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Projects and prisons

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Introduction

Project work is an increasingly widespread phenomenon, but the consequences of project work for people and society have rarely been the subject of critical scientific enquiry (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006). While the mainstream theoretical foundation of project work has been heavily criticised for being an overly rationalist and surprisingly ineffective construct in industry (Morris and Hough, 1987; Packendorff, 1995; Söderlund, 2004), much work still remains in determining its consequences for people and society in practice. Project work is sometimes described as a non-bureaucratic way of unleashing the individual (Kidder, 1981/2000; Christensen and Kreiner, 1997; Gill, 2002); it is also clear that routines, ideologies and power structures on organisational and societal levels are inscribed into project practices in a way that deeply affects work life for modern people (Hodgson, 2002; Buckle and Thomas, 2003). It is therefore the aim of this chapter to critically analyse project work practices and discuss the implications of these practices for people involved in project-based work.

The chapter starts by relating project management research and established project practices, discussing the shortcomings of current knowledge on project work from a critical theory perspective. Then, the critical perspective of this chapter (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 that work organisation can be seen as a set of disciplinary practices through 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. We then discuss the project practices from a critical perspective where we view projects as a mental prison. The chapter is concluded by some thoughts concerning the consequences of project management discourse for life in contemporary society.

Towards critical perspectives on project management research and practice

From having been a rational methodology in construction and defence industries, the project concept and the project form of organising have diffused into almost all sectors of society, to both small and large tasks, to external contract-based projects as well as internal change efforts (Packendorff, 1995). 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 that most 'normal' organisations struggle with (Stinchcombe and Heimer, 1985; Pinto, 1996; Scotto, 1998). In that sense, project-based work is usually seen as a part of the wave of adhocratic 'new organisational forms' that entered most industries during the 1980s and 1990s (see Kerfoot and Knights, 1998; Gill, 2002; Clegg and Courpasson, 2004; Hodgson, 2004).

In many industries and companies, the project is now the normal work form. This is obvious not only in cultural life, advertising, consulting, R&D, IT and so on, but also in several large industrial corporations which execute numerous projects on a daily basis. Given this trend, one might assess that work life for many people is becoming increasingly 'projectified', that is, that substantial parts of people's work life are spent in projects and similar temporary forms of organising (Packendorff, 2002). This is especially visible when it comes to work in 'project-based firms', that is, firms where almost all operations take place in projects and where the permanent structure serves merely to provide administrative support.

The basis of the existence of the project management discipline is an institutionalised agreement about the definition of 'a project'. The project is commonly defined as a unique, complex task with a foreseeable date of delivery, subject to goal formulations in terms of time, cost and quality (see Packendorff, 1995; Söderlund, 2004). 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 order to achieve stated goals. The origins of project management can be traced back to the US defence industry in the 1950s (see Engwall, 1995) where the time factor was the most important one in the arms races of the Cold War. In time, projects 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 and 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 (Stinchcombe and 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, creative and controversial (Pinto, 1996: 25; Gill, 2002). In a sense, project managers are often described in the same way as entrepreneurs, that is, as strong,

controversial, creative and active men, successfully bringing their ideas into the market (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2003). The message is that project management is something objective and distinctive 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 who 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 and Kreiner, 1997). Projects are not supposed to be chaotic, however; the project manager should also be able to make detailed plans for her project despite the inherent insecurity of unique endeavours (Stinchcombe and Heimer, 1985).

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 in terms of both delays and budget overruns (Morris and 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 lie several problems (Buchanan, 1991; Lundin and Söderholm, 1995; Kreiner, 1995; Pinto, 1996). In several sectors of society (such as cultural life, European Union programmes, research and so on) 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 both the context and the future.

Viewed from the perspective of the project worker, projects are often stimulating, but also sources of stress, loneliness, disrupted family lives and superficial workplace relations (Gill, 2002; Packendorff, 2002; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006). One might even say that projects are a way of disciplining the individual in a way that organisations in general cannot do any more (Hodgson, 2002), and that the work form reinforces traditional masculine attitudes to work and life (Buckle and Thomas, 2003; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006).

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 subjected to critical analysis. It is, for example, often said that one of the main advantages with projects is that they are created to reach concrete, specific goals – as opposed to the ambiguous, multi-constituency tactics governing most permanent organisations (Pinto, 1996; Ekstedt *et al.*, 1999). Following this view of projects as efficient activity systems, it is not surprising to find that most theories, methods and practices of project management are aimed at projects as single entities (for exceptions, see Söderlund, 2004; Engwall and Jerbrant, 2003). Given an exogenous goal, it is the internal operations in the project that are interesting to all involved, and the relations to individuals, other projects and organisational and societal contexts are often overlooked. Moreover, 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 aim 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. 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 a way of achieving perfection (Packendorff, 1995).

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 construct and reconstruct through daily action. 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 they express in making sense of these actions. In the words of Hodgson and Cicmil (this volume, Chapter 2, p. 26), we critically ask ourselves 'what do we do when we call something a project?' We will therefore go on to discuss how such a critical analysis can be performed.

Deconstructing project management theories and practices: a Foucauldian approach

One method of critical analysis of contemporary managerial practices is deconstruction, where Derrida's work on philosophical texts have inspired many management researchers during the last decades (Culler, 1983; Cooper, 1989; Martin, 1990; Calás and Smircich, 1991, 1992; Mumby and Putnam, 1992; Knights, 1997).

Derrida focuses on human interaction as production of texts, and states 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), a discourse that can be critically analysed. Derrida (1973) uses the term *différance* instead of 'difference' in order to emphasise that concepts are processual and non-static constructs, situated in time and space. *Différance* is the combination of differing and deferring, implying possibilities of going beyond hierarchical structures, thereby attacking the idea of identities resting on simple forms. Cooper (1989), drawing on Derrida, states 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 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 dichotomies 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 are viable given certain purposes, such as to open our eyes to patterns taken for granted or 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 and Simon classic *Organizations* (1958) and interprets 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 and Smircich (1991) from a power/gender perspective, highlighting hierarchical influence and masculinity as assumptions behind the seemingly critical original text. Linstead (1993) argues that research of organisational 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 (see Hodgson, 2002; Buckle and Thomas, 2003). Texts to be deconstructed are not solely public printed ones – we can analyse empirical interviews, stories and so on in the same way, since every story can be interpreted in different ways.

In this chapter, 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 mind. Metaphorically, these principles also apply to modern organisations, and can be used in critical analysis of phenomena such as management accounting (Macintosh, 1994).

Disciplining space means that prisoners are confined in 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 (for example, military exercise) or clothing (for example, 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 mind, finally, rests upon the principle of *panopticon*, that is, that it is possible to see, monitor and evaluate all prisoners. In prison, this is organised through hierarchies, which means that guards are ordered to monitor limited sets of prisoners, and that supervisors are assigned to monitor limited sets of guards. Through a widespread chain of command, the prison manager can thus constantly monitor each prisoner; the prisoners, on the other hand, are not able to monitor their surveillors. Hierarchic surveillance is 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 and others built the ever-present notion of what modern organisations are about.

From this perspective, project work can be seen as 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' (that is, 'effective') properties that bureaucracies are not considered to have (Ekstedt *et al.*, 1999; Clegg and Courpasson, 2004; Hodgson, 2004). While successfully deviating from bureaucratic norms, project work has of course developed a set of strictly governing norms. One could even say that most project management theory stems 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 organisations as units, but also for people working in these forms. Working in projects has a masculine image of being exciting and performance-oriented (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2001; Gill, 2002) and will also give people who have been normalised into these kind of cultures the opportunity to work in more and more 'exciting', 'creative' and 'risky' projects (these expressions intended to further entice people into project work).

Foucault (1977) described people in society as prisoners, drawing from the history of punishment in which there was 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 profitability – through disciplining time, space and mind. In the following section, we will give some examples of how an empirical study can be interpreted in these terms.

Empirical analyses: the Baltic Opera House and Compute Software

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: that is, they told us their uninterrupted stories about the specific project and project work in general (see Table 6.1). In this way, rich accounts of the project workers' experiences were generated. In light of Foucault's prison metaphor, statements on power and power relations were sought in the transcripts, and formulated in terms of discourses on disciplining time, space and mind: as 'intersubjectively produced texts that embody a dialogue between their experience and our research interests' (Clegg and Courpasson, 2004: 530).

What is interesting from a critical point of view is the discourses that are used. According to Asplund (1979), critical enquiry 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. Asplund provides the example of 'childhood' in order to explain the importance of figures of thought. Without 'childhood' as a specific figure of thought, the organisation of, for example, housing and recreation in society would look very different. By attending to the special needs of children, we (in interaction) produce/reproduce discourses on how to live with children: children need free space, children need time, children should be out in nature, and so on.

Table 6.1 Summary of the two case studies

	Compute Software Inc.	Baltic Opera House (BOH)
Project	Designing, installing and testing an executive information system at a customer company	Setting up an opera play, including rehearsal, stage design and marketing
Project results (according to team)	New customer that must be kept. System successfully installed, significant delay and cost overrun. Customer satisfied	Well-known Italian opera for a large audience. Performed at the first night as planned. Well-received by audience
Interviewed team members (fictitious name, age, role)	• James, 35, consulting manager • Eric, 34, project leader, acting consulting manager • Carl, 28, programmer • Matthew, 26, programmer • Eve, 38, adviser	• Rosalind, 45, producer, planning manager • Barbara, 41, costume manager • Roger, 48, stage design manager • Tom, 41, stage coordinator • Mary, 33, orchestra violinist

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 guide any such differences and similarities. Discourses can be analysed as 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 a certain independence. What is interesting in narratives is 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 expressions of self-fulfilment, economic needs, parental responsibilities and so on, 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 individuals' stories was a regular opera production. The project started when a director for the play had been recruited, after which 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 complex parallel processes converged into the final rehearsals according to a strict time schedule. At BOH, it had never happened that a project deadline (the opening night) had not been met, and it did not happen this time either.

The Compute project was described as 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 was appointed. After going through a design phase, construction and implementation of the system followed. Because of technical problems and inadequate monitoring, the project was severely delayed, and was closed to everyone's satisfaction half a year too late and almost twice as expensive as initially offered.

Disciplining time: coordination, work time extensions and deadlines

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 p.m. to late in the evening, often until midnight:

> My formal work hours are 8 a.m. through 5 p.m., but then we have our deadlines where everything shall be delivered. Then there is no choice other than to work overtime, and then there are rehearsals and performances in the evenings that you must attend. A lot of irregular work hours, indeed. (Barbara)

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:

> An orchestra is a strict hierarchy, from the conductor downwards. This fall, we had a concert and some days before, the conductor replaced one of the songs. He thought that we should have played the new one before, but we had not and it was also technically complicated. When these things happen, we eat take-away food the whole week and skip the laundry. (Mary)

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 on Mondays, but they also perform for other audiences, or stay at home rehearsing their own songs and other performances:

> My work hours vary a lot. Sometimes, I work weekends too. We almost exclusively work evenings and nights, and when we are on tour we can be away for weeks. (Tom)

However, they do not complain because they think they are privileged to be able to earn their living through culture (this is a common way of justifying 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 per cent 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 parallel 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 was eventually delayed was that the project team realised there was a need for extraordinary effort:

> My practical problems in the projects can always be traced back to bad communication between Sales and Consulting. Sales always tell the customers that their problems will be fixed through a fast installation of our software, but in practice, we always have to make far-reaching modifications. And those modifications mean delays. When the project schedule

cracks down, we just have to sit there with our extra hours. In almost all projects I have been working it has been like that. (Carl)

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 opportunities for doing so – they had other different tasks in Compute and different family situations – they all accepted to work overtime:

> Well, you really got frustrated when it did not work, a bit stressed. Always the same thing, the memory problem. Should we change the code or replace the hardware? Quite heavy responsibility, I had written most of that code. I was held responsible for what I had done, yes, so I just had to take responsibility for fixing it. (Matthew)

In practice, those that had the most freedom to work extra hours (that is, young men living alone) set the informal time schedule, and all the others adjusted to that out of loyalty to colleagues, Compute and the customer:

> They worked very hard throughout May. Once – and this is something they will tell you about – they actually worked until early in the morning. Then they drove around trying to find a hotel in the vicinity, but since all hotels were fully booked, they returned to Trucks and continued their work. It was insane! It is OK to work like that for a single week, but in the long run it is harmful for everybody involved. (Eric)

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:

> Well, you don't actually plan for that kind of work peaks. When you make a time schedule, you estimate the duration of each work package and then add some slack so that you get a reasonable project duration and workload in the end. You don't calculate on any bigger problems. No projects go exactly as planned and you don't know everything from start. But if you were to investigate and estimate everything beforehand, you would never come to the implementation phase. (Eric)

Disciplining space: place and bodily control

The main restriction concerning bodily movement at BOH is the coordinated and synchronised rehearsals. For some leading actors, musicians and backstage managers,

all rehearsals are mandatory; if one or some of them are absent, the rehearsal must be postponed within an already narrow time schedule:

> An orchestra is like a construction team. The hall and the equipment is there generating costs all the time, and then you force everybody to come there at the same time. I certainly don't want to be the one who cause delays and extra rehearsals, so I must be well prepared. Of course this is stressful, and it is a stress that you must learn to live with here at the opera. (Mary)

And since opening nights cannot be postponed, all extra rehearsal time needed must be found through working extra hours – all of them also requiring full coordination and synchronisation. Compared to ordinary office work for backstage personnel and regular performances for actors and musicians, the rehearsal period is thus an episode of extreme control of the body:

> People are always worried, and some can get quite nasty when they are nervous. We rehearse during eight weeks, and when there are three weeks left to the first night, nobody thinks there will ever be a performance. It's just chaos. Then you must know that it is always like that, that is how it is supposed to be. If you had no deadlines, you could go on forever, which would be quite unsatisfying. Knowing that you will be ready and knowing that everybody is working in the same direction, that is a fantastic feeling. (Rosalind)

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:

> Those who work in projects, should be at the customers' offices. They are not to be here. At the customers' offices you have the important people, the information we need, and it is also there where the customer can see that they get value for money. You must also follow normal working hours at the customer's office, you should be there when they are there. I don't accept anything else. If you are a customer and you pass by a room where you expect to find consultants, never see anyone there and then receive a huge invoice every month … Then you will start questioning if you get value for money. (Eric)

All consulting hours must be spent at the customer's office, partly due to practical reasons (that is, the physical location of the server into which the software will be installed), partly because Compute want their customers to be able to see and monitor the progress of the project:

> We intended this project to be a quick fix. Trucks had major administrative problems and their 'list of presents' that was immense, so it was not easy to decide where to start … Anyway, we always want to deliver something within 3–6 months or so; we want to show some fast results to the customers. So in this case, we started with the inventory system. (Eric)

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:

> If you have a deadline, you have a deadline. It shows a lack of respect to the project and all the people in the project if you go away. A lack of respect to the customer, the project manager, the team members, you put them all in a bad situation. (Eric)

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:

> It was really throwing away one month on the job. Despite all that work, we couldn't finish the project anyway, so I went on vacation as planned in June. After summer, I was scheduled for a new project at CellCom, so I could only be at Trucks in evenings and weekends. And our contact persons in their IT department never worked evenings and weekends, so our communication deteriorated. Sometimes, I was actually afraid to meet them in the corridors; I knew that they had been complaining to Eric. (Matthew)

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:

> It is my responsibility as project manager to deliver the right thing at the right time to the right cost. I took it quite hard, I must say, despite the satisfied customer. I should have seen the problems coming. I am a very good project manager when I am able to devote all my time to the project. I'm really good, if I may say so. (Eric)

Disciplining the mind: self-responsibility, individualisation and careers

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 backstage managers all participate as individual specialists, who are exposed to national and international career opportunities (if they are successful). Individual performances can be viewed as excellent even if the opera as a whole is not received well by the audience, and several team members were aware that they were individually evaluated:

> Our salaries are lousy, and it is hard for us to maintain our own house despite that we have both been working for ten years now. On the other hand, I learn new things all the time, and there are always new challenges. It is an amazing feeling to be able to learn things that I had never been able to do before. Sometimes, I really feel privileged to get a salary for just playing the violin. But the extra work needed to be able to compete for higher posts in the orchestra, I won't take it. (Mary)

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 an elitist industry in the sense that there are few people with a reputation and high salary; the vast majority of people are not well-paid, 'superior' and well-known. Most interviewees said that they perceived their career opportunities as limited and that they were happy to have gone this far. The myth of a cultural-oriented occupation as free, creative and intellectual is still alive among people, not only those working within this sector. If they want to reproduce their identity as representatives for higher cultural values in society, other people outside (relatives, friends, the media and so on) must also confirm these values.

All interviewed team members were ambiguous concerning their own importance to the project. On the one hand, they said that they could always be substituted by somebody else, but, on the other hand, they usually felt indispensable. Driven both by the fear of not being able to cling on to their jobs and by a feeling of nobody else being capable of performing their tasks, they mentally assumed personal responsibility for the project, often beyond their personal tasks:

> Of course I am replaceable, and I don't want to feel indispensable. But in some situations I am, and I don't like that. If I should die on the spot, the project would go one anyway, but often I just have to go down to the opera to ensure that work continues. You feel indispensable during quite long periods, especially when you are working against a deadline. (Roger)

> Sometimes I can feel that something is not really a part of my job, and that it is not a part of someone else's either. Then I might of course go to my producer and complain, but that means handing over the problem to a colleague, and they have just as much to do as I have. (Tom)

> As a producer, you are never at the centre of anything, you are never visible. But you are supposed to be everywhere, and that feels a bit unrewarding and lonely sometimes. Everybody assumes that everything will work, and if it doesn't, everybody come down on the producer. (Rosalind)

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 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):

> I have been a project manager for eight years, and I find it damned boring. I don't want to do this full-time anymore, and I have old my bosses that I want to take on strategic development instead. (Eve)

Each project manager measured individual performance, and since all working hours were registered to be charged to the customer, there were always hard data available on each consultant:

> You try to keep track on their performance through time reports. If someone works ten hours a day you can let them do that for a month or two, but then you must tell them to slow down a bit. People are young, thirsty for money and could not care less about their health, so you must try to keep that down. It is quite usual to work a lot when a project approaches deadline, and we also pay people well then, but if they work a lot all the time they are probably ineffective. (James)

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. Unlike the cultural sector, the IT sector does not represent any higher values, which also means that the employees in Compute must legitimise and have other rewards/punishment than 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.

The people in these project work situations consider themselves as privileged by having an exciting job and they thus accept the circumstances. 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 who seem to have problems with their childcare, they somehow manage to work it out. The normalising effect is obvious in 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. It follows that it is up to individuals to solve problems with these settings and patterns on their own.

Project prisons: unresisted disciplining

The 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 internalised commitment to the project goal become important control mechanisms.

In practice, this becomes 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 case studies (Compute and BOH) people experience glory and career possibilities when being chosen for 'exciting and stimulating' projects. They seemed not to be able to reflect and resist this, however, and they hardly analysed projects as a way to control people, to get commitment and time from them and even to get them to work harder than they usually would. In that sense we can say that projects form an unresisted mental prison for people, in the worst case a prison much harder to envision and escape from than those of traditional bureaucratic structures.

The people interviewed all have 'convincing arguments' to continue to work within projects. It appears that people in different industries (in this case the IT industry and opera) legitimise their work forms in different ways, however. 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 to convince both themselves and each other (Alvesson, 1991). We will therefore look closer into the two cases to analyse what figures of thought are used to underpin the current discursive practices as they are expressed above.

In Compute, there is a basic understanding of work as a way of creating economic effectiveness and wealth. Customers place orders for Compute's business systems in order to enhance their own profitability, and the profitability of Compute rests upon their ability to deliver expensive software with a minimum of effort. All Compute consultants are aware that projects often become more expensive to the customer than initially stated, but they think that the value 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 lance consultants in order to make even more money. As compared to most people of 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 (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 well-educated 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 education, preparation 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 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 cultural expressions, even though they may sometimes 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 of a longing for growth in society (but in cultural-based terms). Therefore, we cannot dichotomise our cases in that sense. Both are expressions of society, and their ways of legitimising work in projects are different but at the same time expressions of growth (in an economic or cultural sense). 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 to an extent the same construction and therefore to an extent the same impact on people: time schedules with tightly held plans, unique/unusual exciting tasks, and other attractive dimensions that engage people to commitment – in other words 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 be balanced – or should not be.

Another form of structure in both these cases is the gender-related assumption that different individuals handle the notion of project work in different ways. Our working life in society is constructed from gender relations, and we can also analyse that from project-based work (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006). There is an ongoing masculinisation of project work (for example, working time, need for achievement, goal orientation, rationality and the separation of work and private life). 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 and Packendorff, 2006). A dichotomous relationship between private life and work life often implies problems for people with children and other responsibilities and values (Holmquist

and Lindgren, 2002). These responsibilities become a problem they have to resolve by themselves and not something that should affect companies and projects.

Project work as a societal discourse: some thoughts

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

Now that projecticised society – at least partially – is in place, we can say that the expectations were relevant in many ways (Sennett, 1998). However, we can also see new and different consequences of projecticisation, consequences that are related to changed values in society. When we now make project work subject to critical enquiry, we do it from the values and perspectives of today, which means that we see other things. Yes, many individuals have more stimulating and self-controlled work situations than forty 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 changed their values in interaction with changing conditions for work (Arthur *et al.*, 1999).

What we have highlighted in this chapter is that people can still be regarded as the 'obedient victims' of their work situations, but in other, and subtler, ways. On the surface, the project work form can be seen as providing freedom, a sense of doing something important and stimulating. Beneath this surface, we understand people to be even more (self-)controlled in time, in space and in their mindsets. To put it starkly: bureaucracies failed, not because they controlled people too much, but because they could not control them enough. Where bureaucracies failed in this respect, projects have succeeded, at least to a point.

Expressed in terms of Foucault's prison, project work implies disciplining people in space, in time and in 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 was subject to the same rule system. In modern project work, there are fewer such open, formal and general forms of disciplining people, since many of the traditional management responsibilities have been transferred to individuals themselves (see also Hodgson, 2004). Instead, the sources of discipline have become subtle, informal and individualised.

Space, that is, the dimension of bodily movement and control, is not formally regulated neither in Compute or 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 hard for single consultants to question the tradition of working at the customer's office at Compute, just as it is hard for single actors to question the rehearsal procedures at BOH. The individual can be seen as formally free to choose, but on the other hand institutionalised habits/values seem hard to resist – reproduction rather than resistance.

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 (that is, 40 hours per week). In practice, though, work time is guided not 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 personally have to take all consequences in terms of work hours.

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 in 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 can also be seen as 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) construct a context that includes and excludes 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 others. Project settings tend to be dominated by men, leaving 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 the minority and experienced problems with working schedules.

If we look at the acceptance for other minorities (like psychologically unstable people) we will find it more likely that the cultural sector will attract more of these people; the history of theatre, music, painting and so on is full of examples of 'different' people. This sector has an image of people being special in their way of living in society – a stereotypical image, which positions 'outsiders' to mainstream society as 'insiders' within cultural industries.

As researchers, we both enquire into projects and 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 seen for our cases. However, we can be expected to have some self-reflection upon our own lives; sometimes we have crises that force us to reflect on our way of living (Lindgren and 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 and 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 are 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 the foundations of the university system. The present powerful institutional prison of projects can 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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