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Deconstructing Projects:

Towards Critical Perspectives on Project Theory and Projecticised Society

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Abstract

In the many comparisons made between project work and "ordinary" work, project work is usually depicted as an opposite, an opposite positively described as challenging, knowledge-intensive and controversial. Viewed from the perspective of the project worker, projects are often stimulating, but also sources of stress, loneliness, disrupted family lives, superficial work place relations etc. From our point of view, it is important to view projects as a discursive practice in society, implying that project management is something people in organisations take for granted and re-construct. What is interesting is how people act in projects and how it affects their lives – and thus our society – in general, and what hidden assumptions that they express in making sense of these actions.

We have chosen to use Foucault's (1977) notion of the modern prison system as a metaphor for the deconstruction of project work and its consequences in society. In the modern prison, people are (1) confined and separated within a secluded area, (2) subject to an agenda strictly governing both thoughts and actions, and (3) incessantly supervised and evaluated. From this perspective, project work is an explicit expression of the disciplinary principles upon which all modern organising is built. This is applied to empirical stories from two different kinds of projects, one theatre project implemented in the Baltic Opera House (BOH) and one IT consultancy project implemented by the software company Compute. In each case, a number of team members working in the same project were interviewed with a narrative approach; i.e. they told us their uninterrupted stories about the specific project and project work in general.

Expressed in terms of Foucault's prison, project work implies disciplining people in space, in time and their souls. In the traditional bureaucracies, this disciplining was open, formal and general, implying that it was a mandatory part of organisational membership, supported by written rules and structures, and 'fair' in the sense that everybody were subject to the same rule system. In modern project work, there are less such open, formal and general forms of disciplining people, since many of the traditional management responsibilities has been transferred to the individual herself. Instead, the sources of discipline have become hidden, informal and individualised. To put it simply: Bureaucracies failed, not because they controlled people too much, but because they could not control them enough. Where bureaucracies failed in this respect, projects succeeded, at least so far.

Prologue – Project work at the opera theatre

Mary works as producer and project manager at the Baltic Opera House (BOH), situated in a middle-sized Swedish town. She was originally educated as teacher, and joined BOH 23 years ago to work in the costumes department. Soon, she was head of the department, and BOH management recognized her skills in complex planning. At the age of 45, she has now been leading productions of new plays since six years, which means that she is an administrative project manager working closely together with the directors of the respective plays in organising rehearsals, coordinating music, costumes, stage design, marketing etc. Even though her focus is the different projects, she is in fact also coordinating and planning personnel and other resources throughout the organisation – BOH is a small opera house (about 150 employees) and each new play is a major effort where everybody is involved.

Mary describes her work situation as constantly keeping several projects going at the same time, in terms of both long-term planning and sudden crisis management. Each project is clearly defined in terms of budgets, deadlines, resources etc, and must be carefully coordinated and planned so that the right actors and musicians meet with the right directors and conductors at the right times at the right places. In addition, costumes must be manufactured and mobile stage backgrounds must be constructed. Mary finds her work demanding, but also creative and rewarding; creating performances together with professional people and presenting them to an enthusiastic audience is a fantastic thing, she says. Each rehearsal period is eight weeks long, and when there are three weeks left, nobody thinks that there will ever be an opening night. However, hard work, project management routines and professionalism have always helped her meeting the deadlines successfully.

Work has always occupied most of her days, not least since her two elder sons moved to their own apartments. She works all days and often evenings, and she says that she has never been paid for all the time that she devotes to her projects. When her children were small, she worked part-time, but ended up working almost full time anyway, she jokes. On the other hand, it is fantastic just to have the opportunity to work at an opera house, so she would never complain about it. Out of work, she takes care of two houses, two gardens, one boat and her family. Combining work and family was much more difficult before, when all her three children were small. Her husband runs his own business and works even more than she does, so she has always taken the main responsibility for the children. If they caught pneumonia or any other disease, she had to stay at home while still trying to maintain her work at BOH. She

does not think that work 'invades' her private life, however; if you accept to be a project manager, you can never expect a "nine-to-five" job, she says. You rather have to plan so that you really make full use of the free time that is actually available. Of course, work can be both stressful and tiresome, and she thinks that she is sometimes apathetic when she comes home in the evenings. Mostly, this has to do with bureaucratic conflicts at the organisational level, not with the complexity of the projects. Projects are fun, she exclaims.

This short story, albeit taken from a context not usually referred to as a project-based one, is an example of how project practices can be described by people in contemporary society. Project work is an increasingly widespread phenomenon, but the consequences for people and society have rarely been the subject of critical scientific inquiry (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2001). While the mainstream theoretical foundation of project work, project management theory, has been heavily criticised for being an overly rationalist and surprisingly ineffective construct in industry (Morris & Hough, 1987, Engwall, 1995, Packendorff, 1995), a lot of work still remains in inquiring upon its consequences for people and society in practice. Project work is socially constructed in interaction, an interaction in which individual aspirations, organisational structures and societal institutions are interwoven in a most complex manner. While project work is sometimes described as a non-bureaucratic way of unleashing the individual (Kidder, 1981, Christensen & Kreiner, 1997), it is also clear that routines, ideologies and power structures on organisational and societal levels govern project practices extensively (Kadefors, 1995, Pinto, 1996, Mulder, 1997). It is therefore the aim of this paper to critically analyse project work practices, and draw some consequences of a 'projectified' work life to society in general.

The paper starts by relating project management theory and established project practices, discussing the shortcomings of current knowledge on project work from a critical theory perspective. Then, the critical perspective of this paper (based on Foucault's analysis of prisons) is discussed in detail, emphasising the importance of deconstruction as a way of exhibiting the inherent contradictions, disciplinary effects and time regulations in project work practices. Our criticism is thus based in a post-structuralist notion of work organisation as a set of disciplinary practices trough which individuals are controlled and monitored for the sake of organisational efficiency and effectiveness. This framework is then used to analyse stories from two different project teams, one in the IT company Compute, one in the Baltic

Opera house. The paper is concluded by a discussion on the consequences concerning how life in contemporary society could be viewed.

1. Towards critical perspectives on project management theory

During the last decades, projects have become a common form for work organisation in industry, civil services and service producing firms (Lundin & Midler, 1998). The reason for this development is primarily that many products and services have become so customised and complex that their execution require a unique sequence of actions, but also that the increasing pace of change in society results in an abundance of change and development reforms in organisations. From having been a rational methodology in construction and defence industries (Engwall, 1995) the project concept and the project form of organising has diffused into almost all sectors of society, to both small and large tasks, to external contract-based projects as well as internal change efforts. The basic reason for this diffusion seems to be that the project – viewed as a task specific and time-limited form of working – is perceived as a way of avoiding all the classic problems of bureaucracy with which most ”normal” organisations are struggling (Stinchcombe & Heimer, 1985, Pinto, 1996; Scotto, 1998). In that sense, project-based work is a part of the wave of 'new organisational forms' that has entered most industries during the last decades (cf Kerfoot & Knights, 1998).

In many industries and companies, the project is now the normal work form. This is obvious in cultural life, advertising, consulting, R&D, IT etc, but also in several large corporations who executes numerous projects both externally and internally. Given this trend, one might assess that work life for many people is becoming increasingly ”projectified”, i.e. that substantial parts of peoples' work lives is spent in projects and similar temporary forms of organising (Packendorff, 2002). This is especially visible when it comes to work in ”project-based firms”, i.e. firms where almost all operations take place in projects and where the permanent structure fill the function of administrative support.

The basis of the existence of project management theory is a social agreement upon the definition of "a project". The project is a unique, complex task with a foreseeable date of delivery, subject to goal formulations in terms of time, cost and quality (cf Packendorff, 1995). Given this definition, one might also separate project operations from other types of operations and construct methods for managing the project as effectively as possible in relation to the goals. The origins of project management theory can be traced back to the US

defence industry in the 1950's (cf Engwall, 1995) where the time factor was the most important one in the arms races of the cold war. By time, the project form became taken-for-granted even in commercial operations, and then cost and quality became important factors. Together, these three factors form the so-called "project goal triangle", which tells us that a realistic project goal must be a well-balanced combination of them all (Meredith & Mantel, 2000). Since the cost factor is usually the most explicit limitation, practical project management is mostly concerned with balancing time against quality within a non-disputable cost budget, through active decision-making (Stinchcombe & Heimer, 1985).

In the many comparisons made between project work and "ordinary" work, project work is usually depicted as an opposite, an opposite positively described as challenging, knowledge-intensive and controversial (cf Pinto, 1996: 25). In a sense, project managers are often described in the same way as entrepreneurs, i.e. as strong, controversial, creative and active men, successfully bringing their ideas into the market (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2003). The message is that project management is something hard and different that could bring about real change and more effective work procedures. Compared to her colleagues in the corporate chain of command, the project manager is an individual that dares to put her head on the table, taking risks, building dedicated teams, coming up with creative solutions to deliver something unique within the limits of time, cost and quality (Christensen & Kreiner, 1997). The project is not about chaos, however; the project manager should also be able to make detailed plans for her project despite the inherent insecurity of unique endeavours (Stinchcombe & Heimer, 1985). The corporate departmental manager, on the other hand, can always lean against well-functioning routines, predictability and an unambiguous position in the hierarchy when leading her repetitive operations. Since the project manager often has to borrow resources from different departmental managers, conflicts often appear, in which she struggles for the interest of the project against the interests of effective repetitive operations.

As the project form is becoming increasingly common, it is also clear that it is not always as rational and stimulating as intended. Even the most professional project-based organisations show high failure rates, often both in terms of delays and budget overruns (Morris & Hough, 1987). Like "ordinary" firms, project-based organisations are also hurt by conflicts and internal politics, and in the relation between the project and its environment lures several problems (Buchanan, 1991, Lundin & Söderholm, 1995, Kreiner, 1995, Pinto, 1996). The project in its clear-cut form actually does not suit all those operations to which it is

applied, and in some cases traditional project management theory does more harm than it helps. In addition, managers in project-based organisations often spend considerable efforts in distributing scarce resources between different projects and in solving conflicts between project managers and departmental managers. In several sectors of society (such as cultural life, European Union programs, research etc) the project is the only work form available, which means a severe risk that the division into different temporary projects makes it impossible to implement long-term strategies. The projects thus run the risk of just being isolated sequences of action lacking any meaningful links to neither the context nor the future.

Viewed from the perspective of the project worker, projects are often stimulating, but also sources of stress, loneliness, disrupted family lives, superficial work place relations etc (Packendorff, 2002). One might even say that projects is a way of disciplining the individual in a way that organisations in general cannot do anymore (Hodgson, 2002), and that the work form reinforce traditional masculine attitudes to work and life (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2001).

To sum this up, it appears that the established notion of what project management is about suffers from several taken-for-granted assumptions. In order to question project management theories, methods and practices, these assumptions must be made explicit and subject to critical analysis. More specifically, we see the following assumptions as the focus of such critique:

The efficiency perspective. Project management is based on systems theory, implying that a project is always a part of a wider system, always to be found in a means-ends hierarchy. A project is thus a means to achieve an end at a higher level in the system, and are planned and designed to reach its goal as fast, as cheap and as correct as possible (Stinchcombe & Heimer, 1985). It is often said that one of the main advantages with projects is that they are created to reach concrete, specific goals – on the contrary to the ambiguous, multi-constituency tactics governing most permanent organisations (Pinto, 1996, Ekstedt et al, 1999). The concept of the "efficient project" becomes a rhetoric trick to commit people to do things for a "higher value" in that sense. We see the need to introduce other perspectives in which the project goal is just one possible reason why people devote time, energy and commitment to their accomplishment.

The single project perspective. Following the view of projects as efficient activity systems, it is not surprising to find that most theories, methods and practices of project management is aimed at projects as single entities. Given an exogenous goal, the internal operations in the project are what are interesting to all involved. This assumption is currently subject to critique from several directions, e.g. claims to consider multi-project situations, the effects of culture and institutionalised beliefs, the perspective of the individual etc (Söderlund, 2000, Engwall & Jerbrant, 2003). The common point of these different critiques is that the single project perspective excludes several aspects of project management that are needed to understand how people in projects perceive and handle their reality.

The leadership perspective. As a discipline stemming from a need for efficient handling of temporary tasks, project management is most clearly a managerialist field. Almost all theories, methods and practices aims at improving the ways in which project tasks are managed, and perspectives focusing on anything else are rarely considered as legitimate (Packendorff, 1995). Unlike contemporary organisation theory, in which it is almost never assumed that all people in an organisation share the same goals and interests, project management thus departs from an ideal in which the project goal is the *raison d'être* for all involved. One practical consequence of this is the emphasis of task-oriented leadership and the absence of human resource practices in the daily life of project workers.

The normative perspective. Given the preoccupation with efficiency, single projects and leadership, it is not surprising to find that traditional project management theories, methods and practices are mainly normative constructs. Often explicitly referred to as 'tools', the models and checklists of which all project management literature is full convey an image of project management as possible to improve into perfection (Packendorff, 1995). Almost completely missing until the beginning of the 1990's were descriptive accounts of projects, aimed at an improved understanding of what actually happened in projects. Since then, empirically informed scientific inquiry on projects has become an increasingly usual phenomena in project management research, even though it is still mostly aimed at making single projects more effective and better led.

From our point of view, it is important to view projects as a discursive practice in society, implying that project management is something people in organisations take for granted and re-construct. What is interesting is how people act in projects and how it affects their lives – and thus our society – in general, and what hidden assumptions that they express in making sense of these actions. We will therefore go on to discuss how such an analysis can be performed.

2. Critical inquiry on projects – deconstructed theories and practices

One way for critical analysis of contemporary managerial practices is deconstruction, where Derrida's works (focused on philosophical texts) has inspired many management researchers during the last decades (cf Calás & Smircich 1991, 1992, Culler, 1983, Knights, 1997, Martin, 1990, Mumby & Putnam, 1992, Cooper, 1989).

Derrida focus on human interaction as production of texts, and state that there is nothing outside the text (Derrida, 1976). The text implicates hierarchical structures expressed in terms of binary dichotomies (such as male and female, black and white etc), a hidden political meaning behind this that should be uncovered through critical analysis. Derrida (1973) uses the term *differance* instead of 'difference' in order to emphasise that concepts are processual and non-static constructs, situated in time and space. Differance is the combination of differing and deferring, implying possibilities of going beyond hierarchical structures to see what phenomena actually express. Differance thereby attacks the idea of identities resting on simple forms of localisation and logic. Cooper (1989), drawing on Derrida, means that dichotomies consist of binary opposites that in themselves imply that one concept is privileged over the other (he provides two examples: good-bad, male-female). Cooper also highlights the fact that in early historical eras, opposites such as strong-weak and large-small were expressed through the same concept. From this position, he gradually develops a perspective where he suggests dichotomous concepts as being complementary to each other rather than being opposites. This should also be the case of other dichotomizations such as the separation between work and private life and between project work and other work. This reasoning also implies that our focus can be lifted from the concepts as such, and that interaction processes should instead become central, that is, connections and co-construction are stressed. Interaction processes are also emphasised by Janssens and Steyaert (2002) where their 'third way' is characterised by pluralistic multi-voice thinking.

Deconstructions of different sorts of texts from are viable given certain purposes, such as to open our eyes to patterns taken-for-granted or hidden assumptions behind theories. This is not least important when it comes to thoughts or theories that are seen as elegant and compelling and therefore widely accepted – such as popular management models or new organisational forms. Kilduff (1993) has deconstructed the March & Simon classic "Organizations" (1958) and interpret the text as machine-oriented and based on an ideology of programming individuals and collectives. In the same way, Mintzberg's classical study The Nature of Managerial Work (1980) has been deconstructed by Calás & Smircich (1991) from a power/gender perspective, highlighting hierarchical influence and masculinity as hidden assumptions behind the seemingly critical original text. Linstead (1992) argue that research of organizational culture should be done from a deconstruction perspective that views culture as a paradox, as otherness, as seduction and as discourses, in opposition to the predominating harmony-based and unitary notions of corporate symbolism. The theory of project management can be deconstructed in the same way (cf Hodgson, 2002 and Lindgren & Packendorff, 2000).

Texts to be deconstructed are not solely public printed ones - we can analyse empirical interviews, stories etc in the same way, since every story can be interpreted in different ways. We have chosen to use Foucault's (1977) notion of the modern prison system as a metaphor for the deconstruction of project work and its consequences in society. Foucault's view of the historical development of punishment is that it is an ever-increasing path towards total disciplining of people. The power thoughts are central in his texts, but the power concept is different as compared to Marx's: power is structured in and related to positions, not to capitalist society. He is also more interested in how people are exposed to power than who has the power. In the modern prison, people are (1) confined and separated within a secluded area, (2) subject to an agenda strictly governing both thoughts and actions, and (3) incessantly supervised and evaluated. In general terms, one might say that prisons operate out of the principles of disciplining space, disciplining time and disciplining the soul. Metaphorically, these principles also apply to modern organisations, and can be used in critical analysis of phenomena such as e.g. management accounting (Macintosh, 1994)

Disciplining space means that prisoners are confined into a secluded and self-supporting area, and they are able to live their entire lives there. Within the prison, space is further divided into cells, which implies that people are always to be found at identifiable places and

that they – eventually - will start to identify themselves with these places. In organisations, this would mean that employees will have their needs fulfilled within the organisation, and through the structuring of operations into separate organisational units, spatial control and identification are achieved.

Where disciplining time is concerned, it rests upon an authoritative agenda for all tasks regulating with what all people should be occupied at every point in time. This agenda can be even refined through prescribed bodily movements (e.g. military exercise) or clothing (e.g. uniforms), through which the degrees of bodily freedom are further circumscribed. In organisations, time is heavily regulated in this manner through rule systems and agendas (Hassard, 1999), and there are also examples of explicit and implicit regulation of movements, conversational manners and clothes.

Disciplining the soul, finally, rests upon the principle of *panopticon*, i.e. that all prisoners are possible to see, monitor and evaluate. In the prisons, this was organised through hierarchies, which meant that guards were ordered to monitor limited sets of prisoners, and that supervisors were assigned to monitor limited sets of guards. Through a widespread chain of command, the prison manager could thus constantly monitor each prisoner. Hierarchic surveillance was further inscribed using sanctions when rules are broken, and through individual evaluation and comparison of the prisoners' individual performance. These principles of course also apply to organisations; in fact, these are the principles upon which Weber, Taylor *et consortes* built the ever-present notion of what modern organisations are about.

From this perspective, project work is an explicit expression of the disciplinary principles upon which all modern organising is built. Project work rose from an alleged inability of bureaucracies to handle exceptional, time-limited tasks, and it has thus been ascribed all the 'good' (i.e. 'effective') properties that bureaucracies are not considered to have (Ekstedt et al, 1999). While successfully deviating from bureaucratic norms, project work has of course developed a set of strictly governing norms within itself. It is even so that most project management theory departs from the ambition to formulate even more disciplining forms for controlling individual behaviour than those that had been developed for ongoing operations. Paradoxically, this has been presented as a liberation of people. Project work has been presented as a flexible work form, not only for organizations as units, but also for people working in these forms. Working in projects has a masculine image of being

exciting and performance-oriented (cf Lindgren & Packendorff, 2001) and will also give persons, which have been normalised into these kind of cultures, possibilities to work in more and more exciting and risky projects (rhetorical devices intended as positive). What is obvious, out from our empirical studies, is that people do not reflect upon how project as work form can occupy their way of living both at work and in life in general. They develop a normalised project thinking implying that the basic assumptions behind project work are never questioned.

Foucault (1977) described people in society as prisoners, drawing from the history of punishment in which there were a development from brutal violence to 'humane confinement'. He also applied this way of thinking to schools and other institutions. In this case, we use the project work form as another way of controlling and disciplining people for the sake of growth and profit ability. We have chosen some of Foucault's themes in the prison metaphor; time coordination, hierarchical ranking system, body-controlling routines, rewards/punishment, and - as a result - normalising and adjustment. In the following section, we will give some empirical examples how an empirical study can be interpreted in these terms.

3. Empirical analyses

We have used empirical stories from two different kinds of projects, one theatre project implemented in the Baltic Opera House (BOH) and one IT consultancy project implemented by the software company Compute. In each case, a number of team members working in the same project were interviewed with a narrative approach; i.e. they told us their uninterrupted stories about the specific project and project work in general.

What are interesting in such narratives from a critical point of view are what discourses that are used. According to Asplund (1979), critical inquiry on societal phenomena involves three levels; figures of thought, discourses and practices. In a narrative, there are both systematic and erroneous narrative elements, and in the relations between these elements and the figures of thought, we find discourses. Figures of thought are the basic, often taken-for-granted, ideas that we cannot depart from without severe consequences for how we perceive life and society (Jakobsen & Karlsson, 1993). Asplund provides the example of 'childhood' in order to explain the importance of figures of thought. Unless the figure of thought 'childhood' existed, the organisation of e.g. housing and recreation in society would look most different.

By attending to the special needs of children, we form discourses on how to live with children; children needs free spaces, children need time, children should be out in the nature etc.

It is also important to understand that the difference and similarities between discourses cannot be analysed on the discursive level; it is the figures of thought that determine any such differences and similarities. Discourses can be analysed as (often) visible expressions of values, while figures of thought are complex, implicit textures of such values. It is not always possible to relate a discourse to one or several figures of thought in a straightforward manner, and figures of thought are not always found in the practices of individuals; each analytical level has certain independence. What is interesting in narratives are thus how people talk about themselves in relation to contextual circumstances, how they describe their values, what is important to them and what is not important. For example, life form practices where hard work is combined with ambitious child-raising are often expressed of self-fulfilment, economic needs, parental responsibilities etc, building on discourses concerning modern enlightened people. Figures of thought can then be described as (for example) gender relations, growth and efficiency. What is interesting in discourses is of course how they can be related to underlying figures of thought, where we might find a high degree of inconsistency and a tendency to emphasise economic success over human relations.

At BOH, the project studied through the individual narratives was a regular opera production. The project started when a director for the play had been recruited, where after the producer at BOH constructed a rehearsal schedule for the actors and the orchestra. Parallel to rehearsals, a mobile stage setting was designed and constructed, and costumes for the actors sewn. All these parallel processes (all of them complex as they were) converged into the final rehearsals according to a strict time schedule. At BOH, it had never happened that a project deadline (i.e. the opening night) had not been met, and it did not happen this time either.

The Compute project was a typical one for them - neither big nor small, neither a brilliant success nor a disastrous failure. The project was ordered by the large car retailer Trucks with the intention to end information problems in their spare parts operations. It started when Compute received the order for the business system, and a project team were appointed. After going through a design phase, construction and implementation of the system followed. Due to technical problem and inadequate monitoring, the project was severely

delayed, but could be closed to everyone's satisfaction half a year too late and almost twice as expensive as initially offered.

<u>Time coordination</u>

The time-schedule in the theatre project is characterised by interviewees as routinised in the sense that they have fixed hours when they must be there to rehearse and perform, but in practice they are in place from 1.00 pm to late in the evenings, often until midnight. At the core of the project process are rehearsals, which cannot happen unless all required actors and musicians are present. Coordinating all these people into the same place at the same time is the task of the producer; implying issuing strict orders to everybody on where and when to be at work. While maintaining an image of the theatre culture as liberal and creative, the way of governing rehearsals is through enforced coordination and synchronisation. Meetings and discussions also take place during rehearsal time and often project participants are forced to work during weekends. All involved are usually free at Mondays, but they also perform for other audiences, or stays at home rehearsing their own songs and other performances. However, they do not complain because they think they are privileged to have so exciting and cultural jobs, which is a common discourse used to justify long work hours and intense commitment. Few of them count how many hours they work per week, and those who do say that they usually work about 50% more hours than they are paid for by BOH.

At Compute, most of the work hours in the project consisted of individual tasks, and all consultants worked full time on the project (except for the project manager, who coordinated several projects from Compute's headquarters). The different programming and testing tasks could be performed by individual consultants (given that they possessed certain skills), which meant that team members did not have to coordinate themselves according to a given time schedule. In practice, the consultants still tried to work together all the time, not least because there was a need for knowledge transfer from senior to junior consultants. What happened when the project turned out to become delayed, was that the project leader realised that there were a need for extraordinary efforts. The customer had accepted extra costs in the contract, so team members were kindly asked if they could put some extra hours into resolving the situation (after all, they were at least partly responsible for the delay). While the individual consultants had different possibilities to do so – they had different other tasks in Compute and different family situations - they all accepted to work overtime. In practice, those that had the

most freedom to work extra hours (i.e. young men living as singles) set the informal time schedule, and all the others adjusted to that out of loyalty to colleagues, Compute and the customer. Since they had all been assigned to various new projects from the planned end of the current one, the delay meant simultaneous work on two projects for all involved. The new projects had other project leaders, and no managerial coordination took place. From having a situation where an average workload of seven hours per day could be freely planned, they now had to plan for double work by themselves so that the requirements of all project leaders could be fulfilled.

Body-controlling routines

The main restriction concerning bodily movement at BOH is the coordinated and synchronised rehearsals. For some leading actors, musicians and back-stage managers, all rehearsals are mandatory; if one of some of them is absent, the rehearsal must be postponed within an already narrow time schedule. And since opening nights cannot be postponed, all extra rehearsal needed must be solved through working extra hours - all of them also requiring full coordination and synchronisation. Compared to ordinary office work for back-stage personnel and regular performances for actors and musicians, the rehearsal period is thus an episode of extreme control of the body. Moreover, all actors must keep their bodies free from all sorts of illness, which means a high level of self-control also out of work.

While there is no enforced synchronisation of work at Compute, there are still obvious spatial regulations concerning where to work. All consulting hours must be spent at the customer's office, partly due to practical reasons (i.e. the physical location of the server into which the software shall be installed), partly because Compute want their customers to be able to see and monitor the progress of the project. This also means that Compute consultants must adjust their behaviour to the organisation in which their current project is located, while being constantly reminded of them being there as high-priced outsiders. When the Trucks project was delayed, the Compute consultants seldom left their temporary office, seldom took coffee breaks during chargeable time, and they even hoped not to meet their contact persons in the corridors. Since Trucks was located in another town, all consultants spent long hours travelling every day, and even sometimes spent nights at hotels in the vicinity. Again, most of this was not the result of explicit orders from the project leader or other managers at

Compute; the consultants were not monitored by anyone, so they just conformed to their own sense of loyalty, responsibility and (in some cases) greed.

<u>Ranking system/ Rewards and punishment</u>

At BOH, there are differences between different categories of team members where individual evaluation and comparison are concerned. Despite a general discursive image of equality and collectivity, several team members are judged and punished/rewarded individually. Actors, musicians and back stage managers all participate as individual specialists, who are exposed national and international career opportunities (if they are successful). Individual performances can be viewed as excellent even if the play as a whole is not received well by the audience, and several team members were aware that they were individually evaluated. For backstage personnel, a successful career was the same thing as successfully taking on increasingly large responsibilities on sub-project, project and organisational levels. The musicians and the actors were able to compete for leading roles and solo performances, and could be recruited by bigger opera houses, orchestras and broadcasting companies. Those who had done so in the past were remembered with pride in BOH. This is also a high elitist industry sense there are a few selected people with reputation and high salary; the big majority of people are not well paid, "superior" and well known. Most interviewees said that they perceived their career opportunities as most limited and that they were happy to have gone this far. The myth of cultural oriented occupation as free, creative and intellectual is still alive among people, not only them working within this sector. If they want to reproduce their identity as representatives for cultural, deeper values in society, other people outside (relatives, friends, media etc) most confirm these values, which they also do.

In the case of Compute, everybody (except for low-paid administrative clerks) was a potential future CEO of the company. They all had university degrees in business or computer science, they had all been recruited because of their skills, and they were all paid well over the average of the industry in order to deliver superior systems solutions to their clients. Despite an ambitious effort to create a career system that implied personal challenges and competence development for the consultants, most of the your engineers felt that a large career step would be to leave implementation work in projects and to take on sales or managerial work (not necessarily managerial positions, though). Each project manager measured individual performance, and since all working hours were registered to be charged to the customer, there

was always hard data available on each consultant. For most Compute employees, money was a main motivator, and they often compared their salaries and work contracts in order to negotiate an internal hierarchy. The IT-sector is not in the same way as cultural sector representative for any deeper values, which also means that the employees in Compute must legitimise and have other rewards/punishment then BOH. All the overtime required for finishing the Compute project paid off in this sense; they were all regarded as loyal and ambitious employees, and received huge additional salaries for their extra hours.

Normalising and adjustment

The people in these project work situations consider themselves as privileged by having an exciting job and they thus accept the circumstances around. This means that being away from family during weekends and evenings does not upset them, and they adjust their life to non-flexible work settings. Even if there are people that seem to have problems with their care taking of children, they somehow manage to work it out. The normalising effect is obvious in the way that they do not question their way of dealing with this; personal problems are never transformed into problems for the organisation. Established institutional patterns in the cultural sector and the IT-sector are viewed as not changeable, and they are also taken-for-granted in the internal organisational culture. Out of this follows that problems with these settings and patterns are up to the individual n in question to solve on their own.

4. Project prisons – the power of thoughts

Project is in many ways the extreme form of present organisational practices. The traditional bureaucratic way of organising work was not very effective for controlling people and resulted in a massive critique against bureaucracy in organisations. Project organising offered a solution for this and is now a frequently used work form. The advantage of the project form - as mentioned above – is that time and space can be controlled and the tasks kept in focus; Time-schedules and commitment to the project goal become important control mechanisms.

In practice, this become even more a prison than the Taylorist Scientific Management theory of organising, because the assumptions leading people to see the advantages of project work are invisible to most of them. In both the cases (Compute and BOH) people experience glory and career possibilities when being chosen for "exciting and stimulating" projects. They

do not have distance to this phenomena and they hardly analyse projects as a way of controlling people, get commitment from people, get time from people and even get people to work harder than they usually would. In that sense we can say that project form a prison for people, in the worst case a prison much harder to escape from than those of traditional bureaucratic structures.

Modern people are not stupid, however, so of course there has to be convincing arguments for staying working by projects. It appears that people in different industries (in this case the IT industry and opera theatre) legitimise their work forms in different ways. Even though there of course are individual differences, people working at the same workplace seem to construct a set of shared beliefs on why and how they work, beliefs that are used both to convince themselves and each other (cf Alvesson, 1991). We will therefore look closer into the two cases to analyse what figures of thought that are used to underpin the current discursive practices.

In Compute, there is a basic understanding of work as a way of creating economic effectiveness. Customers place orders for Compute's business systems in order to enhance their own profitability, and the profitability of Compute rest upon their ability to deliver expensive software with a minimum of efforts. All Compute consultants are aware that projects often become more expensive to the customer than initially offered, but they think that the values they create in their work is still worth more. They strive for high salaries and even higher overtime payment, but they still envy the few colleagues who resigned and stayed with the customers as free-lancing consultants in order to make even more money. As compared to most people in their own age, they have got a much better start in their working lives (in economic terms), but they are just as eager as anyone else to improve their standard of living, achieve increased status in society and, in the end, become wealthy and happy. In order to fulfil these dreams, they subject themselves to imprisonment in a work situation that often is much different from the life for which they strive. If they just work hard, Compute and all future employers in the IT industry will deliver the good life to them. They are thus not only imprisoned in projects, they are imprisoned in the taken-for-granted dream of economic growth and technological development upon which all Western societies are founded (cf von Wright, 1993). Even though they might want to be promoted away from project-based work, they will never leave the industry.

In BOH, the basic notion of work is somewhat different. Many of the BOH employees know that they could have been better off, given that most of them are intelligent and active professionals, and they do want a high standard of living just like anybody else. On the other hand, they consider themselves fortunate – they are actually being paid for devoting their days to create acclaimed performances at a prestigious opera house. Unlike the Compute consultants, many of them have spent substantial parts of their lives and their economic resources on educations, preparations and rehearsals in order to become what they are today.

Values like responsibility, competence, commitment, motivation and creativity are embraced in BOH. Individuals primarily seek for interesting, intellectual and exciting projects. The overall aim is to develop themselves as well as other people in society (the audience). People and societies must be educated and developed through culture, music, theatre, literature and other culture expressions, even though they express reluctance towards such education. Within the culture sector there is also a clear difference between so-called high culture and culture that many people want to consume (often regarded as popular culture). In the high culture sector, we can also see the same expression of modern society with a longing for better economy and growth in society (but in cultural based terms). Therefore, we cannot dichotomise our cases in that sense. Both are expressions of society, and their way of legitimising work in projects are different but at the same time expressions of growth (in economic and cultural sense) thoughts. Moreover, most people want to have both cultural and economic outcomes of their jobs.

As we can see in these cases people are imprisoned without thinking explicitly in such terms; they work hard, accept rules, punishment, supervision, the whole concept of effective, and rational project management. Both project examples here have the same construction and therefore the same impact on people; Time-schedules with tightly held plans, unique/unusual exciting tasks, and other attractive dimensions that engages people to commitment, in other terms typical project characteristics. The project work form is perceived as legitimate in itself, assumed to be the best way to achieve personal and organisational goals, notwithstanding what those goals are. While contemporary organisations are required to provide a balance between task-orientation and relationship orientation in order to be viewed as attractive to people, projects need not to be balanced – or should not be. Re-introducing old-fashioned work practices in the guise of projects have worked so far – but for how long will it last?

Another form of structure in both these cases is the gender related assumptions that project work can only adapt from society. From our cases we can say that it is clear that men should work full-time and more, women giving birth to children and taking the main responsibilities for them, notwithstanding difficulties in combining work and life. Our working-life in society is constructed out from gender-relations, and in project-based work, this becomes obvious (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2001). These gender relations are clear in many dimensions of traditional masculine structures in project (example working-time, need for achievements, goal orientations, rationality). By this we do not mean that women cannot be committed to these kinds of values, on the contrary there are women who argue in line with masculine structures (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2001). A dichotomous relationship between private life and work life often imply problems for people with children and other responsibilities and values (Lindgren & Holmquist, 2002). These responsibilities become a problem to solve just for themselves and not for companies and projects.

5. Consequences for people and society

When the first prophecies on an increased 'projectisation' of society were presented in the 1960's, the general idea was that bureaucracies had failed and would be replaced by other, more effective organisational forms (Bennis & Slater, 1968). A common denominator of these forms was that they would be 'temporary', i.e. time-limited, goal focused sequences of action (Miles, 1964). While there were some worries about the social consequences of this, such as fragmentation of life and identity and a lack of long-term relations at the work-place (Miller & Rice, 1967, Palisi, 1970), this trend was still seen as attractive since it was expected to liberate people from their bureaucratic chains.

When projecticised society – at least partially – is now in place, we can say that the expectations were correct in many ways (Sennett, 1998). However, we can also see new and different consequences of projectisation, consequences that are related to changed values in society. When we now make project work subject to critical inquiry, we do it from the values and perspectives of today, which mean that we see other things. Yes, many individuals have more stimulating and self-controlled work situations than 40 years ago, and yes, they sometimes pay for that by having – on the surface – a more fragmented life. On the other hand, changing work contexts and decreased dependence upon single organisations are today

seen as a virtue rather than a drawback; in that sense, people have change their values in interaction with changing conditions for work (Arthur m fl, 1999).

What we have highlighted in this paper is that people are still the "obedient victims" of their work situations, but in other, and subtler, ways. On the surface, the project work form provides freedom, a sense of doing something important and stimulating. Beneath this surface, we find people to be even more (self-)controlled in time, space and in their mindsets. To put it simply: Bureaucracies failed, not because they controlled people too much, but because they could not control them enough. Where bureaucracies failed in this respect, projects succeeded, at least so far.

Expressed in terms of Foucault's prison, project work implies disciplining people in space, in time and their souls. In the traditional bureaucracies, this disciplining was open, formal and general, implying that it was a mandatory part of organisational membership, supported by written rules and structures, and 'fair' in the sense that everybody were subject to the same rule system. In modern project work, there are less such open, formal and general forms of disciplining people, since many of the traditional management responsibilities has been transferred to the individual herself. Instead, the sources of discipline have become hidden, informal and individualised.

Space, i.e. the dimension of bodily movement and control, is not formally regulated neither in Compute nor in BOH. What happens is that people themselves regulate where to be and how to behave given the institutionalised habits of their organisations. It is impossible for single consultants to question the tradition to work at the customer's office at Compute, just as it is impossible for single actors to question the rehearsal procedures at BOH. The individual is formally free to choose, but always feel that institutionalised habits must be reproduced.

A similar way of disciplining can be seen where time regulations are concerned. Compute formally requires a certain number of charged hours for each consultant each year, and BOH employees are supposed to work full time (i.e. 40 hours per week). In practice, though, work time is not determined by these regulations, but by project goals. Compute consultants are expected to work until projects are finished according to specifications, and BOH employees are expected to work until the successful deliverance on the opening night can be secured. Sometimes, this can be done within normal work hours, sometimes not. The

point is that responsibility for goal accomplishment rests with the individual, and that the individual thus will have to take all consequences in terms of work hours herself.

Self-disciplining in space and time presupposes a self-disciplined mind, a mind accepting immediate, self-inflicted confinement in project routines in exchange for long-term rewards, be they money, prestige, societal responsibility or personal development. Those people that subject themselves to such self-disciplining are not just a certain category at the labour market, whose work life specifics can be juxtaposed to other categories and where advantages and drawbacks can be found just as anywhere. They are also the elite of the labour market, holding the most attractive and/or well-paid positions in the most attractive and/or affluent organisations. Elites have always – for better and for worse – been extremely influential in constructing institutionalised beliefs on how life should be lived in society, and in that way also shaped the norms by which the population at large would live in the future.

Disciplining discourses (in this case projects) form a context that include and exclude different kinds of people, different kinds of values and different kinds of lifestyles In general terms there are some groups of people that will be preferred over other. We have at first hand men in our project working life, but we have managed to leave other minorities outside. This is clearly the case in the Compute project. However, we can see similarities between the two sectors in how they have built their work-settings for 'free' people without any main responsibility for anyone else but themselves. Since these individuals set the level of what is considered as 'good performance', the result is that many people with childcare responsibilities are seen as 'second class employees'; in both these cases, women were in minority and experienced problems with working schedules.

But, if we look at the acceptance for other minorities (like psychologically instable people) we will find it more likely that cultural sector will attract more of these people; the history of theatre, music, painting and so on are surrounded by examples of 'different' people. This sector has an image of people being special in their way of living in society - a stereotypical image, which many times normalize outsiders as an insider in cultural sector.

As researchers, we both inquire into projects and also work by project, often multiple; we are the living examples of projectified working life. If we take a step aside and look at ourselves, we can see the same consequences for us as people as we have done for our cases. However, we can be expected to have some self-reflection upon our own lives, sometimes we have crises that forces us to reflect on our way of living (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001).

Nevertheless, in our daily practice we reproduce the project society and project work. The life of a contemporary researcher is one of temporary positions, time-limited research grants, scholarships, courses - all intended to keep us at the competitive edge in the quest for new knowledge. Many management researchers of today are torn between the respective discourses of the Compute and BOH employees; we do think that we have something important to contribute, and from time to time, we consider ourselves fortunate and privileged. Nevertheless, we also sometimes compare salaries with our old friends from undergraduate business & economics courses, and when companies call for some extra help, we look forward to the invoicing stage. When we ask ourselves what could be done to improve the working and living conditions for Compute and BOH employees, we agree that reflection, questioning and emancipation is the natural way to go. However, what we need to reflect upon, question and emancipate ourselves from is not only organisational practices, it is the general ideological foundations upon which our society is built. In the same way, our own emancipation as researchers is closely intertwined with foundations of the university system. However, we should also be aware of how changes in society happen. Small cultural initiatives/movements give the base for raising new structures in companies and society. However, the present powerful institutional prison of projects can also be as good as any new one – we know what we have, but we do not know what we will get.

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