Performing arts and the art of performing – On co-construction of project work and professional identities in theatres

Monica Lindgren, Johann Packendorff *

KTH – Royal Institute of Technology, School of Industrial Engineering and Management, Lindstedtsvägen 30, 100 44 Stockholm, Sweden

Abstract

While working by projects and re-constructing organisational and institutional norms on how projects should be, individuals also successively construct an image of themselves in relation to these norms. In this article, we will thus analyse how people in project-based operations simultaneously construct projects and individual identities.

The analysis of interviews from two theatres indicates that project work and professional identities are co-constructed by means of mutual confirmation, simultaneous confirmation/disconfirmation, and mutual disconfirmation. The individual projects become arenas and critical incidents for such co-construction. These discourses are not always consistent with each other, but they are important for what the individuals expect from projects and what project managers expect from individuals.
© 2007 Elsevier Ltd and IPMA. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Teams; Individuals; Culture; Critical theory; Identity construction; Performing arts

1. Project work and individual identity

1.1. Project-based work and identity construction

The increasing use of projects is usually expected to imply increased task focus, better conditions for learning, renewal and flexibility, less bureaucratic forms for management control, etc., [9,26]. This trend is mainly perceived as a positive one for contemporary organisations given that proper administrative systems are used [15]. The basic reason for this perception seems to be that the project is perceived as a way of avoiding all the classic problems of bureaucracy, inertia and rigidity with which most "normal" organisations are struggling [7,26]. In many industries and companies, the project has thus become the normal work form [11].

While the existence, benefits and administrative hardships of project-based organising is well documented in the literature [10,11,15] there is a lack of empirical studies

inquiring into the abovementioned development from critical perspectives, emphasizing the consequences for individuals and society [6]. The few studies actually made indicate a clear need to pursue such a line of inquiry. 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., [13,20,21,25]. One might even say that projects is a way of disciplining the individual in a way that organisations in general cannot do anymore [17], that they are not necessarily panaceas to all sorts of bureaucracy problems [7,18], and that the work form reinforce traditional masculine attitudes to work and life [5,13,21].

In our earlier studies, it appeared that many individuals working by projects tended to describe projects as extraordinary and temporary work contexts where 'normal rules' did not apply [21]. Especially striking was the differences in how they viewed work conditions; while the organisations were described as friendly places that took care of their employees, projects were described as stressful, achievement-oriented places where everybody had to take care of themselves. This points at that the notion of

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +46 8 7906058.
   E-mail address: johann.packendorff@indek.kth.se (J. Packendorff).

working in a project brings with it expectations on several aspects of the work situation, expectations that are institutionally given by project theory and practice and re-constructed by the project workers in interaction [28].

At the same time, they also successively constructed an image of themselves in relation to these norms. If project work is different from other work, they were also professionally different from other workers (an opinion also emphasized by the emergence of PMI and IPMA certifications). When asked about if project work requires special skills or traits, many claimed that higher levels of discipline and dedication were needed, and they also took some pride in being amongst the chosen ones for these hard endeavours [22]. This points at that not only are individuals reinforcing established notions on project work while working by projects – they also at the same time continuously construct their own professional identities, reinforcing notions about themselves as professional, committed and structured enough to endure the hardships of project work. In other words, a project is here seen as a process of co-construction of the project form and of project worker professional identity. In this paper, we will thus analyse how people in project-based operations socially construct projects and individual professional identities over time.

1.2. Theatres as project-based organisations

One of the most established 'industries' when it comes to project-based organizing, is the cultural sector [27]. Apart from some ongoing operations in museums, schools, etc., most cultural activities in society are based in temporary organizing processes – events, exhibitions, plays, publications, movie production, installations, etc. In the opera and theatre sector – which is the empirical focus of this article – each production of a play is organised as a project [9]. During the project, manuscripts are finished, scenic design and costumes developed, plays and music rehearsed. In parallel to these internal activities, the upcoming play is marketed, printed material is designed, etc., – all with the first night as the absolute, fixed and undisputable deadline. Most theatre producers and directors work with project planning in order to be able to coordinate everything, and the team often perceive their work in terms of a series of projects [22,27]. The 'theatre industry' is thus a suitable place for the inquiry into how projects are constructed and re-constructed in social interaction. It is also a place where problems of organizing, innovating and working abound, a place where success is hard both to define and claim, not least because a theatre organisation must perform well in artistic, economical, marketing and societal terms simultaneously [30]. Behind this multi-dimensional character of strategic ambitions, we also often find severe ideological conflicts between artistic and managerial norm systems [31], conflicts that usually find their way into each single project. Theatre work is also special in the way that fixed deadlines and demands on extraordinary individual performances characterise the daily organizing of projects. As noted already in 1981 in a study of theatre project management, an important

> "…concern in the management of temporary systems is the effect of outside, personal, or organisational life space on the task performance of participants. This phenomenon is certainly a problem in permanent organisations as well, but this author knows of no serious mention of it in the organisational literature. Typically, there are emotional, financial, and physical fluctuations in individuals' lives that alter their capacity for work. Illness and death in the family, marital problems, house guests, or problems with children may all affect the participant's concentration. New friends, graduations, anniversaries, recognition, or new opportunities all may increase the ability to perform. In the theatrical setting, the ambiguities about expected success, the public nature of the product, and the intensity of the rehearsal period all make the outside influences more powerful in terms of their impact on final performance". [14, p. 41]

The typical theatre project (as described by Dollar [8]) starts with a preproduction phase, a short period of time when directors and stage managers prepares for the upcoming rehearsals. It begins with the selection of production and design teams and includes the analysis of the script, auditions (if actors must be brought in from the outside) and production meetings. At this point, much of the process is driven by the director's artistic intentions. The stage manager and the producer (who might be the same person in smaller organisations) plan for the rehearsal process and the commercial process of marketing and performance planning, respectively.

During the rehearsal period, directors rehearse all parts of the play with the actors and musicians, while other groups of specialists develop all the other things needed. Electrics and lighting must be designed and installed, a sound system developed. Scenic construction people construct the scenic design together with prop masters who build all sorts of smaller items. A lot of work is also carried out at the costume department, where all clothes to be worn by the actors are manufactured. The rehearsal period ends by the so called "Tech weeks" (i.e. the technical rehearsals when all costumes, scenic design, lightning, etc., are used by the actors for the first time), culminating in the preview or 'general rehearsal' where a live audience is admitted. Then, at last, the opening night comes and the project crew may go on to new assignments while actors, musicians and sound & lighting experts continue into the repetitive work of re-performing the play during a number of evenings. Most theatres have a long-term plan of what projects/plays that are to be produced during the upcoming years, usually with fixed rehearsal periods and opening nights. Many of the typical characteristics of project work are thus also to be found in theatre productions, not least because a theatre project has an absolute deadline that can never be postponed.

2. Studying projects as processes of social construction

In focus for this paper is how individuals in theatre organisations construct and re-construct professional identities as they work by projects. The ontological standpoint is thus that the project form do not exist 'out there', it is social construction produced and re-produced in everyday interaction [3,20,21]. Consequently, the knowledge yielded in research should be concerned with understanding how project concepts and acts are constructed, rather than establishing 'objective truths'. Ideologically, this also means opening up the field to critical questions on the consequences of project work for individuals, organisations and society [6].

A social constructionist perspective will thus help us to understand how interaction between actors and structures implies production and reproduction of project in their daily life. Applied to the inquiry into projects this will imply that projects are studied as social processes where goals, plans, norms, forms of organisation, crises, etc., are discussed, negotiated, argued over and discarded. Participants bring into these processes their professions, their understandings of the industry, their notion of work forms, their social networks, their capabilities and their reputation – which are all subject to both change and confirmation as the social process unfolds.

2.1. Co-construction of work and identity

The concept of identity is widely used on a daily basis in both texts and conversations, and during the last decade it has also entered into the public debate in society. Identity is usually seen in a static fashion, implying that human beings "are something" (e.g. a teacher or a doctor) and that their identity construction process is over, more or less. Against this it has recently been claimed that identities are always in the making; When exposed to discontinuities in life, the identity of an individual is open to change through a process of reflection upon both the past and the future [12,18,23,24]. Life can thus be seen as an ongoing process of identity construction, where the individual tries to understand and define her/himself from the various social situations to which he is exposed. With a social constructionist view we therefore in this article treat identity as something that is constructed and re-constructed in daily social interaction throughout life.

Identity construction are often based in what we can call "institutionalised identities", i.e. concepts such as professional identity, gender identity, ethnic identity, etc. On an aggregate level (society, organisation, clan, etc.) these socially defined identities are valid and homogeneous to a certain extent, but on the individual level they are expressed in a multitude of ways depending on how different individuals describe themselves. In an earlier study [23] it appeared that individuals can connect their identity construction to cultural values, but also to religious beliefs, political ideology or just a lifelong rejection of tradition

and collectives. They may also use professionality and/or organisational belonging in their construction of identity, i.e. that they identify with their work and their industry and the values and practices that they find there. In the following text we have tried to described with help from quotes different expressions of identity constructions linked to discourses combining projects and cultural sector.

2.2. Analysing project work discourses

In the examples of narratives we present here we have used citations, so that we may also open up possibilities for readers to interpret the material for themselves. The quotations should be seen just as examples as there are longer stories from several people behind them. Texts can be open or closed and the researcher/writer is thus obliged to make a choice of which strategy to adopt in reading them. However, we are also conscious that we cannot, 'feed' the reader with all information about the different steps in the process as it is difficult to see what is missing when 'inside' a study. On the other hand we welcome alternative interpretations, indeed, we see this to be an asset in research rather than a problem.

Individuals were asked for their spontaneous story on their life including both work and life in general during a specific project in two theatre organisations. These interviews lasted for two-three hours with each person. Out from the basic question how people simultaneously construct projects and professional selves we have generated some themes based in earlier studies (both our own and others): How projects are initiated [29], how individuals are committed to projects [22], how individuals organise project as work episodes, how individuals describe themselves in relation to work and established identity bases [23]; how project work and professionalism are related to each other [16]. The empirical material was, after typewriting the stories by ourselves, put into these themes. A number of general theoretical themes have thereby formed a framework for inductively extracting specific narratives [4]. In order to find discourses in this construction processes, we took a special interest in contradictions and competing discourses [1]. Based on these we then find some different discourses surrounding projects.

We have used stories from two theatres: (1) the government funded big Baltic Opera House, and (2) the co-owned small Improvisation theatre. Despite their differences, they work in almost the same way. The main characteristics and the interviewees of both theatres and the projects analysed in this paper are presented in Table 1.

2.3. Discourses on the construction of projects and identities

The first discursive construct here called *state of emergency* [19] can be traced in the meaning of 'We can and must do anything!'. The organisation is perceived as constantly being exposed to economic and/or political threats that eventually may lead to bankruptcy, and the members

Table 1
Summary of the two case studies

	Improvisation theatre (IMPRO)	Baltic Opera House (BOH)
Organisation	Co-owned private theatre. Performances, courses and theatre projects for companies. 7 full-time employees, 29 part-time	State-funded public opera house with it's own symphony orchestra. Sets up operas, concerts and ballets. 90 full-time employees, 3 part-time
Project	Setting up a new improvised play	Setting up an opera play
Project results (according to team)	Tested new ways of improvised narrating, learnt a lot. Well-received by audience	Well-known Italian opera for the large audience. Performed at the first night as planned. Well-received by audience
Team composition	Producer works both with administration and marketing, director leads rehearsals. Actors rehearse and play together with single musician and a lighting improvisator	Producer works with administration, director leads rehearsals together with costume manager, scenic designer and orchestra conductor. Stage manager act as project coordinator. Actors rehearse and play
Interviewed team members (fictious name, age, role)	• Nathan, 37, theatre manager • John, 43, actor • Patrick, 42, director • Ursula, 31, producer • Sarah, 35, actor • Anne, 34, actor	• Rosalind, 45, producer • Barbara, 41, costume manager • Roger, 48, scenic artist • Tom, 41, stage manager • Mary, 33, orchestra violinist

of the organisation are thus never safe in the long run. Here we find the organisational stories on the constant external pressures on the organisation and the neglect of internal capacity to handle new incoming projects. It is also the stories on how the seemingly unlimited organisational capacity is also assumed to be valid for single individuals by means of loyalty and professionalism.

The second discourse, *loyalty and professionalism*, is constructed out from processes by which individuals identify themselves as ambitious and responsible, accepting and embracing the projects that are launched. They show to themselves and others that they are legitimate members of the organisation and their professions by always dedicating their full energies to each new project. They also know that they are only just as good as their last project, and they also try to build their personal brands over time.

The third discourse, *organised chaos*, is about the construction of goals, deadlines, teamwork, plans, creativity, etc. It is a discourse expressed in terms of long project with rehearsals and pressures, structured work mixed with urgencies and emergencies, all with the opening night in mind. Projects are rational sequences of planned action, but everything can happen – these projects are also artistic endeavours where creativity and new ideas must be acknowledged and let into the process.

The fourth and last discourse interpreted out from the empirical study is about 'war stories' on project hardships and the mixed feelings when confronted with positive and negative consequences of each project. They relate – not without pride – their long work hours, their chaotic private lives and their tiredness, but also the medial arousal, the standing ovations and the sense of accomplishment and meaning in life.

3. Theme 1 – The eternal state of emergency

When speaking about their organisations, the interviewees present an image of scarcity and external pressures

that force them to seek for new projects and assignments all the time. Their narratives on their organisations' struggle to get resources and expand can be broken down into several sub-themes.

3.1. Earning one's living

Both organisations are a part of the cultural sector, and they are used to scarcity and problems of matching incomes and expenses. In the case of IMPRO, they even went bankrupt in 2002. The commercial parts of their operations become increasingly important to them, and take up a rather substantial part of their time and energy. The struggle for income also means that most long-term planning must be kept open for swift changes as new orders appear:

> "Today, we spoke about a corporate assignment that we might get next fall. It is a company that wants to hire us for a marketing tour all around Sweden, 31 performances. We can do it, and we want to do it. It is a quite big thing, if we get it we will be financially secure for some time. But the ordinary production and performance schedule here at the theatre will crack down totally, of course". (Nathan, IMPRO)

3.2. Fame and making dreams come true

While they all want their theatres to be well-known institutions, they have mixed feelings on visionary projects and fame. Growth, fame and dreams go hand in hand, but not always in a harmonious way:

> "Development is perhaps a better word than growth. We went bankrupt after a very big project called ImproExplosion, which was an international theatre festival. We did not have the financial strength to go for such a project but we went on since we did not realise how bad it was. It was a fantastic project but a major fiasco". (John, IMPRO)

3.3. Reputation and artistic development

If fame and growth are thus ambiguous and sometimes doubtful concepts, reputation and artistry are at the core of what these organisations are about. One part of being a prestigious institution is to be open to others; to invite and be invited, to open their premises for competitors, experiments and external assignments:

"We do have a three year planning horizon for our own performances. Then we have all sorts of events, ensembles and orchestras come here for guest concerts, all sorts of small theatres want to use our stage, schools want to visit us, et cetera. Some days we plan our own projects, and other days we plan for all the other activities in the organisations. We might look like a big house, but we will disappear if we are not open to the world". (Rosalind, BOH)

Artistry is also about always searching for new ways of expression, new ways of narrating, new ways of organising performances. The stagnating theatre is a theatre that does not count:

"We do not want to get stuck in old patterns. During the last project we actively tried to bring in external specialists with fresh know-how. That works very well, we are now rehearsing with a vocalist in order to develop improvised singing. You get a kick out of it, and hopefully you improve. Then you do not repeat yourself, since you have added something to your repertoire of expressions". (John, IMPRO)

4. Theme 2 – Individual loyalty and professionalism

Out of these organisational ambitions, the individuals identify themselves as the ones that are going to do their job as good as possible. Most of them have also entered their respective organisations with earlier experiences of performance orientation and high ambitions. We find several stories that are used to justify both the organisation's demands on them as well as the performance they require from themselves.

4.1. Professionalism

The idea of professionalism is important to our interviewees; they are all trained theatre professionals with years of experience. That means that they automatically assume responsibility for hard and demanding tasks – it is what can and should be expected of them. In addition they will have to handle all emerging problems and keep everything in order. Even though this always implies much more work than full time, they think that it is needed to do the job in a professional way:

"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 some-times. Everybody assumes that everything will work, and if it doesn't, everybody come down on the producer. I took a producer course once, and realised that I can also be as excellent in my work as the singers and directors are at their jobs. That is quite motivating for me". (Rosalind, BOH)

Professionalism also means being rational and controlled despite all emotions around you:

"When I think of this job of mine, I do not find anything to be negative. What might be strenuous is when the opening night gets closer and closer and everyone's nerves start to affect the process. Is everything OK? Will we be successful? The actors get really nervous and there are emotional outbursts and so on. All these things cause stress for me, but not always negative stress". (Barbara, BOH)

4.2. Ambition, career, capability

Closely connected to the notion of professionalism is the ambitions and the need to be seen as a capable and resourceful employee. For some, this is related to cultural development:

"I do a lot of other things outside this theatre, but in the same occupation. I am going to a regional theatre up north as director for a week, and I am also going to teach at the Theatre Institute. I also go to international festivals a lot, at least twice a year, you need to download new ideas all the time". (Patrick, IMPRO)

For others, an ambitious and capable employee is a person that does her job notwithstanding the conditions and consequences:

"I am really a flexible employee! And I must be one! New things happen all the time and I must be creative and think new thoughts. You must always adapt to the situation at hand!". (Barbara, BOH)

In some of the interviewees, there is also the notion that the more roles they can handle in the organisation, the better they are:

"If I have done a good performance at a company gig and we get new orders, I also feel that I have made some money for the theatre and for our survival. It is different now when we own the theatre ourselves. That is important, it is a kind of identity. But a mixed identity; sometimes you think that you became an entrepreneur when you actually wanted to be an actor, and then we are also employers. It is important to think about yourself in all these terms". (John, IMPRO)

4.3. Self-fulfilment

A quite usual story among the interviewees is that their work is actually a life-project for them, something they do to fulfil their dreams and potentials:

"All we do is based in love for what we do here. We have an ardent passion for improvisation theatre! Of course there were more people that wanted to become co-owners, but we wanted the total freedom that we can allow each other in this constellation. Nathan is not an actor, but he is with us because he loves this theatre so much". (Sarah, IMPRO)

4.4. I am indispensable

A last story about the reasons for hard work is the externalisation of the source of long hours and commitment, i.e. that the individual view herself as a necessary precondition for important activities in the organisation:

"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 on 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, BOH)

The source of indispensability may also come from a sense of loyalty for one's colleagues:

"An orchestra is like a construction team. The hall and the equipment are 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, BOH)

5. Theme 3 – Projects as organised chaos

When it comes to the stories about the two production projects at the core of the narratives, several constructs related to the traditional notion of projects appear, such as teamwork, creativity, risk and deadlines. Generally, project work is seen as necessary and as an effective and satisfying way of working.

5.1. Teamwork

Project work is seen as characterised by close teamwork, and a lot of the comments about the problems of projects are related to aspects of teamwork. Roles may be formal or informal, and there are also perceived gender structures that are brought into the projects:

"It works all right, but there is a macho attitude among us that becomes a part of our culture. I speak openly about this because I want all people to be attracted to this theatre, not just tough guys. If one of the guys is in a bad mood, everyone tip around on their toes, people yell at each other and so forth". (Sarah, IMPRO)

A source of problems in the project teams can also be external disturbances that originate from the organisational context:

"I like my colleagues, but then there are always problems that upset me; organisational matters that concerns the whole theatre and not specifically my project. These things affect my job and make me stressed and confused. One such thing is all the unclear orders and rules that come from the theatre director". (Rosalind, BOH)

5.2. Creative chaos

The traditional artistic notion of creative and constructive chaos is much alive in both theatres. It seems to be a widespread belief that good projects should always be chaotic in some way or another, otherwise they have been too well-planned, not allowing for artistic freedom:

"From an administrative viewpoint, our production projects are the same. You need to write contracts with actors and musicians, you need a scenic artist, make-up artist, house hostesses, etc. You need to produce flyers, tickets, posters, programmes. The contents and the people are different every time, of course. My dilemma is that they change the performance as they rehearse. So I need to keep abreast with the ensemble at the same time as I need to write catchy and touching copy. It happens every time". (Nathan, IMPRO)

Creativity is often linked to brainstorming activities and organisational improvisation, while administrators are expected to handle all the negative aspects of chaos.

"Aside from project administration, there is all the ongoing administrative work that you always have to take care of – bookkeeping, course administration, ticket sales, corporate contacts. I have it all in my head. We have a common calendar where everyone are supposed to write down what they will do and where and when. But they never do". (Nathan, IMPRO)

5.3. Taking risks: Balancing between risk and return

A story that relate to the idea of creativity and chaos is the story about production projects as balance acts where you take commercial, artistic and personal risks in order to get something extra out from them:

"During the production, we accepted to do a job for a big company. The company pays a lot of money, and it must be right from the start. If you can handle that pressure it is big fun, and then you are even more happy with yourself. It is risky business, but I appreciate that. If I had not liked the company assignments I had not stayed here. You must like them if you want to work here". (John, IMPRO)

For administrators, the risks are mostly to be found in the constant negotiation between long-term organisational work, short-term project work and the immediate handling of all sorts of upcoming problems and crises:

"Well, as a producer you do everything and you never know what your day will be like. I am quite an organised person, I have a project plan and a list of things to do, I know exactly what I intend to do. But since I am the one who everybody contacts about almost everything, I always have a lot of visitors at my room who come up with all sorts of ideas, problems, changes to the production – you name it! So I never get the time I need to do all the things I want to get done". (Rosalind, BOH)

5.4. Deadlines and the satisfaction of completion

The deadlines in the theatre industry are absolute, which means that a project can never be late – unlike many other industries where projects can be late even though they should not. A first night can never be rescheduled, so everything must be completed then. The notion of absolute time structures is a cause of long work days and stress:

"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. 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, BOH)

On the other hand, most people in the study appreciate deadlines because they imply and ensure that something will actually be completed, evaluated and discarded:

"In a theatre there are two forms of organisation. The ordinary structure that goes on all the time, and then we have the project organisation where everything is projects. It is really very satisfying that you complete tasks and achieve results. If you then receive positive criticism in the press, then you have really accomplished something. And it is not one project only, it is several ones in parallel". (Rosalind, BOH)

6. Theme 4 – 'War stories'

Finally, we will look into the stories about the consequences of project work in these organisations. Unlike the stories about individuals' ambitions about work, these are reflexive stories about what kind of values and norms that are further institutionalised as each project episode pass and is organised the same way as before. They also have an element of 'war stories', i.e. relating to previous hardships and heroic action in the comfort of post-project disengagement.

6.1. Long work days and problems of mentally disconnecting work

Several people in the study refer to the long work hours as a result of structural conditions, things they cannot do much about:

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

Others openly admit that long work hours is something they have got used to and that they cannot really imagine working in another way:

"I work 50–55 hours a week, sometimes weekends too. I can't let go of it, I burn for it. And I am always lagging behind. The atmosphere and all the activity here is most exciting, but it consumes me. You can never focus on anything, as soon as you are into a discussion on important stuff someone calls or knocks at the door". (Nathan, IMPRO)

This also means that work invades private life:

"Patrick and I are best friends, we spent the weekend together in Italy, we do not talk work much. But somehow work and private gets mixed, suddenly you realise that you sit at a restaurant in a beach resort with a glass of wine and discuss work". (John, IMPRO)

6.2. The project-based organisation as emergency ward

Another consequence of how project work is organised is that they all get used to a work life where "fire-fighting" is a natural ingredient of everyday interaction.

"My idea was to do a lot of small things that day, and then a singer called in sick. My whole long-term planning for the project just had to be closed down, and I spent the rest of that day finding another singer who could make fast rehearsals, come to this town, find somewhere to stay and so on. Suddenly my priorities changed altogether". (Rosalind, BOH)

Like the long hours, the institutionalised notion of their organisations as crisis-ridden and chaotic was explained by reference to external conditions beyond the influence of anyone:

"What is hard for the work climate is the economic pressures, we are so dependent... Often, things happen with very short notice. Someone might call today and want us to come and play something at their company next Thursday, and then we must re-schedule our performance here at the theatre and move people between the activities". (Nathan, IMPRO)

"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 knew the new one from the past, but we did not and it was also technically complicated. When such things happen, I serve take-away food to my family the whole week and skip the laundry". (Mary, BOH)

6.3. Self-responsibility and lack of structure

To most of the interviewees, projects mean that someone defines a goal and that everybody then must take responsibility themselves to reach the goal, notwithstanding if the goal is realistic or not. The self-responsible employee who devotes unpaid hours to solve problems caused by unrealistic planning gradually becomes the normal image of the normal theatre worker:

"My husband is one of the stage managers here, and I do not think that anyone in the organisation really understand how much he accomplishes. When he is ill I take care of his job even though I am a musician, but it is because I know how he works. The theatre manager do not understand how good it is to have such a hard-working man in the organisation, and when I jumped into his shoes when he caught the flu last fall I was not recognized at all for that extra effort. That's the way it is". (Mary, BOH)

As long as individuals take care of things themselves and make it work somehow, it also means that the organisational structures that could enhance their work situation are never developed:

"We have the same discussions year after year; how to behave outwards, how to guarantee a certain quality, how open are we to be to others, what is secret and what is not, are we too tough on each other and so forth. First we decide on principles but suddenly a new issue appears that make us abandon the principle. So I try to decide on my own instead". (Ursula, IMPRO)

6.4. Tiredness

All the hard work in the projects also means that they easily become irritated and question why they work where they work:

"Before the bankruptcy I was very close to leave this place. There were no money, there were a bad atmosphere and I worked all the time to keep this place up and running. If you work around the clock, disliking your colleagues, not knowing if you will be able to pay your rent, well then you would rather prefer unemployment". (John, IMPRO)

The worst time is often in the end of the project, when they have worked hard for weeks rehearsing, start to get nervous about the opening night and need strength to perform for weeks to come:

"It has been too much, much too much. And tonight it is the big opening night! [bursts into tears] I can't do it, I have no energy, I'm finished. I do not understand how this will work out at all, it is so damned hard!" (Anne, IMPRO)

6.5. Privileged situation

Still they look forward to new projects and endure the hardships of the current ones. After all, they work with the occupation of their dreams, and there are many that envy them:

"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". (Mary, BOH)

"The reason why I left corporate life is that this is so much more fun. It is fantastic to work with a dedicated team that really has an artistic glow… I get my kicks in life from two things. The first one is then the audience leaves the theatre and I stand here in the foyer and hear them laugh, smile and cry. I hear them speak about how much fun it was, I love that feeling. And then the actors come out, laugh and feel that they have done a good performance. When these two things happen at the same time, that is my reward. That is what I work for, that the actors feel challenged and happy as improvisators, and that the audience walks home moved and happy". (Nathan, IMPRO)

7. The co-construction of project work and professional identity

Given the above discursive analysis of the interviewees' narratives, we will conclude this article by discussing some theoretically interesting points that are all related to the notion of co-construction of projects and the individual identities of project workers. We will discuss what is co-constructed, how the processes of co-construction unfold, and also what possibilities there are to resist and change the direction of these processes.

The basic question discussed in this paper concern the process of the simultaneous construction of project work and professional identity, and it is clear that working by projects has a strong connection to individuals' identity construction. The themes developed from the stories concern different dimensions of these identity processes that also construct the project process. Discourses on e.g., projects as well-planned states of emergency, arenas to display professionalism and loyalty or as episodes of hardship and magic serve to connect modern ideals on project work and the elusive occupational symbolism of artistry and culture.

At the same time, the two theatres exhibit many differences. At the state-funded Baltic Opera House, there is a sharp division between the performing artists and backstage administrators and managers. The people interviewed for this study mostly belong to the latter category, and they all express an ambition to strengthen both their professions and their professionalism. They belong to an international opera field where all reputable houses only employ the best and the brightest, be they CEO:s or janitors, opera divas or oboe players. To be able to deliver a successful opening night, all these people have to be coordinated into performing at their best at one and the same time. While different theatrical professions do different deliverables in this process, they still share a sense of professionalism where they deliver the right thing at the right time with excellent quality.

In comparison to the established project-based structure of BOH, the co-owners of IMPRO have just started a process of re-formulating their professional identities. Their years as romantic amateurs came to an end when their theatre company went bankrupt, but changing their way of working and organizing projects has been a long process that is far from ended. They have forced themselves to widen their occupational selves into project management, marketing and business, and they have also spent vast resources on employing external managers and producers in order to strengthen their managerial competencies. Still, they often feel inadequate, and some of the external recruitments have ended in conflicts.

Despite these differences, that primarily result from the two theatres being of different age and size, the processes of co-constructing work identity and the project work form are most similar. In both cases, the projects become the arenas where romantic ideals on artistry and cultural development meet the pragmatic and rationalist reality of time pressures, economic hardship and demanding audiences.

7.1. Co-construction as processes of confirmation and/or disconfirmation

Processes of co-construction are discontinuous in the sense that they happen when the two notions of project work and individual identity construction meet in one and the same situation. In these situations, different aspects of project work and identity construction confirm and/or disconfirm each other, thereby affirming some notions of projects and identities and disaffirming others.

At the core of the abovementioned discourses is the co-construction that happens when the project work situation is interpreted as inevitably demanding something from individuals, may it be more time, changed priorities, shift of loyalties, etc. We have termed this *mutual confirmation*. After all, projects have been constructed as the main way of organizing new plays, and since projects rest upon collective coordination no single individual can disapprove of pieces of projects. Either you are in or you are out. Individuals – given that they see themselves as professional and responsible – will therefore live up to these demands, thereby confirming both the inevitabilities of the project form and their identity as loyal professionals.

There are also situations where projects and identities are co-constructed through processes of *simultaneous confirmation/disconfirmation* or even *mutual disconfirmation*. An example of the former is the well-known emotional irrationalities that some actors and directors may exhibit during the rehearsal process, irrationalities that fit with the cultural identity construction as an artist but neither with the identity as theatre professional nor the ideology behind project work. Emotional outbursts and nervous over-reactions becomes something to be handled by those not on stage, whose ambitions is to implement their projects whatever happens. When disconfirming irrational emotions in relation to project work, rational thinking is at the same time confirmed as an adequate individual response to project demands. If some parts of the team view themselves differently and behave accordingly, it means that the rest is doing the right thing.

Mutual disconfirmation may also occur, i.e. when there are deviations from the established notions of project work that individuals experience as demanding deviations from their own identities. Such situations happen when organisational politics or financial scarcities are allowed a central place in the organizing of the project, and the professionals in the project feel that such perspectives are illegitimate. Thereby, it is established that organisational/commercial matters are something that is not of the same world as work in cultural projects. Still, such perspectives can be found in the identities of most interviewees in this study, not least because both organisations have operated under scarcity for years which has meant that many directors, stage managers and producers have been forced to incorporate organisational and commercial considerations in their professional identity in order to be able to exercise their professions in the future. Project work and professional identities are thus not stable; they are subject to change over time. In these long-term processes of co-construction, each project is a 'critical incident' opening up for changes but also offering yet another instance of confirming what is already there.

7.2. Beyond theatres: Project management and identity construction

Although the above analysis of the role pf project management in professional identity construction is related to the specific case of theatres, we do think that similar analyses can be made in other project-based contexts. In order to extend our reasoning in that way, one must, however, bear in mind the specific character of theatre projects.

First and foremost, theatre projects operate with absolute and fixed deadlines. Delays are impossible, and the opening night will be held notwithstanding the actual progress made by the team. Professional performance is thus

always situated in an undisputable time regime where meeting the deadline is mandatory rather than preferable. At the same time, there are no other absolute and fixed requirements that can be used to determine success or failure – apart from the general necessity of budget control, the judgement of goal fulfilment is made entirely from the outside, by critics and the audience. Their judgement is highly subjective and there is not always any clear relations between the critics' views and the number of tickets sold [30]. In that way, professional performance in theatre projects is much related to the ability to use previous experiences in formulating artistic visions that should be well received, and to relentlessly pursue through the whole project. There are also other characteristics of theatre projects such as the focus on individual performance (despite the teamwork character of the actual project work), and the high expectations on creativity and dedication, that makes professional performance both an ambiguous and demanding ability to acquire. Professional performances do not imply project success, and project success is almost impossible to assess.

Without going into detail concerning other types of projects and project-based settings, there are some general implications for the study of the project form as a part of professional identity construction. To see oneself – and be seen as others – as professional, one must subject to project management norms; you keep everything in good order, you plan, you deliver according to plan, emotions and irrationalities are kept at bay, and so forth. Theatre projects – along with a few other types of project work – also sets the agenda for all projects through the absolute necessity of conforming to time limits. Although most projects have relative rather than absolute deadlines, project management methodology always prescribes delivery on deadline as a main source of professional performance. In some industries, it almost never happens that deadlines are met, and employees are thereby kept unsatisfied, striving – and un-professional. The co-construction of project work and identity is thereby an eternal process aimed at a vague and elusive image of success – this in a business life where the avoidance of outright failure is often more important to most managers than the claiming of historical triumphs.

In the cases analysed here, it cannot be said that Project Management as a discipline has gained any significant influence in neither IMPRO nor BOH. Even though most producers, directors and stage managers at the two theatres are most familiar with Gantt charts, project goal structures, etc., they are not actively promoting Project Management as a distinct competence of neither themselves nor the organisation. What they do construct is still a modernist notion of professionalism, a system of beliefs linking organisational poverty, legitimacy and success to individual identification with what is high-standard artistry, organisational loyalty and self-fulfilment. Each new project becomes an arena and a critical incident for such co-construction, for yet another confirmation of the current devel-

opment or for experimenting with other forms for theatre production project work.

7.3. Reconstructing project work: On possibilities of resistance and change

If projects and individual identities are then in a long-term process of co-construction implying an increased focus on projects as rational action sequences and individual identities increasingly incorporating the rational/commercial perspectives on cultural work, what can be done to resist and change this development? Should it be resisted and changed?

In Hodgson's [16] analysis of the disciplinary effects of the emerging field of Project Management, it is claimed that the notion of 'professional project management' is a way to make rationalism, functionalism and control over organisational processes more legitimate in the subjective eyes of employees. In the terminology used here, it implies co-construction of both the project work form as such and of the notion of the disciplined, (self)responsible and professional individual. In an era where well-educated, skilled employees were supposed to be liberated from their bureaucratic iron cages through their autonomous possession of knowledge and experiences [2], Project Management becomes a way of re-disciplining them through the coercive use of goals, time schedules, demands on flexibility, etc., [22]. In that sense, Project Management is a part of a general trend towards the 'managerialisation' of the performing arts [31].

Given that there are always possibilities for change, and that each new project can be seen as a window of opportunity for such change, resistance is possible if it is directed at the core of the co-construction process. Instead of adapting the traditional professional identity as theatre professionals to the emerging economist, professionalist and (project) managerialist discourses, employees could instead handle the problems raised by these discourses as traditional problems of theatre operations that have always existed from *The Globe Theatre* onwards. That could e.g. imply handling commercial matters as necessary evils or handling project work as a scenic process of artistry rather than as a managerialist process of functional planning. In other words, making project work a natural and integrated part of the cultural profession rather than treating it as an alien ideology that will destroy and disrupt. What is new is not the problems of funding, planning or meeting deadlines – what is new is the humble obedience with which people discipline themselves into professional identities where managerialist inventions become the ideal and their own operations the problem to be solved.

ference in Oslo, for constructive comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

References

[1] Alvesson M, Sköldberg K. Reflexive methodology: Interpretation and research. London: Sage; 1989.

[2] Bennis WG, Slater PE. The temporary society. New York: Harper & Row Publishers; 1968.

[3] Berger PL, Luckmann T. The social construction of reality. Harmondsworth: Penguin; 1967.

[4] Boje DM. Narrative methods for organizational and communication research. London: Sage; 2001.

[5] Buckle P, Thomas J. Deconstructing project management: A gender analysis of project management guidelines. Int J Project Manage 2003;21:433–41.

[6] Cicmil S, Hodgson D. Making projects critical – Introduction. In: Hodgson D, Cicmil S, editors. Making projects critical. London: Palgrave; 2006.

[7] Clegg S, Courpasson D. Political hybrids: Tocquevillean views on project organizations. J Manage Studies 2004;41(4):525–47.

[8] Dollar C. Stage managers do make coffee: A handbook for stage managers http://www.geocities.com/Broadway/Stage/2203/SMHandbook. html,read24/11-2004.

[9] Ekstedt E, Lundin RA, Söderholm A, Wirdenius H. Neo-industrial organizing: Action, knowledge formation and renewal in a project-intensive economy. London: Routledge; 1999.

[10] Elonen S, Artto K. Problems in managing internal development projects in multi-project environments. Int J Project Manage 2003:395–402.

[11] Engwall M, Jerbrant A. The resource allocation syndrome: The prime challenge of multi-project management. Int J Project Manage 2003:403–9.

[12] Giddens A. Modernity and self-identity. Cambridge: Polity Press; 1991.

[13] Gill R. Cool, creative and egalitarian exploring gender in project-based new media work in Europe. Inform Commun Soc 2002;5(1):70–89.

[14] Goodman RA. Temporary systems. New York: Praeger; 1981.

[15] Hendriks MHA, Voeten B, Kroep L. Human resource allocation in a multi-project R&D environment. Int J Project Manage 1999;17(3):181–8.

[16] Hodgson DE. Disciplining the professional: The case of project management. J Manage Studies 2002;39(6):803–21.

[17] Hodgson DE. Project work: The legacy of bureaucratic control in the post-bureaucratic organization. Organization 2004;11(1):81–100.

[18] Knights D, Willmott H. Management lives. Power and identity in work organizations. London: Sage; 1999.

[19] Lindahl M. Engineering improvisation: the case of Wärtsilä. In: Guillet de Monthoux P, Gustafsson C, Sjöstrand S-E, editors. Aesthetic leadership: Managing fields of flow in art and business. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; 2007.

[20] Lindgren M, Packendorff J. A project-based view of entrepreneurship. In: Steyaert C, Hjorth D, editors. New movements in entrepreneurship. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar; 2003.

[21] Lindgren M, Packendorff J. What's new in new forms of organizing? On the construction of gender in project-based work. J Manage Studies 2006;43(4):841–66.

[22] Lindgren M, Packendorff J. Projects and prisons. In: Hodgson DE, Cicmil S, editors. Making projects critical. London: Palgrave; 2006.

[23] Lindgren M, Wåhlin N. Identity construction among boundary-crossing individuals. Scand J Manage 2001;17(3):357–77.

[24] Nkomo SM, Cox Jr T. Diverse identities in organizations. In: Clegg SR, Hardy C, Nord WR, editors. Handbook of organization studies. London: Sage; 1996.

[25] Packendorff J. The temporary society and its enemies: Projects from an individual perspective. In: Sahlin-Andersson K, Söderholm A, editors. Beyond project management. Malmö: Liber/Copenhagen University Press; 2002.

[26] Pinto JK. Power and politics in project management. Sylva: Project Management Institute; 1996.

[27] Soila-Wadman M. Kapitulationens estetik: Organisering och ledarskap i filmprojekt. Stockholm: Stockholm University School of Business; 2003.

[28] Strauss AL. The articulation of project work: An organizational process. Sociol Quart 1988;29(2):163–78.

[29] Söderlund J. Bland förvaltartyper och förändringsagenter: Skapandet av ett projektmedvetet företag. Stockholm: Posten AB; 2004.

[30] Tajtáková M. Flexibility of strategic choices in an opera house management. Int J Business Environ 2006;1(3):365–81.

[31] Zan L. Managerial rhetoric and arts organizations. London: Palgrave MacMillan; 2006.