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- an Inquiry into Subjectivity and Social Technologies at Work

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It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door, you step onto the Road, and if you don't keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.

Bilbo Baggins, the Lord of the Rings

Foreword

When I first embarked on this study, I too, like Bilbo the Hobbit in the adventure story of the Lord of the Rings, had a feeling of anxiety about where I might get swung off to. And like Frodo the ring bearer, I have indeed many times had the feeling that the road rather than me was leading the way. The author of the Lord of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkien, is famous for building up of a universe, presenting a genealogy with hobbits, orcs, wizards, ents, men and other creatures that have their own history and speak a language of their own. The same goes for the story that I am going to tell you about public working life and some of its key inhabitants. To link this piece of work with the Lord of the Rings might seem somewhat odd. Though public working life can be adventurous it is by outsiders most often thought of as anything but adventurous. Nevertheless this story too has its characters and it seeks to develop a specific language and understanding of a special kind of nature – work and organisation in our contemporary society. And as the Lord of the Rings continuously has spellbound generations, the everyday lives of knowledge workers in the public sector continue to fascinate me.

As with Tolkien's figurative tales it might be difficult to discern, who are good and who are bad, in the settings I have studied. Indeed, my intent is to explore the grey zones of public work life, rather than the clear and distinctive. Characters transform and people change. Moreover, the complexity of governmental institutions, political considerations affecting practice, and the scope of restructurings and reforms in the public sector during the period of study makes this field particularly interesting when exploring the ways in which work, life and subjectivity intertwine. The story of Tolkien and the story I am going to tell share another feature: the theme of a journey. I too had to go out of my door, leave my office and the familiar surroundings at the Copenhagen Business School and enter the world of public knowledge workers. This has been a journey of much joy and laughter, but also one of trials, struggles and hard work. And the inhabitants of the public sector companies that agreed to be part of my study had to accept that

neither of us knew exactly where our collaboration would take us when we started. And this is important. It is in searching, experimenting and exploring subjectivity at work that I hope to bring something back to the field of organisation; to the people with whom I have been working and to the academic community in general. While working with this thesis, a good deal of time and space has been allocated to contemplating and debating how *competence* relates to issues of work, life, and subjectivity. One of the most striking features about competence is the way in which it is distinguished from and permeates other elements in organisations, i.e. material and immaterial products, buildings, rules, contracts, hierarchies, etc. Today we are often told that it is not enough to go to work, get the job done and get out. We have to invest something more, the whole person is wanted at work. It is through our work that we are able to explore and gain possibilities crucial for other parts of life. What is it that makes competence such an urgent and relevant phenomenon in our times? What kind of peculiar nature does it hold? If present working life is not just about getting the job done, but requires deep passionate engagement (Brewis et al. 2006, Linstead 2005, Linstead & Brewis 2007) perhaps we might not seek only professional but also personal fulfilment through work? What is the role of competence efforts in this? Are we to work as shiny happy people in order to be competent? Does competence share the infinite character of happiness?

Maybe these questions give rise to concern. Could it be that competence resembles Søren Kierkegaard's (2007:188) perception of happiness when he asks: "What is happiness? A ghost, not existing until it has been?" Is that why we humans are so eager to strive to become competent, because we seek a happy (after)life? What does this striving do to us? What do we make of it, or rather what do we become? Could it be that subjectivity, "who we are", is not some"thing" to be managed, controlled or steered, but simply emerges in the action, and can only be narrated in retrospect – he/she *was* competent, in this or that situation; he/she is a competent employee since, he/she *has* done so and so? On the other hand, this "becoming" of subjectivity is certainly also recursive, it also anticipates. The subject is not inherently competent; rather subjectivity is continually and variably *performed*. Thus in the thesis I explore the dual question of what are the relations between subjectivity and competence as an open-ended practice and what are its performative powers? Performativity will be further elaborated and discussed in the study. For now it suffices to say that performance is here used in the sense close to that of Judith Butler (1999) who, by drawing on Foucault among others,

has argued that a person's gender is continually and variably performed, it is a kind of becoming or activity, rather than given as a fact.

Though this thesis is a physical end product and the provisional result of my work on subjectivity and competence, it also marks a new beginning. I certainly hope that, as it has been an experience writing this text; it will also turn out to be a book of experience, a book of use. I like to see my study as both an experience and an experiment. The phrase "book of experience" is one I borrow from Foucault, when he famously notes:

> An experience is something you come out of transformed. If I had to write a book to communicate what I'm already thinking before I begin to write, I would never have the courage to begin. I write a book only because I still don't exactly know what to think about this thing I want so much to think about, so that the book transforms me and transforms what I think (Foucault 2002b:239f).

As has been noted by others the French *experience* is translatable to both "experience" and "experiment" in English (Hamann 2005) and as also Mitchell Dean (1994) notes, to write a book is not an end, it is a beginning, and it is in its reception, critique and debate a piece of work should be valued. Writing these words more than three years after I embarked on my study of competence and knowledge workers in the Danish public sector, I can rejoin with Foucault that the process has transformed me too. Though as researcher I am intrinsically linked to my object of study, through the *Performative Power of Competence* I will seek to account for the transformations of others as much as accounting for my own.

Contents

The flat and empirical little question, "what happens?" is not designated to introduce by stealth a metaphysics or an ontology of power but, rather, to undertake a critical investigation of power.

Michel Foucault (1994b:337)

I The Performative Power of Competence

The purpose of this opening chapter is to present the aim and content of *The Performative Power of Competence*. By accounting for my way into the project, I introduce and discuss competence as a research object. I then go on to describe the kind of scientific nature of the study, and finally I present the overall structure of the thesis.

A fundamental query runs through this study, which is simultaneously as specific and local as it is general and global: How come some performances are valued as more competent than others? What determines which performances are actualised as competent, and which as incompetent? While the meaning of competence is itself contested, especially in the field of organisation, this study seeks a non-essentialist approach. Being competent is suggested as exactly that, a be*ing*, a process, a constant movement of becoming; competence is thus not some*thing* fixed, independent of time and space, but an ascription, and is constantly *performed*. Precisely what performances contribute to the notion of being competent remains an empirical question. In this thesis the question is posed as a question of how competence is actualised in work practices.

The point of entry into this discussion of competence is the multiple relations to human subjects. Subjectivation as becoming; the ways in which subjectivities are constantly produced and reproduced, and how these processes relate to the question of competence are of central concern. What actions characterise competent social arrangements (i.e. of employees and organisations)? How do they perform and come to matter? What effects do acts of competence have and does competence belong to a certain practice? What happens when subjectivities are produced in terms of competence?

The Performative Power of Competence seeks to address these questions by challenging established demarcations of the role of humans in contemporary working life. By addressing the theme of *movement,* I wish to contribute to how we can understand competence as a certain kind of subject making in practice. Here practice is to be understood as interweaving of materiality and language, or "entanglement of matter and meaning" as Karen Barad (2007) calls it. Thus, how humans become subjects, how communities are turned into organisations, via the actualisation of competence remain key questions in this study.

My way into the project

In this context I wish to begin the account of my way into the project via five steps: a) how competence is actualised b) how I as a writer and Ph.D. fellow became a subject, who was to work with competence c) what are the sites and the subjects that I have been studying d) the specificities and problematics of giving an account of oneself and e) what happens when the object of study mutates and turns into something else. But let us begin with the actualisation.

On how competence is actualised

> [1]18 February 2005. Bernard, head of the knowledge centre at the Centre for Higher Education enters his office at the teachers college somewhere in the outskirts of Copenhagen. He turns on his computer and reads an email that has just popped up from the Ministry of Education - yet another governmental "change programme", he seems to think before he says sighing:
>
> "A new curriculum arrives, and the immediate reaction is: We need a course! And then relief courses are held all over the country, and it doesn't help much, because courses with preplanned content simply don't work, no way, they are the least effective. Though this is exactly what is demanded by most teachers, you have to recognize that today

[1] Throughout the thesis I use quotes, reflections and small empirical stories like the this to situate the storyline. They are all written in this indented form. Text in inverted commas is direct quotes from interviews with knowledge workers from the four institutions taking part in my study. When nothing else is mentioned, all other text is narrations based on my fieldnotes. All characters from the four institutions have been given figurative names, due to promises of anonymity.

> you have to do the spadework of learning, what you need to learn, yourself".

Judged by the number of publications on competence development issued by official authorities (e.g. the Ministry of Finance and especially the State Employer's Authority) and the amount of money set aside for these purposes, competence seems to be one of the key features in securing the level of public service in the Danish welfare state. To take an example, headings like "professional development", "management reform", "competent and visible managers", "attractive workplaces", "new thinking" and "quality development and debureaucratisation" are all key issues in the 60 billion DKK "quality reform" programme put forward by the Danish Government in August 2007[2].

Work with "competence development" is thus simply *not* just an innocent business of helping employees and institutions establish a better working environment. It also entails a number of political and economic issues and negotiations, not only at the institutional level, but at the overall level of the state. But what is "competence"? And what does it mean when accompanied by "development"? There are probably as many different definitions as there are employees and institutions. But one phrase, which has become of common usage in Danish public governance in recent years, is that competence development must be implemented "strategically and systematically":

> In order to have efficient and attractive jobs in the state, ongoing development of the competencies and qualifications of public employees is necessary. Competence development must be both strategic and systematic. It is to be strategic by relating competence development to the objectives and tasks of the institution and systematic by making competence development a planned and ongoing process. An example of the latter would be recurrent annual performance appraisal interviews (State Employer's Authority 2007).

Interestingly, competence is very often connected to the act of developing something, though the nature of this something may not always be specified. The strategic aspect seems to involve the community, the overall level of the organisation, whereas the systematic aspect seems to point toward recurrent and planned processes by way of programmes. This is at least what government

[2] See www.kvalitetsreform.dk, retrieved 28 August 2007

policies attempt to promote. I was struck by the fact that managing people in competence programmes always seems to include a number of procedures, "soft" social technologies or ways of attempting to regulate employee behaviour (like the performance appraisal interviews mentioned in the quote above). The opening quote from the knowledge centre consultant, signals that competence development is not unproblematic. One needs to do the spadework of learning, what one needs to lean, oneself. At this first initial level competence appears simultaneously as a problem (competence as a need to learn something new) and as a solution (competence as a precondition for efficient and attractive work places in the state). It is this double movement of problem-solution, the relation between competence and ways of managing behaviour that has intriqued me since the beginning of my study. To elaborate further on my way into the project and since the "I"/eye behind any text is central to its development let us take a look at how "one" becomes a subject working with competence[3].

On how one becomes a competent subject

It was while working as a research assistant at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS) that I first learned about the possibility of doing a PhD on competence development, and I was immediately fascinated by the idea. A new project on competence development in the state sector was in the making between the CBS and the Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality Management (SCKK). The SCKK was established in 1999 as a result of the collective agreements between the Danish Ministry of Finance and the Central Federation of State Employees' Organisations (CFU) with the intent to "enhance competence and quality development measures of Danish central government agencies and government institutions" and "provide advice and guidance to central government agencies"[4]. All government institutions can ask for advice and apply for financial support of development projects, but though a great number of initiatives have been taken, the SCKK would like to see more "daring" and "experimenting" projects, which could provoke and stimulate debate. Hence it was in the interest of

[3] I am not saying that the "I" and the author of a text have to be one and the same. As Foucault notes in "What is an author" (2000:211): "The authors's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture…we could say that in a civilization like our own there are a certain number of discourses endowed with the "author function" while others are deprived of it". One simple example of such a discourse that Foucault is talking about is the scientific discourse which uses references as "anchors" (Taylor 2003) to point to its credibility.

[4] Quote from the SCKK objectives www.sckk.dk, retrieved 28 August 2007.

SCKK to make good use of their funding by initiating purposeful competence development via new project constellations, and the CBS was in a position to deliver an appealing project proposal. Through an application to the Graduate Supplementary Training Committee (ELU), a fund that administers financial funds for development initiatives supported by the SCKK, a rationale of a three-year competence development project, with CBS as the project host, was formulated:

> *First*, the objective is – in close collaboration with a number of state institutions under reform – to *develop competence development processes* for (certain) employees of higher education in these institutions. The processes of competence development must integrate, on the one hand, the reorganisation project in question and, on the other hand, the ideas and proposals of the employees involved for relevant changes that can meet the demands for reorganisation.
>
> *Second*, the objective is to *contribute to organisational development and change* in these institutions. Competence development should not be isolated projects for qualifying identified single individuals, but should, quite the contrary, be general, learning processes closely related to the workplace – processes that are both the outcome and catalyst of organisational development that adds value to the organisation. The project thus contributes specific, contextual knowledge in the form of a number of sub-projects realising that what counts as competent behaviour in one situation does not necessarily do so in another situation. Working with organisational development includes drawing up realisable objectives in order to strengthen the implementation and utility value of the development efforts.
>
> *Third*, the objective is to *collate and analyse experiences* from the sub-projects and outline new methods and directions for working with competence programmes for employees of higher education – and to communicate this body of knowledge to other state institutions, including universities.
>
> (SCKK, 2004)

This project rationale fits nicely with the SCKK vision, in which it is said that one of the Centre's prime purposes is to "communicate knowledge about competence development and supplementary training for graduates employed by central

government agencies and government institutions"[5]. But the rationale also reveals several other issues central to how one becomes a competent subject. In the first place competence is thought of as an activity (and a process) taking place in everyday working life (that is not solely via courses, training programmes etc.). Secondly, the project aims to "integrate the reorganisation project and the ideas and proposals of employees involved" hence a certain kind of harmony or alignment of interests are sought developed. Thirdly the project has to "strengthen implementation and utility value" which is imagined to take place via dissimination of the project results both internally in the participating organisations, and most importantly also externally via conferences, books, contributions to the media, etc. Of course these formulations can be twisted and interpreted in a number of ways (and they were), but nevertheless they did set a loose frame pointing to possible directions that the project might take.

For instance, to abide by the intent of the rationale, it would be difficult to announce an external management training course for several weeks' duration aimed at top-management representatives only. The project rationale seemed to require some "action at work". In addition, it also seemed aberrant to propose a 10-step ready-made competence programme in which all phases and activities were accounted for and described in detail beforehand. The project needed to seriously address the ideas and perceived challenges of the workers, which seemed to call for an active engagement with the people in the participating organisations.

During the summer of 2004 the project application to the SCKK was accepted and I was equipped with a project team of *four management consultants* to help me carry out the project. The four management consultants (hereafter referred to as "the consultants") having 8-20 years of experience in organisational development were selected for their proficiency in analysing and working with universities and governmental institutions. As an integrated part of the PhD project I was assigned, on a daily basis for almost two years, the role of, managing and coordinating the efforts of the four consultants.

But before we really could get going, we needed to recruit a sufficient number of state institutions willing to engage in "competence development of highly educated personnel". As one can imagine, many interests had be taken into account when

[5] www.sckk.dk, retrieved 28 August 2007.

recruiting institutions. The criteria laid down by the ELU had to be met (e.g. institutions were to represent: universities, government research institutes, centres for higher education, departments and state agencies), the aspirations of the consultants needed be taken into account and, most importantly, the support and initial commitment of the participating institutions should be properly secured[6].

Inherent in the project rationale are some fundamental suppositions, which were left unexplained, but nevertheless also influenced the course of the project. Competence development should "add value" to the organisation. But what kind of value? Economic value? Social value? Or perhaps even cultural value? Also competence development should be of benefit to *both* the individual *and* the organisation. Hence, issues of disagreement, struggles and disputes that might arise along the way would, according to this rationale, be seen as obstacles and should be removed or overcome in order for the project to be successful and the participants to be deemed more competent.

To me especially the questions of how competence relates to value and how it can be of benefit both to the individual and the organisation have become important questions. But it was not until nearly a year after the activities in the four institutions had ended, when I read Robert Pirsig's *Lila*: *An inquiry into Morals* that I found a probable account of value. In this book Pirsig presents a special take on value:

> It is an *experience*. It is not a judgment about an experience. It is not a description of experience. The value itself is an experience. As such it is completely predictable. It is verifiable by anyone who cares to do so. …We have a cultural inherited blind spot here. Our culture teaches us to think it is the hot stove that directly causes the oaths. …Not so. The value is *between* the stove and the oaths. *Between* the subject and the object lies the value. This value is more immediate, more directly sensed than any "self" or any "object" to which it might later be assigned. It is more *real* than the stove (Pirsig 1991:71, emphasis in original).

[6] A number of institutions were invited but declined to take part in the project before we found the final four to take part. The process of finding relevant institutions that lived up to the criteria described in the project mandate was a time consuming process carried out jointly with the SCKK secretariat and the CBS research team. In some cases we even got to the point of meeting the institution, presenting the project, but without reaching a final agreement and then went on to another candidate.

In these lines the theme of experience emerges again, as it did in the foreword and as with Foucault, Pirsig also links experience to transformation, the relation between subject and object. The question of the relation between the individual and the organisation, it seems to me, is the question of actor-structure or the subject-object dilemma in disguise. Having been at the centre of much sociological thought for more than a century, it would be foolharded of me to think that I could resolve it. But in order to perform "experimental" competence development, which the project was intended to do, it seemed obscure and even stupid to try avoiding any resistance to interventions that the institutions and I might be exposed to. On the contrary I found it much more fruitful to think of resistance and disagreements in terms of strategies, which again could be met with strategies of counter-resistance. On the other hand, I would also be unwise not to seek the widest possible support from all participators in the institutions. So as to how one becomes a competent subject, by accepting the role of project-coordinator I become not only a manager of human *resources*, but also a manager of human *resistances* in the four institutions where competence is set to work. I the following I present a closer look at these settings, the sites and the subjects, that inform the study.

The sites and the subjects

In the autumn of 2004, two institutions accepted the invitation: The National Environmental Research Institute (NERI) and the Centre for Higher Education in Greater Copenhagen (CHE). During the winter 2004-2005 two other institutions joined: the Danish Road Directorate and finally BioCentrum - a department at the Danish Technical University. For the consultants and me to make sense of the many ways to approach these institutions we introduce, for two reasons, an *ideal model* for how to deal with project activities in each of the institutions. First, this will furnish the five of us with a common language and set a space of expectation (first we have to design the project then go on to implementation, then evaluation, etc.). Second, the model provides a sense of security and a frame that makes it clearer to the steering committees, formed in each of the institutions how we were to approach competence development (at least in terms of some overall activities).

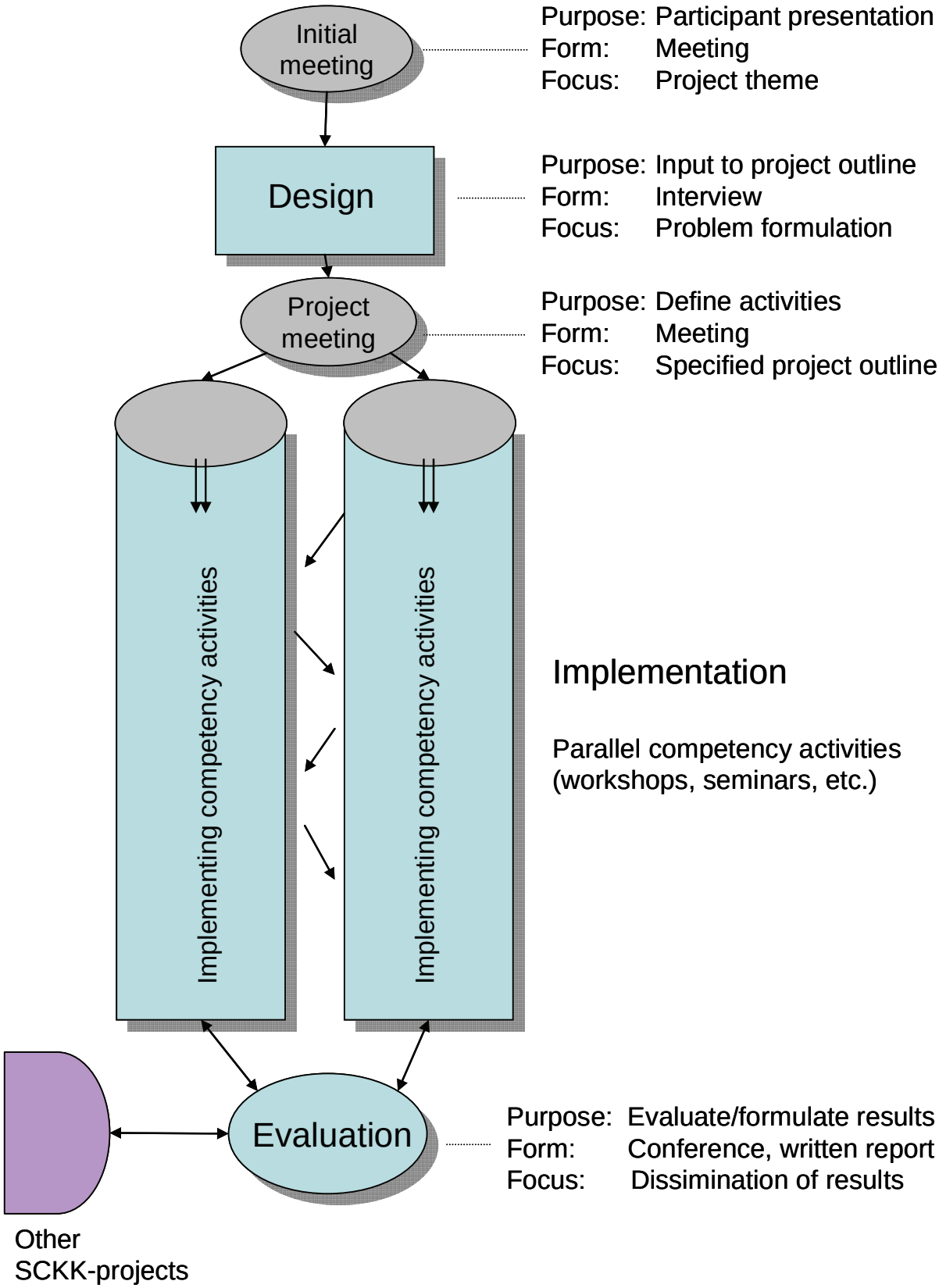

Figure: Ideal model for competence programme

According to the ideal model each competence programme is divided into three phases; a preject phase, including the design of the competence programme, an implementation phase, and an evaluation phase. Each of the three phases are imagined to overlap and draw upon different forms of material; in the design phase documents and open-ended explorative interviews, in the implementation phase workshops and seminars, and in the evaluation phase evaluation meetings, report-writing and a major conference. Furthermore, the model serves the purpose of illuminating the temporariness of competence development. Not only activities labelled "development" or "implementation" count. As was stressed on many occasions, the competence development begins the very moment we enter the door for the first meeting. Further what goes on *in between* the phases (design, implementation and evaluation) might be just as important as the final outcome. Naturally, each of the projects came to deviate from the model in a number of ways. While this required quite some time to explain and negotiate with the steering committees in the four institutions, it presented no problem to the project or the consultancy team as such.

Right from the outset the consultants and I tried to pay due attention to the wishes and ideas of the steering committee of each organisation in order to formulate a project outline that made sense to all partners and had as its fulcrum important future development challenges. Managing four consultants, four competence projects (with sub-projects and many sub-activities) and trying to do a PhD is indeed a challenging and time consuming task. Thus, during the first months of the project I spent more than 600 hours "on site" in meetings, making project presentations, doing interviews, and this was *before* the "heavy" intervention and periods of observation were to take place. In the implementation phase, stretching over five months in total (August – December 2005), numerous meetings, workshops and seminars were held. 23 interviews (out of 30 in total)[7] were selected for transcription, 9 solo and 14 focus group interviews, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. The criterias employed to select interviews were wether new insights arose with regard to the the way the organisation worked, the importance of competence in the organisation, and social dynamic, that is reports of collaboration, conflicting interests, etc. The use of these interviews varies, but a change can be traced over the course of the project. The first interviews were

[7] See chapter V, table in the section "Schematising the institutional settings" for an account of how the interviews were distributed among the four institutions.

primarily a way to get to know the organisation. These would be unstructured interviews with managers, employees, shop stewards and, in some cases, also external partners or customers to the institutions. Hence rather loose interviews guides or themes were used in order to find out the vocabulary and different parts important to the participants. Interviews were carried out in pairs (mostly me and one of the consultants). In this way one could focus on taking notes and paying attention to body language and non-verbal communication, where as the other would put energy into maintaining focus and a good flow in the interview situation, and during the focusgroup interviews an atmosphere in which all participants were given the best opportunities possible of expressing themselves. A practice adopted from the beginning was to write an immediate summary of the impressions from the interview noting: participants, themes/questions, main impression, key statements, observations (linguistic and bodily) and finally learning points/ways to improve questioning techniques. In almost all institutions we used focus group interviews with the intent of promoting negotiated opinions studying "accounts *in* action" as opposed to "accounts *about* action" (Halkier 2002:17). After the first round of interviews an intital analysis was presented to the steering committee in each of the instutions and decisions were made as to what key themes and subjects the competence processes were to be directed at. Later on, additional follow up interviews were conducted, this time more specific. E.g. a series of interviews at the Centre for Higher Education (CHE) focused on the specific role of the knowledge centre consultants, since the competence processes in this institution became designed to address their role, development and ways of knowledge sharing. During the summer of 2005 the programme in the Road Directorate was first postponed and then abandoned, primarily due to heavy political negotiations concerning a major structural reform of the Danish public sector, which would affect the entire operation of the institution. In an interview with Peter one of the managers in the Road Directorate's operations department, we were literally told:

> "It is a bit difficult to sit here with you and talk about future development activities, when tomorrow I don't even know whether my job still exists".

A month later the project in the Road Directorate was shut down. Like in this case the ever changing world may catch up and interfere with any project, also one on competence development. At this time, to gain more in depth knowledge of what was happening in the organisations I decided to devote more energy and time to

two of the four institutions. Since the NERI and the CHE were the institutions with the greatest number of activities and the greatest variety in methods used for competence development, I opted for these two. In consequence I arranged to work in each of the two organisations for a period of two weeks to get a more detailed picture of what it is like to work in these settings. This observation period took place when the implementations of the competence programmes were at its hight. The evaluation phase was carried out both as an event, where the participants gave their immediate responses, and as evaluation meetings with the steering committees. During the spring of 2006 a written report describing the projects was sent to the steering committees at the four institutions for comment. Along with the report the institutions were asked to answer a number of questions about why they joined the project, what had been the main output, and any suggestions for other institutions planning to embark on similar projects. Finally in the autumn of 2006 a conference ended the empirical part of the project organised in agreement with the SCKK. At the conference attended by more than 130 employees and managers from the public sector, two books are also presented, one (Bojesen et al. 2006) based on the written reports. Now writing about my own participation, it is time to reflect a bit on the specificities and problematics of *giving an account of oneself*[8].

Giving an account of oneself

From the above presentation of my project at least two potentially conflicting subject positions appear. The "I as consultant" who is to manage four intervention projects and live up to the expectations of the institutions, the SCKK and the consultants. And the "I as researcher" who is to write a PhD based on research on an interesting and highly complex consultancy project.

In the application to the SCKK it was specifically stressed that the project was to set up and carry out competence development using interventionist approaches. This intent was repeated in formulations like "the project creates synergies between learning and organisational change", and "the research team is not clinical spectators, but partners who play an active role in the life of the institutions". Thus

[8] Judith Butler (2005:112) in her book bearing the same title has reflected on what it means to give an account of oneself. With particular reference to Foucault she compares the confession with the account of oneself and says that: "Foucault reads confession as an act of speech in which the subject "publishes himself". However, in this publication process the subject is transformed, and so by being held to account and by accounting for oneself, the subject is performed. As mentioned in the foreword I propose the same in this text.

a broad framework of action learning was to be deployed in all projects. Action learning and the neighbouring concept action research developed in the 1940's are often attributed to professors Reginald Revans and Kurt Lewin, respectively. One of the key ideas in both concepts is to study participant's actions in "real life settings" (Gustavsen 1998) and make them reflect on them so as to improve practice. In a recent entry in the journal *action learning: theory and practice*, Alan Mumford (2006) who, together with Mike Pedler, has written extensively on the concept of action learning reflects on Lewins famous phrase: There is nothing so practical as a good theory. The problem in much management development is, according to Mumford (2006:69), that

> Methods have been taken up because they "work", but this pragmatic response is flawed. Designers of learning experiences ought to understand better what a particular method will offer and what it will not, because otherwise they become prisoners of their own often limited experience, or the victims of experiences of others.

From this it seems to follow that we should become aware of the methods we use, explicate them, and be willing to question their usage. These steps are much in line with the management model, "system beta" developed by Reg Revans (here quoted in Mumford 2006:70):

> Survey—a stage of observation
> Hypothesis—a stage of theory or of conjecture
> Experiment—in which practical tests are carried out
> Audit—during which actual and desired results are compared
> Review—relating the particular result to the whole context

As Mumford mentions the model should be thought of as circular. Following the ideas of Reg Revans and Kurt Lewin, but also informed by scholars like Chris Argyris (single and double loop learning, espoused therories and theories in use) and David Kolb (experiental learning cycle), action learning seems to be founded on "models" struggling with whether theory should come before practice or the other way around. Reg Revans learning equation: L (learning) = P (programmed knowledge) + Q (questioning insight) is another example. My key message here, linking it to the subtitle from the action learning journal *action learning: theory and practice*, is that theory *and* practice hang together and hence are developed simultaneously in a symbiotic relationship. I do not intend to prioritise or choose one over the other. In giving an account of myself I produce both a theory and

exercise a practice (not to mention the practice of writing). But I can present, with the benefit of hindsight, the place from where my account originates, in this sense I begin by producing "a stage of observation", not in opposition to a theory, but through one. Let me elaborate a bit on what this means.

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter my initial interest was to study how competence can be seen as both a problem and a solution and how this double movement of problem-solution relates to the procedures or ways of managing employee behaviour. Until now I have only hinted at the existence and effect of technologies of competence in this process. But now I want to bring social technologies to the fore. By formulating my intent this way, my point of departure is to ask *for* competence, in order to see what it might become and to examine it as an open *quest*ion, not defined a priori.

This questioning strategy soon brought on other questions, such as "what are the technologies involved in competence development?" "Where do they come from?" "What do they do?" and "Which problems are they meant to solve?" I chose to focus on those technologies that I myself have taken part in introducing to the institutions, during the competence development processes. The advantage of this strategy would be my first hand knowledge of the way in which they were sought implemented, but it also raises a number of theoretical and methodological implications.

In the spirit of inquiry and questing competence, it was not given what kind of interventions "I as a researcher", would and could single out as my research object. In the beginning I tried to keep a distance between what I called "the consultancy project" and "the PhD project", partly to enable me to legitimise that I kept an open mind and tried to avoid being prejudiced. This rather naïve distinction soon collapsed. It was simply not possible to maintain two senses of self at one and the same time. I also tried to avoid the label of "expert consultant", for instance by emphasising the importance of shared responsibility amongst all participants. In some other setting the title PhD might have been associated with expert, ivory tower knowledge. But this was not the case here since almost all organisations I entered were occupied with research, and many of the people with whom I spoke, had a PhD or an equivalent degree. This, however, produced other possibilities for misunderstandings. "PhD" is a well-known category. A PhD working in the Danish Technical University (DTU), in an educational or sector research institution

cannot be that different from a PhD working in the Copenhagen Business School or can s/he? A fellow PhD student at Biocentrum – DTU came up to me after one of the initial presentation meetings and noted:

> "It is a bit strange; competence development, cooperation, management development, knowledge sharing all these "soft" issues that you want to discuss with us, we see as somewhat exotic, extraordinary and as add-ons to our real professional work, they are really what constitute your professional identity. I never thought one could do a PhD on such issues."

On occasions like this one and in working with the four consultants, I tried to foster as much active involvement as possible from all participants. Despite all my deprecating efforts, "I as a consultant" had to do what these people do: consult, give advice, and provide scenarios. I think part of the reason for my reluctance towards playing the expert was my fear of being ascribed some dubious role of having authoritative answers or truth monopoly (and perhaps also diminishing the risk of scapegoating, if something in the project did not work out to the clients' liking). Nevertheless by being there, working there "I as a consultant" offered meaningful distinctions and productive scenarios for the development of each organisation and its members. An example of this is reflected in the following:

> Inherent in competence development is the idea that one improves, but also the less evident that "improving" is not necessarily defined a priori. Therefore, when focusing on competence two aspects are at work simultaneously: What does it mean to improve (in an organisational context), and how does one improve? Getting better at collaborating in practice is only an improvement in so far as it is viewed as an organisational necessity. There is no reason for getting better at something, which is not necessary – that is merely a waste of good energy. Unlike qualifications of which the criteria are defined a priori in terms of standardised assessments, competencies are always related to a permanent – and possibly changing – assessment of necessity (Bojesen et al. 2006:42).

Thus as a consultant I find myself in a position where I need to install certain distinctions, i.e. between qualifications and competencies and act according to what the organisation deems necessary. The reasoning of this approach seems to

be: tell me your symptoms and I will produce a diagnosis[9]. In retrospect this also means that, working with competence there is always something to be diagnosed, fixed, improved or bettered. As a consultant you always look for a state of contradiction, tension or wrongness that opens the possibility for improvement. How was I to help solve the challenges that the organisations are facing? According to the action learning approach one of the initial steps in helping the organisation would be to produce an account of the current state of affairs, a stage of observation. This in return also seemed to require me to have a more or less clear idea of what I was studying. But this was not all that easy, if I had ever imagined that from the beginning.

Studying what? When objects mutate

It was not, as noted earlier, obvious from the outset what I would single out as my main object of research. However, as the projects developed I became interested in studying what this search of competence did to those involved in it; what happened when competence programmes were designed, implemented and evaluated. This was not simply an account of the specific activities, but what such programmes and processes do to the institutions and those actively participating in them. But what exactly was I studying then? For sure, I was not short of possible interpretations of what I was doing. Turning to the SCKK project application, the overall objective of the project reads:

> The purpose of the project is… to create a non-conventional and experimenting development project that, starting from an analysis/understanding of key organisational processes in state institutions under reform, creates and disseminates knowledge of how competence development for the group of highly educated employees takes place in practice – and can be stimulated.

The quote suggests the project to be concerned with the study of *key organisational processes,* which apparently should provide new knowledge about how competence development takes place in practice. Some key observers and project partners suggested that I study how *individual competence* could be

[9] This search for "who I am" and the search for a proper "master subject", i.e. "the researcher", "the consultant", "the PhD student" etc. might be compared to Jacques Lacan's communication model, in which one will never find a fully satisfactory answer of who one is, but will always keep on searching, looking, desiring (Rösing 2005:118). Lacan distinguishes beween three registers in the human knowledge and four discourses. In the second chapter I will go into further detail about the three registers and Lacan's theory of subjectivity.

developed among highly educated employees in the Danish state from an "action learning", bottom-up perspective. Others suggested that I study what *organisational* characteristics were necessary for knowledge workers to grow and prosper. A good number of well-intentioned, but rather vague suggestions were put forward without making my sense of direction any clearer. In academic terms it is worrying not being able to say what one's object of study is. Though the suggestions I was offered ended up being far from the mark, the point is not that they were entirely wrong, or that they did not help me guide my analysis. The point that I want to make is neither one of self-indulgence nor of deeply felt need for meta-reflexivity. The point is that my difficulty in locating my analysis has to do with the nature of competence and the "being" of competence development. As I have tried to show above, any diagnosis concerning what competence is (or can become) must be concerned with making distinctions, producing differences (i.e. symptoms of health or illness, competent or non-competent behaviour, etc.). Making such differences also includes establishing a norm (i.e. that competence development is good, adds value, is for the benefit of both the individual and the organisation). And further, perceptions of the nature of "this norm" are shaped by cultural and historical circumstances. And so my participation in this norm production process meant that I had to employ some kind of analytical distance to my own work. Just as important as it has been for me to *be there* to watch, learn and participate in actions of competence, just as important has it been to take time to reflect on my experiences and actions in another time frame. There is a fundamental difference between "reflection-in-action" and "reflection about action" or as Bramming and Frandsen (2003:266) note between "practical reflexivity" and "reflexive practice". This difference has proved important in multiple ways in my dealings with competence and knowledge workers. Not only am I heavily dependent on and influenced by the cultural and historical inheritance of the Danish public sector (e.g. that competence is an important and meaningful concept which, if used properly could contribute to better working conditions for all). Also, I have, due to my sense of "I as a consultant" and project coordinator, contributed to the making of meaningful categories insofar as I have played an active role in the design, implementation and evaluation of the competence programmes. But where does this self-awareness leave me? Am I too entangled in the programmes and schemes of thought at use to be able to see things clearly, to provide any real description of what I am studying? Should I try to distance myself further from the field? On the contrary, my approach in *the Performative Power of Competence* will be nominalistic, to study competence as a word in the first

instance[10]. According to this approach all answers given to the question of "what is competence?" should be taken as sensible, contextual responses. If I started assuming competence to be a specific *thing* and not other things, then alternative suggestions would seem aberrant, and I would already have installed the norm I so carefully tried to avoid producing myself. However, this approach was not at all easy. Paradoxically, at first competence was barely even mentioned by the participants in the competence development processes. It was more or less taken for granted that everybody knew what competence was. But when I entered the institutions in late 2004, beginning of 2005, started asking *for* competence, leaving it open for exploration, I soon discovered a number of couplings among competence and various contents and concepts. One way I approached competence was to ask very carefully and explicitly those taking part in the project, what competence meant to them. Of course an array of answers was produced, from courses and formal programmes to more informal activities like on-the-job-training and even a "cultural mindset". This variety, however, is not problematic in the sense that it needs be eradicated. On the contrary my questioning approach also allows for questioning the many different notions of competence. Thus after having met with all the institutions in the study, the figure below was produced:

[10] I thank Casper Bruun Jensen for suggesting this to me. In the paper "Researching Partially Existing Objects" (2004) Bruun Jensen in pointing to Foucault and others develop a nominalistic approach to the study of electronic patient records. I will elaborate further on this approach in the chapter "diagnosing the present".

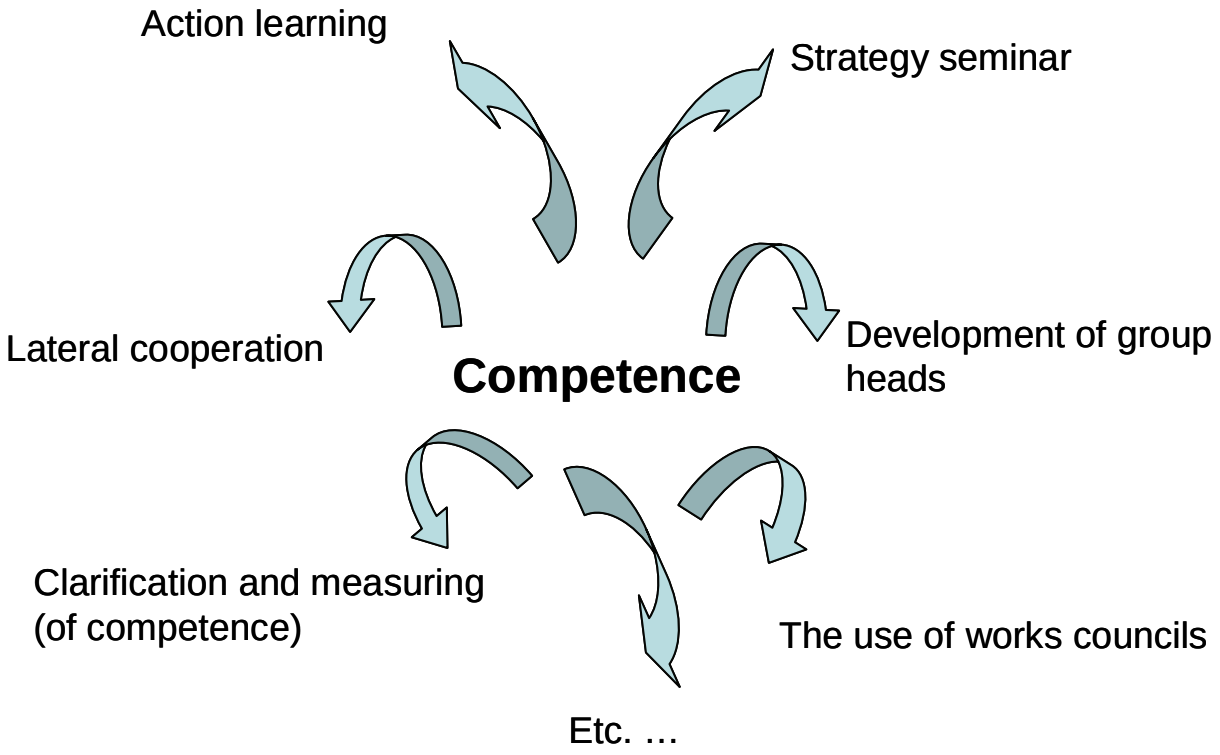

Figure: Signifiers of competence

The point of the figure is to signify competence as a *dynamic* concept, that competence, for me, is an empty concept, void of content from the outset. The signifier "competence" can signify virtually anything, anything that the institutions deem relevant as content for a competence development programme. This approach tries to see competence as a concept that needs to be given meaning, viewing it as a "floating signifier". This however, does not mean that competence can stay void of content, for those in the competence development processes. As also the consultants noted:

> After being involved in the competence development project for half a year it no longer suffices to claim that we are doing competence development. We ask ourselves how "competence" materialises as competence in the project, but we are hardly able to come up with an answer apart from reproducing the many different processes in the organisation. But are we merely to accept that competence development is what we are doing as long as we refer to it as competence development? (Bojesen et al. 2006:112).

While it is perfectly acceptable for the "I as a researcher" to operate with the floating signifier, it becomes problematic, from the perspective of the "I as consultant" to accept any definition at face value as long as it is labelled "competence". The consultants and I have to disclose all relevant connections and signifying meanings of competence - not just those mentioned by "official" spokespersons or institutionalised meanings. Then we must design a program aimed at a number of signifiers singled out in collaboration with participants from the institutions[11]. But as a researcher something in this approach seems disturbing.

[11] The consultants and I also felt the need to know what we mean by competence, and this so urgently that after having worked about three months on the project we formulated the following seven points, mostly for our own sake:

1. The project aims to get beyond the approach to competence that exclusively attempts to implement development as a top-down process. Competence is not only something determined by exogenous stakeholders/forces (e.g. consultants or researchers), but just as much something that the institution can contribute to influence and define.
2. The project aims to concretise the perception of what competence is and what it is to become through a bottom-up process in which candidates for competence development participate actively.
3. The project finds competence to be a local, contextual phenomenon, which is constructed in a social field (e.g. of colleagues and groups) making it impossible at a general genetic level to construct "true" competencies. Therefore, the project aims to make sense of competencies through the daily work of the individual (employee, group, or institution).
4. Any generalised understandings of competence will thus always stem from and be a simplification of one (or several) local premises. Therefore, it does not make sense to implement standardised tools if we want them to have an effect on competence in practice.
5. The project prioritises action research (e.g. action learning) that intervenes by attempting to change the practice of the organisational participants in interaction with the consultant/research team, and thus aiming for collective ownership of the project. Data generation via interviews for the purpose of diagnosis and documentation is necessary but not sufficient and should never stand alone.
6. Development and competence is often referred to as if organisations, groups or individuals have a development problem ("we lack this and that competence", "we have a competence gap", "your competencies need improving", etc.). This logic signals that if development is not dealt with actively nothing will happen – the world is fundamentally static.
7. The point of departure of the project is nevertheless that the world (and competencies) is (are) always in the process of changing, exactly because this is the condition of the world. Or more philosophically: We are not in the world, but become humans by interacting with the world. The relevant question for the project is therefore not if development takes place, but rather what kind of development is taking place (and how it might be manageable).

In the project's view competence is fundamentally a contextual phenomenon, which is constructed in a social field. Therefore the project must include the specific humans and the context of competence development. Since development goes on continuously, the project is also about stabilisation through a certain form of control. Therefore the project can experiment with forms of control different from the traditional ones (classroom, future scenarios as benchmarks,

I am not so much interested in studying the many different links that competence seems to establish, as I am in discovering if there is any rationale or organising principle underlying the way in which competence seems to relate, to workings of practice. How can I describe this constant relating, mutating character in which competence transforms itself into many diverse matters?

This way of formulating my object of study as being one of constant mutation and transformation leads me to consider the utilisation of "assemblage" by Robert Cooper, the British social scientist into what he calls:

> the continuous movement of parts in a restless flux in which the separate identities of the parts give way to a mutual coming *and* going, uniting *and* separating; and in which identities as self-contained units simply *semble*, seem, feign, pretend (Cooper 1998:110).

To Cooper, assemblage is "neither a unity nor a totality but a multiplicity" (Cooper 1998). Cooper, very eloquently points to the many double meanings inherent in assemblage, one of them being *betweenment* "this is the double function of the seam; it separates *and* joins *at the same time"* (1998:111). Maybe this is what I am looking for. Doesn't competence work as an assemblage connecting different parts at the same time as separating them from others? And when I learn that Cooper in pointing to the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze says that assemblage (*agencement*, in French) also means arrangement, organisation and shares the touch of agency, the concept seems even more relevant. But how can it become useful to me in deciding on my object of study? One day driving home from a workshop session a question from one of my fellow consultants gave me a clue:

> *Consultant*: So, who is your dissertation going to be about then?
>
> *AB:* What do you mean?
>
> *Consultant:* I mean, for instance, will I be in there, all that we, I say and do, will you write and analyse that or do you focus solely on the people we work with?

---

generalised evaluation and categorisation tools, etc.). Epistemologically the interesting issue is how competence (development) is constructed in a social field when testing alternative methods of control that start from continuous variability and competence as something emerging within the local, social field.

AB: Well, it's going to be about the work that is produced in the four institutions, that includes you, me and the people we work with…

Consultant: That's not very precise, is it?

The tacit implication of this question is that I am forced to choose *whom* specifically I am studying, because my choice will influence my methodology and my credibility as a researcher. My reluctance to answering the question has nothing to do with doubting that what I am doing makes sense. On the contrary, what I have been trying to avoid is having one single passive object of study in the centre, which would be subject to analysis from an endless number of perspectives. Instead, I want to study *practice* and as a consequence, make objects appear and disappear with the changing conditions of practice. But the conversation with the consultant also made me think in terms of *the who*, the human individuals, in the competence projects. All the programmes include a number of subjects exposed to certain kinds of change processes in which thay are asked to take active part. Competence is not merely an empty concept, but is constantly ascribed to *someone* in performing. The "continuous movement" of competence "in a restless flux" that Cooper talks about is always already linked to subjectivities. This is a breakthrough. Thus, my search for the proper categories, the nominalistic approach, should ultimately rest on the ambition of describing what is happening *in between*, in the daily processes at work, not only as a matter of what happens when competence is invited into the organisation; but as a matter of what happens to *subjectivity* when competence is actualised. Before we can sum up the consequences my way into the project has had for *the performative power of competence* I want to share with you a note on the scientific nature of my study and some of the key concepts employed in the text.

Of scientific nature

Implicitly I have already touched upon what may be called the scientific nature of the study, the ways in which I as a researcher try to meet a field of knowledge ontologically and epistemologically. In a later chapter, *diagnosing the present*, I present my analytical strategy in greater detail, but a note on how theory, practice and methodology hang together and are produced might at this point be in place.

From the presentation of my way into the project above it follows that the kind of knowledge production I adhere to must be created by engaging in a particular field.

In anthropology, perhaps due to its status as an interdisciplinary field, there has for a long time been an intense debate about the grounds for knowledge claims, what kind of "evidence" if any one might subscribe to and how one might be "getting it right" (Hastrup 2004). The skill of writers like Clifford Geertz (1973) in his account of the Balinese cockfight for instance does not so much rest on his ability to stress interpretation as a certain perspective, as is rests on his ability to and linguistic sensibility of decribing a world so meticulously and with such ease that it is as if the reader were sucked in there with him, walking around the streets of Bali, observing cock fights, fleeing the police and so on. Like Hastrup (2004:469) notes:

> "Getting it right" is backed by anthropologists being *in touch* with reality – not by standing outside looking for evidence – and it is further sustained by a narrative imagination that figures out how parts and wholes are constructed and how individual acts and communal images are both mutual preconditions and challenges.

Though I do not dare claim to have performed an anthropological study one may perhaps, with Hastrup (2003:402) distinguish between the specific *technique* by which a given material is produced; the *analytical strategy* which is the plan or criterion for what is to count as material and how it is selected, and the *theoretical ambition* that functions as a guide for thinking, trying to identify new patterns in the material. For Hastrup the three concepts are closely connected in both time and space, but she maintains their analytical separation, as a strategic advantage for the (anthropological) field worker. But most importantly, combined *technique, analytical strategy* and *theoretical ambition* form a "directed alertness" (Hastrup 2003:403), which in itself holds the unpredictable and opens up to new directions.

Consider the following response (and variants herof) that I have given many times at PhD courses or seminars when being asked what I was doing:

> Over the last three years I have carried out a quasi-ethnographic, intervention-based study of how competence arise from the way in which knowledge workers in four public institutions in Denmark act, think and talk about their work and its effects on organisational life, and in this making use of post-structuralist accounts of the human subject.

This response may sound perfectly plausible in view of what I have just said. It denotes a technique (interventionist approach), fragments of an analytical strategy

(studies of how competence arises from the way knowledge workers act, think and talk), and a theoretical ambition (making use of post-structuralist accounts of the subject). But is it accurate? And is it exhaustive? What kind of knowledge does it produce? What kind of meaningful distinctions and demarcations are made in such response? What does it mean to be a quasi-ethnographer? An interventionist? Or a post-structuralist? Do these categories provide meaningful, applicable guidance when one is to analyse data or study competence? Not on their own, I would claim. It is in their *use* that concepts and categories find their worth. The challenge for me, however, is to present the reader with enough information so that s/he can follow where the story is heading without getting the feeling that I jump to conclusions and without being overwhelmed with information falling asleep, methaphorically and literally speaking. This is the mean I will seek to strike. In this chapter I have so far discussed the concept of competence and my approach to it to some depth. However, other key concepts also inhabit this study and have already been mentioned. Therefore I am now going to present actualisation, subjectivity, performativity and neo-disciplinarity as some of the key concepts in my search for competence.

Notes on some key concepts

Actualisation

One first simple demarcation line is this study's focus on phenomena taking place in the settings of a specific number of *workplaces*, and those events related to the organising of this setting (as opposed to all other locations and events in human life). Second, I am interested in situations in which issues of subjectivity get promoted and co-constitute the conditions of development in workplaces. This could, of course, call for a study of a wide array of issues, such as gender, culture, roles, etc. I do not want to deny their existence or potential relevance in general. However, with this study I want to bring to the fore those situations where competence is actualised, in order to promote certain forms of subjectivity. Here actualisation is not merely that which is given appearance *in reality*. A reference to philosophical thought might clearify what I mean by actualisation. At its most general level Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, has a telling way of addressing the problem of actualisation. In discussing the question of how that which becomes is changed, he says "the change of becoming is the transition from possibility to

reality."[12] From such statement it could seem as if our sense of reality of work and organisation is made up by a number of possible realities that are turned into real possibilities. However, since reality, according to the scientific nature of the study is not for us to approach as if we were someplace outside of it, a certain sense of caution is needed. "We are not *in* the world, we become *with* the world" as Deleuze and Guattari (1994:169) say. Hence we have to study reality in its making from its making. Just as writing is a way of creating possibilities, opening up to possible directions and endings; organisational living is a way of becoming. But lived life and the study of lived life is not the same. If competence is concerned with the development of something, we need to know where to look for this something, and we also need to know how we can distinguish it from other things. Hence, for the study of competence it becomes relevant to know when something new is new. In the study of competence I would say that something new emerges, when changes in subjectivity can be observed. Hence, let us take a look at what I mean by subjectivity.

Subjectivity

As noted above I study the production of subjectivity, insofar as it is actualised by competence. Since the concept of subjectivity is used in a variety of ways within studies of work and organisation (for a number of different examples see Knights & Willmott 1989; Knights & Willmott 2007; Newton 1998; Parker 1999; ten Bos & Rhodes 2003), it might be worth elaborating a bit on the use of the concept "subject". Esmark et al. (2005) suggest a post-structuralist account of the subject as an alternative to a classical account where the subject is seen in opposition to an object.

> The concept of the subject is one of the most contested and ambiguous concepts in the tradition of the social sciences and the humanities. Traditionally, the concept is defined in opposition to an object. In that context the subject refers to an entity, which is acting and the object which is that being acted against. … The concept of the individual points toward the possibility of removing layers and qualifications, and the remains is something indivisible that remains the same, that is, something identical with itself (Esmark, Bagge Laustsen & Åkerstrøm Andersen 2005:30, my translation).

[12] Translated from Danish "Tilblivelsens Forandring er Overgangen fra Mulighed til Virkelighed" (Kierkegaard 1994:68)

According to Esmark et al. subjectivity is introduced in a post-structuralist sense, not to replace one fixed or stable notion with another, but to defy the idea that we, as human subjects, can be separated into distinct selves (see also Mansfield 2000:3). The intent here seems to be to point to a certain kind of connectability, and a reversible process of interior and exterior working on one another. Thus this formulation seems at odds with the concept of identity as entity (*identity*), at least to the extent that it is given its etymological meaning of "sameness" (derived from latin *identidem* "over and over"). In this study subjectivity is used as a concept pointing toward the *process of subject making*, of how we are always in a never unfinished state of becoming. But this becoming is not a spontaneous uncontrolled process of movement with no direction. The subject is always linked to something outside itself. One is always subject *to* or *of* something. In sum, the word subject proposes an active and changeable relation to the world. It defies a notion of self as separate and isolated, but operating at the intersection of general truth and shared principles. It is the status of the principles, whether they determine or are determined by us, that is the core of the debate (Mansfield 2000:3). This does not, however, imply that words like self, selfhood, identity, and so on, will be totally abandoned or completely erased from this text. This is so partly because they are still used by the theorists that I draw upon, but also as a way of making my own enterprise of writing more varied, however they should be seen as giving meaning to the most frequently used expression: subjectivity at work.

Performativity

A third important concept is performativity. Not only is the subject not a stable structure, it also has a history which at the same time is discursive and material. As Karen Barad (Barad 2007:60) notes

> "Performativity" has become a ubiquitous term in literary studies, theatre studies, and the nascent interdisciplinary area of performance studies as well. Theorists who adopt performative approaches are often too quick to point out that performativity is not the same as performance, and to merely talk of performance does not necessarily make an approach *performative*. …
>
> To assume that the body is a mute substance, a passive blank slate on which history or culture makes the mark of gender, is to deprive matter of its own historicity, to limit the possibilities for agency. …

> Foucault's analytic of power links the discursive practices to the materiality of the body. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that the body's materiality is regulated through the movement it exercises. In particular, it is through the repetition of specified bodily acts that bodies are reworked and that power takes hold of the body.

As such, performativity is a *doing* that ascribes itself to the movement of bodies, gestures, and materialities. In this study the concept will be used to point to the performativity of subjectivity, that is, how subjects are performed within a specific context.

Neo-disciplinarity

I have already touched upon the notion of discipline and boundary. Hence it might also be relevant to ask: To whom will this text be relevant? What is the overall academic field in which I take my point of departure? In short I wish to argue for a non-disciplinary approach, or even better a neo-disciplinary approach like the one envisaged in the journal *Organization* in its 10th anniversary issue (Organization Editorial Team 2003). So do I not make use of any disciplinary work, one might ask? Of course I am drawing on studies of work and organisation, and I hope my analyses and theoretical development may contribute and be of interest to studies of organisation in general, but I do not want to confine myself to any specific field or discipline, at least not in the sense of a fixed and closed field:

> Disciplines inhabit fragmented, hierarchical spaces where horizontal movement or even drift is deemed to be problematic. They are forms of science which fix. …Neo-disciplinarity rests in the interstices between disciplinary and inter-disciplinary spaces. These interstices are not stable but exhibit much fluidity and dynamism. (Organization Editorial Team 2003:417).

To address the theme of movement and to possibly rethink some of the boundaries produced at work, I like to draw inspiration from many different sources, approaches and "disciplines" (Action Learning, Action Research, Agential Realism, Anthropology, Discourse Analysis, Human Resource Management, Organisational Development, Organisation Studies, Post-structuralism, etc., etc.). Nevertheless, the study finds its motivation, or at least part of it, in the management of human resources. Over the past two decades the debate on how to optimise, motivate and manage human individuals at work has waved back and forth within the realms of Human Resource Management with varying intensity.

As the British HRM scholar Karen Legge notes in her anniversary edition of *Human Resource Management Rhetorics and Realities* (2005:3):

> With some honourable exceptions (Keenoy 1999; Special Issue *Organization*, 1999) there has been a retreat from postmodernist approaches to HRM…in part under the influence of US academic imperialism, modernist positivistic perspectives are now dominant.

I want to argue that any study occupied with the human subject, not just Human Resource Management, needs to be concerned about its subject – here the human – and allow for criticism, scrutiny and new ways of thinking. As Keenoy (2007) argues: "HRM emerged more than 20 years ago on an agenda of thinking the employee relationship differently promoting: emancipation, freedom and progress. Today the employment relationship has disappeared as a theoretical focus within HRM". If by theoretical focus we mean "a process that creates reflexivity about existing and emerging HRM practices that questions, reframes, stretches, replaces and constitutes them" (Steyaert & Janssens 1999a:186), we might consider this as more than a simple critical comment. Taking a numerical approach Keegan and Boselie (2006) support this argument stating that the mainstream HRM journals have largely ignored critical perspectives on HRM[13]. But where does this leave me? How might the *Performative Power of Competence* contribute to the study of work and organisation? One way is, as I have shown in this opening chapter, to be sensitive to the boundaries and demarcations drawn when actualising a concept like competence. On this account it might be worth noting that I do not suggest abandoning disciplines, distinctions and boundaries, this would be self-contradictory. Like Peter Barker, Professor in History of Science at University of Oklahoma says:

> Empirical studies reveal two important classes of concepts, commonly called object concepts and event concepts (a better name for the latter might be "process concepts"). An example of an object concept is "planet" and example of an event concept is "orbit". The attributes of an object concept have values that are constant over time; the attributes of an event concept have values that vary over time. When a system of

[13] Keegan & Boselie surveyed nine prime journals within Organisation and HRM in the period of 1995-2000. Out of 1674 articles they found 39 articles which could be said to make use of a dissensus oriented perspective, according to the dissensus-consensus framework suggested by Deetz (1996).

> object concepts is replaced by another system of object concepts the result is often a scientific revolution. When a system of object concepts is replaced by a system of event concepts the result is a much more dramatic kind of revolution. Brahe used object concepts; Kepler used event concepts (Barker 2008).

What I suggest, or propose is that we investigate competence rather than take for granted what is means. Is competence an object concept or an event concept? What does it matter how we speak, act and think about it? What if competence once was an object concept, but now seems to be changing into an event concept? If this is so, questioning competence might very well call for an analysis of performativity: What does competence become in different setting, under specific circumstances? How do acts of competence perform, relate and produce subjects and organisations in concert?

Summing up[14]

In this chapter I have introduced the *Performative Power of Competence*. By accounting for my way into the study, I have reflected on my role as researcher and as consultant as two different subject positions, again stressing that one becomes a researcher and a consultant by performing these roles in a specific setting. I have suggested that competence denotes a certain kind of being and hence is a concept that needs to be studied in its actualisation as a process. Accounting for parts of my own process in working with competence, I suggest a number of points. Competence in its making is bound to those who work with it and co-constitute them. Hence, competence not only signifies many different contents and meanings but also entails a co-significance of subjectivity. This subjectivity is constantly performed and subject to change, as competence changes. I have offered a number of demarcations throughout the chapter. Competence as a strategic and systematic enterprise is one distinction commonly practised in the Danish public sector. This

[14] Throughout the thesis I will use these *summing up* sections to address a purpose that might deviate from what might be understood by "summing up", in the common sense. I do not intend to limit it to a simple summary of what I have just said or argued. In stead I will make leaps (back and forth) to some of the points made and draw out future consequences that point forward in a new possible direction. This is one way in which I intend to make use of the performativity in my own text, pointing to the fleeting, fitful, forceful flux of things. This does not however prevent me from seeking to build a coherent story line and occasionally, make reference to points already mentioned.

distinction is put under pressure in the encounter with the sites and the subjects of four specific state institutions, in which competence seems to become a dynamic, floating signifier. But competence does not just float around in the world with no direction. It is performed and hence intricately linked to a certain kind of doing. According to this approach competence should be explored, searched for, and not defined a priori. The further consequences of this for my analytical strategy will be explored in the chapter *Diagnosing the Present*. The theoretical ambition will be thoroughly dealt with in the chapter *Theorising Subjectivity* and the technologies used in competence development are presented in the chapter *Competence - in media res.*

With the concepts and theoretical ambitions described above I want to outline a way of thinking about competence that recognises
development of competence as normal and immanent in organisational practice rather than exceptional and externally determined;
competence constituted in relations rather than having some essential properties;
development of competence as intensive, rather than extensive, that is, competence is to be valued by its possibilities for change rather than its scope or location.
If competence, as suggested above is a process concept, and if competence in its actualisation carries with it notions of subjectivity, we need a processual understanding of the subject. Taking this as a starting point I wish to rephrase the question by Foucault that opened this chapter: “what happens?” Not simply as a question of how power is excersised, which was the question he discussed. But to use the same kind of suspicion:

> To put it bluntly, I would say that to begin the analysis of power with a “how” is to introduce the suspicion that power as such does not exist. It is, in any case, to ask oneself what contents one has in mind when using this grand, all-embrasing, and reifying term; it is to suspect that an extremely complex configuration of realities is allowed to escape while one endlessly marks time before the double question: what is power, and where does it come from? (Foucault 1994b:336f).

What if competence as such does not exist? What happens to the organisational setting and what happens to subjectivity when competence is actualised simultaneously as problem and solution in state institutions? With these questions, ascertations, and initial outline of the study I shall now turn to the overall research question and structure of the text.

Research Question and the Structure of the Text

Based on the arguments, concepts and distinctions introduced above, the main research question of this study is: *What becomes of subjectivity, when competence is actualised?*

By framing my question in this way I also point to two lines that run through the study, one asking for the becoming of subjectivity and one for the actualisation of competence. I argue that questions of competence have become inseparable from questions of subjectivity. This bringing together subjectivity and competence is echoed throughout the rest of the text.

Chapter II provides the theoretical grounds for the discussion of subjectivity in studies of work and organisation and asks: How will subjectivity be theorised in the present study? By posing this question I want to develop a framework with which I can analyse how subjectivity becomes important in the study of work and organisation. I review the notion of subjectivity in Althusser, Lacan and Foucault and show how their theories can inform discussions on subjectivity in organisation studies. Seen together these three give the study a direction and contribute to a limitation of what I mean by subjectivity.

Chapter III extends the discussion from the previous chapter by examining the ideology of competence**.** My intent is to explore the relation between competence and subjectivity at work. The purpose of the chapter is to present an overview of what in Althusserian terms might be called the Master subject of competence, or, in other words, to search for the ideology of competence in management discourse, by which subjects become subjected. The chapter advances by assessing a number of key management texts that analyse the world of work and examine changes in the discourse with relevance for competence. The chapter concludes by showing how competence works as a calculative device for my dealings with subjectivity, putting the subject in search and doubt of itself.

Chapter IV consists of the analytical strategy of the thesis. If the Subject (with a capital "S") is observable as movement, when competence is actualised, and if competence itself is performative, it will be impossible to locate the competent subject in any kind of simple or fixed structure. We will have to develop a way of

talking, seeing and studying the mutual creation of competence and subjectivity, which does not begin with entities, essences or structures. The ambition of this chapter is to account for the study's approach to the problem by diagnosing the present making use of social technologies.

Chapter V is an inquiry into the actualisations of competence in two specific settings, the CHE and the NERI. I account for the way competence as a specific practice produces differences, i.e. how being competent entails notions of the organisational citizen, lateral cooperation and viewing colleagues as strategic partners. I propose competence to hold performative power that produces subjectivity.

Chapter VI is a discussion of the future consequences of my analysis. In this chapter I aim to show that notions of subjectivity are very much present and affect the way we think, act and write about work and organisation. I explicate the relevance of asking the question of the subject "who are we, now?" by reviewing the debate on postmodernism in organisation studies.

Chapter VII is devoted to summing up the overall argument of the thesis. Here I look back at the points made and present my thoughts on how the argument of this study can be extended to other agendas, thus marking a new opening.

If over the last twenty-five years in France the most notorious of these strategies have in fact led to a kind of discussion around the "question of the subject," none of them has sought to "liquidate" anything…For these three discourses (Lacan, Althusser, Foucault) and for some of the thinkers they privilege (Freud, Marx, Nietzsche), the subject can be re-interpreted, restored, re-inscribed, it certainly isn't "liquidated".

Jacques Derrida (1995:255f)

II Theorising Subjectivity

As pointed out in the opening chapter, the purpose of this study is to develop a dynamic, processual understanding of the conditions for the production of subjectivity when competence is actualised. This second chapter builds on to this rationale by offering a processual understanding of subjectivity. Such a processual understanding of subjectivity calls for an exploration of different conceptualisations of subjectivity. Hence, I turn to examine three accounts of how subjectivity is produced; Althusser's interpellation, Lacan's identification and Foucault's idea of power relations. These three perspectives are neither alien to organisation studies nor randomly chosen. In fact I will, as we move along in the coming chapters, show how these ideas of subjectivity are very much present and already employed in contemporary competence discourse and in my own studies of work and organisation.

> 8 February 2005. The first focus group interview at the Centre for Higher Education has just begun. In reply to one of his clients from the local community, who has been an important customer in requesting consultancy for development activities, Bernard says:
>
> "We assess, continuously – OK – do we want to go through with the project proposals we are presented with. Fundamentally, we only accept projects that we can learn something from; i.e. we have to build knowledge, we need to develop knowledge important to our professional identity. If we are simply offered to pitch tools with no time to evaluate, etc., then it is not an interesting task."

The basic question that predates this chapter is: inherent in the ideology of competence might there also be a notion of subjectivity? The discussion of the three key conceptualisations of subjectivity will pave the way for the theorisation of subjectivity with the intent of developing a framework suitable to study subjectivity in the making. This theorisation will be carried out by surveying three notions of subjectivity, based upon the concepts of interpellation, identification and power. These concepts are taken from primarily three strategically selected texts (Althusser 1971, Lacan 2006a, Foucault 1994b), but other texts will be included as well. It should be noted that I use interpellation, identification, and power to produce a certain sense of subjectivity, which addresses movement. Therefore, I do not intend to give an in-depth presentation of all the nuances of the three writers. The conclusion of this chapter is devoted to a summary of how the concepts of interpellation, identification and power constitute *subjectivity as movement*, and thereby form the thesis' view on the performative aspects of subjectivity, actualised through competence.

While accounts of subjectivity have a long history in culture studies, philosophy and sociology, the use of this particular concept seems to be of more recent date in studies of work and organisation (Mansfield 2000, See e.g.Rossi 1983)[15]. Naturally this does not prevent scholars of organisation from having a notion of the human, or deal with the question of who am "I". My intent here is to establish the theoretical framework that will allow me later to scrutinise and question (some of) the conceptualisations and dealings with this question in studies of work and organisation.

Althusser's argument: Subjectivity is interpellation

The French philosopher and writer Louis Althusser has a special way of approaching the problem of the subject that has long been left more or less

[15]A search in the Copenhagen Business School Library database on "subjectivit*" gave 169 entries, the earliest from 1980, whereas a search on "identit*" gave 4.364 entries starting from 1967 (the database begins 1965). Similarly a search in the CBS online journal database, searching titles, abstract and full text gave 5.578 versus 30.264 entries respectively. Of course, a search like this does not say anything about the content or the context in which these words appear. However, it does suggest that identity is a more widely used concept within economics and the social sciences than subjectivity.

unexplored in studies of organisation. By using the concept of *interpellation* Althusser in his 1969 text *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (printed in Althusser 1971) develops his theory of how an individual becomes a subject. Althusser describes the process of subject making, using the example of a person being hailed when walking down the street, and in the act of turning around becomes a subject:

> There are individuals walking along. Somewhere (usually behind them) the hail rings out: "Hey, you there!" One individual (nine times out of ten it is the right one) turns around, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that "it really is he" who is meant by the hailing. But in reality these things happen without succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing (Althusser 1971:174f).

Around this fairly simple example Althusser develops his central idea that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. Ideology in this sense is a certain kind of practice with both social and material dimensions. There is no practice except by and in an ideology and there is no ideology except by the subjects and for the subjects, he says (Althusser 1971:170). Thus, ideology is a representational system of patterns reflected in the material conditions of life and the conditions of production in every society; be it customs, behaviour, ceremonies, rituals or ways of thinking. To Althusser, ideology has no outside; *individuals are always-already subjects* (Althusser 1971:176). In a similar vein Foucault suggests that there is no outside of discourse (e.g. see Foucault, Blanchot 1987). Importantly, though, for Foucault discourse is not to be equated with language, but entails as also Althusser suggests material practices[16]. To Althusser ideology is reproduced through the Ideological State Apparatuses[17], that is, through practices and institutions like the

[16] See Karen Barad (2003:818ff) for a lucid presentation of how Foucault's thoughts on discourse can be utilised to promote a posthumanist account of material-discursive practices.

[17] Note that Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses, which he abbreviates ISA, are narrower than Foucault's use of the word apparatus *(dispositif)*, by which he means the way in which knowledge and power are sometimes brought together , sometimes differentiated. "What I am trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements." (Foucault 1980:194). Note also how Foucault, in the interview *Discourse of History,* where he comments on *the Order of Things* at the same time as he pays

church, the family, and in particular the educational system (schools, universities and the like). It is due to the workings of these apparatuses, and the way they are deeply rooted in us, that we are always-already subjected, like an unborn child becomes a subject way before it is born, through the rituals and expectations of a "birth" (Althusser 1971:176). Were we to extend this functioning of ideology unto the workplace, we might say that the employee is produced or manufactured (Jacques 1996) by the material and discursive practices (i.e. policies, agreements and contracts, procedures of recruiting, hiring, appraising, firing, etc.). For Althusser a basic condition of being human is to live in and through ideology. Ideology is immediate, which is why we never question it (Holm 2005:56).

The Master subject

To Althusser the ruling ideologies in every society act like a Big Subject or Master Subject, by which all the smaller subjects are modelled or mirrored. Conclusively, as a result of the hailing process individuals or collectives are becoming subjects when granted a steady position in the structural relation of ideology. Through interpellation the (good) individual becomes a subject to law, to God, to economy or whatever the Big subject ideology of interpellation might be (Andersen 2003a). The small subjects, if they want to perform as good subject, are now left with no other choice than to follow the rules and structures of the ideological state apparatuses. Althusser is clear in his critical edge by saying that subjects work "all by themselves":

> They are inserted into practices governed by the rituals of the ideological state apparatuses. They "recognize" the existing state of affairs (*das Bestehende*), that "it really is true that it is so and not otherwise", and that they must be obedient to God, to their conscience, to the priest, to de Gaulle, to the Boss, to the engineer, that thou shall "love thy neighbour as yourself", etc. Their concrete, material behaviour is simply the inscription in life of the admirable words of the prayer: *"Amen – so be it"*. (Althusser 1971:181)

The view that subjects are interpellated to "recognise the existing state of affairs" has given rise to heavy critique of Althusser (Andersen 2003:52). The critique goes that Althusser should have argued for primacy to be given to the underlying

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tribute to Althusser, distinguishes his own work from Althusser e.g. by pointing to how Althusser thinks the idea of epistemological break as a way of describing changes in structural transformations comes from Marx whereas he does not (Foucault 1996:19-32).

structures of society in expense of the subject's possibility to resist. According to this position, the development of society (and most prominently the rise and dominance of modern capitalism) cannot be explained via the subjective motives of individuals but by the structural unity determining the actions of individuals (Lübcke et al. 2003). Thus, when Althusser continues that the

> individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection (Althusser 1971:182)

it is taken as a token of a fixed structure of the ruling ideology, by which the individual is interpellated and confronted with a so-called "free" choice. The subject can choose between reason and madness, between accepting its position in order to become a "sensible" subject, or face the exclusion from reason without the possibility of defining oneself as a meaningful subject (Andersen 2003a). But, to make the argument, which has been commonplace, that Althusser should be favouring a deterministic view on the developments in history is too simplistic.

The epistemological break between science and ideology

In Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses Althusser was first and foremost interested in developing a *theory* of ideology and according to Althusser there is an epistemological break between a science or philosophy and ideology in practice. This relation is not an assured one, but consists in a constant struggle. The epistemological break takes place every time, by analysing the fundamental structures of society, we exceed the ostensible evidence of ideology. Though his ideas found fertile ground in the 1960s and 1970s university Marxism and in political circles, which capitalised (sic) on Althusser's fame and used it to promote changes in the way society should be organised, he often met these events with silence.

When Althusser concludes "There are no subjects except by and for their subjection", which is why they "work all by themselves" (Althusser 1971:182), it should be seen as a way to describe how ideology tend to become self-propelling. If one is reminded of Freud and Lacan's concepts of the unconscious and the mirror-stage, respectively, it is no coincidence. Althusser sums up his points about ideology as a mirror-structure arguing that ideology ensures: a) the interpellation of individuals as subjects, b) their subjection to the (Master) Subject, c) the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and

finally the subject's recognition of himself and d) the absolute guarantee that everything is so, and on the condition that subjects recognise what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be right: Amen – *"So be it"* (Althusser 1971:181).

As hinted the process of subject formation is not, according to Althusser, selfevident. The subject is an ambiguious term, says Althusser. In addition Althusser believes society and the subject to be anti-essentialistic. Society is not some*thing* given, but exists in a complex of social relations. And the development of society is not ruled by one basic principle, but by co-constitutions of individuals and groups. This is why it is even more important to note the reservations that Althusser gives in the post-script of his essay. In a very modest tone he stresses that "the few schematic theses" presented here, are "obviously abstract" and "leave several important problems unanswered" (Althusser 1971:183). The functioning of the Ideological State Apparatusses should merely be seen as a *contribution* to the realisation of the reproduction of the relations of production. He further argues:

> The "mechanism" of ideology *in general* is one thing. … If there is any truth in it, this mechanism must be *abstract* with respect to every real ideological formation. … Whoever says class struggle of the ruling class says resistance, revolt and class struggle of the ruled class. That is why the ISAs are not the realization of ideology *in general*, nor even the conflict-free realization of the ideology of the ruling class (Althusser 1971:184f emphasis in original).

The dissociation from determinism could not possibly be clearer. Nevertheless, the purpose of Althusser's essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* seems to be to investigate how the structure of capitalist society might reproduce itself. Repressive state apparatuses (e.g. the police or the legal institutions) are not enough. Ideological State Apparatuses, which I have pointed to above, that reproduce values, meanings, and logic reinforce *to some extent* capitalist values, but it is not a deterministic relationship. Thus capitalism succeeds by creating subjects who become its instruments and bearers.

My aim in drawing attention to the concept of interpellation is not to argue for a reawakening of Marxist theory, but to show how Althusser's notion of subjectivity as interpellation can be seen as a powerful explanatory concept to study the politicised movements of subjects and the effects of diversification, when

competence is actualised. According to Althusser ideology is essentialistic, it proclaims to present the true order of things. Hence ideology represses the relational conflicts and contrasts that science invites us to dissect (Holm 2005:61). In sum, Althusser presents us with a task of unmasking the coherent and consistent image that ideology equips us with, in which we are turned into subjects. We shall return later to the more specific consequences this way of framing the problem of subjectivity have for the study of competence, but for now let me confine myself to say that Althusser, with his concept of interpellation, develops an important contribution to the theory of subjectivity that precedes by a good few years the in organisation studies otherwise so heavily cited idea of subjectivation mentioned first and foremost with reference to Foucault. Althusser's contribution has wrongly been claimed overdeterministic, and may be of central concern for us today, when we want to illuminate the workings of subjectivity at work.

Lacan's argument: Subjectivity as identification

Jacques Lacan develops his psychoanalysis by building on Freud's split subject, in which he finds that human behaviour and awareness of oneself are traceable to the structures of the unconscious. Where Althusser and Lacan may share an interest in structure, exploring "unconscious" structures and how they affect our subjectivity, Lacan develops his theory not in order to ask how capitalist society is reproduced; rather he is interested in how the subject's sense of self is established and explores how our subjectivity can emerge in a world already established by language. It should be noted that Lacan's work on the question of the subject is indeed diverse and far-reaching within psychoanalysis[18]. In this section I solely focus on his idea

[18] Lacan describes the conditions of how the human subject becomes a subject via three registers (the imaginary, the symbolic and the Real) and four discourses (the *master discourse*, the *university discourse*, the *analytical discourse* and the *hysteric discourse*). The registers I shall account for below, but the discourses I shall briefly comment on here. In contrast to Foucault, Lacan defines discourse not by its content (the medical, political or power discourse) but by its form. That is, he is interested in asking from which position does the *agent* speak? What position is spoken to, called *the Other*? And what is produced in this speech, what is the *product*? It is important to note, as also Rösing (2005:116) does that the *agent* is not simply a position from where a subject acts on his own free will. There is always something that acts through the agent, namely the *unconscious truth*. The four discourses now work as events or situations in which signs are exchanged with regard to a certain authority. In a capitalist democratic society the economy is given authority as the decisive argument. Within academia the master signifier is to be found in the reference system: "According to Lacan" or "Foucault says" becomes the final justification for an argument.

of the relationship between language and the establishment of the subject, most prominently developed in his short lecture text *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function* delivered in 1949, and printed in his *Écrits*, recently published under the name "The first Complete Edition in English" by Bruce Fink (Lacan 2006a). My initial reason for bringing Lacan into the analysis is to point to his accounts of the *establishment* of the subject, which neither Althusser nor Foucault explicate to the same extent.

The subject is subjected in language

One of the key starting points for Lacanian theory is that the subject is subjected to, subordinated language; that it is always *in* language. Thus, a good deal of grasping how Lacan's idea of the subject works is by finding out how language works. Here, we encounter the first problem, because for Lacan one does not simply "find out" or "grasp" how language "works". There is no outside of language to where one can find or position oneself. This is in part why Lacan notoriously makes use of a great number of puns and wordplays in his lectures to bring to the fore, the delusiveness and ambiguity of language. Following the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Lacan keenly emphasises the distinction between *signifier* (written marks or spoken sounds) and the *signified* (abstract concept in the mind of the language user) as constitutive of the subject's formation in language. In marking this difference he says:

> Linguistics has not simply distinguished the signified from the signifier. If there is something that can introduce us to the dimension of the written as such, it is the realization that the signified has nothing to do with the ears, but only with reading – the reading of the signifier we hear. The signified is not what you hear. What you hear is the signifier. The signified is the effect of the signifier (Lacan 1998:33).

Thus, the practice of reading is vital for Lacan. We can trace his ideas of the subject by paying attention to the difference between the signifier and the signified; between what we read in the broadest sense and what we hear. One could say that we need to improve our skills in reading the everyday practice of organisations and employees. One of Lacan's favorite examples of how the signifier relates to the signified is that of inscriptions on public lavatories (Lacan 2006b:416). The inscription, be it a male or female pictogram, tells us, due to the way we have been taught to decode, in a split second which of two doors to enter when in need. But the pictogram (the signifier) *is* not the specific place (the

signified) of the proper lavatory we are supposed to enter; it is a floating signifier that enters the signified. Lacan's key point here is that the relation between signifier/signified is not inevitable, but arbitrary and governed by convention. Where others would say that it is socially constructed Lacan importantly defies the common notion that we can use language for our own purposes. Language is not a medium or a tool, but a system of representation in which we are destined to try to make sense. This system is what Lacan points to when speaking of signs forming chains of signification. Thus, signs are not anchored in reality, but in our perception of reality. And this perception of language, in which our subjectivity is grounded, builds around a system of differences. To Lacan (and Saussure) language is not a system of randomly connected tools, but a system of specific conventions building on two relationships: the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified and the difference between one signifier and any other. The efficiency of language does not only depend on the perfect way "door" marks the physical material we push when we enter a frame, but moreover the complex web of differences which allow us to distinguish "door" from "window", from "stairs" etc. Language, and hence also subjectivity, consists of a complex cultural order (Mansfield 2000:40).

The mirror stage and the three registers

The key principle Lacan develops to explain his theory of subjectivity is what has become known as *the mirror stage*. Lacan introduces the concept as a way of describing how the young child comes to reconise and distinguish his own body from his mother and the surrounding world. Before the age of six months the child has no sense of self, but sees the world as one diffuse mass. But by looking into the mirror, the child *identifies* himself and understands that he is something distinct and separate from the world[19]. What he identifies with is the *image* of himself.

I'm starting with the man in mirror
I'm asking him to change his ways
No message could have been any clearer
If you wanna make the world a better place
Take a look at yourself and then make a change…
- Michael Jackson

It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context

[19] Lacan places great emphasis on sexuality, i.e. the relationship between the boy-child and his mother, and his becoming aware of the penis (first his own, secondly his father's) as something distinct that separates him completely from his mother's body. Lacan's view on sexuality will only be invoked when it serves to unfold the study's focus on the relationship between language and subjectivity. It suffices to say that Lacan's notion of subjectivity is indeed both discursive *and* material (bodily).

> as an *identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image…the little man is at the *infans* stage thus seems to me to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject. (Lacan 2006a:76, emphasis in original)

Language works or functions by offering to the subject different positions capable of transforming the subject, if accepted. One of the important features of the mirror is that the visual is given centre stage in the development of subjectivity; it simply offers the subject an image of wholeness. But, most importantly, it is nothing but an imago, an idealised image, which leads Lacan to suggest that we exist in three modes or registers: *the symbolic, the imaginary* and *the Real*.

The imaginary

To Lacan[20] (2006a:76) the imaginary register works by acknowledging that

> the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority.

The image (in the mirror) remains a part of the fundamental otherness (that which is outside). This may seem all good and well, but the process of subject making is not that simple. Something disturbs or interrupts. For the subject is not capable of defining itself, it is not alone in the mirror, so to speak, but is defined by the complex relationship between interior and exterior. Today we live in times,

[20] Note that Lacan's use of the mirror metaphor differs from both Althusser and Foucault. Althusser imagines, as mentioned above, ideology having a mirroring effect on society. Foucault elaborates on more than one occasion on the mirror in relation to subject formation. In a 1967-lecture "different spaces", almost as if commenting on Lacan, Foucault states: "In the mirror I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up virtually behind the surface; I am where I am not, a kind of shadow that gives me my own visibility, that enables me to look at myself where I am absent – a mirror utopia. But it is also a heterotopia in that the mirror really exists, in that it has a sort of return effect on the place that I occupy" (Foucault 2000a:179). Towards the end of this quote we trace the difference to Lacan. Foucault analogises the mirror to heterotopia. For Foucault the mirror only functions by that which it reflects, that is, the space one occupies when one looks into the mirror. The effect it produces is something uncanny, it is the opening of critical re-engagement, though heterotopias also have a history and are subject to change.

stressing the imaginary. Hollywood and the commercial industry in general offer us imagos and idols in abundance that we can mirror ourselves in. We can make sense of this complex mirroring relationship by looking to one of Lacan's key interpreters, Slavoj Žižek. In *Enjoy your symptom – Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out*, Žižek gives a number of examples as to how Lacan's idea of subject making might be interpreted:

> In the network of intersubjective relations, every one of us is identified with, pinned down to, a certain fantasy place in the other's symbolic structure. Psychoanalysis sustains here the exact opposite of the usual, commonsense opinion according to which fantasy figures are nothing but distorted, combined, or otherwise concocted figures of their "real" models, of people of flesh and blood that we've met in our experience. According to Lacan's psychoanalysis we fall in love with a woman insofar as her features coincide with our fantasy figure of a Woman. Man is split, divided into the weak everyday fellow with whom sexual relation is possible and the bearer of the symbolic mandate, the public hero. As soon as we force the sexual partner to reveal his symbolic identity, we are bound to loose him. When Lacan says that the "secret of psychoanalysis" consists in the fact that "there is no sexual act, whereas there is sexuality," the act is to be conceived precisely as the performative assumption, by the subject, of his symbolic mandate (collocation based on Zizek 2001:5f).

As Žižek shows the subject – written, spoken or as in this case *performed* – always appears *in the discourse of the other* which is also to say that the subject is always in a state of contradiction:

> The genius of Chaplin in the movie "City Lights" is attested by the fact he decided to end the movie in such a brusque, unexpected way, at the very moment of the tramp's exposure: the film does not answer the question: Will the girl accept him or not? And the opposite question has also to be posed: Will he still be able to love her, is there a place in his dreams for her, who is now a normal, healthy girl running a successful business (collocation based on Zizek 2001:5f).

The image of the self as unified, whole and total is nothing but a faint appearance, a vision stemming from the imaginary. This vision is always contrasted with the power of discourse, which means that your subjective centre is outside of you. In

other words selfhood is radically *decentered* or *displaced*, by a system of meanings, this second register he calls the *symbolic order*.

The symbolic

The symbolic order is concerned with the way symbols and symbolic representations function. Language belongs to the symbolic order, says Lacan, and therefore it is via language, in the broadest sense, that the subject can express feelings, desires, and motives, and through the symbolic that the subject can be represented or constituted. In a way the symbolic is comparable to what Foucault calls the discursive practices, only Lacan does not pay attention to societal institutions in the way Foucault does. However, the symbolic order is not for us to grasp or control. According to Lacan the subject's sense of self is lost in the dense field of signs, so though we always long for unity, always desire it; *we do not know ourselves*. Our selfhood makes us alien to ourselves. We have become so used to identifying the separate body with the individual subject, as if they always went together, as Mansfield (2000:43) writes. Thus, subjectivity for Lacan is never smooth, given or plain and simple, but always problematic. It can only be approached, in an endless number of processes, with many dangerous and complex passages. In Lacan's terms the assuring process of identification ends almost as soon as it has been established, by reaching out:

> The function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the functions of imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality – or as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt* (Lacan 2006a:78).

This relationship between inside (the imaginary) and outside (the symbolic) defines the subject, who is but a fragment of a dynamic field of incompletions. The physical body of the subject sets the limit of the interplay between the imaginary and the symbolic, which gives rise to the third register, that which Lacan terms the *Real*.

The Real

In Lacan the concept of the Real deviates fundamentally from what we commonly would call reality or the real, and hence he writes it with capital "R". The Real is a concept that has been given different positions and importance in Lacan's theoretical development of psychoanalysis, but it is often described as that which interrupts or lack in the symbolic order (Jones, Spicer 2005:231). One way of

explaining the three registers in Lacan's psychoanalysis is, as Rösing (2005:105) does, by using developmental psychological terms. In the infancy stage *the Real* can be analogised to the little man perceiving the world as a blurred mass from which he is unable to distinguish himself. *The imaginary* can, as we have seen, be found in the phase where the child experiences himself in the mirror and begins to realise the world by imagos, as unitary self-contained wholes. *The symbolic* then is the phase where the child begins to speak and take part in the structuration of differences and the displacements, which are the functions of language. But of of course to Lacan the three registers also exceed the psychological development of the baby child into our daily lives and the general function of language. If the symbolic is a neverending slide, the Real is that which escapes symbolisation, that which is lost in between the dense field of signs in the signifying chain, leading to ever-new signs. We might desire a certain piece of clothing, and can't stop thinking about it until the very moment we have bought it, and then after having worn it just a few times, we desire something new. "The subject is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers, whether he knows which signifier he is the effect of or not", says Lacan (1998:50). The Lack in the Other of discourse or desire is unstoppable.

The displaced subject

As in the case of "City Lights" we can never fully know whether Chaplin will get the girl (and she will get him). Again, we can unfold Lacan's message by way of an example from Žižek, when he discusses the Lacanian question: Why does a letter always arrive at its destination[21]? One may think of the German *Flaschenpost*, a message in a bottle. According to Lacan, a letter always arrives at its destination, the moment the letter is put into circulation, i.e. the moment the sender "externalises" his "internal" message, delivers it to the Other, the moment the Other takes cognisance of the letter and thus disburdens the sender of responsibility for it.

> What is crucial here is the difference between the letter's symbolic circuit and its itinerary in what we call "reality": a letter always arrives at its destination on the symbolic level, whereas in reality of course it can fail to reach it (Žižek 1992:10).

[21] Lacan is playing on the different meanings of the word e.g. letter (a written message) and letter (written symbols represented by a sound in language). Thus he says "A letter is something that is

The symbolic's relation to the imaginary consists, according to Lacan (2006a:80), of a dual process of recognition/misrecognition (reconnaissance/méconnaissance) a concept he borrows from Althusser (and Michel Pêcheux). A letter always arrives at its destination since its destination is wherever it arrives (Žižek 1992:10). In Althusserian terms, the process of interpellation consists in the overlooking of its *performative* dimension: When I recognise myself as the addressee of the call of the ideological big Other (Nation, Democracy, Party, God, and so forth), when this call "arrives at its destination" in me, I automatically misrecognise that it is the very act of recognition which *makes me* what I have recognised myself as – I don't recognise myself in it because I'm its addressee, I become its addressee the moment I recognise myself in it. *This* is the reason why a letter always reaches its addressee: because one becomes its addressee when one is reached (Žižek 1992:10).

In the symbolic, things appear to make sense, hierarchies of meaning are established, individual signs constitute a signifying chain, and this is in a number of ways close to what Foucault means by discourse. But as has just been argued the subject's entry into the symbolic is at the expense of the magical feeling of unity it had in the imaginary, and further, the symbolic order does not always function smoothly, the lack or rupture of the Real sets in. The subject is thus confined by a fundamental lack, a longing for unity and wholeness that the encounter with the symbolic so dramatically takes away; "the mirror stage is a drama" (Lacan 2006a), but is in a sense bound to fail. Subjectivity can only come to us in relationships, which are ultimately grounded in language. Even our relationship with ourselves involves dramatisation, projected unto us by the great otherness. Subjectivity is thus never spontaneous, but always a derivative of the triangle consisting of *the imaginary, the symbolic and the Real*[22]. The self becomes a by-product of the language it thinks it uses for its own ends (Mansfield 2000:49). Lacan's rendering of subjectivity is guided by a fundamental sense of *displacement*.

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read *La Lettre, ça se lit* … but it is not the same thing to read a letter as it is to read" (Lacan 1998:26).

[22] Lacan, who became more and more interested in mathematics throughout his life, describes the relation between the three registers as a Borromean knot – three circles overlapping one another with only a small space in the middle. That space, which Lacan calls Object minor a, is that which holds together the three dimensions in his theory on the production of subjectivity. The Borromean knot is named so after an Italian aristocratic family who had this image in their crest. All three clans of the family were needed in order for it to remain unbroken.

With his theory of the mirror stage and the three registers, in which the ego is entangled, Lacan is able to contend a notion of subjectivity in which the subject cannot fully describe itself. The subject is a result of ongoing mirror- and misrecognition processes of identification. Lacan's model of the human subject as a *fragmented body* (2006a:78) opaque and decentred in its making (Lübcke et al. 2003:209) finds its rationale in an ongoing search of image completion, stemming from the world outside. This is a search with no end, because if it ended, an event impossible for Lacan, then the constant efforts to define, write and speak of who we are by the use of language would also come to an end. As long as language exists, we continue to subject ourselves and become subjected (Jones, Spicer 2005:233). The strength of Lacan's idea of subject formation does not only come about by elaborating on how the subject is created through identification processes, but also by reminding us of the rupturing uneasiness and the misrecognitions of language, thus extending Althusser's ideal of the interpellated subject.

However, Lacan's focus on language as the primary medium, through which we are to become knowledgeable about how the subject is established, also has its limits. Though, inside and outside disappear as distinct spheres, as I have tried to show above, there is something in the Lacanian way of thinking, writing and being occupied with the subject and its self-reflexive processes that needs elaboration in order to clarify how subjects become in organisations. It seems to me that Lacan's theory holds great potential for unfolding what happens in organisations, though he does not address directly organisational settings or problems. In doing this elaboration I am drawing on Foucault. While some have seen Foucault as one of the most important contributors in the 20th centuries to how subjects are shaped through language, in the following I shall show how his concept of discourse entails linguistic and material aspects, but first of all how institutions and subjects are interwoven in relationships of power.

Foucault's argument: Subjectivity and power

So far in this chapter I have discussed the question of the subject by way of mobilising ideology (Althusser) and language (Lacan). The final argument presented here derives from Michel Foucault and his invitation to study the question of the subject in the light of power. In his 1982 text *"Subject and Power"*, Foucault explicates his take on the question of the subject and claims how this question had run like a red thread throughout all his academic work (Foucault

1994b:327)[23]. By this time, partly due to the works of Lacan and Althusser, the "question of the subject" had become a topic in French intellectual life[24] and Foucault now repositions his oeuvre in this light.

For example, he poses his research strategy as an antagonistic exercise: "To find out what our society means by "sanity," perhaps we should investigate what is happening in the field of insanity" (Foucault 1994b:329). Similar to both Althusser and Lacan, Foucault recognises the split or divided subject so effectively furthered by Freud. In Foucault's formulation it now becomes: There are two meanings of the word subject, subject to someone else by control *and* tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault 1994b:331).

Struggle and pastoral power

As indicated in the earlier note on apparatus, Foucault's keen interest in power has to do with its intricate connections to knowledge and how this relationship has developed throughout the western world. The question of who "we" are always arises as a struggle, says Foucault. On this account he joins the previous perspectives by noting that subjectivity is problematic. But Foucault's message is different from both Lacan's and Althusser's. Foucault engages with history as an attempt to reposition the question posed by Kant in 1784 "what is enlightenment?" by which he meant: "what is going on, just now"? (Foucault 1994b:335). In an interview a couple of years earlier he makes clear his reason for writing history:

> Let's go back for a moment to the book on prisons [*Discipline and Punish*, edt.]. In a certain sense, it's a book of pure history. But the people who liked it or hated it felt that way because they had the impression that the book concerned them or concerned the purely contemporary world, or their relations with the contemporary world, in the forms in which it is accepted by everyone. They sensed that something in the present-day reality was being called into question. And, as a matter of fact, I only began to write that book after having participated for several years in working groups that were thinking about and struggling against penal institutions (Foucault 2002b:245).

[23] A number of recent scholars point to the importance of this particular text by Foucault (Jones 2002, Mansfield 2000, Newton 1998, Jones and Spicer 2005). However, this is not to say that other texts are unimportant, or will not be pointed to, but I simply chose this one to illuminate my reading of Foucault's conceptualisation of subjectivity.
[24] See Foucault (2002b) and later in this section.

Foucault's dealings with history of the mad, of the birth of the asylum, of the history of our sexuality, of the rise of the penal system, etc., are not enterprises intended to tell us how things once were, but serious attempts to *diagnose the present*. Crucial to Foucault's argument is the coming or concentration of a particular form of power that he reserves for the political structure known as the state (Foucault 1994b:332). Having evolved since the 16th century, the state takes on and transforms the principle of *pastoral power*. This particular form of power having both individualising and totalising effects works by four principles. According to Foucault (1994b:333) the pastoral power:

- assures individual salvation
- is prepared to sacrifice itself for the salvation of the flock
- looks after the community and most importantly the individual for his entire life
- has to know of the inside of people's minds

Foucault is soon to meet the critique that this form of power, so meticulously formed by Christianity, should be limited to the church or any institution for that matter. In fact he goes to great pains in showing how its functioning establishes a mode of thinking which spreads and multiplies *beyond* any ecclesiastical and political hierarchy:

> I don't think that we should consider the "modern state" as an entity that was developed above some individuals, ignoring what they are and even their very existence, but on the contrary, as a very sophisticated structure in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns" (Foucault 1994b:334).

This way of formulating the question of subjectivity brings forth the individual – collective dillemma: How do collective systems relate to individuals? In fact regulations and patterns are what form (one of) the definitions of what Foucault calls a *dispositif*.

Foucault's apparatus

Foucault points to the notion of dispositif by a social apparatus that consists of lines of force. Foucault's interest lies in the organising of knowledge, power and subjectivity. Defined this way dispositif becomes a specific way of managing, wielding and working the social. With his usual sense of producing odd synonyms, Foucault calls the apparatus, as pointed to earlier, a "heterogeneous ensemble"

consisting of "discourses", "institutions", "architectural forms", "regulatory decisions", "laws", "administrative measures", "scientific statements", "philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions" (Foucault 1980:194). Foucault's intention is not to fixate or singularise, but to multiply the patterns and lines of force. In other words, we should look for a specific "system of relations". Power can, as has been argued, not be limited to or identified with the institution. Instead discipline, in the Foucauldian sense, comprises a "whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets. It is a "physics" or an "anatomy" of power, a technology" (Foucault 1977a:215). The discipline divides time, space and body; it de-individualises, and builds mass. On the other hand it also distributes bodies, e.g. distributes the criminals into cells, each according to the crime committed. Another example is the personal identification number[25], which entails both processes of collection and dispersion. It reduces the subject to a number in the registry and at the same time produces a specific dossier, unique for each citizen, patient or client (Fogh Jensen 2005:232). For Foucault, the state brings "salvation" to the people by developing techniques and practices that are tailored to secure our health, well-being, security and protect us against accidents (Foucault 1994b:334).

The subject beyond discourse

Foucault does put a lot of effort into showing how language works on the subject by the use of discourse. An intriguing example is his analysis of the author function (Foucault 2000d), this to such an extent that commentators have said that subjectivity has been seen in terms of language ever since Lacan and Foucault (Mansfield 2000:175). But importantly, discourse should not be reduced to the level of language. For Foucault, as for Lacan, the subject is a construct, subject to change with historical and cultural conditions. In *"Subject and Power"* Foucault seems to stress an alternative to language that might have been with him all along from *The History of Madness*[26] (1961) to *The History of Sexuality III* (1984); the subject does not merely exist on the level of language but certainly in its materiality as well. This is why he so meticulously develops his critical account of

[25] In Denmark every citizen is given at birth a 10-digit *Personal Identification Number* ("CPR number" or "person number" in everyday speech) stored in the Civil Registration System. The register, established in 1968, combines information from all municipal civil registers into one. Today it is almost impossible to receive any form of governmental service without such a number.

[26] First published in English in an abbreviated version as "Madness and Civilization", then recently re-translated and published unabridged by Routledge (Foucault 2006).

the techniques of medicine displacing the practice of panacea in the 17th and 18th century (Foucault 2006:297ff); and the making of docile *bodies*[27] and bodily practices, i.e. practices of handwriting and shooting in the 18th and 19th century (Foucault 1977a:149ff).

Perhaps one of the pillars of Foucault's theory of subjectivity is the subject's possibility of *transformative actions*. This would explain why Foucault over and over again stresses that power is not an institution, it is not something one possesses or holds, instead he says

> It is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon action, on possible or actual future or present actions (Foucault 1994b:340).

This is the key principle upon which Foucault hinges his engagement with power and the formation of the subject. As mentioned this formation process always involves struggles. And Foucault singles out three types; struggles against forms of subjectivity, struggles against forms of domination and struggles against forms of exploitation. All three exist pari passu. His thesis is that today (the text being written in the 1980s) struggles against subjectivity are becoming more important, though the other forms of struggle have not disappeared. These struggles take place in specific relations: "…what characterises the power we are analyzing is that it brings into play relations between individuals (or between groups)" (Foucault 1994b:337).

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[27] In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault writes: "The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A "political anatonomy", which was also a "mechanics of power", was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, "docile bodies". Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body: on the one hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it and turns it into a relation of strict subjection" (Foucault 1977a:137f). The disciplinary power does not deny you your body, but transforms and optimises it. In order to be able to make full use of the powers of the docile body, life must be understood in terms of working hours as it happens in the modern working discourse. Time is valuable, because it is a scarce resource.

How power relations are analysed

But let us go back to the question of how power relations are analysed. Foucault rarely gives specific names to the relations he is speaking of. And while at the same time he says that the relations should be grasped in the diversity of their linkages he also stresses that "the fundamental point of anchorage of the relationships, even if they are embodied and crystallised in an institution, is to be found outside the institution" (Foucault 1994b:343). On this point Foucault and Lacan seem in accordance in their rejection or turning around of common sense. Lacan dismantles Descartes' formula *cogito, ergo, sum* by saying: "I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am, where I am not thinking" (Lacan 2006b:430). To this Foucault seems to reply: "Maybe the target nowadays it not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" (Foucault 1994b:336). Of course Lacan and Foucault do not fully agree on every account. But both challenge the Cartesian division between thinking and being. Thus Foucault continues the quote above:

> We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries" (Foucault 1994b:336).

Foucault is indeed sceptical towards any finality of subjectivity. Perhaps this is why he advises us to analyse blocks of communication, paying attention to how space, bodies, language and power relations are entangled in institutions. Often he stays at the most general level – "power relations are exercised to an exceedingly important extent"
(Foucault 1994b:338), or in the very microphysics of an event[28], but sometimes he seems to strike a mean, as he does in the following, which points to his scepticism of finite subjectivities:

> Take for example, an educational institution: the disposal of its space, the meticulous regulations that govern its internal life, the different activities that are organised there, the diverse persons who live there or meet oneanother, each with his own function, his well-defined character – all these things constitute a block of capacity-communication-power. Activity to ensure learning and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of

[28] E.g. as he does in *Lives of Infamous Men*: "Mathurin Milan, placed in the hospital of Charenton, 31 August 1707: His madness was always to hide from his family, to lead an obscure life in the country, to have actions at law, to lend usuriously and without security, to lead his feeble mind down unknown paths, and to believe himself capable of the greatest employments" (Foucault 2002c:158).

> behavior works via a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differential marks of the "value" of each person and of the levels of knowledge) and by means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy) (Foucault 1994b:339).

The sceptical reader might interpret such a quote with the same kind of critique as raised against Althusser, claiming Foucault to be too deterministic, not leaving any free space for the subject to act or react. But the strength (and weakness) of this kind of example is the co-constitution of the overall, general and the local, specific, the empirical and the theoretical rolled into one. This situation could just as well fit an 18th century village school, or a 21st century international university. As activities and practices change, so do ways of subject formation. Whether this is really an accurate description, is an empirical (and therefore also theoretical[29]) question. But most importantly to Foucault the development of subjectivity, the entanglement of bodies, signs and space is to be found in practice, in the practical execution of relations, hence his self-reflexive formula: "the exercise of power is a conduct of conducts and a management of possibilities" (Foucault 1994b:341).

Critique and the subject as output

Foucault's vigorous notion of power has indeed encountered critique, especially regarding the question of freedom. If power is everywhere, and has no outside, from where should any notion of freedom possibly emerge? His answer is as persuasive as it is vague:

> Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are "free." By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available. Where the determining factors are exhaustive, there is no relationship of power: slavery is not a power relationship when a man is in chains, only when he has some possible mobility, even a chance of escape (Foucault 1994b:342).

[29] Of course, for Foucault, as for this study, theory and practice are not in opposition but are to be seen as relations, relays or blocks of communication "in which the deployment of technical capacities, the game of communications, and the relationships of power are adjusted to one another (Foucault 1994b:339 see also 329).

To Foucault power relations – and thus subjectivity - are rooted deeply in the social nexus, therefore inside and outside, individual and collective are dissolved, they disappear as separate categories of analysis only to emerge as most important elements in any diagnosis of subjectivity, but as a diagnosis of practice. And in this practice there is no authentic or natural self that we can excavate or even resist from. What we can do, and according to Foucault should do, is to maintain an openness geared towards a dynamic creation of the self, a critical experimental exploration of the possibilities of subjectivity in open contest with the modes of being laid down for us in every moment of our day-to-day lives. Why is that so? As we saw earlier, when invoking the question of enlightenment, and as Todd May (2005:69) recently pointed out to us so eloquently, Foucault only poses the question of the subject to reposition it. For Foucault (and for us), the question is not so much, Who are we? as Who are we now? Hence, subjectivity arises as a point in a diagnosis of the present. Not as a distinguishable, a historical phenomenon, but exactly as a specific place in space and time with its own history and its own practices, which we should learn how to question in order to take care of ourselves, to be able to think ourselves differently. This care of the self, *Le Souci de soi*, Foucault analyses in the third volume of his history of sexuality. When asked about it in an interview Foucault makes one of his most explicit references to what he means by the calling the subject into question:

> What I rejected was the idea of starting out with a theory of the subject – as is done, for example, in phenomenology or existentialism – and, on the basis of this theory, asking how a given form of knowledge was possible. What I wanted to try to show was how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another, as the mad or a healthy subject, as a delinquent or nondelinquent subject, through certain practices that were also games of truth, practices of power, and so on. I had to reject a priori theories of the subject in order to analyze the relationships that may exist between the constitution of the subject or different forms of the subject and games of truth, practices of power, and so on (Foucault 2000b:290).

And so with Foucault we reach the conclusion that in order to study the subject it has to emerge as an *output* of our analysis. We need to pay attention to the *conditions* under which subjectivities are created. And such conditions always take the form of specific relationships involving practices of power.

Towards a framework for studying subjectivity as movement

One of the integrative forces and arguments for bringing together the three conceptualisations has been their way of addressing *movement*. Whether it has been through Althusser's keen eye for the distinction and tensions between the Big subject of ideology and the small subjects who get interpellated, Lacan's processes of problematic identification building on the distinction between signifier and signified, or Foucault's underlining of the subject as a result, and by-product, of practices of power, they have all been mobilised to point to the transformation and the becomingness of subjectivity. Thus they all seem to build, in various ways though, on the transformational displacements of the Sausurrian formula Signifier/signified. It is in constant evolving processes of linguistic-material relationships that the contribution of the three perspectives should be found.

However, the differences in their ways of addressing the practice of movement should be seen as part of their contributions. Althusser's notion of interpellation presents subjectivity as imbuement, that which pierces or penetrates. Lacan's displacement of the subject views subjectivity as superseding or dislodging, we do not know ourselves, but are destined to try and search for who we are. And finally Foucault suggests a notion of subjectivity as a historically and culturally specific process of shaping that goes to show what possibilities for subjectivity one may have today in the here-and-now. One of my ways of pointing to the differences in the three perspectives has been to use different conjunctions in the paragraph headings – "in", "as", "and" respectively thus pointing to "*fixation*" in ideology, the "*signification*" of the subject as identification and the "*relation*" with the modes of subjectivity by which we come to know who we are.

Though they do differ, I would like to elaborate a bit on the cohesive force of the three perspectives. In an interview in 1978[30], Foucault links his own work to that of Althusser and Lacan by saying:

[30] This interview was first published in 1980 as *Remarks on Marx - conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, I quote the most recent version from 1991.

> There was one point in common among those who in the last fifteen years were called "structuralists", "though they were not that at all, with the exception of Levi-Strauss: I mean Althusser, Lacan and myself. What was this essential point of convergence? It was a matter of calling this theme of the subject into question once again, that great, fundamental postulate which French philosophy, from Descartes until our own time, had never abandoned. (Foucault 1991:56).

We live in times characterized by survival. Therefore it is not untypical to come across articles of subjects such as the single girl's guide to survival; a mother's secret diary on how to survive childbirth (since 'having babies does terrible damage, especially to the fashionable fortyish mother'); advice on how to survive being in or out of relationship; advice on diet and exercise, etc. Of course, such advice radically changes overtime… If the ideology of the 1990s followed the commands 'Just do it!' and 'Be yourself' today it seems that the new motto the media promotes is: 'No matter what you do, you will do it wrong, but it is better that you follow our advice and try again.'

- Renata Salecl

Indeed all three contributions can be seen as a way of contesting the Cartesian dictum "I think, therefore I am", by approaching the question: who are "we"? Descartes tells us that we are a combination of a mental substance that thinks and a physical substance that acts, a mind and a body (May 2005:69). And though the three authors presented in this chapter would agree with Descartes to make doubt and search of the self a central feature they suggest that mind and body cannot and should not be separated. This is not just the message of "be yourself" or "design yourself" that today in our multi-media world gets promoted as popular culture, though it might be worth paying attention to. As an example we could look at the fitness chain Equinox, which recently launched a campaign under the slogans "Design Yourself®" and "It's not fitness, it's life". Their declaired goal in life is "to help you reach your goals", because it is by reaching goals that you create the "road to a better life"[31]. This view of subjectivity is indeed echoed in many pop-cultural phrases of our time, see Renata Salecl (2004) for a critical Lacanian inspired discussion.

It may seem interesting that a fitness company with a registered trademark "®" in the imaginary order, can have exclusive proprietary identification rights as to how

[31] Slogans and campaigns can be found at www.equinox.dk, retrieved 1 February 2008.

we should “design ourselves”. However, what is also disturbing about the pop-cultural call to “be yourself” or “find your inner, true self” is revealed when we look to the three perspectives presented in this chapter. It is not simply a matter of asking “who” should have the rights to design. Rather it is the very idea that we *can* design ourselves. Calling the subject into question means something very precise, but also very different to Althusser, Lacan and Foucault. However, what combines the three is that the question of the subject is supposed to be exactly that, a question. Not a final answer, not a matter of carving out the core. Because where would such a core come from? In the processes of misrecognition or interpellation with Althusser? In the linguistic displacements of the subject with Lacan? Or in the ever-changing power relations with Foucault? Studying the subject as a question, on the other hand, moves, opens, extends, requires uncertainty, scrutiny, and ultimately is a questioning that will produce a wide array of answers, not simply *the* ontological arrangement proper.

However, as this chapter on theorising subjectivity has pointed out, I do not conceive only of the transformative and ever changeable forces of subjectivation. The story so far has not *only* been one of contingency. By pointing to these varying processes, by mobilising three perspectives on how subjectivity works as movement, I have also pointed to certain limitations. The subject needs limits (of ideology, language, power) in order to exist, hence this chapter has also been a story of “the limitation of the subject”, how the subject is met with limits, in terms of ideology, language or power relations. What remains for us next is to explore how this limitation is set to work in the world of organising.

Summing up

Three arguments in this chapter have contributed to developing a framework for theorising subjectivity. Althusser’s argument of interpellation as an ideological call to the subject contributes to how we might understand the call from the organisation to its employees. With Lacan we pointed to the creation of subjectivity, and as an important part, how the employee in search of answering the call from the organisation (mis)recognises herself, displaces herself. Through Foucault we elaborated on the production of subjectivity as a double process simultaneously involving individualising and totalising forces of power.

Althusser's main contribution is in setting the scene for which movements can take place. With him we might ask: What are the ruling ideologies? What do they look like? How might they affect processes of subjectivation? *Lacan* contributes by pointing to ways of moving, as ongoing "messy" search processes of doubt and lack. From him we are equipped with questions like: How do I reconcile myself in the Other, and the other in me? How come we desire, long for certain forms of subjectivity? *Foucault's* prime contribution lies in his description of the conditions for movement. With him we can ask questions like: How come we tend to think of ourselves in such and such terms? What institutions and relationships make us become who we are? How can we see these relations as products of history and hence changeable?

Combined Althusser, Lacan and Foucault provide us with a "questioning machine" that we can utilise in the search of competence. Interpellation, identification and subjectivation constitute the subject in search of itself not only in language, but also in material and ideological practices. Hence when I ask what becomes of subjectivity when competence is actualised, with Althusser, Lacan and Foucault this would mean that competence is a certain way of actualising subjectivity, and this subjectivity is one we are always in search of, one we are always looking for, but have not yet found, and for that we should be pleased, because otherwise we would stop being subjects.

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

- U2

The problem in this chapter is how the subject can be studied as movement, which as I quoting Derrida pointed out in the opening is not to say that the subject is liquidated. Rather, the subject is entagled in processes of interpellation, identification and subjectification. The task in the next chapter will be with this framework in mind to search for what Althusser might call "the Master subject" of competence. Are there general trends in the way competence is activated in discursive-material practices? This discussion sets the scene for the continuation of the study in searching for the performative power of competence.

A phrase by Marx is pertinent here: man produces man.

Michel Foucault (2002b:275)

III The Ideology of Competence

In the previous chapter I developed a framework of subjectivity as movement discussed through the theorisation of the subject in Althusser, Lacan and Foucault. This discussion revealed a number of relevant points in our search for the actualisation of competence. In this third chapter I present the ideology of competence as a strange phenomenon that substantially impacts the ways in which we see, act and think of ourselves. My intent is to explore competence as an ideology that *calculates* subject formation at work. Hence the purpose of the chapter is to search for the ideology of competence in management discourse. I shall assess a number of key management texts that analyse the world of work and suggest changes in the discourse of competence. I conclude the chapter by showing how competence works as a catalyst for my dealings with subjectivity, putting the subject in search and doubt of itself.

How to analyse ideology

> 9 March 2005. The scene is the National Environmental Research Institute and a decisive meeting about how to procede from the initial analysis of works councils have just begun. One of the management representatives, eager to get on with the project airs his disappointment with what he sees as lack of progress:
>
> *Manager*: Damn it all! Now I really get frustrated. I can't think of anything more to say. Why won't you take responsibility and simply give us a straight answer as to what we are to do?
>
> *Consultant*: I would love to, if only I could, I really would. The problem, as I see it, is that you cannot clarify what you need our help with.

As mentioned in the opening chapter competence affects on many accounts my way into this project of studying how subjectivities are produced in the Danish public sector. The strangeness of competence, when entering the public institutions with whom I were to work, met me on two accounts: first, everybody seemed to

know what competence was about and second, they did not speak of the same when they referred to competence. I tried to address this issue on a number of occasions during interviews and meetings, but often the response I got from the participants was something like: Yes, I think we have to find a common language, a definition. How about you? You have done research in this field; shouldn't you be able to tell us what competence is about? By turning my own question of "what is competence" back at me, they saw no problem in me (or any else for that matter) coming up with a definition. Initially, no one seemed to be interested in finding out where the different demarcations of competence, *already present in practice,* came from, or what logic (e.g. of optimisation) that came with it would effect the way the organisation worked. The rationale seemed to be: If only we can agree on what competence means for us in the here-and-now, and as long as it is in agreement with what "higher political powers" tell us, what is the problem? The problem is that practice always works through what Althusser would call ideology.

The way in which we easily talk, think, and act about competence takes up resources, holds and hides how we get interpellated, subjectivated and what possibilities might be present for altering this subjectivity. Thus, in search of *the Performative Power of Competence,* I find it pertinent to examine competence; to ask questions such as from where does the concept originate? How is it being dealt with in the contemporary organisational practices? What does competence tell us about the past and present contexts in which work is performed? These questions however, should be seen not as attempts to introduce a new ontology of competence, but rather to open a critical investigation of competence. The lesson learned from Althusser, Lacan and Foucault in the previous chapter is that in order to be able to know how to change any practice of competence development, we need to question the present ruling ideology. This might be done in two steps. First we need to see how ideology works to find symptoms of untoward incidents, something "out of tune" in the ideology. A way to go about this is to identify cracks in the immediacy of ideology. Second we need to reconstruct the questions that are repressed in ideology. This strategy of temporarily breaking away from ideology, finding cracks between words and things might be one of the issues that, on the level of analytical strategy, unite Althusser, Lacan and Foucault.[32] Others

[32] Althusser speaks of course of the "epistemological break" between science and ideology as we saw previously, though stressing the the break is never definitive, an event that in itself would be ideological. Lacan takes on from Freud the idea that psychoanalysis can help us identify the problematic relationship between the signifier and the signified. The same thinking as can be

scholars, more directly engaged with management and organisation, have been asking similar questions, though with different agendas. I now turn to assessing a number of these management texts to get an idea of how the ideology of competence works, and in order to find cracks, openings and make use of a symptomatological[33] reading of competence.

Contributors in the making of the ideology of competence

In their highly influential and much debated book *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2003), examine capitalism in the 20th century (and the prospects of capitalism in the 21st century) and suggest that we might be witnessing the coming of a new form of sovereignty, marked by new territories, new forms of power and new media. For instance, they suggest the *network* as a quintessential post-modern organisational form, occupying a virtual space for both the production and distribution of information. Historically economic activity should be seen as evolving in three phases, or perhaps more accurate, transitions overlaying one another. A transition from a) agriculture and the extraction of raw materials to b) industry and the production of durable goods to c) service provision and the manipulation of information (Hardt & Negri 2003:269). The different phases do not replace or outstrip one another; on the contrary Hardt and Negri argue for a fundamental *informatisation of production* that permeates all sectors. In a similar vein, Boltanski & Chiapello in *the New Spirit of Capitalism* ask for the "ideological changes that have accompanied recent transformations in capitalism" (2007:3) [34]. They set out to develop a dynamic relationship between capitalism and critique, of which they see the latter as the principal operator of creation and transformation. Boltanski and Chiapello investigate the emergence of a new image of firms and economic processes. By way of comparison they examine management literature in two periods 1959-1969 and 1989-1994 in order to show how management as a discipline and an ideology has changed from the 1960s to the 1990s (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:60). A number of authors have made

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found in Foucault. Gilles Deleuze (2004:52,65) notes in his book *Foucault*: "We must therefore break open words, phrases or propositions and extract statements from them. …As soon as we open up words and things, as soon as we discover statements and visibilities words and sight are raised to a higher exercise that is a priori."

[33] So far the notion of the symptom and the symptomatological reading has been mentioned in the introduction and in the account of Althusser. As we shall see this concept is not estranged to Foucault either. In the coming chapter *diagnosing the present* I elaborate on its role for my analytical strategy.

important contributions to the understanding of the changing conditions on the labour market and the production of subjectivity, and I could have chosen many others. For instance, wanting to discuss the prospects of changing societal forms, I could have turned to a number of other texts. For instance *The Coming of the Post-industrial Society* (Bell 1973), *The Post-modern Condition* (Lyotard 1979) or *The Rise of the Network Society* (Castells 1996) to name but a few were hallmarks of their time. These texts and especially the idea of post-modernism have all been heavily discussed in organisation studies (a matter that I return to in Chapter VI). By singling out a few texts, with a wide scope, my intent is to see how *competence* emerges from present accounts of the changing conditions of working life that resound in particular with my empirical investigations and enables me to see new features in the empirical material.

An analogy: Windows

It is possible to explain the transition from the modern to Empire in the following way: When everybody used WordPerfect 5.1 for DOS, the system functioned in a particular way. As a user you were in total control, everything was transparent – the system even displayed its codes. The system could not all of a sudden act on its own because it only responded to the commands you gave (discipline society). With the new Windows editions, there is always something working in the background. There is a logic of optimisation, which takes up resources, there may be a latent virus that needs processing, more programmes or firewalls that need to be installed. You are wired up on something you desire, made compatible with something you cannot control. The control system is always sick or defective, always in a state of crisis or on the move. The logic of optimisation rules all the time.

- Anders Fogh Jensen on Empire, my translation.

The "grand" texts of Hardt & Negri and Boltanski & Chiapello are read along with "minor" studies. In a Danish context, and thus on a smaller geographic scale, but similarly extensive in potentiality, Andersen and Born (2001) trace the changes in perception of public employees in the past 150 years. Further, Kristensen (2003) reports of *a boundaryless work* in an investigation of how employee representatives strive for influence and a sustainable future in the subsidiaries of multinationals. Hermann (2003) provides *a diagnostic map of competence development and learning*, which seeks to address the historical conditions and intertwinement of competence, development and learning in present times. By trailing the different routes of the

[34] This book was originally published in French in 1999, I quote the English version only recently translated into English in 2005 and published in paper back in 2007.

concepts, Hermann asks whether competence and learning have become seismological keys with which the working subject is bound to make sense of and recreate herself.

By analysing the above mentioned texts and their arguments I will pose the question of whether competence, in the words of Althusser, can be seen as an overarching Master Subject, installed via the Ideological State Apparatusses of our times? By pursuing this question I equip myself with a frame of reference to go searching for the practice of competence in the organisations that I have studied; hence, in the chapters to come the empirical data from my field study will illustrate my analysis of texts. But before going into details about the arguments of the changing conditions for employees at work, allow me to dwell briefly on the genesis of competence.

On the Genesis of Competence

The concept of competence is central to and finds its present usage drawing on an array of fields: psychology, economics, anthropology, political science, etc. In a not so distant past competence was said to denote matters of law or fact, a form of authorisation; e.g. the king was given competence by the state of law to point out the government of the nation state. If we trace its epistemological roots "competence" used to belong to a juridical discourse related to the power of decision, defined as *the quality or condition of being legally qualified to perform an act* and thus often attributed to the realm of governance or administration (Hermann 2003:30). According to this juridical discourse competence can be granted or assigned, but also deprived. Reminiscences of this still exist, e.g. when doctors pass their qualifying education to assume the tasks with which they have been entrusted according to the Hippocratic Oath[35] expressing the duties and good medical practice of a doctor. However, as both Andersen & Born (2001) and Hermann (2003) note the concept of competence today has diffused into much broader notions, such as *the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified*. This means that from being something you can attribute or deprive someone of according to jurisdiction competence finds itself connected to the development of resources in an economical, psychological or even pedagogical sense. Competence

[35] The oath taken by physicians pertaining to the ethical practice of medicine, widely believed to be written by Hippocrates in the 4th century BC. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippocratic_oath, retrieved 15 December 2007.

is said to derive from the Latin *competere*, meaning to be suitable (Nordhaug & Gronhaug 1994:91). This is also the notion we find in psychology, explained as an "organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment" (White 1959:297). Later in economics constellations like the "core competencies of the corporation" (Prahalad & Hamel 1990) is given much attention as having importance for the strategic management in business firms and yet again as more personalised accounts in which competence becomes the "work-related knowledge, skills and abilities" (Nordhaug & Gronhaug 1994:91). A common feature of these conceptions is that competence is valued as an underlying characteristic *attributed* to the subject at work. Much of the literature on competence, starting from the 1970's and dominantly based in the US, around people like David McClelland's *Testing for Competence Rather than Intelligence* (1973) and later Richard Boyatsis's *The Competent Manager: A Model for Effective Performance* (1982) and Signe & Lyle Spencer's *Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance* (1993) all sought to develop models, which could identify "competence variables" which again could predict job performance. Building on this research agenda emerged other key contributors, such as Mark Huselid (1995) and Dave Ulrich (1997), who sought to evaluate the correlations between systems of high performance work practices and firm performance. Especially the latter advocated HR to be seen as a "change agent" (Ulrich 1997:151) assuming the full responsibility for the organisation's cognitive growth. Thus according to these approaches employees are to assume full responsibility for their own development. Such an important task cannot be left solely to management. Each and every employee must respond actively to his or her possibilities and development needs (Andersen, Born 2001:89ff). Others have done substantial work in developing alternative approaches to competence. For instance Bramming (2001) investigated the notion of competence-in-practice by studying the works of Odd Nordhaug, Etienne Wenger and Pierre Bourdieu and distilled the concept into three fundamentally different approaches. Building on this work in a recent paper I discussed the context of competence (Bojesen 2005). Following this discussion competence may be viewed from a *functionalist approach* (e.g. Boyatzis, McClelland, Spencer&Spencer, Nordhaug etc.) making the subject a strategic resource; a *hermeneutic approach* (e.g. Sandberg 1994;Wenger 1998) stressing the subject as interpretation of human experiences or a *constructivistic approach* (Bramming 2001) based on a reading of Bourdieu in which the subject is emerging from a local practice (Bourdieu 1977;Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). While such labelling may prove beneficial to produce new wholes, the task I set for myself

here is not merely one of classification. For the matter at hand, I want to investigate how the ideology of competence presents itself as something that calls for questioning. The overall movements in the concept of competence suggested by Hermann (2003), Bramming (2001) and others show without doubt a great diversity but also suggest a movement towards more processual understandings of competence. To them it seems like competence has become a moving target. Perhaps the distinction between object concepts and process concepts by Peter Barker (2008) mentioned earlier in this study can be of usage here? Is Hermann right when claiming that

> The (new) concept of competence becomes the general equivalent for the qualities, skills and traits of the individual and extends itself as a fundamental converter of feelings, love, social skills, creativity, instincts, identity, meanings and dipositions that sum up the human being as a whole (Hermann 2003:36, my translation).

With statements like these Hermann builds up an extensive critique based on a review of texts from the UNESCO, the OECD, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and organisational bodies like the Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality Management (SCKK) and the Centre for Public Competence Development (COK). Being competent today not only involves being educated, skilled or trained and is certainly not something you can claim to be according to your professional training or given by any law or jurisdiction. The idea of being fully trained once and for all does not make that much sense anymore. To be competent is not about pursuing a well-defined goal, getting from A to B (Hermann 2003:39). It seems much more to be a certain kind of alertness, readiness and commitment to change, to be prepaired to unlearn. Hence in the spirit of Althusser, Lacan and Foucault my analysis of the ideology of competence does not from the outset seem to privilege the whole, rather it seeks new openings and cracks and holes in the smooth surface of competence.

This is done in the following by examining first a number of subject positions (the manager, the coach, the specialist and the shop steward) and a number of societal and organisational transitions (flexibility, lean thinking, projects and teams) that supposedly are new or are given new content with the coming of the ideology of competence.

Subject Transitions

The coming of a new manager?

When pointing to this seemingly recent shift in the meaning of competence (from a legal, juridical concept to a much more performative concept) it is worth noting that the so-called *need* for training and development is as old as the discipline of management. The origins of management as a discipline can of course be accounted for in many ways. In this study I will join Boltanski & Chiapello in pointing to F.W. Taylor (1856-1915) and Henri Fayol (1841-1925) as key figures who wrote their seminal pieces in the second decade of the last century. For instance, Taylor, who perhaps is the one most eager to popularise the term "scientific management", advances that:

> no great man can (with the old system of personal management) hope to compete with a number of ordinary men who have been properly organized so as efficiently to cooperate (Taylor 1911:6).

The proper organisation of employees and avoidance of attrition is already an issue at Taylor's time. Boltanski & Chiapello establish the genesis of management as a discipline to the time when salaried managers and administrators emerge as a category distinct from owners of firms (Chandler 1990). With this category and the increasing number of large capitalist firms emerges the need for training and educating personnel with appropriate qualifications. Watson (2001) builds on this perception referring to Fayol's *General and Industrial Management* (1949) and Gulick's *Science, Values and Public Administration* (1937) as key publications addressing the issues of training managers. Gulick describes the role of the managers by the POSDCORB principle: Planning, Organising, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting and Budgeting. The emphasis on rather grandiose functions means that it remains unclear what the actual tasks would be of managers fulfilling these functions. According to Watson the challenge facing us is one of finding an alternative to either of these unrealistically one-sided conceptions. This means finding a way of accounting for the fact that managers indeed rarely exhibit the rational, analytical, planning, coordinating and commanding behaviour that "classical" (and still popular) definitions of management imply, whilst recognising at the same time that, for an organisation to survive and flourish in its environment, there must be steering, coordinating, shaping and directing (Watson 2001:37). His

solution seems to be a division between management as a *function*[36] which has sub-functions (finance, marketing, personnel, etc.) and management as an *activity* (filled with ambiguity, power struggles, conflicting interests, manipulating, guessing, negotiating, etc.). To understand what management is, we first need to recognise that its basic rationale is one of establishing and maintaining work organisations as complete entities says Watson (2001:38). A job is a managerial job only insofar as it is concerned with the shaping of the organisation as a whole to bring about its long-term survival. Managing is organising: Pulling things together and along in a general direction to bring about long-term organisational survival (Watson 2001:33). This however only displaces the problem of management to the level of individual qualifications and behaviour.

Consider the following subtraction problem, which I will put up here: 342 - 173. Now remember how we used to do that. Three from two is nine; carry the one, and if you're under 35 or went to a private school you say seven from three is six, but if you're over 35 and went to a public school you say eight from four is six; carry the one so we have 169, but in the new approach, as you know, the important thing is to understand what you're doing rather than to get the right answer.
- Tom Lehrer, New Math, 1965

Traditionally, qualifications are valued as representing the individual human being in objective and purely professional terms. But while qualifications for some today are to be linked with the static juridical notion of competence, and hence seen as a somewhat obsolete concept, competencies (in the new sense) take up a broader agenda. An indicator of this shift might be found in studying changes in educational practices. An example is a new educational doctrine called New Math taught in American grade schools, apparently as a reaction to the Sputnik crisis with the intent to boost children's education and mathematical skills through the use of abstract concepts like set theory and number bases other than 10 so that the supposed intellectual threat of Soviet engineers, reputedly highly skilled mathematicians, could be met.[37] Tom Lehrer, an American mathematician, song-writer and satirist, in 1965 made the finely ironical song titled "New Math", summing up his view that the important thing was to understand what you were

[36] The notion of the function is well-established within organization theory, eg. see Chester Bernard who in *The Functions of the Executive* from 1938 famously argued – unusual for his time – that managers should treat employees competently and with respect in order to gain authority.

[37] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Math, retrieved 17 February 2008

doing, rather than getting the right answer. Though for different reasons, reform of mathematics curricula was pursued in a number of European contries, with a similar intent of producing "greater insight", rather than emphasising facility.

As noted above, studies on competence starting from the motivational research in the 1960s include and combine market research with notions of the human and knowledge forms of psychology, sociology and educational theory and practice (McClelland 1961, McGregor 1960, White 1959). Today, Multinationals like IBM, Heineken, Unilever, Siemens and thousands of other companies around the globe all work with this model perfected through extensive investigations by consultancy companies like the HayGroup Consulting[38]. The goal is to find and define those core competencies in which high-performing managers excel so as to create a matching high performance culture.

Boltanski and Chiapello analyse a number of management practices developed in the same period with the intent of setting targets form management, such as *Management by Objectives* (MBO). By focusing on the role of the *cadre* (French term for salaried managers and administrators) they point to displacements in the economy, thus affecting the notion of competence. Struggles for autonomy and decentralisation are promoted as ways of securing "that decisions will then be taken close to those concerned" (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007:66). According to Boltanski and Chiapello, MBO has the advantage of providing a *rational* process of decision making, that is, those decisions that best meet the criteria and targets of the firm were favoured. Furthermore, MBO has implications for career management, as managers, who meet targets, are most likely to be promoted, exactly because they meet the "objective" criteria and not idiosyncratic or subjective criteria, that are easily deemed unjust (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007:66). As a consequence judgment should be based on sound results rather than personal beliefs or "earned" loyalty. This tendency can be further traced by looking to the practice of performance appraisals[39], which is sustained as a method of evaluating

[38] www.HayGroup.com, retrieved 12th December 2007.

[39] "Performance appraisal is a systematic process of developing criteria by which to assess employees' job performance. Its purpose is to reinforce or redirect behaviour and performance of employees in the organisation. As a method for measuring employee actions against standards of acceptable performance, performance appraisal is perhaps one of the most obvious controls of activity in which organisations engage, especially when used as a basis for improving performance, productivity and efficiency through their use in salary and promotion decisions" (Townley 1994:67).

and setting proper goals for personal development and assessing employees' job performance within the firm. In sum, Boltanski and Chiapello paint a picture of management in the 1960s as

> accompanying the transition from a patrimonial bourgeoisie centred on the personal firm to a bourgeoisie of managers, who are salaried, academically qualified, and integrated into large public or private managements (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:68).

In terms of subjectivity, Boltanski and Chiapello argue that though the management literature in the 1960s is occupied with a rise in professionalisation of management as a discipline and métier[40], we also witness an accompanying change in the role that managers are expected to fulfil. Apparently, advancement based solely on seniority and loyalty is put under pressure in exchange of new appraisal systems like MBO. As a consequence it becomes more legitimate to dispose of managers - being a manager is no longer to be seen as a life time job (if it ever were). Instead managers should learn to see themselves as being in a position to grow and prosper only in order to get on to the next position, and to find new places to fulfil their ambitions. But this is of course not only to the benefit of the manager - it also works the other way round: companies can make managers redundant:

> A manager inspires and encourages, but can just as legitimately have recourse to power, and *cadres* must not be led to believe that they can decide everything and comment on everything just because they are permitted to "participate" (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:70).

Thus the Boltanski and Chiapello's manager may sometimes find herself in the new role as inspiring mediator who encourages her employees to release new energy and new potentials; managers are to act as coaches, not bosses. But this new role of management also puts pressure on the self and exposes the subject of

[40] Armstrong (1985) argues for how accountants in the UK play out strategies for controlling labour, thus more effectively assuming the position as manager, at the expense of engineers and personnel specialists. Thus he says that accountants have been successful in controlling the labour process due to changes in the "global function of capital" because decisions can only be made on a common abstract (financial basis) that the profession of accountants applies. Engineers have to a large extent failed because engineering activity must entail a physical product or process, which can be judged by outsiders. Personnel specialists have ascended into managerial positions partly by exposing the inadequacies of other professions like the engineers, etc., but have ultimately failed because they deliver supplementary performances and find it hard to prove their effect on corporate efficiency.

much search and doubt. This is investigated in our next subject transition, the coach.

The coach

The main difference between the boss and the coach is that of authority. According to Boltanski and Chiapello (2007:76) the "role of the coach is to supply personalised support, making it possible for everyone to develop their full potential". Most importantly, the coach does not have the right answer as to in which direction one should develop. In addition coaches seldom have any formal power over the people they coach. Employees must find the right answers themselves. The role of the coach is to help the employees help themselves, that is, the role of the coach is to act as a redeemer, a midwife, who by asking questions, like Socrates, helps the individual to better know him or herself. However, the coach must be careful and possess knowledge of the human nature, otherwise conflicts may arise:

> Not just anyone can become a coach – those who will play this role will have to possess personal qualities such that they will not intrude upon the subjects with whom they work, or oppress them in line with a deontological approach akin to psychoanalysis (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007:95).

While this role breaks with forms of authority granted by position or title, a new authority arises granted in personal integrity and trust. Let us take an example from one of my four institutions. In September 2004 in the Centre for Higher Education, coaching was introduced as a means for training knowledge centre consultants to support and guide their fellow teachers. It was promoted under the slogan "trainers, train trainers" and received great attention and interest. However, when the consultants themselves were coached they were much more reluctant, and some even turned their back on the process. From the reactions I soon learned that the issue of trust is extremely important. While some people in open sessions could become outright aggressive they were much more willing to engage in open discussions in smaller groups. Perhaps this is not surprising, since some of the questions they were expected to respond to were formulated like: "Do you have inner mental blocks or personal resistances that inhibit your initiatives? What kind of support do you need and from whom? When exactly do you wish to begin and end each action? What goals will you set for yourself" (CHE, 2005a). If questions like these are prompted in a group not knowing each other or not depending on

each other it might become extremely difficult to work successfully with coaching. Further, to begin dabbling with neither coaching activities without allocating sufficient time nor having the proper training may do more harm than good as it will easily open a free rein of emotions. As such coaching opens a new world of emotional management, which may seem "soft" but is just as much about goal setting, targeting the subject as management by objectives or any other management technique employed in order to build excellence and bring about high performance. But the coach is not the only model of excellence. Boltanski & Chiapello (2007:116) note another position along with the mediating role of the coach appear, namely that of the expert or *specialist*. Specialists enjoy great admiration, if they are capable of developing competencies based not on standardised knowledge, but on personal, integrated knowledge. The ideology of competence does not bring about the mere existence of specialists per se, rather it proposes a new content. As managers and employees in general are encouraged to pursue their individual desires changing job positions, transgressing organisational boundaries, specialists become important since they are in positions where they can preserve memory from earlier organisations and projects. But they too have to work with themselves, adopting new procedures.

Responsibility assuming specialists

In a number of texts based on a comprehensive study of data from the Danish public administration Andersen and Born (2001, 2005, 2007) identify changes in the semantics used about the public employee over the past 150 years. From seeing the employee as a *public servant* as taking part in a legal system sustaining the self as a legal character, the authors argue that today the employee is exposed to a discourse in which they are expected to value themselves as human material of certain potential with the aim of becoming a *specialised generalist*. In short, this is a displacement from the juridical subject of the civil servant to the specialised generalist via the import of a new human potential. The specialised generalist not only directs attention inwards at the office and employee function, but also outwards in a self-governing reflection on the bureau and its place in a larger societal context. According to Andersen and Born a concomitant content displacement is going on from devotion for life, loyalty, diligence, and formal qualifications of the civil servant to the flexibility, mobility, and knowledge of the broader societal development of the generalised specialist (Andersen & Born 2001:74). This change is installed via a change in semantics evolving around the employee who assumes responsibility via sound judgement, capacity for emotional

contact, and empathy. Thus, this change in semantics of the employee is not only reflected in the alteration of the self's view of the organisation (from inward to outward directed), but moreover in the coming of a new sense of subjectivity in which the perfect functioning of the organisation as a whole (and the role of the subject herein) should work as a lighthouse guiding one's actions. Thus they speak of the transition from the "employee having responsibility" to the "the responsibility assuming and seeking employee". In this view:

> Having responsibility is passive and reactive. Assuming responsibility is to adopt the ideas of transformation and see one's tasks from the perspective of the organisation. Assuming responsibility means, first of all, assuming responsibility for the development of the organisation, which is expected to manifest itself in terms of a richness of initiatives, a desire for development and commitment (Andersen 2003b:8).

This desire for development is directed at "managing" the inner self of the working subject. No wonder that public organisations today, as Andersen and Born note, put a lot of effort into making visions and not just plans, as visions appear for the "inner eye", but have to be shared by all in order to have effect. Plans, on the other hand, does not need to be shared by the entire organisation to be implemented (Andersen and Born 2005:167). This focus on the management of the inner self reinforced by the ideology of competence relies on the commitment, passion and goodwill of the employee. But it also relies on the human subject to know itself, and display management by special techniques (like coaching, interviews and assessment exercises) in order to be able to give an account of oneself. The managers who are to motivate employees and make them set goals for themselves can become successful by latching on to an ideology which interpellates people as "responsibility assuming", rather than "responsibility having". This requires an active sense of self, and a willingness to work on that self, e.g. with one's coach or mentor. This has further consequences for the role of the people who are safeguarding the employees' interest as a whole, the shop stewards. But these figures do not escape the ideology promoting an organisational perspective on all work tasks and the management of the inner self, that Andersen & Born talk about. Indeed, shop stewards play a key role in this new world of work, change and transition, where search and doubt is the rule rather than the exception.

Shop stewards as change agents

The final role that we will look into is that of the convenor or shop steward[41]. Strongly engaged in the conditions of the Danish manufacturing industry and its development into subsidiaries of multinationals, Peer Hull Kristensen's studies of shop stewards reveal issues important for changing conditions of the labour market (Hull Kristensen 2003, See also Hull Kristensen & Zeitlin 2005). Indeed, it can be argued that because of heavy competition in the manufacturing industry these companies sooner than their colleagues in knowledge-intensive organisations, met the challenges of having to compete on a global scale and to promote workforce participation, thus putting pressure on management and shop stewards to find a common ground. Further, the informatisation of business and rise in educational levels, as described above, also hit firms with heavy physical production facilities, thereby making them more vulnerable to outsourcing. During recent years production facilities relying heavily on manpower have simply moved to parts of the world with low wages. As Kristensen notes, shop stewards in these firms have generated a specific competence of balancing between employers' deeds and employees' needs:

> Shop stewards know from their position and role in the organisation that it is an extremely complex organism of fine balances that is now going to be changed and reorganised. If something goes wrong in this process vital parts of the organism may be lost, that is, employees of the highest qualifications in practice (Hull Kristensen 2003:22, my translation).

Convenors, shop stewards and employee representatives in works councils have played an important part in making the transition from physical production relying on manpower to high-tech knowledge production. They are the only ones who have had access and ability to seeing the individual in the firm and putting themselves in his place. But most importantly, as this study shows, one of the most significant effects of the ideology of competence is that it has made shop stewards and their peers work with themselves and see opportunities where others see problems. In this sense shop stewards may be seen as the new entrepreneurs in tune with the idea of the organisation based on projects and networks rather than

[41] In English, "shop steward" is the name of the representative of a trade union involved in collective bargaining and may hence resonate with the division between white- and blue-collar workers common in industrial production. The Danish term "tillidsrepræsentant" literally means "trusted representative" and has no affiliation with the type of work undertaken. However, due to convention in the literature I maintain the use of "shop steward".

relying solely on the hierarchical systems with formal communication lines and bosses of yesteryear. These shop stewards seem among the first ones to realise that future security is to be found in renewal and not in stability. As Boltanski and Chiapello note:

> The key idea in this conception of work life is employability, which refers to the capacity people must be equipped with if they are to be called upon for projects (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:93).

There is no quarantee of job security. What firms can seek to provide is "employability", that is, skills and flexibility allowing each individual to find a new job inside or outside the firm. Thus, shop stewards may find themselves at the "melting pot of history" (Hull Kristensen 2003), in a situation where the entrepreneurial career is a constant race from one project to the next. And where the value added by each project signals success to the effect that people's careers are more dependent on their own resources and less on the fate of a particular company. In the "boundaryless work", in which the firm is "fragmented", "virtual", "post-modern", where hierarchical constraints are much attenuated, how can one guarantee the loyalty of the manager both to the team and to the project or profit centre that he depends on? Management today must comprise a minimum number of mechanisms aimed at controlling those risks that constitute other forms of attack on personal security. Perhaps this is why the shop stewards in Kristensen's (2003) study describe themselves as free-born and dauntless (in Danish *De fribårne og frejdige*), meaning that they had to assume responsibility and anticipate strategies for the future direction of the organisation.

On the other hand, though shop stewards may be important facilitators of change in these transition processes, their participation is indeed a balancing act. Even with the best of intentions one can soon be enrolled in conflicting relations once the debate gets fiery. As Mike, one shop steward I interviewed at the National Environmental Research Centre noted:

> " …then I realise the change in personality meaning that you don't really attempt collaboration or dialogue, but rather become rigorous and rigid when discussing problems. We constitute a relatively small team and it should be possible to discuss things openly. Nevertheless we end up in rigid attitudes rather than realising that we are actually in a position to test certain ideas, to discuss the pros and cons of the matter."

So though shop stewards are "offered" a more active role, discussing strategic initiatives like competence development, etc. it is not a given that they will do so. While I will discuss the problematics of this specific role in more detail in a later chapter, it suffices to say for the time being that the role of the shop steward and other employee representatives is given great potential for transforming the idea of management being in outright opposition to employees and vice versa.

From this discussion it becomes clear that the conditions for performing management and competently supporting changes in the labour market call for new forms of subjectivity. In today's organisations the shop steward must navigate between management and employees, not only monitoring working hours, wages, etc., but also assuming the role of change agent (Hermann 2003:72). The importance given to such notions as "workforce participation" and "intrinsic motivations," goes to show that motivation is bound up with a desire for and pleasure of performing the work, rather than with a system of inducement-reward tacked on externally and yielding nothing more than "extrinsic motivations". This is a situation that goes hand in hand with the idea of the workplace as an arena for personal competence development. A narrow economic rationale is joined by a rationale of liberation. Let us in the following take a look at what larger societal and organisational transitions we can draw from these subject transitions described above.

Societal and organisational transitions

Flexibility

In Hardt and Negri (2003) the transitions (from agriculture to industrialisation to informatisation) mark the coming of nothing less than a new world of production and organising. By reference to the influence of post-modernity on the world market, they point to characteristics of the "post-modern organisation" as being small to medium in size, valuing complexity, flexible structures and inter-institutional forms of collaboration in order to meet the turbulent organisational and environmental conditions (Hardt & Negri 2003:156). As such they join the choir arguing that we live in a state of transition and turbulence. Diversity is no longer thought to lead to chaos, but is seen as something that brings profitability and prosperity as long as it can be managed. Companies launch "diversity management" programmes to absorb the differences of the world, be it in terms of

gender, race, religion, age, etc., to be compatible and competitive. Future work life does not know the same boundaries as the industrialised world. To Hardt and Negri and others, they provide support from Frederic Jameson and David Harvie, post-modernity is a new phase in the capitalist accumulation of goods, which accompany the realisation of the global market (Hardt & Negri 2003:157).

Almost as if building on this idea, Boltanski and Chiapello argue in favour of the coming of the team and project-based work organisation, which is preferably structured more and more as a network. For instance they quote Peter Drucker, who in the 1960's was a keen promoter of MBO, for arguing that a general rise in educational levels explains why hierarchy has become an outdated mode of organisation (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007:71). Whether prevalence of hierarchy as a governing system is yielding or still very present is, of course, disputable. However, there seems to be only a few who would seriously doubt that the educational level in general has grown in recent years - at least in the western world[42]. Along with a growth in education, management authors of the 1990s promise the coming of a new world in which organisational forms embracing formal equality and respect of individual liberties take the greatest possible distance from the rules and regulations of the bureaucracy. This is a world of

> the flexible, inventive organization that will be able to "ride" all "waves", adapt to all the changes, always have a workforce that is up to date with the most recent knowledge, and secure a permanent technological advantage over competitors (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:71).

This level of thinking seems to break decisively with the need for stability and security so highly praised in earlier times of management history or at least it changes the concept of security, which no longer can be found in life-time employment, where the one job is seen as a vocation; and where you are to serve the office to which you are appointed[43]. In the new times security can only be

[42] According to a survey carried out by Statistics Denmark (Danmarks Statistik) the number of pupils not having completed a qualifying education 10 years after they left secondary school has declined by 21%. In the years 1981-2000,. at the same time more pupils chose higher education. Source: http://www.dst.dk/publikation.aspx?cid=4757&ci=true&pti=2 retrieved December 6, 2007.

[43] "Now no one is restricted by belonging to a department or wholly subject to the boss's authority, for all boundaries may be transgressed through the power of projects". "Another seductive aspect of neo-management is the proposal that everyone should develop themselves personally" (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:90).

brought about as increases in a person's market attractiveness (internally or externally), employment relations are transitory and tend to follow the trend of private relations. Here the nuclear family is under pressure[44] and family life and organisational life sometimes even become inseparable. As Karen Legge (Legge 1999) notes, contemporary organisational life can be represented by two different metaphors: the market and the community. In the market metaphor, humans become customers, commodities and resources and in the community metaphor humans are portrayed as members of teams and families, respectively. These images of organisational life coexist and are overlaying, but with very different implications. When the organisation takes on the role of the family, the discourse of love and care common in the family is given specific propitious conditions. Legge paints a family portrait suggesting the role of the father (fulfilled by management) in control of the children (non-managerial employees) and with the HR function playing the motherly image of the gobetween reconciling matters and making ends meets. Without discussing the politics of the gendered language further, she recognises this to be a somewhat rigid hierarchical and idealised model of organisational life, albeit still very common (Legge 1999:253). While paternalism might prevail, one could ask what this organisational family portrait might look like in the present era of civil partnerships, LAT families[45], mass divorce, single-moms and –dads. Or as Steyaert and Janssens (Steyaert & Janssens 1999b) ask, what might these "non-traditional" families look like seen from the children's perspective rather than from that of the parents? Perhaps the question should not be how the self can be contemplated as a family member in organisational life, but how the familiar ideology of competence constitutes a subject centred on itself? The transitions in the notion of the employee and the flexibility of the labour market spur a need for innovations in terms of new ways of organising work and management. Boltanski and Chiapello point to three processes 1) lean firms working in networks with multiple participants, 2) organising work in the form of teams or projects, intent on customer satisfaction,

[44] In Denmark as in most other west European countries more children than ever are born outside marriage and an increasing number now live with only one parent, and as a consequence the number of half siblings is rising. However where the number of divorces were gradually increasing in Denmark from 1991-2005, in 2006 the trend changed so now the number of divorces out of every 1,000 marriages has declined from 14.2%– 13.3%. Source: Eurostat Yearbook 2003 and Statistics Denmark Marriages and Divorces 2006, no. 205, 11 May 2007.

[45] Living Apart Together (abbreviation: LAT) is a term for couples who, whilst committed to each other, decide to have separate homes rather than one shared residence. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_Apart_Together, retrieved 13 June 2007.

and 3) a general mobilisation of workers thanks to their leaders vision (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:73).

Lean thinking, better management?

Especially the process of *lean thinking* (Womack & Jones 1996) seems to be spreading to all corners of the labour market on these years[46]. Originally developed as a Japanese car production method for Toyota in the 1950's, designed to trim production processes and supply chain management, *lean management* has now spread across all sectors public and private and all professional fields (Womack & Jones 1996;Womack, Jones, & Ross 1990). Thus, I was not really surprised when shadowing one of the teachers' consultants in a Centre for Higher Education, and found myself discussing the possibilities of introducing lean into childcare. As one can imagine, the idea of lean production as a general metaphor and method for children's upbringing and socialisation met critique among the pre-school teachers attending the masters training course. After we had discussed the principles in Lean thinking, one manager from a day care centre said with all signs of disgust:

> How can anyone even talk about the little child in that way, it could be our own flesh and blood, "production", "customer value", "pull factors", "perfection", isn't every child unique and perfect from birth?

But when the consultants directed their attention towards the economic aspects of running a childcare centre, asking how effective their procedures for recruiting and training personnel was, the number of rules and the number of "unnecessary" movements made for any small daily procedure, then the atmosphere and scepticism towards *lean* slowly changed, and some saw the positive aspects of this approach. Most interesting, and perhaps a possible explanation of why lean is being discussed widely in virtually any sector from health care to food industry, is that this debate is no longer about a specific product but about the *methods* and *mindset* which rule any kind of work. Thus, Boltanski and Chiapello (2007:73) point to key organising principles like: "just-in-time, total quality, the process of continual improvement (Kaizen), autonomous production teams" etc. With a concept borrowed from social scientist Robert Cooper the world of management

[46] Though Lean by no means is a new concept it keeps being refined. In a recent Danish book on Lean implementation (Christiansen, Ahrengot & Leck 2006), the authors call it: The first Danish book with cases and examples of how Lean has been implemented during the last five years in different workplaces.

has become a world of human production systems.[47] By elaborating on how human agency connects and disconnects, Cooper is able to show how management is part of a larger system of movement. Hence the verb "to manage" is said to derive from Italian *maneggiare*, meaning to handle. Of course, this is a special view on social organising, one that we shall explore later on, but most importantly the idea of focusing upon continuous improvement and seeking to "trim" the organisation to its core business prominently features in the management literature of the 1990s, but is equally present in today's public working life. One of the ways in which this "trimming" process is thought to be implemented is through the use of projects and the organising through networks which have drastic consequences on (work) life. According to Hardt & Negri and Boltanski & Chiapello social life will no longer be bound to the firm belief that employees possess series of rights and duties, or that the labour market can best be described in terms of a wage-earning class spending their entire career inside large hierarchical bodies and where professional activity is clearly separated from private life (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007:104). Rather, the flexibility of the new world is one in which networks and projects prosper along with the traditional social structures.

Networks and projects

Boltanski and Chiapello assign a whole chapter declaring the coming of the *projective city* (2007:103ff) and Hardt & Negri (2003:281ff) talk about *network production* as transforming the very ways in which we communicate and cooperate in and between work spaces. One of the sources cited by Boltanski & Chiapello (2007:73) is Rosabeth Moss Kanter who, in her 1989 bestseller *When giants learn to dance*, argues that companies outsource some services, turn to suppliers that are specialists in a given field, and thus reduce the need for managing activities that are largely unrelated to their core business. Moreover, they convert some service departments into "businesses units" that compete with external suppliers to sell their services both inside and outside the company. This situation is very close to a story I was told at a meeting with the steering committee at the Danish Road Directorate 12 January 2005.

[47] "I have preferred to call the different systems of social organisation – from factories to supermarkets, universities to professional disciplines, newspapers to television companies *human production systems* whose general purpose is to recreate and reproduce meaningful categories and narratives of thought out of the blizzard of noise and mutterings at the degenerate core of human community" (Cooper 2001b:328).

For the past five to ten years the Danish Road Directorate has invested substantial resources in defining a new role for a group of people who manage orders, contacts and contracts with sub-suppliers. For the organisation which is responsible for building and maintaining the Danish road system, it has proved much more effective to hire local sub-contractors and consultants specialised in such activities than organising them themselves. One of the reasons is that workers and resources are needed for a fairly short period of time, when the building process is running. In a great number of building projects it is much easier to hire a subcontractor, than to employ a great number of people only to fire them after the project has been completed. In effect the role of the Road Directorate and its engineers has changed from building roads, bridges, etc., to monitoring a large number of sub-contractors. This increases demands for project competencies, such as insight into EU law, contract governance, supervision, negotiation (Danish Road Directorate, 2005). The heavy use of out-sourcing has implied changes in organising principles:

> Many of the Road Directorate's tasks are solved in project teams. And that is challenging – also organisationally. The professional co-ordinator stresses that many employees are predominantly project-organised and undertaking a number of department functions. In effect they are expected to meet both department objectives and project objectives – and often simultaneously. Sometimes it is quite difficult at the same time to prioritise and balance the two objectives. Therefore, much is done to enable the participants to discuss what this responsibility entails in terms of actions – also when they are busy and when colleagues are sulky because one or several employees are involved in long-term projects. In such cases it is also the task of the professional co-ordinator to ensure co-ordination and follow-up (Danish Road Directorate, 2004).

Project management is introduced as a way of supplementing the basic divisionalised organisational structure. This is a way of specialising and training members of the organisation in particular fields, enabling them to develop in-depth knowledge of high value to the company. But as the example above and the literature show, there are problems with this project or matrix organisation. Role conflicts and uncertainty as to which projects to prioritise can create tensions and are not easily resolved, when resources are scarce (Johnson, Gill 1993:10). Boltanski and Chiapello seem to sum up the situation of the Danish Road Directorate when they point to prevalent changes in organisational relations as the standard image of the modern firm. This is a form with a slim, or lean, core

surrounded by a conglomerate of suppliers, sub-contractors, service providers, temporary personnel making it possible to vary the workforce according to business level.

> Organisations are evolving towards a model made up of three series of elements, a permanent central core composed of managerial personnel, and possessors of what is called strategic *savoir faire* (i.e. which cannot be delegated outside); a network form of organisation, rather than one with the traditional hierarchies; and a series of satellite supplier subsystems (firms or individuals working from a distance), with various certainty of business and employment (HEC 1994 in Boltanski & Chiapello 2007:74).

One of the other institutions in my study, the Centre for Higher Education (CHE) seems to support this new model of organising work as from its establishment it was organised around three different forms: Colleges, Knowledge Centres and Atlas Houses. The colleges undertake basic, supplementary and further education and training of teachers and pre-school teachers, and are the corner stones of the CHE placed in six different physical locations. The Knowledge Centres are network-based collaborations focusing on strategic areas of competence (i.e. IT & Learning, Inclusion and Exclusion, Didactics in natural science) performed by one to three knowledge centre consultants, working part time. When I began working with the CHE, there were five knowledge centres and three additional ones were on the drawing board, the intention being that knowledge centres should be established and closed according to the core competencies and the needs of the organisation. The knowledge centres' existence relies upon state funding combined with the earnings of the consultants for specified periods of time. Finally the Atlas Houses are informal project networks gathered around a common theme shared by a number of employees (i.e. intercultural competence, or Danish as second language). The Atlas Houses are virtual in the sense that they have no physical presence but meetings are held on a regular basis at shifting locations, depending on the participants.

Teams and second order orderers

According to the management literature, these changes in the structuring principles of the organisation (projects, matrix and network forms), affect the demands raised on the employees as well. Today they should be

> organised in multi-tasked teams (for they are more skilled, more flexible, more inventive and more autonomous than the specialist departments of the 1960s). Their real employer is the customer, and they have a co-ordinator, not a boss. (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:74).

The ideal team is by definition innovative, multiple, open to the outside world, and focused on the customer's desires. Teams are a locus of self-organisation and self-monitoring (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:75). One crucial point is that all this autonomy and self-organised action is not let loose in order for it to bounce off in all possible (and impossible) directions. Control, direction and government are not abolished. On the contrary, all the self-organised, creative human beings on whom performance now depends must be guided, but without reverting to the "hierarchical bosses" of yesteryear. This is where leaders, coaches, visions, projects and teams come into the picture.

> Because the modern organization consists of knowledge specialists, it has to be an organization of equals, of colleagues and associates. No knowledge ranks higher than another; each is judged by its contribution to the common task rather than by inherent superiority or inferiority. Therefore the modern organization cannot be an organization of boss and subordinate. It must be organized as a team (Peter Drucker, quoted in Boltanski & Chiapello 2007:75).

Thanks to the shared meaning of vision, everyone knows what to do without being told. This process also spurs the rising of a new class of workers. The coach and the "professional co-ordinator" mentioned in the story from the Danish Road Directorate are specific examples. The latter has experienced a fundamental shift in responsibilities, a change that fits perfectly the transformation provided by the management of vision. The professional co-ordinator or "orderer", as they call them in the Danish Road Directorate, does not really need to know how to build roads, as was the case earlier. Today, these highly skilled people, often engineers, need to *unlearn* a lot of the detailed specifics of road building (i.e. construction techniques, the slope of roads or the ingredients in gravel and proper mixture herof), in which they have been trained for years and years. Instead they have to learn a great deal about contract management, EU legislation and negotiation techniques in order to manage the sub-contractors and competently perform the role of orderer. Hence, one may say that they become "orderers of a second order" further away from the physical product they used to produce and the profession in

which they were originally trained. In the name of the ideology of competence, such processes are dubbed as liberational.

Liberating management, calculating competence

One of the mega-trends that Boltanski and Chiapello see as a continuation of the 1960s practice onto the 1990s is the issue of liberation. But while in the 1960s the management literature centres on liberating *cadres* from the constraints of the bureaucracy, in the 1990s all wage-earners are to enjoy the power of liberation that goes with responsibility, and freedom of choice over one's own career and working life. This leads to critical comments like:

> The irresistible tendency towards freedom of choice in all domains fuels, together with a growing individualism, a demand for personal autonomy and its possibility. The era of adjutants is over. Not only do subordinates no longer accept authority, but superiors themselves are less and less capable of assuming it precisely when there is a need for more discipline to respond to the complexity of the environment's demands (Crozier 1989 cited in Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:70).

The underlying assumption of this liberation movement seems as has been hinted that competencies no longer refer to a system of jurisdiction, but to a much broader context, albeit still embracing the individual. Managers or employees are granted authority, respect and competence according to their bodies of knowledge and especially to their ability to employ this knowledge. For it to be judged relevant, knowledge must be employed strategically in actions that *match* the demands of the organisational environment. Such demands change, implying that knowledge may become irrelevant, and individuals must develop new potentials (not always strictly professional, but also personal) or they risk being deemed incompetent, inexperienced and redundant.

In this way competencies become closely connected to the *performance* of work and when analysing what competencies an organisation is in need of, one approach is to perform a gap-analysis. The logic of such an analysis is a simple *calculation*:

> What we are supposed to do
> (minus) What we can do / are capable of doing
> Equals What we are needing
>
> (Gringer 2002:16, my translation)

In sum, the the argument among these key management texts is that the concept of competence has changed from being part of the juridical discourse granted by the state, the law, rank, seniority, etc., to become part of a *performative* discourse based on actions, valuations, and what is judged appropriate according to certain "objective" measures. The genesis and rise of this new competence ideology focus on human *performance*, which is to be calculated and measured so as to guide managers and employees in improving productivity and efficiency. According to Hermann (2003) the novel notion of competence leads to direct confrontation with the notion of formal qualifications almost to the same degree as concepts like self-development and life-long learning might be said to prevail over "enlightenment" and strict educational methods of previous times (e.g. reformatory schools)[48]. Furthermore competence, as indicated, is linked to a number of historical processes entailing the establishment of management as a discipline and changing development in organisational forms. Seen as a whole, these transitions in subjectivity and society, mentioned by the management texts, seem to suggest the coming of a new social character; one that promotes change over stability, coaching, teams and projects over hierarchical bosses and functions. But what might be the consequences of these transitions as a whole? This is the question we turn to next.

A new social character?

The intent of exploring transitions in subjectivity, i.e. the roles of manager, specialist, coach and shop steward, has been to identify the various ways in which a new regime of competence might be emerging. Former fixed points of reference, i.e. management having the right to hire and distribute work, shop stewards being in opposition to management, safeguarding their colleagues interests, and the

[48] Historically three kinds of facilities were especially associated with the "reformatory" label: reform schools for juveniles, institutions for women, and institutions for young adult male convicts. New York established the first American facility for juvenile delinquents in 1825, roughly when the first adult penitentiaries appeared. Other states soon established similar institutions. At first boys and girls were housed in the same facilities. Later girls were diverted to separate institutions. Delinquency was loosely defined. Many of the boys had committed criminal offences, but many of the girls had simply become pregnant out of wedlock. The working idea, borrowed from England and Europe, was that young delinquents were the victims of inadequate guidance and discipline. Source: US History Encyclopedia,http://www.answers.com/reformatory+school?cat=biz-fin, retrieved December 10 2007.

employee's subjectivity being anchored in the standards of his education and profession all seem to collapse or dissolve into new ones.

Boltanski and Chiapello note that the French term *cadre* to an increasing extent is substituted for *manager* since the 1960s. This change in terms is not merely one of words. With new terms come new tasks. According to the regime suggested by Boltanski and Chiapello managers do not seek to supervise or give orders; and employees do not await instructions from management before acting. They have understood that such roles are outmoded. They become "team leaders", "catalysts", "visionaries", "coaches", and "sources of inspiration". Managers can no longer rely on hierarchical legitimacy, but in the framework of their projects, they must get all sorts of people to work together, people over whom they have little formal power, which is why managers today must be "intuitive", "humanists", "inspired", "generalists", as opposed to "narrow specialists", and "creative". In short the *manager* is a network man (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:78).

Maccoby (2002) reports of a similar transition when he argues for an *interactive character* replacing a *bureaucratic character* in organisations (see figure). Thus he has it that where the bureaucratic character relies on ideals of stability, hierarchy, loyalty and moralism, the interactive character seeks ideals like innovation, network, free agency and tolerance.

Organisational Social Character

	Bureaucratic	*Interactive*
Ideology and ideals	Stability Hierarchy/ autonomy Organisational loyalty Moralism	Innovation Networks/ independence Free agency Tolerance
Social character	Inner directed Identification with paternal authority Methodological, cautious, saving Market-controlling bureaucracies	Other directed Self-developer/ self-marketing Innovative, experimental, consumer Entrepreneurial companies
Socio-Economic base	Slow changing technology National markets Life long employment Social male wage earner Social male wage earner	Fast changing technology Global markets Uncertain employment Dual wage earners Dual wage earners

Source: (Maccoby 2002:36)

Based largely on a psychoanalytical framework (Erikson and From) Maccoby suggest that since the 1960s a new social character has been evolving in the western world, with particular emphasis on americanised culture:

> To become more productive, organizations began to redesign work. New modes of work required not only new skills but also new values. A new organisational ideology emphasized innovation, interactive networks, customer responsiveness, teamwork and flexibility. The economic organizations creating the greatest wealth had to become interactive instead of bureaucratic (Maccoby 2002:36).

The problem for Maccoby seems to be how we can explain and deal with the transitions that modern capitalist societies experience. Though he seems to point to an overall transition from one state "the bureaucratic" to another "the interactive" he is not sure whether this will lead to outcomes for the better or worse. Hence he

discusses a number of positive life cycle development trends in which for instance coaching and facilitating replacing parenting and protecting might be a positive generative stage (Maccoby 2002:42). A change in initiative from "knowing your place, learning your role" to "interpersonal competence, teamwork" might also be seen as a fruitful positive development trend. However, with new development trends, new development problems arise. Where obsessive conformity might be a problem for the bureaucratic character; the interactive character is said to struggle with lack of boundaries and impulsiveness.

> Lacking a sense of stability in organizations and relationships, he or she becomes more concerned with discovering and expressing an authentic self as opposed to being what others want him or her to be (Maccoby 2002:43).

In this other example of the ideology of competence we are witnessing a transition where the character living within and helping maintain relative stable structures is increasingly supplemented with one participating in endless processes, the outcome of which is focussed on self-development. This development of the self is one based on uncertainty and doubt. The point of all the coaching, demand for innovation and experimenting may seem like an attractive world, but it creates an ideal of second order subjectivity, the competence to be competent, the ability to constantly see yourself as unfinished, not yet fully trained. Some of the authors mentioned in this chapter see this as a truly bad situation, a story of resentment. For instance Andersen asks:

> When openness, preparedness for change, and dialogue are articulated as competencies, does that mean that personality traits such as being introvert, careful, meticulous, and shy become observable as incompetence? Is that desirable? (Andersen 2003b:30).[49]

Though competence, it seems, has become a new ideology, a contributor to the Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser) of our time, can we then conclude that this development is to the disadvantage of the employee and society in general? I would say not. It might promote a strong sense of DIY (do-it-yourself) subjectivity, or as the Danish rock band *Disneyland After Dark* sings: Helpyourselfish. And it might also be true that what we are witnessing is new

[49] Andersen is not alone on this. The works of Richard Sennett and Zygmunt Bauman display similar emotional identity feelings. Sennett calls his 1998 best seller *The Corrosion of Character* and as Baumann notes in his foreword to *Liquid Love*: "This book is dedicated to the risks and anxieties of living together, and apart, in our liquid modern world (Bauman 2003:xiii).

forms of control emerging. Here I would agree with Boltanski and Chiapello, that bureaucratic control may be *overlaid* by a market control, not *replaced* by it[50]. But to claim that competence creates an intrinsic sense of guilt and has become the sacred state church of our time, seems to me to be too pessimistic a view, leading to the determinism of which both Althusser and Foucault were (unfairly) accused. Subjectivity, when actualised by the ideology of competence is not deterministic. It is not only something that is imposed on employees, something done to them. Employees also play an active part in the making of subjectivity as they reflect on and reproduce their social world (Knights&McCabe 2000:424). Hence, we need to study relations, how the small and particular relates to the overall and general.

I've been bounced around
But I'm still standing up
I've been so far down
That my ears they popped
And it was then I knew
By all the wrongs you do
That if you can't be good -
Be careful!
To achieve your happiness
On this terrestrial ball…
Gotta have a clean conscience
But even better: None at all!!
But if you can't be good -
Be careful yeah!

It's when a pat on the back becomes a slap in your face now...
Don't look back just helpyourselfish.
- D.A.D.

Summing up

In this chapter I have explored a number of images of competence as they are portrayed in key texts and by scholars with relevance for studies of organisation. The texts have not been chosen for their explicit dealing with "organisation studies" as a discipline, but rather because they each contribute to the assemblage of present work life with a view to the historical trends and tendencies affecting the way in which competence actualises subjectivity. The texts and arguments were chosen for their illuminative and interpretive force, showed in stories from the organisations that I have studied. One (critical reader) may argue that Hardt & Negri, Boltanski & Chiapello and others deal with alterations in capitalism, not competence. But as has been my point and intent throughout the text dealing with present day capitalism inevitably also implies issues of competence. In fact, competence (and the changes in this concept) can be seen as a key marker in the

[50] "For its part the outsourcing of a large number of operations, either by recourse to subcontracting or through the autonomisation of sectors of large firms, which are treated as autonomous profit centres competing with the outside, has made it possible to replace the hierarchical control by a market type of control. This is less directly associated with the

changing conditions of capitalist work life. Here competence emerges in the shape of new working conditions, changes in roles, new organisational forms, etc. Thus, the quote with which I began this chapter makes new sense. It continues as follows:

> A phrase by Marx is pertinent here: Man produces man. How should it be understood? In my judgment, what ought to be produced is not man as nature supposedly designed him, or as his essence ordains him to be – we need to produce something that doesn't exist yet, without being able to know what it will be (Foucault 2002b:275).

The ideology of competence suggests the coming of a new man, a competent man, that we ourselves take part in producing; it is a certain perspective on subjectivity which reveals itself throughout the search of the competent. No doubt, that competence adds on to the idea of the subject as a construct. Subjectivity in relation to competence is performative and is thus from the outset undecidable[51] but it is neither indefinite nor indeterminate. This relation is searchable and diagnosable and deals with calculation. But how will it be searchable and diagnosable? And how do individuals respond to this ideology? Using the terms suggested by Althusser, Lacan and Foucault we might ask are subjects completely interpellated? Do they identify with the signifiers of competence? Are the subjectivated? To be able to assess these questions in more detail we turn in the next chapter to a discussion of how one *diagnoses the present*. This diagnosis will then act as the analytical strategy which I will follow in the rest of the study.

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dominant-dominated couple, rejected by contemporary authors, for it seems to refer to a contractually free relation between two formally equal parties (Boltanski& Chiapello 2007:82).

[51] "One of Derrida's best-known texts, "Plato's Pharmacy", analyses the ancient Greek pharmakon as treated by Plato in the Phaedrus (Derrida 1961: 61-171). Derrida's purpose in this exemplary dissection is to show how philosophy doctors its subject matter in the interests of a privileged point of view; in this respect philosophy simply exemplifies the bias that runs through all tests that assert or look for "meanings" or "formalisms". The word pharmakon is intrinsically "undecidable"; in ancient Greece it meant both remedy and poison, good and bad rolled into one" (Cooper 1989a:180). It might not be a coincidence that the main character in Robert Pirsig's (1991) Lila, living on a boat always in search of dynamic qualities, bears the same name, Phaedrus.

"I would like to say something about the function of any diagnosis concerning what today is. It does not consist in a simple characterization of what we are but, instead – by following the lines of fragility in the present – in managing to grasp why and how that which is might no longer be that which is"

Michel Foucault (2000c:449f)

IV Diagnosing the Present

In Chapter II I briefly introduced the concept of diagnosis as a way of analysing practice, dealing with the question of "who are we, now?" Implicitly chapter three can be read as an analysis which through the search for the ideology of competence came up with several possible answers to the question of who we are today. In this chapter I shall extend and make explicit the diagnosis of the present as my *analytical strategy* for studying the performative power of competence. Here an analytical strategy is seen as a strategy for how one observes; how the object of a study is constituted as an object[52]. Earlier in my note on scientific nature by reference to Hastrup (2003:402) I identified the analytical strategy as a "plan or criterion for what is to count as material and how it is selected". To address the issue of criterion I begin by discussing the gap between theory and practice and review science as an anarchistic enterprise, a concept I draw from the works of Paul Feyerabend. I then go into more detail about *what is a diagnosis*, what it is for Foucault and what it is for me and provide an example by pointing to the event of Healthy Resource Management. Finally, by exploring Robert Cooper's notion of *institutional thinking* I discuss how organisations come to think in certain institutionalised ways. Viewing competence as a *social technology* is a productive way in which we

[52] By taking point of departure in an analytical strategy, the study defers itself from the view that theory, methodology and method can be distinct and separable. These are not abandoned, but fuse and reemerge in the practice of the analytical strategy. As has been noted by (Esmark, Bagge Laustsen & Åkerstrøm Andersen 2005:11ff) this way of accounting for methodology and method is in keeping with the poststructuralist idea that the symbolic level is basic to our possibilities of accessing the social world and most explicitly formulated by Lacan in his trichotomy between the Real, the symbolic and the imaginary but is also found in both Althusser and Foucault.

can question the way institutions unthinkingly think about competence in terms of activities for separate entities, i.e. individuals or groups.

On the theory and practice gap

Concepts create, Deleuze says. Events, language, reality, are all made up by concepts. And as such, every concept consists of a paradox (Deleuze 2006:166). In the previous chapter I presented competence as one such example. Competence is paradoxical in the sense that it promotes a calculable future (it predicts desirable forms of subjectivity) and holds a performative force (it produces a sense of uncertainty, undecidability, reflexivity, and never ending search). The discussion of the ideology of competence is hence an account of or a way of questioning our present work life situation. Networks, projects and ever moving changeable subjectivities are, as we saw, all important features in this situation. If the subject is only observable as movement, when competence is actualised, and if competence itself is performative, it will be impossible to locate the competent subject in any kind of simple or fixed structure. We will have to develop a way of talking, seeing and studying the mutual creation of competence and subjectivity, which does not begin with entities, essences or structures. The ambition of this chapter is to account for the study's approach to this problem.

Scholars, consultants and companies alike often find themselves in the dilemma of being caught up between re-presentation and experimentation. The problem of whether we are to trust our senses and simply go looking for competence or rather should let us guide by reason and equip ourselves with the most precise rational definition echoes an age-old, lengthy debate in the history of science and philosophy from John Locke (1632-1704) and onwards. C. Wright Mills wrote in his *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) about a spectrum that at the one end had abstracted empiricism and at the other end grand theory. What Mills saw as a major problem to sociology in the 20th century was that too many scholars in his time either gave very specific accounts of large-scale quantitative studies or engaged in building grand theories, with overarching concepts which contributed very little in terms of how we are to make sense of the way people live their lives, they lacked sociological imagination.

In the previous chapter I sketched a history of competence aiming at an intermediate position (according to Mills spectrum) with which I arrived at my

diagnosis of the present. The "position" operates in terms of the analytical strategy by pointing to relays or relations working with assemblages of theories and empirical fragments. Theory here is not a set of rules or regulations to be followed instrumentally, neither is practice that in which we try out or test our theoretical assumptions, rather:

> Practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another. Representation no longer exists; there is only action – theoretical action and practical action which serve as relays and form networks (Foucault 1977b:206f).

Hence, the role of the researcher is not to distance himself from the object of study, but to take active part in the formation of it, the production of knowledge and truths; the tensions and struggles. The researcher is not an innocent observer, but plays an important part in figurational games of truth, power and knowledge. To clarify the consequences of this approach, an example from one of my institutions, the Centre for Higher Education (CHE), may suffice. From the outset the competence programme in the CHE was aimed at studying action learning as a lever for individual learning and organisational change. As it developed it became clear to me that the programme revealed mechanisms of project work. To further explore the characteristics of project work I conducted follow-up interviews, performed after the action learning project had ended. The point was twofold. First, the object of study emerged in action and might change, as the programme evolved. Second, the analytical strategy generated a unique analysis bound to the specific practice in which it is conducted, and might draw on methods accepted in this practice.

The shift in study object in the CHE (from action learning to project work) is of great interest to me, as it seems to underline a relation between theory, method and practice as a co-constituting and constantly evolving process. Thus, this study serves neither to provide descriptive, nor prescriptive accounts but to develop what may be called an *anarchistic enterprise*.

Science as an anarchistic enterprise

The production of knowledge behind this thesis will be easier to relate to if one sees science as an anarchistic enterprise rather than any law-and-order science. Feyerabend has developed such a view in stating that "We may advance science by proceeding counterinductively" (Feyerabend 1979:29). In commenting on the

debate between the rationalist position of his friend Imre Lakatos and his own, Feyerabend famously claimed that *anything goes*, by which he meant to provide a ground for scientific progress that does not inhibit progress but on the other hand does not fall into the rationalistic trap of setting up binding principles (1979:14).

It is worth noting that Feyerabend's arguments *against method* was written to his friend (and declared rationalist) Lakatos, with the intent of provoking and stimulating debate. Contrary to what has been claimed Feyerabend's so-called *anarchistic theses* can be seen as more than wicked phrases and attempts to provoke, indeed it seems reasonable (sic) to suggest that they are part of his independent scientific position (Lakatos, Feyerabend 1999:x). This of course is not to say that Feyerabend rejects progress or reason, but in the foreword of the book he never lived to finish *Conquest of Abundance* he does suggest a special way of working with concepts and analyses:

> I avoid "systematic" analyses: the elements hang together beautifully, but the argument itself is from outer space, as it were, unless it is connected with the lives and interests of individuals or special groups. Of course, it is already so connected, otherwise it would not be understood, but the connection is concealed, which means that strictly speaking, a "systematic" analysis is a fraud. So why not avoid the fraud by using stories right away? (Feyerabend 1999:vii).

Feyerabend goes on to wonder why it is that so many people look for surprises behind events? Why they are dissatisfied with what they see and why the hidden world is deemed more real, than the world from which they began (Feyerabend 1999:vii)? His main idea is that people reduce the abundance of possibilities that surround and confuse them, and with his book he intends to emphasise the essential ambiguity of all concepts. "Without ambiguity, no change", he says. It could be said that Feyerabend does his best to be as systematically unsystematic as possible, yet paying very close attention to and suggesting innovative, anarchistic "solutions" to the problems of how we should account for phenomena like "method" (1979), "scientific knowledge" (1982), "progress" and "development" (1988) and "reality" (1999).

To take up Feyerabend's idea of doing science as an anarchistic enterprise I point explicitly to one theme: Foucault's project of diagnosing the present. My diagnosis of the present is closely connected to Foucault's concept of dispositif (apparatus),

which I earlier analysed as a key element in Foucault's take on subjectivity. Thus, by the term diagnosis of the present I join and draw upon Raffnsøe and Gudmand-Høyer (2005) in pointing out that the dispositif has been a neglected, but most important category from which we are to understand Foucault's analytical practice. Nevertheless I maintain the term diagnosis of the present since I want to point to the active process of diagnosing society and organisational life in the here-and-now. It allows me to illustrate the process I have been through studying organisations both as a consultant who was one kind of diagnostician and as a researcher reflecting on and diagnosing my role as consultant. Further it seems appropriate since I wish to extend Foucault's view and supplement my analytical strategy with other thinkers. Though I do wish to use the term a diagnosis of the present in a very specific way, one that deviates from what historians have suggested, I do not claim that my use of the diagnosis of the present is new, thus Roth back in (1981) identified "Foucault's history of the present" as a general theme that straddles his work.

What is a diagnosis of the present?

In a number of interviews Foucault (1996, 2000c) refers to what he calls diagnostic knowledge. Often this theme arises, when he is asked about the role of science today, or the relation between researcher and the researched. By pointing to the concept of diagnosis, Foucault exerts a special take on the problem of research credibility and how one as a researcher could relate to one's field of study. This diagnostic activity might not differ in content from that practiced within the field of medicine, but its consequences are surely different. In medical practice, for instance, it is often assumed that once we have the proper diagnose, we have the most important tool for determining the corresponding cure, opting out or at least subordinating all other possible solutions. To diagnose the present has, as Hansen & Kristensen (2006) note, nothing to do with trend analysis, hunting the "zeitgeist" or predicting what will happen in the future. A diagnosis of the present concerns how a thing has become Something (and not other things), how matters of course are established as facts. According to Foucault to diagnose is not about eliminating possibilities or wiping out differences, but instead to understand how differences are produced, even multiplied. One might say that Foucault is a prime exemplar of Feyerabend's call for performing science counterinductively, in the sense that he takes great pain in looking for discrepancies, ruptures and fragmentations in the organised, well-established and taken-for-granted. It might not be a coincidence

that Bouchard (1977b) in his selection of essays and interviews with Foucault, *"Language, Counter-memory, Practice,"* plays on the counter-word and describes Foucault as a thinker of the opposite. But here, to be a thinker of the opposite is not simply to analyse negations. Thus, as Bouchard stresses, counter-memory works by "the affirmation of the particularities that attend any practice", this with the intent of pointing to "activity that permits new practices to emerge" (Foucault 1977b:9). *"Language, Counter-memory, Practice"* is a name of an action that defines itself…in the multiplication of meaning" (op.cit.). In this context it is important to note that Foucault does not provide "alternatives" in the sense feel free to choose, A or B. On the contrary, Foucault in his studies of the mad, but also of the criminal, sexual and psychotic subject, stresses an examination of how the notion of the norm comes about. He tries to provide the grounding for understanding how norms are products of a given time, thus extending normality. Foucault asks the general historical question of how the perception of illness displaces itself from being the opposite of health to an anormality:

> By diagnostic knowledge I mean, in general, a form of knowledge that defines and determines differences. For example, when a doctor makes a diagnosis of tuberculosis, he does it by determining the differences that distinguish someone sick with tuberculosis from someone sick with pneumonia or any other disease. In this sense diagnostic knowledge operates within a certain objective field defined by the sickness, the symptoms, etc. (Foucault 1996:95).

One may hold it problematic to compare the researcher with the doctor. However, it makes good sense when the researcher does not try to destine himself from the field, but take active part in it and in the process of diagnosing. For Foucault, it is crucial to understand the forces at play in this "objective field", which he at other times calls rationality (always situational and specific). To be able to see and analyse this field might be what the diagnosis of the present is all about. This type of knowledge goes well beyond a strictly pathological sphere. Indeed, it is closely linked to the making of differences and the finding of symptoms in almost any kind of intellectual enterprise. While in a later interview with Trombadori (1991) he emphasise that we would do well to ask ourselves what today is, he is careful in pointing out that to diagnose the present is much more than to give a simple description, hence the opening quote of this chapter. Instead he characterises a state of examination in which the production of differences through virtual fractures, ruptures and thresholds are at play, and so the intellectual must undertake

the perhaps somewhat cryptic task of analysing how "that which is might no longer be that which is". Importantly if one is to follow Foucault, one does not need to invent new ways of producing empirical accounts. Foucault believes himself to make use of the most conventional methods: demonstration, proof of historical matters, textual references, citation of authorities, drawing connections between texts and facts, suggesting schemes of intelligibility, offering different types of explanations (Foucault 2002b:242).

The problem of studying practice

One might say that Foucault's books should be verifiable in the same way as any other book of history. But Foucault's aim is not to satisfy professional historians. Instead he says his interest lies in constructing himself so as to "invite others to share an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed" (Foucault 2002b:242). Foucault is very careful about explaining this. He states that his goal is that once we are finished reading a text or a book of his we should have established a new relationship to the subject that he calls into scrutiny. In this specific sense, I share this ambition. Whether this relationship, the experience you have by reading the text, is true in an absolute sense is not what counts. Foucault seems to join Feyerabend in arguing that an experience is always fiction. It is something that we fabricate ourselves. The important thing is what we do with those fabrications, and what they make us do. This could give the impression of a researcher almost careless about how one should go about the production of data. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the interview mentioned above, Foucault explains the consequences of his approach to the truth of his data:

> The first is that I don't depend on a continuous and systematic body of background data; the second is that I haven't written a single book that was not inspired, at least in part, by a direct personal experience. … The formulation of a scientific discourse is not situated above history or off to the side: It's as much a part of history as a battle or the invention of a steam engine, or an epidemic. Of course, these are not the same types of events but they *are* all events (Foucault 2002b:244,277).

> Further if we truly want to construct something new or, in any case, if we want great systems to be opened up, to challenge a certain number of real problems, we have to go and look for the data and questions where these are located. Moreover, I don't think an intellectual can raise real

> questions concerning the society in which he lives, based on nothing more than his textual, academic, scholarly research. On the contrary, one of the primary forms of collaboration with nonintellectuals consists in listening to their problems, and in working with them to formulate those problems: What do mental patients say? What is life like in a psychiatric hospital? What is the work of a hospital orderly like? How do they deal with what they experience? (Foucault 2002b:285).

Our investigations must take place amongst the people we study (intellectuals or not), there is no way of producing context specific data, from above high we have to get down to earth "connect with the lives and interests of individuals", as Feyerabend reminds us. Foucault's point is that our diagnosis of what today is; the norms, distributed rules, reinforced by institutions and the actions of people are never given, but should be seen as an historical and cultural product. Thus, when we are told through governmental policies, e.g. like the ones from the Danish State Employers Authority, which I mentioned in the initial chapter, that competence development is to be performed *systematically* and *strategically* we should pause and question how this connection, how this norm came about? Not in order to rectify or apply this or that model, but in order to be able to see what today is and in order to know how to change it. If Foucault is right in stating that we live in a regime where certain areas are legitimate for state intervention, then we should look to the carrying out of these interventions. In the following I will discuss, through an example that Foucault himself gave, what such a diagnosis might look like.

Eventalising diagnosis: Healthy Resource Management?

In a series of lectures on social medicine[53] Foucault raises the question of whether one could say that today we live in a crisis of medicine or a crisis of anti-medicine and thus in a very explicit manner addresses the theme of diagnosing the present. In these lectures Foucault takes his historical starting point with the introduction of the Beveridge Plan:

> This plan served as a model for the organization of health after the Second World War in England and in many other countries. The date of this Plan has a symbolic value. In 1942 – at the height of the World War in which 40,000,000 people lost their lives – it was not the right to life

[53] Foucault gave these lectures at the state university of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1974 (Foucault 2004).

> that was adopted as a principle, but a different and more substantial and complex right: the right to health. At a time when the war was causing large-scale destruction, society assumed the explicit task of ensuring its members not only life, but also a healthy life. (Foucault 2004:5f)

Foucault proposes that we live in a regime that sees the care of the body, corporal health, the relation between illness and health as appropriate areas of state intervention and suggests that we analyse what he calls "the birth of somatocracy" as replacing theocracy (Foucault 2004:7). By asking after the bodily production of norms, the difference between health and illness in our times, we will be able to diagnose what today is, and gain a deeper understanding of the events that have come to shape our thoughts and actions. To understand Foucault's dealing with the production of norms we must look to his mentor George Canguilhem and his prime work *the Normal and the Pathological* first published as his doctoral thesis in 1943. Canguilhem was first and foremost interested in examining how a science of the living axes its vital and humane parts, and secondly how this science covers up social ideologies, that is how the "norm" and "the normal" are constructs and not scientific facts, deeply imbued with political, economic and technological imperatives. Ultimately this addresses the question of the subject. As Foucault writes in the foreword in the later, extended 1966-edition:

> We understand why Canguilhem's thought, his work as a historian and philosopher, could have so decisive an importance in France for all those who, starting from different points of view (whether theorists of Marxism, psychoanalysis or linguistics), have tried to rethink the question of the subject (Canguilhem 1998:23).

Canguilhem seeks the question of subject formation in biological terms, i.e. by promoting a new view on error in pathology: "Disease is not a fall that one has, an attack to which one succumbs, but an original flaw in macromolecular form" (Canguilhem 1998:278). Sickness is not to be eradicated but is a part of life; it is a threshold reduction in the number of obscurities that the living organism can tolerate. Hence he has it that "some diseases can be dangerous to cure" (Canguilhem 1998:279). Life does not simply consist in adaptation but also in the ability to create. Sickness constitutes in this sense the limit for possibilities of innovation. Errors are not to be eliminated but should be seen as code of flaws, derailed and thus opening up to new possibilities. Whereas Canguilhem seeks to improve science, Foucault's interest lies in the explanatory power of finding new

possibilities in the well-known and established. Thus, in his discussion of the crisis in medicine he wants to analyse

> the totality of conditions which allowed the health of individuals to be insured, became an expense, which due to its size became one of the major items on the State budget (Foucault 2004:6).

Similarly I will be discussing the norms that allow the State to intervene, not only for the sake of corporal health, as Foucault shows, but perhaps also for the sake of corporate health. Perhaps then competence development under the rhetoric of Human Resource Management could be seen as a sheer remedy to provide a *Healthy Resource Management?* This is a way of managing that not only pays attention to linguistic practices, but just as well includes, as Foucault suggests, somatic, bodily practices.

Embodied practice

Foucault is very careful in pointing to the role the body plays (cf. his notion of corporal health) and how it relates to the diagnosis. And crucial to any diagnosis of the present, we should not see the social setting, the organisation or the state as some kind of overarching frame giving us directions to do this or that. We have to include and analyse the variety of actions and opinions including our own in the diagnosis. Intuitively, this might seem good and well. On the other hand when, as an external consultant, one attends at a meeting, one can very easily feel the pressure to come up with a meaningful way forward and thus succumb to the desire of reducing the matter to finding out who is to solve the problem. Everything seems much easier if you can point to one person and say: It is your responsibility. Make sure that this or that competence activity works. Or if we can point to the organisation saying: It is the responsibility of “management” to secure the proper conditions for a working environment, or since the “state” has granted us these rights (i.e. that every employee should have a yearly performance appraisal) we are now allowed to conclude that everyone does get the same development possibilities (if these appraisals are really held). Whereas the consultant is bound to respond to the views and meanings given by the people working in a particular practice, the scholar performing the diagnosis of the present needs to equip himself with an analytical distance, showing how acts are enacted, how rules are imposed and reasons are given as a manifestation of how this particular practice works. Though it is crucial for your detailed account of practice that you have actually been there, you do not claim to analyse reality as such.

Instead you draw up patterns, illustrations and pictures as coherent as possible (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer 2005:163). But where the diagnosis, or apparatus, may act as a guide-line, producing lines of direction, it is never determinate. The diagnosis does express a prescribing and stabilising effect, but has no fixed essence. Too many unforeseeable changes and vibrations affect the diagnosis.

Having felt on my own body how the special logic of practice works, it made perfect sense when I came across one of Foucault's interviews "questions of method" in which he says:

> In this piece of research on the prisons, as in my other earlier work, the target of analysis wasn't "institutions", "theories," or "ideology" but practices – with the aim of grasping the conditions that make these acceptable at a given moment; the hypothesis being that these types of practice are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideology, guided by pragmatic circumstances – whatever role these elements may actually play – but, up to a point, possess their own specific regularities, logic strategy, self-evidence, and "reason." It is a question of analysing a "regime of practices" – practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken-for-granted meet and interconnect. To analyze "regimes of practices" means to analyze programs of conduct that have both prescriptive effects regarding what is to be done (effects of "jurisdiction") and codifying effects regarding what is to be known (effects of "veridiction") (Foucault 2002a:225).

In my view, as in that of others (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer 2005) one common exertion runs through Foucault's entire oeuvre, namely that of analysing practice. He is not to be seen solely as a discourse theoretician using archaeology as a "method", or as a genealogist on the disciplined or the mad subject, or eventually as a theoretician on sexuality and power showing how subjects are governed[54]. Considering his life long effort and struggle with the conditions of human knowledge production, one could perhaps at best read his works as exactly that, a contribution to how the production of knowledge as a human practice works, not as discursive prehistoric phenomenon, but as bodily histories of how to diagnose the

[54] These three, the archaeological period, the genealogical period and the history of subjectivity are a common division discussed and critiqued in Foucault's work, throughout the reference literature (see Han 2002 for an example).

present. Having laid out the main characteristics of the diagnosis I still need to discuss in further detail where this diagnosis can take place, where is it to be located. But as I just briefly mentioned, to analyse practices or regimes of practices means that one has to give up the idea of finding simple location[55].

Beyond simple location

As stated, to study the mutual creation of competence and subjectivity we need a way of how not to begin our analysis with entities, essences or structures. We need to acknowledge Feyerabend's ambiguity and Foucault's (and Deleuze's) paradoxical nature of concepts. For this task, there are a number of reasons why a social technology approach is productive. First, it allows me to get beyond the question of who initiates competence development, who decides, who is to blame and so on. "Who…?" simply is an inappropriate question, when one wishes to analyse practice in a flexible manner allowing objects (and subjects) to vary in importance. Secondly, because this position allows me to study how individuals become subjectivated (Foucault 1994b) not as a result of some external collective power or something that the individual invents itself but by practices of problematisation (Foucault 1994a)[56]. Thirdly, because studying human practice by the workings of social technologies allows me to problematise, fragilise that which

[55] "Simple location" is concept coined by British philosopher and mathematician Alfred N. Whitehead, and also discussed in studies of organisation by Robert Cooper (1998). In *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead defines simple location as the idea which says that "material can be said to be *here* in space and *here* in time, or *here* in space-time, in a perfectly definite sense which does not require for its explanation any reference to other regions of space-time" Whitehead quoted in Spoelstra (2007:78). For Whitehead as for Cooper any diagnosis of movement can not take as its starting point a system of entities (and identities) with natural locations, which makes Cooper venture against the idea of formalised division of labour. We will return to this problem when discussing institutional thinking.

[56] According to Lemke (2000) Foucault introduced the notion of problematisation in order to more strongly delimit the methodological procedure of "historical nominalism" and "nominalist critique" (Foucault 1992:238) in his studies from realistic conceptions, on the one hand, and relativistic positions, on the other: "When I say that I am studying the "problematization" of madness, crime, or sexuality, it is not a way of denying the reality of such phenomena. On the contrary, I have tried to show that it was precisely some real existent in the world which was the target of social regulation at a given moment. The question I raise is this one: How and why were very different things in the world gathered together, characterized, analyzed, and treated as, for example, "mental illness"? What are the elements which are relevant for a given "problematization"? And even if I won't say that what is characterized as "schizophrenia" corresponds to something real in the world, this has nothing to do with idealism. For I think there is a relation between the thing which is problematized and the process of problematization. The problematization is an "answer" to a concrete situation which is real" (Foucault quoted in Lemke 2002:56).

is taken for granted, and follow the movements of everyday practice without a priori claiming it to be good or bad, healthy or sick. Social technologies give rise to the production processes of subjectivity, how individuals are made into workers, employees, engineers, consultants, etc. These technologies are, like Foucault's concept of Bio-power, concerned with the regulation of life, these processes repress things in order to produce things. And by using the diagnosis I am able to question, lay bare contradicting parts and to show and open up the modes of production of competence. In this sense I share the Foucauldian ambition of stating a problem, not solving or denying it.

Social technologies are important to Foucault, especially in the later parts of his work, e.g. in the lectures on *Security, Territory and Population* he held at College de France in 1978 (2007). In this respect Foucault sees the history of the apparatus as a history of social technologies. But where the history of technology traditionally (in the natural sciences) concerns the technologies we have developed over time to master the nature, the history of the social technologies concerns those technologies with which we have come to master one another (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer 2005:155). As such, all technologies are concerned with issues of government, mastery and influence. This at the same time means that they cannot be said to belong to an institution, a structure or even to be exercised by individuals. As Foucault notes with regard to power in the "Method" section in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*:

> One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (1998:93)

My intent is to take a nominalistic approach to technology, studying it as a word in the first instance. Here the work of Robert Cooper comes to mind as particularly relevant as he connects not only with Foucault but also with Heidegger, who on many accounts seems to have inspired Foucault[57].

[57] Thus, in *Return in Morality,* the last interview he gave before his death, Foucaults say: "Heidegger has always been the essential philosopher. I started reading Hegel, then Marx, and I began to read Heidegger in 1951 or 1952; then in 1952 or 1953, I no longer remember, I read Nietzsche. I still have the notes I took while reading Heidegger – I have tons of them! – and they are far more important than the ones I took on Hegel or Marx, my whole philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger" (Foucault 1996:470).

The Question Concerning Technology

While, the first part of "techno-logy" techné derives from ancient Greek, and means the art of making present, of bringing something to realisation (Cooper 1993) the last part logos points at thought, consciousness and awareness, how we think about techné, what signification we ascribe to specific techniques. Thus technology can simply mean to create. But, as Cooper (1993) points out, in the modern use of the term, technology has got a strange twist. Today we stress the immediacy of use and the constant availability. If we turn to Heidegger we are able to see techné as the art of revealing that which does not reveal itself. In his *Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger diagnoses his present as an age of technology (Heidegger 1977:27). In this age, we are given the challenge of taking into possession being in a calculable and regulated way. The act of *possession* aims at finding being's *position*, and so Heidegger has it that technology is a certain type of latent production or procedure. Heidegger uses the term *ge-stell* (en-framing) to denote the modern constructions of cause and effect in which our thinking, actions and cognition are bound to take place (Heidegger 1977). But technology does not entail all possibilities of production. As Cooper notes "the world is made *still* in order that it can be more easily manipulated or transformed into a stock of movable resources" (Cooper 1993:283). Thus we have to get beyond technology as instrument. As long as we stay at the level of the instrument we are bound to the conception of mastering the technology, and do not see its nature or functioning (Heidegger 1977:62). For this study it is important to stress that technologies can change and thus do not have one essence, but are designed with a certain type of rationale or functioning, which makes us think and act in specific ways. Hence technology promotes a certain kind of being or becoming beyond that of the instrument – a becoming of creation – and a specific trait in this creation is causal production, *causa efficiens*. If we think of a time management system, a causal relation between the worker and the time measured in minutes and hours is being produced. The worker becomes visible in the system, through the physical time he spends working, and this presence is reported into the system, made tangible in terms of minutes and hours. Other factors – i.e. how efficient he is, or whether he enjoys this kind of work is not reported by this specific technology.

This brief encounter with the thoughts of Heidegger gives rise to two points: It is not the existence of technologies in themselves that we should care about, they

have and will always be there, he says. Rather it is the nature or becoming that comes with technology, which makes us think in terms of automatisation, efficiency, accumulation, expansion, etc., we should be worried about. Second, technology produces, holds and prescribes disposable resources, raw material and sources of energy that need revealing and questioning. But where does this questioning take place, where do we find social technologies? I have argued that we need to get beyond simple location. There is no one place or level to say "here it is" or "look over there". As in the old joke: "God is nowhere" – depending on how you divide the last term in that sentence: "No where" – or "Now here" it produces a radically different meaning. An important point in the thinking of the beyond, says Cooper, lies in the very word division or di-vision, as he tends to write it. To see multiple differences is to acknowledge the double stance *di-* in any *vision*, which he exploits in double phrasing labour of division – division of labour. By pointing to the act of division, Cooper wants to remind us how we tend to group and link parts and wholes, often without thinking further about it. Spoelstra (2007:77) in commenting on Cooper provides us with a number of examples:

> …leadership could be understood as "inspiring other members of the organization to act according to the objectives of the organization of a whole"; refusal of work as "acting in a way that disadvantages the organization as a whole"; Human Resource Management as "the effective use of individual resources in order to enhance the performance of the organization as a whole", and so on.

The point that Spoelstra makes is that an "institution" carries with it a whole number of co-constituted meanings and it is institutionalised, precisely because of these shared meanings, in our language and thinking, that we accept them without questioning (Spoelstra 2007:77). What I propose by discussing Heidegger and drawing attention to the institutional thinking of Cooper is that competence has become institutionalised as the knowledge, skills, capacities, and all the other attributions discussed in the previous chapters which we accept without further questioning. By scrutinising competence through social technologies, we can become aware of the institionalised thinking inherent in competence, which is why I now turn to elaborate on the relation between institutional thinking and social technologies.

Institutional thinking and social technologies

Contemporary work life is made up of technologies, though we often do not pay attention to their workings or even sees the effects they have on us. One of the confusing aspects of the term "technology", that I want to point to, is to think of it solely as something "technical" or "mechanistic". One might think of technologies such as the alarm clock that wakes us up in the morning, the coffee machine that makes our morning coffee, the car that brings us to work, the key that (un)locks the door, the door handle that opens it, the wheels on our swivel chair, the phone and pc as means of communication, perhaps even office supplies designed to make working life easier: Staplers, ball pens, paperclips, but also access cards, pin-numbers, the flush of the toilet and so on and so on. These are all physical products, designed to fulfil a specific purpose. But the production mode of technology has a latent nature that works differently.

Doing social science in between institutions

In the works of Robert Cooper a concept of technology is unfolded that at the same time points to the materialistic "thingness" of the world, while also acknowledging the special nature of technology. Everyday technologies such as the television, the computer or the newspaper only perform as technologies in so far as they connect and disconnect the human agent and the surrounding world (Cooper 2005:1690). Cooper does not, as Heidegger, have a philosophy of technology as such, but technology plays an important and immanent part in many of his writings. It is no coincidence that Robert Chia (1998) calls his book tribute to Cooper *Organized Worlds–explorations in technology and organization with Robert Cooper*. In a recent text, "Relationality", he presents the world as a system of categories and things, thus reflecting Heidegger's influence. Cooper (2005) states that we are essentially "institutional products of divisionary thinking":

> Sociology and psychology persuade us to think of the human world as an aggregate of naturally integrated forms such as society, groups and individuals. We tend to see each of these as separate structures, with society as the overall container of groups and individuals (Cooper 2005:1689).

Though taking a different starting point Cooper seems to advocate for the same kind of demasking and revealing as Heidegger. Cooper makes us see what institutional thinking does to us, i.e. the SOGI-model that may be familiar to

generations of students and scholars of organisation theory. SOGI is a mnemonic for remembering the words Society, Organisation, Group and Individual. It serves as a model for different levels of analysis where (obviously?) society is an aggregate of the other three levels, Organisation for the group and the individual, the group consists of any number of individuals more than one, and the individual is the smallest unit of analysis. According to this model, to analyse a body of knowledge one has to specify on which level one's analysis is performing. The problem with such an approach is that it makes the analyst blind to that which permeates or crosses the four levels: E.g. is competence an organisational or individual matter? My point is that it is both. Of course this is not to say that we should abandon all categories, "one needs to be nominalistic, no doubt", but whereas Cooper warns us against the unintended effects of institutional thinking, by making the barriers fragile, he does not entirely share Heidegger's concern with the dangers of technology. Cooper's point seems to be that categories and things may make it easier for us to grasp reality but they also hide its underlying complexities (Cooper 2005:1689). Cooper takes inspiration from Heidegger in the argument that the great divide between subject and object having ruled the human perception of being since the days of Descartes should be rethought in the light of technology. In this way, the public employee and his or her knowledge is systematised and collected into specific products, which Cooper (2001b) calls human production systems. Cooper argues that universities and the academic system as a whole have become factories, with the sole purpose of producing ready-made products for public consumption that are not easily questionable. Having to work with four knowledge producing institutions, among these two within the university system this thinking seemed central to me. In an interview I therefore asked him what constitutes institutional thinking in the university and how it relates to philosophy. Cooper (RC) replied:

> *RC:* Let us remind ourselves that the university as an institutionalising system is relatively modern. Sociology and psychology did not exist as specialised disciplines in the 19th century. William James, known today as a psychologist, was just as much a philosopher as a psychologist. He did not think in the categories laid down by institutionalised journals and publishers. He "crossed barriers" simply because academic boundaries did not exist for him as they do for us. In order to think more flexibly, more critically, we have to learn to *unlearn* our conditioned tendencies

to think in terms of specific categories and in terms of specific terminologies.

AB: If we are to do social science then, if we are to break down those barriers, how can we do this without having social science becoming an underlabourer of philosophy?

RC: Critical thinking and unlearning means that we operate outside the conventional boundaries of the academic disciplines, so that we do not naturally think in terms of separate disciplines such as social science and philosophy. At this level, the term "underlabourer" should give way to "interlabourer". The "interlabourer" works *between* categories and disciplines, and is always crossing boundaries in order to understand what lies beyond the conventional classifications and terminologies. Michel Foucault is a good example of the academic "interlabourer": he refused to work in strict categories so that people never knew if he was writing history, social analysis, philosophy or literary theory. Significantly, he saw that these different areas of thinking were really talking about the same questions. And yet we have also to recognise that the world of academic disciplines is also a product of organization. The university, like the supermarket, creates its products for ease of consumption and arranges them in convenient categories. In other words, the university is a production system just like the factory and the supermarket which create a ready-made and meaningful world for us.[58]

Thus, when I am engaged in analysing so-called knowledge intensive institutions, universities, research centres and the like, I should in particular pay attention to the specific kind of institutional thinking at play here. Again, we find similarities between Heidegger's view on technology and Cooper as they both seek ways of how we can question after technology, thus seeking its fragility and not static states. According to Cooper, knowledge intensive organisations populated by academics produce not so much physical end-products, but knowledge-intensive products like: New educational courses, research projects, new ways of managing and organising, etc. This mode (or nature as Heidegger would call it) of production supports a regime in which project work thrives, as it fulfils the need of getting knowledge input from many sources. The regime at play in these institutions should neither be traced at an individual level nor at an organisational level.

Instead attention should be given to the intermediate - the spaces, the planes of existence and forces between or within the individual and organisational levels. But what might this betweenness look like in terms of subjectivity. Again Cooper's sense of institutional thinking and refined questioning technique might make us see behind the categories.

Human production systems

With the introduction of project work, a highly sophisticated social process becomes visible when public institutions are set under pressure to "re-organise", "keep up-to-date", "enhance efficiency" and "create attractive work environments, ensuring a motivated and well functioning labour force". In this regime powerful rhetoric like New Public Management, Human Resource Management and Competence Development enhances the need for project work, teamwork, in-house training and competence building. Coopers notion of technology is clearly one of relational nature. When talking about the relational aspects of work life we should, according to Cooper, bear in mind:

> The original double meaning of the term individual as both separate and connected suggests that the so-called individual is divided and undivided at the same time. This implies a certain distinctive tension between the human agent and the environmental objects that sustain it, for nothing can now be seen as self-bounded, independent form. Individual and environment become complexly mixed together as a field of dynamic interchanges in which locatable terms lose themselves in a dense interspace of relations (Cooper 2005:1690).

Cooper marks tension as a central feature from which both the subject and the organisation is created. If we think of the time management system mentioned earlier, the translation of human work into measures of time becomes visible as one latent aspect. But Cooper goes further. He wants to emphasise how "inside and outside disappear as separate locations and merge together in the creative tension of the space between that both separates and joins" (Cooper 2005:1690). Cooper sees these interspaces in a larger context, where he reserves the term "human production systems" to the different systems of social organisation (Cooper 2001b:328). The academic system providing prime products like education and research can be seen as such a production system. It produces and reproduces not

[58] Interview with Bob Cooper, 26.02.2007, authors files.

only meaningful categories and narratives (i.e. that scientific knowledge is best disseminated through peer-reviewed journals and books), but also this system of production has a sense of prediction as meaningful cultural codes are laid out with which we shape ourselves in time (Cooper 2001b:328). In Cooper's texts we find at times a minimalist notion of the self, i.e. the systems actively constituting and defining the very act of human being (Cooper 2001b:328). At other times he argues in favour of a much more vibrant and energetic notion when he asks how it might be possible for individuals to create and recreate themselves (Cooper 1976, Cooper 2001b:329). This oscillating notion of the self and the relation to its social surroundings can be enhanced by looking to Michel Foucault. In the lectures Foucault (1997a) gives at Collége de France on "Society must be defended" and later in the "History of Sexuality" he argues in favour of a relational approach to production of subjectivity:

> Rather than starting with the subject (or even subjects) and elements that exist prior to the relationship and that can be localized, we begin with the power relation itself, with the actual or effective relationship of domination, and see how that relationship itself determines the elements to which it is applied. We should not, therefore, be asking subjects how, why, and by what right they can agree to being subjugated, but showing how actual relations of subjugation manufacture subjects (Foucault 1997a:45).

At first Foucault's mentioning of the manufacturing of subjects seems very much in line with Cooper's human production systems and in fact Cooper does, on numerous occasions, make references to Foucault (Cooper 1989b, 1998, 2005). However Foucault continues and provides us with more nuances of how we can grasp and analyse the production of subjectivity as a social technology. As an example of what he means by production of subjectivity, he mentions a given society's school system. Of course this system can be described in terms of its educational apparatuses and practices. But further Foucault wants us to see how these apparatuses interact, support and define "a number of global strategies on the basis of multiple subjugations (of child to adult, progeny to parents, ignorance to knowledge, apprentice to master, family to administration…)" (Foucault 1997a:45). When revealing relations – just as Heidegger and Cooper suggest – Foucault advises us to "identify the technical instruments that guarantee that they [relations, ed.] function" (Foucault 1997a:46). But as we learned from Heidegger we also need to see beyond the instrumentalised part of technologies in order for

their nature to appear. Foucault's occupation with the concept of technologies is exactly the simultaneous existence of the individual as "separate and connected", "divided and undivided at the same time" that tallies with Cooper's work when he talks about relationality. By stressing the relation, Foucault and Cooper sketch a framework for how to study subjectivity at work. Foucault stresses the tensions that Cooper also mentions, but does it in terms of power relations. Cooper says that we have to be aware of the "everyday objects, who act as carriers and transmitters of human agency in space and time" (Cooper 2005:1691). The point is that social technologies set a certain "space of action", in which certain dimensions of the working subject become manageable and have the ability to manage themselves or others. It is exactly by analysing this space, or interstice, that we come to diagnose the present and to show how that which is, might no longer be that which is.

Summing Up

A number of points have been raised in this chapter. First of all I have suggested a certain approach to analyse what today is, making use of a Foucauldian-inspired diagnosis of the present. This approach has stressed the importance of analysing practice as multiplicity. To diagnose the present is to study that which is being actualised in practice, which is to look for what goes on between institutional structures and individualised learning experiences. I have stressed that technologies create a space in which subjectivities are actualised and that to actualise competence is to ascribe possibilities of action, but competence also actualises, it holds a performative power. Hence to see the question of competence as a question is equally important.

To embark on a diagnosis of the present, one can study competence as a word in the first instance. Via a nominalistic approach I have showed how competence mutates and multiplies. But studying phenomena as words in the first instance does not necessarily mean that they also remain wordily in the last instance. One cannot determine once and for all whether competence programmes are discursive or material, local or general, productive or unproductive, technical or political, or a complex mix of all of these. To make such a judgment calls for a more thorough analysis. If objects are presumed to have fixed properties, this way of doing analysis is a paradoxical enterprise. But once, one begins to recognise that study objects can have variable ontological characteristics, that they can mutate and be articulated and constructed differently in different practices, the paradox

diminishes. In discussing the question of what is a diagnosis of the present, I have made three points clear. The first is that to diagnose the present is to understand how differences are produced. The second is that the production of differences implies a notion of the norm (healthy or sick, good or bad, beneficial or harmful), and finally that these norms are cultural and historical products that vary from practice to practice, from time to time. Examples of such norms regarding competence are that competence it said to aim at a harmonious state between the individual and the organisation by making both the organisation and the individual work more efficiently. But competence is not a neutral instrument, it also produces tension, struggle and power relations, I claim. Working with competence implies that there is something wrong, something to be diagnosed, fixed, improved or bettered. In specifying where to locate my analysis I have argued in favour of approaching practice from the view of social technologies. Hence as consultants we become vendors of technologies.

These technologies can be said to point to the ways in which the conducts of people are attempted to be regulated. By discussing the concept of social technology in more detail, I have showed that it is not (only) a thing, rather it can take on many forms (discursive, material etc.). Social technologies come with an inherent functioning i.e. they make us think in terms of automatisation, efficiency, accumulation, expansion, in short the growth of both the organisation and the individual subject. It is this nature that needs to be called into question, exposed to revealing and scrutiny. Finally by asking where to find social technologies and what they do, I have argued in favour of crossing barriers looking to the level of the intermediate, the interstice and showing that social technologies work by a certain force and produce a “space of action”, an objective realm defined by the symptoms, differences, etc., of the particular practice in which they work. From this follows that the realm of competence fertilises conditions for certain types of subjectivity and suppresses others. To get to know the further characteristics of this realm of competence, one needs to put the diagnosis into practice. This could of course be via documents and policies, rules and regulations, but we also need to take into account the physical layout of the workplace and the interaction among people there and the means of communication available. In the next chapter I shall explore how this analytical strategy is put to work in the empirical settings of the study.

How scary and uncomfortable it may feel you cannot reach a destination without travelling

Chris Steyaert (1997:231)

V Competence – in medias res

In this chapter I discuss the way in which my analytical strategy of *diagnosing the* present, presented in the previous chapter is put into practice. The purpose of the chapter is to show how competence holds a performative power, which produces subjectivity. Chapter II gave us via readings of Althusser, Lacan and Foucault a framework for studying subjectivity. Chapter III discussed via the ideology of competence the coming of a new competent man and in Chapter IV this idea was crystallised into my analytical strategy of diagnosing the present via social technologies. Hence, drawing on insights from the previous chapters, I now analyse competence as a social technology that produces subjectivity and works through practices of interpellation, identification and subjectivation. Through these practices I show how a setting for competence is established, and explore how this setting changes, ruptures, breaks down, and how these breaks can be seen as symptoms of new emerging apparatuses (dispositifs).

The chapter is divided into three major sections. *First* I account for how I enter the settings in a number of different ways, each pointing to the midst – the in medias res – of competence in practice. *Second* I go on to tell the story of how competence is actualised in the Centre for Higher Education Copenhagen (CHE) and *third* how competence is actualised in the National Environmental Research Institute (NERI). After each section I briefly sum up the major learning points with regard to how competence produces subjectivity.

Setting the settings

In the following I shall explore two empirical settings, the CHE and the NERI. By *setting* I wish to point to *the place where an action or event happens*. But just as this place, according to the *diagnosis of the present*, has to be chosen (i.e. the writer needs to write from somewhere), it can only be approached as it happens, as

a happen*ing*, from a temporary centre and outwards[59]. This is the consequence of my analytical strategy. In Lacanian terms *this is it* also means *this is* not *it*[60]. Whenever one says "now we know what competencies we need", perhaps we should equip ourselves with the productive doubt "we do not know what we need". Hence, with Lacan, we do not know exactly what we are missing, except that we *are* missing, or lacking something. In this study "setting" inherently carries the process of "that which is being set" as well as pointing toward the incompleteness of "he who announces this to be a setting". It is in this light that I wish to approach the empirical settings.

Let us remind ourselves of where we left the presentation of the *empirical settings* earlier in this study. In the introduction I presented *the sites and the subjects* and described how the project of performing "competence development of highly educated personnel" entailed four public institutions and how I decided to study two of them in detail. In the introduction I presented an ideal model for the competence development programmes that served as a guide for how the consultants and I approached competence development in the four institutions. Now we are able to call this approach into question. If the setting is always a happening, our study of it must take place *in medias res*, in the midst of things, and from the midst of things. Through the sites and the subject, centre and subject are linked. In this midst of things, what Foucault (Foucault 1972:17, Lübcke et al. 2003) calls "a particular site", "the diversity of discourse", the "transformation at different levels" or "specific modes of connexion" there is no way of

[59] The centre is here used in a specific sense. It is a key theme in Derrida's essay "Structure, Sign and Play", which by some has been called an exemplar text marking the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism (Esmark, Bagge Laustsen & Åkerstrøm Andersen 2005:25). In his text Derrida (2001:352) claims the centre "not to belong to totality", "the center is not center", rather it is a marginalised framing, a rupture, a redoubling. In a similar vein, scholars in organisation have noted, perhaps more clearly, that "after all, the centre is as far away from boundaries as one can get, despite the fact that the centre, by its very nature, attempts to keep them as close as possible. (Organisations defined by core competencies have relatively fixed borders close to their centre, which is another way of saying that core competencies determine)" (Spoelstra, O'Shea & Kaulingfreks 2007:283).

[60] Recent commentators on Lacan also point to this, see e.g. (Jones, Spicer 2005:236) and (Rösing 2005). As Rösing notes: "as a pragmatic rule of the thumb you will get far in your psychological analytical strategy if you try to ask the opposite question "what if the opposite is the case?" What if the client who avows to love men simultaneously says that she hates them? What if Coca Cola's commercial slogan *"this is it"* simultaneously means "this is not it" – Coca Cola is never a completely satisfying object, which is exactly why we continue buying it…?" (Rösing 2005:103, my translation).

distinguishing competence in phases of design, implementation and evaluation[61]. Of course this does not mean that we cannot *present* or write about the settings, narrating them and *assigning* a before, a now and an after. But when we are in the field, as I am when I study, observe, experience competence in practice, there is no before and no after, only existence. There is only the centre from which beginnings take place:

> The place of the centre can be taken up by form *(eidos)*, origin *(arché)*, purpose *(télos)*, energy *(enérgia)*, essence *(essentia)*, existence *(exentia)*, substance *(substantia)*, subject *(subjectum)*, truth *(alétheia)*, God *(deus)*, the human being *(humanus)* etc., but their fundamental figure is transcendence, that is, transgression of the game of difference. The centre always has the character of a transcendent point that simultaneously makes itself accessible and thus can be understood as "presence" (Esmark, Bagge Laustsen & Åkerstrøm Andersen 2005:26f, my translation).

Hence, the settings begin, and begin and begin, in multiple ways. Every beginning is unique and is at the same time a sort of repetition, which we will see in this chapter when

The settings begin by schematising the institutional settings, from where the NERI and the CHE are selected

…

The settings begin by historicising the NERI and the CHE

…

The settings begin by meeting the NERI and the CHE

…

The settings begin by abstracting the activities, programmes, etc., carried out in the NERI and the CHE

…

[61] In a study not that all together different from this one, Christine Mølgaard Frandsen (2004) proposes a *practice of interbeing* to the study of a transformation of the human and the subjectivity. This interbeing, which in Danish translates *mellemværende*, has a double meaning of "being in the middle" and a vibrating notion of "unresolved difference", has many names. Hence Frandsen (2004:226) in pointing to Deleuze and Foucault mentions: The passage, the interstice, the episteme, relay, middle, non-relation.

Schematising the institutional settings

	The National Road Directorate	Biocentrum - Danish Technical University
Project title	Competence development in the operations department	BiC Development in competencies –Let's make a Difference!
Purpose	Uncover challenges of governance in the transition to a new organisational (matrix) structure	Enhancing organisational understanding and sensitivity by: a) Developing a new notion of "collaboration" b) Developing a shared language and assessment of competencies
Focus		a) Lateral cooperation b) Assessment of competencies and formulation of development plans
Participants		Faculty and administrative staff in two research groups
Time	Start: Jan. 2005 Design: Feb.– Jun. 2005 Project is ceased: Oct.-November 2005	Start: Feb. 2005 Design: Feb.- Aug. 2005 Intervention: Aug.-Nov. 2005 Evaluation: Jan-May 2006
Activities	Four introductory focus group interviews with representatives of local road centres and seven meetings with the steering committee.	To sub-projects: a) Three focus group interviews, three half-day workshops a number of meetings with steering committee. b) Nine solo interviews and two half-day workshops.
Consultancy team	Two management consultants, one PhD fellow	Two management consultants, one PhD fellow

	National Research Environmental Institute	Centre for Higher Education
Project title	Implementing Works council system and A new role for middle management	Action learning in the Development department
Purpose	Development of Organisational competencies by: a) Implementing and making sense of a new works council system b) Formulating a new standardised job description for middle managers	Integration of new hires, stimulating modus II thinking and knowledge sharing by use of action learning across organisational boundaries
Focus	a) Manager-employee relation in the works council system, learning meetings b) Job description and responsibility of middle management	Three strategic themes: Evidence based practice, the learning organisation, organisational development
Participants	Shop stewards, middle managers works council representatives, and research directors	17 knowledge centre consultants and department head
Time	Start: Oct. 2004 Design: Jan. – May 2005 Intervention: Aug.-Dec. 2005 Evaluation: Jan.-May 2006	Start: Oct. 2004 Design: Jan. – May 2005 Intervention: Aug.-Dec. 2005 Evaluation: Jan.-May 2006
Activities	Two sub-projects: a) Six focus group interviews, one all-day workshop, numerous meetings with the steering committee, 2 full weeks of observation b) one all-day seminar, participant meetings, interviews and observations made by participants	Four solo interviews with knowledge centre consultants, five months work in three action learning groups, four focus group interviews with top management, external partners and colleagues
Consultancy team	Two management consultants, one PhD fellow	Two management consultants, one PhD fellow

One way to present the settings I have been working in – the four institutions – is by way of a schema. What does this schema tell us, what can we extract from it? We get an overview of the project title and the express purpose of doing competence development in the four institutions. We get an idea of who takes part in the processes, the time of the processes and largely what activities they are engaged in. We do not learn much about, for example the events that went on before the consultants and I entered and prompted the institutions to accept to participate in procsses of competence development. We do not, from the shema, know much about the *historical background* of the two institutions, the NERI and the CHE (marked bold, in italics) which I centred on during the summer of 2005. We get to know next to nothing about what it might be like to *meet the institutions*, what it is like working there, what are the physical surroundings and so on. Also, we do not get any idea of how the various activities that made up the competence development processes were linked and how the people working there received them. Nevertheless, researchers, organisational scholars, consultants and the like produce schemas like the above to present an "initial picture" of a project. It is, I would claim, part of our institutional thinking, just as we often are presented with an organisation chart, when entering a new organisation in order to know who reports to whom. In the following I present three different passages, beginnings, enterings into the midst of the settings by accounting for the history of the NERI and the CHE, my meetings with them and the activities the competence development processes entailed.

Historicising (NERI)

Formed as an amalgamation between five specialised laboratories under the Danish Environmental Protection Agency, the National Environmental Research Institute (NERI) was established in 1989 as a Sector Research Institution. At the time of the study the NERI's objectives and results were negotiated and signed in a four-year performance contract with the Ministry of the Environment. Though affiliated with the Danish Ministry of the Environment, the sector research institution is an independent body which undertakes research tasks at university level and provides scientific advice to decision-makers and various governmental agencies. During the 1990s the NERI expanded rapidly in step with environmental programmes and regulations, but in 2001 when a Liberal-Conservative government took over, this sector was radically reduced also in terms of control, measurements and monitoring, which the NERI had specialised in undertaking. The NERI's activities are financed not only through an appropriation under the Danish Finance Act, but a

substantial, and growing, share of its income comes from external funding. In 2003 this share was 40%, and it has since then been increasing to approximately half of the institution's budget. The main sources of income are grants from research programmes and research councils and contracts with public authorities and private companies for research and advisory tasks. The NERI is responsible to the Danish state for providing the technical and scientific foundation for policy decisions related to nature and environment. Thus, the NERI collects, processes, and assesses information about nature and the environment and utilises this knowledge as the basis for providing independent scientific advice[62]. During a recent university reform initiated by the Danish government a memorandum suggested fewer and larger research institutions. As a result of this process, the NERI has merged with the University of Aarhus as of January 2007.

The NERI is organised in eight departments, specialising in different types of "environment: 1. Arctic; 2. Atmospheric; 3. Chemistry and Microbiology; 4. Freshwater; 5. Marine ecology; 6. Policy Analysis (environmental economics and –sociology); 7. Terrestrial (agriculture and plants); 8. Wildlife Ecology and Biodiversity. As of 2001 faced with budgetary strictions, the NERI had to make a choice. It could either adopt a strategy of cutting down the staff, which would reduce the skills accumulated over many years, making it difficult to provide the same level of services as previously. Or it could opt for an *active strategy* by selling its services and research capabilities to external clients, thereby maintaining its skills and qualifications (NERI 2003, 2004). By taking the latter course, the internal pressure on the organisation increased, making way for the argumentation that the active strategy could only be accomplished by *joint lateral collaboration* among the eight departments. Among the results of this pressure was to trigger the organisation to launch a *novel structur of works councils* with the intent of fostering collaboration across departments and the three different regional locations: Roskilde, Silkeborg and Kalø. Furthermore, the active strategy revealed a need for a *standardised and more active role of team managers*. This change, in turn, has become associated with a change in the "organisational ordering" discourse, moving focus from issues of bureaucracy (rights, duties and rules) to issues such as values, visions and strategies, whereby it is attempted to improve performance through joint commitment, motivation and responsibility. In this

[62] The information in this section draws upon the presentation brochure "NERI – a main actor in European environmental research".

arena “competence development” emerges as a necessary problem and as a possible solution to managing internal affairs as well as external ones, ie a growing number of partners at both national and EU level.

Meeting (NERI)

Monday morning 7 November at 8:45. Bus 216 makes a sharp turn, and a wide field opens in front of me. The gentle twists and turns of the main road through the flat landscape make me think of what a perfect place this would be for a Sunday walk. With the low yellow buildings plotted in between large groups of trees and the shallow waters of the nearby bay, one cannot possibly think of a more beautiful place for the headquarters of *the National Research Environmental Institute*. No wonder that the most energetic people working here jog every Friday, starting from and finishing up at the Policy Analysis department (with a gentle smile called “the Huts” by the inhabitants). The bus stops. Most passengers get off, they all seem to work here or at the Risø National Laboratory[63], which used to hold Denmark’s only nuclear reactor. This explains the guard, the massive barrier blocking passage in both directions, and the large red and white signs warning visitors that they are now entering state property. Most of my fellow passengers simply pass the guard quietly, each of them, as if at a word of command out their small yellow ID card (though no one utters a word). The front guard nods and the officer inside the guardhouse writes down number and time of arrival of each employee. The entire procedure repeats itself in reverse every afternoon when the people leave the area. But I, as an external visitor have to report inside the guardhouse and give “visitor information”, that is write my full name, time of arrival, expected time of departure, and name and number of my contact person.

I am to meet with Paul one of the researchers from the Department of Policy Analysis. Lisa, the secretary to the director of research has taken care of all the formalities prior to my two week stay in the Department of Policy Analysis, setting up my email account, providing me with access codes and passwords enabling me to login to the intranet and other internal web-forums and databases. She should also have notified the guard of my arrival, but apparently the message had not got

[63] The NERI headquarters share the site of the Risø National Laboratory which was established in 1955. Niels Bohr, the physicist was one of the driving forces to work for the establishment of the institution that has since then been a major factor in technical science research in Denmark. The last nuclear reactor was deactivated in 2001 and until 1999 the Laboratory upheld its own fire service for security reasons. Source: www.risoe.dk, retrieved December 28 2007.

through this morning. Just as I turn off my cellular phone (another sign at the entrance says “please turn off your cellular phone”) Paul greats me with a big smile, “Hello, welcome, your office is right this way, down the hall; close to mine and the kitchen”. Lisa has arranged a work station for me in a small office. I share it with another PhD fellow. “You are lucky that we have room for one more at the moment, normally every corner is occupied”. Paul is kind enough to take the time to show me around. My office, which became “my space” for my entire stay, is located next to the kitchenette, where most employees typically meet at 12 noon for lunch. Some bring there own food, but the majority get their lunch from the canteen in the main building that serves food to all NERI employees, but they bring it back to the Policy Analysis department to lunch with “their colleagues”. Paul and I talk about this at a later stage: “Policy Analysis is like a small family we are in a way a bit isolated from the rest of the NERI”. One day after lunch we have a project meeting in which we are to use the video-link. This system makes it possible via camera and a sound system to “meet” the other participants who are in two or three different physical locations. I follow Paul to the main building and down into the basement. We pass a number of rooms with large glass cases. I am later told that the Marine Ecology Department uses them to observe and analyse fauna samples. The meeting goes well. Linda, one of the shop stewards, tells me afterwards. “It is a great system this video-link. Because of it we don’t have to travel as much as we used to. On the other hand it means that I don’t know my colleagues in Jutland quite as well as I used to now that we are not meeting in person.” Everyone seems to have something to do, to know where they are going, so I return to my office. Later that afternoon I am to interview Mary, but she is busy filling the “PMR” for a great research project in the EU Framework programme FP6, so she asks if we can postpose the interview till tomorrow. “Sure, no problem”, I say, “What is a “PMR”?” “That’s a Project Management Report. In these large EU funded projects you really need to meet *all* the deadlines, and they are deadly serious about them, or they will take away the funding – and afterwards you even need to save all documents for five years in case that OLAF wants to see them”, she says before she rushes off to her office…What is OLAF, I was just about to ask, but she has already left. “Doesn’t matter, it can’t be difficult to figure out”, I say to myself. After an hour’s search on “the Bazar” [the intranet] I find not only that OLAF is the EU office for fraud, I also realise that at the NERI there are standards for almost anything. Project Management in general is advised to follow the guideline in the “Logical Framework Approach”. This project management model is specifically developed for the USAID (United States Agency for

International Aid), but is estimated to fit the needs of the NERI by 75%. There are guidelines for performance appraisals (and one specifically for how to prepare for the appraisal), there is even a guideline for when various media should be contacted including millimetre rates. (Danish Kroner per mm. when advertising in the newspaper). This explains why I had to fill out a three-page form, with personal information, etc., before being allowed to enter the NERI area this morning.

Next morning when I arrive in my office, there is an email waiting for me, sent at 5:41am from Paul. “Sorry to let you down! … I cannot be there today. I’m working from home, slaving to meet a deadline tomorrow. See ya Paul”. Apparently it is quite common that employees work at home to “avoid being disturbed” and “get the job done”. It is simply unacceptable to show up at work and say that you cannot meet the deadline – a strategy to avoid this can be to report that one is ill and then get the work done at home. As Paul tells me: “We are so busy that we only have time to talk with one another about the most urgent issues and deadlines. And we are mainly working in projects – that affects the working environment – all the time you have to think about making money. Working this way means that we have become somewhat isolated and much focused on deadlines which is a barrier to interdisciplinarity and knowledge dissemination internally. Projects are fine, but we are under much pressure.”

Abstracting (NERI)

In one of the first meetings at *the NERI* between the team of consultants and the steering committee the notion of “lateral cooperation” appears as a recurrent issue. To make this theme the focal point for the competence program seems in tune with the ambition of addressing organisational change processes and a broad representation of employees and managers. What lateral cooperation should entail, however, is an open question, and I soon get the feeling that it has become a *mantra* that is an all-encompassing category, suitable for explaining almost anything. After a number of meetings it is decided to address the issue of competence development from two angles – that of the works council system and that of the middle management at the NERI.

The competence development program on works councils has been prompted, among other things, by the NERI decision to change the structure of works councils from one in each department holding more than 25 employees to a total of

three works councils located in Roskilde, Kalø, and Silkeborg (see figure below). The new structure consists of a main works council (MWC) and a local works council (LWC) at each of the three locations. One of the first tasks is to clarify whom you represent as a member of the works council, what are the works council's tasks, that is for what issues is the works council responsible? The management of NERI wants employees to assume greater responsibility for the missions and strategies of the organisation than is currently the case and finds that works council meetings should be used to discuss such issues. In relation to competence development it will be interesting to see how the change in responsibility will affect the manager-employee relationship as employees are expected to perform a different role, but simultaneously management must make room for this to happen. In April 2005 all members of works councils are invited to participate in a one-day workshop to discuss and test the idea behind the new works councils in relation to concrete examples. As the next step a project group including representatives of all departments in Roskilde is established to discuss, over six months, how department meetings can become productive elements of the works council system.

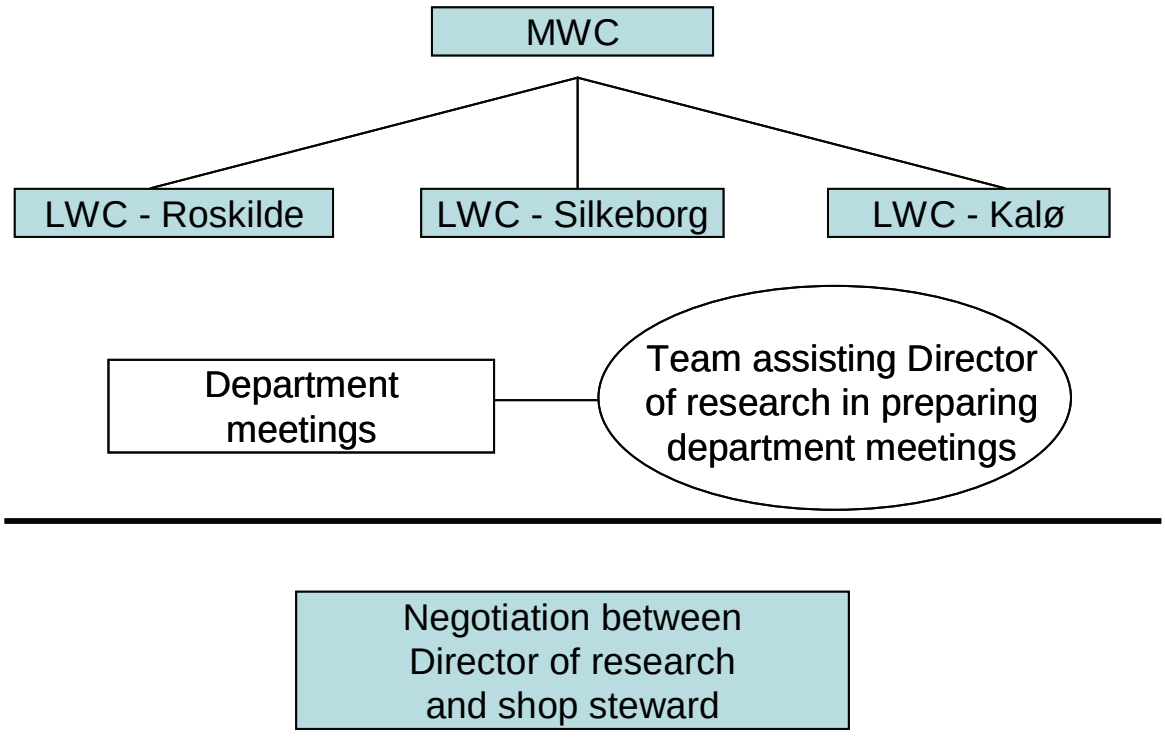


Figure: The divisionalised works council system at NERI

The other competence development programme concerned team management at NERI. The position as team manager had been introduced in the organisation some years ago as a middle management position, but the contents and responsibilities of the job varied from one department to the other. The intention of the programme was to standardise the position of team manager (TM) throughout the organisation. The programme is to focus on what the NERI understands by TMs, including identifying challenges and frameworks for TMs, a uniform job description, and proposals for how to make TMs accepted throughout the NERI. The idea of the programme was born at a management seminar in the spring of 2005 at which all NERI managers (team managers, research managers, and the CEO) meet for the first time. A project group was established including two research managers, two team managers with personnel responsibility and two team managers without personnel responsibility. Over the coming six months the project group will meet regularly for one-day seminars, and in-between the meetings each member of the group will be working with the issues. However, it proves difficult for the group to find time to meet, which makes the consultants reflect upon whether the NERI gives sufficient priority to the project (and team management in general). Nevertheless, in the end the project group succeeds in gathering the threads and producing a number of recommendations for how the NERI may handle the middle management function in the future, including changing the name to *section head*. Through the competence development programme the participants succeed in clarifying the position of section manager, i.e. in general personnel responsibility, and how the middle manager position is best sustained and promoted.

Historicizing (CHE)

In 1998, the Danish minister of Education, Ole Vig Jensen, launched a debate on *The Education Establishment of the 21st Century* (Ministry of Education, 1998), and presented the idea of a new institutional structure for short and medium-term higher (teachers, nurses, laboratory technicians, etc.). The intention was to promote and enhance a number of features: cooperation with customers, supplementary and advanced training, internationalisation, quality development, multidisciplinarity, efficiency and flexibility.

On 1 July 2000, the Danish Parliament passed an act that enables educational institutions to merge into *Centres for Higher Education (CHE)* and the new institutional format came into being. The CHE institutions were to group the nearly 200 institutions for higher education and develop new courses in basic,

supplementary and advanced training, including a wide portfolio of research and development tasks. The educational establishment welcomed this new institutional form, and by 2001 the Ministry of Education approved 23 CHEs all over the country. Right from the beginning the new CHEs faced high demands for quality and professionalism. In December 2004, just after I began working at the CHE of Greater Copenhagen, the Ministry of Education introduced criteria that the CHEs must meet in order to obtain the status of *University College*.

In January 2006, the number of centres was consolidated to 22 CHEs, three of which were granted the status of University Colleges. However, already in May 2006 the new minister of Education, Bertel Haarder, recommended to the governing bodies of the 22 CHEs to change the CHEs into a number of *multi-disciplinary regional Occupation Colleges*, and as of 1 January 2008 eight new organisational bodies have been established (Ministry of Education 2007).

One of the CHEs, the Centre for Higher Education Greater Copenhagen, organised itself in 2001 with three founding colleges of education; one teachers training college and two pre-school teachers colleges. Since then three additional colleges have been integrated into the CHE. The CHE, abbreviated "CVU Stork" (short for *Stork*øbenhavn) in Danish uses a stork as its logo. Within this particular CHE activities are divided into three areas or departments 1) the Department for Basic Educational Training as school teacher or pre-school teacher, 2) the Department for Supplementary and Advanced Educational Training and finally 3) the Department for Development. At the next organisational level, the Department for Development consists of nine knowledge centres with 17 knowledge centre consultants most of whom work part-time[64]. Organisational growth and development has been vast and pervasive. Since 2004 the knowledge centres have grown from four to nine and the number of knowledge centre consultants has increased by more then one hundred per cent. In this period the management of the Development Department recognised the need for strengthening the consultants' abilities to reflect upon and change their own practice (what they call meta-learning). This is to be done by setting up a system of documentation that exceeds mere registration of activities.

[64] The number of centres and consultants as of April 2006.

Meeting (CHE)

21 September, 2004. Demonstratively he lays both arms on the table. His eyes are fixed on the inquirer, it is unmistakable, this is time to keep silent – not talk. We are attending a workshop at the CHE on new and old fields of competence within knowledge centres. The group gathered around the table consists of knowledge centre consultants and specially invited representatives of CHE partners. The participants are grouped according to the eight fields of competence they represent, and we have just been listening to a presentation of institutions and institutionalisation, and in particular about the work of the Centre for Institutional Research.

I sat back wondering. How could the question "what are your core competencies?" relate to "reorganisation" and "distribution of resources"? In my view and being an outsider, the question is well-intentioned and may relate to the history of the Centre for Institutional Research as an independent research centre dating ten years back as opposed to the other knowledge centres that have existed for two years at the most. The message from the gentleman on the opposite side of the table, who is a member of the Development Council, is perfectly clear: this workshop is supposed to be about visions and exchange of ideas, questions about finance, resources, and staffing are to be discussed elsewhere.

But what are the visions and ideas proposed, then? The purpose of the workshop, according to the agenda, is to reach a common analysis of "potential inappropriate overlaps and delimitations of the eight fields" (that the knowledge centers are to cover). This issue immediately provides for a discussion of positioning rather than of visions for competence fields of the future. The whole morning is spent on presentations by knowledge centres, both existing and those still in the pipeline. Each presentation provides arguments for the necessity of its field being given or maintaining the status of knowledge centre of significant importance for the further development of the CHE. Each field is asked to identify and describe itself in terms of competencies and to account for "current and previous research- and development activities, experiences of educational development, publishing, and networking" (CHE, 2004b).

The workshop brilliantly reflects the game of positioning and power, fighting for what to put on the agenda, who is allowed to ask which questions, and what it is

legitimate to discuss. As Ann, one of the pre-school teacher participants tells to me during the break:

> ”It is as if the construction of the CHE has contributed to giving the employees strategic and political competencies in manoeuvring, setting the agenda, etc.”

The workshop debate also reflects the fact that colleagues know they will be working together in the future and therefore want to know about each other’s projects and present themselves as positive and attractive partners of collaboration. In the light of the workshop debate I note down the following about the CHE:

- There is a strong wish to become *research based.* This seems, among other things, to imply greater freedom to define research- and development tasks. A quote from the principal of the CHE reads: *CHE’s should attempt to produce a new form of knowledge different from that of both university research and of professions* (CHE 2003:55).

- Target management is being widely implemented. For instance, the CHE is to have 25 employees with a PhD degree and 10 PhD students as of 1 August 2005. All knowledge centers are to achieve a 60% self-funding ratio in terms of salaries and operation costs by 1 January 2005.

- All training and development programmes should include an *international* perspective, such as giving high priority to participation in international research networks.

- It seems very difficult to prioritise subjects. No one wants to promote himself as the one who tells the others what subjects are more or less important. To the question of what competencies the CHE cannot do without, the answer is didactics. There seems to be a shared understanding that “didactics” is more than a professional field of knowledge, it transgresses all other fields.

- It is unclear what the tasks and key profile of each knowledge centre are. There is a lengthy discussion about what tasks each knowledge centre should assume. For example, the task of “evaluating the national implementation of a curriculum for day care centres” will be relevant to at least three knowledge centres depending on how the task is interpreted and which concepts are stressed. One centre would be relevant if

"curricula" are emphasised, another if "evaluation" is emphasised and so on.

21 November 2005. I arrange with one of the experienced knowledge centre consultants to shadow him for a week[65]. In an email prior to my arrival I tell him why I want to shadow him: "I'm interested in knowing what happens when the consultants are not present, and the calendar is not filled with "the action learning project". I am to meet John at 9.30 a.m. in the foyer of the building at Ejbyvej in Skovlunde, a Copenhagen suburb 13 kilometres outside the city. Upon arrival the main building is empty, not even the secretaries, who are usually keeping an eye on visitors, seem to be there. I find John sitting in of the annexes to the foyer, talking to someone, I have not met before "Please, have a seat", John says, still munching his roll, "I'm just planning this week's teaching with Peter". After having watched the two men, eating, talking, drinking coffee, planning, and joking, their way of "planning" strikes me as strange. They are not planning in the strict sense of the word (i.e. follow a list of points or stick to an agenda). Rather, they talk "around" the subjects that they each know must be included. John (enthusiastically): "And then we need some cases – the students need to learn that nature is something, we create". Peter: "Surely, we could give them a lecture in philosophy of science…falsificationism…positivism?" John: "Yes, a philosophy of science for pedestrians…(Johns phone rings)…sorry, I really need to answers this one". After the meeting, John and I sit and talk about how this week might evolve. It seems to be a week crowded with meetings and activities "outside the house". Monday prep meeting with traineeship responsible, Tuesday meeting with traineeship committee, Wednesday talk at the centre for applied didactics in natural sciences, Thursday teaching, Friday nothing at the moment. John: "But this plan will change, trust me!" "Is this a normal week?", I want to know. "Well, what is normal?" John replies. "Sometimes I like to imagine that I have more time to prepare for teaching, talks and stuff, but since we got the CHE, nothing is "normal", or the unusual is the norm, which can be very exciting too - by the way - sorry you had to start the week listening to me planning my teaching, but it was the only time possible, now should we get going? We have 15 minutes to get to the prep meeting". Friday afternoon we meet to round off the week. John wants to know how it has been. The weekdays pass by for my inner eye. In and out of

[65] The shadowing consisted in my following two knowledge centre consultants around for a week at all their meetings, teaching sessions, lunch, etc. The days would begin around 8 am and end around 4 pm.

meeting rooms, classes, driving from one place to the other. Sitting down for half an hour borrowing a PC at the CHE "common office", checking emails, lunching, etc., writing a few notes, talking to someone who wants to know more about a specific topic in the natural sciences. Coming and going, being on the move is the general picture, which is confirmed in this very moment, as we do not sit in John's office, but in the open foyer of CHE main building, with colleagues, students and visitors walking by. Though John does have his own office, it is at another building, in another part of town, and since the CHE main building "is where all the action is" the final interview also takes place here.

Abstracting (CHE)

In the CHE a programme promoting action learning was carried out enthusiastically over five months from August to December 2005. 17 knowledge centre consultants were assigned to work in three action learning groups focusing on the sub-themes: Evidence Based Practice, the Learning Organisation, and Organisational Development. Each group held meetings with one of the external consultants in between the four action learning seminars (square boxes). At these seminars all participants and external consultants met, each of the three groups reported on their progress to the others and discussed various cross-thematic issues. The diagram below illustrates the flow of events in the action learning project:

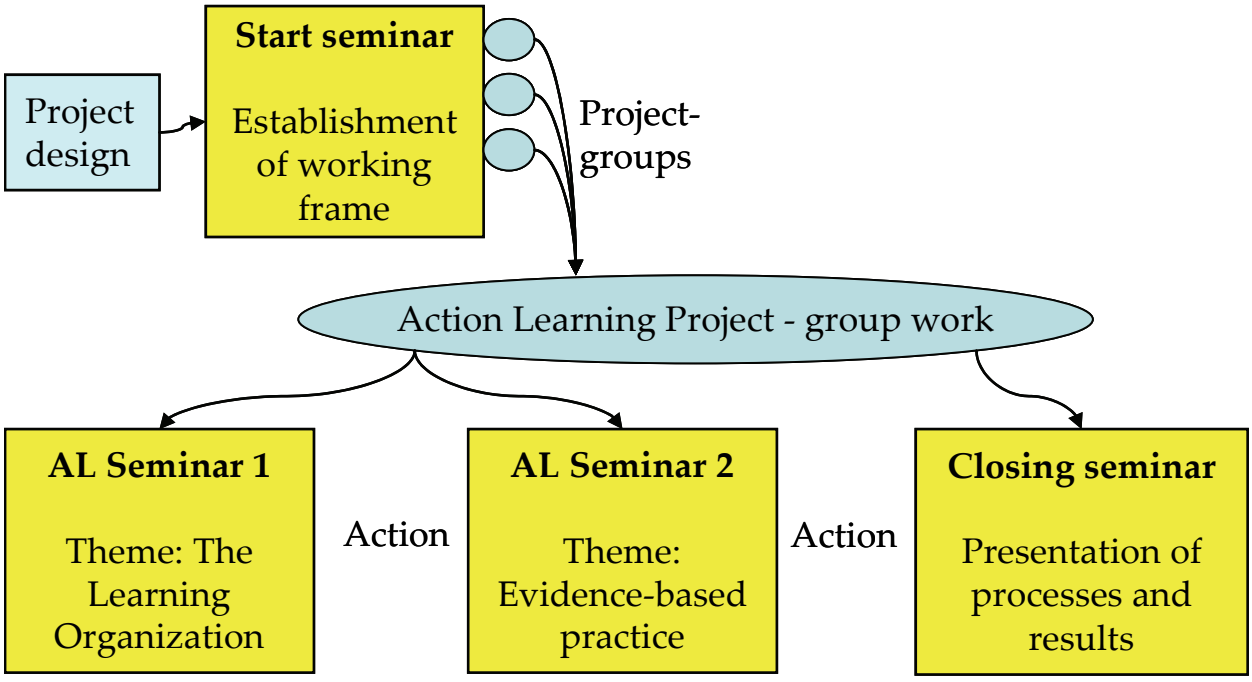


Figure: Flow of events in the Action Learning project

Though the seminars were important forums for self reflection and presentation, it was via the three groups formed at the start seminar (three circles) that most of the project work took place. Each group was asked, based on a list of guiding instructions, to set up performance goals for themselves individually and for the team. These goals were discussed and decided upon as a psychological contract at the first meeting of each group with the external consultant. Also, in setting the goals all groups and participants were strongly encouraged to have the content of their project work directed at an external partner (i.e. customers of the CHE, students, fellow colleagues not in the project). As one of the participants noted afterwards:

> "…that I think was one of the main issues in the action learning project, you [the external consultants, edt.] kept on asking, who is going to use the knowledge that we produce? To whom should we report? Who is the customer of our knowledge product?" (Bernard, knowledge centre consultant).

Even though each group set up goals individually, there was an underlying purpose of combining the efforts of the three action learning groups: to enhance organisational knowledge, develop new procedures, and integrate new members into the organisation. These objectives were supported by different forms of intervention. Not only the seminars can be regarded as intervention, but also the psychological contract, coaching techniques, various tools of communication, mentoring, etc.

Summing up

In a short span of years (sixteen for the NERI and only six for the CHE), under changing governments and ministers, the fields of environmental research and further education have experienced ever new processes of restructuring, new institutional forms, and new demands for quality assessment. This in itself makes these institutional settings interesting when exploring changing working conditions. But the fact that these settings and the employees in them are subject to volatile conditions is exactly what made the SCKK choose these institutional types in the first place.

At a first glance, the NERI and the CHE may look like prime examples of institutions that *share* features, such as recurrent cutbacks in appropriations,

pressure to compete on market conditions and perform in an environment of increasing demands for efficiency, documentation and transparency. However, as the various beginnings above have shown, there are major differences and tensions between and within the settings. Though both institutions are the result of amalgamations, the CHE has a considerably shorter history[66] and seems to be more sensitive to being merged. As Leonard one of the CHE top-management representatives says in an interview:

> "…One of my fellow students at that time said to me: "do you really dare let the merger run for so long?" That is a really good question because of the serious vulnerability that we revealed during the process. Though the formal merger only took a couple of months, the whole process lasted for three years, meaning that at any time any decision could be up for debate – again and again. When the h…. are you going to close the bag?"

And the employees share the manager's frustration. They are looking for stabilising elements, i.e. job descriptions or appraisals in which they can find security. The knowledge centre consultants in the CHE always seem to be on the move. They do have an office, but are rarely there, because they have to teach, meet with colleagues, costumers or political partners. In the NERI everyone seems to know his or her place and function in the departments. Each deparment has been more or less autonomous but now they are trying to collaborate in a more lateral fashion. It is not easy, though, rules, standards and time pressure are seen as barriers.

In the previous chapter, *diagnosing the present* we identified two issues of direct importance for the analysis of competence. The first one, to diagnose the present, is to expose oneself to the production of differences in working life. The second one, to study the present through the lens of social technologies, means that we are studying the minimisation of differences. Thus, two movements or forces are at play at the same time, the production and the minimisation of differences. But where this section has sought to introduce, establish and build up the setting in which competence is to be actualised, the next section shows how the setting continuously "breaks down". By breaking down I mean to search for the cracks, openings and non-workings in the ideology of competence. Through two stories of

[66] Though one of the teachers colleges in fact is the oldest in Denmark dating back to 1791. Source: www.blaagaardsem.dk, retrieved 28 December 2007.

technologies at work in the settings of the Centre for Higher Education and the National Environmental Research Institute I turn to accounts of how subjectivity and competence intersect.

By addressing a number of social technologies in these settings I point to *events of competensing*, in which subjects are always on the move, in the making, searching forever onwards. Because of the action learning approach, as discussed in the *giving an account of oneself* section deployed in both settings I alternate between describing how the technologies work and what we are to make of them.

The CHE story

Balancing political targets and autonomy

Across the Danish public sector the organising of work in projects has increased dramatically in the last few years, not only as a way of managing defined and bounded tasks, but also as a more general, persistent phenomenon of designing organisations as such. Parallel with this development, the Minister of Education is concerned with providing the proper settings for the CHE to fulfil its role, and encourages the centres to play an active part in creating the best organisational design, that is, a network or project design, in which local governance enhances the free flow of knowledge and the freedom of individuals to connect and disconnect:

> I gladly contribute to the consolidation of this institutional form by giving the CHEs greater freedom and autonomy to choose the design of organisation and management that fits best the foundation and strategy of each CHE. Besides, the bill focuses on debureaucratisation and a devolved rule – two principles that this government supports (Ulla Tørnæs, former Minister of Education in CHE 2004a).

Apparently the rise of the CHEs in Denmark marks the coming of a new organisational practice based on the hallmarks of freedom and autonomy to choose, debureaucratisation and devolved rule, officially installed and supported by the ministerial system itself. But since their formation the CHEs have also experienced a profusion of mergers and organisational restructuring, and there is little indication of this constant flow of governmental action coming to an end. It is in this space that the knowledge centre consultants should operate as

“organisational translators” with a licence to cope with the many restructurings and translate them into meaningful actions and prioritisations:

> ”A knowledge centre consultant is expected to set up contacts at all levels, to establish contacts to important coalition partners at all levels internally and externally. And a knowledge centre consultant is expected to be able to prioritise the overall strategic development of the CHE, including the plans and visions of the mergers. And you are expected to identify yourself with this development, that you, in a way, are able to draw the right conclusions and implement all these visions in your own daily practice. And I would like to add that this organisational development, the internal development of the organisation and the ability to establish relations of cooperation, this calls for a huge degree of self-government. Because knowledge centre consultants should be capable of making prioritisations, right? One should be capable of choosing what is important for me and my knowledge centre in one position and so on, and what is important within this area of action and within these fields of development” (Bernard, knowledge centre consultant).

The knowledge centre consultant is expected to participate as translator and mediator at many levels. This is in fact one of the features stressed, when jobs are promoted. Besides, the position as individual knowledge centre consultant is only a part-time job. Hence, by dividing work between educational tasks, consultancy tasks and research & development tasks the knowledge centre consultant is expected to manage and participate in a large number of relationships and to an increasing extent outside the “formal” organisation. The formal organisation itself is decentralised, as the knowledge centres as units are physically dispersed. The centres mainly consist of one or two consultants. This is only one of the tricky balancing acts that knowledge centre consultants have to perform. They are given “freedom” and “autonomy” from politicians to choose for “themselves” but at the same time face ever new reforms, restructurations, laws and regulations. This situation is not new and everyone seems aware of the political game to such an extent that jokes are being played out, officially. As mentioned CHE of Greater Copenhagen has as its logo the stork. Stork is an abbreviation of “*Stork*øbenhavn” (Greater Copenhagen). In the course catalogues that the CHE sends out every year, in which they present their services and courses to customers and clients, they quote an expert from the Danish Ornithological Society saying:

> According to biologists the future of the *Stork* in Denmark greatly depends on political decision making (CHE 2004b:77).

The question is not whether to choose autonomy *or* being dependent on political will. The field of education and the coming into existence of the centres for higher education is a political field, created by political decision making. Hence the knowledge centre consultants, who are to act as prime change agents in the teachers training colleges and similar organizations, are endowed with a fine political sensitivity the moment they are hired (and probably even before during their training as teachers). They are, as Althusser would say, interpellated as political subjects. But there is more than simply a political ideology at play, affecting the subjectivity of knowledge centre consultants.

Technologies at work

In the following I will focus on how competence as a social technology is brought into play in the CHE, and how subjectivity of the knowledge centre consultants is produced when they go along with the effects of project work. In short it can be said that in the use of projects two cultures or ideologies clash: One being a tradition of working in groups. Many teachers have been trained in the tradition of problem-based learning and group work, a learning approach developed at the Roskilde University Centre (RUC) in the 1970s as an alternative to more individualised tests common in most other universities. In his annual speech 2007, the rector of Roskilde University Centre said:

> Roskilde University Center was founded in 1972 as one of the most groundbreaking university experiments in the world. 35 years on, we can demonstrate that the model for learning and knowledge creation first tried out on a large scale here, has become recognised all over the world as “problem-based learning”. Roskilde University Center has come to symbolise renewal of the Danish universisty sector, making Denmark one of the most competitive economies in the world (RUC 2008).

The interesting thing about this approach is that this learning model, originally developed in stark constrast to a ruling capitalist ideology, is now linked to an ideology that praises competitiveness, globalisation, management, etc. The clash between these cultures occurs in the CHE at the time when the competence development processes are beginning, to such an extent that the mere use of words having even the faintest resemblance of management easily becomes a swear word.

A quote from Tracy one of the initial interviews on 3 February 2005 in the CHE provides a good example:

> *Tracy, CHE Manager*: "Well, we have to be extremely cautious about the language we are using. If there is the slightest hint, even very vague, that this or that initiative is a part of what you could call "management", the effect is like a red rug to a bull. We lack the respect for variations in terminology and it may give rise to, not conflicts, but clashes then, which we really could do without."

A specific example of management language that created resistance was the use by the CHE during the merger of the term "profit centre" as a label for one of the teachers training colleges. This was really "too much". With that experience in mind, it was with some apprehension and fear that the consultants and I launched the competence development project. How would it be regarded by the critical employees in the CHE? In the following I present how the competence development processes came to involve four different social technologies: *action learning, coaching, evidence-based practice* and *project work.*

Action Learning

As mentioned action learning is a key element in the competence development project in the CHE. The theoretical framework used to describe action learning resembled the Organisational Development tradition and scholars such as Kurt Lewin, Chris Argyris, David Kolb and Donald Schön. Especially Schön's emphasis on reflection-in-action and Kolb's notion of experiential learning were often used as metaphors among the project participants, although neither the members of the Centre for Higher Education nor the two external consultants explicitly mentioned the underlying theory. At the initial meeting with all 17 knowledge centre consultants in August 2005 a learning paradigm of the project was described as a circle with two dimensions:

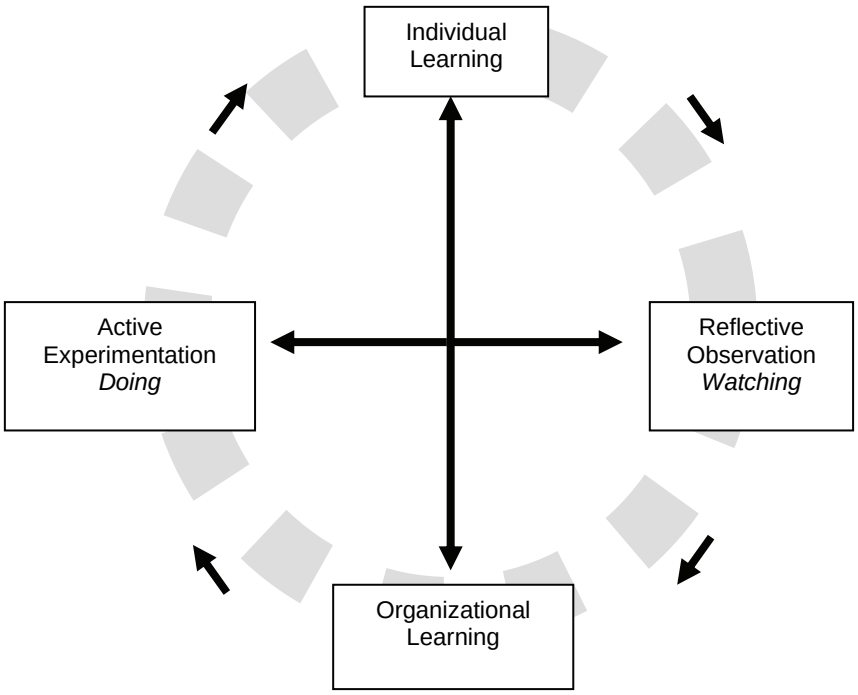


Figure: Learning paradigm in the Action Learning Project

The initial idea behind formulating the learning paradigm in this way is two-fold. The participants in the action learning project were asked to engage in *active experimentation* and *reflective observation* for the benefit of their own *individual learning* and contribute to *organisational learning*. This learning paradigm was applied in a course of events, designed in collaboration with us (the consultants and I) and the knowledge centre consultants. An important aspect that we tried to institutionalise with this model was that competence development is not something taking place outside of work, but through the practices of everyday work. Prior to the opening seminar, the steering committee and the team of consultants had decided on three themes; the learning organisation, organisational development and evidence-based practice. Hence, the 17 participating knowledge centre consultants were now asked first to form action learning groups of 5-6 in each and determine which of the three themes they wish to work with for the next five months. Each action learning group would meet on a regular basis and be assigned a number of meetings with one of the consultants. Since this was the first day at work for about half of the knowledge centre consultants there was a great deal of uncertainty about what this project was about. We tried our very best to reduce the uncertainty. Hence we produced a very detailed Excel document stating hour by hour who was supposed to do what, where and when. It does not really help. We

asked the action learning groups to set up specific targets for how they would work with their theme. We showed a PowerPoint slide with a comprehensive list of *demands for action learning projects*. According to this all projects must

- be important and support the strategy, targets and plans of the CHE
- be challenging to the participants professionally and personally and encourage transgression of boundaries
- entail practical – binding – cooperation within the development department and with partner institutions
- be acceptible as objects for learning – the necessary amount of time should be available
- be realisable within the decided time frame
- be anchored in the organisation (in terms of power, competence and authority)
- be given the resources necessary, after realistic evaluation
- not only be framed in words, action was needed, not reports, but results were to be created
- be measurable in terms of visible actions, specific measures, etc.
- be linked to/be a part of ongoing processes/projects
- have a clear vision for the surrounding world
  (CHE, 2005b)

Looking over these "eleven commandments" again, as they were dubbed by one participant, I am not really surprised that the knowledge centre consultants were a bit puzzled. One of the key messages of the day was to try to reduce uncertainty, but what it did was to produce a whole range of questions. Who would make sure that projects were "realisable", or "anchored in the organisation"? What kind of boundaries did we image them to try to transgress? And what about all that *talk* about *action*, *results*? Looking at the faces of the 17 knowledge centre consultants certainly did not leave the impression of enthusiastic change agents, eager to "anchor themselves in the organisation" and lend themselves to become "measureable in terms of visible actions" etc. But since much of the action learning took place in small teams, let us have a look on how these action learning groups worked, through the lenses of two other interventions: coaching and evidence-based practice.

Coaching

In the CHE project, coaching is defined through a number of statements. Coaching is "the ability to help others increase their capabilities", it is valued as "a method of unlocking human potential to maximise performance" and "as a leader coaching,

you should support the individual teammembers, so that their performance benefits the team's targets" (CHE 2005a, see also Whitmore 1996).

The whole point about coaching is that it is not a way of giving answers, but a special questioning technique, with the ideal goal that you develop your own solutions and your own guidelines in order to change practice. "All" you have to do is to answer your coach's questions and act accordingly. Questions are typically divided into four phases, one leading on to the next in a circular fashion:

- Target: What do you want to achieve?
- Reality: What does the reality look like?
- Choices: What options do you have?
- Decisions: What do you want to do?

(CHE 2005a).

Each phase has a long list of possible questions and outcomes assigned to it. This way of working with themselves should appeal to the knowledge centre consultants. One of the quotes frequently used by the head of department stresses the need for other models than the linear downward "percolation" of knowledge.

> Traditionally, models of R&D have tended to be linear. That is, research is initiated by academics in higher education institutions which can later, and separately, be usefully applied by others in an educational context. In many sectors, such linear models have been found wanting: The research does not, in fact, get usefully applied. More recent models have focused on interactions between the participants with an orientation to problem solving. This fits a knowledge management perspective, since in these models the participants have to agree on the problem that has to be solved and work together to provide the knowledge to solve it, which requires many interactions and feedback loops. (National review on Educational R&D: Examiners' report on Denmark OECD, October 2004 in CHE 2005b)

Coaching is meant to be a natural integrated part in all the three action learning groups, to support processes where "participants have to agree on the problem that has to solved and work together to provide the knowledge to solve it". The intention was to provide the knowledge centre consultants with a tool that they could use in terms of meta-reflection on their own practice and could use when they were supervising others. But it was received with mixed emotions. Two of the three action learning groups chose to opt out of this particular model. Reasons

given were that it got too close to their personal spheres and comfort zones. But in one of the groups the knowledge centre consultants were thrilled by the coaching tool. These knowledge centre consultants who themselves are often approached for help and advice from their colleagues, found multiple advantages in working with it. Hence, it was used not only in the action learning group meetings with the external consultant, but the knowledge centre consultants applied the coaching method to their own practice, making use of the techniques when they met with colleagues in various project settings. Even outside the action learning project, for example during discussions of new curricula, it was used. The reaction from the participants in the action learning project ws that coaching at large opens their eyes for reflecting on their own practice.

The coach is not a problem solver, not an expert, not a teacher/instructor, on the contrary, a coach is one who tightens targets, helps stick to ideas, gives feedback (CHE 2005b). The metaphors of the mirror are manifold. As mentioned earlier the function of the mirror plays an important role in the works of Althusser, Lacan and Foucault. We can now see one of the effects Foucault talks about when he states:

> In the mirror I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up virtually behind the surface; I am where I am not, a kind of shadow that gives me my own visibility, that enables me to look at myself where I am absent – a mirror utopia. But it is also a heterotopia in that the mirror really exists, in that it has a sort of return effect on the place that I occupy (Foucault 2000a:179).

The event of coaching among the knowledge centre consultants in the CHE enables a certain practice. It is a practice in which you as employee are always on your way, you never reach a fixed and final state but can (and should) always ask "what do I want to achieve now?", "what does my (new) reality look like?", etc. In this way questioning and always being in a state of doubt and search assembles in the act of coaching.

Evidence-based practice

Another intervention that plays an important role in the production of subjectivity in the action learning project is the notion of evidence-based practice. In 2004 when I began working with the CHE this concept had really become a hot political issue spurred by the press and debates on the PISA survey (Programme for International Student Assessment, www.pisa.oecd.org). In the 2003 survey, Danish

children were rated to have fair or even poor skills in reading, geographical knowledge, certain mathematical skills, etc., compared with children in the other Nordic countries such as Finland. Obviously, the concept of evidence-based practice is encountering vast criticism from the Danish educational establishment (e.g. see www.dpu.dk Danish Pedagogical University Newsletter #3, 2006).

One of the action leaning groups is investigating more specifically how the concept of evidence-based practice can be made useful and beneficial to the CHE. Thus the management of the CHE wants to look into its positive aspects and avoid rejecting totally the concept as yet another means of control, of manoeuvring and limiting teachers in pursuing their profession. But there is a fine line. In the news magazine Agora, in September 2004, where the debates about yet another political intervention in the way the teachers colleges are run were at its highest, the head of the development department wrote:

> Perhaps training teachers is too important to leave to the trainers. Perhaps we should accept some political agendas and instead try to document and qualify the political decision-making process. That means, interfere and stop whining…We who train teachers need to become more proactive and attempt to influence the working conditions for training teachers, document how new teachers function in the school, etc. Perhaps the politicians will get smarter…and perhaps we will also learn something (CHE 2004d:3).

After lengthy debates back and forth in the action learning groups on the concept of evidence and whether it could or should be defined we made a decision. They decided to focus on the recurrent event of resource allocation to specific development projects, an event in which all 17 knowledge centre consultants according to policy and practice must take part. The CHE is given a certain amount of money each year to distribute to those employees who have ideas about how to improve the profession, set up new internal courses etc. (again a result of how work organised in projects is stimulated). In this context the knowledge centre consultants act as supervisors and allocation committee to their fellow teachers. The action learning group came up with the idea of making this allocation process evidence-based, which means that project proposals based on developing evidence-based knowledge should be preferred to other proposals.

To this end the groups developed an evidence distribution scale that all knowledge centre consultants should embrace for future use. The evidence distribution scale contains six dimensions:

- The purpose of knowledge production (of the project proposal)
- The specific targets of knowledge production (of the project proposal)
- Criteria for research methods
- Communication plan
- Conditions for evidence
- Descriptions of how evidence is being produced

The six dimensions are listed in a table to help each knowledge centre consultant, 1) advise colleagues preparing a project proposal, and 2) select and determine which project proposals should be allocated resources.

These two examples are only fragments of how the action learning project produces differences and assigns attention, but they give an impression of how interventions affect the practice of the knowledge centre consultants. More specifically, in the following I shall address how these interventions affect the production of subjectivity, and how project work functions as a social technology.

CHE – a projective city?

Indeed, the actualisation of competence in the CHE has has revealed a number of examples of how work is organised that might be compared to what (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007) calls *the projective city*. In this city employees are asked to invest their knowledge, feelings and identity to become productive. The city thrives on creativity and innovation, but not from some inward transcendent source of inspiration. On the contrary it is valued as a function of its number and quality of connections (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007: 129). In this city employees need to understand themselves as contributors to living products and services with which consumers are to be targeted close and personal. For individuals to become productive they have to flourish under conditions where emotions and questions of identity are a natural and immanent part of (work)life. Hence a good and productive working environment is highly dependent on the aspirations of individuals. In the CHE, each knowledge centre consultant faces a whole range of expectations. With the introduction of work organised in projects it may be very

difficult to figure out what exactly is expected of you. As Peter, one of the experienced knowledge centre consultants puts it:

> "since we began organising work in the knowledge centres three and a half years ago we have again and again requested job descriptions, but without success".

One of the effects, they claim, of organising work in projects is that it becomes extremely difficult to know what is expected of you. You get a lot of (ideological) calls from the organisation: Be flexible, be innovative, try out new things! But exactly how, this should be done, you have to figure out yourself. No one will tell you what you should do, but nevertheless you are evaluated on the basis of the results you produce in your knowledge centre. The overall strategic goals of the organisation set forth by management hardly translate into the daily division of labour. This might not be solely due to project work, nonetheless the message is clear: Expect to be managed, but by the ideology in your own project work – not by a manager:

> "…self-government is being set out in the shape of specific tasks and projects etc. but there is no doubt that it is very blurred how my colleagues and I should manage the more implicit demands for self-government. Our job is indeed very contextual…One might say that we lack governance on how to govern ourselves" (Bernard, knowledge centre consultant).

This demand for self-knowledge echoes with Foucault (1997b) when he states that to take care of oneself consists in knowing oneself and the only way that the soul can become self-knowledgeable is by looking at itself in a similar element, a mirror (Foucault 1997b:231). Perhaps this is why the coaching intervention proved popular with some of the knowledge center consultants, as it immediately made sense to the persons involved and gave them a tool to manage themselves. But in day-to-day work the knowledge centre consultants lack exactly this similar element. The reason why they want a mirror is partly to be found in the fact that they often work alone. As we learned from Lacan in chapter two, the subject is not capable of defining itself, it is not alone in the mirror, so to speak, but is defined by the complex relationship between interior and exterior. The employees in the CHE are formed in the image of the organisation, i.e. by the use of coaching techniques, calls for evidence-based routines, techniques of measurement etc. Besides, each knowledge centre consists of one to two consultants:

> What we have here is a loss of power, which you have to learn to cope with. The role as consultant entails balancing between professional skills in processes and development issues and showing an appropriate sense of humility towards the complexity of the daily lives of those we are trying to help (CHE 2006).

And the role of consultant is yet again at odds with the role as researcher. While the consultant must sell his services (60-70 per cent of all knowledge centre activities should be funded by external, private partnerships), the researcher strives for scientific knowledge at university level. The self-government of these different contexts (the position as teacher, consultant and researcher), is an integrated part of working in the CHE, and contributes to the production of subjectivity of the knowledge centre consultants. But it also blurs the evaluation criteria of the professional body of knowledge that each knowledge centre consultant possesses.

This leads us to another effect of project work: The increasing demand for making results transparent. When asked about the most critical condition for organising work in projects, the answer came immediately:

> "Documentation! The demand for documentation and the demand for highlighting performance and results and stuff like that. But the demand for documentation is new and to me a fundamental condition when working on a project. When we are engaged in this knowledge centre project, we have to report our results and take stock on how we will present our production as a knowledge centre" (Bernard, knowledge centre consultant).

The very same day that a new knowledge centre opens you can find headings on their webpage displaying "results", "publications" and "status reports" including financial issues like grants, external funding, number of coalition partners, employees, etc. This demand for documentation within public sector companies is nothing new (e.g. see Blau 1955) but it takes on new dimensions and is further enhanced by the action learning project. In the action learning project the knowledge centre consultants are continually asked whom the knowledge they produce might benefit and how they would report on it. Thus, the knowledge centre consultants state that one of the basic outcomes of the action learning project is that change in behaviour is brought about by altering your own practice, your procedures and rituals and by starting to reflect upon these changes. Yet again the mirroring image of ideology becomes apparent. These processes of

documentation make the introduction of project work visible as one that promotes certain kinds of flexibility, or to put it more precisely, slows down the instability of life. As I argued with Cooper (and Heidegger), every technology is just another way of guiding and directing thought in accordance with a certain procedure. Now the new procedure in the CHE becomes one of self-government and documentation, but there is yet another effect of the introduction of project work, one more directly linked to time.

Not only are the knowledge centres physically dispersed, each consultant is expected to use a good deal of his time to make contacts "outside of the house". This makes it difficult to meet and have time to reflect together. In this mesh of movement and changeability it is no wonder that employees in the Centre for Higher Education cling onto quasi-stable structures like the knowledge centre. With the framework of social technologies we can explain why the knowledge centre consultants need something to be stabilised. If they experience that most of their daily work is to come up with routines for everything, and no "structure" seems to be stable, they must think of something else. Perhaps this is why the members of the CHE are having a hard time imagining that the knowledge centre too is just another project with time limits, demands for self-government, evaluation, etc. As one knowledge centre consultant puts it:

> "There is no doubt that a knowledge centre is a project. In my understanding a knowledge centre is formulated as a project, which is pretty clearly expressed through my own work. We have been given 7 million [Danish Kroner, ed.] to establish this knowledge centre within a timeframe of two – two and half years. In that context we subscribe to the same rationale of management as any other project, but I don't think this is the general conception among my colleagues, where the job as lecturer rooted in teaching is of central importance" (Bernard, knowledge centre consultant).

The interesting thing is that this constant pressure for prioritising, selling services, and documenting produces a certain sense of time. In fact, one of the reasons for setting up the action learning project is to secure time for meetings and reflection among members across knowledge centres. Nevertheless the knowledge centre consultants protest strongly against having meetings in between the action learning seminars. It is very clear, that each knowledge centre consultant's ability to select and prioritise is put under pressure by the advent of of yet another series of

meetings besides those already in their schedules. One of the first questions asked when the knowledge centre consultants were introduced to the programme was "How are we to find time for all these activities? How many hours are we expected to spend?" Hereby implicitly asking: Which "time account" are these meetings and activities to be taken from? One thing is for sure, organising workin projects creates an extremely high focus on the time factor. Therefore it is crucial for the knowledge centre consultant to keep track of his time. This also implies that the consultant is in a permanent intermediate state, always on his way from one project to the next, creating a temporal pressure that is hard to escape.

Summing up

As discussed in Chapter III, social technologies should be understood in a broad sense. Foucault (1997b:87) notes that technologies are: "*the procedures…suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it and transform it"*. This directs our attention to the production of subjectivity. In this chapter I have presented examples of four *social* technologies (action learning, coaching, evidence-based practice and project work), thus extending Foucault's keen eye for technologies of the self. By stressing the "social" aspect, I seek connection and association to a broader arena. Technologies operate in the *relations* between employer-employee, individual-organisation, between experimentation and observation. The table below illustrates competence as a social technology and its workings:

Competence as a social technology in the CHE

	Interpellation	Identification	Subjectivation
Action Learning	The employee is called upon with demands of experimentation and alignment of ones desires to the organisation	The employee identifies himself through ongoing learning processes in which search and doubt play an important part	The subject is entangled in a space where a quest for results are produced by harmonising individual and organisational goals
Coaching	The employee is called upon in terms of setting up targets for personal development	The employee identifies himself by mirroring questions from the coach	The subject is entangled in a circular process constantly exposable to new demands for achievement
Evidence-based Practice	The employee is interpellated as a subject to be measured accoding to best practice	Key signifiers are transparency, clear judgment, systematisation, documentation	The subject is entangled in practice producing "evidence" (e.g. the evidence distribution scale)
Project Work	The employee is interpellated as a subject *in time* producing transparency, measuring time	Key signifiers are transparency, clear judgment, systematisation, documentation	The subject is entangled in temporary processes of self-governance and ongoing search for new potential project partners and new project selves

These (of course simplified) examples go to show how competence, as a social technology, produces and regulates a certain conduct. When competence is actualised in the CHE it supports a regime of change in which the subject can educate and develop him/herself. Crucially, embedded in these contemporary processes of competence development, is a particular ideal of subjectivity stressing self-governance, evaluation and time management. But there is a qualitative difference with regard to time. The first three (action learning, coaching and

evidence-based practice) is based on an idea of the subject participating in a separate context, ie. a coaching sitting. Project work on the other hand capitalises on the other three. Here the subject is not only interpellated through certain formal practices (action learning, coaching, evidence) but as a projectified social being living in a projective city. This project regime is very much present in the CHE. By dividing their work between educational tasks, consultancy tasks and research & development tasks, the knowledge centre consultants are expected to manage and participate in a large number of relationships both inside and outside their "formal" organisation. The formal organisation itself is decentralised as the knowledge centres are physically dispersed, and mainly consists of one to two consultants – working part-time. As have been discussed the knowledge centre consultants must comply with certain procedures, engage in connections and disconnections and endure the intentionality of project work, when it is introduced. In the Centre for Higher Education, however, the knowledge centre consultants must operate in between figurations of given conditions and possible ways of actively forming their world. Instead of just receiving orders the knowledge centre consultants are given time and money to create profit in order to gain access and be connected to the next project.

As we have seen, the actualisation of competence constructs steering and local ordering in the permeable, fluid, constant flux of everyday human work life. The message I have delivered is in fact a rather simple one: Pay attention to social technologies. And special attention should be given to those cases where social technologies, due to new forms of labour division and organising work, take up space in order to produce subjectivity. In the next section we continue our search for competence – in media res by exploring how competence and subjectivity is entangled in the NERI.

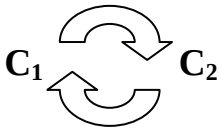
The NERI story

Ma[r]king space for competence

At an initial meeting in November 2004 with management representatives of all regional departments at the NERI, the consultants and I ask: What key challenges do you think the NERI will be facing in the future and what demands will this place on the organisation? The initial answers are 1) an increase in internationalisation, for example a growing need for applying for funds 2) setting

up large research projects at EU-level, and 3) as a result of the first two an increase in the need for cross-departmental collaboration.

The management seems to imagine these challenges as key *driving forces* for the processes of competence development that we are about to initiate. When we ask the managers how they are going to manage these challenges and what initiatives they think may be important, they mention a socalled "DEPSIR" model for project governance that does not make much sense to me at the time. Instead the consultants and I strive to introduce a *relational* approach to competence development. This is done by drawing a C1-C2 "model", which is to indicate that whatever state of competence (C1) the organisation thinks it is in when we begin our project, will affect the anticipated outcome state of competence (C2) and affect the members' horizon of anticipation. And in reverse, the goal that we might set up for ourselves (i.e. "meet the globalisation", "set up more EU-funded projects", "collaborate more across departments", etc.) will point directly back to our initial starting point. But what if "meeting the globalisation" is a constantly moving target that will change over time, one that we cannot fixate. Or at least only fixate temporarily? What consequence does this have for our competence development processes? Does it mean that we cannot set up strategic goals? That we cannot work "systematically and strategically" with competence, as the *State Employers' Authority* advises all government institutions to do?[67]



We put all these questions and many more to the managers, and they find the C1-C2 model interesting, though they do not seem capable of imagining how it can be translated into a project on competence development or what consequences it may

[67] As a matter of curiosity, these initial challenges changed dramatically during the course of the project. Two years later, when we are to round off the project there are tough negotiations about a possible collaboration, even merger with a number of university institutions. And in January 2007 the NERI merges with the Aarhus University, the second largest in Denmark. Major restructurings are launched in order to make the organisation ready to engage in a number of new relations as a result of the local government reform, for example new regional environmental centres replace the work which had been carried out by the former counties. My point is that in competence development no matter how long or short the project is, challenges that are radically different from those you can anticipate the moment you formulate a plan, may very well emerge. And these "new" challenges are very likely to occupy and change the key attention of management participants, etc., thus altering the content and prioritisations of the competence processes. This goes to show the difficulty in predicting future challenges and deciding on present development activities according to this prediction, when competence is seen as a moveable, fluctuating concept.

have. Nevertheless, we settle on not defining the specific content of the competence development processes up front, but allowing a search process for what would be most relevant as a theme for competence development processes. A steering committee consisting of management, employee and shop steward representatives is to ensure the focus and drive of the project. The consultants and I are motivated, the management has given the "go-ahead" and everything seems to be in place for an "experimenting" competence development project. Thus, we try working with competence in an explorative and open-ended fashion.

After a series of meetings with the steering committee in the beginning of 2005 it was decided to restructure the works councils, the centre of our attention. Furthermore, it was decided that the next step for the consultants and I was to talk with managers and employees from all the three locations of the NERI. Hence we began setting up interviews. Yet, after a number of meetings, notes, interviews, and discussions, we had not reached any final conclusion as to the more specific content of the project. The process of "breaking open up words" (Deleuze 2004:52), making competence "fragile" in processes of search and doubt seemed able to go on and on until a crucial event at a steering committee meeting. This was the meeting in which the managers said as quoted earlier:

> *Manager*: Damn it all! Now I really get frustrated. I can't think of anything more to say. Why won't you take responsibility and simply give us a straight answer as to what we are to do?
>
> *Consultant*: I would love to, if only I could, I really would. The problem, as I see it, is that you cannot clarify what you need our help with.

This outburst of frustration not only *marks* a turning point for the project. It also becomes a closure and *makes* a certain space, in which competence is taken seriously as a performative concept. Here marking and making seem to go hand in hand. In this space the manager acknowledges that something must be done, though he does not know the answer, not even how to get to the answer. At the same time, the consultant realises that the tolerable limit of search and doubt has been reached and acknowledges her responsibility in trying to find a way out.

Keeping competence open

One of the ways out of the dilemma of "not knowing" where we are heading is to embark on new territories of uncertainty. We find a new opening when splitting up

the project in two: One part dealing with the role of middle managers and another with the use of works councils. Recognising this situation (and the conscious formulation hereof) takes time. A new process of doubt and search can begin, but this time we have a clearer sense of focus (at least that is what the persons involved say).

During the interviews the NERI employees will often ask, with a bit of uneasiness: Can you tell us, what this competence project really is about? The question is, of course, perfectly understandable when external consultants ask you about your job, with the declared purpose of "exploring opportunities for competence development". Especially if "competence development" in different situations means that you will have to do something different, in order to move away from an "unwanted state". To begin with we answer something like:

> *Consultant:* "Well the concept of competence, which you are asking about, is a peculiar concept that everybody uses. Sometimes a word is widely used, e.g. development, but if you ask what it implies, it is not that easy to define. As a researcher or a consultant you can choose to work with a specific definition of a concept when doing field studies – interviews – or you can leave it to the interviewees to define the meaning of the concept in relation to a new structure."

This type of answer is part of a double strategy. Trying to keep the concept of competence open long enough for members of the organisation to come forward with their own significance, and at the same time providing a space where the people from NERI can talk meaningfully about competence and we can get to know the organisation. Thus, the decision to visit the three locations of the NERI: Roskilde, Silkeborg and Kalø came out of a wish to to interview representatives of management and staff, both with and without prior first hand knowledge of works council systems. This tour of the organisation was carried out with the intent of exploring the various views upon the new structuring of works councils. Many different views were expressed and a lot of stories told during these interviews. Soon it became clear to us that a competence programme concerning a novel restructuring of the works council system had not to do with the implementation of a structure, but opened profound feelings and mixed opinions as why the NERI was to have a new works council system.

The intentions of re-structuring works councils

Though a group consisting of both employee and management representatives had been discussing thoroughly the content and structure of the works council system, we got the impression that it was management's idea to reduce the number of councils. As Tim, one of the Deputy General Managers said, when I asked him:

> *AB:* "Does that mean that it was management's idea with a works council for the three locations?"
>
> *Tim:* "Yes."
>
> *AB:* "Does this idea date far back and has it been known throughout the organisation that it originated from management?"
>
> *Tim:* "No, not in Jutland, I don't think that they have realised that, but they knew it in Roskilde and have for years fought against it, even the research mangers."
>
> *AB:* "Do you know why they have been against it in Roskilde?"
>
> *Tim:* "Well probably for several reasons. Those that had a works council did not want to surrender sovereignty, so they have primarily been against the idea of a common works council – and those that did not have a works council wanted one. Then we coupled the two processes and told the latter that they would not get one until a common works council had been established. This resulted in some advocating for a common works council while others still resisted arguing that they already had a works council (in departments with more than 25 employees, ed.) - nobody should come and interfere with their affairs. This was not the way they phrased it, but I think this was what they meant."

At a meeting with the steering committee on 9 March 2005 we were told that the NERI needed a new works council system for at least five reasons. 1) A previous retrenchment programme had not been managed optimally; "too many cooks spoil the broth" we are told. 2) The existing structure did not support lateral collaboration. 3) It had been experienced that the roles of works councils representative and shop steward were confused. 4) The NERI needed a more harmoneous and uniform information culture, in which all relevant parties are

informed fast and reliably. 5) The management needed a qualified and competent body of employee representatives.

But was this the whole story? What role can the works councils play ifthey were only given the strategic importance? Alongside the efforts in the NERI to try to change the role of the works council a new decree was send out in relation to the collective agreement in the beginning of 2005 from the State Employer's Authority that the works councils were to deal with long-term discussions of the overall development of the work place.

What role can works councils play?

Of course the management's way of putting the problem of works councils made us curious and the consultants and I wanted to know how the other members of the NERI perceived the problem. Hence, in subsequent interviews we asked: Why do you think you are witnessing this change in the works council system? Burt, one of the managers answered:

> *Burt:* "I prefer to refer to the existing main works council (MWC) as the secret committee, because nobody seems to know what they are actually doing in the works council and the main works council – at least not the people I talk to. Perhaps it is because the construction belongs to a different age. It no longer makes sense, like in the industrial society, to talk about the conflicting interests of management and employees. It does not work like that today, and in that sense I find the system somewhat obsolete. I have also been a general employee, but this has been my attitude all along."
>
> *AB*: "What is different – what is it that belongs to the past? What is the present or the future?"
>
> *Burt:* "Well today management and employees have a common interest in making the organisation – the NERI – well-functioning. This means that the classical conflicts, like the ones we have witnessed at the Danish Post Office, where employees and management representatives are at daggers drawn, are not seen here. That the MWC still exists is a relic of the past where you had to fight. Today it is more about operation, and much cooperation takes place everywhere but in the works council."

On the other hand some employees had other explanations of why the NERI was to have a new works council system.

> *Poul:* "They [management, ed.] wanted fewer people who are protected by special rules, such as union representatives in works councils and security councils. There must be fewer people who are difficult to fire. I think that this is by and large what they say. Therefore, in my opinion, we have got a geographic works council."
>
> *AB:* "Some say that the conflicting interests of employees and management are a thing of the past. Today everybody seems to wanting the best for the NERI. What do you think? This is not what you have said so far."
>
> *Martha:* "I think so."
>
> *Christian:* "Me too. Today I think that we see each other as a team working toward a common goal, and none of us want anything but the best for the NERI. It may, of course, be difficult to see what is best for the NERI with people like Poul who say that rules must be complied with and we will be "punished" if we don't, while others can choose not to comply. I think that if you really dig into the matter, then everybody agree that we collaborate and are close to one another."
>
> *Martha:* "I think it important to keep in mind that management has the right to manage and distribute work. I don't think that the employees find this problematic, but it is important that we feel management listens to us though we may not carry our point. The mere fact that you get the opportunity to air your opinion and be heard makes things function better."
>
> *Poul:* "I think that management has missed a historic opportunity of selling this project. They have not informed about it. Of course there were the minutes from the MWC meeting at which it was negotiated. But you had to actively track them down. It is beyond me that they have not produced a "pixie book" version or something – it has not been advertised at all. I mean they have a product that they want to sell."

Others are less harsh in their criticism, but still doubt whether a novel structuring will do any good:

> *Pete:* "But when I read about the new WC structure and the things mentioned, then I tried to compare it with and balance it against competence development. There are, however, few issues that the new WC structure can contribute in relation to competence development, unless you start taking things more seriously than in the past – meaning that the issues may have been there in writing, but they have not been at play."

From these statements arise a whole number of issues. Clearly, in the past the employees elected as members of the works council perceived themselves as in opposition to the management. Further, according to some managers it has, in the past, been difficult for the shop steward to manage two different tasks: represent the employees on the works council and safeguard employee interests. Employees, on the one hand, call for trust and managers' ability to listen "it is very important, mentally, that *that you get the opportunity to air your opinion and be heard*", as one employee says. Still, most employees do not really dare taking full responsibility for their desired influence. "I believe it most important, that we are aware of the fact that it is up to the management to manage and distribute work". This creates a strange kind of paradox: Employees want to be responsible, and yet they do not really dare or do not really believe that they will be taken seriously.

Meeting learning, learning meetings

Based on all the information from the interviews, we plan a seminar day for all existing and new representatives in the works council system, all in all 40 employees. The new system will start operating as of 1 April and in addition, a new collective agreement has been signed, in which the works councils are given a much more central role in issues, such as competence development. After years of criticism and bad vibrations, it is a tough job to try to change the situation. The consultants and I ask ourselves how we can break with the previous practice. One issue to address is the tendency that management always seems to find it necessary to *explain* things. Perhaps we could give the new representatives a positive open-minded *experience* instead of an already designed and non-negotiable explanation? Also, we want to try transform all the negative energy that former employee representatives aired towards the old system into a profound commitment to the new system, and perhaps put management representatives in a position where they are forced to listen, not argue. But it will not be easy. And finally, we want to work with the framing of the seminar, that is, the questions of uncertainty and doubt that

new members may have towards the new system and the physical setting in which the seminar is to take place.

The initial seminar proposal from the steering committee is a programme based on group work and a speech from the director general. Though we want to meet the needs of the organisation we decide to turn things a bit upside down and suggest an alternative programme. As a first step we ask all participants to formulate what they think are the intentions of the new works council system. In this way we get everyone to contribute to a positive and progressive mindmap about how the works council system can contribute to making the NERI a better place to work. To create a sense of energy and stimulate everyone a bit we use “odd/funny” artefacts (such as rubber ducks and other animals, dolls, rubber balls etc.). The writable walls are filled with ideas and good intentions for the new works councils.

In the next phases these intentions are narrowed down by using team excercises, reflection and listening and then translating the intentions into specific tasks. The intent is to create a dialogue based on trust and equality. A group process based on case-examples is used to discuss the grey zones of what tasks are to fall within the purview of the works council system. The seminar ends with all partipants producing specific presentation “products” (visual, auditive, text-based) and a rehersal session in which they try to present it to each other, so they can pass on the good news to the rest of the organisation. The material is presented. The sound of clapping hands and laughters fill the room and a sigh of relief runs through the audience.

Back at the NERI a new closure is found when the department of policy analysis is chosen as the site for implementing the experimentalist ideas of the works council system. This is done by focusing on the flow of information from the department to the local works council meetings and further to the Main Works Council and vice versa.

A new group of employees representing all departments are pointed out as observers and they decide to experiment with “learning meetings” which support the information flow in the new works council system by using techniques such as a specified agenda, having a group prepare the meetings, and by trying to make other employees than the director of research speak at the meetings. The first place for these learning meetings to take place is in the system analysis department. The

reason for choosing this department is interesting in that system analysis is mentioned as “the department with no problems”. Over the course of more than a year where the consultants are at the NERI, the competence development process evolves via a long journey with a number of openings and closures (from frustration in the steering committee over the works council seminar to the training and use of learning meetings in the system analysis department). These temporary nodal points mark the opening of the next event, and the next, and the next and thus act as signifiers of competence, in a Lacanian sense.

Where the environment is a passion…

Initially, the management at NERI accepts the offer of launching competence development processes with the aim and the hope of enhancing the organisation’s capability to shape and control competencies. But if it is to be successful it is believed that the processes must be firmly rooted in the departments of the organisation. Thus, the project is launched with the sub-objectives of increasing employee participation and control over one’s job, and a good working environment, achieved through focused competence development.

In NERI the purpose of the competence development programme is to enhance the ability of employees to make flexible use of cross-departmental collaborative projects, to work in cross-disciplinary teams and to assist in generating visions for how and where the NERI in the future may be able to sell services that are of use (perform well) in society at large. Competencies (lateral collaboration fostered by changes in the tasks of works councils and group managers) thus become add-ons to the previous drive for specialised qualifications structured by and organised within the eight initial departments. And the issue of competence becomes the means by which this highly complex and all embracing change in the “outside world” can and will be processed “internally”. An issue focussing on how roles, aspirations and behaviour of individual employees can be changed through an experimental development project creates and diffuses new forms of knowledge. As indicated, the drive for competence (reflected in the perceived economic, political and environmental changes) gradually becomes translated into an all-encompassing transformation involving both the constitutional ordering (from bureaucracy to something else) and specialist professional identities into competent performers acting under uncertain and volatile economic and societal conditions where there is constant pressure to ask: How can I best contribute to the NERI becoming useful for the Danish society?

…the fuel is competence?

The answer to the question: Where the environment is a passion…what is then needed, seems to be competence development. Another example of how competence becomes both the problem and solution to an unwanted state can be seen if we turn for a moment to the Shell group, as presented in the text box. The slogan "where cars are a passion…" was part of a new strategy, which was supposed to help re-brand Shell as a company with a strong green, ethical and environmentally sustainable profile; a corporation not afraid of showing emotions; a company that *car*es. Thus the slogan, figuratively speaking, also means that if you are obsessed with a passion, you do not settle for less. You do not simply look to small-scale advantages in the here-and-now, but go for what is best in the long run; you do not compromise, but are willing to do whatever it takes to reach the higher goals, build commitment and realise potential. Passion, commitment and the unlocking of potential are all most important ingredients for the NERI to become successful and for a competence programme to become more than empty words and hot air.

In 1997, the global group of energy and petrochemical companies Royal Dutch Shell launched a new slogan: Where cars are a passion, the fuel is Shell. *This slogan came after the 1995 incident with the Brent Spar oil rig, which generated massive governmental and NGO critique and consumer boycott resulting in political problems and an emotional media upheaval for Shell. The Brent Spar experience in particular, taught Shell a lesson of the vulnerability of global brands. Today, ten years after, Shell states on its website: "The Group learned that public opinion had become much more sensitive to environmental issues. In the next decade, the Group worked much harder to open a dialogue with interested parties regarding its environmental impact and to develop good relations with the communities affected by its work".* (www.shell.com, retrived 22-10-2007)

According to the description above the solution to the NERI situation seems, as in the case of Brent Spar, to be of a higher order. In the case of the Brent Spar, commentators have argued that the solution to the problem of what to do with the worn out oil rig does not depend on a short term risk assessment of first order (how and where to dump it), but on an assessment of second order (Bredsdorff 1998) – the longer term total socioeconomic effects and side-effects, i.e. that cleansing needs to be

part of the production process not something that is handled separately[68].

Similarly in the NERI the problem of competence seems to embrace issues at the individual as well as the overall organisational, cross-departmental level. Competence has to be handled in practice and thus address both the individual and the organisational levels simultaneously. By studying competence as a word in the first instance, and by addressing the overall question of the thesis in the case of the NERI, we have now learned that the language of competence entails feelings of passion and a constant reflexivity to be turned against oneself and the organisation. Employees in the NERI must, without any doubt, work hard in order to realise the active strategy. And the restructuring of the works council system is supposed to support the very same goal. Rephrasing the Shell slogan in the situation of the NERI could then be: "Where the environment is a passion, the fuel is competence?"

Institutional thinking in NERI

The competence development processes in the NERI entail a double commitment. I, as an employee have to ask myself how can I be highly skilled and committed to the job I do *and* how can my efforts benefit the higher goals of the organisation? While the employees are not always aware of this double bind, they are clearly trained in seeing themselves in a larger political perspective. As mentioned above a DEPSIR model for project governance is used across the NERI. Initially it did not make much to me what those words meant until Paul, a researcher at the department of policy analysis, explained to me the role of the organisation and its relation to his own work:

> "Our work is based on the DEPSIR concept. In society you have *driving forces* (D), *pressure* (P) on the environment (E), such as pesticides if they are used in agriculture, then it is agriculture which is pressure. (S) is state, that is, the state of the environment, we work out the state report, it is SYS that produces it and it covers all the land with which the other departments work. (I) is *impacts*, the effects that we observe if the bio-diversity of Danish inland waters changes due to pesticides, pesticide pollution, soil pollution, moving of groundwater drillings caused by pollution. We have closed down lots of groundwater drillings due to

[68] See Niels Bredsdorff "The precautionary principle, not the principles of the market is to rule" pp. 99-101 in (Boelsgaard 1998)

> pollution – these are all the things in the DEPSIR chain we work with. Finally there is (R), *reactions* which are what the political system does to change undesirable states. That is where we find the system analysis, where we work with all the relations in order to identify the pressures and driving forces at work, the environmental state and the development. We then work out reports for e.g. politicians or the Danish Environmental Protection Agency to assist in deciding which measures to implement to make sure that e.g. water quality criteria are complied with" (Paul, researcher).

This way of describing and seeing one's work and role in the organisational setting gives a certain space which also influences how a competence programme can emerge as meaningful and how problems and solutions are defined. By seeing one's role as a part in the DEPSIR chain: Driving forces → Environment → Pressures → State → Impact → Reactions, competence is defined accordingly. When we discuss the possible content of a competence development programme, it implicitly becomes a matter of exploring the most important changes in the outer world, i.e. globalisation, cutbacks in appropriations, increased partnerships with the business community, etc., as *driving forces* and how they affect the working *environment*, thus setting the current organisational *state* under *pressure*, i.e. resulting in less motivation to collaborate across departments, with a proposed change in the works council system as a *reaction*. In other words: For competence processes to make sense in the NERI they must address or fit into the DEPSIR line of thinking. This thinking in turn risks making competence, "that which is installed as a reaction to an unwanted state". Of course this does not exclude other perceptions of competence, but by paying attention to the *institutional thinking* (Cooper 2005) that social technologies like the DEPSIR model install, we can see how competence emerges simultaneously as a problem and as a solution.

The political interpellation of employees in NERI

To my surprise I found when entering the organisation that the management does not see the NERI as under pressure from the outside world, but feels to a large extent that it is capable of shaping the future prospects for the organisation. The appointment of a new, more proactive and high-profiled Minister for the Environment in August 2004, may be an important factor in the growing optimism of the NERI. At the end of her first year in office, when the Budget debate had just

ended with a positive result, seen from the eyes of the department, the minister wrote:

> I hope that you are all up to the tasks – even though I know that they are many. We are trying to introduce a new way of solving the tasks by, in part, sending them back to the supervisory bodies in order to make available resources in the department for thinking transversely, more long-term, and more strategically. The aim is that we should be further ahead than we usually are, making us more proactive and less reactive. Figuratively speaking I have said to [the Department Head], that by the winter holidays in February we should be two weeks further ahead in planning than we currently are. This is of course easier said than done. Nevertheless I hope that one of the results will be that each of you finds it even more rewarding working in the Ministry of the Environment – among other things because each of you will be allocated greater responsibility for your tasks. (14-11-2005, quote from email sent to all employees in the Ministry of the Environment)

It is worth noting the warm and friendly tone in the email, as if indicating "we are in this together, and I will do whatever I can to support you, giving you the best working conditions". At the same time, the email also points to the issue of distributing responsibility. The sentence "but I hope that one of the results will be that each of you finds it even more rewarding working in the Ministry of the Environment" takes for granted that all employees are actively seeking responsibility. This could of couse be read as one symptom of how the ideology of competence works and how subjects are interpellated in the NERI. One of the initial challenges that management pointed to before embarking on the competence development processes was the growing need for lateral collaboration and the setting up of EU-funded research projects. These two challenges seem to translate themselves into colliding demands, at least for one of the senior researchers Jim, who states very clearly:

> "I have been here for 11 years and for 11 years they have talked about improving cross-organisational cooperation. I do not think that I am wrong in saying that if you can have an EU project of 5, 8, 10 million with colleagues in four different countries, then the moment you are turned into project leader you have the power to negotiate with your project partners and delegate responsibility. If you have a 50,000 DKK internal project involving colleagues from other units, you will have at

least two research directors on the sidelines. In other words seven times more trouble working on an internal project, but for 11 years – and probably 3-4 years before I arrived – they have tried talking about this. But there are structures in our system, such as our financial system, that work contrary to internal cooperation" (Jim, researcher).

To Jim the demand for EU-funded projects seems to become a career move chosen at the expences of lateral cooperations via inhouse projects.

Are works councils a way of "keeping customers satisfied"?

Managers, on the other hand, call for a stronger proactive attitude among employees who should actively seek responsibility with an eye to the overall organisational goals, though they are not really willing to let go of responsibility or believe that employees will do it. As Kenny, one director of research says:

> *Kenny*: "There is a description of the division of issues between MWC and WC, and what is taken care of at department meetings. If we start with the latter, I am looking much forward to the department meetings because we think it is a good idea to establish planning groups to assist the boss in preparing the meetings (laughing). The structure here looks quite interesting. Employees are very welcome to participate, but I don't expect much from them… Are we missing input from employees – is that what you are asking?"
>
> *AB*: "Yes."
>
> *Kenny*: "No I don't think so – strategy planning is located elsewhere… The WC is operating between departments and between employees and manager. You could say that the WCs are the "lungs" of the departments if there are problems."

It's the same old story
Everywhere I go
I get slandered, libeled
I hear words I never
heard in the Bible
And I'm so tired
I'm oh so tired
I'm just trying to keep
my customers satisfied
satisfied

Simon & Garfunkel

Methaphorically speaking, talking about works councils as the "lungs" of the departments, one could say that they might be crucial for breathing, but they are not the "heart" of the business. The description that this director of research refers to is the figure of the divisionalised works council system, presented earlier in this chapter, the one decided by management. From the above

statement it appears that the research director has little confidence that things will change in the near future. He seems to say that works councils will become little more than arenas for “relieving pressure” and letting employees get out with their frustration “if there are problems”. Definitely a much more limited idea of the works councils than the idea of making it a forum in which employees and managers walk and work hand in hand, bubbling with new ideas, making strategic proposals for new development agendas, transforming the organisation.

Seen in this perspective the competence project on making the works council system foster lateral cooperation, indeed becomes a matter of both the production of differences and how to minimise them. The language of competence is seen as a sheer remedy defining both problems and solutions. As Tim one of the deputy general managers says:

> ”The primary task of the works councils is to create trust between employees and management – nothing else.”

No wonder that both employees and managers meet us with some scepticism carrying a long and troublesome experience in trying to change the works council system, and on top of that they are equipped with the DEPSIR-line of thinking. Consider what the consultants write in their report:

> The reason why we’ve come to the NERI is that the organisation has a need for competence development which we think we can fulfil. In that way, a tacit “agreement” already exists justifying the meeting. On the other hand, at the start of the process nobody has defined what they want and what they can supply. What we mutually understand by competence is by and large never discussed. “Competence development” is an open concept though not a concept void of content, since everybody finds it sufficiently important to meet. Therefore, in the first place the meeting about “competence” is a mutual tacit declaration of trust, of cooperation in *creating* competence development which stands to test as the NERI management and the consultants offer their opinions and implement activities – letting the competence project take shape (Bojesen et al. 2006:106).

This strategy, which I have called open-ended and explorative proved useful in the beginning, since we bought ourselves time to get to know the organisation and the various viewpoints voiced for and against the restructuring of the works council

system. On the other hand it also raised a certain pressure for legitimising our presence, making sense of competence:

> Competence is already tied to a certain worldview according to which it makes sense. In other words, we cannot persuade organisations to produce "vytelipot"[69] merely by telling them to do so. But if we say "competence", then they will. However, to a large share of employees in the NERI it does not seem to make much difference whether we say "vytelipot" or "competence" apart from the latter evoking a certain resonance. And this is the point, because it is very difficult to get others to involve themselves if they don't feel they have any idea of what they are participating in… And perhaps even think that they *ought* to understand it, because "competence" is a recognisable word. In that sense understanding "competence" is relevant as something else than an academic exercise. It is relevant in an organisation not only to be able to "process", but also to be able to locate the process in a substantial landscape that makes sense. As consultants we should be able to do that, but also managers inasmuch as they want to work with competence development (Bojesen et al. 2006:113).

In sum the workings of competence at NERI display diverse and contradicting movements, i.e. NERI employees asking for responsibility, though they are not really willing to do what it takes to follow up on their desired wants. And managers asking for a more active involvement from employees, but are not really prepared to have the important discussions in the forums where they are present.

Summing up

In this section I have presented the story of technologies at work in the NERI. In the NERI the movements of competence seem to oscilate like a pendulum. From processes of doubt and search to a nodal point of a certain type of closure, then on to new processes of doubt and search and a new nodal point. From the initial frustration at the steering committee meeting to the works council seminar, to the testing of learning meetings in the policy analysis department, the important point

[69] "Vytelipot" is a self made word simply pointing to no sense. The point the consultant is making is one of legitimacy. The *meaning of competence* could just as well have been "tommyrot" or "balderdash", if it was not for the system that legitimises competence and the acts of working with it.

in terms of competence development seems not to be the ability to define a fixed end goal. It is much more important that those taking active part get the feeling of learning something new and that change in terms of discursive or material practices become visible to others in the organisation. The institutional thinking in this setting, exemplified by the DEPSIR line of thinking, is particularly strong. Combined with a constant time pressure the need for self-reflexivity is put forward so as to meet the demands of the organisation and to set new goals for your own development. Compared to the situation of the CHE, there is a difference in the way competence works as a social technology in the NERI. Perhaps it is due to the many systems, the longer institutionalised history and hence internalised practices, but employees in the competence processes do not ask for "techniques" or "tools" to the same extent as in the CHE. Of course we can distill main areas from the story above similar to those in the CHE in which subjectivity is produced, for example: *Institutional thinking*, *learning meetings* and *the use of works councils*. Let me comment on these three in reverse order.

Just like this chapter has discussed the potentials in making management and employee representatives share the same goal in works councils, the actualisation of competence have also shown how both employees and managers doubts or disagree that such alignment and harmony can be created or is even desireable. Though employees are strong hailings, as Althusser would say, supported politically for making the works councils forums for long term strategic planning this has an uncertain future in the NERI. Yet, there are strong processes of interpellation in which the employees are called upon to be proactive, and cooperate across departments, but employees does not always identify themselves with these calls, i.e. the experienced researcher who believe it causes "seven times more trouble working on an internal project" than on much more prestigious EU-funded projects.

To foster and support a uniform information culture and make employees more proactive learning meetings was installed as an intervention by the consultants. When I talked to employees in the system analysis department after the first of these learning meetings, people's reaction varied from "is this important?" to "the NERI might not benefit directly from this, but a more proactive attitude is a good thing". So though some parts of the processes like a specified agenda was incorporated into the organisational discourse it remained by and large, according to the participants, an external event.

The logic of simple location, discussed earlier with reference to Cooper (2005) was encountered in the institutionalised thinking of the DEPSIR chain in which employees are asked to set up projects and operate accordingly in a space defined by a chain of elements from *driving forces* to *reactions*. With this logic incorporated into the thinking and practice at the NERI, it risks making competence that which is installed as a reaction to an unwanted state.
If we are to ask the pragmatic rule of thumb question "what if the opposite is the case?" in a psychoanalytically inspired analysis advised to us by Rösing (2005:103) we could ask: What if lateral cooperation is not the solution to the challenges that the NERI face? But such a suggestion calls for a reorientation of both management and employees. Like one management representative said to me "As long as I am confident that they [the employees] will do as they are told, I can let go". Perhaps ongoing positioning struggles will make the NERI competitive for the new globalised markets situation, in which they also need to navigate with due respect to political agendas?

The main problem in this chapter has been how the relation between competence and subjectivity is being played out in the specific settings of the NERI and the CHE. So is it possible to perform competence development without invoking processes of subjectivity? As it turns out in the stories of the NERI and the CHE the actualisation of competence does promote new senses of subjectivity. These are ideals of person-hood stressing proactiveness, self-reflexivity and actively assuming responsibility for the goals of the organisation.

My claim is that these two stories by no means are exceptions. In fact they may be taken only as symptoms of a much larger movement of re-structuring of work. Perhaps the events in the NERI and the CHE should be seen as a result of the coming of a new capitalist spirit, as suggested by Boltanski & Chiapello and Hardt & Negri among others. This is a world in which "the project" is favoured over "the function" and where "change" and "excitement" overlay "predictability" and "security". The projective world in which processes not structures form the basis for organisations has been heavily discussed in what might be called postmodern organisation studies. To explore the consequences of my analysis this is the theme we turn to in the next chapter.

As for the individual, every one is a son of his time; so philosophy also is its time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as foolish to fancy that any philosophy can transcend its present world, as that an individual could leap out of his time or jump over Rhodes. If a theory transgresses its time, and builds up a world as it ought to be, it has an existence merely in the unstable element of opinion, which gives room to every wandering fancy.

G.W.F. Hegel (2001:19)

VI The Fiat or Failure of Postmodern Organisation Studies?

In this chapter I explore the consequences of the analytical strategy put to work in the previous chapter. I then explicate the relevance of asking the question of the subject "who are we, now?" by revising a specific debate on postmodernism in organisation. At a more general level, I elaborate on the consequences of the analysis. Thus underlying themes emerging from the postmodern debate on agency are addressed, that is, representationalism and how we acquire knowledge of the world. Finally I sum up these issues and argue what use the theories of subjectivity I deploy in this study (Althusser, Lacan and Foucault) have for the study of organisation.

Posts and turns in "Organisation Studies"

It has arguably been fifteen years since postmodernism entered organisation studies (Parker 1992b). Think for a moment of the significance of this. In 1992 we hardly had the internet and certainly not features like YouTube–Broadcast Yourself™ or Facebook.com. Mobile phones were too large to fit into a coat pocket, and did not include SMS text functions, no one had heard of viral marketing[70], Germany had just been reunited, the Russian Federation revived, and

[70] The first to write about viral marketing was media critic Douglas Rushkoff in his 1994 book *Media Virus*. The assumption is that if such an advertisement reaches a "susceptible" user, that user will become "infected" (i.e., sign up for an account) and can then go on to infect other

satellite TV had just recently started to spread to all corners of the globe. It was, many would claim, a different world then, in terms of communicating, organising and living.

Yet, we might find that nothing much has really changed after "the postmodern condition" (Lyotard 1984). If "the key problem raised by postmodernists is the impossibility of having certain knowledge about "the Other" (person, organisation, culture, society)" (Parker 1995:553), why, then, are we still indulging in this debate? Why should we care, more than fifteen years after the demise of Althusser, Lacan and Foucault, to return to these writers as if they are still speaking to us? What remains for us to think about and act upon in their writings? What is the relevance of their works for organisation studies and working life in contemporary organisations? Has not every possible interpretation of these thinkers been given?[71]

In order to get a grip of these questions, allow me to take one step back and re-consider the question posed when I developed my analytical strategy in Chapter V, a question that should be at the heart of any organisational enterprise, be it as manager, researcher or anyone else, but which is often associated with the discipline of philosophy. The question is: Who are we *now*?

In a number of articles in the journal *Organisation Studies*, the issue of postmodernism entering organisation studies was heavily discussed. Parker (1992b) initiated the debate and spurred a number of replies and papers on the issue (Carter 1995, Chia 1995, Clegg 1995, Jackson 1995, Parker 1992a, Parker 1995, Parker 1999, Tsoukas 1992) all addressing the effects and potential consequences of postmodernism to organisation studies. On his most critical edge Martin Parker ventures:

> that postmodernism is a dangerous, and potentially disabling set of ideas for critical organisation theorists to adopt. This is because I believe that any emancipatory project is not well served by giving up entirely on notions of "truth" and "progress" (Parker 1995:553).

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susceptible users. As long as each infected user sends mail to more than one susceptible user on average (i.e., the basic reproductive rate is greater than one), standards in epidemiology imply that the number of infected users will grow according to a logistic curve, whose initial segment appears exponential (source: Wikipedia, retrieved 28 November 2007).

[71] I am here paraphrasing Todd May (2005) who asks the same kind of questions, yet only with Foucault.

Parker clearly believes the postmodern project to be one of emancipation, a concept we have already dealt with indirectly in the discussions earlier in this study; emancipation through ideology (Althusser), through psychoanalysis (Lacan), or through power relations (Foucault). And so, even if I were to limit myself to this account, these three writers should have something to say to studies of organisation. But before we engage further in their importance for studies of organisation, let us take a look at the debate on postmodernism, since it, as I have said, reveals a number of important points concerning the question of *who are we now?*

Any talk of a field or discipline (here postmodernist organisation studies) must, according to Parker (1992b:2), have an idea of what it means to be one, that is, a notion of boundary. Who belongs to the field, and who does not. Who does and who does not belong is simply rephrasing the question: who are we now? In Parkers terms, though, the question is divided into two: "How do we recognise a postmodern organisation?" and "Can we use a postmodern analysis to see organisations in a different way?" Similarly I have in this study I have been asking how do we recognise competence, and can we use an analysis of the subject as movement to see competence in a different way? Whereas Parker for a number of reasons is "unable to deliver a solution" (Parker 1992b:13) to the questions he raises, he does give a good account of the strands and underlying assumptions of the debate on postmodernism in organisation studies.

Parker (1992b) goes to great pains in making a distinction between what it means to be post-modern (a periodisation, "after" modernism, with a hyphen) and what it is like to being a postmodernist (a theoretical perspective, without a hyphen). From this distinction follows two discussions; one on what it means to be living in a (proclaimed postmodernist) world and one on what postmodernism (as a theoretical perspective) can contribute when we are to acquire knowledge of the world in which we are living.

My intent with posing the question of *who are we now* is not to make final ontological claims about the times in which we are living or whether our society is moving into a different epoch, just like I did not claim that the transistions I traced in Chapter III, the ideology of competence are the only ones probable. Rather I wish to explore what, if anything, the debate on postmodernism in studies of

organisation can contribute to my study, when ultimately discussing, what becomes of subjectivity when competence is actualised?

The real danger, according to Parker, is *if* postmodernism equals stereotyping, i.e. that *modernism* should reserve for itself faith in reason, equated with progress and that this entails the world viewed as a system that comes increasingly under our control as we gain knowledge of it (Parker 1992b:3), while *postmodernism* should be the way of thinking which holds that the "out there" is completely constructed by our discursive conceptions of it. Language is crucial in constituting "reality", and all our attempts to acquire true knowledge of the world should be seen for what they are – forms of discourse (Parker 1992b:3).

The implications of this divisionary thinking for the studies of organisation would be that either we strive for as much knowledge in order to gain power over organisations, so that we are ultimately able to design them[72] or we acknowledge that controlling systems input and output are beyond our reach since employees and environment are mere constructs, thus interpretation becomes central and all we can do is to "expose the fragility of organisational life and the myth of its stability" (Parker 1992b:5). As becomes evident, the postmodernism debate raises the problem of representation. If the world is changing, so are we, or as Parker says: "If our culture is being transformed, then so may our organisations" (1992b:2).

Is Foucault a postmodernist? Is Althusser, Lacan?

Where does this leave my study, do I side with the modernists, when I work with competence projects to change practice in public organisations or am I in tune with the postmodernists when, with Althusser, Lacan and Foucault, I assess accounts of non-essentialistic subjectivity? Posing the question like this would soon lead to other questions. How can I group three, yet French albeit so different writers under one "Subjectivity" umbrella; what kind of –ism would they belong to? Was Althusser a post-marxist? Was Lacan a post-Freudian structuralist? Was Foucault a post-Nietzschian post-structuralist? As Rösing (2005) and Harding (2007) has recently argued Lacan radically challenge the binarity in psychoanalysis and point to the fluidity, sliding differentiations and asymmetrical features of the signifier.

[72] For a lucid example see for instance Mintzberg's "Structure in Fives: Designing Effective Organisations" (Mintzberg 1983).

And, if we ask Focault for instance, we soon learn that nothing is more futile than subscribing to any form of fixed programme:

> What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing – with a rather shaky hand – a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary, in which I can loose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write (Foucault 1972:17).

So far I have claimed this study to be non-disciplinary, even neo-disciplinary, and I indeed believe in the strength of multiple perspectives, and of the obscure small kind of empirical work, filled with energy and almost indiscernible[73]. This does of course not imply that I do not take into account the specifics of the subject of which I am writing (as we saw in Chapter V), or the historical conditions under which I conduct my study (as the account of competence I gave in Chapter III). One of the reasons for making Foucault inform this study is precisely his sensitivity towards the fragility and contingency of history. Here I believe Todd May has an important point when reminding us why we should turn to great thinkers of previous times:

> Nothing outside of a fragile and contingent history made us who we are. That, as it will turn out, is at once our nature and our hope. As Foucault tells us, "There is an optimism that consists in saying that things couldn't be better. My optimism would rather consist in saying that so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances than with necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints." (Foucault quoted in May 2005:67).

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[73] Michel Foucault: "I had gone in search of these sorts of particles endowed with an energy all the greater for their being small and difficult to discern" (Foucault 2002c:161).

The key word here is “more”. By this Foucault clearly signals, that the question of progress that Parker invokes, is not a decisive matter of either-or, but a flexible matter of more or less. It should be noted that though Parker seems fully aware of this point, he still ventures against “self-avowed postmodernists and not poststructuralist writers such as Derrida or Foucault” (1995:554) and thus falls prey to the kind of categorising Foucault warns against. Nevertheless, it is important to maintain Parker’s point, that:

> The organisational world is not like the natural world and cannot be kicked, tested or measured in an uncomplicated way. Yet to suggest that organisations exist *only* as shifting and indeterminate webs of meaning also seems counter-intuitive. (Parker 1995:556)

But it should be clear that neither Althusser or Lacan and certainly not Foucault would pose such a claim. To them discourse and materiality hang come together, and becomes together. So what are we to do with this insight more than fifteen years after the debate of postmodernism was started in “Organisation Studies”? According to Parker we have to strike the right balance between sceptisism and realism or, as he puts it, it is a matter of striking the mean, carefully noting that:

> There is simply no place, independent of us and our intentions, where “evidence” can be found when we are studying organisations (Parker 1999:43).

And yet we have to remind ourselves that this relativism does not imply a dismissal of producing words, distinctions and judgments

> I simply do not see how an interesting form of conversation could take place if it did not use dualisms, and hence make judgements. Of course, we should always be suspicious of our words, of our descriptions, but this does not somehow mean we can manage without them (Parker 1999:42).

But as I have just argued above we should distinguish (sic) between making distinctions with the intent of a) choosing *either* one *or* the other or b) using distinctions to assess fragile changeable circumstances with due respect to the necessities. Claiming to belong to this or that –ism is not as important for this study as it is to show how theories of subjectivity (postmodern or not) inform studies of organisation, all in the pursuit of being able to pose the question of who are we now? This is what we will turn to in the following.

Subjectivity in Organisation Studies

Of the three main writers on subjectivity deployed in this study, Foucault is by far the one whose work has been most eagerly discussed in organisation studies, which is why I shall begin with him. Foucault poses the idea that the struggle of subjectivity is becoming increasingly important and one of his explanations is the coming and transformation of the state (Foucault 1994b). How are contemporary studies of organisation recieving this idea?

The works of Foucault and his idea of subjectivity have been heavily and widely debated within studies of work and organisation. As a result we have seen a growing literature trying to link the insights of Foucault to labour process theory (Knights & Willmott 1989;Knights & Willmott 1990), Human Resource Management (Townley 1993; 1994; 1998; 1999; 2005), organisation studies (Burrell 1988; Casey 1995; Knights 2004; McKinlay & Starkey 1998; Newton 1998) and sociology and political theory (Dean 1994, 1999; Rose 1990; Miller & Rose 2005). According to Newton, organisation studies primarily benefit from Foucault on two accounts. He can help scholars of organisations dissolve the dualism between subjects and "objective" structures since "the subject herself is not some independent, bounded and fixed unity, but, instead, is intimately bound to power/knowledge relations which traverse both subjects and (what are conventionally seen as) social structures" (Newton 1998:418). The other account on which Foucault is truly beneficial to scholars of organisation we have already dealt with, namely Foucault's conceptualisation of subjectivity which seems to reject that human behaviour has any essential nature:

> Foucault's work appears compatible with the argument that there is no essential self, since following Foucault, the self cannot be "read" outside discourse. As the self cannot be prediscursive, it cannot be essential "since no two individuals can have precisely the same discursive experiences" (Knights 1995: 13) (Newton 1998:418).

But though we have seen a great number of studies capitalising on the works of Foucault within organisation studies scholars like David Knights and Hugh Wilmott are prime examples – the debate on subjectivity still seems to be stuck on at least two accounts. According to Newton the problem is that Foucault leaves us with an "inadequate framework to explore how agency is played out in particular contexts" (Newton 1998:426). Thus he further ventures

> …as elsewhere in Foucault's work, no theoretical frame is provided for understanding how decisions will be made within local power relations (Newton 1998:427).

These charges make Newton conclude that:

> Foucault's doubts about existing arguments concerning changes in the self (e.g. 1990:14), mean that his later work does not constitute a basis for considering how senses of ourselves change as power relations change. In consequence, it cannot easily inform our understanding of how changing senses of ourselves relate to changes in discourse (Newton 1998: 436)

Criticism like this would seem like a hard blow to any scholar in studies of work and organisation wishing to find inspiration in Foucault, were it not for Foucault's insisting on *not* to give specific guidelines or pieces of advice. Though Newton seems to provide a good overview of the debate on Foucault and subjectivity, his critique misses the mark on at least one crucial account. He criticises Foucault for not delivering any answers as to how we should proceed; for leaving us with nothing but an "inadequate framework" for how to approach agency, and no "theoretical frame" for understanding how decisions are made in power relations. But did Foucault intend to provide such an overview? Is the critique that has been levelled against postmodernists fair and reasonable: "But once you have deconstructed, then what? How can we reconstruct, or get anything positive from this?" (Calas & Smircich 1999:649)? As Foucault keenly points out:

> I am an experimenter and not a theorist. I call a theorist someone who constructs a general system, either deductive or analytical, and applies it to different fields in a uniform way. That isn't my case. I'm an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before (Foucault 2002b:240).

An analytical strategy making use of Althusser, Lacan and Foucault can be said to be symptomatological and consisting in two operations: the finding of cracks in the ideological or discursive-material surface and the reconstruction of the questions, which lie hidden in the text. But we should also bear in mind that Lacan advises us not to take language as a medium or a tool. Hence you "re-construct" something which is already there, not in order to become more knowledgeable about oneself or in the pop-cultural sense to "design yourself", but to be reminded of who you are. To be engaged in processes of competence development, one does not simply

deal instrumentally with the management of human resources (as opposed to any other kind of resource, material, discursive). It is the very lives of people we affect as they affect us, or as May, puts it:

> We must approach Foucault's work, both as we read it and as we seek to extend it to understand who we are now, not simply as a set of texts to be deciphered, commented upon, researched, psychoanalyzed, annotated, cited, and, for those of us who teach, assigned to undergraduate students as part of a new, improved canon. Nothing would be more a betrayal than to treat Foucault as a newly minted member of the Dead White Male Academy. Instead, we must treat his works as the ancients treated their philosophy; we must take them up as spiritual exercises. For the Greeks, and especially for Hellenistic philosophy, the point of a philosophical text or a teaching was not to offer more knowledgeableness but to orient one toward a way of living. As such, one returned to those texts or those teachings not because a nuance of thought had been forgotten or an inference not well understood, but because one needed to be reminded of who one was and what one might become (May 2005:76).

With May, what I suggest that we do with the works of Althusser, Lacan and Foucualt is the same. I suggest that we return to them not to so much to learn about how the penal regime worked in the Middle Ages, how Freuds psychology can be re-read or capitalisms can be criticised, but to recall the ever changeable and contingent nature of our own history, and to remind ourselves – because we so often forget – that our history is indeed contingent.

The use of Lacan in organisation studies remains to this day limited, though within the past few years new publications are beginning to explore his relation to especially subjectivity and work. Thus in 2005 Jones and Spicer argue:

> Whereas Lacan has had a significant impact on cultural and social theory, his work remains largely unexplored in organisation studies. Even when addressing issues that are of central concern to Lacan such as the subject and language, there has been a tendency in organisation studies to privilege Foucauldian frames of reference (Jones, Spicer 2005:228).

And before them, in 2000, Triantafillou writes that the only study he manages to find which deals with Lacanian psychoanalysis, in terms of work and subjectivity is Paul Du Gay's (1996) *Consumption and Identity at Work*. However, today a part from Jones & Spicer (2005), a number of authors Arnaud (2002, 2003), Vanheule and Verhagen (2003), Roberts (2005) and (Harding 2007) are all arguing for the productiveness of Lacan's work in organisation studies. For instance, as John Roberts argues:

> Lacan's account of the "imaginary" problematises versions of disciplinary power that rely entirely upon discourse to explain the ways in which power is constitutive of subjectivity. It also offers a detailed account of quite what was involved for the subject in processes of identification. It can be seen to supplement an account of the fluidity of the symbolic, and hence the relational and contingent nature of identity (Du Gay, 1996), with an account of the formation and possible lifelong pursuit of the deathly desire to fix and stabilise the self within its flows (Roberts 2005:621).

Turning to Althusser, it seems that his critical account of subjectivity, his basic idea that the collective system of ideological state apparatuses (realised in concrete form by governments, institutions, etc.) interpellates us and tells us how we are to become reasonable, good and ultimately "free" subjects, can easily be utilised and traced in studies of work and organisation. Though Althusser received much fame in the 1970's there are a few recent examples of mentioning Althusser's idea of subjectivity in organisation studies (see e.g. Fleming 2005;Fleming & Spicer 2003;Jones & Spicer 2005). Hence, I have been unable, so far, to find any recent studies of organisations making explicit analyses by way of his concept of interpellation. Though the works of Althusser (and perhaps its reception in particular) is devoted to a re-turning to Marx, promoting ways by which we can emancipate ourselves from capitalism, an idea only a few will embrace as a research strategy these days, there could be plenty of areas within organisation studies in which ideas of Althusser would find fertile ground. One area could be the growing literature on subjectivity "systems" taking power over people and surveillance (e.g. see Ball & Wilson 2000; Knights & McCabe 2000; Ball 2005) and the possibilities of struggle and resistance in contemporary organisations (e.g. Fleming & Spicer 2007; Spicer & Böhm 2007). Examples like Business Process Reengineering, Total Quality Management, Human Resource Management, New Public Management, Lean Thinking, etc., are clearly susceptible to the same kind

of critical analysis as Althusser presents. Interestingly, some of the studies mentioned could benefit from a more dynamic notion of resistance, e.g. Knights and McCabe mention that they "focused primarily on the response of employees to managerial action" (Knights, McCabe 2000:434). One research question could be how certain managerial ideologies produce notions of subjectivity beyond ideology? But how come we do not see analyses like this drawing on Althusser in studies of work and organisation today?

Instead, commentators link the relevance of Althusser to Marxism noting that Althusser's influence has declined steadily since the 1970s with the decline in Marxism's academic prestige (Mansfield 2000:53). How come a recent special issue of *Organization Studies (2007 vol. 28 iss. 9)* is devoted to discuss the future of Labour Process Theory, yet does not have a single reference to Althusser? This is remarkable since Labour Process Theory has been the academic area which during the past ten to fifteen years most persistently has held on to Marxist inspired research agendas in studies of organisation. Will the future of organisation studies bring new life to the thoughts of Althusser? If we are to follow (Beverungen 2008) one can only hope that organisation studies, if it is to reconsider questions of the state, ideology and politics has yet another encounter with Althusser's ideas to come. What I propose here, is to make use of Althusser's insight into how subjects are interpellated, but maintaining that they still have a choice of not "turning around", or better to extend the interpellation by making it not only about turning, but also re-turning, another coming, an answering back, which is what we are able to think of thanks to the work on subjectivity by Althusser, Lacan and Foucault in combination.

Summing up

I opened this chapter by noting the moment some fifteen years ago when postmodernism arguably entered organisation studies (and more certainly entered "Organization Studies", the journal). This debate revealed the importance of dualisms. Foucault does not argue against dualisms, but makes them fragile, that is, produces analyses so that we can see that they are results of historical convention and that we *can* think of them differently. Where influential authors in organisation and management tend to see certain numbers as magic (e.g. see Henry Mintzbergs

"Structures in Fives"[74] or without comparison Stephen Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People"), Lacan and Althusser tend to favour the number of three, at least when pointing to the possibilities of misrecognition, and that we are not alone in the mirroring processes in the symbolic order of language, the Real sets in and interupts[75]. This, however, does not mean that we should, or could remove all dualisms, quite the contrary. As Borgerson & Rehn (2004:457) have argued "dualisms should be preserved for critical purposes that are fundamental, even in their absence, in organising practices". In this study, for instance, I have deployed dualisms *between concepts* objects concepts/process concepts, *within a concept* competence as a juridically stable event/moving target, *between practices* material/discursive, and, on an *ontological level*, the dualism between self/Other. Finally, in this chapter I have discussed the dichotomy between modernism and postmodernism. My argument has been that the dualisms produce a creative space, as long as we do not present them in a hierarchic manner which forces us to choose or hierarchise them. Perhaps this reveal one of the reasons why postmodern organisation studies can be said to have conquered it self: Due to its strong focus on language and the linguisticly formed subject, it has left out to account for how the material practices comes to matter, how they are created, formed and shaped.

[74] As a sequel to the 1983 classic, Mintzberg has announced that he putting out "structure in sevens".
[75] It should be noted that where three is the number for Lacan in the symbolic, one is the number of the imaginary, the whole, unity even when thought as a fusion of the two (Rösing 2005:107).

No period has sacrificed so much to the belief in action without a subject as the last fifteen years, which were nevertheless often credited with a "return to the subject". But the subject in question was an individual agent, not a subject of history.

Luc Boltanki & Eve Chiapello (2005:531)

VII The Performative Power of Competence - revisited

The purpose of this final chapter is to sum up the contributions of *The Performative Power of Competence.* By *re*turning to the themes and ideas addressed in the previous chapters I account for how competence and subjectivity have been related in this study and what the nature is of this relation. My contribution will be accounted for in three steps: the first on making competence a problem to be questioned; the second returning to the research question: what becomes of subjectivity, when competence is actualised? and the third on how competence must be studied in the event. Through these three steps I show how my workings with competence entailed a certain kind of questioning; a questioning that must be grounded in "events" of competence and as a consequence working with competence is not merely about activities but about an ideology – a performative power which transforms those taking part in it.

Making competence a problem

In the opening chapter I launched the idea of competence as a practice of being; an ongoing process in which subjects are variably performed. Central to my argument has been to examine competence as a practice, that is a practice that actualises, creates, connects and produces, but also one that delimits, calculates, and reduces. Hence I discovered that competence was about producing and minimising differences, that is competence sets norms (healthy or sick, good or bad, beneficial or harmful) for what is to be valued competent and reduces the number of possible competent outcomes (some events are actualised, whereas some are not). Competence became relevant to ask *for* because of my initial observation that competence apparently today denotes a double-signification as a problem (a need to learn something new) and a solution (a precondition for efficient and attractive

workplaces). As we saw in chapter I and further explored in chapters III and V, competence is extremely effective in linking itself up to the object (the organisation, the employee(s), the culture, etc.) it seeks to signify. But when I want to study the way that these processes of linking and relating come about, it does not suffice to limit my study to end points of competence (company visions and targets, individual career plans and so on). These temporary and abstract significations only go to show how competence works by operations of differentiation, but they miss the *performativity* of competence. How has the thesis contributed to this way of making competence a problem?

As suggested in the opening chapter, I have followed an outline which acknowledges competence as a) normal and immanent in organisational practice, b) constituted in relations, c) intensive rather than extensive. So when I raise the *performative power competence* as a pressing problem of our times, more than to study it as a problem that points to a certain object, we need to examine the multiple ways competence problems relate to competence solutions. Making competence a problem is hence a *redoubling*. If competence in itself signifies both a problem and its solution we have to study the double movement of diagnosing a problem, and prognosticating a cure, a proper treatment. We might understand this redoubling better if we look at the way Foucault addresses the problem of difference; the relation between problem and solution:

> The freeing of difference requires thought without contradiction, without dialectics, without negation; thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; thought of the multiple – of the nomadic and dispersed multiplicity that is not limited or confined by the constraints of similarity. … What is the answer to the question? The problem. How is the problem resolved? By displacing the question. … We must think problematically rather than question and answer dialectically (Foucault 1977b:185f).

Questions already hold within them certain problem-solution constellations. And it is in the linking of problems and solutions that we may find a way to think openly or to get beyond the "simple location" of competence discussed in chapter III. My argument in studying and writing the "problem" of competence shares the ambition which Foucault points to above. I did not intend to write a history of a specific "period". Nor did I want to "solve" the problem of competence once and for all. Instead, I have wanted to raise a problem (competence) in relation to a

question (subjectivity). This relation is by no means chosen at random. Rather as I have shown, competence holds a performative power, which connects and transgresses the established boundaries of the organisation (i.e. functions, professions, job descriptions). By actualising the project and the "projectified self", for example, personal beliefs, gestures and dispositions like self-governance, target setting, experimentation and striving for new goals in the interest of the organisation get promoted in the ideology of competence.

This is also why the diagnosis of the present should not be seen as an attempt of writing a teleological history of the subject, rather, as it was pointed out in chapter IV, I critically examined how competence is presented to us as both a problem and solution in certain ways, and for us to make sense of what this problematisation does to us, i.e. making us think competence in terms of time efficiency, transparency, goal setting and self-governance. Hence, making competence a problem, getting beyond the simple location of the competent object we need to make ourselves sensitive to the performativity always already inherent in competence. And the way I have done that is by installing a new frame of reference, asking what becomes of subjectivity, when competence is actualised? Let me recapitulate it in two steps, subjectivity first.

What becomes of subjectivity…

In chapter II, I presented a framework for how I wanted to study subjectivity, by critical reading of Althusser, Lacan and Foucault. The point of entry into this debate on what becomes of subjectivity; how one becomes a competent subject was that one does not become competent in a vacuum. The social arrangement: society, the state, family, work places, institutional thinking and so on *produces* human subjects as possible members. But since we all belong to a number of communities we have to break with the idea that we are solely governed by one repressive apparatus but instead interpellated by many apparatuses, what Althusser called Ideological State Apparatuses. Hence competence actualises a complex social field and is *not* an "underlying characteristic attributed to the person at work", as influential HRM literature continues to suggest.[76] Competence is shaped in highly complex relational games of truth involving struggle, power and feelings

[76] As discussed in chapter III "On the Genesis of Competence" influential HRM theorists like Boyatsis (1982), Spencer & Spencer (1993), Nordhaug (1994), Huselid (1995) and Ulrich (1997) all ascribe to this view in various versions.

of anxiety, guilt and doubt but also enjoyment, happiness and eagerness, sending the subject forever onwards. With Althusser, Lacan and Foucault we can explain the ever ongoing subjectivations, re-structurations, mergers, etc. which find their political, linguistic and material legitimation in the ideology of competence by the way that the employees and their organisations in both the CHE and the NERI are never fully developed. It is when I recognise the call from the organisation that I can become a responsible "competent" employee and simultaneously a not-yet-fully developed object for competence development. In symptomatological terms, i.e in the Master discourse that Lacan speak of, "to be cured," is to be in a position where no new procedure or restructuration is needed. This is the object *petit a*, the never fully satisfied object of *the Real*, that we may strive for but never reach. As soon as employee appraisals have been implemented, or a new reform has been put into action, it becomes the basis for yet another desire, a new programme or competence development process.

What happens to the subject then, when competence is actualised? So far, I have primarily dealt with this question in indirect terms, for example in chapter II, where I suggested that the subject is re-interpreted, re-inscribed, restored, entagled in processes of interpellation, identification and subjectification. And again in chapter III, where I pointed to a number of subject transitions. According to the ideology of competence, to be a subject is about "being suitable" explainable by "an organism's capacity to interact *effectively* with its environment". But these "suitable, effective interactions are now redoubled. For instance to be a competent teacher it is not enough to know your curriculum, you also need to contribute to the development of good teaching practice, by questioning, criticising and promoting new professional standards. Hence, in the CHE, they have a knowledge center for "the ongoing development of the teaching profession".

This could look like *Homo Sapiens* (literally "wise man" in Latin) with the mediation of competence being replaced by *Homo Oeconomicus* (the neoliberal man), a figure for whom everything becomes a matter of investment and return (new project possibilities, employability, etc.). And as a consequence, society would not be the society of the supermarket, with endless possibilities that Cooper often talks about, but the society of the enterprise. But the coming of *Homo Oeconomicus* is, I believe, what already Foucault signified in the 1970s by the

term biopower[77]: *Homo Oeconomicus* is not only the man of exchange, he is not simply a man of consumption; rather he is the man of enterprise and production. What my study suggests is that with the ideology of competence, we might be witnessing a new turn. We might be moving beyond the "control society" mentioned by Foucault and Deleuze and into new forms of flexibility. Perhaps what we are witnessing is the coming of *Homo Liquens*[78]*?* This would be a man made liquid in ever floating signification processes; a man who acknowledges that there can be no end to competence, only temporary openings and closures. This is why I have also striven to show that, in Lacanian terms, there can be no inside or outside of competence. The subject is in the organisation just as the organisation is in the subject. Such movement is not only at loggerheads with the juridical deliminations of competence from earlier times. It also raises a number of demands for those engaged in processes where competence is actualised.

…when competence is actualised?

First, our strategy of analysis when we want to investigate how competence and subjectivity relate, needs be suited for this kind of study, it must include specific accounts of work from the people we study while at the same time remain sensitive to possible transformations, knowing "how that which is might no longer be that which is" (Foucault 2000c:450). In such an analysis, viewing competence as a social technology is productive because it enables us to question and go beyond the way organisations, via their institutional thinking come to think of competence as activities of improvement for certain specified individuals or groups. *Second*, the demands of competence of being "suitable" and "interacting effectively" call for a certain kind of judgment. Though many transitions become observable there is no objective outside position wherefrom the subject can be valued competent or incompetent. One simply has to follow the relations produced *through* the practice of competence. *Third*, following this "perspectivism" if the subject is in an

[77] The two lecture courses at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979 in which Foucault speaks of biopower/biopolitics, *Security, Territory and Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, are being published in English translation at the moment by Palgrave Macmillan. The former came out in 2007; the latter will be available from April 2008.

[78] Knalhatt 2005, from whom I borrow this term sees *Homo Liquens* as a part of a much broader development involving the rise of new technologies like bio-technology and nano-technology, by which we begin to design ourselves, from the use of silicone in breasts to the invention of designer babies with intelligent genes. This might give a whole new sense to the term "designing effective organisations".

ongoing process of becoming, it is difficult to plan or test for a specific end result. If there ever was a ceteris paribus "law" of competence it now becomes inoperative. Any model of competence seeking universal or generally effective, superior performance detached from the concurrent development of those who are to perform must from this point of view be rejected. It may be that the State Employers Authority asks all government institutions to carry out competence strategically and systematically but this view is challenged by the way practice works. Competence is always-already strategic. It is no problem setting up a plan, systematically and strategically. But as we saw competence is impossible to "capture" in a plan, insofar as the very object of development is not a physically stabile product, but the human subject and subjects are subject to change, so to speak. Due to the performative power of competence we have to study the specific problem-solution constellations, that is studying competence in the event.

Studying competence in the event

What is actualised then, when competence is invited into organisations? The key argument has been that there is an intricate relation between processes of competence and the subjectivity produced in these processes. And this relation can only be studied by analysing the *specific incidents or events* in which competence is actualised. How are we to study this relation between competence and subjectivity? As we saw in chapter V, in my analysis drawing on Althusser, Lacan and Foucault, the subject is interpellated, identified and subjectivated through specific processes of competence. Let me explain the consequences of this by way of an experience from one of the action learning meetings in the Centre for Higher Education (CHE).

> "By now I have reached the age and life experience where I am capable of distinguishing private life from working life, thank you!" The voice cuts through the room like a buzz saw and everything turns quiet. I have just pointed to the agenda for the action learning meeting suggesting that we proceed by discussing *personal development objectives*. "Oh no!" I think, have I now, once again, violated one of the unwritten rules of behaviour in the CHE? Even though, according to the plan, we are well into the implementation phase of the competence development project, I know very well how easy it is to step off – I have already tried it several times. Carrie, the knowledge centre consultant, whom I "interrupted",

> glowers at me and after a long period of silence and an even soothing discussion we decide to close the meeting as we do not seem to get any closer to a definition of evidence today. After the meeting Lucy approaches me saying softly, “I think that you did it quite well, today”. But since that day with this team I keep a low profile in terms of airing proposals for competence development such as the one about personal development objectives, even though they had already been decided on according to the project plan.

This incident from my fieldwork goes to show the *disciplinary* effects of working with competence. My well-intentioned idea of performing action learning, suggesting that the employees in the CHE worked with personal development objectives encountered resistance. But just as competence can produce guilt and a sense of incompleteness for those being exposed to it, in this and many other cases it also immediately produced a sense of doubt and guilt in me, making me posing all kinds of questions to my own enterprise: What can I demand of those I ask to work with competence? Had I gone too far in suggesting personal development objectives? How much facilitating power can I ask of myself?

The point is, that being engaged in competence processes, knowing the competence is not merely an innocent business of for example setting up “a personal development goal”, I do not know when the reaction that I get is due to me overstepping their subjectivity or whether they are using their subjectivity *strategically* to make me feel uncertain, thereby producing an unresolved space of interpretation and doubt.

There was no way that I could predict how the knowledge centre consultants would receive the idea of action learning. And though the consultants and I tried to manage and “control” the process the best we could, by setting up pre-analysis, doing interviews, testing ideas and themes on the steering committee, we had to accept the uncontrollable nature of competence. As my encounter with the knowledge centre consultants revealed disciplinary effects, it also reflected how competence becomes performative. Concepts of theory, empirics and method intersected and were rolled into one practice. At the time of the action learning meeting in the CHE I believed myself to be one of them. I thought I could speak open and freely, without caution and deliver a straightforward suggestion, theory-based of course, as to what I thought was the next step. But I was reminded of the

fundamental difference between the knowledge centre consultants as participators and myself as coordinator. To work with competence processes is not an innocent business, theoretically elaborated, practical and well-intended as it may seem. They had to live with the consequences of the competence development processes afterwards, whereas I did not. And it was not until much later that I found out how knowledge centre consultants balance the key indicators they are measured by, i.e. striking the balance between managing oneself and being willing to sacrifice oneself for the benefit of the community. If I, as an outsider, perhaps unknowingly, attempted to shift this balance, resistance would occur. Further, these processes of competence development create uncertainty and make the participants doubt on themselves and their possible worth. And if they resist, the doubt and guilt is not removed, but displaced. Indeed, it is one of the prime effects of competence. It installs a legitimate space of search and doubt, which also affect those facilitating the development, as we saw in the example from the CHE above. I began to doubt on my role and position as consultant and facilitator in the process of asking the knowledge center consultants to search for new senses of selves.

My development as a subject working with competence, learning little by little how to manoeuvre the institutional settings was bound to the topic we worked with, competence, and so was the subjectivity of those I wished to influence. And more importantly, since the nature of this topic, competence, is highly profiled and prestigious, it also contains potential individual and social conflicts and hence becomes extremely sensitive to the way it is managed.

By searching for actualisations I suggest that we need to see how new wholes arise from the fragments of the hole (i.e. how the competent subjects in the projectified organisation are given time and resources to create profit in order to gain access and be connected to the next project). In my view, describing how movements of competence multiply and disperse the human subject does not suffice. We should also account for how unities, temporary and fragile as they may be, arise from multiplicities. This is what I have shown throughout the text (i.e. by analysing the use of works councils, action learning, teams etc.) and here again by way of the CHE example. One of the time-places where whole and hole, unity and multiplicity meet and intersect is the *event* (Böhm 2003;Sørensen 2004). This should come as no surprise at this stage in the text after all I did “eventalise” my diagnosis in chapter IV. Yet we might recall how Foucault in his “questions of

method" (1994a:226f) quite clearly says that the singularity of the event and the multiplicity of causes hang together:

> eventalization means rediscovering the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies and so on, that a given moment establishes what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal and necessary. In this sense, one is indeed effecting a sort of multiplication or pluralization of causes.

Competence and subjectivity then are an explosive cocktail. They intensify one another. To be a competent working human being today is as Bauman (2000:32) formulates it a basic characteristic of the present: "Needing to become what one is, is the feature of modern living." The role of the consultant in these processes of self-search and self-doubt is first and foremost to promote possible selves and possible futures and deliver the technologies needed for individuals to become competent selves in these futures. But as we saw in the stories from the CHE and the NERI the introduction of social technologies releases profound emotions and struggles. As a consequence the consultant becomes not only a "vendor of technologies" but also a "manager of human resistances".

Summing up[79]

With this thesis I have produced an account of how competence holds performative power with which both organisational settings and subjectivities are simultaneously *produced*. Examining the intimate relation between competence and subjectivity I suggest the coming of an ideology of competence as a new Ideological State Appatatus of our times. This new ideology becomes visible when public work places call for coaches, change agents, teams and seek to install flexible structures in the projective city. But as I showed with the use of projects in the CHE and the NERI, competence is much more than mere activities. It may be supported by activities like coaching and action learning etc. but with it comes a fundamental mode of thinking, an ideology, which defines how we can become subjects, competent employees. An incorporated part of being competent is to

[79] Again, as I pointed out in the first of these *summing up* sections they deviate from what might be understood by "summing up", in the common sense. More than being a simple summary of what I have just said or argued I have used them to make leaps (back and forth) omitting some points, stressing other and thereby opening new possible directions. This summing up section is no exception.

doubt and search for the "suitable" or "effectively" interacting self, knowing one will never reach the end.

Competence hold within itself a performative force, but has simultaneously become a diagnosis of a sickness, "an unwanted" state and a cure. Hence, it becomes problematic for consultants if they cannot come up with quick fixes, because nothing is worse than suffering from an illness, not knowing how to diagnose and treat it. But as we were also reminded by following knowledge workers in their daily doings, struggling with competence, "some diseases can be dangerous to cure" (Canguilhem 1998:279). Seeking its performative powers, competence has revealed itself as a unique vehicle to actualise subjectivity and to bring us into positions of "not-yet-fully" developed subjects. Resistance and struggle reside, as basic conditions, but are transformed into important elements in the self-creating, co-constituting ideology of competence.

Competence itself is a contested concept, which is precisely why it must be resisted, re-configurated, revised, dominated, re-invented by the workings of competence. In this world, agency is not a problem in the strict sense, because agency is all around. Seeking the performative power of competence is not so much about *uncovering* competence, finding an essence, as it is a question of "tuning" it, finding channels, events or practices that can link up and thereby *intensify* transversal struggles into larger, collective but discontinuous movements[80]. The performative power of competence legitimises subjectivity transformation, and the subject finds satisfaction, not in the liminal experiences of competence upgrading but in the infinity of ongoing processes in search of yet another I.

[80] Paraphrasing Nealon (2008:106): "The Foucaultian question or problem is not so much *uncovering* resistance, as it is a question of "tuning" it – finding channels, concepts, or practices that can link up and thereby intensify transversal struggles unto larger, collective but discontinuous movements".

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair…

Robert Frost, The Road Not Taken

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With the metaphor of “the road” from the Lord of the Rings I opened this text, and wanted it to become a book of experience and experiment. Looking back I feel tempted like Bilbo the Hobbit to say that there is only one road. Being a traveller in competence, I have experienced the road like a great river: its springs are at every doorstep, and every path is its tributary. But as with Bilbo and the finding of the Master ring, the traveller who sets out, and the traveller who returns are not one and the same. The ring transformed Bilbo’s life (as it did with all of its other bearers). In the ring was a performative power, giving them qualities they did not have before. With *the Performative Power of Competence* the text (and the ring) is closed, and this is what by reference to Robert Frost “has made all the difference”.

Frederiksberg, March 2008
Anders Bojesen

Resumé

The Performative Power of Competence undersøger kompetence i en række konkrete arbejdspraksisser. Afhandlingen stiller skarpt på kompetence, men viser samtidig hvordan kompetence aktualiserer en række mulige problemer og løsninger. Igennem udforskningen af disse problem-løsningskonstellationer vises det hvordan kompetencens indhold, det kompetente, *forskyder* sig. Det bliver derefter klart at kompetence (og kompetenceudvikling) ikke blot er en uproblematisk, neutral begivenhed. Kompetence handler ikke blot om individuelle eller organisatoriske opkvalificeringsprojekter. Kompetence indebærer en værdidom (om det kompetente og ikke-kompetente) og er derfor i udgangspunktet altid allerede strategisk. Det betyder at kompetence ikke længere kan ses som "et underliggende karakteristika ved individet på arbejde" men må forstås som en dobbelt bevægelse; det vil sige som den samtidige udpegning af et *problem* (behov for at lære noget nyt) og en *løsning* (forudsætning for at skabe effektive og attraktive arbejdspladser).

Ved at forfølge forskydningerne i problem-løsningskonstellationerne, vises det hvordan kompetence som en skelneoperation (der producerer og minimerer forskelle) kobler sig til stadig nye endemål (visioner, strategier, karriereplaner, brugen af samarbejds-udvalg, mellemlederfunktioner osv. osv.). Aktualiseret kompetence er aldrig genstandsfri, men må ses som en uhyre effektiv forbindelsesmaskine, der altid forbinder sig til en lang række konkrete genstande og dagsordner. Dette træk præger litteraturen om kompetence, der i vid udstrækning tager forholdet for givet. Resultatet bliver en instrumentalitet, der ikke kan spørge til forbindelsen i sig selv. Det kræver nemlig en overvejelse over kompetencedommens egen performativitet. Det er her afhandlingen sætter ind, på niveauet *inden* forbindelserne etableres, og spørger hvordan det er muligt at holde kompetence åbent som begreb, fænomen og praksis, så man kan studere dets egen performativitet, det vil sige, hvad der overhovedet forbindes med hvad og hvem som problem og som løsning i den konkrete kompetenceproces?

Hvis vi vil undgå at foregribe kompetencens indhold som konkret genstand og dermed blive låst fast på et allerede givet indhold, må vi indsætte en ny referenceramme. I afhandlingen vælger jeg at studere relationen mellem kompetence og subjektet.

Abstract

The Performative Power of Competence examines competence in a number of specific work practices. The thesis focuses on competence, but shows at the same time how competence actualises a number of possible problems and solutions. By exploring these problem-solution constellations it is shown how the content of competence displaces itself. It becomes clear that that competence (and development of competence) is not simply an unproblematic, neutral event. Competence is not merely about individual or organisational projects of skill enhancement. Competence entails a value judgment (with regard to the competent and not-competent), which is why it is strategic from the very outset. This means that competence can no longer be seen as an "underlying characteristic attributed to the subject at work" but must be seen as a double movement; in other words as the concurrent designation of a problem (a need to learn something new) and a solution (a precondition for creating effective and attractive workplaces).

By following the displacements in the problem-solution constellations it is showed how competence works as an operation of differentiation (producing and minimising differences) and linking itself to ever new end goals (visions, strategies, career plans, the use of works councils, middle managers etc., etc.). Actualised competence is never object free but has to be seen as an extremely effective relational machine, linking itself to a wide array of specific objects and agendas. The competence literature tends to take this feature of relationality for granted. The end result is an instrumental thinking not capable of questioning the relation itself. To question the relation calls for an analysis of the performativity of the judgement of competence. This is where the thesis sets in – at the level before relations are produced – and asks how it might be possible to keep competence open as a concept, phenomenon and practice, making it possible to study the performativity of competence, that is who and what is connected as a problem and who and what is connected as a solution in the specific event of competence?

If we want to avoid the anticipation of the content of competence and the linking to a specific object we need to install a new frame of reference. In this thesis I chose to study the relation between competence and the subject.

Det bærende argument er her, at kompetence ikke kan skilles fra den kompetente aktør, og derfor altid indebærer en forestilling om subjektivitet. Det enkelte menneske (subjekt) arbejder og bliver sat i arbejde af den performative kraft, der ligger i kompetencebegrebet. I og med at mennesket-i-arbejde er i en konstant tilblivelsesproces, må subjektiviteten også studeres som bevægelse. Afhandlingen søger derfor teoretisk at bidrage til en forståelse af subjektivitet som en særlig form for subjekt*skabelse*, der har bevægelse som sit grundlæggende omdrejningspunkt. Igennem en kritisk læsning af tekster af Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan og Michel Foucault udkrystalliseres begreberne interpellation, identifikation og subjektivation som centrale for forståelsen af det bevægelige subjekt. Udgangspunktet er, at det at blive kompetent aldrig finder sted i et vakuum. Det sociale fællesskab vi indgår i *skaber* mennesket som et muligt medlem (det være sig samfundet, staten, familien, arbejdspladsen og de logikker, der her gør sig gældende). Men siden vi alle indgår i mere end et fællesskab samtidig, bliver vi nødt til at bryde med forestillingen om at vi skabes alene af en repressivt instans men i stedet interpelleres af en flerhed af instanser, det som Althusser kalder for Ideologiske Statsapparater. Og ligesom de Ideologiske Statsapparater rekrutterer subjekter ved at interpellere dem, har subjektet selv en aktiv rolle at spille i hvorvidt han eller hun tager imod tilbuddet og besvarer kaldet om at blive samfundsborger, familiemedlem, medarbejder osv.

I afhandlingen vises det hvordan kompetence har bevæget sig fra en overvejende juridisk betydning *at være lovformeligt kvalificeret til at udføre en given opgave*, til i dag at omfatte langt bredere betydninger såsom *i kraft af sin person at være velegnet eller velkvalificeret*. Reminiscenser af den juridiske diskurs findes stadig, fx når læger i kraft af deres profession har kompetence (og etisk forpligtelse) til at helbrede. Men hvor dette kan ses som et typisk eksempel på en institutionaliseret relation mellem kompetence og kompetencens genstand står kompetence i langt de fleste tilfælde i et anderledes uafsluttet forhold til det subjekt, der skal udvikles. Kompetence kommer derfor til at handle om, at den enkelte skal være sig sit ansvar bevidst og påtage sig idealet om selvrealisering og personlig udvikling i jobbet som en eksistentiel fordring.

The central argument is that competence cannot be separated from the competent actor, which is why competence always carries with it a notion of subjectivity. The human (subject) works and is set to work by the performative power inherent in the concept of competence. Since the subject-at-work is in an ongoing process of becoming, subjectivity has to be studied as movement. By making movement its focal point, the thesis seeks to contribute to a theoretical understanding of subject*making*. Through a critical reading of texts by Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault the concepts of interpellation, identification and subjectivation are crystallised as central to an understanding of the moving subject. The point of entry into this debate is that one does not become competent in a vacuum. The social arrangement in which we take part: society, the state, family, workplaces, institutional thinking and so on *produces* human subjects as possible members. But since we all belong to a number of communities we have to break with the idea that we are solely governed by one repressive apparatus but instead interpellated by many apparatuses, what Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses. And like the Ideological State Apparatuses recruit subject, the subject itself plays an active part in whether he or she is to accept the offer, answering the call of becoming a citizen, a family member, an employee and so on.

The thesis shows how competence has moved from notions in a primarily juridical discourse as *being legally qualified to perform an act*, into much broader notions such as *the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified*. Today we still find reminiscences of the juridical discourse for instance when doctors due to their profession possess competence (and an ethical obligation) to cure. But where this may be seen as a prime example of an institutionalised relation between competence and its object, in most cases today competence emerges as unresolved in relation to the subject who is to develop competence. Competence therefore signifies a personal responsibility each individual must assume in order to live up to his or her responsibility and act out self realisation and personal development in the job as an existential demand.

I afhandlingen vises det endvidere hvordan en række overgange markerer indvarslingen af en ny mulig kompetenceideologi. Centralt for denne kompetenceideologi står betegnelser som lederen som coach, medarbejderen som ansvarstagende specialist, tillidsrepræsentanten som forandringsagent og i det hele taget forestillingen om arbejdspladsen som et netværk af teams, der med interne og eksterne interessenter, i bedste "lean" stil konstant søger mod produktivitetsforbedringer ved at reducere spild og sikre stabilitet i de processer, der skaber værdi for kunden.

"Det projektificerede samfund" lader til at være et oplagt symptom på denne nye ideologi, hvor medarbejdere ikke længere tildeles en bestemt funktion på ordre af chefer, men i stedet gives opmærksomhed og ressourcer, så de bedre kan realisere deres fulde potentiale til gavn for dem selv og organisationen.

Empirisk undersøges, hvilken subjektivitet der opstår, når kompetence aktualiseres i fire specifikke arbejdskontekster i henholdsvis Biocentrum-DTU, CVU Storkøben-havn, Danmarks Miljøundersøgelser og Vejdirektoratet. For at undgå den selvfølgeliggørelse der ligger i koblingerne mellem kompetence som problem og løsning udvikles en analysestrategi for "det, der aktualiseres". Her byder samtids-diagnosen sig til som en relevant analysefigur, hvormed spørgsmålet: *hvem er vi i dag?* kan stilles uden at blive den endelige teleologiske historie om, hvordan mennesket bliver menneske (og hvordan medarbejderen bliver medarbejder). I stedet søges en udpegning af de muligheder for subjektivitetstransformation, der stilles til rådighed. For ikke at låse sig fast på det genstands-kompetente installerer afhandlingen ligeledes et begreb om kompetence som en *social teknologi*, der installerer en langsommelighed i koblingerne mellem kompetence som problem og løsning, og dermed gør det muligt at få øje på hvordan disse koblinger kan om- og gentænkes.

Med disse to greb, samtidsdiagnosen og kompetence som social teknologi dukker kompetence op som omfattet af en særlig (ideologisk) tankegang om det gode og fornuftige i at skabe resultater, gennemsigtighed, målbarhed, selvledelse mv., samtidig med at det bliver muligt at diskutere kompetencens performativitet.

The thesis goes on to show how a number of subject transitions mark the coming of a new possible ideology of competence. Key designations for this ideology of competence are the manager as coach, the employee as responsibility assuming specialist and the shop steward as change agent and the whole concept of the workplace as a network of teams, in which internal and external partners under the influence of lean thinking seek to enhance productivity by reducing waste and securing stability in processes that create value for the customer.

In this new ideology the "projectified society" seems to be a symptom of how employees no longer are to fulfil functions and take orders from bosses, rather they are granted attention and resources to help them realise their full potential to the mutual benefit of themselves and the organisation.

Empirically, the thesis examines what becomes of subjectivity when competence is actualised in four specific work practices, namely that of Biocentrum-DTU, CVU Storkøben-havn, Danmarks Miljøundersøgelser and Vejdirektoratet. To get beyond the simple locations of competence as a problem and competence as a solution an analytical strategy to observe "that, which is being actualised" is developed. This analytical strategy bases itself on a diagnosis of the present posing the question: *who are we, today?* not as a way of writing the final teleological story of how the subject becomes a subject (or how the employee becomes an employee), but rather to explore how new possibilities for subjectivity transformation are made available. In order to escape the fixed mode of competence objects the thesis introduces competence as a *social technology*, this technology grants slowness in the making of links between problem and solution, thereby making it possible to remake and rethink them.

These two, the diagnosis of the present and competence as a social technology make it possible to see competence as an emerging ideology promoting the good and reasonable in creating results, transparency, measurability, self-governance etc. while at the same time discussing the performativity of competence.

I sin analyse af praksis betjener afhandlingen sig af et stort empirisk materiale fra den offentlige sektor inden for det danske uddannelses- og forskningsfelt. Materialet omfatter som nævnt fire kompetenceudviklingsforløb, der er gennemført over en periode på atten måneder fra 2004-2006, og i afhandlingen gås i dybden med to af de fire forløb. Materialet er unikt ved, at det er skabt i et samarbejde med fire konsulenter, hvor forfatteren selv har været til stede og har bidraget til udformningen af de kompetence-udviklingsskabende processer. Ved at bringe de konkrete kompetence-udviklingsforløb igennem den samtidsdiagnostiske analysestrategi afdækkes kompetencebegrebets performative kræfter. Heri vises det, hvordan et særligt ideal for kompetent medarbejderskab, der betoner pro-aktivitet, selvrefleksivitet og en aktiv tagen ansvar for organisationens mål står som pejlemærker. Her vises det også hvordan kompetence manifesterer sig ikke blot på et sprogligt-diskursivt niveau (fx i form at politikker og nedskrevne strategier) men ligeså meget på et kropsligt-materielt niveau, der fx omfatter den fysiske indretning af arbejdspladsen, kommunikationsformer mv.

Med afhandlingen fremstår kompetence nu som en særlig værenspraksis. En praksis der aktualiserer, skaber, forbinder og producerer, men også en praksis der afgrænser, kalkulerer og minimerer. Når studiet viser hvordan kompetence handler om at producere og minimere forskelle betyder det, at kompetence på én gang opsætter normer for (det gode og det dårlige, det sunde og det usunde, det gavnlige og det skadelige). Samtidig reduceres med kompetence også mulighederne for kompetente udlæsninger (nogle begivenheder aktualiseres, mens andre forbliver uaktualiserede). Formuleret kort markerer kompetence en særlig ideologisk *til*værelse, det vil sige bestemte måder mennesket kan være-til.

Et symptom på denne kompetence-ideologi er fx når offentlige institutioner inviterer konsulenter indenfor for at skabe coaches, forandringsagenter, tværgående teams, der igen har til formål at skabe øget fleksibilitet, tværgående samarbejde og projektorganisering. På den måde kan arbejdet i de fire institutioner ses som en "uklarhedens installation", der betjener sig af forestillingen om, at man som kompetent medarbejder (og konsulent) skal være "positivt forstyrrende", "kritisk refleksiv", kunne "arbejde med sig selv" og bringes i en situation af "konstruktiv selvtvivl" for "altid at kunne blive bedre".

By analysing practice, the thesis makes use of a large empirical material from public sector institutions within the Danish educational and research establishment. The material comprises four processes of competence carried out over a period of eighteen months from 2004-2006 of which two are dealt with in detail. The material is unique in the sense that it is a result of the author's shaping of these processes of creating competence in close collaboration with four consultants. By exposing the specific processes of competence to the diagnosis of the present the performative power of competence is revealed. It is shown through ideals of person-hood stressing proactiveness, self-reflexivity and employees actively assuming responsibility for the goals of the organisation. It is also shown how competence manifests itself not only at a linguistic-discursive level (for instance in written policies and strategies) but just as well at a bodily-material level, encompassing the physical layout of the workplace, means of communication, etc.

With the thesis competence now emerges as a certain practice of being. This is a practice which actualises, creates, connects and produces, but also one that delimits, calculates, and reduces. The study shows that competence is about producing and minimising differences, that is competence sets norms (healthy or sick, good or bad, beneficial or harmful) for what is to be valued competent and reduces the number of possible competent outcomes (some events are actualised, whereas others are not). In short, competence signifies certain ideological modes of existence.

Symptoms of this ideology are cases where public institutions invite consultants to help them create coaches, change agents, cross-disciplinary teams all with the aim of sustaining flexibility, lateral cooperation and project organising. In this way the work in the four institutions can be seen as the instalment of a "regime of obscurity" which builds on to the idea of the competent employee (and the competent consultant) as performing "positive disruption", "critical reflexivity" and "work on the self", promoting positions of "constructive self doubt" in order to "improve oneself".

Kompetencens performative kraft består i den samtidige diagnose af mangelstilstanden og udmåling af den rette behandling. For konsulenten bliver det et problem, hvis vedkommende ikke kan til veje-bringe den rette diagnose og kur som et "quick fix", der kan rette op på den uønskede mangeltilstand, idet intet er værre end at få diagnosticeret et problem uden at få stillet den rette behandling i udsigt.

Samtidig hævder afhandlingen imidlertid også, at det vil være farligt for ikke at sige umuligt at kurere den mangelstilstand som producerer en samtidsrelevant subjektivitet. Fx skal modstand mod forandring og en kritik af det bestående ikke blot elimineres som kværulanteri. De må derimod ses som væsentlige elementer i transformationen af det selv-skabende, selv-refleksive, ansvars-tagende subjekt. Kompetencens performative kraft legitimerer subjekttransformationen så længe subjektet finder tilfredsstillelse, ikke i de afgrænsede kompetence-udviklingsaktiviteter, men i den uendelige vedvarende søgen efter endnu et kompetent jeg.

The performative power of competence resides in the diagnosis of an unwanted state and the concomitant determination of the proper cure. Hence, it becomes problematic for the consultants if they cannot come up with the proper diagnose and cure as quick fixes, because nothing is worse than suffering from an illness, not knowing how to diagnose and treat it.

Yet, simultaneously the thesis claims it is dangerous if not impossible to cure the state of deprivation produced in the diagnosis of the present. Resistance to change and critique of the established order for example are not to be eliminated as unproductive troublemaking, but must be seen as important elements in the transformation of the self-creating, self-reflexive, responsibility assuming subject. The performative power of competence legitimises subjectivity transformation, and the subject finds satisfaction, not in the liminal experiences of competence upgrading but in the infinity of ongoing processes in search of yet another competent I.

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The text gives the reader plenty to think about, not because the text is confusing but because it asks interesting and intriguing questions.

The strong thesis is that the whole emphasis on competence (development) has to be inquired into how it is performed (actualised in work practices) and how it brings along and shapes a process of subjectivation. This is brought out in a text which follows a strong line of argumentation and reflection to reconstruct such a problematisation by bringing in a lot of relevant and original conceptual resources.

(Excerpt from the evaluation committee's assessment)

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