition. This de-legitimises any attempts to ground an ethics on pure speculative reason or on socially detached rationality – or a veil of ignorance – since all such positions are implausible. MacIntyre is certainly not the only one who advances a theory based on the creation of ethics as part of a social practice. This social construction of ethics (values, ideals, norms) is one of the main components in Critical Theory (Lukács, 1971; Mannheim, 1976) – a component that renders emancipation possible since structures are mouldable.

¹ Several professional and academic associations share an ambition to formulate, maintain and develop a coherent body of knowledge within the project management field. However, when explicitly mentioning the *Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK)*, we refer to the standard document and the registered trademark owned and published by the Project Management Institute (PMI) since 1987.

In a male-dominated project-based industry such as the construction sector, the social construction of ethics intersects with the construction of gender. Taking a feminist stance, we are inspired by what can be referred to as the feminist critique of ethics (a quite diversified field, as we note in the next section). In the same vein as MacIntyre, such critique rejects a universal conception of ethics and reclaims legitimacy for an ethics embedded in a context of relations and interactions. Subjects are no longer detached and autonomous; rather, they are interconnected and dependent. To heed the context means that, in the male-dominated construction community, it is hardly rewarding to study ethics without taking gender into account (cf. Greed, 1991). Moreover, in one of the authors' works (Lennerfors, 2008), gender emerged as a very important category when conducting a study on ethics and project management. Another broad source of inspiration is the theoretical tradition of critical management studies, specifically critical project management studies. Within the field, contributions from a feminist stance have been quite rare – as will be discussed in the next section – which makes it even more important to not fall into the trap of gender-blindness.

In line with the thought that ethics is a part of a community, we will try to give a rich account of a case study – hence the relatively large number of pages dedicated to a critical analysis of the empirical material. Such a focus should not be interpreted as an attempt to draw general conclusions from a single case. Rather, we intend to discuss an interesting case in order to problematize a number of issues concerning the construction of ethics and gender. Our aim is to explore the complexity of such constructions by bringing forward what may be considered as discrepancies. We will discuss how femininity and masculinity related to ethics are not the terms of a discrete dichotomy, but rather may be seen as more fluid constructs.

To summarize, this article intends to add to the limited discussion about ethics in project management by taking a gender perspective; we also want to criticize universalistic stances on ethics and, indirectly, on project management, by analysing the importance of the context with reference to an empirical case. But let's not jump to conclusions. We start by sketching the outlines of the theoretical framework for our analysis.

Critical analyses of ethics in project management – a theoretical framework

As pointed out, ethics is rarely acknowledged as a central aspect of project management, and we have yet to see the establishment of a tradition of critical approaches to the analysis of ethics in project management. Other researchers have been engaged in similar questions driven by a critical preoccupation, of course. We can roughly divide such analyses into two streams, namely 1) critical perspectives on project management, in which some adopt a gender perspective and 2) feminist ethics as a critique of traditional ethics. We will briefly discuss these traditions below.

Critical perspectives on project management, 'traditional' and gendered

Critical analyses of project management, inspired by the field of Critical Management Studies, have focused on different aspects, but one of the most discussed issues is how control and discipline are enacted, constructed, and manifested in this 'new' form of work. While project workers are viewed upon as emancipated, creative and autonomous subjects, critical researchers have shown how formal tools and structural arrangements, the professionalization of the project management discipline, and also more subtle informal and individualized mechanisms, have shaped project work practices and project workers' subjectivities (Hodgson, 2002; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006a; Thomas, 2006). Project managers control individuals working in projects, but are also, as professional project managers, self-disciplined. The issue of control and self-disciplination in project work has, therefore, become a central preoccupation in this line of research.

Likewise, mainstream project research tends to view projects as flexible, action-oriented opposites of permanent bureaucracies (cf Lundin and Söderholm, 1995). However, both projects and bureaucracy rely on rationalised and formalised tools and techniques as well as on rules (Hodgson, 2004; Hällgren and Söderholm, 2006), and they both emphasise the objectification of work and strict control (Thomas, 2006). Therefore, while project management might have represented a possible emancipation from the shackles of the iron cage of bureaucracy, project management may indeed seem to be reinforcing the control of individuals.

Most critical project studies have focused on formal control mechanisms within project management and their complex interplay with more cultural or normative forms of discipline and control. Less has been written on the construction of explicit ethical norms to follow and on how these norms are then handled in practice. Even if the step from analysing and taking a critical stance on control to discussing ethics is not that long, it has seldom been taken. There is clearly a need for studies within the critical tradition that focus on how ethics is constructed when working with projects, particularly rich empirical studies.

To further the notion of ethics as constructed in project work settings dominated by masculine norms, we need to take into account the notion of ethics as gendered. Gender plays a significant role, still even critical studies have suffered from gender blindness (Martin, 2003a). From a gender perspective, work, organizations and knowledge about management are no longer considered to be 'neutral'; rather they are sites for producing and reproducing gender and gendered norms (cf. Alvesson and Billing, 1999; Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Kanter, 1993; Wahl et al., 2001). Consequently, gender-informed critical approaches add a new power dimension to traditional critical theory by recognising the presence of a gender order. Hirdman describes this gender order as constituted by two logics (Hirdman, 1988). The first is the separation of the masculine from the feminine and the second the subordination of the feminine to the masculine which is considered the norm. The underlying point is that the gender order is an ongoing construction; therefore it can, and should be, subjected to critical scrutiny (Martin, 2003b).

Critical project researchers have indeed occasionally used gender theory to analyse project management knowledge and practice. Masculinities are predominant in texts such as the PMBOK – the ‘bible’ of project management (Buckle and Thomas, 2003) – but project work has also been shown to reproduce inequalities in practice (Gill, 2002; Styhre et al., 2005) and reaffirm masculinities as control, competition and dedication to work in situations where there was expectations on teamwork opening up for femininities such as cooperation and empathy (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006b). Although these studies focus on different aspects, we can see how working in projects has meant a re-construction of competence as intertwined with the construction of (certain) masculinities. Given these notions on disciplination and gender as central aspects in the analysis of the construction of ethics in project work, we now turn to the underlying issue of feminist ethics as an alternative to (masculine) universal ethics.

Feminist ethics

A feminist critique of ethics is not a homogeneous stream of critique, but rather a multitude of voices that criticise something conceptualised as ‘mainstream’ or ‘traditional’ ethical theory. Carol Gilligan’s critique of the implicit bias towards a detached ethics of universality in Lawrence Kohlberg’s experiments can be seen as paradigmatic in this sense (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1981). Gilligan’s work brings up the subordinated role of an ethics of care and a relational ethics that are part of the moral experiences of most women. Even though Gilligan’s work is not intended to be essentialising, it may appear as built on essentialist assumptions when described in a schematic and simplified fashion (Crane and Matten, 2004). In this latter version, men are expected to handle ethics as a universal matter, to which the feminist critique opposes by advocating the alternative ‘ethics of care’. The main point in Gilligan’s work is that theories of ethics are gender-blind and written by/for a community of men only.

The relational theme that is brought up in Gilligan’s work has been developed into several directions. One such interpretation is developed by Noddings, whereby caring is situated in a relationship which is contextualized (Noddings, 1984). One cares for particular individuals, not about mankind as such. This relational type of an ethics of care brings up the need for understanding the context of ethics. Another stream of feminist ethics emphasises the mother-child relation as the foundation of ethics. It is claimed that one party is always more vulnerable, and such an empirical fact should thus be taken into account when developing theories (Ruddick, 1983). The mother-child relationship is here contrasted to the contractual relationship held to be the predominant mode of portraying societal relations. The contractual relationship describes a relation between two equal, independent, rational persons, while the mother-child relationship describes a relationship where one party has (unlimited) power and the other one is vulnerable and dependent (ibid.). Virginia Held, in a way, brings this mother-child relationship to the next level, in expanding its legitimacy from the private realm (at home) to the public realm (Held, 1983). A possible step towards a better and more ethical society could be a re-conceptualisation of human relationships from contractual to care-based also in the public realm. However, there are possible deficiencies with the mother-child relationship, when it comes to the unequal distribution of power, and the possible arbitrariness in the discretion of the mother.

What we find valuable in feminist critiques of ethics is a suspicion against universal accounts of ethics being based on some kind of detached rationality. A main point in feminist critiques of ethics is not only to include the moral experiences of women into theories, but also to emphasise those aspects of ethics which tend to disappear in the (serious) world of men, namely relationships, care, cooperation, consensus, community and dependency. What we end up with is a critique which shares some of MacIntyre's arguments, especially his later work on the importance of dependency (MacIntyre, 1999), but with a specific feminist dimension.

An important point to which we must return is the social construction not only of ethics and project management, but also of gender. In our analysis we will speak of masculinities and femininities which are to be understood as social and cultural constructs shaping the values, experiences and meanings that are culturally interpreted as typical of men respectively women in a given social context (Alvesson and Billing, 1999), or better 'within a system of gender relations that give them meaning as *gendered 'masculine'* (Martin, 2001: 588) or *'feminine'*. As in other dichotomies the masculine/feminine one can be criticized for creating opposites where 'real' men and women move between such constructs. There is also a debate, although quite limited, on the use of dualisms and dichotomies in organization studies, especially in terms of gendered dichotomies (Alvesson and Billing, 1999; Holmquist and Lindgren, 2002), for example the gendered labelling of leadership (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). Knights (1997) analyzes the different approaches to dualisms and their consequences from a theoretical point of view, and how, even trying to undermine gender inequality, researchers end up by reproducing it. Celebrating dualism, for instance, is a way of making 'the other' visible, but it can imply conflict and hierarchy. Keeping in mind this issue, in practice we are still held accountable for what we do as a woman or a man, which means that doing gender may be unavoidable (West and Zimmerman, 1987). How we interpret an action or interaction depends on whether it is done by a woman or man as well as the kind of individual considered appropriate for certain positions are two examples of the (sometimes unconscious) gendered nature of organizations.

To summarize, a critical perspective on project management and on gender, and feminist ethics have elements in common and give our analysis a certain direction. They encourage us to pay attention to the social construction of both ethics and gender – and their mutual relation – to be suspicious of universalistic claims and, therefore, focus on their situated dimension and the importance of the context, and finally to analyse how these notions are constructed and what are the consequences in terms of control and discipline.

Short-circuiting projects and bureaucracy; the case of the SRA – project management in a context

Although projects have traditionally been narrowly defined in industrial terms, the label 'project' is today being applied to an array of widely different situations, both in working and private life, and the notion of project management may thus become an empty signifier. Therefore, even if some characteristics of working in projects may be common to all these endeavours, we do think that the context in which the project is

carried out affects how the practice of working in projects will be constructed. We will therefore describe the context of our study, the Swedish Road Administration (SRA), in some detail. We start from the big picture, the societal context, and turn to the SRA as a context, and end with the local practice of what project managers do at the SRA. First a few words on our method.

Method

The research project started as a study of ethics and project management in the construction industry. Gender emerged as an interesting category and perspective already during field work, although it was in the course of the analysis that we realized the complexity of the issue. Interviews with 31 people working in one of the SRA divisions, mostly project managers, have been carried out by one of the authors (male). Other people interviewed are heads of departments, a head of region, a director-general and employees from technical and legal support units. Of the 27 interviewed project managers, three were women; these figures also reflect the actual ratio of men to women in the total population of project managers. The questions dealt with what project management ethics is at the SRA: e.g., what ‘good project management’ is, how relations with the contractors should be handled, or how to handle ambiguous situations.

In analysing these interviews, we have taken an interpretative stance inspired by social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). We have treated them not as reports of how project management ‘really’ is done at the SRA. Rather, we relate to the interviews as accounts of how those people involved in project management construct an image of what good project management is as well as how one manages a project. Gender emerged as a central category partly due to how good project management has been described in terms that, with our theoretical understandings, are interpreted as gendered, and partly due to one of the interviewee’s accounts of herself as a gendered project manager. In other words, we consider gender as a contextualized practice and we base our analysis of certain constructions as gendered on, respectively, our own theoretical position, and on ‘participants’ orientations’ as evident in the text (cf. indexing in Sunderland, 2004; cf. also Swann, 2002). We also consider ‘numbers’ as important in this case: in an organization and an industry that has been and still is male dominated, men are in a privileged position to make sense of complex realities and shape norms for what good project management is, drawing upon masculinities in the industry. We will analyse talk as gendered not in terms of ‘language style’ (cf. Holmes, 2006), but in terms of what is said, i.e. which traces of the construction of masculinities/femininities we see in these accounts. Our analysis comprises several steps: we have re-read the empirical material several times ‘seeing’ new patterns as well as contradictions/inconsistencies, and at the same time we have re-read the theoretical contributions that inform our analysis ‘seeing’ how they helped us in our interpretations. In other words, we take a sceptical interpretive stance, where we try to combine an open attitude to the material with our theoretical understandings (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). The themes we will present can be said to have ‘emerged’ doing a close reading of these texts and keeping in mind the context for these texts. The quotes found in the article are significant as illustrations of how talk about a certain theme can take form, and are, of course, just a fraction of the empirical material. In the second part of our analysis, we have chosen to focus particularly on quotes from two of

the project managers, one woman, Pettersson, and one man, Axelsson. This does not mean that our entire discussion on gender and ethics relies on these two people, in particular the woman. Gender is present in the talk of the other project managers as well, particularly the men. Still, we found it extremely interesting to focus on them in the last part of our analysis and to juxtapose how they construct ethics because such constructions reveal a complexity that is not acknowledged by usual views on ethics and gender, particularly reductive readings of feminist ethics. By giving place to empirical constructions of ethics that 'disrupt' the theoretical understanding of masculine and feminine ethics, we do hope to enrich the theoretical discussion on ethics and gender. The aim of this is thus to explore, to problematize and to discuss the issue in a certain context and relate it to the theoretical work done. We do not aim at any general conclusion or universal theory, which would be a contradiction to our position. Of course, more empirical work can be done to reach an even deeper understanding of the phenomenon. It would be interesting, for example, to interview more women; something that might present some difficulty in this industry. Let's turn then to the context.

The context of project management ethics

We have argued that the context and community is important to understand not only ethics, but also project management. We hold that the most important factors are that the SRA is a big and important public sector organisation, located in the ethically problematic (and male dominated) construction industry, with no resources for implementing projects within the organization.

Public sector organization

The fact that the SRA is a public sector organisation is stressed by many respondents as the main argument for the need to uphold high ethical standards. The director-general explained in an interview that the entire activity of the SRA has to be based on 'ethical grounds'. He explains that the SRA is 'a public authority, responsible to the government, having to administer a rather significant amount of tax money' and that the SRA has 'to do that in a way that is aligned with the fundamental values that govern society.' Furthermore, SRA is constantly appearing in public media, which reinforces the need for being ethical. Many of the respondents also conceive of the private sector as a place somewhat void of ethics, which creates the necessity to protect the tax payers' money from companies in the private sector. This might be a general judgment on the private sector, but it is even more valid in the construction industry, according to an interviewed regional manager.

Swedish construction industry

The Swedish construction industry has a legacy of haphazard work, petty corruption, and inefficiency. The regional manager of the SRA explained that people and companies are always trying to take short-cuts and the SRA has to safeguard itself against these attempts. Many respondents, for example project manager Mr. Åkesson, states that the SRA is seen 'as a standard for the industry'. The respondents consider themselves as responsible for creating a sound 'tone at the top'. SRA is in fact the biggest Swedish public buyer of construction work with an annual turnover of 6.7

billion Swedish Kronor (around 700 million Euro). With great power, comes great responsibility.

A first obvious measure to raise standards in the construction industry, albeit not initiated by the SRA, was a project involving the whole industry, public buyer and private and public contractors to understand how to break down structures that stifle competition and pricing transparency, to reduce the use of illegal labour, and to strengthen the competence of the buyer. This work resulted in the previously mentioned official government report about the risks and possibilities of the construction industry (SOU, 2002). This industry-wide effort, spanning over public and private sectors, confirms the aforementioned claim that the construction industry has suffered from anti-competitive diseases. It also indicates that the industry is trying to get better and remove the stigma of 'unseriousness'. From the point of view of gender, the title of the report is also interesting: 'Pull yourselves together, guys!', or, for those who know Swedish, 'Skärpning gubbar!'. It is thus not only the industry which has problems, but these problems are attributed to men. A certain kind of 'old' men. It would not be a generalisation to suggest that the industry in which the SRA is a leading figure is dominated by middle-aged men. Only around 10 percent of the project managers at the SRA (in the division studied) are women (in 2003).

Tax payers' money but no operational resources

The ethically problematic and male dominated private construction industry is nevertheless an industry on which the SRA is dependent. In the wave of deregulation and privatisation of industries in the beginning of the nineties, it was decided that the SRA should focus on being a competent buyer of consulting services and construction work. They should have no internal resources for actually carrying out construction work. It is within this contextual setting that we understand project management, ethics and gender.

Project management ethics in a context

What is project management at the SRA? Project management is certainly a very complex practice with many dimensions. However, if we focus on how tax payers' money is used (the need for ethics in administrating tax payers' money was expressed by the director-general), we find that most of that money goes to suppliers. From this perspective, project management amounts to making the best use of tax payers' money. Therefore, the relationship with suppliers (e.g. consultants and contractors) might be held to constitute a rather central role in project management ethics. There are certainly other ethical issues that may be addressed: environmentalism, state appropriation of private land, accurate information to the public, etc. Nevertheless we have focused on the supplier relation, not only because the relation to supplier is economically significant, but also because of the inherent ethical problems and corruption in the intersection between the public and private sector (Andvig et al., 2000; Rose-Ackerman, 1978), and because of the repeated references to ethical problems in supplier relations during the interviews. The SRA as mentioned before has no resources for implementing projects, which makes them dependent on the suppliers. The supplier relation is where discussions about project blueprints, extra costs and compensation are held, which can

lead to increased costs for the SRA and increased income for the suppliers. Given this contextual description of project management at the SRA, an organisation with intense contact with the private construction industry, what is project management ethics?

Masculine and feminine project management ethics at the SRA

Let us start with some insights from how the project managers conceive professional ethics by asking them how a good project manager handles the relation with suppliers. One recurrent answer is that it is about keeping a straight line from the beginning of the project. You act correctly from the beginning and you do not change your behaviour and mind during the project, no matter what contractors demand or think. In other words, there is a very strong tendency amongst the project managers to talk about fairness as *independence* from contractors.

You should be straightforward straight away, y'know. And then I think that they feel that they want to do business with you; that this is fair; that this is serious. (Åkesson)

The project manager thus has to uphold a strong unchanging character. This is also expressed by project managers at the SRA with the word '*integrity*'. Integrity is 'not to be under anybody's thumb' (Gustavsson) or 'to be economically independent of somebody' (Rickardsson). To maintain integrity is not only an issue related to that of being bought, or corrupted, by a contractor, but is also an issue related to everyday project work. Again, you shouldn't give in to any demands from the contractor. Moreover, you should treat every demand in the same way. As one project manager puts it:

[Ethics is about] acting in a good way. The different contractors should know that it doesn't matter if it is me or anybody else for whether they will get money or not. (Axelsson)

This means that, if a contractor approaches the project manager at the SRA, the project manager should act in a way which is totally *impersonal* and *impartial*. The contractors should know that it does not matter which of the project managers is approached with a demand; the answer should be exactly the same notwithstanding the personal identity of the project manager. To stay independent from the contractors and consultants guarantees the maintenance of impartiality: to 'get involved' can mean 'become partial'.

In these accounts of what it means to be a project manager what may be visible is the strong tendency towards concepts such as *integrity*, *independence*, *impartiality*, and *impersonality*. These very concepts are those unveiled as gendered by feminist critique of traditional organization theory (for example Kanter, 1993; Wahl et al., 2001; Alvesson and Billing, 1999; Collinson and Hearn, 1996). Masculinity constructed as toughness, rationality, independence, impersonality, authority, and control becomes the norm of how work is to be done. As Kanter (1993) puts it, a 'masculine ethic' can be identified as part of the early image of managers. This 'masculine ethic' (or organisational monoculture, Hearn, 1992) elevates the traits assumed to belong to some men as necessities for effective management, one of these traits is for example 'a capacity to set aside personal, emotional considerations in the interests of task accomplishment' (Kanter, 1993: 22). Independence is also a concept strongly related to

masculinity, for example by conceptualization of how identity is constructed in a masculine culture (as opposed to the interdependence characterising the feminine relational way): 'a self-concept that depends on differentiation and social-emotional separation from others' (Dachler and Hosking, 1995). At the risk of sounding more monolithic than we are, we can see how constructions of masculinity and of ethics are intertwined when project managers speak of good project management.

Another theme emerging from their accounts is the need for being in control. The SRA handles a great amount of tax money which has to be protected from profit maximising private sector suppliers. They speak of dominating the contractor. As one project manager states,

We command and control. [...] We command and control and order. Ha-ha! (Svantesson)

We have already discussed that control is one of the issues critical studies of project management have elicited. We see traces of control becoming self-discipline in our case too. The object of control is the relation with the contractor as well as one's own self in that relation. Control is interrelated with impersonality, impartiality, independence and integrity. Again, we are able to read the need for control through gender lenses and see how control is a fundamental element in the construction of masculinity, for example in 'competitive masculinity', a masculinity construction which implies a 'way of relating to the world wherein everything becomes an object of and for control' (Kerfoot and Knights, 1993: 671), which also demands self-discipline, self-control and self-domination. Indeed, to control social relations and one's own self-image has been held to be part of the identity work that especially men are doing in order to maintain a secure identity at work (Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Holgersson, 2003).

This preliminary analysis of project management at SRA suggests that the image of the good project manager corresponds and intersects with the construction of a certain type of masculinity. As in other organizations and contexts, competence and masculinity conflates (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). The gender order is re-constructed by making masculinity the norm and, thus, implicitly femininity as deviation. It then becomes interesting to look at what women say, since so far we have heard only male voices. Do women construct a good project manager in the same way?

One of the three women interviewed discusses the importance of being a woman for her conception of project management ethics.

[A project manager should be] fair. But I think that *as a gal* I might dare to be fairer. I don't have to show that I'm right. I can get back to a meeting and say 'well, we were wrong, you were right'. I don't know if it's easier for me than for a guy to do it, but I hope... well, actually it shouldn't be easier, but I think it might be. (Pettersson, emphasis added)

Pettersson is the only one of the three to discuss gender as an important component in ethics. She also speaks of fairness and describes herself, 'as a gal', as allowed to be more fair than other project managers. *As a gal* compared to *as a project manager*. She doesn't have to 'keep a straight line' like the male project managers. Nor does she have to prove that her actions stem from an unchanging character. She can be wrong, and can

try to correct mistakes, while the male attitude would be to carry on, and on (cf. Greed, 1991 for similar accounts of women in the same industry).

By explicitly referring to her gender as what makes the difference in terms of how she acts as a project manager, Pettersson interprets herself as ‘other’ than the norm, the guys. In a sense, the gender order is reproduced. She also seems to be aware that showing one’s weakness and fallibility is not what project managers do. Her account is therefore concordant with our analysis so far. We see an organization where project management ethics is constructed in masculine terms and where control is considered as a major issue.

Yet Pettersson’s ethics is not only different. In the quote above one might recognise a sense of pride. She considers herself to be really fair, while the men only want to be dominant and right all the time. This conception of ethics, as true fairness, as opposed to male dominance and insistence on being right, may be seen as a potential way of initiating change regarding project management ethics at the SRA (cf. Wahl, 1998). Instead of being right and being dominant, one should be fairer. Pettersson, however, holds that as a woman she can be fairer. This fairness might only be available to women. To sum up, our preliminary reading holds that there is a dominant masculine ethics at the SRA with values such as integrity, independence, impartiality, and control. Pettersson also frames these values as masculine, while at the same time presenting a better alternative – an ethics which takes fairness seriously. From now, we will continue reading the interview with Pettersson, but we will problematize its inherent relation to masculinities and femininities. We will present other empirical material that problematizes the monolithic view that both we, and Pettersson, have had up to now.

Consideration for suppliers: Problematizing masculinities and femininities

The supplier relation is where most of SRA’s money flows, so it is not surprising that a lot of the material in the interview concerns conflicts related to fair compensation. Pettersson holds that male project managers, while realising how a flawed argument had led to the supplier not being paid enough, cannot admit that they were wrong. They have to be in the right. Pettersson, as we have heard, claims to be different.

When I notice that the contractor is actually right and we were wrong, even though we have denied any compensation, then I want to give the contractor that compensation, but the construction management consultant does not agree with me. He thinks that we were so sure before. But I say that it later appeared that we were wrong. Then he says that it is up to the contractor to discover that. But I hope that we will be repaid in some other way in the future and he says: no way. [...] [The other project managers] do not agree, they think that you should keep a straight line. They do it in that way. It’s difficult to admit they were wrong. There, I think there is an advantage of being a gal. (Pettersson)

To be a female project manager in a male-dominated organization means to be more visible and to run the risk of being judged by stereotypical assumptions about women in general (Kanter, 1993). In our case, it could be argued that Pettersson herself has accepted such stereotypical assumptions, explaining her own behaviour as depending on her being a woman, i.e. someone who can show vulnerability and fallibility. When

women enter organizations the question becomes who is going to get precedence in constructing notions of 'women' and 'femininity'. Often it is men that are in positions of being able to do that (Wahl, 1998). In our case, it may be argued that Pettersson is actively constructing herself and stands for her own way of managing projects. Pettersson might thus be seen as what Wahl defines as a power resource (ibid.).

Nevertheless, why should a project manager at the SRA care about the suppliers' profitability? If the suppliers cannot present good arguments for extra compensation themselves, is it not remarkable that Pettersson herself finds the arguments for the suppliers and admits that she was wrong? In accord with our take on the feminist critique of ethics, Pettersson's description of project management ethics could well be in line with an ethics of care. What is remarkable for a feminist critique of ethics is that we have found evidence of an ethics of care even among male project managers at the SRA. They frequently state that the SRA has to understand how the suppliers are not in the business of charity, i.e. suppliers need to make money. The SRA has also to remember that it makes no sense to drive a supplier into bankruptcy (there are already too few actors). So, while our reading of the empirical material up to now has focused on a masculine ethics, another ethics based on consideration for the supplier, alongside the construction of dominance, impersonality, and independence exists. Axelsson, a male project manager, describes how lacunae in the contract might provide the institutionalised setting for being considerate:

Some lacunae in the contract should exist – the possibility for the contractor of getting some extra money. It doesn't have to be wrong. The competition is limited and yet the prices are, due to competition, very low. So somewhere, sometimes, they have to be able to get some extra income. (Axelsson)

Consideration and an ethics of care is part of project managers' account of how to deal with suppliers. Once, Pettersson was approached by a contractor who also wanted to get extra compensation. Listen to her account of the situation;

Once I got a telephone call from a contractor: 'Now I know that I don't have any chance, but we have had so many problems, we are 200.000 SEK minus. I beg you to get this money'. I told him that he couldn't ask for it straight out. And I felt, he only does this because I'm a gal. So I said: 'forget it'. However, I discussed the matter with a representative of a municipality also involved in this project, and he said 'the project was carried out in an exemplary manner, shouldn't they get something for it?'. We checked the contract for lacunae. And we found some lacunae, where the contractors could be entitled to some money. And they got a bit of what they demanded. We said: 'see it as a bonus'. This is the way to do it [i.e. bonuses for exemplary work]. You could also write the contract so that contractors get the incentive for doing a good job and coming up with good ideas. But you have to do that in a formalized way from the beginning. (Pettersson)

Pettersson interprets the indecent proposal as related to her being a woman. Our reading is that it is not the case. More or less tacitly, it is the way relations between project managers and contractors work. Finding lacunae is how you make money. Almost all project managers agree that contractors only make money if there are errors to be found in the contract.

An interesting turn is that Pettersson's argumentation for a different system reflects ideas widely diffused in the management literature giving expression for rationality. Returning to the preceding part, we see that Pettersson has indeed been discussing

fairness, not consideration. We interpret her way of describing how to handle relations with contractors as really the most impersonal, independent, impartial way. If the SRA has made a mistake, she deals with it in a rational and impartial manner by giving the contractor what is due the contractor.

What consequence does this have on our argument? Is the feminine ethics, in the description of Pettersson, indeed an ethics which strictly focuses on impartiality, impersonality, and a commitment for doing exactly ‘the right thing’? Do Pettersson’s ethics relate more to fairness than to consideration (an ethics of care)? Axelsson, on the other hand, does indeed care for the suppliers’ well-being. He stated that one should not drive a contractor into bankruptcy, that the contractors are vulnerable due to intense competition and that they are in need of some extra money once in a while. These insights seem to point to a situation where the feminine and masculine versions of ethics are not so dichotomous. Pettersson, who claims to use a feminine ethics, resembles textbook descriptions of a masculine ethics. Axelsson, a man, is into the business of caring and consideration. Nevertheless, there are some particularities in the accounts that might suggest why Pettersson can be considered different from the other project managers – namely control.

By leaving lacunae in the contract, project managers give contractors something extra. This is the way of caring for contractors. However, we hold that the masculine version of project management is to emphasise that they are still in control. Contractors find the lacunae themselves, present the problems to the project manager, who can do nothing else but accept extra costs. The scenario described by Pettersson, when she first says *no* and then says *yes*, is unacceptable in a masculine project management ethics. The common view is that there is a need to stay in control. By changing her mind, Pettersson deviates from this norm. The main issue is thus not about giving extra compensation to contractors; it is about giving the impression of being in control.

We view a construction of masculinity as paternalism: men exercising power by authority but with benevolence – a protective authority based on cooperation rather than coercion, a wise and self-controlled father that rules in a just way (Collinson and Hearn, 1994: 13). Research in the field of masculinities has long been interested in the fragility and precariousness of strong and authoritative identities (*ibid.*). In order to uphold such identities, men are constantly ‘working’ on that; not losing face is a central element. Here again the need of being in control is important, as well as the need for caring for the other men’s ‘face-keeping’ (Holgersson, 2003). Not crushing a contractor, but working with lacunae may be interpreted in this way too. Both parties keep their faces. Contractors accept being controlled and sign unrealistic contracts, as long as they can show profitable figures at the end of the project (for other cases and interpretations of the issue of contractual arrangements and inter-organizational relationships see for example Clegg et al., 2006 and Green, 2006).

To sum up, our empirical material problematises a strict division between a masculine and feminine ethics. Pettersson is impersonal and sticks to the facts, and she calls this feminine. Axelsson, a man, is caring and shows consideration. What is important is to not lose face and to seem to be in control.

Conclusion and discussion

Ethics is an important component of business and organization studies, often with the hope of finding universal applicable rules or principles to avoid the ‘trap of relativism’. Project management is no exception and, although ethics discussions are still relatively marginal, expectations of creating a general framework for ethics are dominant. Our empirical case takes place in the construction industry, in a public sector bureaucracy, which is held to have ‘historically intense’ relations to masculinity. Work is organized in projects, which also have been argued to reinforce and reify masculinities. Our choice of analysing this case through gender-lenses makes it possible to see what gender-blind studies would have missed.

It is therefore not surprising that ethics is constructed in terms of impersonality, impartiality, independence and integrity. Moreover, respondents work in projects and we suggest that project management discourse might contribute to translating ethics into ‘being in control’ more than might happen in other bureaucracies. Aspects of visibility and accountability in projects might contribute to norm systems even more rigid than the traditional iron cage bureaucracy. These contextual elements lead to a construction of ethics similar to the usual description of a masculine ethics in critical project management theory and feminist ethics writings. The context might also show how such ethics have been constructed: the construction industry has always been – and still is – dominated by men, who might reasonably be given precedence in interpreting reality.

In reaching this neat picture, we realized that there have been many ‘anomalies’ in the empirical material questioning such a monolithic view in the form of narrative themes that existed parallel to the expected masculine discourse. Male project managers have not only emphasized impartiality and independence, but also consideration and care. One female project manager spoke of feminine ethics, but also challenged the other project managers’ ethics by drawing on an ethics of detached rationality, a masculine ethics.

The complexity of how ethics is constructed and practiced in this case clearly shows that it is not possible to discuss ethics in a de-contextualized way. Moreover, femininities and masculinities are fluid and constantly under construction. As earlier mentioned, gendered dichotomies have been discussed within the field of organization studies from a theoretical point of view (cf. Alvesson and Billing, 1999; Holmquist and Lindgren, 2002; Knights, 1997). They are useful but problematic at the same time. Our contribution is to provide an empirical example of how femininities and masculinities become intertwined, even in a context where masculinities would indeed be expected to dominate.

Likewise, the case of the SRA provides a more nuanced description of the issue of control in projects. We see here that control is indeed a central and important issue, but is also a question of gendered disciplining. Men are subjected to discipline as they are expected to show they are in control (in line with what other critical studies have pointed out), but they are not strictly controlled in their actions (they still leave lacunae in contracts). They are expected to construct their own identity in masculine terms, something that can marginalise those who do not follow the same norm.

In conclusion, we do think that our article can contribute to the critique of universalism and normativism that has characterized most of the literature on project management and on ethics. We claim that the context in which project managers' work is of extreme importance and has to be taken into consideration to understand how projects are managed and how ethics takes form, instead of attempting to ground an ethics on socially detached rationality. This is also a methodological consideration: rich empirical studies are needed and we show how such an approach can provide interesting and sometimes surprising insights. Our article provides one example of how ethics in project management is constructed, and it would be interesting to see how this construction takes form in other contexts (for example in other industries or settings) and to compare such studies in order to reach a variety of versions of project management ethics that can give a more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

Most importantly, however, we add to the tradition of feminist organization studies by showing one (more) example of the gendered character of organizations and, in this case, the particular aspect of ethics in project management (even though it comes in unexpected ways). The article also belongs to a tradition of critical studies that highlights the central issue of control and discipline in project management work and identity construction. However, as indicated, control now assumes a gendered character. Moreover, we have discussed that dichotomies between different conceptualisations of ethics are fluid and we have shown instances of an ethics of caring between men, and of men that criticize a woman performing a masculine detached ethics. In this way we have tried to problematize the notions of detached ethics as masculine and an ethics of care as feminine. Future contextualized studies may contribute by going beyond, or, at least, by subjecting gendered dichotomies to critical scrutiny.

references

- Alvesson, M. and Y. D. Billing (1999) *Kön och organisation [Gender and Organization]*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Alvesson, M. and K. Skoldberg (2000) *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Andvig, J. C., O.-H. Fjeldstad, I. Amundsen, T. Sissener and T. Søreide (2000) *Research on Corruption: A Policy Oriented Study*. Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) & Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).
- Berger, P. L. and T. Luckmann (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin.
- Billing, Y. D. and M. Alvesson (2000) 'Questioning the notion of feminine leadership: a critical perspective on the gender labelling of leadership', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 7(3): 144-157.
- Blomquist, T. and A. Söderholm (2002) 'How project management got carried away', in K. Sahlin-Andersson and A. Söderholm (eds) *Beyond Project Management: New Perspectives on the Temporary – Permanent dilemma*. Malmö: Liber Ekonomi.
- Buckle, P. and J. Thomas (2003) 'Deconstructing project management: a gender analysis of project management guidelines', *International Journal of Project Management*, 21(6): 433-441.
- Clegg, S. R., T. S. Pitsis, M. Marosszeky and T. Rura-Polley (2006) 'Making the future perfect: constructing the Olympic dream', in D. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making projects critical*. London: Palgrave.
- Collinson, D. L. and J. Hearn (1994) 'Naming men as men: implications for work, organization and management', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 1(1): 2-22.

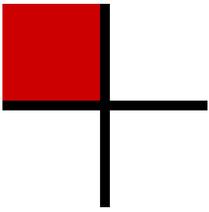
- Collinson, D. L. and J. Hearn (1996) *Men as Managers, Managers as Men: Critical Perspectives on Men, Masculinities and Managements*. London: Sage.
- Crane, A. and D. Matten (2004) *Business Ethics: A European Perspective: Managing Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability in the Age of Globalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dachler, H. P. and D. M. Hosking (1995) 'The primacy of relations in socially constructing organizational realities', in D. M. Hosking, H. P. Dachler and K. J. Gergen (eds) *Management and Organization: Relational Alternatives to Individualism*. Aldershot: Avebury. [http://www.relational-constructionism.org/media/primacy_of_relations.pdf]
- Gill, R. (2002) 'Cool, creative and egalitarian? exploring gender in project-based new media work in Europe', *Information, Communication & Society*, 5(1): 70-89.
- Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Greed, C. (1991) *Surveying Sisters: Women in a Traditional Male Profession*. London: Routledge.
- Green, S. (2006) 'The management of projects in the construction industry: context, discourse and self-identity', in D. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*. London: Palgrave.
- Hearn, J. (1992) *Men in the Public Eye: The Construction and Deconstruction of Public Men and Public Patriarchies*. London: Routledge.
- Held, V. (1983) 'The obligations of mothers and fathers', in J. Trebilcot (ed.) *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Ethics*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld.
- Helgadóttir, H. (2007) 'The ethical dimension of project management', *International Journal of Project Management*, 26(7): 743-748.
- Hirdman, Y. (1988) 'Genussystemet: reflektioner kring kvinnors sociala underordning' [The gender system: reflections on women's social subordination], *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 3: 49-63.
- Hodgson, D. (2002) 'Disciplining the professional: the case of project management', *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(6): 803-821.
- Hodgson, D. (2004) 'Project work: the legacy of bureaucratic control in the post-bureaucratic organization', *Organization*, 11(1): 81-100.
- Hodgson, D. and S. Cicmil (2007) 'The politics of standards in modern management: making 'the project' a reality', *Journal of Management Studies*, 44(3): 431-450.
- Holgersson, C. (2003) *Rekrytering av företagsledare: En studie i homosocialitet [Recruitment of Top Executives: A Study of Homosociality]*. Stockholm: EFI.
- Holmes, J. (2006) *Gendered Talk at Work: Constructing Social Identity through Workplace Interaction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Holmquist, C. and M. Lindgren (2002) 'Why opposites attract: on the problems of dichotomisation in research', paper presented at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting, Denver, Colorado, USA.
- Hällgren, M. and A. Söderholm (2006) 'The road to moral displacement in project management', paper presented at the 3rd Making Projects Critical Workshop 'Making Projects Critical: Beyond Project Rationality', Manchester Business School, UK.
- Kanter, R. M. (1993) *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kerfoot, D. and D. Knights (1993) 'Management, masculinity and manipulation: from paternalism to corporate strategy in financial services in Britain', *Journal of Management Studies*, 30(4): 660-677.
- Knights, D. (1997) 'Organization theory in the age of deconstruction: dualism, gender and postmodernism revisited', *Organization Studies*, 18(1): 1-19.
- Kohlberg, L. (1981) *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row.
- Lennerfors, T. (2008) *The Vicissitudes of Corruption: Degeneration, Transgression, Jouissance*. Stockholm: Arvinius.
- Lindgren, M. and J. Packendorff (2006a) 'Projects and prisons', in D. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*. London: Palgrave.
- Lindgren, M. and J. Packendorff (2006b) 'What's new in new forms of organizing? on the construction of gender in project-based work', *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(4): 841-866.

- Lukács, G. (1971) *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. London: Merlin.
- Lundin, R. A. and A. Söderholm (1995) 'A theory of the temporary organization', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11(4): 437-455.
- MacIntyre, A. C. (1985) *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. London: Duckworth.
- MacIntyre, A. C. (1988) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* London: Duckworth.
- MacIntyre, A. C. (1990) *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.
- MacIntyre, A. C. (1999) *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*. Chicago, Ill.: Open Court.
- Mannheim, K. (1976) *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Martin, J. (2003a) 'Feminist theory and critical theory: unexplored synergies', in M. Alvesson and H. Willmott (eds) *Studying Management Critically*. London: Sage.
- Martin, P. Y. (2001) 'Mobilizing masculinities': women's experience of men at work', *Organization*, 8(4): 587-618.
- Martin, P. Y. (2003b) "'Said and done' versus 'saying and doing': gendering practices, practicing gender at work', *Gender & Society*, 17(3): 342-366.
- Noddings, N. (1984) *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Project Management Institute (2006) *PMI Member Ethical Standards*. Newton Square, PA: PMI.
- Rose-Ackerman, S. (1978) *Corruption: A Study in Political Economy*. New York: Academic Press.
- Ruddick, S. (1983) 'Maternal thinking', in J. Trebilcot (ed.) *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Ethics*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld.
- SOU (2002) *Skärpning gubbar! Om konkurrensen, kvaliteten, kostnaderna och kompetensen i byggsektorn [Pull Yourselves Together, Guys! On Competition, Quality, Costs and Competence in the Construction Sector]*. Stockholm: Fritzes offentliga publikationer.
- Styhre, A., M. Backman and S. Börjesson (2005) 'YCC: a gendered carnival? project work at Volvo cars', *Women in Management Review*, 20(2): 96-106.
- Sunderland, J. (2004) *Gendered Discourses*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Swann, J. (2002) 'Yes, but is it gender', in L. Litosseliti (ed.) *Gender, Identity and Discourse Analysis*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Thomas, J. (2006) 'Problematising project management', in D. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*. London: Palgrave.
- Wahl, A. (1998) 'Deconstructing women and leadership', *International Review of Women and Leadership*, 4(2): 46-60.
- Wahl, A., C. Holgersson, P. Höök and S. Linghag (2001) *Det ordnar sig: Teorier om organisation och kön [It Will Be All Right. Theories on Organization and Gender]*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- West, C. and D. H. Zimmerman (1987) 'Doing gender', *Gender & Society*, 1(2): 125-151.

the authors

Lucia Crevani is a doctoral candidate at the department of Industrial Management at the Royal Institute of Technology, School of Industrial Engineering and Management, Stockholm, Sweden. She is currently working on two in-depth empirical studies of industrial firms, where leadership is studied as collective processes of social construction.
E-mail: lucia@kth.se

Thomas Shinozaki Lennerfors is a researcher at Gothenburg University, School of Business, Economics and Law, Sweden. His doctoral thesis explored the vicissitudes of corruption, while his current research is focused on the subjective dynamics of owners of enormous crude carriers. From September 2009, he will be doing a post-doc at Meiji University, School of Commerce, Tokyo.
E-mail: lennerfors@gmail.com



The imagined user in projects: Articulating competing discourses of space and knowledge work*

Chris Ivory and Neil Alderman

abstract

This paper articulates the role of the imagined user in the design choices of a higher education client with respect to a project to provide new workspaces for one of its divisions. The case study centres on the disagreements that occurred between different factions within the client organisation regarding the type of office space that was appropriate for its workforce. The paper examines the ways in which competing images of academic knowledge work and knowledge workers were conjured up in differently imagined users and deployed as persuasive user-stories in the design process. The analysis of the case uses the narratives of key project actors to identify the underlying discourses that were articulated to support particular imaginings of the user. The case shows how the successful deployment of discourses was tied up with the power wielded by particular actors at different times during the project. The paper suggests that the articulation of an imagined user implies that project actualities may be presumed as well as real and that discourse analysis provides a useful mechanism for understanding these imagined actualities.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the role of the imagined user in the design choices of a higher education (HE) client with respect to a project to provide new workspaces for one of its divisions. Although open-plan has come to be regarded as the dominant solution for the provision of office space (Edenius and Yakhlef, 2007) at the level of the project and individual organisation, the issue of workspace design remains as contentious as ever – there is no consensus as to the sort of workspaces that best suit knowledge workers and knowledge work. The conduit for this conflict into the design process is provided, we suggest, by the imagined user. The imagined user reflects and expresses discourses that construct the knowledge worker and knowledge work in particular ways within the design process and in so doing shapes design choices.

* The contribution of Paul Richter to the ideas shaping the arguments about imagined users is gratefully acknowledged. We also thank the referees and the editorial team for their helpful suggestions. Any remaining errors are, of course, our responsibility.

The paper uses a case study of a specific project in an academic setting to examine the way in which competing images of academic knowledge work and knowledge workers were conjured up in differently imagined users and deployed as persuasive user-stories in the design process. In so doing, we seek to contribute to an emerging body of theory on the design process as a social, interactive and discursive practice (Bucciarelli, 1988; Lloyd and Deasley, 1998; Lloyd, 2000; McDonnell et al., 2004 and Mathews, 2006) and bring a critical perspective to studies of the user in the innovation process and in projects.

The paper builds a case for the role of the imagined user as a rhetorical device in the expression and enactment of discourses within projects. Our position stems from observations that, despite the rise and rise of user-centred and participative design, the user is most notable for his or her physical absence from the design process and that interaction with users is not one of simple knowledge-transfer, but one in which knowledge about users is constructed both with and *without* input from users. The creation and referencing of 'imagined users' is part of a persuasive process (cf. Suchman, 2000) – imagined users are simplified caricatures that conveniently fit (or do not fit) the sorts of design solutions (in this case particular configurations of space) under discussion. This suggests the need to go beyond knowledge-transfer accounts of the role of the user in the design and project process and to acknowledge the social construction of imagined users in project interactions.

The user

Users figure prominently in the design and innovation literature. Users are viewed as a key force in innovation and successful design (von Hippel, 1976, 1988; 2005; Woolgar, 1992). User involvement is considered key to project success, particularly where success is linked to improved organisational performance (Duffy, 1992; Mathiassen and Purao; 2002), subsequent user satisfaction (Ferguson et al., 1997), and for preventing design failures (Ivory, 2004).

Interest in user input as a corrective to poor design has led to a research focus on how best to expedite the interaction between users and designers; what might be termed a 'knowledge transfer' focus. This emphasises finding better ways of getting to know users' contexts and encouraging users to maximise their understanding of what is technically and financially possible. Mechanisms identified for doing this include: user groups, usability trials, user surveys, direct user observation and, latterly, various web-based forums. (See Woolgar, 1992; Gardiner and Rothwell, 1985; von Hippel, 1976, 1988, 2005 for discussions of user-producer forums.)

There are, however, two problems with the 'knowledge transfer' model of user-producer interactions. Firstly, there is no guarantee that those involved in the design process will actually view user input as useful or desirable. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that designers and others habitually resist user input for a variety of political and professional reasons (Ivory, 2004; Woolgar, 1992; Suchman, 2000). This resistance may not be openly stated and there are many subtle means of managing the interaction with users to reduce its impact on design decisions (Ivory, 2004).

Secondly, there is a tendency in the knowledge transfer model to underestimate the complexity of generating and capturing useful user knowledge. Gaining useful knowledge about any aspect of the social world, including that of users, is difficult and time consuming (cf. Boland and Tenaski, 1995; Hislop, 2002). Knowledge is invariably socially mediated and negotiated (Weick and Roberts, 1993). Its precise meaning is also difficult to control as language is fluid and without fixed or unambiguous meaning (Boland and Tenaski, 1995). Moreover, knowledge is imbued with the values and assumptions of those who produce it (Brown and Duguid, 1998) and is interpreted in accordance with the values and assumptions of those who receive it (Baumard, 1999; Bolisani and Scarso, 2000). In other words, the knowledge emerging from the interaction between users and designers/managers is a product of that interaction and does not necessarily reflect 'user wishes' in any objective sense.

In the absence of reliable and accessible knowledge of user needs, and given the tendency of designers and managers to protect their own autonomy in decision making by excluding users, it is unsurprising that our own observations find designers and managers constructing 'imagined users' to fill, and take advantage of, the gap left by their absence.

Imagined users

The imagined user is a discursive construct, depending for its existence on the dialogue of those involved in the design process. Imagined users are conjured up in the form of vignettes and anecdotes based on personal and second-hand experience, assumptions and more or less reliable research data. The key role of the imagined user in design dialogue is to give substance and rhetorical force to competing discourses relevant to the design issues in question. Creating and drawing on imagined users effectively translates broader discourses into persuasive context-specific accounts of users and use. The design process is not just an exercise in trying to 'get it right'; it is a forum for the expression of potentially conflicting cultural, economic, political, ideological and professional preferences (McDonnell et al., 2004).

In the light of criticism of the vagueness in the definition of discourse (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000) in much discourse analysis, we are careful to spell out our position here with respect to the relationship between discourse and imagined users. Alvesson and Kärreman talk about discourses ranging from micro and meso to grand and mega discourses. Generally speaking, grand and mega discourses are long-term articulations of ideas, expressed through multiple outlets, with potentially strong determining effects on behaviour, institutions and organisations (see, for example, Glass (1997) on Nazism, Atkinson (1999) on Thatcherism, or Fairclough (2002) on globalisation). We reserve the term discourse for phenomena such as these, durable shared ideas that have the potential for shaping thinking, behaviour, organisation and institutions. We do not apply the term discourse to those articulations that are emergent, transient and with only localised or negligible effects (the micro and meso discourses described by Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). In this formulation the imagined user is not a discourse in its own right, but a referent to, and an articulation of, a discourse. The distinction here is

between meaning (i.e. discourse) and its vehicle, the articulation of discourse, in this case in the form of an ‘imagined user’.

Our view is informed by critical assumptions about the role of discourse in shaping subjects and constituting them in power relations (cf. Heracleous and Barrett; 2005, Philips and Hardy, 2002). In the context of projects, we view discourses as playing a vital constituting and stabilising role, but also as closely bound up in the exercise of power. Discourses enable progress, but also constrain it to particular trajectories. They do so by constraining and directing thinking; delimiting what is discussable and how it can be discussed (Doolin, 2002; Grant and Hardy, 2003; Atkinson, 1999). In the context of inchoate and complex realities, such as those often presented by design dilemmas, discourses create much needed, but very particular, ‘road maps’ (cf. Deuten and Rip, 2000). Discourses are actively evoked and promoted in order to produce *particular* desired effects (Hardy, 2004). Rhetorical strategies play a key role here (Mueller, et al., 2003), as do such factors as the receptivity to particular arguments of an audience and their particular take on the credibility of the speaker, but perhaps ultimately it is access to resources (physical or symbolic) that is key in determining who is heard loudest, clearest and most often (see, for example, Rhodes, 2000 and Fairclough, 2005.).

Re-thinking projects and projects research

The focus of our research is upon the early design and planning stages of the project. These are the occasions when customer requirements are translated into physical drawings, contractual agreements and ultimately agreed project plans. However, project studies tend to ignore these early phases. ‘The project’ is typically defined as starting once major requirements have been established. This is recognised, to some degree, by attempts to broaden the scope of mainstream project management to encompass project definition as well as implementation (Morris, 1998). As Lundin and Söderholm (1998) suggest, the narrow view of project management tends to ‘black box’ the context of the project and disregards, ‘the phases before and after implementation’ and the possible ‘impacts’ these may have on the project, e.g. with regard to the creation of momentum for the project (Lundin and Söderholm, 1998: 41- 46).

We respond to this critique by focusing on the interactions that occurred in the early planning and design phases of the project studied; the period when there was a commitment within the organisation to begin a capital project, but no firm or detailed decisions as to the precise form the project should take. While client requirements are not set in stone during this early phase (Koskela and Howell, 2002) it remains the case that the early planning stages are vital for giving the project its initial focus and trajectory.

Traditional views of projects and project management interpret outcomes as a result of a rationalistic application of appropriate tools and techniques predicated on notions of command and control. In particular, conventional perspectives view power as just another tool or technique that project managers need to master to achieve outcomes (Lovell, 1993), while power struggles relate to mastery of the resources required to do

this (Marshall, 2006). According to Magenau and Pinto (2004: 1033) ‘successful project managers understand the constructive uses of power’.

In common with a growing body of literature that questions the universality of this perspective (Hodgson, 2002; Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006; Thomas, 2006) and calls for a ‘rethinking’ of project management (Winter et al., 2006), we take a more critical stance by considering the outcomes of projects to reflect political processes and power struggles between stakeholders as much as the physical design decisions and actions of project managers. As Newcombe (1996) identifies in the context of construction, there is often a gap between the power granted by the contract and the power needed to bring things about. This suggests that the political manoeuvring of project managers and other project actors will be central in project actions. Adopting a Foucauldian position, Clegg et al. (2002: 319) suggest that under more liberal notions of governance ‘the personal projects and ambitions of individual actors become enmeshed with, and form alliances with, those of organisation authorities and dominant organisations’. In the early stages of major projects, this jostling for power and influence over project definition is, we surmise, likely to be a key determinant of design outcomes. In projects that involve changes to the design of the working environment, the user of that environment (the worker) has a strong vested interest in the design outcomes, but little authority and resource to influence outcomes in their favour.

Nevertheless, the creation of power vested in one set of project actors is likely to engender spaces and forms of resistance in others (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994), particularly the user, when the proposed design solution threatens current arrangements. In academia, such projects need to be observed in the context of a wider trend towards what has been termed the new public management (Chandler et al., 2002) and the resultant phenomenon of academic resistance to it (Barry et al., 2001). This suggests a need to focus on the ‘lived experience’ of project actors (Cicmil et al., 2006) and to identify what happens in the ‘white spaces’ between the conventional objects of project management enquiry (Thomas and Buckle-Henning, 2007), in other words to investigate the ‘actuality of projects’ (Winter et al., 2006) as project actors struggle to assert their own preferences in shaping the emerging direction of the project.

Our approach to analysing the ‘lived experience’ of project actors will be to re-construct the imagined users and related discourses that have been articulated by them through the design process and to examine their roles in the light of uneven but shifting power relations.

The case study

The case study focuses upon conflict within a large University client over the choice between open plan and cellular office space that was to be provided for staff in a proposed new departmental building. It focuses on the discourses that were drawn on by the project actors as they sought to support particular space preferences. At the heart of the case for an open-plan solution lay a particular (though contestable) characterisation (through allusion to particular dominant social discourses) of how academic work (or more generally, knowledge work) is done.

The case study is constructed from five in-depth interviews with senior members of the organisation (labelled A-E in the text) conducted as part of a wider investigation of staff attitudes and opinions. Respondents were asked to comment on the key arguments surrounding the decisions at senior management level first to adopt open-plan and then later to modify it. We focus on the way in which the user was constructed in the arguments deployed by these actors.

Our analytical approach involved a close reading of the interview texts produced in order to identify and then group the competing themes and arguments made as they related to users. We then linked these themes and arguments (mainly in the form of short articulations about the nature of work and organisation) to broader social and organisational discourses about work and organisations. The analysis paid close attention to the project context, in relation to which individual accounts had been created (Philips and Hardy, 2002). This is by no means an objective process and readers must reach their own conclusions as to the validity of the analysis. In analysing our case study material we considered both the apparent discourses shaping the debate and the politicking that occurred as participants deployed their authority in support of their preferences.

The history of the project was long and convoluted, but centred around the perceived need to bring a split site department onto a single site, whilst improving the facilities for the teaching of its students. At an early stage, a key objective imposed by senior management of the University was for a substantial amount of open plan space to form the core of the design. Negative reaction and lobbying by user groups within the department led to an agreement for a limited number of cellular offices to be included, but nowhere near enough to guarantee each academic their own office.

The initial project proposal failed on planning grounds and the project was reconstituted through a proposal to lease commercial office space, with some re-configuration to suit educational use. This was attractive to senior management in that it enabled the project to be funded primarily out of fee revenue rather than appearing on the balance sheet as a capital expenditure.

The project sponsor drove the choice of a commercial lease and insisted on increasing the use of open plan space. He was supported by other members of the senior management team and the Estates department, which viewed the high cost of existing space as a major problem for the University. These actors had positive views of previous projects to create open plan working spaces, both for administrative functions and for research units. The case study project was the first to propose the same solution for a conventional teaching department.

The solution being pursued by the project sponsor was not universally supported amongst senior management and neither was their insistence on an open plan design. When they left the institution, just prior to the signing of contracts, the new project sponsor successfully sought additional funding to allow for an increase in the provision of cellular offices. The to-ing and fro-ing of the project process and the shifts in power within the project form the backdrop to our investigation of the discourses about academics as space users and knowledge workers.

The case for open plan

The supporting case for open plan articulated by the senior management team consisted of two major themes. One framed open plan as an essentially 'rational choice' for the organisation and the other constructed academic knowledge work in such a way as to create a high degree of fit with open plan.

The rational choice argument

This argument focused on the objective implications of cost and resource for the organisation. The case for support was linked to a more or less 'taken for granted' discourse about organisations that stresses the primacy of the needs of the organisation over the needs of its employees. Subscribing to this particular discourse has particular implications for how users are imagined in the design process:

The economic ones [benefits] are absolutely straightforward, you know, it's very, very clear and we've seen it with the new [] building where the cost of installing even some cellular offices, which is now what's going on, is considerable. It's adding £400,000 or £500,000 to the cost [of the new building]. (A)

... if you wanted to achieve the same sort of building with cellular offices the footprint would have to be 120 – 130% bigger and into that it becomes cost. If you are thinking of buying the building, we're talking 3 grand, 3.5 grand if you include all fees, per square metre; that's the build cost plus all fees, probably a bit higher than that. And so every extra square metre you either are paying extra for nothing or, you know, you could put more activity in a particular building from a purely economic perspective. (B)

It's about housing activity in a way that's optimum to the business while trying to aim for some efficiency of cost and space which makes your business competitive, because it obviously doesn't help you to waste money on space you don't actually need... (C)

The rational choice argument is presented as 'self evident' – making it a powerful and persuasive one. However, the 'rational choice' discourse also affects how users are positioned with respect to the decision making process and the project. This discourse frames the issue of space solely in organisational terms. In effect the organisation assumes a priority over, and becomes a proxy for, all users. Consequently, any need for further discussion about the user is negated – the user effectively disappears (is unimagined). Notice, for example, how the issue of providing appropriate space for the multitude of different staff in the organisation becomes one of 'housing activity'. Not only has a homogeneous set of users become reduced to the singular, but also their existence in the project is reduced to 'activity'. This is a classically 'modern' discourse in which the material and the social are treated as separate concerns.

The inevitability of change discourse

Another largely 'taken for granted' discourse characterising modern Western economies is the widespread acceptance of the inevitability of technological and organisational change. Hooking into this discourse provides a useful underpinning for promoters of any sort of change (organisational or technological) and a handy means by which to encourage the unquestioning acceptance of it:

Who makes non-open plan buildings anymore, apart from us? The market wants open-plan. It's flexible and cheap etc. etc. People generally accept it improves working practices. They wouldn't be doing it if it didn't make sense. (A)

The commercial world has been in open plan for 30 years, presumably they don't think it's dragging down their performance. Or why would they do it? (C)

If you were Boots [a national retailer] or something you'd just be interested in minimising the total footprint. (B)

The appeal here is both to the inevitability of progress and to another entrenched, but related, discourse in HE – the idea that it lags the private sector and needs to catch up. The project is presented in the same light as a private sector endeavour where the effect on the bottom line is the driving consideration. Users are again dealt with indirectly and by proxy, this time by drawing on the presumed successes of open plan for knowledge workers in other sectors. Any detailed consideration of the specific needs of users (i.e. the academics) is negated again.

Constructing the fit between users and space

Whilst discourses that focus on the organisation and/or that foreground the inevitability of change are perhaps the clearest means of dealing with users, users can also be articulated (imagined) in ways that fit preferred space solutions. The following extracts describe the personal observations of A and B of the positive impact of open plan environments on their own experience of work.

I could immediately see the advantages of this. You could talk to people and my PA was sitting next to me more or less. And for the first time I could see there was an incredibly efficient way of getting things done. You can see people, you can walk over, you can get access to people, you get a lot more communication. (A)

I found the social network within the office changed dramatically. ...In the [open plan] office you see whether people are there and go and have a conversation. So I found it pretty effective in a way. (B)

I recognised that you get spontaneous things going. Where normally if you want something to happen you have to say 'can the three of you get together and do something about this'? What I observed was that if something came up people would spontaneously get together. You could actually see it happening in front of your eyes. You can actually see the interactions happening. This made me aware that this can work in a really positive way. (A)

(A) and (B) are actually talking here about high level administrative work rather than academic work. The blurring of categories of work, the creation of a single homogeneous user, is typical of designers who do not wish to respond to input from real users (Woolgar, 1992). This homogenisation also allows users to be lumped into a single discourse about use and work without the dangers of making distinctions and, therefore, having to talk in detail about how various groups actually do work. This account conceives of work as what might be termed 'observable action' (e.g. spontaneous meetings, ongoing interactions, unplanned discussions) all of which, it is suggested, are facilitated by open plan spaces. This notion of work, as something inherently visible and observable, is a recurrent theme amongst supporters of open plan and its key effect in design discourses is to focus attention away from the sort of work

that does not involve interaction, talking or meeting others; that is activities such as thinking, planning, concentrating – the sort of work activity that is arguably *not* well supported by open plan spaces (cf. Banbury and Berry, 2005, for example).

The following extracts achieve the same ends (constructing users and their work in particular ways) but by describing academic work in terms of perceived problems. As Latour (1996), has noted, good engineers must also be good sociologists, to be successful they must blend social questions with technological solutions into a single discourse. In the context of planning activity, Throgmorton (1996) has referred to this as persuasive story telling. The problems proposed do not have to be real, merely plausible in the eyes of potential sponsors.

One of the big problems I think you have with academic communities is we are always are talking about silos, we are always talking about people not talking to each other enough, we are always talking about the way in which people don't interact and we find work-arounds for this all the time. We want to set up seminars, we have networks and we have groups and those all address the fact we sit in our cells and spend a lot of time at home actually. These are things that open plan working could really address. (A)

... 'cos the interesting issue is all around the whole discourse of what they come to work [for] and what they value around it; and they like their little office, but then they bemoan the fact they can't get any kind of social contact. (B)

These extracts reinforce the very particular claims for how work is done, focusing on interaction and the problem being a cellular solution. So again, open plan is a solution, but only to a very specific characterisation of the problems of academic work and in some minds the solution can be transferred from different work contexts, such as administration:

In what kind of milieu do you get academics working and cross-fertilising? OK the [administrative] office is not the best example, but it stops a lot of emails being sent. If you see someone is there you can walk across and you can have a conversation. (B)

The problem of real users

Input from imagined users, such as the ones constructed in the above accounts, is always welcome in rhetorical and persuasive accounts. Real users, however, can present thorny problems to the creators of such persuasive but partisan discourses. Real users may disagree, resist, seek to re-edit management discourses and articulate counter narratives alluding to counter discourses. It is important then, from the perspective of those bringing new projects into entrenched contexts, that they neutralise difficult 'real user' input where it does not support their case. The weakness of real users, as opposed to imagined ones, is that their intentionality can much more easily be accessed and alluded to by their detractors (imaginary actors are more slippery in this respect, they can be quickly re-imagined in order to deflect or side step criticism). Six reasons are brought forward:

1. The resistant user lacks self-knowledge

Most objections to open plan working centre around a lack of privacy (Sundstrom et al., 1980):

... noisy environment... actually anyone can adapt, and the mind does start tuning things out. (A);

'It's just getting used to a modern building really. (C);

in other words academics have grown used to out of date, inappropriate office space and need to adjust to the commercial realities of the 21st century.

At the end of the day you are up against people's natural visceral response to something, a response to 'the other'. (B);

resistance as a knee-jerk reaction against the unknown (Mokyr, 2002: 252).

2. The resistant users are simply wrong:

The argument then that people have is that either you can't do research or it wouldn't work in an academic department, because you need to see students. There's various things like that. First of all, I have done plenty of research here. The meeting I had before was with my RA. We just come in here [a private meeting room] and have our meetings. I have written more than one article sitting at an open plan desk. (A)

...why is it an academic doing research, you know, has to have a protected office space whereas [...] someone working at high level in Boots or a lawyer doesn't have an [office]? (B)

I am assured by people that have never done it, never tried it, that it can't be done. [said with some irritation] (A)

What causes the problem is actually a kind of mind set and a culture change; because if people don't want to do something they will find reasons why it can't work. That is the key issue. (A)

3. The resistant user is falsely claiming a special case:

One of the reasons people want cellular offices is because people want to do everything in their own office space. (C)

There are some interesting discourses around, you know, what is open plan, how do people actually use the current space they're in, and what is it about the academic job that really...is it that different from any other job? (B)

There is no difference doing research and concentrating on your other work. PAs need to be able to concentrate. I think there is a sense that, you know, oh we are so special to do our work we have to have total peace and quite in our own room, whereas PAs don't need that, administrators don't need that. (A);

and therefore, by implication, neither do academics even though the nature of the task might be considered radically different:

I think the greatest issue with most academics is not the space per se, it's actually what to do with their private libraries. I think... that is probably the biggest problem you face in any kind of open plan with academics is people's private libraries and they like having them on the shelves like: 'I like having access to my reference papers' and stuff like that and then you do begin to ask, well, how often do you use them or is it just nice to have – as a kind of comfort blanket around you? Looks impressive when you've got students coming in – this defines you as a proper academic or not... (B)

... and its not a coincidence that most organisations do this and cognate firms such as firms of lawyers where you get people making exactly the same arguments, they feel they need privacy, they feel they need a space to themselves and they've got to a certain [stops self] you know they do the same sort of things that we do. And yet they have gone open plan ... I hate to use the word common sense but frankly if it wasn't a productive way of doing it why would lawyers be doing it? And what is the real difference between what lawyers do and what we do? (A)

Noteworthy in this set of extracts is the recurring reference to other presumed similar workers for whom open plan has also been adopted, although, ultimately, the similarities are questionable and the mere fact of adoption in this other context is hardly a guarantee of appropriateness in either context.

4. Resistant users are themselves a barrier to success:

... if you look at what [two of the administrators] have created, you know they've used the filing systems to actually create semi-cellular offices. They have tall partitions and they place themselves right at the far end in terms of approachability and accessibility. And so people will subvert the open plan concept in order to maintain some sense of ...[what they had before]... You go in there without them [dividers] and you think what a marvellous space, but people subvert them, then they complain, but because it was left to them, their little decision about trying to maintain their own little world then permeates absolutely everything. And then they blame the space for creating the problem in the first place. (B)

We are a long way from a user-centric design paradigm here. The suggestion is that users themselves are the barriers to the success of open plan, indeed that they actively subvert it, subsequently blaming failure on the design, whereas if only they had gone along with the design as proposed the project would have worked.

5. Resistant users are self-interested (and immoral):

... that is real money that has to be earned out of our activities, has to come out of the student experience, has to come out of jobs. (A)

Why academics should have offices is because they are poorly paid and it's the only kind of prestige that an academic gets and it is linked to notions of prestige and status and hierarchy... It is another argument that is often deployed. (B)

Why should we be putting large amounts of resource that the university is earning –largely through its teaching, which therefore comes in via the students – why should that be going into creating an environment, which staff particularly want for reasons they might have but which is costing a vast amount of money? (A)

These extracts are in effect articulations that causally link up the consequences of bad and selfish user choices for the organisation and its stakeholders. The 'bad choices' narrative also links to discourse about the service 'obligations' of the organisation to create a moral position. Alternatively, objections are simply framed as a front for some other personal agenda:

Now I do find it interesting that the academics say it's not for us. What is it about the nature of academic work that says it's different? I'm willing to accept some of it that it's different, but you know, people start saying 'privacy, I have lots of confidential conversations with students', well, bollocks they do. They might have that for about 10% of the week, 5% of the week if they're lucky, but if you had a quiet room you'd negate that. The telephone thing is another one that I often hear. And I wonder if in terms of that discourse they substitute things like that for what they

really want, what the whole thing is really about, which is about their personal space and their library and the things they have round them. (B)

6. The cellular offices provided are not used anyway

I don't know if you have some technique for finding out the real secret reasons why people don't want to go into open plan. One of them might be that people will know if they are there or not. It would be very hard to get people to admit to that. You know what it's like, if you go round now, it's an ordinary working day, it happens to be in July, if you knock on doors you will not find people in most of the rooms. People actually do not use offices, that is the reality... I haven't got the research to prove it but I have got a strong instinct that if we went round and checked... (A)

... and I think it is quite interesting if you walked around and observed your colleagues' work patterns, most academic offices are not used for what, 70, 75% of the working week, I suspect. (B)

So the users' preferred solution, which in this case admittedly represents the status quo, is really just a front, because the assumption is the cellular space is not being used fully anyway.

The arguments against open plan

Dismissing the claims of pro-open plan supporters

Unlike pro-open plan supporters, its detractors did not have to attack the perceived users of the space, because users' preferences were well known to be predominantly for cellular offices. However, they did make efforts to undermine the evidence of those supporting it. This is of course pure politics. It was observed, for example, that much of the enthusiasm for open plan had been generated by a visit to the offices of the University's legal team.

They took the senior management team around their office. They were largely solicitors, professionals. You know, most solicitors are autonomous, do their own thing, they were raving about it, they had just moved into this building, how their performance had been improved. So it was quite a good sell on to the senior management. We [University senior management] were wined and dined there as their clients. One or two of the senior management team went down there and saw how well they were working. (E)

This visit, it was suggested:

conditioned the minds of the senior management team that this could work. Whether they had in their minds that this was for the administration or academic side I don't know. It was impressive to the people who went there. (E)

[And that as a result] ... the whole idea of open plan had got into the mentality. (E)

So its detractors frame the open plan solution, less as a reasoned strategy for the organisation and more simply as a conditioning of the minds of senior people. Moreover, the supporters of open plan were perceived to lack evidence for their case:

There was not much evidence around so people were arguing for and against on the basis of all kinds of arguments, you know, my mother used to work in open plan and she hated it, all this kind of stuff. (D)

'I had seen the evidence. It just wasn't worth a bloody candle' (E).

There was also a strong suggestion of very personal agendas:

[The project sponsor] was absolutely adamant that open plan should be applied to the [department] come what may. Partly because of his experience for the open plan for the [administrative] office, that was in his head, he says 'I'm going to', and he's the sort of manager who says 'come what may', regardless of what every one else wants. You were going to have open plan whether you liked it or not. And that was a matter of principle on his part. I was not a party to it, I objected to it. But I was out voted. (E)

The fact that the ownership of the project had been devolved from the University's Executive Board to the project sponsor's division effectively legitimised their power and authority and the 'powerlessness' of others to deflect them from this course of action reflects this.

Creating alternative discourses about how work is done

One of the most obvious ways of mounting a defence against entrenched support for open plan would have been to construct, through discourse, counter images of how academic work is done. Yet despite widely expressed objections to open plan by many academics and a number of senior staff, alternative discourses were not evident in the research data. We were unable to identify a discourse that constructed academic work as, say, reliant upon a quiet, secluded environment. Given the research evidence against the efficacy of open plan for such work, this was surprising.

What we did find was more attention to the differences between types of work that were carried out within the university – in contrast to the accounts of those supporting open plan who tended to lump all activities together. In the case against open plan, for example, a clear distinction was made between academics who were research active and those who were becoming more administration focused. Strangely, contract researchers (i.e. those without permanent lectureships) were also identified as a group who could go into open plan: 'They are not your typical core academic, that is the point' (D). The notion of a 'core academic' seems to suggest that contract researchers were viewed as both transitory and more compliant and hence less powerful within the organisation.

Administrators were also identified as groups who could usefully go into open plan:

With regards to administration, it's a fair hypothesis to say that it would work more effectively in open plan. So to that degree, given there is an institutional requirement that you have more open plan, given that you can see there is an argument, and you know your support system is working as well, as effectively, as it could do, then it seems a reasonable enough proposition to put the support into that environment to start with. To that argument I am favourably disposed. (D)

This position allowed the project to go forward on the basis that open plan was okay for some as long as there was some concession to the academics' desire for cellular space.

The people are the organisation

The one clear argument that was mobilised against open plan was the argument that staff morale was a critical issue for the organisation and that open plan risked damaging

it. Moreover, the experiences and stories reported widely in the press of other projects that had attempted to create open plan workspaces in other similar institutions were mobilised as part of this counter-argument. Other such projects were seen to have failed (in this discourse a collapse of morale is a problem for the organisation) so this one risked failure as well.

... as a result of people saying they were going to take their bat home, they were going to work at home it just wasn't worth it. I had read all the stuff about SPRU [Science Policy Research Unit at Sussex University] and so on, so I was aware of it. The issue of academic leadership, this is the academic community. This place is nothing without the academic community, you can't run things like that. (E)

This position was a reversal of the pro-open plan lobby's position, which focused on the needs of the organisation. In this counter discourse, the academics *are* the organisation. Ultimately, this take on the organisation, and the interpretation of the SPRU experience as meaningful (not just a slight blip on the march of progress) served to point the project away from open plan.

Discussion

The fact that we struggled to find clear discourses about academic work that would support a case for cellular offices was instructive. The lack of an imagined pro-cellular office academic user in the minds of senior management (most of whom were academics themselves) was indicative, we believe, of the dominance of discourses that stress images of work as interactive and social. This connects the design decisions in this project directly to what have been termed post-bureaucratic discourses on work organisation (Gee et al., 1996). We suspect that it was the unfettered dominance of this, and related discourses, that made it extremely difficult to make a case for workspace design that supported isolated, quiet, contemplative work. The case for cellular offices emerged instead out of *not* talking about academic work and by giving ground on 'other' activities such as administration. There was no clear discussion of what academic work actually is.

Without a credible academic user rooted in a persuasive discourse about how academic work is done, the case against open plan was difficult, but not impossible to sustain. The case against it settled ultimately on re-defining the organisation as inseparable from and dependent upon, its work force. In this way it became possible to focus on 'people issues' *as* organisation issues. The idea that morale would be damaged in an organisation dependent upon academic support made the appropriateness of open plan or cellular offices irrelevant – the organisation would cease to function effectively if its staff withdrew their support. In this way we see how resistance to the perceived threat of open plan office accommodation on the part of academic staff was manifested through the threat 'to take their bat home'. The possibility of staff choosing to work at home, rather than occupy the new open plan space, represented too much of a risk for the project in the eyes of some senior managers: 'yes, open plan might be the best thing in the world, but not if it involves 30 years of struggle to change academics' mind sets' (D). Our findings in this respect chime with the observations of Anderson (2008) that academic resistance is often articulated through such discursive positions.

Would this argument have been enough to sustain resistance to the open-plan discourse? Perhaps not in itself, but it did provide the grounds, the road map, for a coup when the opportunity for one presented itself. For contractual reasons the project stalled for a time and this breathing space coincided with some changes in senior management, which shifted the project's power base and a coup became possible:

The change in leadership created the opportunity for others to seize back the reins if you like... People moving around loosens up some of the decisions. You know, if we want to change that decision we have to go back and confront someone in an existing role, with an existing power base...loads of political energy to change it. (D)

This should not, we feel, imply the primacy of political manoeuvring over discourse, but rather an interdependence between the two. 'The power balance shifted at a point and it was possible to ride the surf going in another direction' (D), so while material changes loosened things up, the availability of an alternative discourse directly shaped the possibilities that emerged from that material change. 'I would like to think we had up our sleeve things that would help when the opportunity came along. It came along a bit quicker than we thought it would come along so we took the opportunity' (D).

Conclusion

What the analysis of this case suggests to us is that discourses around the imagined user are not unitary. There are many discourses that are mobilised in support of particular pro- or anti- project interests. Noticeable in this case was the fact that the discourses mobilised by the project advocates outnumbered those arrayed by actors opposing the proposed project, notably by the users themselves. Discourses that imagine the user may well fly in the face of empirical evidence or be based largely on hearsay or anecdote, rather than the results of rigorous research, but are no less effective for all that. Such discourses seemed harder to resist when promoted by those in positions of relative power within the project.

The implications for users affected by projects to redesign or reconfigure the working environment, and hence working practices, include the importance of articulating an imagining of the user in a way that accurately reflects the way that their work is done. In arenas such as academia and in other forms of knowledge work, the invisibility of the work process, dependent as it is on mental processes of thought, reflection, creativity and concentrated effort, in contrast to physical and therefore observable tasks, means that discourses that present users imagined in particular ways are easier to manipulate to support specific positions and by the same token, harder to refute or resist.

Project managers and sponsors should note that strong discourses create paths along which projects and project participants can move in unison. The route is clear even if not all of the project participants feel it is heading in the right direction. However, 'alternative', but less strongly articulated or previously rejected or suppressed paths, have a habit of retaining their existence until such time as the opportunity for re-articulation presents itself. It becomes possible then, to see apparently singular projects as carrying with them the traces of 'dormant' alternative projects informed by suppressed discourses and with that, the potential for a coup. This draws attention to the

fractal nature of projects (cf. Law, 2002) and the threats implied by this. It should also alert those who wish to resist particular project directions to the fact that drawing on persuasive well-connected discourses is key to achieving those ends.

The use of discourse in this way is an illustration of the actuality of projects that needs to be better understood if we are to improve our management of them. The notion of the imagined user suggests that there are also imagined actualities that inform and influence project design decisions. Discourse analysis appears to be a useful tool for identifying and interpreting these imagined actualities.

references

- Alvesson, M. and D. Kärreman (2000) 'Varieties of discourse: on the study of organizations through discourse analysis', *Human Relations* 53(9): 1125-1149.
- Anderson, G. (2008) 'Mapping academic resistance in the managerial university', *Organization*, 15(2): 251-270.
- Atkinson, R. (1999) 'Discourses of partnership and empowerment in contemporary British urban regeneration', *Urban Studies*, 36(1): 59-72.
- Banbury, S. and D.C. Berry (2005) 'Office noise and employee concentration: identifying causes of disruption and potential improvements', *Ergonomics*, 48(1): 25-37.
- Barry, J., Chandler, J. and H. Clark (2001) 'Between the ivory tower and the academic assembly line', *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(1): 87-101.
- Baumard, P. (1999) *Tacit Knowledge in Organisations*. London: Sage.
- Boland, R. and R. Tenaski (1995) 'Perspective making and perspective taking in communities of knowing', *Organization Science*, 6(4): 350-372.
- Bolisani, E. and E. Scarso (2000) 'Electronic communication and knowledge transfer', *International Journal of Technology Management*, 20(1/2): 116-133.
- Brown, J. and P. Duguid (1998) 'Organising knowledge', *California Management Review*, 40(3): 90-113.
- Bucciarelli, L. (1988) 'An ethnographic perspective on engineering design', *Design Studies*, 9(3): 159-168.
- Chandler, J., J. Barry and H. Clark (2002) 'Stressing academe: the wear and tear of the new public management', *Human Relations*, 55(9): 1051-1069.
- Cicmil, S., T. Williams, J. Thomas and D. Hodgson (2006) 'Rethinking project management: researching the actuality of projects', *International Journal of Project Management*, 24(8): 675-686.
- Clegg, S.R., T.S. Pitsis, T. Rura-Polley and M. Marosszeky (2002) 'Governmentality matters: designing an alliance culture of inter-organizational collaboration for managing projects', *Organization Studies*, 23(3): 317-337.
- Deuten, J.J. and A. Rip (2000) 'Narrative infrastructure in product creation processes', *Organization*, 7(1): 69-93.
- Doolin, B. (2002) 'Enterprise, discourse, professional identity and the organizational control of hospital clinicians', *Organization Studies*, 23(3): 369-390.
- Duffy, F. (1992) *The Changing Workplace*, ed. Patrick Hannay. London: Phaidon Press.
- Edenius, M. and A. Yakhlef (2007) 'Space, vision and organizational learning: the interplay of incorporating and inscribing practices', *Management Learning*, 38(2): 193-210.
- Fairclough, N. (2002) 'Language in new capitalism', *Discourse & Society*, 13(2): 163-66.
- Fairclough, N. (2005) 'Critical discourse analysis, organizational discourse, and organizational change', *Organization Studies*, 26(6): 915-939.
- Ferguson, D.S., H. Horan and M.A. Ferguson (1997) 'Indicators of permanence in workspace features: perceived importance and relationship to workspace satisfaction', *Canadian Journal of Communications*, 22(1) [online at: <http://www.cjc-online.ca>].

- Gardiner, P. and R. Rothwell (1985) 'Tough customers: good designs', *Design Studies*, 6(1): 7-17.
- Gee, J. P., G. Hull, and C. Lankshear (1996) *The New Work Order*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Glass, J. (1997) 'Against the indifference hypothesis: the holocaust and the enthusiasts for murder', *Political Psychology* 18(1): 129-145.
- Grant, D. and C. Hardy (2003) 'Introduction: struggles with discourse', *Organization Studies*, 25(1): 5-13.
- Hardy, C. (2004) 'Scaling up and bearing down in discourse analysis: questions regarding textual agencies and their context', *Organization*, 11(3): 415-425.
- Heracleous, L. and M. Barrett (2001) 'Organizational change as discourse: communicative actions and deep structures in the context of information technology implementation', *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4): 755-778.
- Hislop, D. (2002) 'Mission impossible? communicating and sharing knowledge via information technology', *Journal of Management Studies*, 17: 165-177.
- Hodgson, D. (2002) 'Disciplining the professional: the case of project management', *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(6): 803-821.
- Hodgson, D. and S. Cicmil (eds) (2006) *Making Projects Critical*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Ivory, C.J. (2004) 'Three studies of client and architect interactions: implications for the innovation process in construction', *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management*, 16(4): 514-531.
- Keil, M., A. Tiwana. and A. Bush (2002) 'Reconciling user and project manager perceptions of IT project risk: a delphi study', *Information Systems Journal*, 12: 103-109.
- Knights, D. and T. Vurdubakis (1994) 'Foucault, power, resistance and all that', in J.M. Jermier, D. Knights and W.R. Nord (eds) *Resistance and Power in Organizations*. London: Routledge.
- Koskela, L. and G.A. Howell (2002) 'The underlying theory of project management is obsolete', paper presented at the Project Management Institute, Annual Conference, Seattle.
- Latour, B. (1996) *ARAMIS: The Love of Technology*, trans. C. Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Law, J. (2002) *Aircraft Stories: Decentering the Object in Technoscience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lloyd, P. (2000) Sub faculty of Industrial Design Engineering, Delft University of Technology, Jaffalaan 9, 2628 BX Delft, The Netherlands [Available online June 2000; visited Dec 2007].
- Lloyd, P. and P. Deasley (1998) 'Ethnographic description of design networks', *Automation in Construction*, 7(2/3): 101-110.
- Lovell, R.J. (1993) 'Power and the project manager', *International Journal of Project Management*, 11(2): 73-78.
- Lundin, R.A. and A. Söderholm (1998) 'Managing the black boxes of the project environment', in J. Pinto (ed.) *Project Management Handbook*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Magenau, J.M. and J.K. Pinto (2004) 'Power, influence and negotiation in project management', in P.W.G. Morris and J.K. Pinto (eds) *The Wiley Guide to Managing Projects*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Marshall, N. (2006) 'Understanding power in project settings', in D. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Mathews, B. (2006) 'Locating design phenomena: a methodological excursion', *Design Studies*, 28(4): 369-385.
- Mathiassen, L. and J. Puro (2002) 'Educating reflective systems developers', *Information Systems Journal*, 12(2): 81-102.
- McDonnell, P., P. Lloyd and R. Valkenburg (2004) 'Developing design expertise through the construction of video stories', *Design Studies*, 25(5): 509-525.
- Mokyr, J. (2002) *The Gifts of Athena*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Morris, P. (1998) 'Key issues in project management', in J. Pinto (ed.) *Project Management Handbook*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

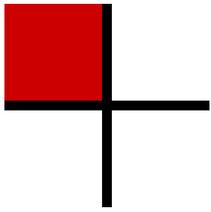
- Mueller, F., J. Sillince, C. Harvey and C. Howorth (2003) ‘A rounded picture is what we need’: rhetorical strategies, arguments, and the negotiation of change in a UK hospital trust’, *Organization Studies*, 25(1): 75–93.
- Newcombe, R. (1996) ‘Empowering the construction team’, *International Journal of Project Management*, 14(2): 75-80.
- Philips, N. and C. Hardy (2002) *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*. London: Sage.
- Rhodes, C. (2000) ‘Doing’ knowledge at work, dialogue, monologue and power in organizational learning’, in J. Garrick and C. Rhodes (eds) *Research and Knowledge at Work*. London: Routledge.
- Suchman, L. (2000) ‘Organising alignment: a case of bridge building’, *Organization*, 7(2): 311-327.
- Sundstrom, E., R.E. Burt and D. Kamp (1980) ‘Privacy at work: architectural correlates of job satisfaction and job performance’, *Academy of Management Journal*, 23(1): 101-117.
- Thomas, J. (2006) ‘Problematising project management’, in D. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Thomas, J. and P. Buckle-Henning (2007) ‘Dancing in the white spaces: exploring gendered assumptions in successful project managers’ discourse about their work’, *International Journal of Project Management*, 25(6): 552-559.
- Throgmorton, J. (1996) *Planning as Persuasive Storytelling*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- von Hippel, E. (1976) ‘The dominant role of users in the scientific instrument innovation process’, *Research Policy*, 5(3): 212-239.
- von Hippel, E. (1988) *The Sources of Innovation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- von Hippel, E. (2005) *Democratizing Innovation*. Cambridge Mass.: MIT press.
- Weick, K. and K. Roberts (1993) ‘Collective mind in organizations: heedful interrelating on flight decks’, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(3): 357-381.
- Winter, M., C. Smith, T. Cooke-Davies and S. Cicmil (2006) ‘The importance of ‘process’ in rethinking project management: the story of a UK government-funded research network’, *International Journal of Project Management*, 24(8): 650-662.
- Woolgar, S. (1992) ‘Configuring the user: the case of usability trials’, in J. Law (ed.) *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology, and Domination*. London: Routledge.

the authors

Chris Ivory is a lecturer at Newcastle University Business School and member of the Centre for Knowledge, Innovation, Technology and Enterprise (KITE). His background is as a social scientist and his research interests include innovation and technology management, the media, critical management approaches to project management, and the management of complex projects.
E-mail: c.j.ivory@newcastle.ac.uk

Neil Alderman is a senior lecturer at Newcastle University Business School and member of KITE. His background is as a geographer with research interests that include innovation and technology management, the design and product development process and the management of complex projects.
E-mail: neil.alderman@newcastle.ac.uk

Chris and Neil have collaborated extensively in research, the concept of the imagined user being the latest of their ideas, and are currently seeking funding to pursue this further.



Struggling to 'fit in': On belonging and the ethics of sharing in project teams*

Manuela Nocker

abstract

This paper explores the links between belonging and ethics, which remain largely underdeveloped in project studies and are overlooked in everyday practice of managing projects. It focuses on belonging as the process articulating identity-construction of an inter-organisational project team from a global management consulting firm that was working in IS design. As the team's experienced 'sense of place', belonging becomes the space which highlights preferred affiliations and exposes how – individually and collectively – ethics are played out in the context of the management of projects. Four *in situ* belonging-narratives (of opposition, pragmatism, reflexivity, and the habitual narrative) represent ethics as part of lived action and of a life-world that emerge from deconstructing and reconstructing 'the team' and an ideal worker in projects. The team's struggles to 'fit in' were experienced both when resisting and when collaborating with the dominant collective narrative of belonging. Modes of belonging are constituted in the relationship between self, others, and 'otherness', creating a situated ethical imagination of how to 'be professional'. Implications concern the politics of belonging and call for a renewed practical ethics that engages with the social nature of 'being', to change the current view of professional identities in projects.

Introduction

This paper argues that the exploration of the fundamental 'emplacement' of belonging (Malpas, 2001; Casey, 1993) is underdeveloped in research on projects and that understanding its articulation can open up new possibilities for ethics in project work. Belonging here can be understood as the ongoing 'sense of place' (Sarup, 1996: 1) that a project team experienced or the particular ways to participate in the collective process of engaging in the project. Philosophers have long acknowledged the importance of place for identity and belonging. Heidegger views place as the *topos* of Being (1971) while for Merleau-Ponty (1962) both human experience and thought are embodied and linked to an immediate and concrete environment. In Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1969) the attachment to place, or *topophilia*, lays the grounds for the exploration of selves through the places we inhabit.

* I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and the editorial team for its support.

This text links the question of ontology with that of ethics by taking a deconstructive take at what appears to be simple: the notion that a project team forms a community or a 'we' that knows how to proceed in context, living its 'being' according to the prevailing view of how it 'should be'. Yet today's project teams are mainly exposed to the rationalist approach of project management, which promotes the systematic standardisation of its practice as a coherent body of knowledge (Hodgson 2004; Cimcil and Hodgson, 2004; 2006) and is largely devoid of any understanding of its complex interrelationships with belonging and identity. Still, it is assumed that the latter are important for the very existence of a project team: cooperation. A long tradition of group identity studies, such as social identity theory (Brown, 2000; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), organisational identity (e.g. Dutton et al., 1994), and self-categorisation theory (e.g. Turner et al., 1987), describe the processes by which group identity is formed and the effects on action and cooperation. They share the view that cooperation can be fostered by identifying with the group. However, these approaches stress a dichotomous view of belonging or not-belonging (*to* the team), thereby neglecting the many ways in which social selves are performed in group situations. They also do not attempt to deepen the issue that cooperation cannot be separated from the necessity of solidarity in groups and of them from their networks of relations.

The departure point taken here is that belonging always is ontologically a 'belonging together' (Mason, 2000) or a 'being with' which needs to be interrogated (Nancy, 1991). This is not a traditional view of belonging as portrayed for project teams. The questioning of that social bond undoes any naïve idea of a 'we' in project teams. It rather becomes the relentless examination of its taken-for-grantedness. It is thus that an 'ethics of sharing' can be conceptualised. We share with the other 'an originary and ontological sociality' (Nancy, 1991: 28) because a 'finite being always presents itself "together", hence severally' (ibid.). Thinking in terms of '[b]eing-in-common' rather than 'common being' (Nancy, 1991: xxxix) gets rid, on the one side, of any idea of individualism and, on the other, of any totality of the social space. It allows for grasping that could be potential shared grounds for belonging and for cooperation in project work, which nowadays is mainly sustained by inter-organisational teams in a complex web of project relations. It also raises the question of the actual possibility of solidarity linked to collective action in a space of emergent difference. Notwithstanding that such endeavours may not itself be political for a project team (while contributing to make cooperation viable), it allows for examining shared experiences in projects and the moral horizon of living together. The aim here is to not separate the ontological and the ethical, and to not exclude a view of its political potential. Looking at a project team's sense of belonging gives us an excellent opportunity to make sense of these three registers together.

The project team's narratives of belonging here tell us of 'what it means to be situated in particular places... the various ways people attached and attach themselves (affectively) into the world' (Grossberg, 1996: 185-6). These are inextricably tied to how individual team members construct self-understandings, identifications, and imagine their own social space in terms of what is considered 'proper', 'right' or 'wrong' in managing projects. From this perspective, belonging (*to* the team) is not a given. It is seen as possibility which may or may not be actualised. The social world where team activities take place and the team's social selves are inseparable emergent

processes. However, the paper posits that the experience of 'togetherness' is in itself not enough to account for belonging and requires a narrative performance to be sustained, but also rejected and reconfigured. It highlights the personal experience of a project team's joint action, and the performance of different desires and identifications about how to live and work together – the shared space of 'being' shaped by social practice, difference, and lived action (Lefebvre, 1991). It also stresses the importance of conceiving of belonging and its links to ethics beyond the view of subjectivity, to incorporate the notions of responsibility and community. Looking at the actual modes of belonging can help us to understand what has been called the 'sharing of being', which is critical to our notions of freedom and autonomy (Nancy, 1993: 70-71) – and thus, of ethics. This can support an alternative view of professional identities and their sustainability in project work.

Belonging, narrative identity, and the performative nature of 'being together'

As a process of becoming, belonging is part of identity construction, rather than identity (Hall, 1990; Sarup, 1996). It is always relational, uncertain, and incomplete (Hall, 1990; 1996). In the process of identity construction narrative is constitutive, not just a medium for the expression of a selfhood which lies somewhere 'inside'. 'A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though it is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going... the ongoing story about the self' (Giddens, 1991: 54). Narratives are thus 'interpretative devices, through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others...' (Lawler, 2002: 242). As such, we can speak of a narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1991: 32; Polkinghorne, 1991; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002) which demands a certain structure to lend coherence to our sense of belonging. Narrative also marks the boundaries of what is included or excluded from the process, and can serve to legitimise action and personal experience (De Certeau, 1984). In this paper I take the view that the narratives 'do not reveal an essential self as much as a preferred one, selected from the multiplicity of selves' (Kohler-Riessman, 2003: 8). Even if there are limits to how selves can be intentionally placed because of unconscious processes, we can approach narratives performatively, shifting attention from the content of the story to the actual 'story work' (Gabriel, 2000), that is, how the telling of it takes place (Mishler, 1995). Performativity of identity also means that the 'production of chosen identities takes place through a series of performances, or occasions in which identity processes are played out' (Hetherington, 1998: 19). In this study those 'occasions' are found in the personal narratives of belonging, alongside the co-authoring of the main shared story of project experience.

Yet the concept of performativity itself carries some theoretical foundations beyond a mere local narrative construction of identity – a key point for the interpretation of our team's senses of belonging. The predominance of the normative function of discourse in identity construction has been significantly conceptualised by Judith Butler (1990; 1993), who emphasises that identity emerges from the 'repetition' of discursive practices (Butler, 1990: 140). The 'citational' (1993: 2) nature of those practices repeats collective norms that both constitute the group and make its presence felt in the common space. Applied to project work, the performativity of practices refers to current

commonly accepted wisdom about what constitutes professional knowledge and conduct in projects. This shapes subjectivities and identity, reinforced by the view of 'project management' as an aspiring or emergent profession (Hodgson, 2005). An over-reliance on the role of discourse in creating and shaping identities has been criticised for its lack of attention to agency (Herzig, 2004: 133; Nelson, 1999: 322). The focus also refers to individual subjectivity. Even Chantal Mouffe's take on collective identity maintains this emphasis. Her concept of self and identity is described, rather similarly to Butler's, as an 'an ensemble of subject positions, constructed within specific discourses...' (Mouffe, 1992: 237).

This paper acknowledges the profound impact of discourse but does not subscribe to views that cast belonging and identities mainly as its product. Instead, lived experience, individual motivations and personal expectations are seen as having 'equal dignity' for the performance of team modes of belonging. Our ways to belong are embodied in affect and emotion; they are placed in a particular time and space. Belonging does not just mean 'being' but also 'longing' for acceptance (Bell, 1999: 1). In this study, it is built on the basis of enacted team practice, how the team imagines its own work and life, and what it could become. This is consistent with a post-structuralist view of an emergent social space that always is practiced and imagined (Lefebvre, 1991) and emphasises the challenges of understanding ethics as that which we may come to have 'together' or how we are 'us' (Nancy, 2000) as an effect of the 'ontological sharing' (Nancy, 1993: 70-71).

Telling the background story: Scene and the actors

The present analysis of team members' performance of belonging focuses on four individual narratives and is drawn from a wider ethnographic case study of inter-organisational IS development project team. That research explored project work in terms of narratives of knowledge practice with the team as focal actor; later it also critically engaged with project ontology from a spatial perspective (Nocker, 2004; 2006). It was based on different data-gathering techniques (observation of team meetings, writing field notes, interviewing, collecting documents) and focused on the reconstruction on the main team journey. To explore team action and experience, in the wider study I specifically concentrated my data collection around the weekly team meetings; however, I also participated in other meetings (for example, user workshops). In this paper the focus will no longer be shared team action, but how individuals use different discursive strategies in positioning themselves and others, exposing their sense of belonging to the team. The main emphasis is thus on individual narrative construction of social selves and the value attached to it in its various nuances.

The initial project team consisted of eight Blooming management consultants and a representative of the recruitment agency Dill (all names fictitious). Blooming consultants were part of the information and communication technology services of a global management consulting firm with over 30 subsidiary geographical practices and around 150 offices throughout the world – a Big 5 management consulting firm in the UK. The client representative in the team was a senior regional manager, not a management consultant, and was seconded to the project team full-time because of her

longstanding experience in the company and her knowledge of specific business process and the intended users of the system. The team's mandate was to work on a front office information systems design project for the client 'Dill UK', one of the UK's leading secretarial recruitment agencies.

Of the initial project team not all remained in the team until the project ended. Some left at different stages or continued working on an *ad hoc* basis in the areas of technical and functional design, infrastructure supply, and in the set up of the network in the recruitment agency's branches. These membership dynamics affected me as a researcher, too. While I could observe team meetings for a certain time, when the project was put to a halt rather abruptly due to the take-over of the project sponsor, group observation was no longer possible. I had to start chasing team members individually and using every opportunity to talk with them to 'fill in the gaps' about what was happening. This was also the time when the emotions about personal experience of the team became heightened, and so issues of belonging or non-belonging surfaced more explicitly. Four team members can thus be seen as the 'core team' because they have shared experience over the whole duration of the project. They became the main narrators of the stories presented. They are three management consultants (Mark, the business designer; Charles, the project manager; and Kelly, the change management consultant) while one is the client representative (Julie, who also held the roles of joint project manager and business designer). Figure 1 shows how they were embedded as a team in the overall project organisation (original project document). Kelly's role was factored under 'project support' although she was a permanent member of the team.

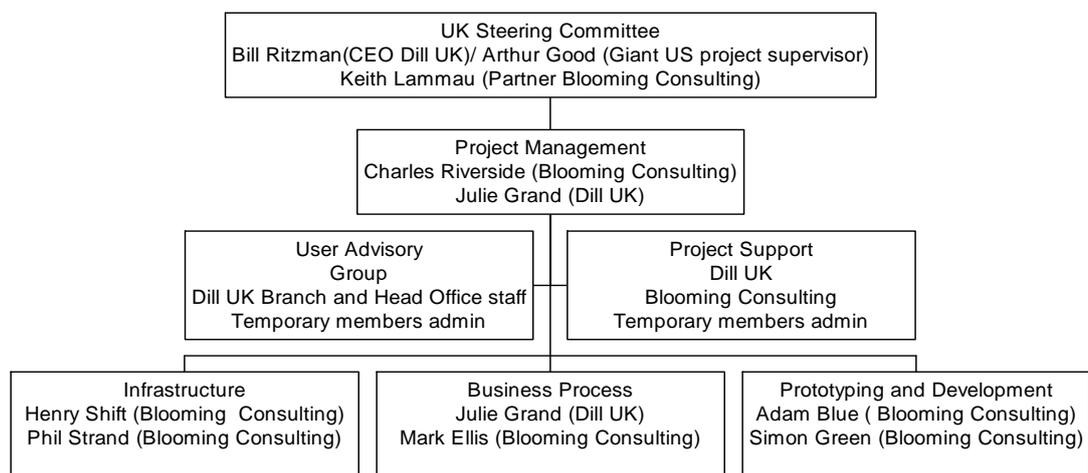


Figure 1: Project organisation. Shows support and supervisory group for the project team.

Regarding the client, established in the 1980s, Dill UK expanded into fifty-five branches across the country, employing up to 500 people. It supplies temporary and permanent staff to UK-business companies. Dill UK was a subsidiary of 'Giant US' – the project sponsor – one of the world's leading global recruitment corporations with a

presence in the USA and Europe. Within the UK, Giant US did not carry its own name but was branded autonomously as Dill UK. During the research period, the larger 'Ride US' corporation took over the project sponsor Giant US and this takeover soon brought the UK project to a halt.

The reasons for the project set up were Dill UK's operating procedures. These were not standardised between company branches and there was no electronic network in place. Data on clients and applicants for temporary and permanent jobs was processed manually and a great deal of business was done through informal communication between recruiters and applicants. The initial business case provided the scope for the design, prototyping, and development of a front office system and the rollout of networked computers to Dill's recruitment branches. It was planned that design and prototyping would extend over six months, after which the system should be implemented (coinciding with the start of a new project/phase).

For initiating the project, the project team had to consider the potential modification and implementation of 'O2K' – a software application already being used overseas by Giant's US recruitment business. Blooming consultants believed that the application was a reasonable functional fit with the Dill's business requirements, though they still needed to confirm its feasibility and make the necessary changes to the source code to meet Dill's requirements. The main team story describes how O2K became an object of contention and continuous negotiations between the project team and its 'counter-parts' at the sponsor's headquarters in the USA. Mainly, the US team of consultants executives refused to cooperate and give away the software code for the application to be implemented in the UK. Gaining knowledge of the code was only partially successful for the team. While it was creating various tactics and expanding crucial networks and alliances to face resistance and proceed, only two months into the project, the sponsor Giant US was taken over by Ride US – a leading global recruitment corporation. This came as a complete surprise to the project team and initiated a time of unprecedented uncertainty in the project. Several signs of decay reflected that the project was coming to a halt although, for a while, the team retained hope of being able to continue the project. Project activities were drastically reduced and soon the team was only completing tasks. The narratives here re-present a complex space of lived action in terms of belonging. Such polyphonic narratives (Boje, 2001) express the individual storytellers' construction of certain team qualities, expectations and desires experienced or envisaged for project management and collaboration (e.g. competence needed, communication, trust, etc.).

I have performed a two-way narrative analysis to look at discursive strategies in the positioning of self and others in the team. The first way was to analyse interviews as a whole unit of discourse, using Riessman's (1993) textual analysis of poetic structures. As Riessman points out, this has the advantage of no longer having to identify a plot in the text. It was thus possible to include open-endedness and the ambiguity of positioning self and others in the team. Procedurally, I have divided interview transcripts into parts, scenes, and stanzas. I have certainly structured the flow of narratives, but followed the textual movements of the storytellers. Their statements and positioning remain temporally-bound, showing how positioning is accomplished scene by scene with reference to particular issues that underlie belonging. What becomes

salient in terms of a practiced 'ethics of sharing' (or the lack thereof) emerged more distinctively with the second way of analysing text through the storytellers' use of poetic tropes. These refer to the 'attribution of motive; attribution of causal connection; of responsibility; namely blame and credit; of unity; of fixed qualities, especially opposition; attribution of emotion' (Gabriel, 2000: 36). It is in this way that values and morality of 'being together' are espoused to oneself and each other.

In approaching the belonging-narratives as a 'performative struggle over the meanings of experience' (Langellier, 2001: 3), we can see how personal identities are constantly constructed and produced out of the relationship with an audience. This audience included me as a researcher, too. The narrators tried to make me 'join their story', take sides, or exclude me; I reacted to and shaped moments of communication, thus participating in the construction of narratives. An illustration of this will become salient, for instance, in Mark's narrative. When speaking about particular topics or circumstances and people: 'fluid positioning, not fixed roles, is used by people to cope with the situations they find themselves in (Harré and Langehove, 1999: 17). Table 1 shows the performance of different senses of belonging. Each narrative expresses main tropes that bestow the overall 'tone' to what is told and how. Team members might position themselves or the team as victims or heroes; they might describe themselves as active or passive, thus shifting positions, both deliberately and unwittingly. For instance, Julie's main image of a 'proper team' and how it should work depends on her repeated attribution of responsibility to others (poetic trope characterising ethical stances). However, she is ambivalent in positioning herself; while she hopes to gain more respect from others, she partly empathises with them. Thus she constructs a narrative of opposition. Julie lives between different self-narratives even if she 'colours' her positioning mainly through blaming the team of consultants. Mark defines his sense of place by adherence to professional practice in rigid terms, Kelly mediates and crosses borders of practice while Charles shows how professional affiliation is made the leading agent of his narrative.

Table 1: Storytellers' images, poetic tropes, positioning of self, and emergent narratives of belonging.

<i>Storyteller</i>	<i>Main image (of 'a proper' team and project management</i>	<i>Main poetic tropes expressed (ethical stance)</i>	<i>Positioning of self</i>	<i>Emergent self- narratives of belonging</i>
Julie	'Running to stand still'	Attribution of responsibility	Ambivalence	Opposition
Mark	'No downside'	Attribution of unity	Denial	Habitual
Charles	'Motivate yourself'	Attribution of agency	Rationality	Pragmatism
Kelly	'Somebody more on the ground'	Attribution of emotion	Relatedness	Reflexivity

Senses of place: Performing the narratives

'Running to standstill'

Julie's sense of belonging is constructed mainly as a narrative of constraint and conflict. The primary text strategy used is one of opposition but it is not a fixed pattern throughout the text. Julie spoke at length about her difficulties and the emotions she was experiencing in the project. Her blaming attitude sets the tone for the whole narrative in which she portrays herself as 'victim' of unsupportive consultants in the team.

My main priority, as I recall, was the fact that the team was not communicating with me; they were going off and having meetings, making decisions that affected the business but they weren't letting me know. I didn't know what meetings they were having or any conclusions; they weren't writing them down, so that was my main point of the meeting.

Julie blames Blooming consultants for her difficulties in learning project methodology and points out their unwillingness to communicate with her. She proceeds in her narrative with an externally-oriented view of the team. The others are to be blamed and should also 'restore' collaboration with her. However, after a while, she turns the narrative 'inwardly' to tell of her anxiety about where 'to fit in'.

My role is supposed to be the project leader but I'm not ultimately making the decisions. I should be involved. I'm still unclear to where I fit in. My role at the moment is learning what's going on; I feel like I'm running to stand still. They – the Blooming team – have a procedure. If they do something, if they produce a report, they put it onto the PC. I only became literate three weeks ago, so I'm not up to speed with that.

If the team 'owns' procedures, Julie is not stepping back from attempts at revenge and counteracts by strengthening her own procedural requirements towards consultants.

I expect them to keep me informed. I think the more now, probably I'm becoming more annoying because now I understand more processes. So I'm making them put more procedures in place, which for one is necessary but two, is also irritating for them because they don't want to be giving me information or stopping and having to explain things all the time because they, in their mind, know what they're doing.

Julie is also ambivalent. She 'forgives' the consultants' behaviour while blaming them.

I think some people's nature is like that. They are less keen of being questioned on the decisions that they've made but then, they have time constraints and they're paid. But actually no, I'm not really that much sympathetic to it. Their job is to make sure that I understand...

For Julie the team is distant and unsupportive. She does not feel part of it and positions it as incapable to meet her learning needs, to construct open communication and a fair level of partnership. She does not view such behaviour as temporary – one that would improve and 'develop' – but rather as an unchangeable fact.

'No downside'

Mark's narrative competes with Julie's. This will become apparent in the different tone of the text. The storyteller tries to maintain a 'factual' language and a positive view of the team. He remains 'silent' about Julie's outburst in a meeting that both of them

attended. My interview took place right after that meeting when – rather to the surprise of the rest of the team – Julie voiced her frustration about the state of collaboration for the first time. The reinforcing of teamwork procedures made salient differences in team members' expertise and working cultures. Julie was ambivalent over the use of common procedures: she felt it 'widened the knowledge gap' between herself and the consultants.

Mark explains that the meeting has to be considered a routine meeting, downplaying the emotionally charged episode that I just had 'witnessed'. The narrative starts with a view of his role responsibilities.

I thought the meeting went well. I mean it was just a progress meeting, it wasn't a key meeting. I was taking over responsibilities that I've been carrying since the start of the project but I was never really intended to carry.

Mark had also sponsored the addition to the team of the change management consultant from Blooming's to support the client employees' transition to the new information system.

Kelly... I've been very keen to get Kelly involved because she is a change leadership specialist, so she will be dealing with how we communicate to the users and the people external to the project. I thought I was very, very happy with the meeting today. I'm very happy; it was very positive.

This positive emphasis shows Mark's satisfaction with the team situation and the newcomers. At the same time, the text shows that he 'softened' the negative episode with Julie and persisted in his assumption that there would not be any problem of collaboration.

I don't think there was any problem at all or anything particularly different from the dynamics. I know there was Julie getting more confident. She is more happy to take a hand up and say: 'Look guys, I need this!' rather than wondering if she is going to ask a stupid question. She knows the business better than we do and she's worked here for 13 years; she raises some issues that we won't see. So I think in terms of the dynamics, there is no downside.

At the end of Mark's narrative, 'there is no downside' in terms of perceived effects of Julie's behaviour for teamwork. His view is based on a single discursive strategy of 'communicative risk-avoidance'. Mark denied having problems working with Julie, and the rest of the team was presented implicitly in a positive manner. Mark tells a normalising (yet not normative) narrative trying to impose to the audience how the narrative should be read. In his view, the team would be making progress and 'grow together'.

'Motivate yourself!'

This narrative tells us about the need to cope with changing project requirements, making compromises, and deciding on trade-offs in uncertain environments. Overall, the team is depicted positively. Substantial differentiations, however, are made based on the storyteller's view of individual capacity for self-motivation at work. Based on this criterion, Charles categorises actors as either in or out of the group of motivated team members.

Within a team things that went well... Well, I think we had some strong performance on the team. I felt, there are people in Blooming's who try to positively seek out to work on engagements. I found people that positively want to work.. Mark Ellis did an excellent job. Kelly is pretty much in that category as well. It took a while for Kelly and myself to understand each other and I think we know each others' strengths.

Charles oscillates between a rationalist and a pragmatist approach. Whereas the former is underpinned by a moral stance exemplified in the text by a repetition of 'shoulds', the latter makes constant reference to a context that did not allow a proper team contribution to emerge.

Phil [infrastructure specialist] would always do what was required of him but he was very rarely taking initiatives. As a manager you're used to manage the job; Mark Ellis was more to management. Mark was very strong. I think Phil needs some guidance for building his motivation and commitment. He didn't enjoy the experience at all but that shouldn't impact on duly honest performance. If we only perform well when we're enjoying ourselves then we are not making any consultancy. Or, at least, you have to find enjoyment in difficult situations; you have to meet the challenges; you have to motivate yourself even when the client is difficult.

On this view, aspects such as 'liking' the activity one is engaged in are framed in such a way that they become the criterion that can distinguish good and bad performance. Charles uses pragmatism and denial to justify himself. He also perceives himself as a victim of the client's behaviour. Although showing some hesitancy in attributing blame, Charles' suspension of judgement is not maintained throughout the narrative.

We started well with quite a tight team and with a clear plan. It first went to the rye a little bit when it became clear that 02K was not the right product and the whole plan suddenly didn't make sense. So we probably all got frustrated about the fact that decisions weren't made and progress couldn't be made, but that sounds like I'm blaming the client for everything and I'm not sure. I'm largely, but we could have made more progress. That was frustrating.

Charles perceives himself as 'entitled to leave the ground' of day-to-day project management without having to question his own conduct. He is aware of some of the implications for the team.

We should have started Mark clearly is the senior guy who is going to run it whereas Julie in particular wouldn't except Mark in that role. It was perfectly appropriate for Mark Ellis to sit and run things there but not in her eyes. I've should have paid more attention to Julie.

Charles is thus able to 'manoeuvre around' issues of role responsibility with different tactics: blaming, rewarding, and distancing himself. Responsibility becomes almost exclusively a matter of developing personal motivation to engage in the project. Some tension around the storyteller's own management style is quickly 'resolved' within the narrative, to give closure to personal experience.

Do more myself and trust less the team way. But having said that, until now I haven't had problems like I had at Giant US, and I happen to allow the team a lot of attitude because these are very bright, highly paid people. They should be capable of managing their time. So I tended to be fairly hands off and got more involved since. I'm this way. More focused on role structures but, again, that is a bit of a reaction to the situation.

Hence, Charles does not end with a narrative of transformation. He does not really envisage the need to change either his leadership or his management style. His moral

judgement supports the value of behavioural rationality in the context of high uncertainty where facilitating the team's sense of togetherness and sharing would not be among the core responsibilities of a highly-paid project manager.

'Somebody more on the ground'

Kelly was the senior change management specialist in the team. In the view of this storyteller, consultants' assumptions of professional practice are hindering more than facilitating teaming as an inter-organisational process. The narrative reveals the qualities and criteria that are imagined as fundamental for supporting collaboration and for gaining more influence when working with stakeholders. Kelly makes clear how ambivalent behaviours might be triggered due to the experienced pressure in the project. She thus constructs the team as in need of her support.

And what did Julie say? She upset Mark. I didn't take it quite as extremely but she made a comment about the functional specification that wasn't to use. Mark took it very personally. Julie was saying 'this is rubbish' and wasn't showing him any respect. She felt Charles wasn't spending enough time there, so there was all this sort of underlying tension and I suppose, at that meeting, I felt she tried to get some sort of clarity on what the next steps would be.

Julie was not seen to understand the 'rules of the game'. Yet Kelly continues to justify Julie in the light of the project's uncertainty.

I sat down with Julie; she didn't really understand, so to talk about business rules: She got quite upset in that meeting and felt the whole project was getting a little bit out of hand and that people weren't being supportive, so we sort of seemed to, and I was quite surprised at that! But we seemed to have got to a point where she felt a little bit at risk because of this merger.

Kelly positions Julie simultaneously as a 'victim' and as a 'perpetrator' in the extremely volatile situation. Julie would be manipulating the team to fulfil her own expectations.

Julie felt exposed generally... but in her way was starting to begin to think 'Right, I point the finger at a few people and say they haven't worked very well.'

Kelly's is constructing her self-narrative as mediator. This voluntary role-taking is not acknowledged by Julie. This pushes Kelly to become explicit about her idea of team effectiveness. She so moves away decisively from being a mediator later in her narrative.

I don't find Julie's approach very structured; so what I was trying to do was to put some structure around. To say 'Let's just, let's not emotion carry us away here. What is it that you are missing?'

Julie is constructed in the guise of a child which imitates others. The imitation is preordained: it must be Blooming's way of managing projects. Kelly had indeed tried to replace Charles who was not there most of the time.

It was an assumption that she would grasp all these things and people. To a certain extent I could agree with that. I introduced to her the idea that may be in going forward we'd need a slightly different project structure where you would have somebody on the ground more constantly than Charles.

Kelly does not perform a pessimistic narrative. She breaks from the conventional idea of having a 'common team goal', and emphasises the importance of making sense together about developing actual opportunities to shape the collective process.

You might say 'Ok, you've got what we want to achieve and each of us individually will work out the how but we will share that in an understanding' and sort out if our measures will be constructive. So, for me, that's saying a common output, but a shared understanding of it, and an opportunity to shape how it get's done in the group.

Yet sharing perceptions might not necessarily bring about a better cooperation. Team members may not be empowered to take decisions.

The biggest missing for me is that we didn't have an opportunity to discuss it, so there actually wasn't a leader. Mark would take a lead and he would agree that you needed common goals and objectives but not feel empowered to have that sort of conversation. He would be looking for that to come out from somewhere else. So he was tactically trying to adjust what he saw and I'd say that would be more his deliverables: the seeing the need for a bigger goal.

Kelly positions the team as fragmented. This fragmentation has its root in the lack of conversations about the common space of experience. She describes team members as unable to incorporate personal interests and goals into wider team goals. Kelly remains critical of enacted professional practice. The team is not seen as just a victim of the situation; it is described as having been incapable of moving up to the collective level of sharing. The storyteller's construction of team life and belonging supports a more relational understanding of social selves. Kelly remains flexible and imaginative about what 'structure' should look like in a project and for a team.

The chiaroscuro of belonging

The narrative space of belonging in this paper can be seen as *rhizome* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), which is heterogeneous in nature and can have infinite ramifications (Chia, 1999). We can see different storytellers that have cast themselves as a multiplicity of characters using different strategies and tropes to put forward their identifications and desires, narrating 'polyphonic' tales (Bakhtin, 1965; 1984) of belonging. The team's enacted practices are linked to desires and preferences which emphasise the notion of belonging underpinned by the 'knowledge of the proper' – or what could be called a 'situated imagination' (Stoezler and Yuval-Davies, 2002) about ways to participate in team life and project work. In Julie's narrative, blaming is accompanied by imagining how she could be better supported in order to learn; Mark denies personal feelings and imagines a team unity as 'natural' improvement. In contrast, Charles imagines an autonomous and self-motivated team even if he is not prepared to engage in the process. Finally, Kelly imagines ongoing conversations that were not really taking place. If there is a shared wish to control and master relationships in the team by adhering to habitual practice, at an individual level it is experienced differently: in Mark's case, largely through suppression of emotions and personal expression; in Charles' case, more openly through the idea of being able to 'fix' problems through rational solutions. This 'illusion of omnipotence' comes with a particular view of expertise, which forges a certain knowledge that is 'less and less that of the *desiderable* in any sense and more and more that of the simply *doable*'

(Castoriadis, 1991: 249; original emphases). If narratives are spatial practices that mark boundaries, it is my contention that these two narratives have built frontiers rather than bridges in De Certau's terms. These two narratives promote a life-world in projects where 'vulnerability and pain are magically sidestepped' (Elliott, 2004: 79). Indeed, standards about project management adopted by the professional service consultants in this team have been 'cited', in Butler's terms, and have affected the team's sense of belonging. In this sense, 'one does not simply or ontologically "belong" to the world or any group within it. Belonging is an achievement at several levels of abstraction' (Bell, 1999: 3). For the project team, those levels refer to oneself, to the others, and to the emergent difference stemming from cited practice which they had to face individually and collectively.

If we consider the other two narratives, the experience and imagination of the team's belonging changes. Julie's narrative of opposition and Kelly's narrative of reflexivity envisage belonging without losing sight of difficulties or of the possibilities to positively redefine the collective space. The two narratives do not account for the same space of belonging either. The predicament of 'reciprocation and recognition' (Gabriel, 2000: 84) where vulnerability and caring are not excluded sign Kelly's view. This narrative gives a rich picture of a more relational and performative understanding of teamwork and project management. Although the team is seen as having been unable to arrive at shared understandings, for the storyteller cooperation *can* be enabled and remains a possible world to pursue in projects. Julie's narrative is mainly characterised by blaming the team as the 'villain', the anger and frustration stemming from perceived unfairness towards her. The main feature of her identity construction as a team member is grounded in that perception of injustice. However, Julie is not only playing the victim; she also claims back a space for herself in the team through her opposition, even if not without ambivalence. This has not been 'a confident voice narrating a simple tale of achievement, success, survival and sacrifice, but it is a voice which allows different constructions of identity to be experimented with, developed, modified, rejected and reconstructed' (Gabriel, 2003: 175). If Julie resists a way of being a project manager that she feels imposed upon her, she nevertheless opens up a space for dialogue in her constant effort to adjust. 'Seeking to belong' (to the experts), Julie embodied a liminal identity space. These kinds of hybrid spaces and the movements in-between (Bhabha, 1990) of lived action tend to be downplayed in current project management approaches, and this was partly salient in the enactments of team members.

The four narratives reveal how dominant project management practice has become an instrument for inclusion/exclusion and for the legitimisation of social practice. This was opposed but, more often, it triggered conspicuous ambivalence regarding personal choices, action, and how to 'fit in'. Yet, in the constant tensions between lived experience, expectations, and imaginations, the team has also been capable of self-reflection, questioning its own assumptions and practices. Storytellers have been able to draw a rich and particularised picture of their personal experience, exposing how they imagined the team to be, as well as how it 'could become' – as alternative or possible worlds to inhabit together.

Opening up spaces of belonging: In pursuit of an ethics of sharing

The team's narratives expose different forms of belonging through ongoing identifications, dis-identifications, and conspicuous misrecognition. The narratives fundamentally question current notions of a 'common team identity' that are defined by team membership, a unitary view of social selves, and a simplistic notion of knowledge integration. The team's life-world draws on particular experiences and underlying desires that are invoked on the basis of imagined criteria (i.e. qualities or values) for team collaboration and project management. Individual narratives favoured aspects that can be subsumed in qualities emphasising relational awareness, mutuality and respect, and a sense of achievement and worth. The team's narrative performance so became a complex process of positioning oneself and others, and moved beyond either resistance or conformity by emphasising ambivalence, denial, contradiction, and rationalisation.

Different enacted practices have shaped the team's life-world and exposed its ethical imaginations. The latter became 'a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings blend and clash' (Sarup, 1996: 25). On the one side, those writings 'adhere to' and on the other, 'break free' from instrumental rationality as conventionally understood in the case of project teams. In this sense, 'if identity is always somehow constrained by imaginative forms, it is also freed by them...we are not necessarily restricted in terms of such cultural imagination of social circumstances' (Frith, 1996: 122). This then has been a narrative performance of a complex social space: if a 'team feeling' was not achieved, individual narrative performance has enlightened us about ways in which belonging was experienced and ideologically conceived. I therefore place my reading of the narratives as 'the desire and capacity of individuals and groups to negotiate new forms of belonging – many of which are disconnected from more familiar attachments to territory, geography, or polity' (Croucher, 2004: 35-36). Crucially, different forms of imagination and desire about how to live together shaped senses of belonging, not fixed criteria or characteristics. Tensions due to ongoing power relations created hybridity that was sustained alongside competing attempts to lend coherence to the individual's identity narrative. The narratives tell us about the struggle to belong (narrative of opposition) as well as its 'taken-for-grantedness' (the habitual narrative); they also tell us about the desire to change forms of belonging. All these ways to belong help to explain what it meant to be a team member in this study, and may indeed apply to the increasing number of project teams that are facing similar situations in today's often volatile project environments.

The team's narratives raise two fundamental questions although my answers can only be tentative and incomplete. One concerns the mode in which we understand belonging; the other is about its links with collective action, and how a new 'ethics of responsibility' could look like to make solidarity possible when there is no shared feeling of belonging. In either case, the implications need to be addressed. Let us look at belonging 'itself' for a moment. Firstly, the narratives (of reflexivity and opposition) point to the relevance of 'the freedom not to belong as the right to withdraw from one's constituted identity in order to form a new one, and the freedom not to be represented' (Melucci and Avritzer, 2000: 507, abstract). This clearly undermines an 'integrationist-view' of belonging. We may therefore benefit from Agamben's radical idea of a

collectivity that can be seen as 'being whose community is mediated not by any condition of belonging... nor by the simple absence of conditions...but by belonging itself' (1993: 85). Following Agamben's reasoning, and trying to 'translate' it in the context of the project, team members would not have to share properties or understandings, nor have a unitary 'team feeling'. If individuals in the team are working and living together, that would be enough to speak of belonging: what 'counts' is the existence of a relationship to the team itself.

Secondly, we need to reconsider the links between belonging, agency, and solidarity. The narratives in this paper shift our attention from the question of identity or 'who we are' to contemplate 'what we are doing together' and 'how we are relating to each other'. Agency is therefore not located solely 'in the team' or in a conceived space of project management practice.

... Agency is the product of diagrams of mobility and placement which define or map the possibilities ... Such places are temporary points of belonging and identification, of orientation and installation, they are always contextually defined. (Grossberg, 1996: 102)

The narratives have pointed at *how* those temporary 'orientations and installations' could look like. An implication may be that attachment is no longer relevant for thinking of belonging; everyone would have to find personal ways to cope with the effects of 'heightened' individualism (see the narrative of pragmatism). On the one hand, this would be consistent with the assumption of a shared identity where solidarity is taken for granted; it would just 'happen' as a by-product of interaction. On the other, it would emphasise an ethics of rule-following inscribed in standardised practice and the spatio-temporal organisation of resources. Solidarity would emerge mainly because of actual 'opportunities for interaction' (Brint, 2001: 19).

Another possibility – the one favoured here – is to revise how an alternative 'citizenship' may be reconstructed in a team. This may perhaps be seen as a more 'tempered radicalism' that can help us in working through ambivalence and change (Meyerson and Scully, 1995) without having to dismiss the possibility of some shared ground for belonging. As this study shows, crucially belonging can exist in narrative construction and thus 'feel real' to participants. So the question is whether belonging takes on a positive or a negative meaning for the actors involved in joint action. The kind of ethics of responsibility evoked here is far removed from the more conventional notion of interaction and group behavioural norms for cooperation, which stress consensus in cognitive terms. The rights and duties and the sense of entitlement always have an affective and embodied dimension; they also require to be negotiated among participants. One would be led to assume that such aspects are best 'captured' by virtue ethics. It would be closer to what Flyvbjerg (2001: 2) described based on Aristotle's virtue of *phronesis* as 'the judgment and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor.' Yet, the narratives in this study invite us to be cautious: social actors as 'virtuosi' may inspire behaviour but this kind of excellence can be difficult to achieve when fragmentation and ambiguity co-exist alongside the 'pull' of inertia of habitual practice. The narratives suggest the need for a refined ethical-aesthetical understanding of knowing how to work in projects (see the narratives of opposition and that of reflexivity). Aesthetic knowledge implies an awareness that is both intuitive and emphatic (Strati, 2000). Attuning to such 'ethics of aesthetics'

highlights how expressions of people are enacted through collective identifications in everyday life (Maffesoli, 1996), calling for more attention towards 'spontaneously responsive relations to others and otherness' (Shotter, 2005: 115) through the local interactions and ways to generate different ways to know, to belong, and live together.

Yet where does this leave us with solidarity? The narratives suggest that solidarity is not possible without some shared understanding of what a practice means in day-to-day interactions. This resonates with a thinking of a project team as a community, which is an ongoing project where the sense of belonging is never to be fully attained. 'Incompletion is its "principle"' (Nancy, 1991: 71). Such ontological primacy of sharing is what creates the very experience of a space of community; it cannot be taken for granted while always being a place of ethics, politics, and responsibility. Unlike virtue ethics, such approach does not propose a particular concept of a 'good life' in project teams. It rather suggests how to create the conditions to make contributions possible within different project arrangements. It is also compatible with holding a multiplicity of values. The narratives point out that some of these will need to be made explicit in the group. In this sense, we cannot just speak about values *per se*, but of the affirmation and recognition that lived values may gain in the shared space of belonging.

The narratives suggest that this will only be possible if we loosen the 'stranglehold' of standardisation that erases spaces of difference and lived experience. This may be achieved with a more critical revision of project management education (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2004). The conceived social space (Lefebvre, 1991) of team action could then be reconstituted. What is at stake is no less than what is suggested also for us researchers in studying organisation – the 'restoration of experience and of corporeality... to acknowledge what was never lost but merely *misplaced*' (Linstead and Höpfl, 2000: 2-3; added emphasis). This paper thus proposes to advance empirically an ethics of belonging and responsibility where identities, values, and modes of dwelling in projects do not appeal to some external criterion imposed upon teams but originate from enacted team experience, ongoing negotiations, and forms of imagination about the possible spaces to inhabit together.

references

- Agamben, G. (1993) *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bachelard, G. (1969) *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon.
- Bakhtin, M.M. (1965) *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bell, V. (1999) 'Performativity and belonging: an introduction', *Theory, Culture, & Society*, 16(2), 1-10.
- Bhabha, H. (1990) 'The third space: interview with Homi Bhabha', in J. Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Boje, D.M. (2001) *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*. London: Sage.
- Brint, S. (2001) 'Gemeinschaft revisited: a critique and reconstruction of the community concept', *Sociological Theory*, 19(1): 1-23.
- Brown, R. (2000) 'Social identity theory: past achievements, current problems and future challenges', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 30(6): 745-778.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies That Matter*. London: Routledge.

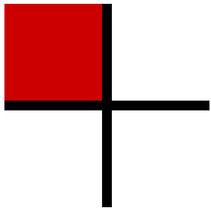
- Casey, E. (1993) *Getting Back into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Castoriadis, C. (1991) 'Power, politics, autonomy', in D. Ames (ed.) *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chia, R. (1999) 'A rhizomic model of organizational change: perspective from a metaphysics of change', *British Journal of Management*, 10 (3): 209-227.
- Cicmil, S. and D. Hodgson (2004) 'Knowledge, action, and reflection in management education – the case of project management', paper presented at the 20th EGOS Colloquium, Ljubljana, Slovenia.
- Croucher, S. (2004) *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- De Certeau, M. (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dutton, J. E., J.M. Dukerich and C.V. Harquail (1994) 'Organizational images and member identification', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 39(2): 239-263.
- Elliott, A. (2004) *Subject to Ourselves: Social Theory, Psychoanalysis and Postmodernity*, 2nd edition. Boulder: Paradigm Press.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2001) *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How it Can Succeed Again*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Frith, S. (1996) 'Music and identity', in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.
- Gabriel, Y. (2000) *Storytelling in Organisations. Facts, Fictions, and Fantasies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gabriel, Y. (2003) 'Glass palaces and glass cages: organizations in times of flexible work, fragmented consumption and fragile selves', *ephemera: theory and politics in organization*, 3(3), 166-184.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Grossberg, L. (1996) 'The space of culture, the power of space', in I. Chambers and L. Curti (eds) *That Post-Colonial Question*. London: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1990) 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in J. Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Hall, S. (1996) 'Introduction: who needs 'identity'?', in Hall, S. and P. du Gay (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.
- Harré, R. and Langenhove, L. (1999) *Positioning Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M. (1971) *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Herzig, R. (2004) 'On performance, productivity, and vocabularies of motive in recent studies of science', *Feminist Theory*, 5(2): 127-147.
- Hetherington, K. (1998) *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics*. London: Sage.
- Hodgson, D.E. (2004) 'Project teams: the legacy of bureaucratic control in the post-bureaucratic organisation', *Organization*, 11(1): 81-100.
- Hodgson, D.E. (2005) 'Putting on a professional performance: performativity, subversion and project management', *Organization*, 12(1): 51-68.
- Hodgson, D.E. and S. Cicmil (2006) *Making Projects Critical*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Kohler Riessman, C. (2003) 'Performing identities in illness narrative: masculinity and multiple sclerosis', *Qualitative Research*, 3(1): 5-33.
- Langellier, K. (2001) 'You're marked: breast cancer, tattoo and the narrative performance of identity', in J. Brockmeier and D. Carbaugh (eds) *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Linstead, S. and H. Höpfl (eds) (2000) *The Aesthetics of Organization*. London: Sage.

- Lawler, S (2002) 'Narrative in Social Research', in T. May (ed.) *Qualitative Research in Action*. London: Sage
- Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Maffesoli, M. (1996) *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. London: Sage.
- Malpas, J. (2001) 'Comparing topographies: across paths/around place: a reply to Casey', *Philosophy & Geography* 4(2): 231-238.
- Mason, A. (2000) *Community, Solidarity and Belonging: Levels of Community and their Normative Significance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Melucci, A. and L. Avritzer (2000) 'Complexity, cultural pluralism and democracy: collective action and the public space', *Trends and Developments*, 39(4): 507-527.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962) *Phenomenology and Perception*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Meyerson, D.E. and M.A. Scully (1995) 'Tempered radicalism and the politics of ambivalence and change', *Organizational Science*, 6(5): 586-599.
- Mishler, E.G. (1995) 'Models of narrative analysis: a typology', *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5(2): 87-123.
- Mouffe, C. (1992b) 'Democratic politics today', in C. Mouffe, (ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*. New York: Verso.
- Nancy, J.L. (1991) *The Inoperative Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nancy, J.L. (1993) *The Experience of Freedom*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Nancy, J.L. (2000) *Being Singular Plural*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Nelson, L. (1999) 'Bodies (and spaces) do matter: the limits of performativity', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 6(4): 331-353.
- Nocker, M.O. (2004) 'Projects as emergent space: shifting boundaries of a multiple horizon', paper presented at the 2nd workshop *Making Projects Critical: 'Projectification' and its Discontents*, 13th-14th December, St. Matthias Campus, Bristol Business School, University of the West of England.
- Nocker, M.O. (2006) 'The contested object: projects as emergent space', in D. E. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1991) 'Narrative and Self-Concept', *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 1(2 & 3): 135-153.
- Ricoeur, P. (1991) *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics, From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics of Action*. London: Sage.
- Riessman, C. (1993) *Narrative Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Rimmon-Kenan, S. (2002) 'The story of 'I': illness and narrative identity', *Narrative*, 10(1): 9-27.
- Sarup, M. (1996) *Identity, Culture, and the Postmodern World*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Shotter, J. (2005) "'Inside the moment of managing': Wittgenstein and the everyday dynamics of our expressive-responsive activities", *Organization Studies*, 26(1): 113-135.
- Stoezler, M. and N. Yuval-Davis (2002) 'Standpoint theory, situated knowledge and the situated imagination', *Feminist Theory*, 3(3): 315-333.
- Strati, A. (2000) 'The aesthetic approach in organization studies', in S. Linstead and H. Höpfl (2000) (eds) *The Aesthetics of Organization*. Introduction. London: Sage.
- Tajfel, H. and J.C. Turner (1979) 'An integrative theory of intergroup conflict', in W. G. Austin and S. Worchel (eds) *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole.
- Turner, J.C., M.A. Hogg, P.J. Oakes, S.D. Reicher, and M.S. Wetherell (1987) *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

the author

Manuela Nocker is currently a Lecturer in Organisation Studies and Innovation at the University of Essex, Essex Business School, Entrepreneurship and Innovation Group. Her research uses organisational ethnography, post-structural theory, and narratives to develop critical approaches in the study of project work, belonging and identity, ethics and collaborative practice.

E-mail: mnocker@essex.ac.uk



Who is colonizing whom? Intertwined identities in product development projects

Thomas Andersson and Mikael Wickelgren

abstract

Despite the considerable number of studies on workplace identities in the organizational literature, the project management area of research is relatively de-personalized. In seeking to develop this research, this qualitative, longitudinal study of a product development project in the automotive industry focuses on how individuals use the project as a resource for their own identity construction while at the same time the project colonizes their identities. The study reveals that the identity construction processes of the project leaders and of the project are closely intertwined and co-constructed. The project leaders face a paradoxical situation: their identities are colonized, regulated, and controlled by their company (or car, or project), and yet they believe they make their choices voluntarily. However, the core values of projectified society are 'hidden' in the identity work that an automobile company consciously uses to develop cars associated with specific emotions and values.

Introduction

In describing projects in the 1980s at Apple Computer, Inc. (now Apple, Inc.), Sculley and Byrne (1987) tell the story of the Apple T-shirt slogans. When a new project at Apple started, the T-shirts from the last project with the slogan 'Working 80 hours and loving it' were replaced with new T-shirts with the slogan 'Working 90 hours and loving it'. This story, from the new era beginning in the 1980s when projects became an important part of our organizing practices, shows how projects tend to invade and even take over people's lives. It is now possible to talk about a projectified society (Lundin and Söderholm, 1998; Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm, 2002) where projects regulate and, at some level, even control human existence (Deetz, 1995).

The projectified society means that more and more organizational members are being redefined as project workers and project managers (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006), which has an effect on their identity. Enterprise logic, that is, initiative, energy, self-reliance, boldness, willingness to take responsibility for one's actions, might even become a major element in their self-identities (Storey et al., 2005). However, because project management focuses on structure, activities, and control, identity issues in project settings have been relatively unexplored.

Project management has become one of the most influential management fashions. Management research tends to surf the same fashion waves by both confirming and criticising ideas that are of practical interest and application (Andersson, 2008b), but project management research, despite some recent contributions (e.g., Packendorff, 1995; Sahlin-Andersson and Söderlund, 2002; Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006), contain too few critical voices willing to examine the effects on workers of this trend toward project work. It is necessary to refocus on the work and the people in project research (cf. Barley and Kunda, 2001).

The traditional view, which characterizes projects as flexible and permanent line organization departments as stable, has become more and more nuanced and is now often described as subtle and multi-layered (Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm, 2002). There are even contradictions where projects are promoted as examples of de-bureaucratization that are, in fact, examples of re-bureaucratization that generate complex responses from employees (Hodgson, 2004). As a result, people have to construct their own identities in a tension-filled setting where they find themselves oscillating between the allegedly exciting and dynamic project environment and the supposedly tedious and static line organization. In product development projects people are simultaneously involved in constructing at least three other identities in addition to their own: the *product* itself, the product development *project* and the *brand of the company* that produces the product.

These intertwined and complex identity processes do not in themselves explain why people are willing to work 80 or 90 hours a week. Several studies argue the explanation lies in the colonization of people's identities by modern corporations (Deetz, 1992) where the regulation of people's identities produces 'appropriate individuals' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) and controls their psychic identities (Deetz, 1995). We claim that the colonization processes extend beyond corporate influence. Certain people actively seek these demanding positions, recognizing that there is something to be gained from such work. These project leaders tend to aspire to the core qualities of project work and thereby also to the discourse of enterprise (cf. Storey et al., 2005). The identity work performed in project is to a large extent membership work, that is, work proving that you are a competent project worker (Jönsson, 2002). The project discourse thereby enables enterprise discourse to shape people's self-identities.

In this study, our aim is to describe the complexity of identity processes in projects and especially focus on colonization aspects of these processes.

Taking the 'identity turn' in the project management field

We view identities as processual, situational, and relational because they change over time, vary in different contexts, and are established in relation to other social entities on the same and/or different levels (Andersson, 2008a). Given this understanding, human life is an ongoing process of identity construction where the individual tries to make sense of, understand and define him-/herself in relation to different social situations (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007). There are influences on the aggregate level (e.g., gender identities and professional identities) and different discourses provide identity

templates (Watson, 2001), social-identities¹ (Watson, 2008) or institutionalised identities (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007). Individuals elaborate on and work with these aggregate identities by trying to integrate them into their self-identity (Watson, 2008). This implies that, for example, professional identities may be characterized by homogeneity on an aggregate macro level (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000) and by variations on a micro level. However, the macro discourse forms the contours and contexts that guide the construction of the local discourse (Kuhn, 2006).

There is a reciprocal dependency between the self and the context (Lindgren and Wåhlin, 2001), which is illustrated by the concepts of identity work and identity regulation. The two concepts constitute two different roles that discourse has in identity processes (Kuhn, 2006). The separation of the processes, however, takes place on a conceptual level. In reality, it is difficult to distinguish between the processes (as difficult as it is to sort agency from structure in the social sciences). Identity work has been defined as 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003: 1165). In this definition, identity work consists of the interpretive activities of reproducing and transforming self-identity. Identity regulation is defined as the discursive practices that condition identity processes (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Identity work and identity regulation influence self-identity (the organized narrative of the self), but self-identity can also induce identity work. Identity processes are thus constituted by the interplay between self-identity, identity work, and identity regulation (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Identity work means that the actor uses discourse as a tool, while identity regulation ties people to social structures through, for example, roles and scripts. At the same time, discourses can regulate identities and can be used in identity work. The processes are complex and intertwined, as Alvesson and Willmott (2002) emphasize when they explain that the most sophisticated forms of identity regulation are 'hidden' in people's identity work. Consequently, colonization can enter both identity regulation and identity work processes. The colonization that comes from identity regulation is more direct and explicit, while colonization through identity work is more implicit, but also stronger.

Project work and project discourse as means of colonization

Projects are identity processes in themselves, but we focus on projects as arenas and resources in the formation of people's self-identity. We think a collective vision, such as a project identity, is interesting primarily because of its influence on people's identity construction (cf. Alvesson et al., 2008). Processes of co-construction may occur when notions of project work and individual identity construction confirm and/or disconfirm each other in a situation (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007). This result may trigger both identity work and identity regulation processes on the individual level.

A projectified society means that more people work in different kinds of project organizations and that people in permanent organizations are more involved in projects

¹ They are called social-identities in order not to confuse them with social identity and social identity theory that constitute another theoretical frame.

as a part of their normal work. As project management discourse becomes more established in many organizations, even as it competes for attention with other discourses (Green, 2006), such project management discourse has strengthened. Lindgren and Packendorff (2007) describe four different discursive constructs that are central to the project management discourse: state of emergency, loyalty and professionalism, organized chaos, and 'war stories'. The state of emergency construct means that project workers are constantly exposed to economic and/or political threats that jeopardize their futures. The loyalty and professionalism construct refers to the assumed high levels of ambition, commitment, and responsibility that project members bring to their projects. The organized chaos construct defines projects as sequences of planned action, allowing for the possibility that anything may happen. The 'war stories' construct refers to the narratives of project hardships that result from people's high professional investments in terms of long working hours and chaotic private lives, but also to the narratives of the satisfaction and feelings of accomplishment people experience during project work. The values represented by project management discourse are very similar to what other researchers (e.g., Storey et al., 2005) refer to as enterprise discourse (i.e., initiative, energy, self-reliance, boldness, willingness to take responsibility for one's actions).

Project management discourses provide social-identities on different levels that both constrain and enable action; therefore, these discourses have significance beyond their focus on the regulatory aspects of social-identities. In most instances, actors have the freedom to choose among a number of identity templates (Llewellyn, 2004; Andersson, 2008a), but some specific social-identities are most promoted or preferred (Rose, 1989), which greatly limits the 'freedom' of choice. Intertwined processes of identity work and identity regulation are in effect at all times, so the choice of identities is by no means 'free'. Instead, the choice has the character of 'either you are in or you are out' (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007: 362).

Since identity construction processes are dependent on the social situations individuals find themselves in, to understand project work it is important to recognize its influence on individuals' self-identities. Yet there are actually few empirical studies that illustrate how individuals handle a projectified reality (Packendorff, 2002).

Although stand-alone projects often are presented as offering an escape from the bureaucracy of permanent organizations, there are actually more similarities than differences between such projects and such organizations. Projects may even reflect re-bureaucratization and a high level of discipline (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006a) even though they are presented as de-bureaucratization devices (Hodgson, 2004). Projects do not mean the abolition of hierarchical organization, but rather permit the re-construction of some aspects and confirmation of others (Clegg and Courpasson, 2004). Because projects vary greatly, project work is not a homogeneous work form (Turner and Cochrane, 1993; Packendorff, 1995). Packendorff (2002) recognises the heterogeneous nature of project work when he creates a typology of different project work situations, based on the following two analytical dimensions: 1) the degree to which the individual's work is tied to the temporary project or the organizational context; and 2) the degree to which project work is either routine or exceptional for the individual. Product development work, in general, is characterized by the typology called 'Project-

based work' where the project work is routine and is performed in the organizational context (Packendorff, 2002). Since the new car projects that are the focus of this study may be categorized as project-based work, this typology is therefore our main interest in understanding its influence on individuals. The typology of project-based work requires that individuals spend most, if not all, of their time working in projects in a stable, organizational framework. Project work is accepted in the organizational setting as a natural part of the individual's employment (Packendorff, 2002). Since such project work implies that temporary organizations exist within more permanent organizations, where people directly or indirectly relate to both groups, projects create arenas of intertwined identity processes. These processes create multiple targets of identification and de-identification on the individual level (e.g., Kuhn and Nelson, 2002; Pratt, 2000).

Projects often have overly optimistic deadlines as well as constant shortages of resources, both of which limit the time available to project workers for reflection and learning (Packendorff, 2002). Even when people have time for such reflection and learning, they are often reluctant to use it and instead jump to the next project (Evans et al., 2004). As they move from project to project, the repetition of procedures generates a type of professionalization. Yet project managers seem ambivalent about their 'professional identity'; they both aspire to it and resist it (Hodgson, 2005). Because of the lack of opportunities for reflection and learning, project workers often seek higher positions in future projects as their reward, with the result that their careers become a series of endless projects requiring increased responsibility and commitment (Packendorff, 2002). Emergency situations and problems that arise owing to these time and resource constraints are resolved by heroic actions that gradually become taken-for-granted solutions. Such solutions combined with the discursive constructs of 'working a lot' and 'choosing the project over private life' have significant implications for project workers' work/life balance.

Projects and work/life balance

Project work requires committed project leaders and project workers who to a large extent connect to the logic of enterprise (Storey et al., 2005). Since projects must meet deadlines, project leaders and workers often have to take time from somewhere else, which usually is their private life (Eaton and Bailyn, 2000). Project-based work is perhaps one of the best examples of the new and evolving forms of work psychological contracts where people agree to work as long as it takes to complete their tasks, but in return expect greater flexibility and autonomy in choosing their working hours (Vielba, 1995). Watson and Harris (1999) note similarly that managers in particular (including project leaders) tend to regard their formal or informal contracts as 'doing whatever it takes' rather than as 'working x hours a week'. 'Doing whatever it takes' is a very abstract commitment that is hardly measurable (Andersson, 2005) since basically it is a social construction dependent on the project leaders' sense of duty and the external pressures for heroic actions. The dark side of this commitment means long working hours with the inevitable risk of burnout, stress and work/life balance difficulties, all of which may lead to problems with health, general well-being, and family life. The potential damage is as real for the project workers as it is for their organizations.

Furthermore, in many work organizations, especially organizations characterized by project-based work, long working hours are part of the culture that separates the committed from the non-committed workers (Kunda, 1992; Watson, 2001). The work culture that values working a lot, regardless of the sacrifice to individual and family life, is associated with the manager identity (Andersson, 2005) and may be even more identified with the project manager identity (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007). Clearly, the level of normative pressure and discipline is high in some organizations (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006a). For women, who often have the greater share of home and family responsibilities, a reasonable work/life balance in such a work culture is difficult to achieve (Marshall, 1995). Additionally, the project management discourse promotes masculine identities (cf. Hodgson, 2003) and tends to reinforce characteristics typically considered masculine, such as rationality, efficiency, control and devotion to work (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006b). Consequently, organizational control exerted through normative pressure is only one reason why people fail to maintain their work/life balance (Hochschild, 1997). The normative pressure extends beyond the organization and is connected to the projectified society, which means that project work and project discourse colonize people's identity processes from several levels.

Case background and methodological considerations

We will use some empirical extract to illustrate our theoretical claims. These empirical extracts emanate from a longitudinal qualitative study performed in 1998-2001 and 2007. The data collection in the intervening years (2002-2006) was characterized more as simply staying in contact with the studied organization. We agree with Cicmil et al. (2006), who argue that longitudinal studies are essential in project management research since they permit descriptions of processes such as colonization. Furthermore, a qualitative study allowed us to approach the studied phenomenon closely.

We studied projects managers who were jointly running new car projects at Volvo Car Corporation (VCC). In addition to direct observations, we video-taped 100 hours of project management meetings and audio-taped individual interviews with all participating project leaders. Our combination of observations and interviews allowed us to observe the practice and everyday lives of the project leaders and to discuss the observations with the interviewees. Thus we were able to observe the project practice closely (Cicmil et al., 2006). In 2007, we interviewed some people from the initial round of interviews who still worked in new car projects. Using this wealth of empirical material, our focus here is on the multi-layered aspects of identity regulation and identity work, especially in terms of colonization, in the studied setting.

The VCC new car projects were led by people with considerable internal status and high formal rank in the company (Wickelgren, 2005). Taking on the role of a project leader in the new car projects made one something of a company hero – so long as the projects were successful commercially. This semi-mystification of the corporate hero was a reflection of the 1990s trend in personalizing the image of the powerful 'large-project leader' (Womack et al., 1990) or the 'heavyweight' development teams (Clark and Wheelwright, 1992). In the world of new car production, the project culture was one of

glorifying action orientation and the hard, often hectic work required to meet the tight deadlines.

Project leaders work a lot – part of the identity and a consequence of priorities

In many work organizations, working long hours is an important part of the organizational culture that separates the committed from the non-committed workers (Kunda, 1992). Consequently, working a lot and making sacrifices, such as in one's family time, are consistent with the expectations and demands of such organizational cultures. This project culture, with its project identities, is pervasive in new car projects. As one TPL explained:

I work all the time! Weekends, evenings...Before Christmas I picked up my husband at a Christmas party in the evening, and then I went back to work and stayed there until midnight. Still, I met a colleague on Saturday morning and was able to do some more work before we left for Christmas. That is typical in my work. I haven't time for the simplest things in my private life. (Ophelia, TPL)

For two reasons, this TPL worked seven long days a week. First, owing to her area's activities in the overall project, her job as a TPL required long hours and many working days. Second, and perhaps more in line with Kunda's observations (1992) on the prevailing cultures of engineering organizations, a high-level project leader is simply expected to work a lot. If a project leader could limit his/her workweek to 40 hours, while delivering the expected results, peers, subordinates, and superiors would still question his/her contribution to the results. At VCC, where the project leaders are constantly monitored during projects, it would be a major break with the generally held view of the project leader's role if he/she did not work long hours on the project. Since the product and the project come first, and people come second, the vast amount of work on projects is regarded as normal. Everyone is expected to do everything possible to ensure the success of a project, and any project leader who works only 40 hours a week would be severely criticized if there were any project failures. The perception is that a project leader who works only 40 hours a week lacks the dedication for such a position. A double work effort is the standard required of project leaders, as one BPL explained:

The period between projects is tough. It takes time to come down. In the beginning it is hard to accept that working 40 hours a week is not the same as having a half-time job, but that is the feeling. [...] I have accepted that there are no interesting jobs where you work 40 hours a week, but I think it might be possible to stop at 60 hours a week... (Richard, BPL)

This reflection by an experienced project leader of large new car projects at VCC suggests his final surrender to the logic of product and project first – people second. This subordination of the human element to the constructed products seems to require thinking of these products as more than inanimate objects – the conceptualization of cars as social objects (Harré, 2002). Since people do not want to be mastered by things, their subordination to products in this way is a humiliating and demoralizing experience. An alternative strategy might inflate the constructed products in some way (Harré suggests a narrative) that would make them more than material objects. This

strategy could be the result of a process of mutual and simultaneous identity creation where the product, the project, and the individuals serving them all lend and borrow bits and pieces from the others' evolving identities. Thus, the different entities meld and create intertwined identities while simultaneously supporting each other.

Parallel identity construction – product, project, and individual project leader

Project leaders' career paths are related to their influence on the new cars. The car is in focus and the identity of the project is closely linked to the car, but the car is also linked to the project leaders' management of the projects. In talking about former projects, the project leaders talked about the car models, for example, the 850 or the V70, or they talked about 'Richard's project' or 'Adam's project', that is, using the project leader's name to identify with a specific car model. The close link between the project, the car and the project leader is almost an emotive one. This linkage is well illustrated in a documentary film that was made on the new car projects in this study. In the film, the interviewer and a BPL visit a car exhibition where the interviewer points to a Mercedes-Benz and asks: *Can you imagine yourself building that car?* The BPL responds:

No, it is hard to build cars that you don't like...I mean, it's an excellent car, but I couldn't do it. I wouldn't do a good job... it just isn't me.

As this statement suggests, from a project's origin, the identity processes of a car, a project, and a BPL are intertwined.

Project leaders are also chosen as members of the new car project management teams based on their individual identity and the expectations for the product. The HR director who was involved in the selection of individual project leaders for the new car management team commented on one of the choices:

[Seamus] was, along with his competence regarding car development, chosen because he was an almost perfect customer targeted for the V70. He was a loving father of two small children, who was seen carrying his two child car seats between the different test vehicles he was driving on a daily basis here at the company. He lived the life of a typical projected V70 customer. He was highly educated, had an interesting and challenging job, and a wife with similar background and job circumstances. He lived with all the many expectations that come from parenthood, owned a house, and had a great passion for sailing. He drove his kids to their soccer training, and did the shopping on his way home. On weekends he packed his car with his family and the gear for sailing trips. Putting him on the management team of the new car project gave him an opportunity to develop the perfect car that satisfied his lifestyle, and the company got the intended car developed. We also used him as an example of our projected customer in a part of our marketing campaign for the V70. (Norman, HR director)

When the selection of the management team takes into consideration the lifestyles of project leaders, the identities of the individual, the product, and consequently, the project, is almost totally intertwined. This co-construction of identities highlights the colonization process. As well as seeking employees trained for and skilled in certain tasks, the employer looks for people whose private lives qualify them for work assignments. Thus, family situations and leisure activities are factors given consideration when assigning people to some of the more desired company positions.

Who is colonizing whom?

The project leaders' primary task was to translate the VCC corporate values into tangible products. In performing this task, they became the main interpreters of the core (and long-lasting) values that were reflected in the products they hoped consumers would buy in the next seven to ten years. This translating task was not one of merely following instructions since the institutional structures in which these project leaders worked could not provide solutions for each and every problem. There was no manual for how to be a project leader. The VCC people created the existing structures, but these structures could be changed as a consequence of the project leaders' initiatives and decisions. Owing to this management style in organizing product development projects at VCC, we assert that the project leaders in this study acted as active agents who could make choices and could exert their independence in their identity work.

However, in a strictly Deetzian (1992) sense, it can be argued that VCC colonized the project leaders of our study. They surrendered to the dominant structure of the company because the company was so much more influential than they were in the roles as individual project leaders. Even if these leaders had collaborated, they could not have resisted the power of the VCC structures. While the VCC project leaders worked hard and completed their tasks, even when the time and resources for the projects were limited, as project leaders they had to comply with the governing circumstances and rules of the game that were set by VCC.

Nevertheless, taking a less strict interpretation of the projects and the project leaders, it is possible to ask if the project leaders had free will in their situations. An alternative interpretation of the project leaders' actions is that they were addicted to their work and their positions in the new car projects. In this interpretation, it is arguable that their commitment was more self-imposed than company-imposed. At the start of the work, each project leader focused on obtaining the desired leadership position, but once he or she had achieved that position, the desire to keep it had almost a narcotic effect. The project leaders developed addictions to their work, and could not escape. Their only solutions were surrender, collapse, retirement, or death, whichever came first. The self-imposed commitment was the way they more or less consciously subordinated themselves to the rules of projectified society (Lundin and Söderholm, 1998; Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm, 2002), which colonized their career aspirations and made them work even harder to achieve company goals (Packendorff, 2002).

A third interpretation of the project leaders' situation was that they had no choice, either in their work or in life in general. However, we claim not that they had no choices, but that their choices were limited by different restrictions. Identities are not created in a vacuum – they are influenced by other people's perceptions and expectations. Identity templates can be elaborated on to a certain extent, but they have regulating aspects (Rose, 1989). Even when you can choose between different identity templates, some are certainly preferable, or even inevitable, if you want to be at the centre of a project. From an identity perspective, the project leaders had to make their own personal set of choices by balancing the different expectations on them. Each project leader had his/her own expectations of what to do, and how to do it, both as professionals and as private individuals. For simplification, we highlight here only two kinds of expectations that

faced the project leaders: expectations from the company and expectations from people in their private lives (immediate family, friends, neighbours and relatives). Both expectations created structures that influenced the choices made by the project leaders. The impact of these structures was different for the different project leaders, and thus they made different choices about how they performed their tasks, how many hours a day they worked, and where they worked. The general opinion held by the project leaders and the company was, however, that the project and the products were priority number one even if exceptions were made for the importance of weddings, births, funerals, and other private events that the project leaders prioritized. In that sense, they had all accepted enterprise as a major element, or even *the* major element, of their self-identities (cf. Storey et al., 2005).

It is also important to acknowledge that the project leaders themselves wanted to put significant effort into the projects. For reasons of personal interest, they wanted to work with cars, and in the new car projects they had the unique possibility to affect future products in a way people outside the projects could not. The company used this interest in appointing project leaders who could be 'one with the car'. The expectations on the project leaders required them to work long and hard hours, but even in the absence of those expectations, the project leaders would still have spent considerable amounts of time at work for the sheer pleasure of working with what interested them most. As Alvesson and Willmott (2002) conclude, the strongest identity regulation is hidden in people's identity work. For the project leaders in this study, this was very true. Their interest in cars was consciously colonized and used by the company with the result that the project leaders prioritized the project over themselves.

The project leaders' interest in cars has another dimension: the intertwined identities of the people, the product, the project, and the company. Because of their genuine and strong interest in the automotive product, the project leaders wanted positions where they could exercise influence over the products in the early design phases. They avoided positions where the decisions taken on product issues were indistinguishable from overall company policy decisions. Such product issues for new car models are totally intertwined with overall company decisions as far as brand, resource allocation, and company image are concerned.

Conclusion

The identity processes at the organization (the VCC brand), the new car projects, the project members, and the new car models are so closely intertwined that it is almost impossible to separate them. Because of these intertwined identities, products are developed that represent the core values that are central to the company's history and reputation. The project members think VCC, feel VCC, breathe VCC; they simply are VCC. Nevertheless, because of the enormous work commitment required of them, the price the project members pay is high in terms of stress, long hours, demanding deadlines, and personal sacrifices.

Deetz (1992) concludes that modern corporations colonize most entities they come in contact with, including their own employees. A straightforward interpretation of this

idea is that the project leaders in our study are the subjects of colonization. They are absorbed by the projects, and their identities are regulated in order to manage the often uncontrollable product development process. Identity regulation is thereby used as a form of organizational control (Deetz, 1995; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) for the purpose of attaching emotions and value to the brand.

However, even if Deetz's conclusion illuminates certain parts of the colonization phenomenon, we cannot fully understand the identity processes viewed only from the perspectives of colonization and identity regulation. The multi-layered identities that are constructed and co-constructed (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007) in such an intertwined way and that result in a situation of inseparable identities also reflect aspects of personal choice. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) claim that the strongest identity regulation processes are hidden in people's identity work, that is, people are regulated, but still believe that they have free will. In our study, VCC actively used the project leaders' interest in cars to link their individual identity work to the identity work of the car and the brand. The attachment of emotions and value to the brand and the car became possible by 'hiding' it in the project leaders' identity work. To some extent, the project leaders knew they were subjects of control, colonization, and regulation, and yet they chose this career path with full recognition of the consequences for their work/life balance. Their choice meant accepting long workdays and potential emotional and psychological damage in exchange for professional status, job fulfilment, and high compensation. The colonization had consequently moved beyond organizational control and corporate influence. The project leaders were colonized by the projectified society, a situation which made them aspire to the core constructions of the project management discourse: state of emergency, loyalty and professionalism, organized chaos, and 'war stories' (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007). The project leaders subordinated themselves to the discourse with a belief of 'free will', which is as far as a colonizing process can go.

The new car projects at VCC are associated with the attributes of movement, development, and a future-orientation, which are strengthened by a project discourse characterized by constructs such as states of emergency that increase the sense of rapid forward movement. People who want to be a part of such an environment must be loyal (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007) and must be aligned with the project and its values (Jönsson, 2002). Working long hours makes a statement: I am committed to the project! In that sense, a project's leader is colonized by his/her project. Despite this colonization, as long as project leaders are aligned with their projects, they can take advantage of the future-orientation aspect of the projects for self-development. When a project develops at a rapid pace, its project leaders develop and grow rapidly as well. Consequently, there is a co-construction of movement and development in project leaders' identities and the project work/project discourse. The reality of this mutual growth is evident when project leaders jump from project to project, each requiring more commitment and increasing responsibility, in ever more complex circumstances.

The project leaders in this study are in a paradoxical situation because of their colonized, regulated, and controlled identities that they partially chose themselves. On the one hand, they have been directly colonized by the company (or product, or project). On the other hand, they have co-constructed their identities in an exchange with their

organization. They are simultaneously subjects of voluntary identity regulation (Andersson, 2008a) and users of the projects as a platform and resource for identity work. However, projectified society is always hiding in, and thereby regulating and colonizing, their identity work.

references

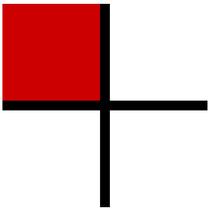
- Alvesson, M., K.L. Ashcraft and R. Thomas (2008) 'Identity matters: reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies', *Organization*, 15(1): 5-28.
- Alvesson, M. and D. Kärreman (2000) 'Varieties of discourse: on the study of organizations through discourse analysis', *Human Relations*, 53(9): 1125-1149.
- Alvesson, M. and H. Willmott (2002) 'Identity regulation as organizational control: producing the appropriate individual', *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5): 619-644.
- Andersson, T. (2005) *Managers' Identity Work: Experiences from Introspective Management Training*. (Diss.) Gothenburg: Bas.
- Andersson, T. (2008a) 'Identity work and identity regulation in managers' personal development training', GRI-report 2008:7, Gothenburg: Gothenburg Research Institute.
- Andersson, T. (2008b) 'Personal growth and sensitivity training: fashions in management and management research', *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 38(2): 61-82.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Barley, S. and G. Kunda (2001) 'Bringing work back in', *Organization Science*, 12(1): 76-95.
- Cicmil, S. and D. Hodgson (2006) 'Making projects critical: an introduction', in D. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cicmil, S., T. Williams, J. Thomas and D. Hodgson (2006) 'Rethinking project management: researching the actuality of projects', *International Journal of Project Management*, 24(8): 675-686.
- Clark, K. and S. Wheelwright (1992) 'Organizing and leading 'heavyweight' development teams', *California Management Review*, 34(3): 9-28.
- Clegg, S. and D. Courpasson (2004) 'Political hybrids: Tocquevillean views on project organizations', *Journal of Management Studies*, 41(4): 525-547.
- Deetz, S. (1992) *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Developments in Communication and the Politics of Everyday Life*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Deetz, S. (1995) *Transforming Communication, Transforming Business: Building Responsive and Responsible Workplaces*. Cresskill: Hampton Press.
- Eaton, S.C. and L. Bailyn (2000) 'Career as life path: tracing work and life strategies of biotech professionals', in M. Peiperl, M. Arthur, R. Goffee and T. Morris (eds) *Career Frontiers: New Conceptions of Working Lives*. London: Routledge.
- Evans, J., S. Barley and G. Kunda (2004) 'Beach time, bridge time and billable hours: the temporal structure of technical contracting', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 49(1): 1-38.
- Green, S. (2006) 'The management of projects in the construction industry: context, discourse and self-identity', in D. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Harré, R. (2002) 'Material objects in social worlds', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19(5/6): 23-33.
- Hochschild, A. (1997) *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Hodgson, D. (2003) "'Taking it like a man': masculinity, subjection and resistance in the selling of life assurance', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 10(1): 1-21.
- Hodgson, D. (2004) 'Project Work: the legacy of bureaucratic control in the post-bureaucratic organization', *Organization*, 11(1): 81-100.
- Hodgson, D. (2005) "'Putting on a professional performance': performativity, subversion and project management', *Organization*, 12(1): 51-68.
- Hodgson, D. and S. Cicmil (eds) (2006) *Making Projects Critical*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Jönsson, S. (2002) *Product Development: Work for Premium Values*. Malmö: Liber.
- Kuhn, T. (2006) 'A 'demented work ethic' and a 'lifestyle firm': discourse, identity and workplace time commitments', *Organization Studies*, 27(9): 1339-1358.
- Kuhn, T. and N. Nelson (2002) 'Reengineering identity: a case study of multiplicity and duality in organizational identification', *Management Communication Quarterly*, 16(1): 5-38.
- Kunda, G. (1992) *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lindgren, M. and J. Packendorff (2006a) 'Projects and prisons', in D. Hodgson and S. Cicmil (eds) *Making Projects Critical*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lindgren, M. and J. Packendorff (2006b) 'What's new in new forms of organizing? on the construction of gender in project-based work', *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(4): 841-866.
- Lindgren, M. and J. Packendorff (2007) 'Performing arts and the art of performing: on co-construction of project work and professional identities in theatres', *International Journal of Project Management*, 25(4): 354-364.
- Lindgren, M. and N. Wåhlin (2001) 'Identity construction among boundary-crossing individuals', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 17(3): 357-377.
- Llewellyn, N. (2004) 'In search of modernization: the negotiation of social identity in organizational reform', *Organization Studies*, 25(6): 947-968.
- Lundin, R. and A. Söderholm (1998) 'Conceptualizing a projectified society', in R. Lundin and C. Midler (eds) *Projects as Arenas for Renewal and Learning Processes*. Boston: Kluwer.
- Marshall, J. (1995) *Women Managers Moving On: Exploring Career and Life Choices*, London: Routledge.
- Packendorff, J. (1995) 'Inquiring into the temporary organization: new directions for project management research', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 11(4): 319-333.
- Packendorff, J. (2002) 'The temporary society and its enemies: projects from an individual perspective', in K. Sahlin-Andersson and A. Söderholm (eds) *Beyond Project Management: New Perspectives on the Temporary – Permanent Dilemma*. Malmö: Liber.
- Pratt, M. (2000) 'The good, the bad, and the ambivalent: managing identification among Amway distributors', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 45(3): 456-493.
- Rose, N. (1989) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. London: Free Association Books.
- Sahlin-Andersson, K. and A. Söderholm (2002) 'The Scandinavian school of project studies', in K. Sahlin-Andersson and A. Söderholm (eds) *Beyond Project Management: New Perspectives on the Temporary – Permanent Dilemma*. Malmö: Liber.
- Sculley, J. and J. Byrne (1987) *Odyssey: Pepsi to Apple – a Journey of Adventure, Ideas, and the Future*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Storey, J., G. Salaman and K. Platman (2005) 'Living with enterprise in an enterprise economy: freelance and contract workers in the media', *Human Relations*, 58(8): 1033-1054.
- Sveningsson, S. and M. Alvesson (2003) 'Managing managerial identities: organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle', *Human Relations*, 56(10): 1163-1193.
- Turner, R. and R. Cochrane (1993) 'Goals and methods matrix: coping with projects with ill defined goals and/or methods of achieving them', *International Journal of Project Management*, 11(2): 93-102.
- Vielba, C. (1995) 'Managers' working hours', in *British Academy of Management Annual Conference Proceedings*, 331-338.
- Watson, T. (2001) *In Search of Management: Culture, Chaos and Control in Managerial Work*. London: Thomson Learning.
- Watson, T. (2008) 'Managing identity: identity work, personal predicaments and structural circumstances', *Organization*, 15(1): 121-143.
- Watson, T. and P. Harris (1999) *The Emergent Manager*. London: Sage.
- Wickelgren, M. (2005) *Engineering Emotion*. (Diss.) Gothenburg: Bas.
- Womack, J., D. Jones and D. Roos (1990) *The Machine that Changed the World*. New York: Macmillan.

the authors

Dr Thomas Andersson is a senior lecturer in management at the University of Skövde and a research fellow at the Gothenburg Research Institute where he is active in the research program Leadership, Innovation and Co-workership. His doctoral thesis *Managers' Identity Work – Experiences from introspective management training* was recognized by the prestigious Wallander grant.
E-mail: thomas.andersson@his.se

Dr Mikael Wickelgren is a senior lecturer in management at the University of Skövde and a research fellow at the Center for Consumer Science at the Gothenburg Research Institute where he currently is studying the criteria consumers use when buying new cars. His doctoral thesis *Engineering Emotion – Values as Means in Product Development* examined value-based product development projects in the Swedish auto industry.
E-mail: mikael.wickelgren@handels.gu.se



Towards a (more) critical and social constructionist approach to New Product Development projects*

Beata Segercrantz

abstract

This paper contributes to a critical debate on software product development projects. This is done by discussing certain shortcomings of mainstream new product development (NPD) literature and by offering an alternative approach to understanding NPD. The aim is not to argue against the 'existence and desirability' of NPD. However, the paper is critical of the univocal nature of most mainstream NPD literature, which potentially operates to marginalize certain voices and to limit possibilities for future actions. The paper moves towards offering a more critical social constructionist approach. Drawing on interviews with software product development experts, the paper provides an illustrative example of studying NPD projects. Here attention is shifted to the heterogeneous emergence and becoming of projects in and through which discourse, social practices, and subjectivities are dynamically produced. The approach emphasizes sensitivity to a wide range of accounts, sometimes contradicting ones, and to issues arising from them by being cautious of established conceptualizations in the outset of a study. It is suggested that such an 'analytical' approach may facilitate conceptual resources for critical debates and transformations.

Introduction

Many researchers in management and organization studies have pointed out that project based work has increased in a wide range of sectors and industries (e.g. Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006). The focus of this paper is on software product development that typically is carried out in project settings in which complexity, unpredictability, and continuous change is common (Kolehmainen, 2004). Software development projects, as a form of work, often involve complex problem solving as well as potentially changing customer requests, tasks, colleagues, and physical places of work. Therefore organizations engaged in software development activities form an interesting field of study from the perspective of (critical) project studies.

* I wish to thank Jeff Hearn for his very helpful comments on this paper. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers, the editors of this special issue, the participants of the EIASM 4th Workshop on Making Project Critical, and Jonna Louvrier for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

There is a well established literature on New Product Development (NPD), which explores various processes of NPD projects (e.g. Cooper, 1990; MacCormack et al., 2001). In this literature, projects are theorized and explored as processes consisting of discrete steps, often viewed as relatively linear and sequential, which potentially can lead up to new products (see e.g. Cooper 1990). Further, this large body of research has focused on developing models on the basis of which NPD teams could repeatedly commercialize successful new products. Underlying these efforts seems to be an assumption according to which projects are conceptualized in relatively static terms; NPD processes are understood as entities with certain characteristics that can be carefully planned and controlled. Understanding projects in these terms implies reifying projects, thus giving them ontological priority by drawing on an ontology of being (Chia, 1995). An implication of such attempts is that the conceptual entities are treated as unproblematic, putting them beyond critical analysis (Chia, 1999).

The aim of this paper is to address shortcomings arising from the univocal nature of NPD literature. This is done by viewing projects as discursively constructed, reconstructed, and transformed in and through relational processes rather than ascribing projects ontological priority as discrete events. This involves taking up an ontology of becoming (Chia, 1995), that is, a context-sensitive approach to understanding interaction and local orchestration of relationships through which projects and subjectivities emerge. These processes are viewed as ultimately ongoing and open-ended, therefore continuously producing multiple constructions of projects which in turn are constantly modified and contested (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) in specific historical and cultural situations (Gergen, 1973). Understanding projects in these terms can open up projects to new critical considerations. However, although questioning the ontological assumptions underlying most mainstream NPD literature provides important insights into the becoming of projects, such efforts do not necessarily offer a critical account of the phenomenon studied. This paper is concerned with developing a critical social constructionist approach that builds on an ontology of becoming and emphasizes giving voice to a wider range of social actors, such as projects workers. This is done by shifting attention to the analysis of unfolding micro-practices that shape reality in diverse ways in an attempt to bring forward a rich array of accounts for potential critical considerations; considerations that address, for example, asymmetrical power relations and dynamics of constructing subject positions.

Drawing on a social constructionist approach, the paper provides an illustrative example from an IT company. The empirical illustrations show how product development projects are discursively constructed and organized as well as how these processes have certain implications for how project workers make sense of themselves.

Moving on from prescriptive new product development models

New software product development is typically carried out in projects. There are several established approaches to NPD, which have focused on exploring processes of NPD projects. More specifically, much mainstream NPD research has investigated how such projects are managed and how NPD processes can be improved. During the last three decades it has been argued by different writers (e.g. Cooper, 1990) that NPD involves

processes that can be carefully managed. Cooper (1990) claims that effective NPD projects are often divided into predetermined stages; in the end of each stage there is a quality evaluation to ensure that all predetermined objectives have been met before the projects moves on to the next stage. Further, it is argued that managing NPD projects through these stages involves adopting a specific process that takes into consideration factors that have been shown to drive successful NPD performance (Cooper and Kleinschmidt, 1996). Such clearly structured models are built on the assumption that successful management of NPD projects requires prevention of uncertainties and changes, as well as careful planning by determining the product concept, design, production, and market introduction at the outset of an NPD project (Iansiti, 1995).

Since the late 1990s, some mainstream NPD literature has increasingly drawn attention to how product development in many industries is carried out in highly dynamic and uncertain business environments (e.g. Bhattacharya et al., 1998; MacCormack et al., 2001). For example, companies developing software may have to deal with frequently changing technologies and customer preferences, making traditional NPD models, such as Cooper's model, difficult to adopt in the software development industry (Iansiti, 1995). How changes and uncertainties during a development project may be taken into account has been approached in various ways. Eisenhardt and Tabrizi (1995), for example, elaborate on how NPD processes can be accelerated. The objective of compression models that advocate fast product development is to compress predetermined process stages, which are assumed to be predictable, implying that uncertainties can be kept at a minimal level (Kamoche and Cunha, 2001). Hence the competitive advantage of a firm is assumed to be determined by the speed of NPD through planning, rationalization of specific stages, and reduction of uncertainty. The compression models are based on similar assumptions as traditional NPD models, although the compression models put more emphasis on time. The waterfall model, which is sometimes applied in software firms, can be seen as a version of the traditional and the compression NPD models.

Dissatisfaction with the NPD models discussed has led some writers to explore flexibility (Iansiti, 1995; MacCormack et al., 2001) and improvisation (Kamoche and Cunha, 2001). Here, flexibility refers to the development of models in which different product development activities overlap (Krishnan et al., 1997). For example, if a development process is structured into three phases such as (1) the concept development of the software product, (2) the implementation, and (3) the testing, these three stages overlap in flexible models, while such stages follow each other sequentially in traditional models (MacCormack et al., 2001). This implies that successful NPD processes are responsive to new information concerning the market and technologies throughout the project by including change as an ingredient in NPD, yet putting emphasis on certain structures and process designs (Iansiti, 1995). Models advocating improvisation in NPD support the idea of less structured development activities to improve innovation and to ensure 'self-organizing' in projects (Kamoche and Cunha, 2001).

As illustrated, many mainstream accounts on NPD have been rather prescriptive. The objective has often been to find best practices for managing optimal NPD processes. Recent mainstream debates on NPD (e.g. Kahn et al., 2006) continue to address related

issues such as the optimal level of formalization of NPD processes, adaption of models to different environments, benchmarking ,and NPD in global settings (Kleinschmidt et al, 2007).

The NPD models discussed do not provide a comprehensive classification of product development models but the review reveals some common mainstream conceptualizations of NPD. Although there are differences between different NPD models, we can discern certain concerns and assumptions that the models seem to share. For example, many mainstream models of NPD have focused on reducing product development costs, accelerating processes, and improving product quality by describing how successful NPD should be organized. Ultimately, the objective of these accounts seems to be to help practitioners choose the ‘right model under the right conditions’. In this endeavour, the prescriptive or best practice accounts concerning NPD tend to emphasize reason, which is assumed to culminate in progress through increased human control of the world leading up to, for instance, new products (Prasad, 2005; Parker, 1992). In other words, much mainstream NPD literature presupposes that improved models of NPD processes and projects are likely to lead to progress. Through increased empirical knowledge about different characteristics of NPD, it is assumed that structures of the world, including NPD, can be found; structures that leave little space for margins or deviation from rules of reason (Bauman, 1992). Only increased precise predictions are assumed to produce effective NPD projects and formulating the predictions requires ‘finding’ a single best account or sometimes a limited number of related accounts (O’Shea, 2002). The prescriptive accounts in mainstream NPD models, however, pay little attention to various consequences of the models on individuals, for example, the models tend to take a gender-neutral stance. As Hodgson and Cicmil (2007) point out, the dangers and cost of standardization in organizations have been neglected, including impacts on subjectivities. Complex ways in which individuals respond to dominant discourses of organizations seem to be under-explored (Thomas and Davies, 2005). Next, I will discuss how these types of shortcomings can be addressed.

Towards a critical social constructionist approach to NPD projects

A commitment to the NPD models discussed in the previous section implies an emphasis on an ontology of being (Chia, 1995). More specifically, projects and NPD processes are described as objects existing ‘out there’ with certain characteristics such as (in)effective process stages. NPD projects are thus understood as relatively stable entities within which product development is carried out. From this it follows that projects as entities are given priority in analysis and ways of organizing are seen as secondary accomplishments, that is, organizing is assumed to come into existence through the projects. However, if NPD projects are in contrast seen as socially constructed, projects become instead a ‘consequence’ of organizing, that is, through organizing people construct projects rather than vice versa. This view on social phenomena privileges an ontology of becoming (Chia, 1995).

To explore the becoming of projects, this study draws on certain social constructionist accounts. There is a wide range of social constructionist approaches, which have emerged from influences of a number of writers during the last 40 years (Burr, 1995). As various versions of social constructionism differ in many respects (see, e.g. Knorr Cetina, 1994), I will outline a specific social constructionist framework, which I will show is both 'analytical' and 'critical'. The implications that follow from this framework, when adopted to study NPD projects, are significantly different from the implications that result from most mainstream NPD studies.

The becoming of NPD projects

Taking up an ontology of becoming implies exploring NPD projects beyond the specific meanings produced in mainstream NPD literature. Hence our attention shifts towards complex social processes that software product development experts engage in; the interactions and relational processes that take place between them (Burr, 1995). Through these processes, projects are socially constructed and come into existence as they are attributed with specific meanings. How the product development processes interactively unfold and construct certain shared understanding of NPD and not others are emphasized. These actions are continuous and thus meanings attributed to projects are more or less constantly modified as the actors participate in NPD (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Meanings are therefore always in a state of becoming, never fixed (Chia, 1995), and should be understood as primarily culturally and historically specific (Gergen, 1973). In sum, by engaging in certain process, actors seek to construct stabilized meanings of NPD but, simultaneously, as they participate in these projects various meanings are modified.

When understanding NPD projects as emerging through relational processes, discourse becomes the primary target of concern (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). By exploring discourses that software product development experts draw upon to bring certain organized states into existence (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), we can attempt to understand how they produce order and predictability to make social reality 'more liveable' (Chia, 2000). Looking at discourse in particular contexts provides insight into how NPD is '*made to work*' (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002: 578) as social actors locally take up specific actions. Further, certain contexts are assumed to provide a wide range of discourses while other contexts may provide a very limited number of discourses to draw upon. Likewise, it is suggested that various actors do not have equal possibilities to make use of discourses in specific contexts (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Some voices gain more legitimate positions while others are marginalized or silenced (Grant et al., 2005), for example, depending on the hierarchical position, gender, age, and education of a person (Burr, 1995). In the local conditions of product development, there are then always a number of discourses that construct specific versions of NPD projects while excluding others. Hence the discursive production of projects also appears to have potentially suppressive effects (Hodgson and Cicmil, 2007). The prevailing discourses that shape NPD have implications for how project workers involved can or should act, that is, by participating in organizing practices actors simultaneously construct themselves (see e.g. Bergström and Knights, 2006). Discourses are therefore seen to be tightly intertwined with how NPD projects emerge

and how actors are addressed in these processes; they act both as resources that actors can draw on in their interaction with others and as discursive constraints. Nevertheless, software product development experts, like any other social actors, are seen to have some room for choice in relation to discourses available (Davies and Harré, 1990; Bergström and Knights, 2006).

To conclude, 'discourse is first and fundamentally the organizing of social reality', and identities are constructed through these organizations (Chia 2000: 517). Further, the notion of discourse is also viewed as continuously contested, resisted, and modified. Hence actors are seen as both users and manipulators of discourse (Burr, 1995). This means that discourse, social practices, and subjectivities are viewed as dynamically produced. It is precisely through exploring these micro-processes of dynamic production that we can develop an understanding of the actual becoming of various social realities (Chia, 1999; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). For example, to explore the becoming of NPD projects, mainstream NPD models should be seen as discursive templates (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), not as functional plans to be efficiently realized as intended, but as resources that may introduce new ways of understanding, constructing, and carrying out projects. Therefore, the implementation of a new NPD model in a project acts as the 'beginning' of various discursive practices through which the model is reinterpreted, sometimes institutionalized, or perhaps even ignored; simultaneously, identities and subjectivities of the product development experts engaged in these unfolding processes are constructed (Chia, 2000).

An approach to facilitating critical accounts

If we understand reality as always in flux and take as our target of concern processes of labelling and fixing experiences, we can begin to recognize how specific versions of reality are constructed and what maintains them. Here I am specifically interested in how certain discourses and voices appear to gain legitimate positions while others are ignored or silenced (Burr, 1995). In exploring such issues, the focus on processes of becoming opens up possibilities for bringing forward different, sometimes contradicting, voices that are otherwise often deprived in analyses. In contrast, most mainstream NPD studies seem to be engaged in a search for more and more 'accurate' portrayals of product development projects, thus producing univocal accounts. This implies winnowing out what is considered the 'false', which, from a social constructionist perspective, operates to suppress voices rather than bringing forward the rich array of accounts that constitute NPD projects (Gergen and Thatchenkery, 1996).

Some of the critics targeted by social constructionist accounts have questioned the possibilities of the approach to provide critical accounts of social phenomena in terms of ethical and moral issues (Czarniawska, 2005). Moreover, if we take an anti-realist stance to social reality, how can we privilege certain discourses or voices? Further, can any social reality be deconstructed? There is great number of issues, which writers drawing on social constructionism explicitly do not seem to approve of (Czarniawska, 2005), and therefore one could argue that there are certain cultural and ethical limits to what is seen as desirable and undesirable (Dachler and Hosking, 1995). However, social constructionist accounts, as understood here, do not privilege the researcher's voice

over the voice of the researched. Hence the aim of a study is not to produce a specific answer to how certain conditions should be organized. Instead, various actors who potentially take up the research 'findings' in ongoing relations are seen to be in key positions regarding how the conceptual resources are translated into action in local conditions. Further, in bringing about change, social constructionist accounts emphasize the *social* aspects of processes of construction, which implies that transforming established constructions is a complex social achievement and not a simple choice to be done. The role of social constructionist studies then becomes to reveal the discursive becoming of certain effects with the objective to facilitate conceptual resources to transform, for example, suppressive effects.

By unmasking the becoming of certain effects, we can produce new alternatives for the future. This objective sharply contrast to much mainstream NPD literature, which typically aims at formulating one or limited prescriptive options for the future to produce preferred effects (O'Shea, 2002). To open up new options for future action, some social constructionist studies adopt a rather analytical approach while others take a more critical starting point (Jokinen and Juhila, 1999). A critical approach may, for example, start out by assuming the existence of asymmetrical power relations. Various practices in and through which these relations are maintained and justified are critically explored, often to achieve change. However, analytically oriented social constructionist studies put more emphasis on empirical data and issues arising from it, and therefore avoid formulating specific presumptions at the outset of a study. Rather than seeing these two approaches as two extreme examples, Jokinen and Juhila (1999) suggest that they can be placed at each end of a methodological dimension; a study can move back and forth on this dimension and thus be both analytical and critical, depending on the stage of the study. For example, analytically informed studies may produce critical results, and hence not only illustrate the becoming of a particular effect but also facilitate a critical account following the analysis. It is my intention to adopt such an approach here to develop a better understanding of how product development projects are discursively organized in certain contexts. However, as it has become apparent, my ambition is not to develop a prescriptive account but, following an 'analytically informed analysis', I attempt to provide a critical discussion of the results. An important beneficial implication of this effort is the possibility to give voice to a broader array of accounts, perhaps previously deprived ones, and to address some consequences of project-based work on project workers.

An illustrative example of organizing software projects

Drawing on the social constructionist approach outlined in this paper, I have conducted a study that explores software product development during organizational restructurings. The study consists of 81 semi-structured interviews conducted in Finnish IT companies. In this section, a brief illustrative example is presented to demonstrate how a group of six product development experts working within the same IT company (hereafter given the pseudonym EN Systems) constructs ways of organizing projects.

The analysis began with several readings of the transcribed interviews that explored similarities and differences, consistency and variations, as well as looking at the full

range of accounts. The starting point was analytical in the sense that I carefully identified and described certain context specific performances of language, which constructed ways of organizing projects (Jokinen and Juhila, 1999). This was done by avoiding defining and imposing logics at the outset of the analysis on the phenomenon studied. This is not to argue that I stepped into the analysis without any preconceptions, nor do I suggest that any critical conclusions cannot be drawn from the results. The suggestion is that I was cautious with established conceptualizations of projects and presumptions of, for example, power relations (Jokinen and Juhila, 1999). I began by focusing on ways of organizing and attempted to be as open as possible to different micro-practices producing stable effects. When all accounts that could be interpreted as describing organizations had been located, I continued by analyzing them in detail and by allowing some patterns to begin to emerge. The analysis showed how ways of organizing and subject positions were dynamically constructed and thus I proceeded to explore subject positions and their implications.

An illustration: Product development at EN Systems

EN Systems had a few software products, but the organization was constantly engaged in NPD projects. The ways in which the projects unfolded usually followed a similar 'product development model', that is, a discursive template (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002):

The process, according to my view, began as the person who is pulling the strings, the major guru, who sort of leads the product development, he has a long history, he has seen many products, he has even seen many versions of this product [under development], that is, of financial portfolio systems. He has seen many financial portfolio system products and systems related to them. Based on this experience he has probably during the years developed a vision and he also happens to be, let's say quite an intelligent person. Somehow he can keep all these things in his head, it helps. And then he probably got a green light from someone to begin developing his idea. In my view, it has been lead from one head. ... Each [team member] has had a very narrow scope in it [the NPD project]. One hasn't let them intervene in everything. Instead they have been, well, let's say that their scope has been kept narrow with dictatorial means. It is maybe doubtful in a social sense, but on the other hand it has given good results. That is, a product has been created. And if you would start messing a lot outside your own scope, then you would suffocate very soon. It has worked in this case. Perhaps everyone has respected it. There has been a leadership style that is efficient in my opinion. (A product development expert)

As we see, product development was organized according to a vision that had emerged over time, rather than in accordance with an 'established' NPD model. The aim of the actions taken when translating the vision into product development was to strictly control practices in a rather bureaucratic manner. Hence NPD was implicitly seen as practices residing in a context of potential disorder or even chaos that in most projects needed strict ordering, implying that disorder was to be avoided.

The project leader, who was also the supervisor of the other interviewees, was located in a relatively powerful position and was able to define the vision and to further delegate tasks in line with it. As the extract above shows, these power relations were legitimized in the interaction between various actors through certain discursive moves; the project leader constructed himself and was constructed by the other interviewees as a 'major guru', a more 'experienced' and 'intelligent person', hence making it easy for

him to claim voice. Implicitly the other interviewees were simultaneously produced as 'less intelligent and experienced', thus maintaining the project leader's position.

Although the project leader and the other interviewees occupied different positions and possibilities to claim voice, all interviewees can still be seen as agents of NPD. Moreover, the 'NPD model', shaped by the project leader's vision, can be seen as a discursive template that served as a resources through which the other actors interpreted their experiences and interrelated their actions while at the same time also modifying it to varying degrees (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). The interviewees often explained that the discursive template assigned to them 'a very narrow scope' in which to act. More specifically, as the 'NPD model' was translated into action, the product development experts constructed themselves as 'communicators'; their obligations were to follow instructions, to further delegate tasks to others (for new local reinterpretations), and to make sure that the tasks were carried out successfully. Hence the experts were constantly moving between the positions of complying with authority (project leaders) and positions as practicing authority towards others in lower hierarchical positions. Engaging in such activities was not a simple non-political process. The process of delegating task sometimes involved struggles and persuading other actors to take up specific responsibilities in certain ways. Carrying out these tasks required commitment and dedication, often experienced as stressful, as one interviewee said: 'I enjoyed it but undeniably it has been stressful and time consuming in the sense that a normal work day doesn't seem to be enough'.

In the story we see how a discourse of ordering and control was emphasized and rarely questioned, hence having significant implications for how NPD projects were organized. Projects were produced as practices that can be planned, predicted, and controlled in detail. In addition we can discern how the product development experts were offered subject positions in very specific ways within this discourse. Here, I view subject positions as achieved through the interaction between discourse and human agency (Bergström and Knights, 2006; Hardy, 2001) as individuals participate in various micro-practices. A specific subject position provides social actors with a conceptual repertoire and location that define limitations and possibilities for those who take up that position (Davies and Harré 1990). For example, the project leader was, in contrast to the other interviewees, located within a structure of rights that entitled him to a voice for defining a discursive template for NPD and including/excluding experts in projects. The other interviewees took up narrowly defined subject positions offered in discourse and were 'locked' into a structure of rights (and obligations) that addressed them as 'communicators' and instruction-followers.

The analysis of various micro-processes also illustrates how the interviewees (dis)identify with their subject positions (Fleming and Spicer, 2003); how actors are locked into structures of rights/obligations that they can accept or attempt to resist (Burr, 1995). The interviewee cited in the beginning of this section seems to dis-identify with the subject positions offered through the seemingly institutionalized 'dictatorial' ways of organizing projects. However, he still performed his obligations and even defended the practices by claiming 'it has given good results' and 'there has been a leadership style that is efficient', thus legitimizing the relations of power (Fleming and Spicer, 2003). In contrast, another interviewee explicitly seemed to identify, at least in

certain local conditions, with the subject positions offered; working under time pressure functioned as an important means through which he was constructed as 'a person who is needed by the company'. Concerning the other interviewees, it is more difficult to conclude how they related to their positionings, but nevertheless they all participated in various practices in similar ways, as illustrated in the extract, hence showing commitment to the projects and the reconstruction of certain power relations.

Conclusions

With this paper, my intention has been to draw attention to valuable implications that potentially follow from focusing on projects as discursively constructed in contrast to viewing projects as discrete events. Such a shift in focus involves a shift from an ontology of being to an ontology of becoming (Chia, 1995), that is, a shift from producing snapshots of NPD projects to exploring micro-processes of product development (O'Shea, 2002). As discussed, most of the NPD literature has attempted to 'discover' and formulate 'accurate' representations of NPD projects, which have provided thorough snapshots of projects (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002) but, simultaneously, have produced univocal accounts that potentially suppress a wide range of voices. To address such shortcomings, I elaborated on an alternative social constructionist approach through which the dynamic character and becoming of NPD projects can be better understood. More specifically, a crucial implication that follows from adopting an approach that is sensitive to the fluxing reality and the plurality of accounts is that we can open up more critical debates as it becomes possible to explore the diversity of voices.

To illustrate how marginalized voices could be brought forth and circulated in various micro-practices (Gergen and Thatchenkery, 1996), one possible path (amongst many) was sketched out. The suggestion was that by taking an analytical starting point without formulating clear presumptions at the outset of a study and by emphasizing giving voice to deprivileged actors (Jokinen and Juhila, 1999), we can generate new, more heterogeneous insights to project work; insights that later can act as critical conceptual resources for transforming the field of practice. However, in contrast to critical theory, the aim is not to 'provide direction and orchestration' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006); rather, this study encourages a search for useful readings of various social phenomena, which may produce change when placed in motion in certain contexts (Burr, 1995).

This paper also sought to illustrate the becoming of projects and subject positions by drawing on interviews with software project workers. The 'analytical' starting point of the study focused on various discursive practices, showing how NPD projects were constructed through dominant discourses that emphasized ordering and control, thus constructing ways of organizing projects in very specific ways. These practices left little room for the interviewees, with one exception, to negotiate subject positions, therefore also limiting the interviewees' actions and possibilities to claim voice (Burr 1995). The discursive view of subject positions taken here suggests that social actors take up specific subject positions within discourse, and that this is achieved through the interaction between discourse and human agency (Bergström and Knights, 2006). Further, as Davies and Harré (1990) argue, social actors have the 'choice' to accept or

resist their subject positions while also modifying them. Nevertheless, perhaps surprisingly, although the ways of organizing in the empirical illustration seemed to provide the interviewees with little space for negotiating subject positions, the interviewees did not resist their subject positions in their accounts, with the exception of one interviewee. This humble obedience (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007) in project settings deserve more attention in future studies, as various forms of compliance and resistance as well as (dis-)identification may contribute to complex and contradictory processes as individuals make sense of themselves.

As the illustrative example showed, the suggested social constructionist approach may prove most useful through the possibilities it offers to understand compliance and resistance, identifications and dis-identification at the level of subjectivities (Thomas and Davies, 2005). The strength of such inquiry is that it 'breaks out of the dualistic debate of "compliance with" and "resistance to"' and generates a nuanced, multidirectional understanding of the process through which different social actors come to accept specific subject positions (Thomas and Davies, 2005: 683) in, for example, project settings. This approach to resistance and compliance is in sharp contrast to mainstream NPD literature that implicitly or explicitly assumes that control can be achieved by designing optimal models that structure project work in certain ways, while resistance to such ways of organizing work is viewed as arising from unsuccessful management and design (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; see also Hodgson, 2002). Thus one of the most important implications arising from project studies drawing on the social constructionist account presented in this paper is the possibilities offered to produce broader, more varied, multidirectional, and perhaps even contradicting interpretations by focusing on the becoming of projects in terms of heterogeneous everyday micro-practices; practices in which discourses, practices, and subjectivities are dynamically constructed.

references

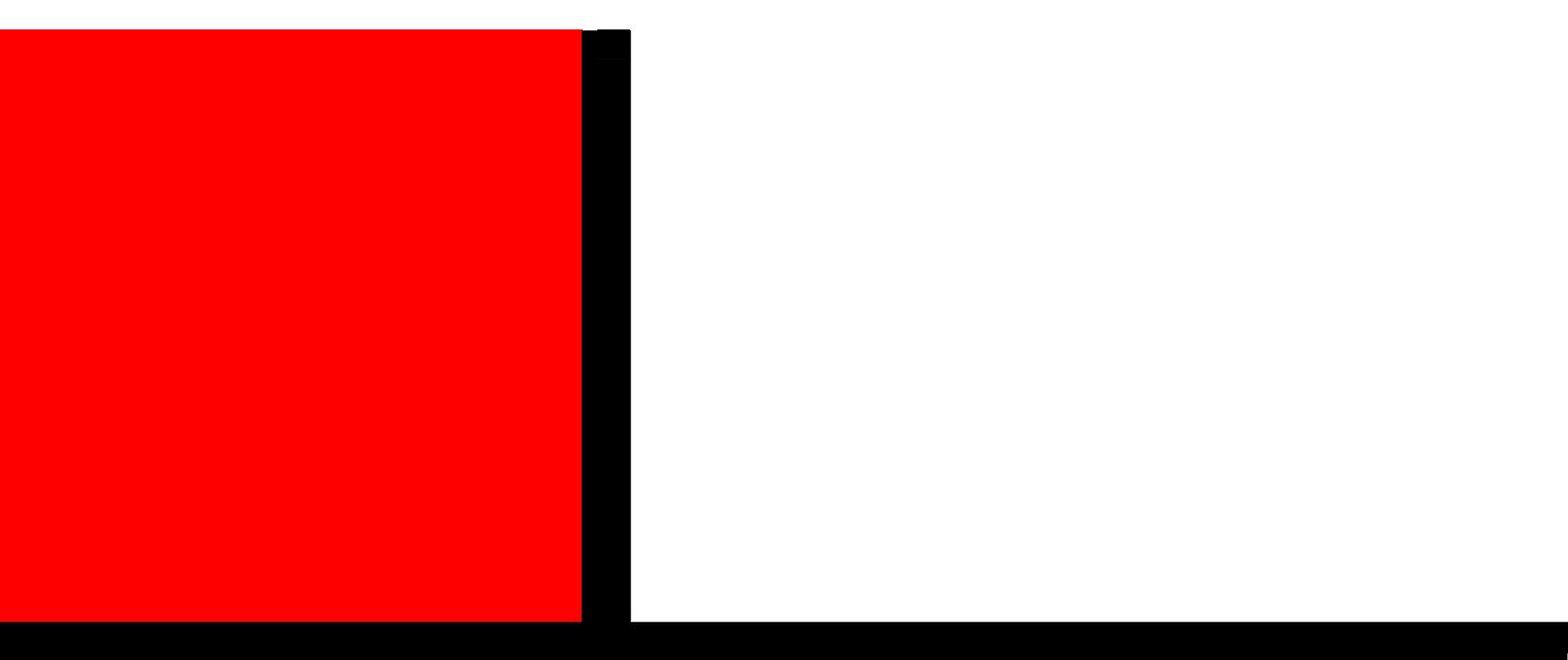
- Alvesson, M. and H. Deetz, (2006) 'Critical theory and postmodernism: approaches to organizational studies', in S. Clegg, C. Hardy, T. Lawrence and W. R. Nord (eds) *Handbook of Organization Studies, second edition*. London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. and H. Willmott (2002) 'Identity regulation as organizational control: producing the appropriate individual', *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(5): 621-644.
- Bauman, Z. (1992) *Intimations of Postmodernity*. London: Routledge.
- Berger, P.L. and T. Luckmann (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Doubleday.
- Bergström, O. and D. Knights (2006) 'Organizational discourse and subjectivity: subjectification during processes of recruitment', *Human Relations*, 59(3): 351-377.
- Bhattacharya, S., V. Krishnan, and V. Mahajan (1998) 'Managing new product definition in highly dynamic environments', *Management Science*, 44(11): S50-S64.
- Burr, V. (1995) *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Chia, R. (1995) 'From modern to postmodern organizational analysis', *Organization Studies*, 16 (4): 579-604.
- Chia, R. (1999) 'A 'rhizomic' model of organizational change and transformation: perspective from a metaphysics of change', *British Journal of Management*, 10(3): 209-227.
- Chia, R. (2000) 'Discourse analysis as organizational analysis', *Organization*, 7(3): 513-518.
- Cooper, R. G. (1990) 'Stage-gate systems: a new tool for managing new products', *Business Horizons*, 33(3): 44-54.

- Cooper, R. G. and E. J. Kleinschmidt, (1996) 'Winning businesses in product development: the critical success factors', *Research Technology Management*, 39(4): 18-29.
- Czarniawska, B. (2005). *En teori om organisering*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Dachler, H.P. and D.M. Hosking (1995) 'The primacy of relations in socially constructing organizational realities', in D.M. Hosking, H.P. Dachler and K.J. Gergen (eds) *Management and Organisation: Relational Alternatives to Individualism*. Aldershot, UK: Avebury.
- Davies, B. and R. Harré (1990) 'Positioning: the discursive production of selves', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20(1): 43-63.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. and B. N. Tabrizi (1995) 'Accelerating adaptive processes: product innovation in the global computer industry', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(1): 84-110.
- Fleming, P. and A. Spicer (2003) 'Working at a cynical distance: implications for power, subjectivity and resistance', *Organization*, 10(1): 157-179.
- Gergen, K. J. (1973) 'Social psychology as history', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26(2): 309-320.
- Gergen, K. J. and T. J. Thatchenkery (1996) 'Organizational science as social construction: postmodern potentials', *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 32(4): 356-77.
- Grant, D., G. Michelson, C. Oswick and N. Wailes (2005) 'Guest editorial: discourse and organizational change', *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 18(1): 6-15.
- Hardy, C. (2001) 'Researching organizational discourse', *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 31(3): 25-47.
- Hodgson, D. (2002) 'Disciplining the professional: the case of project management', *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(6): 803-821.
- Hodgson, D. and S. Cicmil (2007) 'The politics of standards in modern management: making 'the project' a reality', *Journal of Management Studies*, 44(3): 431-450.
- Iansiti, M. (1995) 'Shooting the rapids: managing product development in turbulent environments', *California Management Review*, 38 (1): 37-58.
- Jokinen, A. and K. Juhila (1999) 'Diskurssianalyttisen tutkimuksen kartta', in A. Jokinen, K. Juhila and E. Suoninen (eds) *Diskurssianalyysi liikkeessä*. Jyväskylä: Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy.
- Kahn, K. B., G. Barczak and R. Moss (2006) 'Dialogue on best practice in new product development. perspective: establishing an NPD best practice framework', *The Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 23(2): 106-116.
- Kamoche, K. and M. P. Cunha (2001) 'Minimal structures: from jazz improvisation to product innovation', *Organization Studies*, 22(5): 733-764.
- Kleinschmidt, E. J., U. Brentani and S. Salomo (2007) 'Performance of global new product development programs: a resource-based view', *The Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 24(5): 419-441.
- Knorr Cetina, K. (1994) 'Primitive classification and postmodernity: towards a sociological notion of fiction', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 11: 1-22.
- Kolehmainen, S. (2004) 'The dynamics of control and commitment in IT firms', in T. Heiskanen and J. Hearn (eds) *Information Society and the Workplace: Spaces, Boundaries and Agency*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Krishnan, V., S. D. Eppinger and D. E. Whitney (1997) 'A model-based framework to overlap product development activities', *Management Science*, 43(4): 437-451.
- Lindgren, M. and J. Packendorff (2006) 'What's new in new forms of organizing? on the construction of gender in project-based work', *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(4): 841-866.
- Lindgren, M. and J. Packendorff (2007) 'Performing arts and the art of performing: on co-construction of project work and professional identities in theatres', *International Journal of Project Management*, 25(4): 354-364.
- MacCormack, A., R. Verganti and M. Iansiti (2001) 'Developing products on 'internet time': the anatomy of a flexible development process', *Management Science*, 47(1): 133-150.
- O'Shea, A. (2002) 'The (r)evolution of new product innovation', *Organization*, 9(1): 113-125.

- Parker, M. (1992) 'Post-modern organizations or postmodern organization theory?', *Organization Studies*, 13(1): 1-17.
- Potter, J. and M. Wetherell (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage.
- Prasad, P. (2005) *Crafting Qualitative Research: Working in Postpositivist Traditions*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Thomas, R. and A. Davies (2005) 'Theorizing the micro-politics of resistance: new public management and managerial identities in the UK public service', *Organization Studies*, 26(5): 683-706.
- Tsoukas, R. and R. Chia R. (2002) 'On organizational becoming: rethinking organizational change', *Organization Science*, 13(5): 567-82.

the author

Beata Segercrantz is a doctoral candidate at Hanken School of Economics in Finland. In her current research she explores social processes in software product development during organizational restructurings. Prior to her doctoral studies she worked at Hanken as Project Manager for an executive program and as HR Manager in an IT company.
E-mail: <mailto:beata.segercrantz@hanken.fi>



www.ephemeraweb.org

editorial collective

Armin Beverungen
Bent M. Sørensen
Chris Land
Damian O'Doherty
Lena Olaison
Martyna Sliwa
Michael Pedersen
Nick Butler
Peter Svensson
Stephanie Schreven
Stephen Dunne
Stevphen Shukaitis
Sverre Spoelstra

affiliates

Akseli Virtanen
Alessia Contu
Alf Rehn
André Spicer
Anthony O'Shea
Campbell Jones
Christian De Cock
Katie Vann
Ruud Kaulingfreks
Sian Sullivan
Samantha Warren
Steffen Böhm