



## Project management behind the façade\*

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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

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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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

<b>Bureaucratic operations</b>	<b>Project operations</b>
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!

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