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Doctoral Thesis

The Organization(s) of Well-being and Productivity: (Re)assembling work in the Danish Post

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The Organization(s) of Well-being and Productivity

Ph.d. Serie 38.2012



**Copenhagen
Business School**
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

The Organization(s) of Well-being and Productivity

(Re)assembling work in the Danish Post

Mette Mogensen

Doctoral School of Organisation
and Management Studies

Ph.d. Serie 38.2012

THE ORGANIZATION(S) OF **WELL-BEING** AND **PRODUCTIVITY**

Mette Mogensen

(Re)assembling work in the Danish Post

A circular diagram consisting of several concentric rings. The diagram is divided into segments by radial lines. Three segments are highlighted with color: a green segment in the outer ring, a yellow segment in the middle ring, and a blue segment in the inner ring. The text "(Re)assembling work in the Danish Post" is written along the curve of the green segment.

Mette Mogensen
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Prologue

My Ph.D. has been part of a larger research project with the title: Well-being, Self-management and Productivity (WESP), and partly financed by the Danish work environment research fond. The prime matter of concern of the project has been to investigate how worker well-being has become not as traditionally held a management responsibility, but increasingly so part of the responsibility of the self-managed employee. Under the new organizational regime of self-management the employee is expected to control his/her own work effort and productivity in relation to given output demands. In this endeavor worker well-being becomes a matter of productivity. The aim of the project is to clarify how this new mode of organization affects the work environment of the employees. Beside the Danish Post 2 municipal primary schools and a big Bio-tech company have served the empirical outset of this qualitative investigation (Bramming et al. 2008).

From my engagement with the WESP-project, as well as my past years participating in R & D projects within the working environment field, I have inherited, so to speak, a natural interest in the working environment and also a politically motivated concern for the well-being of the workers. I have also caught an interest in how the work environment field, given modern forms of organization, seems to have become increasingly indiscernible from the field of management studies. Although traditionally they form part of two opposite political agendas, having worker well-being as a common prime interest, the two fields show to produce more or less similar diagnosis and propositions for improvements, which makes it hard to tell them apart. How to act politically when the means to protect the workers are at the same time the ones used for management control? The framing of this thesis, as clearly demonstrated in the research field, springs from this initial interest, but not least the ambition to produce an empirically sensitive knowledge that may serve to offer new possible positions and differences from which to act.



Chapter 1:

From trimmed legs to a whole human being
– juggling stability and flexibility

IT IS 9 AM in the canteen at the Copenhagen head office of The Danish Post (TDP). Two teams from the local area, counting around 25 postal workers, are having a day off from their usual routes and routines. Today they have stayed in bed a little longer than usual, have dressed in civilian and are now enjoying the obligatory round of coffee, rolls, jam and pre-sliced cheese, while they are obviously enjoying each other's company. Each team sits at separate tables. It is the two teams' turn to do the one day compulsory course, which has been assigned for every postal worker in TDP. Management has decided to re-invigorate the TQM principles under the headline of 'Total Involvement in Quality'. In everyday parlance the course is called: TIQ 3.0. The two teachers for the day, hired from the regional adult training center, are waiting in the nearby room. Chairs have been placed along the walls, leaving the floor cleared and inviting. A stack of yellow post-its are placed on each chair and white, still empty posters hang on the wall behind each seat. They are ready. The subject of the day is 'creativity'. The course is well planned and changes between short slide shows and various physical exercises in pairs. Some of the slides reoccur; for instance the picture of a red stair carpet and the statue of a polar bear. We are instructed to stand every time we see the stair carpet, while the polar bear indicates that we should sit down. The stair carpet: up. We are told to celebrate our mistakes by raising our arms over our heads shouting. 'YES, I made a mistake!' We practice several times, shouting it louder and louder. It seems a little awkward, but seemingly everyone buys in. The stair carpet, the bear, up, down. YES, I made a mistake! Creativity is about being here and now. It is about daring. On our chests we all carry a piece of masking tape. It does not reveal our names, but the job we dreamt of having as kids. I am surrounded by doctors, an archaeologist, a football player, a ballet dancer and an architect to mention but a few. I always wanted to become a journalist. We display our dream, and it makes us open and receptive. The rest of the day, we spend playing. Doing comic scenes, improvising interviews, laughing, competing, and loudly celebrating as we make our mistakes. Only later reality creeps in as the teams are asked to sit down and agree on 3 initiatives that would make up a good workday. One of the teams would like to make room for a table, to be able to sit and share some bread or cake. Later on, one of the teachers tells me that they have changed the course a bit along the way. Even if it counters the original concept. Creativity is about not always focusing on the result. To stay open in the uncertain process of creation, like a child. But adults need meaning, as she explains. Hence, they have introduced the theme of 'a good workday' a little earlier in the program than planned and invited the team leader of the respective teams to stop by towards the end of the day; to commit them too. The goal is that the team and their leader continue the work they have started once they get back home. According to the teacher, however, this is generally difficult. As they start making things more concrete, to translate the ideas into daily practices, they run out of steam. Demonstratively, she collapses her torso on the chair beside me. They fall back into old patterns, she adds.

The dilemma of The Danish Post

The Danish Post (TDP) is in a dilemma: on the one side, there is a need for increased flexibility, on the other, a continuous demand for rigorous stability. The importance of flexibility is introduced due to the increased competition of postal distribution. TDP, following EU regulations, holds no longer the privilege of monopoly. Other Danish as well as international competitors have turned up during the last 10 years and 2011 will be the year of complete liberalization of the postal market in Denmark; as in the whole of EU. The fierce competitor by far, however, is the dramatic decline in letters and parcels to be distributed. Since year 2000 the drop has been no less than 40 percent (Post Danmark 2011). Nowadays, most people prefer E-mails over snail mail. The old fashioned letter is considered an option mainly when one really wants to stress sincerity or when, for one or the other reason, a physical signature is needed. Besides the present financial crisis, the ambition of Danish government to digitalize communication between citizens and authorities has catalyzed this general trend. Accordingly, internet is taking over as the prime infrastructure of communication and distribution. New solutions and ideas are called for in this situation of transition. The fusion with the Swedish Post forming the group 'PostNord' has been one way of increasing the muscle of competitiveness in an international market of postal delivery. The hope is to gain not least administratively and technologically from the fusion. Over the recent years, TPD itself has already been involved in the development of various digital alternatives and works as well along the lines of increased market differentiation; making customers pay for various extra services and creating flexibility and customer friendly solutions by the means of self service. Considering the advantage of existing expertise of logistics and distribution, reflections among managers also touch upon whether distribution of letters could be supplemented by alternative products: Could we perhaps deliver food for elderly people; water the gardens of summer residences; transport blood for transfusions? The latter has already been taken up. All in all, TDP is forced to adapt to changing markets, to think out of the box. Symptomatically, in this period of transition, the traditional bureaucratic structures, which have governed TDP, are called into question. With a sigh, local HR consultants characterize TDP as a very big ship: reacting only slowly and reluctantly to the efforts of setting a new course, pointing at employees and local managers as the ones to be unsympathetic to change. Mirroring this, the formal strategy of 2010-12 covering the business area of Distribution, 'culture development', which is translated into the education, change and development of the frames of minds of managers and employees, is defined a target area and the standards presently used in Distribution are up for thorough revision; the general ambition being 'to loosen in selected standards' (DIS 2010). Like the general trend towards de-bureaucratization, TPD thus tries to dress its organizational structures and managerial concepts in a post-bureaucratic vein.

On the other hand, there is the necessity of stability, even rigidity. Delivering letters or blood for that matter, from A to B is not that complicated. It might be a complicated logistic problem, but it can be planned for and executed quite routinely. "How hard can it be?" As one HR consultant rhetorically asks, hinting at the tendency of the large organization of TDP to complicate matters beyond what the task at hand can reasonably justify. Looking at the chosen route of adaption so far, automation and standardization has been the prime answer. The sorting and handling of mail is thus highly automated and centralized as are the logistics of delivery. Although the red uniform in the landscape might still generate associations to a romantic picture of the local Postman Pat, the work done and the routes driven by the postal workers are all standardized by the use of tight time-motion studies and advanced computer technologies. The only manpower driven part of Distribution is scripted down to the smallest of details. The automation and standardization is not least supported by the quality measures set by national law. To bring out mail in due time and match the letter with its correct address has to

be adhered to in 93 percent of the cases. As such, delivering mail from A to B is a rather fixed assignment calling for stability rather than creativity and flexibility. One would not tend to celebrate a delivery error. For every letter there is one right mailbox to hit. Addresses are unequivocal.

Within TDP, the dilemma of flexibility-stability is generally framed as a running battle between considerations of production on the one side and considerations of development on the other. In practice, it shows as instances of incommensurability between the goals of organizational departments: the Human Resource department wishing to instigate worker learning and reflexivity; and Production Development, which on the other hand is guided by the rationales of production engineering and has the rapid and constant flow of production as their prime concern. It also shows as an unresolved conflict of worker identity. While the organization praises the stability of their postal workers, their attitudes are generally found to be far too conservative, far from adaptive. The postal workers tend to stick to routines, doing what they have always been doing, without realizing the major changes that are inevitably underway, so the argument goes. If they are not simply out of a job within a few years due to the need for significant reductions in staff volume; they definitely have to change. It no longer suffices to be the owner of a pair of well-trimmed legs able to drive a given route and deliver mail within due time. The new postal worker has to take care, not merely of the delivery of today, but also worry about the possible delivery of tomorrow. The postal workers have to invest themselves in their job, to engage in ongoing improvements of production, to think creatively, to think ahead. The postal worker of tomorrow is a whole human being, who identifies with the challenges of the organization at large. At least this is the image presently available when one looks into overall business strategies as well as management initiatives counting the self-sustained teams and the various mandatory courses along the lines of Total Quality Management. Here the postal workers are taught how to think and act creatively; how to let go of old patterns and tune in on their true human potential. Following standards is obviously no longer enough. Postal workers have to become self-managed, to become competent managers of them/themselves.

A classic – and its possible re-configuration

This conflict of TDP is a classic. It frames the core problem of organizational theory: how to coordinate the relation between the worker's resources and the work task at hand in order to achieve the goals of the organization, now as well as in the future. As framed by Mintzberg (1983): do one choose the coordinating mechanisms of bureaucracy in order to control output by standardization or do one infuse flexibility, expanding the use of skills and judgments of the workers at the same time developing an organization more apt for adaption to external changes? Following Mintzberg, the choice of the optimal organizational design is not a generic matter. It requires a case to case judgment in relation to the specific organization at hand: its history, the current products, the profile of the employees, the market environment etc. (Mintzberg 1983). In other words, to find the proper organizational design is a contingent and basically empirical matter.

However, historically as well as in current management and organizational theory the normativity attached to certain modes of organizing has prevailed. In both private and public

organizations, bureaucracy has had extremely bad press, while the market orientation and flexible solutions of so-called post-bureaucracy has been suggested as the better alternative. As pointed out by Alvesson and Thompson, adopting the characteristics of post-bureaucratic organizing as opposed to traditional bureaucracy has become a statement of legitimation and ideology (Alvesson & Thompson 2010:15). It equals taking sides with the new, the future oriented, the competitive and the humane; as opposed to the old fashioned, the outdated and the basically inhuman ways of traditional bureaucracy (Du Gay 2000). In line with this, institutional theorists have shown that some organizational recipes are simply more popular than others, spreading across businesses and countries, irrespective of their actual effectiveness in practice. Basically, for organizations to gain success and legitimacy they have to mime the ways and norms of other successful organizations (Røvik 1998, 2007; DiMaggio and Powell 1991).

While a general move from bureaucracy to post-bureaucracy seems to be taking place, at least rhetorically and in terms of a certain ideological preference, researchers point out the lack of empirical evidence that the bureaucratic structures are actually in decline. Rather the opposite move has been widely recorded. Jobs of previous high degrees of skill discretion and professional expertise are currently being standardized (Hvid et al. 2010; Kärreman, Svenningsson & Alvesson 2002; Allvin et al. 2011). Simultaneously, increased divisions of labor create highly routinized and standardized job types, clearly exemplified by the establishment of call centers or call center functions (Alvesson & Thompson 2010; Batt et. al. 2003, 2007). As concluded by Alvesson and Thompson, the presumed showdown with bureaucracy in favor of post bureaucracy thus serves as a rather poor explanatory device when wanting to understand organizations and organizing of today. The overall picture is rather muddy and diverse. Alvesson and Thompson propose instead the alternative notion of 'hybridity'; that post bureaucracy is not simply replacing bureaucracy but that the two modes of organizing co-exist. Rather than contradictory in terms, the co-presence of standardization and flexibility should be considered a specific trait of modern work organizations.

How to study the co-existence of standardization and flexibility?

In TDP, as illustrated above, standardization and flexibility actually do co-exist. All the while they intensify their efforts to automate still larger parts of the pre-sorting of mail, leaving only the final distribution to humans; the efforts to create responsible work teams and self-managing employees engaged in continuous improvements of production is going on simultaneously. Ambitions of flexibility and standardization apparently go hand in hand. Or rather, the question, which has been the point of departure of my research, has been how to understand the interrelation between the two apparently opposing organizing efforts. How exactly is standardization and flexibility related as organizing efforts in the practice of mail distribution and how can such a possible co-existence be conceptualized? Is a co-existence at all feasible in practice and with what consequences? Will it lead to the dominance of one rationale over the other? Or is this question maybe already unduly tainted by inadequate assumptions? Indeed, by which measures and methods should one identify, distinguish and evaluate an organizing attempt going on somewhere in between standardization and flexibility?

Recent empirical research has been conducted along these lines already; both within the field of critical management studies and within the field of Danish work life studies (Kärreman, Svenningsson & Alvesson 2002; Alvesson & Kärreman 2004a, Alvesson & Kärreman 2004b; Kärreman, Alvesson & Wenglén 2006; Hvid et al. 2010; 2008; Holt et al. 2010). In the framing by Kärreman et al. (2006) the conceptual endeavor is: “to close the gap between the normative (ideological, emotional, charismatic) and the rational (behavioral, bureaucratic technocratic) modes of control” (Kärreman, Alvesson & Wenglén et al. 2006:335).

What the articles generally investigate and demonstrate are the specific workings of the various ‘inter-faces’ between what is conceptualized as two different ‘cages of rationality’. Cages, which empirically, however, show to be working not as each other’s opposites but rather ‘in tandem’ (Kärreman & Alvesson 2004). Furthermore, traditional bureaucratic features are given renewed credit. Rather than de-humanizing work in the course of daily work practices, technologies and bureaucratic standards function, as resources to the knowledge workers under study (Kärreman et al. 2002; see also Buch et al. 2009). Following from these results, Alvesson and Thompson suggest the reconsideration of, not just the normative stance towards bureaucracy, but also the theoretical/methodological approach:

“ (...) it may be misleading to explore bureaucracy only in structural terms. Despite the presence of systems, procedures, and rules, cultural orientations may make these more flexibly used and less constraining, thus in a sense partly transcending bureaucracy (Alvesson & Thompson 2006: 500).

Instead of conceptualizing bureaucracy as something outside the employee, imposed on them against their will and contrary to their general human-ness, bureaucracy should be analyzed as a possible ‘vehicle of shared understanding’ expressing ‘a collective mindset’ amongst the workers (Ibid.; Kärreman et al 2002: 79). In this sense, the CMS scholars are mirroring the message of Du Gay, as he praises bureaucracy to carry a certain ethos lending to the workers of bureaucracy an ethical comportment, a register of competent behaviors (Du Gay 2000; Du Gay 2004).

Reconfiguring standardization and flexibility

Taking as my point of departure the empirical dilemma of TDP I find myself in an equal analytical and methodological dilemma: I want to explore the immediate tension between standardization and flexibility, while at the same time tentatively dismissing their opposition as the main frame of explanation. My solution to the problem has been two fold. For one I have made an alliance with Actor Network Theory, which serves as my main analytical and methodological resource. In the following chapters, I will elaborate how I believe this to have helped me in my endeavor. Secondly, I have tried to identify what I believe to be the actual ‘motor’ of the dilemma of TDP and thus of my concern, namely the various ways in which the relation between the postal workers and their work is organized. This is not a simple matter. Given different forms of coordination, different organizational modes, the postal workers, the notion of work as well as their relation will be enacted differently. I will explain by briefly returning to the observational note heading this introduction.

What/where is work?

“ Work today displaces the imagined boundaries between spaces of consumption, personal and family life, and the workplace. With this displacement or even dissolution between life and labor, the realm of non-work becomes marginalized (as it becomes functional) since more and more of the social landscape is constituted as a space of labor” (Fleming & Mandarini 2009:339)

Considering the general debates on standardization vs. flexibility, what I find interesting about the obligatory course in TDP is first and foremost the ways in which it suggests that the distinction between work and non-work should be drawn and hence how workers can and should relate to their work. Following the historical analysis of Jacques Donzelot, one could frame the course as an example of the historical shift in the relation between worker and work; from a contractual relationship, instigating the worker as a subject of rights external to work; to a relation defined and regulated by the worker's 'pleasure in work'. Pleasure is transformed from extrinsic to intrinsic to work. From a relation of prior antagonism to a possible state of equilibrium "producing the one in the other" (Donzelot, 1991:280). While pleasure i.e. well-being was previously held to be a possible and positive output of production, it is now perceived as a prerequisite. When the postal workers are prompted to spot, to set free and to groom their unique creativity, it happens not just for the fun of it, but rather, in order for their individual potentialities to become accessible to the organization and to goals of productivity (Maravelias 2007, Fleming & Sturdy 2007, Kristensen & Pedersen 2009). Work and the individuality of the postal workers seem to coincide.

At least this is what the course attempts. Looking at the reactions of the postal workers towards the course, the picture is less clear-cut. Some chose to leave the room more or less permanently by way of the legitimate emergency exit offered: smoking breaks. They clearly considered the course as mere nonsense. Some were angry; as one of the postal workers agitatedly whispered in my ear: "we are treated like children!" Others played along with a permanent ironic comment up the sleeve, causing the teachers some concern that they would ultimately sabotage the day by 'winning the crowd over'. Yet others simply appreciated the distraction from everyday routine, even engaging vividly in the efforts to 'bring something home'; to make specific changes in the day to day practices of the team. In other words, constant negotiations were going on, trying to settle: is this work? And even; who am I to be participating in something like this?

When I pose the very simple research question: how is the relation between well-being and productivity organized in the Danish Post, my interest is the same: To try to settle the matter of work and how it is currently configuring/configured by the pleasures and productivities of postal workers.



Chapter 2:

The classic story of worker
well-being and productivity retold

An old story in need of re-telling

Talking about the relation between worker well-being and productivity and the various ways in which it has been conceptualized and managed, to be sure, is not a new field of interest. Rather it lies at the heart of management and organizational theory and practice at least since the efforts of Taylor at the beginning of the 20th century to professionalize the field of production management (Taylor 2004; Mogensen 1999, 2000). Dancing with a giant size research tradition, I have chosen to go back in the history of organizational theory to focus on Human Relations and the Socio-Technical-Systems theory, respectively. This is by no means coincidental. The Human Relations and the Socio-Technical Systems theory serve as the background of the more recent fields of research that I consider key to my subject. The field of critical management studies on the one side and the psycho-social work environment field on the other. Both serve as contemporary attempts to theorize, criticize and, to varying degrees, intervene in the ways in which modern day organizations seek to organize and balance off the ambitions of worker well-being and productivity respectively. Accounting for their 'predecessors' will give me an ability to better appreciate the positions within the present contributions and debates; their conceptual strengths as well as their weaknesses when it comes to understanding current day dilemmas of standardization and flexibility.

But the re-telling of the old story also serves the purpose of unearthing insights that have tended to be dismissed in subsequent receptions and thus leap out of focus in organizational theory. I am thinking especially of socio-technical systems theory and its original outset in 'the work task'. At the time the task was considered key to organizational improvement and coordination. In the present ways of conducting as well as problematizing modern management and organizations, however, hardly any attention is offered the mundane but crucial 'what' of work organization. This counts management theory, its critics as well as the work environment field. What is quite interesting is that they all share, despite their disagreements stemming from different historical and normative outsets, a lot of common and primarily generic assumptions about how to best organize the human resources of production.

Questioning spheres of work: the ontologies and normativities of organizational theory

When visiting the Human Relations theory and Socio-Technical-Systems theory I wish to track within the two fields of research, how the relation between the well-being of the worker and the productivity of the company has been theorized and second of all how this translates into certain ideas as to the proper management/organizing of this relation. In particular how the notion of worker participation, autonomy and self-regulation comes to play a decisive and highly normative role. Following Latour, slightly rewriting his general methodological ambition not to define 'the building blocks of the social world' in advance (Latour 2005: 41), I will be deconstructing the building blocks of the two theoretical schools. Not in order to be able to identify their proper ontologies once and for all in order to keep them as fixed points of departure; but in order for them to be an analytical tool that I can use to work out the debates and matters of concern happening in present day theorizing as well as in my case study. Hence, my particular focus will be the separation of spheres and identities of work: The social as opposed to the technical, the human as opposed to production, the psychological as opposed to the physical, the managerial as opposed to work practice and autonomy as opposed to control. In other words, it is the production of these

distinct spheres and their effects that has caught my interest; they are the social building blocks of my concern.

Furthermore, I am interested in the outspoken normativities that are co-produced. When spheres of work are fleshed out, for instance 'the social' concerning the human beings, their attitudes and feelings, it is clearly accompanied by a certain valuation. Attending the social sphere in particular is per se the better way of understanding and managing productivity issues. And this is so seen from the perspective of employees, employers and society alike. The general point of departure is that focusing on 'the social' equals a win-win situation. To attend to worker subjectivity and the social relations at work, within both Socio-Technical Systems and Human Relations respectively, has been considered a major leap forward compared to the cold and calculative apparatus of Taylorism that makes the worker act as a cog in the wheel defined by its physical attributes. The discovery of the social is hence part of the simultaneous modernization of production, the betterment of working conditions of workers and the betterment of society in general (Rose 1999, Donzelot 1991; Mogensen 2000). The reason that I find this interesting is that these normativities are still very effective. As touched upon in the introduction, one only needs to consider present day bureau critique in order to see how the concern for 'the human' side has taken on the role as the a priori 'better argument'. As described by Du Gay, the bureau critique has claimed a patent onto what is considered humane, taking as point of departure, " [...] a thoroughly romantic belief that the principle of a full and free exercise of personal capacities is akin to a moral absolute of human conduct" (Du Gay 2000: 3). In other words, working according to rules, regulations and standards is perceived as excluding everything that is considered ethical, emotional, humane from the sphere of production. As described for instance in the article of Maravelias (2007), the bureaucratic organization works by a logic of 'exclusion', whereas the post bureaucracy works according to logics of 'inclusiveness' (Ibid.: 564). Post bureaucracy includes 'the whole human being', not just the work roles given within the organization, and hereby still more aspects of the life of workers become relevant to production. Introducing 'the human being' to matters of production was historically, and is still to a large extent, considered to be a way of joining what was previously held 'artificially' separate, given the nature of man, and thus equaled a general notion of progress¹.

Empirically grounded

At this point, it is important to mention that the reason for me to take an interest in these different 'spheres of work' and the presence of particular ethically charged positions across fields of research is not a theoretical one. It is spurred by my empirical research. When I set out to establish some kind of understanding of well-being and productivity in TDP to begin with, it became quite clear to me that this was not a straight forward matter. Various versions of well-being seemed to exist alongside each other. What they all had in common and what came to be my analytical approach in order to know and understand them, was the way that they seemed to rely on the existence of different 'spheres' of work. On the one side, following for instance HR initiatives, well-being was defined as closely connected to productivity, while at the same time characterized as different to ordinary work practices. Well-being was apparently happening in a certain and very important sphere of 'the social'. On the other side, looking at the notion of well-being among the postal workers, alternative versions were suggested: One mirrored the HR framework and related to the notion of 'the social': something to do with enjoying bread and cake and beer with colleagues, however seemingly lacking the connection to productivity. The other version of well-being showed

to connect to immediate work practices, delivering mail within due time, leaving matters of ‘the social’ out of scope. In all cases, ‘the social’ appeared as relevant, a sphere of work considered to be important to attend to in the name of well-being and productivity. In the theoretical chapter more attention and detail will be given as to how to conceptualize these apparent differences, using among other John Law’s conception of ‘modes of orderings’. Here and now my focus is to show exactly how the problematic of my case is widely mirrored in the history of organizational and management theories.

Reading the Hawthorne effects

The event that has put the human and its well-being on the agenda of production management was and is still considered to be The Hawthorne experiments conducted in the late 1920’s and early 1930’s. In the course of the experiments, a whole new sphere of interest became visible and hence accessible to management initiatives: the informal social relations at the work place as well as the personal attitudes of the worker. As it has been coined by Peters and Waterman, some of the biggest management Gurus of today, the message of the Hawthorne experiments was, “that it is attention to employees, not work conditions per se, that has the dominant impact on productivity” (Peters and Waterman 1982 cited in Jones 1992: 454). In other words, following the Hawthorne studies, social relations in the work place become more important than attending to factors such as work time, payment systems and the general physical conditions of the work set up. Factors previously regarded as the focus of proper management. Notwithstanding the massive theoretical debates which have been raised both then and more recently in attempts to counter the scientific evidence of the Hawthorne experiments, Human Resource departments, including the ones of TDP, seem to be continuing to pamper their workers in the name of productivity. When I have had trouble seeing the relevance of for instance a picnic in the woods or the quest for greater individual creativity to the development and better execution of postal work, the effects produced at the Western Electric Company, still seems to be the better explanation. Despite the contested grounds of the study itself, the language and knowledge produced, has demonstrated an extraordinary ability to survive. As framed also by Nikolas Rose, the Hawthorne studies are recognized, ” [...] to provide a new language for interpreting the links between the conditions of work and the efficiency of production” (Rose 1999: 70).

In the following I will firstly be looking more into the experiment itself. Secondly, using especially the text of Charles Perrow, I will try to decipher the prevalent theoretical positions and methodological discussions following the Hawthorne experiment in particular and the human relations school in general.

At the Western Electric Company

Back in 1924, at the Western Electric Company in Chicago, experiments on lighting and its effects on productivity were set on track and continued for two and a half years. Small groups

of female workers from different departments were picked out from the factory floor for the experiment; one group being the notorious control group. Lightning was changed and its effects on production noted. Subsequently, the workers were interviewed as to their reactions to the various changes. To the researcher's surprise², productivity rose in all three groups, but with no immediate correspondence to the level of illumination. Other factors were suspected to be influential; especially that of changed supervision. Later on, after three series of lightning tests, other factors defined as important within existing knowledge of industrial psychology were tested for, such as changed work hours, payment systems and rest pauses. A particular test room was appropriated, the T-room, and inhabited by five female relay assemblers and like before productivity outputs were measured according to the changes introduced. Again, results over a long period of time showed positive developments in rates of productivity independent of the specific changes made. The results ended up serving as the proof of the importance of human relations to goals of productivity. Friendly supervision instead of strict discipline; recognition of informal work groups; personal attitudes and satisfaction as a means of production were the lessons taught, not least to management. Invited as an academic consultant, Elton Mayo played a decisive role in producing this exact reception and he was also involved in the subsequent introduction of the regular interviewing of workers and a management training program. With regard to the former, the workers were permitted to relieve their complaints, while the results were used for the researchers to identify the real causes of the complaints. Along the lines of Mayo's psycho-pathological theory, a notion of 'manifest causes' to worker attitudes served as the theoretical background. This helped translate the dissatisfaction of workers with general working conditions, as for instance that of monotony, into a matter of individual psychology (Gillespie, 1991: 137, 139). As framed by Rose, "The worker did not exist in a realm of brute facts and events, but in a realm of meaning" (Rose 1999: 87). A causal chain of relations was created between the general psychological state of the worker, their attitude towards their work and finally the impact on levels of productivity. The happier, the more productive, so was the rationale produced. And although dissatisfaction might adhere to problems in childhood or the recent death of a relative, the general understanding was that these attitudes were indeed possible to manage and influence.

Friendly supervision

While the overall effect of the Hawthorne studies was the proliferation of the link between the psycho-social status of the individual and productivity levels, particular attention also rose as to the role of supervisory practices. So called 'friendly supervision' was identified as the lubricator of the identified link and in order for managers and foremen to be able to take on this specific assignment, educational programs were initiated, based on the new knowledge produced. As Gillespie points out, the Hawthorne studies had a close connection with the professionalization of management (Gillespie 1991: 5-6; see also Mogensen 1999; 2000). This was a process, which had been underway since Taylor and the specific function of the managers inscribed by scientific rules. But focus was changed by the introduction of individual well-being and the social relations among workers as factors of production. The competent supervisor was not merely the expert engineer working in line with the stop watch and the credo of 'the one best way' to work; he also had to take on a more 'human' face showing particular attention towards the individual and psychological attitudes of each and every worker. By the introduction of social psychology and the 'discovery' of the human side of production, what happens to management is a gradual integration of two rather different logics, termed by Mogensen 'a marriage between the engineer and the teacher' (Mogensen 2000).

A development which placed the well-being and development of the individual worker center stage in the efforts to increase productivity and defined the managers as ‘servants’ of this ambition³.

Reading the Hawthorne effects | CRITICAL VOICES

Bad science and bad ideologies

“ In short, the real change had been that management had taken an interest in the two groups of workers. They were given special treatment and special status as compared to the rest of the workers. The attention apparently raised morale and morale raised productivity. It was a happy thought” (Perrow 1979: 91)

As is obvious in the irony of the quote, Perrow has his reservations towards the Hawthorne effect in particular and the human relations school of thought in general. Reservations, which he presents as part of his book, *Complex organizations* – a critical essay written 1979 (Perrow 1979). Perrow is certainly not the only critic. Two main groups of critics can be identified, which I will visit shortly below. The first proposes the Hawthorne studies to be simply ‘bad science’ shooting at the methods of data collection and the lack of evidence supporting the subsequent interpretations. The second has also been preoccupied with evidence, but mainly within an ideological framework.

To take the latter first, the Hawthorne studies were taken to be a perfect example of what happens when social scientists become ‘servants of power’ i.e. work in the interests of the companies, meanwhile tainting the purity of science (Gillespie 1991: 266). But more importantly, the ideological critique has aimed at the general inequalities of production. Inequalities between workers and managers produced by the underlying ideologies of the psycho-social approach. An example of this are articles by Bramel and Friend published in the beginning of the 1980’s. Proposing a Marxian reading, the authors suggest the Hawthorne studies to have deliberately overlooked the evidence of resistance and class conscience among the workers of the assembly test room. In the course of the study, workers are pictured as primarily passive, irrational and easily manipulated; at the same time proposing management and management rationality to be of superior order. According to the authors, the overall effect of this approach has been a symptomatic general blindness towards class issues within industrial psychology (Bramel and Friend 1981, 1982). In other words, the ideological critique reintroduces basic conflicts of interest, which were otherwise suggested to have been overcome by the win-win situation established between worker well-being and company productivity.

According to the critique concerning scientific validity, this is apparently also a matter of continuous interest. One of the latest articles on the subject has been published in 1992. Several

researchers have revisited the data produced during the Hawthorne experiments, coming to the overall conclusion that there is really no valid evidence of the link made between on the one side positive individual attitudes, strong informal relations and 'soft' management; and on the other that of increased productivity (Argyle 1953; Carey 1967; Jones 1992). There are general inconsistencies to the ways productivity is measured altogether and not least, the evidence driving the different experiments are proved to be of very poor quality. Rather than being based on proper statistical analysis, the interest in the informal relations of the workers appears to be due primarily to qualitative and similar 'vague' forms of evidence. Correspondingly Carey talks of 'gross errors' and 'incompetence' (Carey 1967: 416) while Jones concludes that the so called 'Hawthorne effect' is based on 'slender or no evidence' (Jones 1992: 467). Carey even suggests the results to be supportive rather of older world views of motivational theory, namely that of 'monetary incentives, driving leadership, and discipline' (Carey 1967: 416). Something which was exactly excluded as irrelevant in the Hawthorne results.

Reading the Hawthorne effects | Discussion

The effects of Hawthorne

While the scientific support for the human relations school in general seems poor, what will be my point of departure, is that when taking on a methods critique as the above, there is a tendency of reducing criticism to a matter of evidence. While the latter argument by Carey – that for instance wages still plays a crucial role in the motivation of workers – does reveal some kind of interest in the substance matter, characteristic of the methods critique in general is that it shifts the main interest from the link between well-being and productivity to detailed statistical arguments. No matter how immediately appealing it might be to reveal that the emperor wears no clothes, the methods critique misses out on the most important part of the discussion; namely that of the various effects of the Hawthorne discovery. Judging from the impact of the studies on today's theorizing to have discussions on validity seems rather irrelevant. As eloquently illustrated by both Gillespie and Rose, the truth of the link between well-being and productivity has been established and serves as the mold of current management theorizing and practice, no matter if the results of the Hawthorne experiments and its many predecessors are truly valid or not (Gillespie 1991: 268,269; Rose 1999). Hence, the Hawthorne experiments should rather be considered the proof of the general argument also found within science technology studies; that scientific facts should be conceived as the end result of a process of social creation rather than a matter of representational evidence (Latour and Woolgar 1986; Latour 1993). A creation, which holds the ability to have profound impact on the world no matter its contingent character. Exactly this serves as an answer to Gillespie's rhetoric question in his conclusive chapter: how the behaviors of 5 women handling wires in a confined space could come to express a generalized truth about the importance of workers well-being.

The lost organization

Moreover, the methods critique is based on a certain view on both organizations and its 'inhabitants': as pre-defined identities and their causal relations. The argument against the Hawthorne experiment and the human relations school based on the qualities of statistics and proper experimental practices stresses the idea that matters of well-being and productivity can in fact be measured and split up into variables. The only question being whether one is measuring respectively keeping out the right ones. This is certainly the argument displayed in the critique by Carey (1967) but also in the paper by Jones (1992). Notwithstanding Jones' conclusive remark that, "the Hawthorne effect is largely a construction of subsequent interpreters of the Hawthorne experiments" (Jones 1992: 467), his own ways of testing the Hawthorne results given today's improved statistical methods only seem to repeat the limitations of the experiments of the time: the isolation of individual determinants leaving out the organizational context and its contingencies as a matter of bias. It is of course an approach, which seem advantageous when one wants to be able to pick out specific factors for intervention and management. Following Perrow, however, using variable testing as the main research method has primarily served to produce endless lists of variables, proving no clear causal link to levels of productivity but rather producing more confusion (Perrow 1979: 98,99).

This does not imply that methods critique is simply irrelevant, only it takes a different framing for it to gain an interesting impact on theory development. While the nature of Perrow's critique is directed precisely towards the methodological grounds of the Human relations school, the aim of his critique is different. According to Perrow, methods critique is but the first layer in search of 'a more basic level of analysis' (Ibid.:133). A basic analysis, which sets out to pinpoint the consequences produced when one tries to explain organizations primarily by the attitudes and behaviors of individuals. Perrow concludes that the problem of human relations theory is that, "We learn a great deal about psychology and social psychology but little about organizations per se in this fashion" (Ibid.). Even though the thought of basic versus some kind of surface appearance may not be entirely to the point, what Perrow interestingly suggests is that socio-psychological theorizing has caused for organizational theory to lose sight of 'the organization' in favor of the individual. A support for this argument can be found in the account of William F. Whyte (1983), reviewing his engagement with the human relations school and worker participation in particular over the past 30 years. As he states: "[...] we have treated human relations as if they occurred in an economic and technological vacuum" (Whyte 1983: 400). Hence, another effect of the Hawthorne studies has been the production of a purified interest in individual psychology in favor of a whole range of other relevant and context specific elements: the physical working conditions, the particular work task, the technology used, the organizational structure, the larger industrial and market set up, gender roles etc. And this is certainly not a problem of theory only. As described by Gillespie, the basic understandings produced by the Hawthorne experiments were so influential because they were used to build up a new profession of managers, the so called personnel managers; the Human Resource Managers of today (Storey 1991).

Modern day management and its critics – a question of control

Initiated by the historic discovery of human social-psychology a completely different style of management appeared. As framed in the article by management theorist Walton, the strategy of management to control workers should be replaced by an effort to create worker ‘commitment’ (Walton 1985). In the work of Bettina Mogensen, the historical development of two different but co-existing ideal-types are identified to describe the possible roles of the manager: the engineer and the teacher. The engineer is defined by a focus on ‘the ongoing improvements of technologies in order to release existing natural or physical energy sources’ (Mogensen 2000: 4) and is readily related to the production mode of ‘Taylorism’. The teacher on the other hand, was to focus, ‘on the ongoing improvement of societal and individual energy sources’ trying to ‘educate the unenlightened and help them to become free subjects’ (Op cit.). The teacher is exactly the ‘friendly supervisor’ of the Hawthorne studies, based in the recognition that the workers were not simply physical labor power to be systematically controlled, but human beings to be developed and changed. As Mogensen points out, it was not a change in attitude towards employees happening over-night. Introducing ‘the teacher’ as a possible new role of managers took not least additional training and education in order to fulfill their role in the new ‘spirit of collaboration’ (Ibid.: 9), and as she points out, it is still a process of change going on in present day work places. Indeed, the shifting of control onto employees, their increasing self-management and alongside this their ‘transformation’ from worker to ‘whole human beings’, is a recurrent theme in present day management literature (Manz 1986; Manz & Sims 1986, 1987) and not least among critical management scholars.

In the following, I will look into the latter arguing, in line with Du Gay & Vikkelsø, that although the field of critical management studies defines itself as the antagonist of management theorizing and practice they tend to share the overall conceptual geography and preoccupation with ‘the human factor’. The only disagreement is whether this should be deemed either negative or positive:

“ The overriding importance of ‘the human factor’ in this instance ‘the whole human being’, is not in question, with one side hailing the new norms and techniques of organizing as a means of liberating people’s humanity, and the other arguing precisely the opposite, that human flourishing is actively undermined, curtailed or otherwise impeded by such norms and techniques” (Du Gay & Vikkelsø 2012:4).

As a consequence of this close connection between CMS and the Human Relations school of thought they tend to produce blind-spots of similar character. A point, which I will attend to below.

Management humanization - power in disguise

A great deal of critique of the alleged ‘humanization’ of modern management has been produced within the framework of Critical Management Studies⁴. It is stressed that the increased focus on worker well-being, involvement, commitment, learning, creativity etc. does not minimize management control, but rather transforms it into a more subtle and less transparent kind. A ‘normative control’, which, contrary to the disciplining by standardization and best practice, operates not in opposition to

employee subjectivity and autonomy but rather has it as its precondition (Casey 1999, Kunda 1992, Fleming & Spicer 2004). As put by Willmott in his analysis of corporate culturalism:

“ [...] the distinctive quality of human action and of labor power, resides in the capacity for self-determination. This insight informs the understanding that corporate performance can be maximized only if this capacity is simultaneously respected and exploited” (Willmott 1993: 525).

According to Willmott the management of corporate cultures operates by what he terms ‘a seductive double think’ defined by ‘the simultaneous affirmation and negation of the conditions of autonomy’ (Ibid.: 526). In other words, the alleged respect of the individual worker is revealed as in reality a deceitful exploitative form of management. An exploitation, which is not necessarily realized by the employees themselves, making it even more dangerous. Numerous analyses within CMS illustrate how the apparent enabling environment of modern management serves to individualize what is in reality caused by intensified power structures. The double think-mechanism creates a double bind situation in which the employee is inclined to take up the limits of the corporate framework as a matter of his/her own limitations (Kunda 1992, Casey 1999, Tynell 2002, Gudiksen 2007). Rather ridding the employees of the iron cage of rationality imposed by traditional management, the new forms of management introduces, so it is argued, an even tighter ‘iron cage’ of control (Barker 1993).

In later writings the perspective of normative control has been re-configured following the latest trends within modern management. The so-called ‘neo-normative’ control is different from its normative predecessor since it operates not by a perfect alignment between employee subjectivity and corporate culture, but rather by inducing a difference between the two (Kristensen & Pedersen 2010, Fleming & Study 2009). The employees are encouraged to just be themselves (Fleming & Sturdy 2009), to be ‘authentic’ meaning always representing to the organization a not yet seized potential. As put by Fleming & Sturdy, “Control is achieved when what was once protected from the organization via cynicism and psychological distancing is appropriated as a corporate resource to enhance output” (Ibid.: 571). Characteristic of this new form of control is that it is appropriating what was previously considered by CMS-researchers the realms of employee ‘micro-resistance’: the moments of irony, gossip, cynicism and psychological distancing (Maravelias 2007: 564- 65). Following Contu, these micro-resistances can be considered merely ‘de-caf resistances’ that do not fundamentally change the capitalist logics, but rather serve to support them (Contu 2008).

The critique of Human Relations re-visited

My point is not to discuss whether it is the normative control or the neo-normative control which is the most suited to describe present day organization. My primary aim has been to show that no matter which form of control, the basic logic governing the CMS research is staged the same way: as a matter of determining the level of worker autonomy facing the (still subtler) control efforts of management, to finally judge whether this (the management recipe under study) is truly a more human way of managing or not. The present exhortations on cynicism as possible or impossible modes of resistance, I believe, are only symptomatic of this very same and quite old agenda (Fleming 2005, Fleming & Spicer 2003).

The aim of CMS has from its inception been, ‘to conduct research against management’ (Alvesson, Bridgman & Willmot 2009:1) and despite the fact that the inspiration from Braverman has been gradually replaced by Foucaultian and other poststructuralist perspectives (Ibid: 6; Maravelias 2007), a de-masking of power residing in management discourse and practice still seems to be the prime target (Ekman 2010). Indeed, this is a both important and relevant ambition, not least facing the fact that still more employees suffer from stress-break downs due to over-commitment. The widespread mode of self-management does have a great deal of downsides and structural deficiencies (Pedersen 2008, 2009). However, I will argue that there is an empirical insensitivity in the CMS framework as well as a paradoxical repetition of their prime target of critique: the Human Relations School. As mentioned earlier, the critique raised against Human Relations was that it was managerial since it focused only on the actions of management making the employees passive re-actors; that it treated the worker as a generic individual with no particular characteristics (such as class consciousness for instance) and lastly that it was suggesting an unproblematic win-win situation from the alleged humanization of production. While the latter is surely not a problem to CMS, I will argue that the managerial focus as well as the production of generic individuals are still relevant critiques.

Staging the usual suspects – an example

I will use the article by Kärreman, Alvesson and Wenglén (2006) as an example. Apart from the fact that the article is interesting since it treats the same overall subject as this thesis i.e. the possible co-presence of bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic principles of organizing, the advantage of the article in this context is that it displays detailed empirical evidence. As a reader one has the opportunity to evaluate whether the authors actually succeed in using their empirical material constructively in their conceptual endeavors, “to close the gap between the normative (ideological, emotional, charismatic) and the rational (behavioral, bureaucratic technocratic) modes of control” (Kärreman et al. 2006:335).

The setting is school management. The study follows the implementation process of a range of standards defining common methods and measures of the work of school teachers across a group of Swedish private schools. To the surprise of the authors, the teachers accept the standardization without voicing any form of resistance (Ibid: 343). The conclusion is that the standards are accepted by the school teachers due to their ‘charmatization’ by the use of ‘visionary rhetoric’ of school managers. Or put differently: the teachers are silenced and immobilized because the various modes of control work in tandem, the standardized control being ‘sugar coated’ by its ideological counterpart. As is thus concluded, “This supports the notion that bureaucratic forms of control can support ideological forms of control and vice versa” (Ibid.: 344).

No doubt the empirical material is both extensive and solid, however, as I will argue, the conclusion is reductive in character because of a range of a priori assumptions configuring the whole scene of empirical ‘surprises’ and theoretical arguments in the first place. First of all, the role of the teachers as well as that of standards, seem to be fixed in advance. Defined by their professional autonomy, the authors have the a priori assumption that any kind of standardization will counter this position and hence the interest of the teachers. Standardization is per se the opposite of autonomy, and nothing to wish for. This is also the reason that the lack of resistance can be characterized as a ‘surprise’. As is stated normally “[...] the teachers at SchoolCo are not a compliant group” (Ibid: 344). In other words, compliant becomes an employee identity: it is something one either is or is not. And if the latter is the case, and one all of a sudden complies,

surprisingly, subtle manipulations by management can be the only valid explanation. This leads me to the second point of critique: the article focuses primarily on the actions of managers, all the while the workers are reduced to more or less passive re-actors being interviewed, observed and finally interpreted by the researchers in light of the rationality the management program. Symptomatically, the statement of one of the teachers saying that the standards were accepted because, 'they [the teachers] did not have to invent what was already invented' (ibid.: 344) is overlooked as a potentially alternative explanation to that of management charisma. A different interpretation would be that the teachers are 'complying' simply because the standards do not change their daily work, or may even, as expressed by another teacher, serve as a positive resource making things easier in the course of everyday teaching and planning (Op.cit.). Hence, if one actually takes at face value what the teachers say and do, both the bureaucratic standards and the post-bureaucratic 'sugar coating'⁵, may become more than simply a question of management control.

Surely, as a reader one does not have all the details of the case, but from the above reading it does seem as if the chosen CMS-framework of the researchers affects the results quite decisively. It produces a range of self-imposed limitations when it comes to the scope of understanding the work organization under study: a primary focus on managerial rationality, a generic employee of no particular characteristics other than a preset identity as autonomous (or compliant/subjugated), and a consequential lack of detail/interest when it comes to the actual work practices of teachers. Following the reading of CMS by Susanne Ekman it is a perfect example of how the story of 'the usual suspects' i.e. 'capitalism, managers, instrumental goals and control' (Ekman 2010: 22) are acted out against the normative backdrop of liberation and autonomy. The analytic counter-strategy of Ekman is an increased empirical sensitivity trying to avoid the reproduction of the usual suspects. As she suggests, "Maybe surprising results would appear if we were open to the possibility that sometimes instrumentality feels more authentic than the absence of it" (Ibid.: 38). In many respects, my own analytic strategy and overall ambition points in the very same direction, only I would like to add an increased focus on the organization. As pointed out by Perrow above, what the Human Relations School (as well as its critics) are lacking is the attention towards the organization. With regard to organizations, post-bureaucratic or otherwise, indeed its human relations are but one aspect. This is exactly the thread taken up by Socio-Technical-Systems Theory.

The Socio-Technical Perspective

Re-introducing 'the technical'

Only about 20 years after the Hawthorne event, studies in an English coalmine was the focus of a school of thought, which situated the human factor within the larger framework of production systems; defined by a technical as well as a social side. The introduction of the technical side, served a critical comment to current day Human Relations. Summed up by Trist, one of the founding

fathers of the Tavistock School and the socio-technical perspective, the problems posed by the improvement of human relations alone was that it simply did not make a difference to daily work. No matter how progressive the personnel policies invented to take care of the human factor, “Nothing had happened to change the structure of jobs. There was no change in the nature of the immediate work experience [...]”, and Trist continues:

“ Work organizations exist to do work – which involves people using technological artifacts (whether hard or soft) to carry out sets of tasks related to specified overall purposes. Accordingly, a conceptual reframing was proposed, in which work organizations were envisaged as socio-technical systems rather than simply as social systems” (Trist 1993: 39).

In other words, and in line with the above critique of Human Relations as well as its ‘twin opponent’, CMS, what the socio-technical systems approach addresses is that the exclusive focus on the social side – the individual social-psychology of workers, the informal group and the activities of management seeking to better the human relations – serves to exclude from vision what the organization is set up to do in the first place: get work done and achieve specific goals by the use of artifacts and various technologies. As teasingly suggested by Hunt relating to the role of management:

“ [...] the moral of our story is that, if not completely determined, organizational processes are importantly constrained by influences associated with the tasks on which they work. It follows, therefore, that managers will have something less than an infinite number of degrees of freedom in making decisions” (Hunt 1976: 113)

Whereas Mayo, and the human relations school in general, suggests the informal social relations and ultimately the psycho- pathological structures of the individual to be the fundamental level of analysis and intervention, the STS perspective introduces the technological structure of production, and not least the work task, as equally important aspects. The STS theorizing does not discard the knowledge of social psychology but shares with Human Relations the values and importance given to the psychological well-being at work⁶. However, contrary to the findings of Hawthorne it is not a factor to be managed and pampered in isolation. Well-being is basically considered to be determined by the socio-technical set up, the organizing of the work task. Consequently, well-being as well as economic performance are defined as ‘outcomes’ dependent on the ability to make a ‘best fit’ between ‘the substantive factors’ of production, namely that of the technical system and the social system (Trist 1993). The prime question of STS in order to attend to the simultaneous goal of ensuring productivity and the well-being of the employees hence becomes: how to manage, “the people and technology interface” (Cummings 1978: 625). While the technical system has to do with the machines and the engineering capabilities of designing them in order to gain optimal flow and productivity; the social system has to do with the organizing of the people of production: their work roles and the tasks and obligations attached to them. The two systems are different in character; however, mutually dependent and any given change in the organization at large need to attend to them both in order to gain the right balance in the system as a whole. As summed up by Trist:

“ [...] a work system depends on the social and the technical components becoming directly correlated to produce a given goal state [...]. The distinctive characteristics of each must be respected else their contradictions will intrude and their complementarities will remain unrealized (Trist 1993: 51).

As mentioned, this basic lesson of ‘joint optimization’ between two distinct spheres of production was originally learned in the English coalmining industry. In the next section, I will present the now classic article by Trist and Bamforth (1951), which came to be the point of reference for numerous research and development projects under the headline of socio-technical optimization. I do so not simply out of historic curiosity, but also to re-vitalize the close relation established between the work task proper and the norm of worker autonomy. A link, which has unfortunately evaporated even within the Socio-Technical-Systems design tradition itself.

In the mines

The article by Trist and Bamforth (1951) describes the change in work organization in an English coalmine in the late 1940's, with the specific focus of the social and psychological consequences of the introduction of a new and automated work technology and design. The coalminers were previously operating in small primary groups responsible of a full circle of operation proposing to every worker a wide variety of tasks and the need of performing a wide range of skills including their specific ‘underground experience’. Introducing the mechanized and so-called ‘Longwall-method’, the workmen were separated out in order to execute very specific work roles in accordance with the new technology. Instead of face-to-face groups they now worked in large units without the possibility of physical contact and flexible coordination in relation to the unforeseeable conditions of the mine. Previously, the relation between the miners and their work was characterized by what Trist and Bamforth terms ‘responsible autonomy’, meaning a high degree of self-regulation between them. Due to the new technology and work organization, this was replaced by a wide range of negative consequences. While the spatio-temporal disintegration stemming from the specialization of tasks and the introduction of 3 shifts made coordination harder, the workers were still highly dependent on each other. An ‘isolated dependence’, however, which made each individual worker more or less unable to act upon problems or irregularities, since they were produced further ‘down the line’. A range of undesirable behaviors among the workers were recorded. Trist and Bamforth list attitudes such as ‘reactive individualism’ with everybody fighting for themselves; a tendency towards mutual scapegoating, going on both between colleagues and between management and workers; and lastly, they observe an increased absenteeism. In other words, the general morale among workers is shown to decline. Due to the Longwall method, everyone is basically focused on taking care of themselves. However, this is not presented as an individual problem. As Trist and Bamforth pinpoints, “[...] the absence of institutionalized mutual obligation means that there are no statutory group tasks and each individual can be held ultimately responsible only for clearing his own length” (Trist and Bamforth 1951: 30). The negative developments are considered inevitable. Without the team as the basic and institutionalized unit of the execution of work, which previously tied the workers together by common moral obligation to achieve common ends, an egocentric attitude is bound to take over. The basic point of Trist and Bamforth, then, is that the new technology introduces not only a new way of organizing but simultaneously produces a certain kind of social system leading to social disintegration, low morality as well as a lowered work performance and quality.

A general critique of Taylorism

Trist and Bamforth's empirical study of a new coal mining technique is very detailed and specific. The reader is introduced to a whole new vocabulary of mining and as a reader it takes quite a lot of effort to become acquainted with the many tasks and work roles in the pit black of the mines. However, the article should be read, and was also framed and conceived at the time, as a critical comment on the general development of automation within the English industry. The interconnections analyzed between the new organizing of coal getting and the correspondent radical changes in the social relations and general well-being of the coalminers, gain strength exactly because they form part of a general critique and argument of the time, going beyond the mining industry as such. Trist and Bamforth pinpoint their general scope of study as follows:

“ In the account to follow the Longwall method will be regarded as a technological system expressive of the prevailing outlook of mass-production engineering and as a social structure consisting of the occupational roles that have been institutionalized in its use. These interactive technological and sociological patterns will be assumed to exist as forces having psychological effects in the life-space of the face-worker, who must either take a role and perform a task in the system they compose or abandon his attempt to work at the coal-face” (Ibid.: 5).

Relating directly to the principles of scientific management, used within the mines, Trist and Bamforth describe how management decisions might be based on perfect calculations translating tons of coals into manpower and work hours, however proving a total lack of concern when it comes to the social effects and the psychology of the people employed (Ibid.: 14). When looking into Taylor's recipe of scientific management, the psychological and moral dimensions were, however, not completely absent. But they were factors that were regulated by individual contracts in order for them to be ultimately excluded as decisive in matters of production. For instance the team and its influence to work and work organization were to be diminished. According to Taylor, teams would always try to slow down the work pace and deliver but one third of 'a fair days work'. Therefore, an important ambition was to diminish the importance of the team and its internal relations (Taylor 1967: 49-50). This was done by the very same techniques, the technique of scientific management, which Trist and Bamforth show to be at the root of the problem: the splitting up of tasks; the isolation of individuals; the removal of rules of thumb and general knowledge of experienced workers and the differentiation of status and pay among the workers. While the content and regulation of the individual work contract was considered an important motivational factor and a way of performing fairness according to Taylor, in a socio-technical perspective the awarding of individual performances is but one more element of blindness towards the inevitable interdependence among workers given the work task at hand. As opposed to scientific management, which holds the individual as its main target of work design and management, the socio-technical perspective addresses the team as its 'basic building block' (Cummings 1978: 627), redefining the social relations from the root of the problem to be instead the ultimate answer.

The self-regulating group

The main part of the article of Trist and Bamforth describes the technology and downsides of the social structure produced by the automated Longwall-method. The 'real' findings of the Haighmoor seam project (forming the empirical basis of the article), i.e. the successful reintroduction of small self-regulating groups, is mentioned only briefly (Trist and Bamforth 1951: 3-4). Due to the already tense atmosphere within the coalmining industry at the time, the representatives of the coalmining industry were anxious to spur more labor conflicts if total re-organization of production were put on the agenda (Eijnatten 1993, Trist 1993). Hence, these results, which became the mold of the STS tradition, were not published until later.

The self-regulating group was from then on considered to hold within their specific social structure a moral, a psychological and a productivity gain. The logic goes as follows: In the smaller group, workers regain their sense of responsibility towards the work task, since it is possible to perform the full circle of coal getting within the framework of the group itself. Instead of focusing on one isolated and very specialized task, every worker has the capability and the responsibility to perform a wide variety of tasks. This in turn brings satisfaction i.e. well-being to workers, who furthermore perform better or at least just as good as any Tayloristically organized production. The workers are freed from being a mere extension of machines (Jordan 1963 in Eijnatten 1993: 35), introducing them instead as skilled, flexible and not least genuinely interested in doing a good job (Cherns 1976).

The Socio-Technical Perspective | CRITICAL VOICES

The (dis)integration of the social and the technical

In the article by Trist and Bamforth (1951) they introduced the importance of integration between the two realms of production and their respective forms of knowledge; that of the engineer and that of the social scientist. The reference being the consequent negligence towards the social within traditional Taylorized production. However, it seems as if the paradoxical result has been an increasing split between the two spheres of production. The engineer and the teacher did not get married after all (Mogensen 2000), or at least it seems that they agreed on a very strict division of labor: the engineer attending to the technical and the psychologist tending the social. Symptomatically, discussions within the field are structured along the lines of the divide between the social and the technical. Some address the lack of attention given to the social side of production, referring to 'the technical bias' within STS (Clegg et al. 1996; Nadin et al. 2001), while others find that the technical is generally black boxed as the independent variable of STS-design (Aagaard 1996: 171). The latter critique holds that the technical appears only as a set of already defined structures namely that of the job task, leaving but the socio-psychological needs of the workers, i.e. the social open for design interventions (Op.cit).

The work design recipe of Cherns (1976) can be read along the line of this latter critique. While it addresses specifically engineers in charge of the technical design of organizations, it urges them, given the 9 design parameters, to pay specific attention to the social structures of work. As he explains, “[...] a production system requires a social system to integrate the activities of the people who operate, maintain, and renew it; account for it; and keep it fed with the resources it requires [...]” (Cherns 1976: 784).

The social is presented as a sphere for redesign and intervention, in order to gain the effects of productivity already inscribed in the technology of the production system, which for its part stays unquestioned. As such, the dialectical relation between the social and the technical spheres seems ultimately abandoned. What is left, following the above, is a highly technologically deterministic standpoint as well as a reductionist and functionalist approach to the social; defined as an adaptive tool to improve production. When the employees have their skills developed, their discretion increased, their work roles enhanced, this can be seen as but an effect of the demands posed by the technical mode of production. Paradoxically, STS ends up adding to the splitting of the two spheres rather than their increasing integration. Following De Sitter (1993), this fate is however not paradoxical but rather inherent to the conceptual distinction of the two spheres in the first place: the insistence that they belong to each their realm, each their field of knowledge. According to De Sitter, a genuine mutuality can be conceptualized only when these predefined ontologies are dismissed (Ibid.: 165). Another general critique raised against Socio-Technical-Systems theory is its conceptualization of the organization as a system of equilibrium.

Functional equilibrium

Negotiations and the mutual bending of interests are considered key processes of STS in order to obtain the best possible organizational design. This is stressed especially in the principles developed by Gustavsen, who draws his theoretical inspiration from Habermas (Gustavsen 1993; Gustavsen and Englestadt 1986; Eijnatten 1993). Although conflicts are thus addressed and even considered unavoidable, critics have found STS to be both managerial in focus and far too harmonious in scope, overlooking the basic conflicts of capitalist production (Aagaard 1996; Bowker and Kaghan 2001). As pointed out by both Aagaard and Nielsen, STS can generally be characterized as uninterested in the politics of the company (Aagaard 1996:171; Nielsen 2001). The idea of a possible ‘best fit’ equaling both productivity and well-being stresses this point. While conflicts might be acknowledged, consensus stays the ideality of organizational order. As expressed by Cherns, “Majority rule, horse trading or power plays are unacceptable. Members must reveal their assumptions and reach decisions by consensus” (Cherns 1986: 155). In the work of de Sitter, the goal of proper STS design is literally depicted as a balance (see de Sitter 1993: 63). In other words, a proper STS design, whether it is conceptualized and acted upon as matter of democratic dialogue or more like that of a complex system of mutual adaption involving also other non-human elements, the goal is to establish a state of equilibrium.

From 'organizational choice' to universalized theory

As characterized by Eijnatten, STS is a practical paradigm (Eijnatten 1993: 12). Doing action research, being part of socio-technical reorganizations in practice, is a crucial part of the STS tradition. The core principle of 'organizational choice', which contests technology to determine the social structure of production, grows out of this experiential attitude. The message from the mines was that it is indeed possible to choose an alternative social structure than the one of increased task splitting and specialization otherwise characteristic of automation. Every design solution has to be adapted to the specific organization, its technologies, markets, products and worker profiles. The notion of 'best fit' was considered first and foremost a contingent matter to find its answer only by using a pragmatic and contextually sensitive approach. Expressed by Thorsrud commenting on the Norwegian Democracy projects:

“ There was no such blueprint and in the nature of the case there could not be. There were only principles for the redesign of jobs, which, whatever their general validity, would have to be shown to be applicable in each and every technological setting” (Thorsrud, 1968: 124).

What should be obvious from the above is the tension however created between on the one side the original ambition of 'organizational choice' (Eijnatten 1993: 3, Trist et al. 1963; Trist 1993: 38), embedded in the practices of action research – and on the other the move towards more or less fixed theories, recipes and normativities considering the general functionality of job (re)designs and worker democracy. The many (action) research projects following the insights of the English mining industry ended up being far less empirically sensitive. As summed up by Barley and Kunda, “By the late 1960's, socio-technical systems scholars had turned their attention to formalizing abstract concepts that could be used across settings” (Barley & Kunda 2001: 81). Besides the work-task modeling which ended up representing a large research area in itself (see Hackman & Oldham 1974, Hunt 1976, Arnold & House 1980, Oldham & Hackman 2010), the normativity related to the self-regulating groups and the basic psycho-social needs of the individual worker translated into an equal systematic implementation of participatory processes and worker democracy. By the use of models and process tools, guiding the parties, employees and employers, the ambition was to strike just the right balance between internal (worker) and external (management) control, assuming at the same time that internal control was per definition better to secure worker satisfaction and thus productivity (see Gustavsen and Engelstad 1986; Gustavsen 1993; Thorsrud 1975; Nielsen 2001).

What seems to have leaped out of focus over the years is the intricate relation observed by Trist and Bamforth in the mines; that worker autonomy, in the guise of the self-regulating group, is first and foremost crucial facing the specific work task and its technological set-up. As they put it:

“ So close is the relationship between the various aspects that the social and the psychological can be understood only in terms of the detailed engineering facts and of the way the technological system as a whole behaves in the environment of the underground situation” (Trist and Bamforth 1951: 11).

Although the empirical results then were indeed used to form also a general critique of the organization principles of Taylorism, this was still a critique founded on the specific conditions of the mining industry and its particular circumstances. As such, the studies in the mines cannot be used as a general recipe of organizational coordination. Following the reasoning of Thorsrud, not just technologies but also the ‘social design’ i.e. worker self-regulation and autonomy, will have to find its validity and applicability in the specific setting, in relation to the work task and production technologies at hand. There is no blue print.

I will argue that the development within Socio-technical Systems theory reflects the current challenges posed and debated within the psycho-social work environment. In order to make this argument, I will firstly be introducing the links between Socio-Technical-Systems and especially that of the Scandinavian work environment research, and secondly I proceed by outlining the debates currently going on with regard to the future role of worker control and autonomy in light of so called ‘flexible production’. These debates also seem to discard the specificity of the work task in favor of a general focus and normativity attached to worker autonomy and the specific psycho-social attitudes and needs of the individual.

The psycho-social work environment

The heritage of Socio-Technical Systems Theory in Scandinavian work life research

Reading the old STS literature, it becomes obvious how it resonates the tradition of Scandinavian work environment research. First of all, there are the direct links from the Tavistock School to the Norwegian projects of industrial democracy, initiated by Thorsrud in the late 60’s. More generally however, the overall ideology and ambitions of democratic reforms are infused into the DNA of the Scandinavian work life tradition during the 70’s as it changed its ways of framing and acting upon matters of health and safety. As described by Allvin and Aronsson (2003), the notion of a ‘work environment’ emerged as a result of a general transformation: from a pragmatic effort protecting the bodies of the workers from particular hazardous elements, such as for instance a dangerous saw-blade, to a notion of a complex of various factors within ‘the environment’ including hazards beyond the physical dimensions of manual labor (Ibid.: 100). The psycho-social dimension was introduced and alongside this, the previous strategy of protection was supplemented by the dimension of participation (Nielsen 2001). By its introduction, the notion of participation

was not limited to the realm of the production site. In line with the STS tradition the general ideology was that:

“ Workers had a right to demand working conditions suitable to their needs. Furthermore, this right was not confined to practical needs at the workplace. Since the worker, or so the ideology claims, evolves as a human being and as a citizen through her practical participation at work” (Allvin and Aronsson2003:102).

Hence, the notion of the work environment becomes closely linked to the development of societal democracy instigating a healthy work environment as a general human right, based in the ideas of particular human as well as societal needs. In other words, the generalized assumptions of participation and democracy as well as the notion of specific psychologically constituted worker needs are mirrored unequivocally within the Scandinavian work environment field. And quite like the development towards generic models within the socio-technical systems design field, the participatory dimension of the psycho-social work environment also becomes operationalized in the Demand/Control model developed by Karasek in the late 1970's.

The Demand/Control model

The D/C model can be considered a pragmatic way to combine and operationalize the protective paradigm with the general ambition of work life democracy (Karasek 1979; Hvid et al. 2010). Combining the insights from the research in job satisfaction with epidemiological research on job environment stressors, Karasek gathers the two strands in the D/C model⁷. The basic line of thinking of the model is that the level of control by individual workers has a positive influence, a kind of buffer effect, on the negative consequences otherwise caused by high job demands. The job control dimension equals rather precisely the basic knowledge developed on the self-regulating groups of the English mines and the prescriptive action developed accordingly within STS: that a modulation of the social structures of work has a positive effect onto worker well-being. The control dimension thus covers questions of skills and task authority respectively. The former is defined by the opportunity to use and develop skills in the job while the latter measures to which extent the workers have the freedom to make decisions concerning the execution of their jobs. Similar to the STS tradition, Karasek argues that improvements in levels of worker control (self-regulation), does not interfere with the basic rationale of productivity. As he states:

“ The major implication of this study is that redesigning work processes to allow increases in decision latitude for a broad range of workers could reduce mental strain, and do so without affecting the job demands that may plausibly be associated with organizational output levels (Karasek 1979: 285).

If the organizational structure is defined by flexibility and equity, so Karasek argues, it is possible to increase worker well-being and at the same time keep the status quo of production demands. Similar to STS, the model holds a general critical stance towards the social organization within bureaucratic and

Taylorized production while suggesting the flexible, i.e. worker controlled mode of production, to be a win-win solution: Productivity and well-being at one blow.

Several and interrelated points of critique have been raised as a consequence of these basic assumptions. Increased levels of control do not necessarily lead to enhanced well-being. Confronted with increasingly flexible modes of production and the introduction of self-management as the prime form of coordination, it is becoming increasingly difficult to define worker autonomy as a critical position and a matter of human rights. The Control and Demand sides collapse, introducing control as an integral part of the demands of modern work life. In the following, I will present these issues of critique, as well as suggest how they might be understood in relation to the basic conceptual prerequisites of STS: the distinction between the social and the technical and their functional interrelation.

Questioning the D/C model

The D/C model has had a huge impact on the research and the theoretical discussions in the Scandinavian countries as well as internationally. According to Hvid et al., the strength of the model lies primarily in the evidence produced within epidemiological research, documenting again and again the correspondence between low degrees of control and increased risks of stress symptoms, cardiovascular diseases, muscle and joint problems etc. (Hvid et al. 2010: 641). In a Danish context the D/C model serves as the spine of the Copenhagen Psychosocial questionnaire, which is currently being widely used across various trades and within both public and private organizations (Kristensen et al. 2005). When critique has been raised, it has mostly been transformed into suggestions on how to supplement the model by further dimensions such as transformational leadership or rewards (see for instance Nielsen et al. 2008; Siegrist 1996). Generally, the critique raised and the new dimensions added, also by Karasek himself, (Karasek and Theorell 1990) seems to be directed towards what is considered to be the highly individualized focus of the model (Hvid et al. 2010). Adding dimensions such as social support, trust and rewards, to mention but a few, has thus served to 'infuse' the importance of social relations into the model. Despite these developments, which aim to incorporate the changes occurring within the labor market in general, the model and the basic rationales sustaining it are currently being questioned.

The question raised is whether the general pull towards flexibility, personal involvement and self-management across a wide range of jobs, typically leaving the workers with high degrees of control, can be counted as a simple and positive increase in decision latitude or whether the new modes of organizing call for new modes of explanation. The arguments of contestation are catalyzed by several sources of research. One consists of empirical statistical evidence produced both internationally as well as in a Danish context, which have served to question the promised 'buffer effect' of control (Klitgård & Clausen 2010). A problem, which has shown to be particularly manifest among so called 'knowledge workers'. While knowledge workers are generally characterized by high degrees of decision latitude and opportunities of development, still more incidents of burn out and stress are showing, thus challenging the basic assumptions of the general well-springs of worker autonomy. In a qualitative study among knowledge workers (Buch et al. 2009; see also Sørensen et al. 2007) have pointed to the highly ambiguous effects of worker control, producing at once enthusiasm and burn out among knowledge workers. In other words, these empirical results raise the more general question whether worker control is still the one factor evening out the pressures of increasing job demands.

This is taken up by Allvin and Aronsson, which I will use to sum up the present conceptual challenges. While Allvin and Aronsson do not produce any empirical evidence, their analysis of

the traditional conceptual framework and positions of the working environment field gives an interesting outset to understand the present dilemma of control and autonomy. Supporting the empirical research by Buch et al. (2009), Allvin and Aronsson conclude that large parts of the labor market, the ones considered privileged, are left out of scope by traditional measures, since present conceptualizations of the work environment do not mirror the specific challenges posed by the flexible working conditions of modern work life (Alvinn & Aronsson 2003).

The disintegration and individualization of 'the work environment'⁸

According to Allvin and Aronsson, the trouble started already as the psycho social dimensions of the work environment were introduced during the 1970's and 80's. This potentially exploded the subject matter from a question of defining the causal relations between symptoms and hazardous factors into an ever-expanding field of possible problems. As a consequence, the field produced was becoming "increasingly unmanageable, even irrelevant", as they provokingly suggest (Allvin and Arronsson 2003: 101). The problem was that the objects of attention within the new psycho-social environment could not be defined as the distinction between features of the environment and the experiences of the subject became increasingly indiscernible. In other words, when the distinction between the subject and the object disappears, i.e. the cause and its effect, the notion of a work environment loses its strength as an object of intervention. Furthermore, or rather as a consequence of this, what the psycho-social environment approach lacks is the previous strength of a well-defined job distinguishable from its surrounding circumstances. According to Allvin and Arronsson, these interconnected conceptual or even ontological obscurities produced by the psycho-social prefix, leads to a further difficulty, namely one of settling the responsibilities between employers and employees. When the basic negotiating order; the naming and framing of the work environment itself is blurring, it becomes increasingly difficult to decide not just what to do, but also who is responsible. While employers are traditionally held responsible for the work environment, this does not apply for the experiences, the subjective dimensions of work. They are increasingly placed on the other side of the fence, in the lap, or rather in the minds, of the worker. All in all, Allvin and Aronsson do not leave much hope for the future of a psycho-social working environment agenda, since they believe its basic building blocks are disintegrating. As they state:

“ Hence, our conceptual understanding of a work environment presupposes a relatively well-defined job with a set of relatively well-defined conditions; conditions that, furthermore, may be treated within an established order of negotiation. Any attempt to broaden the concept beyond these considerations runs the risk of obscuring our understanding of it and, above all, of undermining the order of treatment that ultimately is the very purpose and legitimacy of the concept” (Ibid.: 104).

As a consequence of the disintegration of previously unquestioned basic building blocks within the work environment field, a tendency is to draw attention to the interpersonal relations between employees and managers establishing them 'as the principal environmental factors for each other' accompanied by a range of 'therapeutic-like treatments' (Allvin & Aronsson 2003: 101). Reading about stress, on the official website of 'arbejdsmiljø-viden', which has the responsibility to communicate the latest research to the Danish public, the most important thing one can do

when stressed seems to be to share one's thoughts. To talk to colleagues and to the boss, to share how one feels. Dialogue-tools can be downloaded for support. Not much is said about the work task¹⁰. Another example is the growing concern for the subjective meaning in work, relating to Karl E. Weick and Etienne Wenger (Olsén 2008, Kamp & Madsen 2008, Sørensen et al. 2008)¹¹. Although the concept of the work task and also the institutional and discursive levels are touched upon, the work environment is primarily seen through the lenses of the individual. When the work environment now seems to reside in the individual and/or its personal relations, the means of intervention must be developed accordingly. As pinpointed by Pedersen, the increased focus on individual coping strategies as a means of stress intervention, becomes a symptomatic trait, addressing exactly the way in which the question of organizational issues, i.e. the work environment, is being 'folded into the individual' (Pedersen 2008). When the work environment, both the causes and its negative effects, becomes individualized, it makes it even harder to think of classic protective measures. When something goes wrong, when work becomes stressful, it is basically the responsibility of the individual (Ipsen 2009, Pedersen 2008, 2009).

From brute facts to a realm of meaning

As shown, the outset for research and intervention in the psycho-social work environment is found in the Socio-Technical-Systems tradition, a tradition of equal focus on the technical and the social aspects of production. Symptomatic to the development within the STS- field itself, however, the psycho-social work environment seems to have lost track of the technical side and as I have argued above, this split was institutionalized in the D/C model. The model separates out the demand from the control side letting control cover but the psycho-social dimensions of work organization thus leaving the technical as an independent variable. Following the changes in general labor market structures, the split of the D/C model is, however, being questioned. Quite similar to the diagnosis of CMS scholars, work autonomy is no longer as straight forward as previously assumed. It no longer serves as the unquestioned buffer against management and indeed as no unequivocal standpoint in the fight against worker exploitation. Worker autonomy, and thus worker well-being, has become part of the demands of the modern job and as a consequence the scene of intervention has moved from the environment and into the individual and its social relations, which become both the problem as well as the solution. In this respect, the diagnostic reading of Rose is quite appropriate to repeat. Closely linked to the introduction of the science of social-psychology into the work place, work is increasingly conceptualized as 'a realm of meaning' rather than addressed as a matter of the 'brute facts' of production (Rose 1999: 87).

Summing up and taking a stance

What should be clear from the above presentation and discussion of the human relations school and the socio-technical systems theory is that they both serve to condition the very focus of this thesis: the organization of well-being and productivity. With Human Relations theory worker well-

being i.e. worker sociality enters the scene as a particular realm of production equally important to productivity as the material and technological means of production. This is a position and ontology which is not altered by the socio-technical-perspective, but rather enforced by the introduction of a fundamental difference to the technical realm. This was surely not the original intent of the mining studies but nevertheless the result of further theoretical developments. Second of all, this 'invention' of the social changes the understanding of organizational coordination and control, which becomes far more 'friendly' and inscribed in a new management profession. The previous standardization represented by the engineering logics of Taylorism is discarded or at least supplemented by a mode of coordination which is generally considered more humane. The tight bonds of management control are loosened and workers are given more autonomy.

This truth, this particular historical framing and organization of worker well-being and productivity, serves as the outset of both critical management studies and the psycho-social work environment of today. And this is exactly the problem that I wish to address. As critics have implied, the focus on human psychology and the human relations of production has served to send other matters of work organization, equally decisive to both productivity and to worker well-being, into a conceptual dark. When Allvin and Aronsson above describe how the psycho-social work environment has lost its object, it is exactly because the notion of the work organization has been reduced/converted into a matter of worker psychology. And when CMS and work environment studies debate how to best secure worker autonomy the outset is equally individualistic and 'humanistic': a matter of the relation between worker and management. This is also where the debates on standardization and flexibility referred to in the introduction commence. Debates which all tend to circulate around the same axis of management control vs. worker autonomy, and also share the same tendency to become abstracted and displaced. Standardization and flexibility respectively are discussed as generic forms of coordination and management, with specific consequences to the human relations, but without any obvious connection to the specificities of the work organization of concern. My point is that by focusing primarily on the relation between management modes and worker autonomy and furthermore treating this relation within a language of human social-psychology, the question of worker well-being and productivity is dramatically reduced, and it is against this reduction that this thesis will set out.

The work task revisited – a methodological issue

In this effort I believe there are some things to learn from the original Socio-Technical studies. One thing is that it might have developed into a highly functionalist, generic theory on worker participation; however, this dismisses the contextual sensitivity, 'their pragmatic/cultural' approach (Kaghan & Bowker 2010), actually displayed in the original mining studies. When Trist and Bamforth argue for full work circles and widespread self-regulation, it was due to the specific task: coal getting. The fact that it was going on underground, in the pit black, exposing the workers to great dangers, made it crucial to make it possible for the workers to actually apply their specific 'underground experience', an experience exceeding the splitting of individualized tasks of automated production. In other words, the organization of the task was due to the specific circumstances of coal mining. One might say this is a trivial point. I believe, however, that there is every reason to reintroduce it in order to stress the importance of analyzing and evaluating the mode of organization in regard to the specific task at hand. Be it coal getting, teaching or delivering letters. If not, we risk reducing the study of work organization to that of management and individual subjectivity and endless theoretical exhortations into the proper understandings of control, autonomy and resistance.

Recent contributions within Danish work life research have already pointed towards a renewed emphasis on the work as an entrance point to re-invigorate psycho-social work environment issues. In the 'VIPS'-project, the integration with the daily work tasks is thus considered a decisive element in the overall strategy of improving the psychological work environment (Sørensen et al. 2008: 186). The logic being that the work task and getting it done is from the very beginning a prime concern of both workers and employees. This is not to say that it is a simple endeavor. As demonstrated by Bramming et al. (2012), the work task is not a singular entity, it is distributed between three potentially opposite rationalities: the existential dimension stressing the subjective investment in the job; the goal-oriented dimension stressing the performance goals defined by the organization and lastly, the professional dimension containing the pride of craftsmanship. In other words, the work task is a complex, organizationally distributed and potentially conflictual matter. The main point, however, is not to find a new model, recipe or generic understanding to get a firmer hold of the thing. According to Dartington (1998), who is still part of the Tavistock Institute, it is more of a 'heuristic device (Ibid: 1477). 'The primary task' is not something to be defined once and for all. But one still has to try, so he suggests. And this is important. It leaves the researcher the obligation to find specific, if only temporary, answers instead of generalized ones. To stay tuned to the ongoing, specific and practical accomplishments of 'the primary task'. No factor analysis, no predefined analytical measures such as the D/C model, no fixed notions of interests, no predefined ideological standpoint towards standards or flexibility respectively, no predefined preference of either the social or the technical. Having the work task as my methodological approach is thus a way of 'regaining a lost specificity' within organizational studies (Du Gay & Vikkelsø 2012); to empirically ground the investigations of configurations of well-being and productivity within The Danish Post, among postal workers and beyond. It invites an empirically sensitive network thinking:

“ The notion of primary task [...] offers a route from the primitive (self-seeking) to organizational (open system) meaning. It defines itself not simply in its own terms but in relation to the external world” (Dartington 1998: 1489).



Chapter 3:

An ethics of field specificity
– introducing Actor Network Theory

“ Student: But I can't imagine one single topic to which ANT would apply!!
 Professor: Beautiful, you are so right, that's exactly what I think...
 Student: That was not meant as a compliment.
 Professor: But I take it as a true one! An application of anything is as rare as a good text
 of social science. (Latour 2005: 156).

Post post-ANT – employing an ethics of field specificity

My theoretical inspiration stems from Actor-Network-Theory as it has been developed by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law (Callon & Latour 1981; Latour & Woolgar 1986, Callon 1986a, 1986b, Latour 1988, Law & Callon 1988), including the research conducted under the label of 'post-ANT' (Law & Hassard, Leigh Star 1991, Mol 2002, Gad & Jensen 2010, Vikkelsø 2007).

While ANT has been developed primarily as a result of an empirical and political attention towards the dominating truth-claims of science whose black-boxing of own practices and powers ANT typically aims to uncover (Woolgar & Latour 1986, Latour 1988, 1996, Callon 1986a, 1986b), the post-ANT variant has set off from a critique of its predecessor. Post-ANT claims that the preoccupations of classic ANT with 'the stronger network' and its monopoly status tend towards a 'managerial' perspective (Law 1999, Leigh Star 1991). As an alternative, the post-ANT stance stresses that multiple and partial network orders are characteristic of the organization of the social (see for instance Mol 2002, Law 1994).

In the article 'On the consequences of Post-ANT' (2010), Gad & Jensen suggest that the distinction between the two should be read less as a basic theoretical disagreement than a result of the fact that ANT has managed to spread across a wide variety of disciplines and consequently has come to address a much broader empirical field of interest (Gad & Jensen 2010: 57). My own research is no exception. Travelling to different settings, ANT has inevitably been transformed and multiplied, raising the self-reflexive question characteristic of post-ANT: what is ANT? A self-reflexive process which has tended to reify both the position of ANT as well as that of post-ANT (op. cit). Rather than looking for a more or less substantial (dis)-continuation between the two strands of research or even trying to choose between them, so the authors argue, one should stay focused on the particular characteristics of the field. In so many words, the crucial matter of concern is one of deploying what Zuiderent-Jerak & Jensen (2007) has elsewhere termed 'an ethics of specificity' (Ibid.:229), continuously deciding upon 'a good description' in relation to the given empirical field of research. In line with this, presenting a study of the introduction of Electronic Patient Records (EPR), Vikkelsø exemplifies how the analytical ambitions of classic ANT and post-ANT respectively work as different, yet complementary, approaches in the effort to make good descriptions of the implementation of an EPR. Good descriptions as in both practical and politically relevant (Vikkelsø 2007; 306). Vikkelsø thus refuses the a priori identity of classic ANT to be particularly 'managerial' or negligent of delivering symmetrical accounts of the field. Ultimately, the value of any ANT-analysis cannot be determined a priori, but only in accordance with its practical effects, with its possible engagements with the field (Ibid.: 307).

Carrying on from this, when I present my analytical framework below, it should be read as part of the above attempt to displace the question of a theoretical choice between 'classic ANT'

and ‘post-ANT’ into a matter of making a good i.e. effectful description of my field. While I do recognize the slightly different knowledge interests of the two strands, my particular choice of analytical repertoire should be read primarily as a way to attend to the following recursive questions: What are the characteristics of my field? What is my knowledge ambition? What do I believe to be the most effectful analytical strategy? Or more eloquently put, using the words of Gad & Jensen, my use of ANT can be considered: “(...) a vessel of intellectual resources that can only bear fruit in specific constellations with empirical matters” (Gad & Jensen 2010; 75).

Re-assembling the social

The above ‘displacement’ strategy is well in line with the explicit ambition of ANT (classic and otherwise) not to act as another grand theory of the social. Following the main point of Latour’s rather programmatic book *Reassembling the Social* (2005), the investigator should not apply explanations that do not come into being within the field of study. When Latour suggests, ‘not to define the building blocks of the social beforehand’ (Ibid.:41), he does so in an explicit rebellion against one of his most fierce ‘enemies’: ‘the sociologists of the social’ (Latour 2005: 9). These sociologists are characterized by their untimely introduction of all sorts of explicatory frameworks represented by for instance categories of gender, age, social class etc. Categories of the social, so Latour argues, which leave no room to openly explore what ‘the social’ consists of in the specific setting under study. Instead of importing theoretical explanations from outside the field, the researcher should simply follow any object of study and its possible relations to statements, actions, people or things in the given context, using the words and explanations of the field itself. Latour puts this analytical research strategy as follows:

“ [...] it is no longer enough to limit actors to the role of informers offering cases of some well-known types. You have to grant them back the ability to make up their own theories of what the social is made of. Your task is no longer to impose some order, to limit the range of acceptable entities, to teach actors what they are, or to add some reflexivity to their blind practice. Using a slogan from ANT, you have to ‘follow the actors themselves’, that is try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands” (Ibid.: 12).

As a result of this descriptive attitude, the network, i.e. the possible relations of any object, is in principle endless, taking a great deal of stamina on behalf of the researcher as she must keep track of the often very mundane traces and relations making up the research object. Following from this, ANT has been characterized a ‘modest sociology’ (Law 2004) or as framed by Latour himself, a sociology for ants, referring to the character of the little animal as a, “blind, myopic, workaholic, trail-sniffing, and collective traveler” (Latour 2005; 9)¹.

As presented in the previous chapter, the concern of this thesis lies within a theoretical landscape that tends to split up the organization of work into a variety of spheres such as ‘the social’, ‘the psychological’ and ‘the technical’, as if they were natural fractions of reality. And I have argued that it is by this ontological splitting that the knowledge of well-being and productivity has been and still is produced and debated. Also within *The Danish Post*. ANT offers a quite different outset, turning the demarcation of the spheres themselves into an object of study: How are the

distinctions established, by what means, and with what effects? It is in this sense that Latour frames the task of the researcher as a re-assembling of the social, suggesting that to follow the ways and distinctions of the field will produce a different version (or possibly several) of sociality than the one typically offered by the available theories.

One obvious consequence of this general attitude appears in my analysis as an absence of theoretical concepts and thus an ambition to keep out predefined notions of the social, its scales and values. In this sense, my analysis follows the general credo of Latour to re-assemble the social by way of 'mere description'. Of course it is not just that². Although I do try to learn from my field, to follow the important actors as they are defined by my informants, acting as a scaffold in this effort, I have had a range of principles and sources of inspiration which are thus inevitably part of the description; although now nearly invisible. These principles form part of the ANT repertoire. Resonating the basically 'anti-theoretical' spirit of ANT, I have chosen to do a highly selective account of this repertoire, presenting but the elements that have affected and guided my research and analysis.

Distributed agency

The most important principle of Actor Network Theory is of course the Actor-Network, which redefines dramatically the notion of agency as a property of single actors. Any actor gains agency only by the relations established to other actors in a wider network. To cite Latour again, "An actor is what is made to act by many others" (Latour 2005: 46). Action is thus redefined: from being perceived as a cause and a starting point to an effect. As an example, I will take the description of a manager in the Daresbury Lab as described by Law (Law & Moser 2003). The manager, called Andrew, is considered a competent leader. He knows when to take action and his co-managers trust him to make the right decisions. What Law makes clear, however, is that Andrew's competence and power are not characteristics of Andrew himself. His identity and agency as a manager is rather the effect of a range of quite mundane artifacts surrounding him: His office and the comparatively larger desk placed in it, his work flow charts printed and lying on the table offering him the necessary overview, his secretary who brings him this information, his responsive co-managers etc. etc. As summed up by Law " [...] he is an effect of a performance that is distributed not only across his body, but also into a ramified network of other materials" (Law 2003: 4).

Why is this important? To my research it is particularly important because it allows a distributed notion of the actions and identities of my informants under study, whether they are postal workers, HR consultants or local team managers. The individuals and their proclaimed 'features', including those of power, interest, skill, morality and autonomy (or the lack of such) become an effect of a particular organization, a particular networked set-up. Neither power nor interests can explain the actions of individuals, if anything they are the ones to be explained³. This is a position which clearly challenges the essentialist and often antagonistic view on the identity of employees and managers respectively, appearing within my wider research field as well as within TDP. When I encounter for instance a general wish among management in TDP to change 'the attitude problems' of postal workers, this calls for a closer look at how these attitudes as well as their problematic character have come to occupy such a pivotal role, that is: How are they singled out? What are they connected to? What makes them a matter of concern in the first place? Actions and identities coming across as 'resistance' or 'cooperativeness' respectively, are thus to be explained by my analysis of the wider network of postal organization and not something to be taken as a point of departure or as a matter of course. As framed by Jensen, ANT holds what he terms a 'non-humanist disposition' (Jensen 2004), and considering the way in which my field tends to frame a whole range of problems

as a matter of individual characteristics, this particular non-humanist disposition serves as an important strategic analytic standpoint⁴.

'Geographies of delegation' – the interplay of humans and non-humans

The next principle I would like to stress, is the well-known fact that Actor Network Theory claims agency also to texts, procedures, concepts, machines; all sorts of things that would normally be considered 'dead' or at least not relevant for sociological investigation. This analytic ambition is termed 'generalized symmetry' (Callon 1986a) and it embraces the ambition to research the social without favoring or distinguishing beforehand between its various parts such as for instance its 'social' or 'technical parts'. These distinctions are not an expression of a natural order but rather a product of the relational dynamics within the given network and as such historically contingent⁵. In applying the principle of symmetry, I have found Akrich's term 'geographies of delegation' useful since it stresses the highly dynamic relation between the humans and the non-humans, pointing to their fundamentally symmetrical yet mutually unsettled identities and competences. Both identity and competence are being settled in an ongoing process of delegation from human to technology and back again. Following the basic performative dynamic of the network, Akrich stresses that non-humans no more than humans can be demarcated in and by themselves. The identity of an object emerges as a result of the ways in which it is acted upon and related to other objects or humans (Akrich 1992: 206). When non-humans are considered equally important as humans, representing the 'missing masses' of sociology (Latour 1992), this does not mean, as critical voices have implied, that non-humans all of a sudden take on "autonomous power" (Collins & Yearly 1992: 312)⁶ acting on their own behalf. A focus on the non-humans should help the analyst appreciate that non-humans are given equal attention and that even the most human characteristics such as emotions, morality, memory, or well-being for that matter, are already part of, mediated by the technologies, things and texts surrounding them. As pointed out by Akrich, the challenge of investigation is how 'this reciprocal adjustment' between objects and humans may be described (Akrich 1992: 207).

Morality distributed

I will dwell on 'the reciprocal adjustment' for a moment since it touches not simply on the identity of humans and non-humans but equally so on the delegation of morality and even humaneness going on between them. Latour commences his article "The Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts" (1992) with an example of a seat belt or rather the obstacles he faces as he refuses to put it on. As a result of his protest, Latour has to witness first a flash of red light and then suffer a terrible and insistent sound of a high pitched alarm. It does not stop until he puts on the belt or simply takes out the key from the ignition and gives up his ambition to drive the car all together. Latour then poses the interesting question to the reader, "Where is the morality?" (Ibid.: 225). Normally, one would point to the driver since he is the one supposed to act morally: to fasten his seat belt as the law prescribes. The point made by Latour, however, is that morality does not merely reside in the driver. The red light and the annoying alarm delegate morality to non-human actors as well. When Akrich talks about the reciprocal adjustments between objects and humans and picture this as going on within a 'geography of delegation', this is exactly what she is aiming at: that action as well as

morality is distributed across both humans and non-humans suggesting that without this delegation, without a morality readily inscribed in the red lights and alarms by bright engineers, the moral car driver would never, or at least more reluctantly so, come into existence. Again, the non-humanist disposition is stressed by suggesting the distributed and material character of morality.

Programs and Anti-programs

What is equally important though, and treated extensively within the ANT literature (De Laet & Mol 2000, Leigh Star 1991, Callon 1986a, 1986b, Latour 1996), the program of action or scripts inscribed in technologies, things or texts is not necessarily adhered to by the humans involved. The humans might refuse to use the technology all together or invent a range of alternative uses for it, thus altering the original script. In the case of the seat belt, Latour himself chooses to make his local auto-mechanic switch off the light and the alarm once and for all, offering him the opportunity to be an unlawful car driver once again. In Latour's own words, every program of action always implies an anti-program (Latour 1992: 251).

My original interest in work standards and the ways in which I have tried to describe their role and effects in my analysis, has been greatly inspired by the above relation of humans and non-humans. I believe it offers a dynamic perspective on the relation between the postal workers and the technology, work tools and work procedures present in their everyday work. Apart from describing the particular program of action inscribed in the given technology/procedure, my interest has been to understand the reciprocal adjustments going on between the postal workers and their non-human 'co-workers' involving as well the wider network, the geography, of other defining actants.

Most evidently, this dynamic of delegation is described in the first and second chapter of analysis, in which I focus on the route planning system and the development of a new bike and kickstand, respectively. In both cases it is quite obvious that identities, competences as well as moralities are delegated and negotiated. When considering the route planning system some of the questions are: who knows about the route, what is the definition of a fair days work and who is the postal worker to go with it? In the process of developing and testing a new bike, the bodies of the postal workers are simultaneously prompted to change as is the level of discretion afforded when driving the bike. The original scripts of the various standards set the scene in particular ways, by defining both the bodies and mentalities of the postal workers to go with it. It is obvious, however, how the functionality of the standards are quite dependent on postal workers that do not simply follow these scripts, but actively engage in their alteration in order for them to become effective, to indeed work as standards. Based on Latour's distinction between the social order as 'ostensive' or 'performative' respectively (Latour 1986)⁷, recent research on routines by Feldman and Pentland has stressed especially the performative aspect: that standards and routines that are normally considered representatives of stability and a certain 'mindlessness' (Feldman 2003: 727) should be recognized for their equally dynamic qualities, stressing the variations in each performance of a routine⁸ (see also Pentland & Feldman 2005, Pentland & Feldman 2008). When opening up for analysis the black box of routine, so they argue, it will become obvious that what may seem both stable and consensual in fact takes a lot of effort (Pentland & Feldman 2005: 801).

While the dynamic delegation between technology and humans might seem more obvious in the first two chapters, every analysis holds a tension between some kind of program on the one side and on the other side the practices, routines and knowledges of the postal workers, who in most cases are the ones to enact the anti-program. Apart from the route planning technology and the new bike and kickstand, a Lean program, cake and cake lists as well as HR events to increase

well-being and creativity are taken up and analyzed as specific non-human actors offering certain programs, certain ‘geographies of delegation’.

The focus on programs and anti-programs is, however, only one of my analytical strategies. As proclaimed above, I have also followed an interest that is typical for the so-called ‘post-ANT’ scholars, wanting to describe the versions of postal organization that are not necessarily defined by antagonistic forces. In the practices of postal distribution it seems there are also things going on that do not necessarily answer directly to the program, but which are nonetheless important to the ongoing organization of well-being and productivity.

Otherness and multiplicity

The article of Susan Leigh Star, “On being allergic to onions” (1991) is often mentioned as a representative of the particular (feminist) critique voiced against traditional ANT (Gad & Jensen 2009; Law 1999, see also Haraway 2004). In the article she addresses the importance of investigating what she terms the “silent work” of current standards/strong networks, represented by Othered identities and worlds. To illustrate this point, she tells the story of an encounter between the stronger network represented by the standardization of McDonalds and her own actions as an allergic. Confronted with a standard burger, her action of having to scrape off the onions on the one hand makes her fall outside the available customer category (the stronger network). On the other, her ‘invisible work’ is not unrelated. It even has a productive effect, so Star argues, since it acts to uphold the ways of the offered standard/network (Leigh Star 1991: 29). Star thus demonstrates that there is more to an ANT analysis than to account for the victorious (the standards of McDonalds) and as such she produces a classical political message voicing the position of the disfavored. But Star’s example carries more than the voice of the disfavored. It also shows how immediately Othered practices and preferences are in fact capable of enacting new possible identities in a productive co-existence with ‘the bigger actor’. Following from this, scraping off onions is not considered an anti-program, defined simply by its antagonistic relationship to the dominating standard and practice. Although it introduces difference, it is another difference than the one operating by confrontation.

This latter point is elaborated by Law, in his book *Organizing Modernity* (1994) in which he analyzes the organization of Daresbury Lab, a publicly financed English research laboratory. It is a case-analysis with a particular focus on the management of the laboratory, which resonates in many ways the case of TDP. Law demonstrates how the organizing of the Lab is conducted along the lines of quite different yet simultaneously operating ‘modes of ordering’⁹. Here citing from a later article:

“ The different modes of ordering produce certain forms of organisation. They produce certain material arrangements. They produce certain subject-positions. And they produce certain forms of knowledge” (Law 2003a).

Law identifies four modes of ordering: Enterprise, Administration, Vision and Vocation (Law 1994: 75-82). Modes of ordering do not differ much from the description of a network; the decisive point of Law’s research (compared to ‘classic’ ANT) is that there are several distinct networks operating simultaneously. Especially in later articles, Law attempts to elaborate on the inter-relational dynamics of these co-existing orders (Law & Moser 2003, 2003a), suggesting that they are in fact defined by their productivity.

The productivity of multiplicity

In the article *Managing, Subjectivities and Desires* (2003), based on Law's study, Law & Moser develops on this notion of productivity. Organization, so they contest, depends on the simultaneous performance of different logics working together in what they term "productive slippage" (Law and Moser 2003: 8). In this line of thought, and contrary to traditional ANT, to organize/stabilize the social does not necessarily rely on processes of translation, interessement and irreversibility (Callon 1986a, Callon & Latour 1981) creating in the end a momentarily stable and singular network. The act of organizing may as well stem from the co-existence and co-extension of immediate opposite logics. In the case of the Lab, each mode of ordering, whether Enterprise, Administration, Vision or Vocation, has something important to contribute in the execution of the tasks of the laboratory. Although Law clearly demonstrates in his book how enterprise tends to get 'the upper hand', not least since it gains strength from the dominating liberal discourse of enterprise sweeping across the English society during the time of Thatcher, Law and Moser stress in the later article (2003) the equal importance of for instance the mundane administrative tasks of archiving. If not properly conducted, the Lab will not be able to satisfy the legal framework defined by its status as publicly funded. Equally so, there is a need for the ethics of vocation i.e. the qualified expertise of scientist 'puzzle solvers', since this makes sure that laboratory work is conducted with just the appropriate sense of scientific quality. And finally, there is the dimension of vision, described by Law as a highly individualized ethos, closely related to Weber's charismatic leader, enacted by a few of the researchers in the Lab and serving to inspire and engage newcomers of the Lab.

The how of multiplicity

Although the overall argument of Law and Moser may seem convincing, not least considering the apparent different networks/modes of ordering that characterize the highly effective organization of TDP, the actual empirical workings of productive co-existence between the various modes of ordering is under elucidated. Besides a dialogue between three representatives of management, which Law and Moser then takes to be an enacted compromise between the logics of enterprise and the logics of administration (Law & Moser 2003: 2), it stays unclear how the coordination between modes of ordering actually takes place. For more details on the enactment of organizational multiplicity Mol's study of arteriosclerosis serves as a better example.

In her empirically elaborate study of arteriosclerosis situated in a Dutch hospital, Mol shows how different versions of the disease is a result of specific practices and knowledges enacting the disease in mutually exclusive ways. When pathologists look at and diagnose arteries in the lower limb post-mortem by the use of a microscope, they enact a quite different arteriosclerosis than does the patient in the consultation room, telling the doctor about the many obstacles, such as staircases or long stretches of walking, that confront them in their everyday lives. The various practices make the single diseased body become "the body multiple", characterized by being 'more than one but less than many' as coined by Mol (cited from Gad & Jensen 2010: 72). Most importantly, when discussing the productiveness of multiplicity, Mol stresses that what may seem a highly fragmented organization of arteriosclerosis in effect works rather effectively. Despite the differences, despite the fact that neither patients nor disease exist in the singular, the organization actually hangs together, patients do get cured. Mol presents a range of specific empirical examples as to how the practical coordination of different arteriosclerosis is going on. As summed up in

an article by Sjögren (2008), Mol basically identifies two coordination mechanisms: one based on ‘addition’, the other on ‘calibration’. The former, as the name indicates, works by adding up different forms of diagnosis. In practice this may be done by the use of the patient record, which represents what Mol terms ‘a composite object’ (Mol 2002: 71). In the record, oppositional forms of diagnosis are added up without necessitating them to refer to the same kind of disease/object¹⁰. Nevertheless, the patient record works, i.e. coordinates, since it produces specific suggestions for treatment. It produces action and eventually it produces cure in keeping with the overall *raison d’être* of the hospital. The coordination by calibration on the other hand operates by the introduction of a common measure (Ibid: 84) which translates the different diagnosis into a common language.

When I look into the specific organization of well-being and productivity in postal distribution, I do so with a specific interest in understanding the different ways in which well-being and productivity are configured/organized in practice. This implies, in line with Mol’s various artherosclerosis, that there might be several well-beings and several productivities at play at once. The question is how these different versions are enacted, to use the word of Mol, and how they are allowed to co-exist or not. Considering the matter of an overall organizational ‘hanging-togetherness’ (mail gets delivered in time every day), the empirical question is how the co-existence and coordination of the various versions is actually brought about.

Multiplicity as a generalized norm?

When reading the feminist critique of classic ANT, but also for instance the work of Law, especially his later work in which he chooses to write more about ANT (see Law 2004, Law 2003, Law 1999), there is a tendency that the multiplicity-approach substitutes empirical description with theoretical reification and a generalized normativity: Singular is bad, multiple is better. In many ways this seems an ironic and probably unintended by-product of the multiplicity-oriented research. I write ‘unintended’ since when reading Law and Mol themselves, they are both well aware that the multiplicity that they describe is not a theory of the world. Modes of ordering, so Law explains, are not theories of organization, they are rather to be considered a heuristic tool of the researcher since they are the result of empirical discoveries (Law 1994: 83-84). In other words, the ordering effects of the networked organization is as much the order and effect of the researcher’s efforts. And correspondingly, so Mol reflects, multiplicity is an act as any other:

“ This book tells that no object, no body, no disease, is singular. If it is not removed from the practices that sustain it, reality is multiple. This may be read as a description that beautifully fits the facts. But attending to the multiplicity of reality is also an act. It is something that may be done – or left undone. It is an intervention” (Mol 2002: 6).

When stressing that multiplicity is not simply a characteristic of the world, but as much an effect of the deliberate choice of the researcher, however, multiplicity risks becoming instead a political philosophical position. When stressing that multiplicity is a choice of the researcher, it seems to imply that not choosing it would be the same as reducing the world. And who would want that? As demonstrated by Leigh Star for instance, it would tend to dismiss the ‘silent work’, the scraping off the onions, the disfavored position. In the article “Performativities: Butler, Callon and the

moment of theory” (2010), Du Gay points to this tendency of leaving the empirical and historical contingent analysis in favor of the explicitly political/philosophical position (of the reflexive researcher subject) as a characteristic of a performative stance. A stance associated originally with Butler but also found, so he argues, within the wider research community of STS (Du Gay 2010: 171). As argued by Du Gay, there is a certain ‘political romanticism’ to the approach (Ibid.: 177).

This aspect of romanticism is taken up by Gad & Jensen. Taking the work of Marilyn Strathern as their outset, they argue that no matter how ambitiously the ANT researcher seeks to employ a symmetrical strategy for analysis, trying to privilege no one in advance, but rather be open to any sorts of complexities and hybrids of the social, this might not necessarily carry a better world (Gad & Jensen 2010: 70). On the contrary, citing Strathern:

“ [...] neither a mixed nature nor an impure character guarantees immunity from appropriation. On the contrary, the new modernities (a-modernity and postmodernity) have invented new projects that forestall such imaginings. We can now all too easily imagine monopolies on hybrids, and claims of ownership over segments of network” (Strathern 1999; 135 cited from Gad & Jensen 2010: 70).

Multiple realities are potentially as oppressive as are the ones of ‘the stronger network’, so the gloomy message seems to be. There is no general theoretical/philosophical standpoint available to serve an antidote to exploitative powers.

It all depends

Du Gay argues for a general stance of ‘it all depends’ (Du Gay 2010: 174) and this is also where I will be hanging my hat. In line with this, as pointed out by de Laet and Mol, multiplicity or ‘fluidity’ as they choose to call it, should not be treated as a new standard, as a new general ‘good’ to be employed and sought for everywhere (De Laet & Mol 2000: 253). In their particular case study, it may have made the Zimbabwean Bush Pump work better: it allowed for more people to have clean(er) water, and it made possible the respect of the particularities of the various local villagers as opposed to enrolling them in a generalized script of ‘users’. However, fluidity of technologies, or organizations I will add, is not always for the better. As concluded by de Laet and Mol “It may be a good – and we suggest that you find out for yourself whether or not it is in the cases that you happen to deal with” (op.cit.). In other words, multiplicity is neither a general theory of organization nor a general good, but something to be achieved and judged from case to case. In my case, by following the various configurations of well-being and productivity, hopefully, I will be able to qualify the character of the particular versions of postal organization, how they interrelate and what kinds of conflicts or possible ‘productive slippages’ they seem to produce. Whether the result ends up being (politically) relevant, a happy or a sad story, whether it ends up being ‘a good description’ able to resonate and engage my field, as suggested by Vikkelsø, will at least have to await the specific analysis and its conclusions. It is certainly not inherent in the choice of doing an analysis of multiplicity.



Chapter 4:
Methodology
– defining the 23rd bowl

Between description and experiential engagement

“ For scientific, political and even moral reasons, it is crucial that enquirers do not in advance, and in place of the actors, define what sorts of building blocks the social world is made of” (Latour 2005: 41).

As I started my research, I was eager to find a way to research the organizing of well-being and productivity that would qualify to meet the attitude of Latour's words above: neither to look for phenomena of specific kinds nor for their causalities. At least my ambition was to postpone for as long as possible the moment of closure. Carrying on from this, my general attitude when doing my empirical research has been utterly explorative, simply asking: What is going on here? What is postal work about? What is important to whom, how and why? In this chapter, I will elaborate on how exactly I did this. As in: where and what I went to explore; what kinds of methods I used and why; what kinds of methodological challenges I have been confronted with and how my efforts and troubles have informed my knowledge of the field and the kind of analysis I have ended up producing.

Mere description?

Having the ambition of not defining the building blocks of the social in advance might be a very noble ambition, but it has the tendency to obscure the methodological challenges of description, especially concerning the role of the researcher. Latour himself generally refrains from giving specific guidelines as to 'what to do' when confronted with the task of describing and analyzing a specific phenomenon. His answer, in the 15 pages Socratic dialogue (Latour 2005:141-156), given to the baffled and frustrated student who wants to know what to do, is that the student or any researcher for that matter should simply stay descriptive, learn from the field and 'follow the actor' as Latour has elsewhere put it (Latour 1987). The reason why Latour is generally not fond of methods, or as he puts it, 'that dreadful word methodology' (Latour 2005: 17), becomes clear in a short, rather old but telling review of Mike Lynch's book *Art and Artifact in Laboratory Science: A study of Shop Work and Shop Talk in a Research Laboratory* published in 1985. According to Latour, the main problem with Lynch's otherwise fine grained descriptions of laboratory work is that it is 'cursed' with the elaborate methodological reflections – or 'precautions' as Latour prefers to call them (Latour 1986: 546). The methodological reflections/precautions, so Latour suggests, tend to mime the notion of science held by the natural scientists under study: that all statements recorded are to be preserved and presented "[...] as a naturalist would do with a rare specimen of butterfly" (Ibid.: 546). The alternative, so Latour suggests, would be for Lynch to grant himself the same rights as those enjoyed by the scientists under study: to be able to change instruments, focus as well as scale as they go along. The suggestion implies that Lynch should add something to the field in the course of his writing and basically accept that, "No amount of method can make one text less of a fiction than another one" (Ibid.: 548). In other words, the reason Latour generally detest method and methodology is the frequent use of it as a precautionary strategy in face of an ambition to produce 'truth'. Ironically, as also pointed out by Gad & Jensen, there is the tendency

in Latour's own work to do more or less the same. When Latour suggests the researcher to keep a 'weak' vocabulary in order to make way for the language and voice of the informants (Latour 2005), this seems to maintain the very positivist ideal. As Gad & Jensen comments:

“ We question, however, whether it is really necessary to work with a 'banal' or 'meaningless' language to give other actors appropriate voice. One could, for instance imagine cases where actors would like to learn from ANT. Indeed, in some cases, this might be of even more concern to those actors than that their 'prolific idioms' are faithfully reproduced in sociological accounts” (Gad & Jensen 2010: 64)

When I lend quite a lot of pages to reflections on method and methodology, this should not be seen as acting out a series of 'precautionary measures'. Quite the contrary the purpose with this is to put the formative role of the researcher back on stage. In this sense, I follow the recent pull within the ANT field to give up the distinction between normative 'action research' on the one side and mere 'descriptive research' on the other (Science as Culture, special issue, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2007). As expressed by Jensen: “[...] normativity is not an attribute of theories or specific methods, but instead something which emerges in the course of doing research, through engagement with other actors” (Jensen, 2007: 237)¹. Following this, method should not be dismissed as an unduly precautionary strategy, but treated, conceived of, written as an integral part of the object of study in order to qualify the specific kind of 'engagement with other actors'. Or to put it in a more down-to-earth manner, using the words of Law, “The argument is no longer that methods discover and depict realities. Instead, it is that they participate in the enactment of those realities” (Law 2004: 45), leaving the researcher with but the choice of an active and inherently political position.

Supplying an extra bowl

In line with this, I have found a great deal of inspiration in the article written by the French philosopher and psychologist, Vincianne Despret with the title Sheep do have opinions (2006). The main point of the article does not differ from a lot of other methodological reflections following from a performative ontology (see for instance: Law 2004, 2009; Mol 2002) but since its way of getting the message through is so clear, so well performed (sic!), albeit happening in a unfamiliar setting of sheep and baboons, I have chosen this article as a point of departure to clarify the overall approach of my study.

Describing the research on sheep among ethologists², Despret illustrates how the research questions and methods used to investigate a given field are not only crucial in the sense that they define the dimensions of the research object that can be identified. As if it was a matter of perspective³. Following a performative approach, Despret contests that the methods used constitute the object of study, what it is or rather what it may become. As a result, the criteria for doing valid research changes. From being a matter of doing a naturalistic representation of the object (to produce 'truth'), or alternatively a partial perspective version of it (a relative truth), it becomes a matter of enabling the research object to become as interesting as possible. As expressed by Despret's informant, the basic attitude and question will have to be, “In which conditions are we most likely to be able to make visible that which hitherto could not exist?” (Despret 2006: 364). In the case of sheep, the problem is that they have been studied within a framework that allows them

to become but competitive and hierarchical in nature and as such they come across as rather simple and uninteresting animals that do not stimulate further questions. However, employing different methods in the study of sheep, they have been allowed to become increasingly interesting and as a result they have been offered the title of 'honorary primates' (Ibid: 360). Making the whole difference, so Despret illustrates, was an additional bowl of food. Instead of offering the 22 sheep under study a number of 22 food bowls, they were offered 23. Due to a different research design they were offered the opportunity not to compete and thus become a different and more interesting kind of animal: a sheep of elaborate and complex social relations, in turn offering the researcher the opportunity for further investigations and new kinds of questions, all the while expanding on the possible nature of sheep.

By her no doubt peculiar example, Despret pinpoints that scientific research is – or at least should be – of a highly experimental nature. That it should try to attune to the object in ways that will eventually produce new kinds of answers as to its possible nature. At the same time she takes on a strategic position. Strategic in the sense that the different versions of sheep-nature produced are judged in relation to the already existing framework of sheep. The ethologist and her 23rd bowl are going 'upstream' in an otherwise 'downstream' research context, as Despret puts it. In other words, the alternative questions posed to the sheep are produced and defined by their difference to the conventional theories on sheep already at play.

Identifying the upstream – going downstream

While I have adapted a generally explorative attitude, following the ambition of Latour, my research has been equally shaped by an ambition to produce something different than the current research. As described in the previous chapter, the larger research field of which my Ph.D forms part tends to reproduce a range of ontological distinctions and normativities as well as a highly individualized and generic notion of well-being, leaving little room for alternative versions across both (critical) management and work life research. Especially the recognition of the work task and its specific organization seems to have disappeared from view in favor of a preoccupation with individual attitudes. In the context of TDP, these tendencies seem to prevail. A short conversation with two HR professionals, which was conducted as we were planning my research set-up among the staff in the Copenhagen DIS headquarters, may serve as an illustration. Out of pure curiosity, I asked them to say a few words about the notion of well-being. What they came to think of? They rather quickly agreed on the importance of a range of fringe benefits, referring to the degree of pampering of the employees: the possibility of access to for instance body massage or fresh fruit during work hours. The basic rationality of the Hawthorne effect seemed to be thriving. As I will demonstrate in chapter 7, in the practices of HR well-being is readily translated into fun and games based in an idea of the postal worker as a creative human being able to unite the goals of productivity and well-being in the course of their ongoing human development. Not a word on work and work organization. Similarly, taking another prevalent approach to well-being into account, the yearly surveys conducted to measure the general level of employee satisfaction, the link to work practices seem equally distant. When the survey ends up with an index score named Big S (for Satisfaction), based in a complex mathematical calculation of the weighted average of each question, this is more or less impossible to relate. Except from to itself. It makes good material for comparison: Distribution area against distribution area, team against team and year against year. And this is also what it is used for. An index number of 4,5 is straight forward as in easy to read, compare and thus to manage, but it stays obscure how it is related to the actual work organization of postal work. As pointed out by Law (2004) although presented as

a representation of the world, the survey 'sees' basically a world of its own doing. In my effort to go 'upstream' in a downstream like this clearly I am in need of questions and methods that put the specificities of the work task and its organization to the forefront.

My 23 bowl – working compatibilities

I have found an ethnographically inspired approach and especially the method of auto-photography to be my alternative. Contrary to the research on sheep, however, I did not succeed in finding a single bowl, metaphorically speaking, to make my field act differently, more articulately. It has taken quite a lot of bowls, devices and 'artificial mediators' (Latour 2004) to make up for the 23rd bowl. First of all, these mediators constitute my various methods: auto-photography, group and single interviews, (participant) observations, document readings. Second of all, an important device of mine owes as well to the way I have chosen to write up my analysis. Following the general knowledge of ethnography, writing is not a discipline of mere representation. Rather the writing decisively affords a certain field (Clifford & Marcus 1986, Van Manen 1988, Emerson et al. 1995). My writing is no exception and is thus included in the make-up of my 23rd bowl. Third of all, a certain tension between the performative ontology of Actor Network Theory on the one side and an aesthetic research tradition informed by phenomenology has played its part too (Pink 2009, Strati 2000, Warren 2002). Although I might not agree on the philosophical underpinnings of the aesthetic approach (see also Mogensen 2010), I have generally followed the ambition of aesthetic/'sensory' ethnography when engaging with the field. Pink presents the ambitions of the sensory ethnographer as follows:

“ I propose that one of the goals of the sensory ethnographer is to seek to know places in other people's worlds that are similar to the places and ways of knowing of those others. In attempting to achieve this, she or he would aim to come closer to understanding how those other people experience, remember and imagine” (Pink 2009:23).

According to Pink 'the sensory embodied experiences' of the researcher (Op.cit.) are key to this ambition, and confronted with the work practices of the postal workers this experiential approach proved relevant. Their relation to work was quite obviously based in their bodies, depending on bodily routines and they were hard to obtain knowledge from except through other experiential categories than words. In this sense, participant observation, driving mail and sorting mail, proved to be an important point of entry in postal work and its organization. Moreover, getting introduced to the literature of (auto) photography and the wider field of organizational aesthetics/visual ethnography inspired me to experiment with other 'sensous' methods (Pink 2001, 2009). For instance, I did a round of observations with a particular focus on the sounds and the atmosphere in the sorting office and in the writing up of my observational notes, I experimented with what I called 'ethnographic pictures', trying to condense my experiences as if they had been a snapshot. Following ANT and not least the standpoint of Latour, the experiential approach is often critiqued.

Equal to ‘the sociologists of the social’ (Latour 2005), the so-called ‘phenomenologists’ seem to be a favorite target. In the article from 2004 already cited above, Latour reflects on the role of the body in science, clearly having the aesthetics/phenomenologists as his antagonist⁴. As he concludes:

“ No subjectivity, no introspection, no native feeling can be any match for the fabulous proliferation of affects and effects that a body learns when being processed by a hospital” (Latour 2004: 227).

What Latour, as ANT in general, is after is a de-naturalization of the experiential subject and body of phenomenology and its claim to a better and truer representation of the world, stressing instead the body’s inherent artificiality as a potential for knowledge/politics⁵. By ‘artificiality’, Latour means to point to the non-essentialist character of subjectivity and knowledge as it is being constituted and distributed in/by technologies, material artifacts, knowledge practices etc. Indeed, as already argued in the theory section, I find this a both relevant and timely position when it comes to studying the organization of productivity and well-being. The question is, however, how to take up this kind of mediated subjective experience as a resource for knowledge production? While Latour’s article on the body serves as an exception, as already argued the general tendency within ANT is to call for mere description, to follow the actor and to keep the voice of the researcher as weak as possible. However, self-reflexivity of the researcher, does not necessarily lead to indulging self-vision. Following Donna Haraway’s programmatic text on situated knowledges (Haraway 1991), it might even lead to a clearer situatedness; a researcher with an embodied vision capable of creating a difference: A difference between the descriptions offered by the researcher and the practices under study. Haraway’s critique of ANT and its ambitions of ‘mere description’ is that by pretending to be no-body and no-where, the act of representation becomes mimetic and impossible to hold responsible of its results. The researcher becomes self-invisible (Haraway 2004: 234-35)⁶.

Following the vocabulary of Anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (2004), I suggest a compromise in which ANT and an aesthetic/experiential approach may operate by extension: that the resources of ANT extend into the field of aesthetics and vice versa, creating what Strathern calls ‘a working compatibility’ (Strathern 2004: 35). At least this has been my ambition. Drawing on the cyborg-metaphor developed by Donna Haraway (Haraway 1983), Strathern contests that the decisive point of ‘working compatibilities’ is found in their ability to create a new viewing point, a new researcher identity/body consisting of different parts, which do not, however, sum up to a complete whole. Like the cyborg’s original intention there is a pleasure in the confusion of boundaries (Haraway 1983: 1). Working compatibilities form an identity of ‘partial connections’. My 23rd bowl is an attempt, a specific methodological set-up, which consists of a researcher body of both aesthetic/phenomenological and ANT ‘parts’ hopefully capable of producing a view from somewhere; (self) aware of its inherent partial perspective. The various methods put to use, the photographs, the interviews, the observations and the writing each serve as mediating devices to make the experiential body of this researcher see, hear, sense and write the field of postal work in a specific way.

The structure of the remaining chapter

After a brief introduction to my field, The Danish Post (TDP), I will unfold a host of practical issues related to auto-photography when applied in the context of postal work, arguing that the

method of auto-photography should not be generally praised (or the opposite), but rather evaluated by its particular usefulness in the given setting. Additionally, the effects produced when adding a camera to the field of postal work serves as a rather telling story of my case and my role as a researcher.

After this, I look into my analytical efforts to make the photographs 'visible'. This part asks the basic question: how and why have the photographs produced a better or different access to the field? This takes me directly into the phenomenological underpinnings of photographic method, as it is presented within organizational aesthetics and visual ethnography and the alternative position offered by ANT.

Serving as the theoretical backdrop, this then leads to present my specific method-design counting group-based photo-interviewing but also the (participant) observations, interviews and various text-readings, which serve as important 'seeing devices' in the visualization/analysis of the photographs.

Finally, I reflect my choice of representation in light of the above. Using a specific picture as point of departure and organizing principle of each of the 4 analyses presented in the thesis, I undertake a 'stitching together' of a variety of events, actors and scales producing a networked assemblage of co-existing, partly overlapping versions of well-being and productivity. A format of analysis which ends up being the most visible expression of the methodological ambition of 'working compatibilities'.

Getting introduced

Putting an ear to the ground⁷

It is worth noticing that when I write 'TDP', it does not mean that I have been everywhere in the organization. I have primarily been related to the department of Distribution. It is the biggest department in TDP, both in terms of number of employees as well as economically⁸. Furthermore, Distribution defines TDP as a company, not least in the eyes of the general public. As its name reveals, Distribution takes care of distribution, or in more everyday parlance: they deliver mail. Narrowing it down even further, I have been engaged primarily with a distribution area north of Copenhagen and more specifically two distribution centers within this area⁹, with the HR manager of the area as my prime contact to begin with. Having roughly situated my study, it is time to describe in more qualitative terms my first encounter with and experience of my field.

My first visits to the distribution centers were basically characterized by finding out the lie of the land, putting an ear to the ground. As such, I was following the prescriptions of my prime contact. Clearly, the HR Manager was worried that I would come waltzing in with all my theoretical concepts not knowing the first thing about postal distribution. Giving me the advice to start out among the postal workers was a way for him to warn me that without any knowledge of postal

work, I would not go far. For example, I was not allowed to do an interview with the Director of Distribution, before I had received a certain notion of things. Although I agreed on the basic tenet, at the same time I found it quite interesting how he, a rather highly placed manager, seemed to almost glorify the ways of 'practice'. Of course it was also a matter of a certain skepticism towards researchers such as myself, but as would become gradually evident to me, his position represented a general attitude. On the one side, an apparent huge respect towards the man on the floor, the postal workers getting things done, while on the other side, an equal frustration and even patronizing attitude. At this first meeting, as we were discussing the challenges of HR initiatives for instance, the very same postal workers would be characterized in liking with children: having a hard time to understand the necessities of continuous learning and development. In other words, it became clear to me from the start that the organization had a rather ambivalent relationship to their postal workers. On the one side, they were the proclaimed heroes; on the other, they were deemed to represent the prime obstacle when implementing the changes necessary to meet future challenges.

Two teams

In the course of this first meeting with the HR manager and his colleague, I was willingly given the access to two teams, which were presented as opposites: One situated in the country side in a small distribution center, the other in a fairly big center and operating in the outskirts of Copenhagen, thus representing a more city-like environment. From here on I will call them the Country-team and the North town-team, respectively. According to the HR manager, the distinction between country and town is rather decisive when it comes to the 'culture' of the teams. Furthermore, the Country-team was characterized by younger postal workers, whereas the North town-team mostly consisted of very experienced, older postal workers. From their descriptions, I gathered it to be a good idea to have two teams of different kinds. Young - old, country - town, experienced -unexperienced, big center – small center. Evidently, at the time I did not know what this would mean, whether it had an importance or not. Although I did not plan to operate with a range of factors, at least I had been given the chance to see whether size, environment, age, experience would show to play a decisive role or not. Since I had to give up collaboration with the Country-team quite early on in the process due to the general anxiety of the team leader, who considered my presence a surveillance of her and her performance, I have not had the possibility to try out the importance of the differences. Furthermore, I believe my general approach to my informants, treating them as roles/personae rather than individuals with each their life story¹⁰, would have made it difficult to do a comparison in any case. Common to the two teams was, however, that they were both very well-functioning and part of well-run centers. The country team had recently applied for a special price and in North Town they were already displaying a team profile in the absolute top-end. Apparently, it was not the first time that the North Town-team had been researched or found suitable to internal experiments. As I found out, they were rather frequently used as practicing ground for new and inexperienced team leaders, for instance. In other words, they were seen to be generally cooperative and thus easily researchable. Following Despret, as she makes distinctions between more or less interesting animals, the two teams picked out for my research were already deemed interesting as in '[...] it is easy to watch them, it is fun to watch them' (Despret 2006: 361). Thus, full of hope, good faith and the general support of management, the first thing I did was to introduce the teams in question to a camera. The way this went off and how it reflects the auto-photographic method in general will be the focus in the following.

Picturing Well-being

Auto-photography

The use of auto-photography was a method already inscribed in the WESP research project. The reason to work with auto-photography was to produce an empirically generated version of well-being, sensitive towards the perspectives of the postal workers and not least rooted in their everyday work practices¹¹. For the same reason, I found the theme of ‘a good workday’ a better overall framing than asking them to take pictures of the far more abstract ‘well-being’. I also asked the postal workers to add a written log thus compelling each photographer to add a few words to the chosen motif answering the questions, “What is in the picture, and how is it connected to the theme of a good workday?” Each team was given a digital camera to circulate amongst them for a period of one to two weeks, after which they would send the pictures to my mailbox accompanied by the logs. From the team in North Town I received 8 pictures while the country team was more productive sending 22 pictures and logs all in all.

The first picture from North Town showed a green field with a grey sky above, traversed by an airborne electric wire, carrying the short log: “quiet, relaxation (country route)”



After this, more pictures followed: another green field, two pictures of mailboxes, a couple of pictures from inside the sorting office, a picture of a big metal cage containing parcels and a picture of a postal van and a smiling man:

- A1 Quite, relaxation (country route)
- A2 Forthright mailbox facility offering physical relief
- A3 Forthright mailbox facility offering physical relief
- A4 The team's 'Grand Old Man', the most helpful
- A5 Busy on a Saturday morning
- A6 Poul at a depot on a Saturday morning
- A7 No text

Also the country team sent several pictures of nature, mailboxes and colleagues, but they also added pictures showing various cakes, a happy dog, a kickstand and a waving customer.

- B1 When the sun shines from a nearly cloudless sky
- B2 There is no better view along the route
- B3 If only the shrubbery was not under water
- B4 Look at the green woods
- B5 Wonderful that one can follow the seasons, when everything blooms
- B6 It is when the flowers bloom and the sun is shining
- B7 It is also wonderful when people have a proper mailbox carrying a name tag
- B8 It makes me happy when people trim their hedge allowing me to back my wonderful yellow van straight to the mailbox
- B9 A good bike with a kickstand
- B10 I am so happy when I finally spot the shrubbery for me to park behind
- B11 Great with shorts
- B12 Hopefully the fence will hold - there is a very angry dog inside
- B13 A good day is when there are parcels for Mingus and he waits for his doggy treat
- B14 When happy customers are waving
- B15 When you have a sugar slump it's nice with a sweet and helpful colleague ready to offer a bag of sweets
- B16 It makes Dorris happy when we are all gathered to talk
- B17 A 50 year old birthday calls for a celebration
- B18 It is great when your colleagues have brought homemade cake
- B19 No text
- B20 We cannot seem to get enough of cake



▲ A1

A2 ▼





▲ A3

A4 ▼





▲ A5

A6 ▼





▲ A7



▲ B1

B2 ▼





▲ B3

B4 ▼





▲ B5

B6 ▼





▲ B7

B8 ▼





▲ B9

B10 ▼





▲ B11

B12 ▼





▲ B13

B14 ▼





▲ B15

B16 ▼





▲ B17

B18 ▼





▲ B19

B20 ▼



The combination of a snapshot and a log has given birth to a new name: “Snap-log”, which has been presented already in several articles in relation to the WESP project (see Bramming et al. 2009, 2012; Bramming & Staunæs 2011). Obviously, (auto-) photographic methods are not the invention of this project. As I will turn to below, photography as well as auto-photography has been applied more broadly within organizational studies and ethnography, although still considered a ‘niche’ method (Harper 2002; Grimshaw & Ravetz 2005)¹².

Photographs as an access to ‘more’

When photographic methods are put to use within anthropology, organizational studies and the broader field of social sciences, the general argument is that it produces a different and better access to the objects/subjects of research (Pink 2009, Schwartz 1989, Warren 2002, 2005, 2008, Strati 2008). Furthermore, photography is seen as a way to research a mode of existence normally left out in conventional studies of organizations, i.e. what Gagliardi terms the: ‘unconscious or tacit and ineffable’ (Gagliardi 2006). A kind of knowledge which is based in the body and its sensory faculties and thus hard or even impossible to speak of let alone put into writing. As such, photography is appreciated as an alternative vocabulary serving to expand the limits set by the domination of words and language within academia (Gagliardi, 2006, see also Strati 2000, 2008). More importantly, however, images are considered to call forth not just the sense of vision, but to establish on the behalf of the spectator a sensory encounter evoking all five sensory faculties at once. This is an understanding not least prevalent within ethnography, where photography as well as other visual media are being revived (see Pink 2001, Macdougall 2006; Grimshaw and Ravetz 2005; Pink et al. 2004). One of the main points of these contributions is exactly that images produce a larger sensitivity on behalf of the researcher towards the field and its informants, since the whole human sensorium¹³, – the whole body, – is engaged in the viewing. In line with this phenomenological position, Warren presents photography as part of a, ‘sensual methodology’ (Warren 2002) defined by its ‘immediacy’ (Warren 2005: 864). In line with the arguments of the French semiotician and philosopher Roland Barthes, the validity of photography is thus found in its experiential capacity. The ability to ‘attack’ the body of the spectator, as Barthes puts it, contrasting this to the cultivated and reflected alternative of the ‘studium’ (Barthes 1983: 31). Contrary to other and more critical versions of vision – as the inspective and powerful eye of the Panopticon problematized by Foucault (Foucault 1980); the gaze of objectivity playing with the scales of nature within science and technology studies (Latour 1983, Haraway 1991) or the critique of Sontag that claims a general over-exposure of images and their de-sensitizing and controlling effects in our society (Sontag 1979) – in the context of visual ethnography as well as organizational aesthetics, vision is considered a tool of access, inviting a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the world and its inhabitants.

Auto-photography

In the case of auto-photography, when photographs are taken by the informants themselves, these features of better access and richness are believed to be enforced. Following Warren, auto-photography captures not only the habitual preferences and views of the researcher, but also the view of the researched, offering them a photo-voice (Warren 2005). Accordingly, auto-

photography has been used especially in the research of groups that are difficult to access by means of conventional research methods: children, homeless people, ethnic minorities, in short: people who are either unable or simply not used to articulate their lives in words (see Rasmussen 1999, Staunæs 2000, Warren 2005). In the paper *Lessons from photo-elicitation: encouraging Working Men to speak* (Slutskaya et al. 2012), it is argued that the auto-photographic method allowed for the informants, male butchers, to elaborate on for instance their work life's emotional dimensions, which are normally left unspoken and thus marginalized. A lack of words, which stems from a general unfamiliarity with 'narrative disclosure' related to the habitus of a butcher, so the authors argue. Although I did find the photographs to be highly productive as a tool of research, for instance during group-interviews, which I will reflect upon more thoroughly below, I remain skeptical when it comes to the generalized claim that photography provides better access as in a better representational mode of hitherto hidden aspects of the world.

First of all, in my own experiences with introducing a camera to my field it became clear that it is necessary to take the highly practical and context specific issues of the (auto)-photographic method into account. As Staunæs has pinpointed, auto-photography is certainly no 'quick fix' (Staunæs 2001) to be readily applied anywhere. Rather than generally praising photography for its inherent qualities and virtues, the appropriateness of the method has to be judged according to the specific context in which the camera is introduced. Second of all, as I was about to analyze the snaplogs, I was not necessarily 'attacked' by the immediacy of the photographs, but rather confronted with a 'paralysis' (Chalfen 2002) due to their representational straight forwardness. A situation which made me question the general claim to 'moreness' and made me look for methodological advice in ANT; to go beyond the experiential phenomenological body. I will be addressing these points in turn and in greater detail below, at the same time allowing the reader a progressively richer account of my specific field of study: the organization of postal work.

Introducing a camera to postal work

A camera-cyborg?

In a method-article by Bramming and Staunæs (2011), the authors present the potentials and effects of auto-photography in field research suggesting that the concept of 'the cyborg' best captures what happens when a camera is introduced to the field. In the relation between the informant and the camera a new actor appears: the-informant-with-a-camera. A cyborg actor potentially able to change the power relations of the field, so the authors contest. To understand this dramatic statement on auto-photography, I will briefly present the empirical example which carries the argument: As part of a study of everyday life among school children, an ethnic boy has been handed a camera. As he is being told off by a teacher, he takes out his camera and 'shoots' back at the teacher. This causes the teacher go ballistic and the boy to run off, back to the researcher to announce that he is in trouble (Ibid.:12). The 'shooting back' of the boy, so Stauning and

Bramming reflect, makes visible that the teacher is being observed, forcing him to re-consider his position and legitimacy in relation to the pupil. It is a fascinating and dramatic example, suggesting the cyborg to be a suitable metaphor. In comparison, on the floor among the postal workers, the camera did not succeed in becoming this decisive, or this dangerous to say the least. In the context of postal work, the camera rather served to support the relations and identities already at play. Nevertheless, the camera did have formative implications and may serve as a point of entry to reflect both on the method of auto-photography and the organization of postal work as a specific field of research. This is what I aim to illuminate in the following sections.

Handling a camera

Before handing out a digital camera to each of my case-teams, I introduced the snaplog method to the teams involved. In the North Town team this was done as part of a regular stand up meeting on the floor in the sorting office, taking but a couple of minutes, while in the Country-team, the team leader had arranged for some bread and coffee in the lunch room so that I could introduce the method to the whole house at once. In the Country-team they immediately started discussing what they would like to take pictures of, while in North Town one of the postal workers openly suspected my intentions; that the pictures might be used against them somehow, that I might be on a mission for management, that I could not be trusted. I ensured him to the best of my ability that this was very far from the truth, stressing that they should participate only voluntarily, as should the people in front of the camera. The 'Ethic Guidelines' were already hanging on their notification board accompanied by a general introduction of the research project. The next step was basically out of my hands. After handing over the camera that carried a small sticker reminding the photographer of the theme, 'A good workday', I could do no more. Now it was basically up to the team whether there would be any empirical material for me to study, whether the snaplog method would prove to be a productive method or not. Before introducing the camera to the postal workers, though, I had cleared the process with the local team leader. As my prime contact in the distribution centers, the team leader also acted the prime responsible. In both centers it had taken quite some energy to pick out a week or two that would be convenient for them considering the work load forecasted. What was equally important, so the team leaders suggested, was to find one or two persons that would take on the responsibility to run the show: who would ensure that pictures were in fact taken and that the camera would circulate between team members. In this respect the team leaders were indispensable since they knew the dynamics of the team and who to pick as the responsible able to commit the rest of the team. A recurrent phrase of both team leaders was, 'we will handle this', as in, 'it might be that this is really a tough one to follow through, but you need not worry, I am on top of this'. The funny thing was that this attitude actually made me worry. However, I received the pictures from North Town in May 2009, only a little later than planned and things also went without further complications in the Country Team. The second round of snaplogs, however, had a quite different outcome. Originally, following the WESP project, the plan was to do several snaplogs, and in the project group we had agreed on the next theme to be 'Self-Management'¹⁴. This second round of snaplogs was never followed through. For some reason, it was just never the right time. People fell ill, the manager was not currently present or general uneasiness and job insecurity due to the fusion with the Swedes, were but some of the reasons put forward. In so many words, doing snaplogs (or any other research activity for that matter) in a postal setting was not a straight forward business. This became even clearer in comparison.

Postal work in comparison

Being part of the WESP-research project, which counted also two public schools and a bio-tech company, I could not help to draw some lines of comparison. In the bio-tech company, the employees, some of which were in Japan at the time of the snaplog session, simply used their cell phones to shoot the pictures, write up their log and readily send the lot to the e-mail of the responsible researcher. As I received the first pictures, they were put directly into the text message, making them almost un-viewable due to the enlargement. Only after technical assistance from the IT department was I able to distinguish the first photograph as a green field traversed by an old telephone wire. Clearly, the technology of digital cameras did not suit postal workers, at least not when it came to the subsequent processing of them; having to send them to the researcher. In North Town they had only one accessible computer on the floor. Finding even one person who knew the entry code was difficult. Another obvious difference was the character of the logs. While the logs of the postal workers would amount to a maximum of three lines, and just as often consisted of not more than a few descriptive words, the logs of the bio-tech employees would easily take up half a page, displaying a lot of self-reflexive details to accompany the often highly symbolic character of the pictures. With regard to the schools, the teachers tended to take on the method as if it had been their own invention and without further ado it was possible for my research colleagues to conduct two rounds of snaplogs. In one of the schools they even chose to adopt the snaplog method as part of their own efforts to develop their practices. No management pressure necessary, no need to appoint and keep track of the particularly responsible employees. As a matter of fact, it seemed that using the camera helped the teachers stress an already established work ethos: a strong engagement with the life and social relations taking place outside the framework of the class room (see Gylling Olesen 2011, Bramming et al. 2009). In another recent research project representing a different work setting i.e. the work of hairdressers, the researcher was taken by surprise by the enthusiasm displayed by the hairdressers to participate and take photographs. An enthusiasm which the authors explain by the fact that hairdressers are normally 'under-studied' and thus appreciated the unexpected attention and voice that the cameras offered (Shortt & Warren 2012: 23).

Looking at the postal workers, and especially in relation to the team of North Town, getting the snaplog process rolling was readily translated into a classical antagonistic pattern. Seen from the point of view of the postal workers, this was one more thing that management wanted them to 'implement' bearing basically no relevance to everyday work. What difference would it make taking pictures? They listened as I explained what they were supposed to do and later on, as I presented them the 'results', they did not see any reason to contest what I had 'seen'. The use of the camera, the pictures as well as my research project in general were basically considered of little relevance if not a simple waste of time. A characteristic quite similar to the one attached to the projects regularly introduced by management. As a researcher with the humble ambition of being of just a little use, it was a tough position to handle and it would have been easy to follow the general framework offered in TDP: that postal workers are more or less impossible to engage and that this was simply another expression of their general skeptical attitude.

A matter of personal engagement

As I have come to know the organization better, however, I have reached the conclusion that this would be to misread the situation. The apparent 'indifference' and lack of engagement of

the postal workers, has to be considered in relation to the work task and its organizational set-up. When the second round of snaplogs was dismissed, when the team leader did not answer my e-mail, or my interviews were cancelled on the same morning of my appointment, none of this necessarily concerns the content of my project or the personal engagement of my informants. When working under an extreme time pressure characteristic of mail distribution, every activity is highly compressed and any extra assignment is something to shy away from. To understand what was at first occurring to me as an experience of being unwanted or simply ignored, one has to factor in the importance of the goals of production: to get mail out in time. This is what everyone, including this researcher, has to relate to. Because TDP is a production site where time is measured in such detail, it is vulnerable to even the slightest change posed by for instance the weather, illness or the time consuming 'photographic projects' and questions of a researcher. Several points should be clear from the above: First of all, that the introduction and value of auto-photographic methods should always be judged in situ. To be able to claim that auto-photography produces a richer and better access to the field, or that it is able to stir existing power relations as in the case of the cyborg school boy, presupposes at least that the camera is actually taken up and the button pressed. Otherwise nothing happens. My point, though, is not that 'nothing happened' in my case. The camera was actually put to use and interesting pictures that have come to play a highly productive role in my research were produced.

Furthermore, all the trouble I have experienced trying to involve my informants in the research process, the lack of engagement, the resistance I encountered, has offered a telling picture of the organization and what matters to its inhabitants. And it has served as an occasion for self-reflection. Rather than generating regrets, the 'recalcitrance of my field' (Latour 2004) has called for a reconsideration of my initial version of the postal workers. When I was looking in vain for the engagement of the postal workers, regretting that they did not put in extra time in my research project or showed enthusiasm towards the involvement and photo-voice offered to them, I was mirroring the general normativity of management as well as my own normativity, assigning the postal workers the role of the antagonist. In other words, I tended to overlook that 'engagement' might take on a quite different shape and character when it comes to postal workers.

Following the point made in relation to the photo-research of male butchers, i.e. what is framed as their general unfamiliarity with 'narrative disclosure' and the expression of emotions, the postal workers seem to be alike. However, taking account of the simple fact that there are no spaces and no time to actually sit down, write and reflect in the course of a workday, the short and straightforward logs might as well be considered the result of a practical matter of work organization rather than an expression of the character of the informants. When a group of informants come across as inarticulate or unwilling to disclose themselves and their emotions, it does not have to imply that elaborate self-reflections or emotions are simply 'hidden' or 'unspoken of'. It might be that they are simply irrelevant in the present context, at least in the format anticipated by the researcher and his/her methods. One may well ask whether it is indeed relevant to postal workers, or butchers for that matter, to display emotions or an elaborate 'narrative disclosure' when mail has to be delivered and meat cut out under extreme time pressures. In other words, the obstacles of the snaplog process made visible represented the difference between the ideal informant inscribed in the auto-photographic method and the actual postal worker of TDP.

After going through with the snaplog process and its various obstacles, I was presented yet another obstacle: What to make of the pictures of blue skies, happy dogs, mailboxes and cakes now printed and hanging on my office wall? This is the issue I will be turning to next.

Establishing a 'seeing device'

How to see?

When I received the snaplogs in my inbox, I was of course excited to see what the postal workers had chosen to frame. It was my first impression of the work seen from the eyes of the postal workers themselves, since I had mainly been talking to HR and distribution managers up till then. The snaplogs were my first possibility to get an impression of how their work practices were linked to the matter of well-being. The difficulty I was confronted with was the invisibility of the pictures' apparent visibility. They seemed almost impervious to my gaze in all their representational logic: This is a cake, this is a dog, this is a kickstand. In that sense, I was experiencing the relation between the referent and the image itself, as described allegorically by Barthes as the inseparability of two wet leaves or the difficulty in telling the landscape from the window pane (Barthes 1983: 14). Photographs are representational evidence, something one has got to believe. But they also risk to become paralytic (Chalfen 2002: 141). When what one sees is what there is/was, then what more is there to say or do as a researcher? My challenge was to figure out how the very straight forward pictures could possibly tell me more and different things about postal work than more traditional methods such as interviews or observation would allow for. The photographs clearly needed contextualization. As argued by Schwartz: "[...] the use of photographic methods must be grounded in the interactive context in which photographs acquire meaning" (Schwartz 1989: 120). As is generally the case when photographs are put to use for empirical studies, I have also used interviews for this purpose (Harper 2002, Warren 2002, 2005, Hurdley 2007, Schwartz 1989)¹⁵.

Photo-interviewing

In each distribution center I set up a group interview with 5 participants from the respective teams. My ambition was for them to verbally elaborate on the snaplogs produced, in order to contextualize them and thus make them intelligible to me as an outside spectator. I left it with the team leader to find volunteers, only asking for some variation in age and experience. I planned a succession by which I would introduce the pictures, tentatively organizing the snaplogs thematically, and I also prepared a guideline of questions to drive further elaborations. From this first ordering, the themes of a good workday were: Outside/A sense of freedom (i.e. the pictures of nature); Physical work environment/good work tools (i.e. mailboxes, a bike with kickstand, shorts and sandals); Nice colleagues/ Effective Cooperation (i.e. pictures of team members, cakes and candy). Apart from these, I received one photograph from the North Town team with the descriptive log, 'cages with sorted mail', depicting three big metal cages on wheels containing parcels. I was unable to categorize this beforehand, but during the interview it received a theme of its own: Orderliness. Representing the last theme, I had 2 pictures of a smiling waving woman and a happy dog. I named this theme 'Customers'. In general, the pictures and thus the chosen themes appeared to be quite similar across the two teams, irrespective of the clear difference in the number of pictures produced by each team (8 and 22).

The collectivity of the photograph

Despite the fact that the logs accompanying the pictures were often very short and purely descriptive, it my choice of themes proved to be in line with the framing made by the postal workers themselves. In the course of the interview I introduced one, or sometimes two pictures if they were more or less similar, asking them to tell me, what was in the picture and how this was connected to a good workday. However, I did not have the ambition that the answer should be provided by the photographer. Sometimes the photographer was not even present. This was a deliberate part of my design. I have wanted to treat the photographs primarily as an inherently collective matter: as an utterance that has come into existence due to the larger organizational set up of postal distribution, presupposing that any photograph taken will make sense to the rest of the team. Of course many of the pictures and the stories told were both personal and specific: The shrubbery was not framed for its nature-qualities but served as the photographer's favorite place to pee; and correspondingly, the framing of the pebble road in the woods turned out to be the calm and welcome starting point of this particular postal worker's route. In each case, though, the individual photographs all contained common experiences. The picture of the shrubbery, for instance, carried a long standing and passionate dispute between the postal workers and TDP: TDP ignores the need of the postal workers to have access to toilets and shelters along the route. By staging the contextualization of the photographs within a 'natural group' (see Frey & Fontana 2002), each picture turned out to unfold an organizational and collective context. In this respect, I have departed from the usual approach within the field. Contextualization, it seems, is mostly sought for by individual meaning making. Following Warren on the matter:

“ (...) the specific meaning of the event and the reason for its 'capture' is known only to the photographer. If we accept this inherent subjectivity of photographs made by research participants, as I argue here, then we must also let them explain their photographs to us, drawing out their specific meanings for them” (Warren 2005: 866).

I do not contest the importance of these individual accounts, but I believe they risk dismissing other important defining actors and other 'contexts' of the photograph than the one immediately apparent to the photographer.

The objects in focus

Apart from the collective dimension, involving more people in the context-making, I have also wanted to pay due attention to the objects in focus, the inherent thing-ness displayed¹⁶. It is always a picture of some-thing or some-place¹⁷. An interesting example of how place and things come to matter is found in the recent article by Shortt and Warren (2011) on the identity making of hairdressers, which draws partly on an Actor Network-framework¹⁸. In their analysis, they manage to show how the stories and identities of the hairdressers are inseparable, indeed constituted, by the objects and tools of work: the hiding places away from the mirrors in the salon; the worn out vinyl caused by busy feet circling the customer in the chair over and over again. These places and things in the photographs are not simply interesting as mediating 'cues' to the individual sense making and identity of the photographer (Weick 1995); they are constitutive of the possible bodies and identities of the hairdressers. A point which proves to be equally important when it comes to the work practices and bodies of the postal workers.

Expanding the context – increasing articulation

Finally, I suggest that the resources represented by my (participant) observations, the reading of law documents, managerial strategies and reports as well as various qualitative single interviews conducted as part of my field work, play an equally important role as valuable ‘seeing’ devices: They represent a way of expanding the context of the snaplogs thus making them more articulate, more interesting as Despret would put it. Referring to Latour and his critique of phenomenology, my argument is that the ambition of producing ‘a photo-voice’ as put forward by Warren (Warren 2005) might be achieved also by adding something to the field, by expanding the possible meaning of the photographs well beyond the specific voices of the informants. The notion of ‘photo-voice’ is related to a political ambition of letting informants ‘have their say’, to voice what is normally not voiced placing the researcher in a position of as little authority as possible (Ibid.: 872). Latour’s notion of articulation is different. Contrary to that of photo-voice, the validity of articulation is not found in the ability to faithfully represent the world of the respondents – what Gubrium and Holstein has elsewhere criticized as ‘naturalism’ (Holstein & Gubrium 1997; 2003) – but to perform by a variety of artificial means a world with as many nuances as possible (Latour 2004: 210). In other words, the photo-voice of the postal workers is not simply waiting to be transmitted by the help of my photographic method, but is in need of further articulation. My alternative to a photo-voice is to follow the various directions from the photograph into the larger network of postal organization introducing actors and events that also operate by other logics than the ones of the postal workers. The following will elaborate how I have managed to articulate this network by introducing the methods equally part of this thesis.

Additional devices: Interviews and observations

Interviewing – getting to know about work practices and roles

I have conducted 17 interviews all in all, which have all been tape recorded and for most parts transcribed¹⁹. Most of my informants (11) have been located in the two distribution centers, as this has been the anchor-point of my field work. I started out doing a range of interviews with representatives of the most central ‘roles’ of the centers: the distribution managers, the team leaders, the postal workers and the shop steward. The framing of these interviews was broad, mirroring my interest in becoming acquainted with postal work and its daily organization. Later on, as I learned more about postal work and became more focused I conducted interviews with a more specific framing visiting also other places of the organization. The two major themes of this second and third round of interviews have been 1) Work standards with a specific focus on the route planning system and process 2) The teams and their (self) management. Each theme covers several interviews counting both interviews at center level, area level as well as the central administrative level (HR-manager and Production Developers)²⁰.

Active interviewing and 'lay ethnographers'

My way of interviewing follows the constructionist stance of Holstein and Gubrium (1995): That an interview is 'active' in the sense that it builds on the interaction between the informant and the interviewer 'co-producing' knowledge as the conversation unfolds. As such, I have had no ambition to stay particularly neutral or to reveal the 'real meanings' of the informants, as if they were precious gems simply waiting to be transported to the surface by way of my questions. A pipeline metaphor that is used by Holstein and Gubrium to describe the basic thinking within a realist paradigm²¹. I have tried to produce, however, as descriptive and specific accounts of my informants as possible (Spradley 1979). Rather than explanations and general views on this and that, I have been keen to ask for concrete examples. Because of my trouble getting access to for instance the route planning process in the distribution center²², I have had to rely primarily on verbal accounts on what happened. In this sense, the interviews come to work as an important supplement to my observations (see below). Following Anne Marie Mol, who uses the accounts of patients as ethnographic material (Mol 2002: 15), my informants have acted as 'lay ethnographers', lending me the detailed descriptions of practices and the use of artifacts that I otherwise would not have attained.

Informants as personae of office

I have generally considered my informants as 'representatives', a Weberian 'personae of office', rather than individuals with specific life worlds (Kvale 1994; Kvale & Brinkman 2008). The reason for this is both strategic and correspondent to the specific reality of TDP.

To take the latter first, I have had the clear impression that individuals in TDP are still considered largely replaceable, whereas the work roles defined by bureaucratic procedures, structure and rules are key. During my two years of involvement with the distribution center of North Town, I have witnessed the replacement of 3 distribution managers. While the replacements are not in themselves striking, considering the general efforts to restructure TDP, the unchanged and highly impersonal physical office of the distribution manager came across as significant: The grey vinyl on the floor, the faded snap frame pictures on the wall; the desk, the cupboard, the meeting table all kept in neutral looking beech wood, the white curtains with a curvy blue vertical line classic to Danish public institutions. — All in all an office of absolutely no personality. No matter who was currently occupying the chair behind the desk, the office stayed the same and one might add: so did the role to go with it. Although many efforts have gone into turning TDP into a private and enterprising company, the state bureaucracy is still extremely visible. Consequently, it makes perfect sense to consider my informants first and foremost as 'personae of office'²³.

In regards to the former, the reason should be found in the general ambition of the research project to produce a difference to the highly individualized perspective dominating present research and debates on well-being. In this sense, seeing my informants as 'personae of office' serves to enact what Du Gay calls 'a defensive doctrine' (Du Gay 2008: 140). A necessary counter-position within an otherwise dominating discourse of the 'supra regional persona', serving as the generalized norm and benchmark irrespective of the specific organizational setting (Ibid.: 141). This ambition of mine²⁴ also has a highly mundane and practical expression. When I cite the postal workers, for instance, I choose to call them P1, P2, P3 etc. P stands for postal worker, while the number simply indicates that there are more voices than one. I mention that exactly this postal worker is a woman, particularly experienced, confrontational or possibly young only if it is important to the story or

the point I wish to make. But of course there are differences. Individual postal workers as well as managers do differ. In my analysis this shows for instance when a postal worker all of a sudden carries a name. Admittedly, this is partly so because it works better in the text, but it is related as well to the fact that they for some reason have managed to stand out against their colleagues in the sorting office, literally creating a name for themselves. My general stance, however, has been to formalize and generalize the identity of my informants. As I have already touched upon, this choice also has its limits. There are issues that I am not able to address, for instance when it comes to comparing the two different centers or differentiate between the postal workers in a team according to various individual features. The conceptualization of informants as 'personae' favors an interest in the sameness of overall subject categories rather than their internal differences. One may argue that the 'defensive doctrine' needed, at least in an organization such as TPD, should not be based in the bureaucratic virtues of office. In many respects, this is already the dominating subject position available. The question is, however, for how long. As my analysis will indicate, the general discourse within management, the education programs of team leaders and postal workers, the ideals of the self-sustaining team represent precisely the individualizing strategies and norms of enterprise as described and criticized by Du Gay (see also Du Gay & Salaman 1992). In the efforts to make TDP a private company, the individuality of the postal workers has become a big issue, something which is eagerly problematized and acted upon. In this chorus, not many are taking the stance of 'the persona' and if so, it is certainly not considered a moral virtue.

Beyond words – doing observations

While I have had an ambition to use my interviewees as lay ethnographers, I have generally had a hard time understanding their work practices when put into words. The verbalized world of postal work is filled with standard abbreviations and references to specific work processes and tools impossible to grasp for an outsider. In this sense, it has been crucial to supplement my interviews with observations. Being an eye witness gave me the opportunity to ask, on the spot, about the practice and the various tools used, thus linking the specific things with their particular wording. I was slowly learning. Furthermore, I found that interviews were badly suited as I wanted to know about work standards and how they were used and conceived of by the postal workers. When I asked them to mention the most decisive work standards, for instance, they were mostly unable to answer. What I got were stories primarily about the standards that did not work, the standards that had pissed them off; the standards of controversy. The rest was silence. At least they were not able to talk about them in interviews. But as I observed their work, they were there in hundreds, seemingly acting as unproblematic extensions of their eyes, hands, arms and legs. They were well-functioning tools of work: labels, lists, shelves, plastic boxes, work procedures, enacted in their routinized behavior. Apparently, it was not until the various standards and procedures stopped working, creating a disruption and dis-order, that they became visible and speakable to the postal workers. This should come as no real surprise. As treated in length by ANT-researchers, this is a general problem when wanting to study the relation between users and technology in cases where technologies have been stabilized and hence black boxed (see for instance Akrich 1992). While the controversial standards were quite easy to follow since they were already verbalized and were official points of dispute, as for instance the controversy of manual sorting or not²⁵, the 'invisible' and unproblematic standards took a different strategy. It took close observation but also the engagement of my own body. As I helped out sorting mail into the shelves or driving the bike, engaging with the standards involved in the work, I experienced quite clearly how all sorts of difficulties (re)appeared; all the difficulties of a work standard and a body badly attuned:

It took me minutes to match each letter with the right compartment in the shelf or my foot kept getting stuck as I parked the bike. Little moments of disorder to remind me of the effort it takes for a standard and the apparent smooth movements of the experienced postal worker to actually serve their purpose.

Becoming a postal worker?

In the literature, different possible positions as an observer can be found. From total observer, the notorious fly on the wall, to participant observer, acting more or less on the same terms as 'the natives' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). From the start, I had the ambition to participate and work as a postal worker, if only for a short while. I went on a bike-ride and a car-ride, I helped out in the sorting office as often as I could, and I followed a team leader for a week. However, due to the very early hours of postal work combined with the distance between my house and the centers, I had to settle with less participation than planned for. All in all, I have had around 17 full days of observation, covering a period of almost two years. In this sense, I never became a true 'native' immersed in the culture and thus capable of understanding it from 'within', as is otherwise the trademark and norm of ethnography (Goffman 1989). A Danish professor and anthropologist, Kirsten Hastrup, talks about the importance of 'sharing the presence' with the informants under study and describes how she herself transformed from the Danish researcher Kirsten into the Icelandic cow-tender Kirstín during her 6 months stay in Iceland (Hastrup 1990). Given her new identity, she was able to experience their other world. In many respects, I remain sceptical towards this ideal in the first place and I do not contest to have changed my identity during my research. However, I did experience the importance of both time and place to the way I was perceived. Literally sharing the time with the postal workers proved to be crucial in order to be accepted: meeting early in the morning, passing the gate, greeting the other postal workers as they turned up, taking part in their social interactions and chit-chats at the shelves, adhering to their ways and following their daily rhythms. Surely, I did not become a postal worker. The simple fact that I was sitting on a chair taking notes disqualified me completely. No one ever sat down when inside. Sitting is an activity for managers, 'getting wet arses', I was told by a harsh looking shop steward. Nevertheless, I passed for a non-manager despite the sitting since I was doing the sitting in their place and time, on the floor. The clearest sign that sharing time and place with the postal workers meant a great deal occurred as I chose to shadow a team leader of a different team in the same distribution center. For almost a week, instead of sitting among the postal workers on the floor, I spent my time in her office on the 1st floor. I followed her down the stairs as she chose to take her rounds of 'good mornings'. I walked the floor up and down, looking at the postal workers at their shelves. One day I was even handed her phone and her office chair in order to take incoming calls and try to handle disgruntled customers while she had to attend to some urgent affairs outside the center. Sitting on the chair worrying about the next problem to roll in, I surely felt like a team manager. The phone, the office on the 1st floor and the chair I was sitting in prompted me to become one; if only in a very incompetent version. Changing identity, however, did not necessarily take quite as many props. Performing seemingly innocent tasks that are also part of a postal worker's work day, such as picking up rubber bands from the floor, stacking the yellow boxes on pallets or gathering the rollers to fit a prescribed area on the floor, had a huge effect. As I had just picked up a rubber band, one of the postal workers turned from his shelf towards me and suggested, 'So, now you have become a team leader?!' Merely because of the timing of my activity (they were sorting, I was clearing the floor), I became a team leader, if only for a short while.

'Ethnographic snapshots' – enacting events

“ On the one hand the ethnographer must make her way into new worlds and new relationships. On the other hand, she must learn how to represent in written form what she has come to see and understand as the result of these experiences” (Emerson et al. 1995: 15).

As much as observation is part of a field work, so is its representation; the writing²⁶. As demonstrated by Van Manen, one may choose different styles of writing in the attempt to represent the field (Van Manen 1995). In order to process my observational notes, both the ones jotted down in my notebook as I was sitting on a chair among the North Town team as well as the more full blown texts produced as I returned to my computer, I have experimented with a style of writing that I have called 'ethnographic snapshots': Rounded stories from the field of about half a page. Similar to that of a snapshot, catching a small part of the world, these stories have been a way to condense the many pages of field notes into a number of telling events. This does not mean that they simply speak for themselves. In line with a notion of the field as something co-created by the researcher (Hastrup 2003; Pink 2009; Law 1994), it is not until they are actually written that they become 'events' of the field. And similar to the snaplogs, these little stories are absolutely dependent on the larger context in order to become meaningful, to become events. To cite one of the absolute classics within ethnography, Clifford Geertz, the little pieces of text are like a twitch of an eye (Geertz 1973: 2-3). It may mean a whole range of different things. It is only when related to the larger context that it is possible to tell the twitch from that of the wink. In the analysis of the customer for instance (Chapter 7), I describe a little incident with a postal worker, Steven. He shows me a letter containing a visa card and tells me that the addressee is leaving for Egypt the very same morning. The question is whether Steven will be able to reach the address in time. A highly specific and down to earth story and yet it serves to prompt a general theme of my field, namely that of professional pride. The 'ethnographic snapshots' do not necessarily convey to the outside reader exactly what they mean. Quite like their snaplog siblings, they need a contextualization in order to become intelligible. While some of the ethnographic snapshots are put to use in the analysis, as devices of communication and to give a better sense of the setting, others have served primarily as helpful devices in the process of analysis.

Reading documents and their effects

Characteristic to a classic bureaucratic organization, most of TDP has been put into writing, and one can find a written description of any position, work role, work process and work standard either in heavy ring binders or as ready-prints on the intranet. All these documents help constitute and stabilize TDP as an organization, make it durable across time and space as documents are passed on and used to structure, for instance, the course of a meeting, a job appraisal interview, work hours and divisions of labor. As such, documents can be considered important actors in the organization and not merely representations, operating by a principle of transparency. Documents do something, as Atkinson & Coffey phrase it; they are 'performative' (Atkinson & Coffey 1997). But they are not necessarily performing at their own 'will'. As pointed out by Latour, documents

are also modified, supplemented and even deceived by their intended users (Latour 1986: 267). In the sorting office among the postal workers hardly any documents are circulated. If so, they are mostly in the hands of managers and readily ignored by the postal workers as irrelevant or incorrect representations. Work schedules and holiday schedules, various spreadsheets presenting the facts of production quality (on the lean board), short notifications of meetings or abstracts from the security board and instructional sheets on how to do proper lifting of heavy packages. These are the kinds of documents characteristic of the sorting office. Symptomatic to the pace and the very short time spent inside, texts should be of no more than 1 or maximum 2 A4 pages if they are to attract the attention of the postal workers, so one of the HR consultants explained. I had the impression that a lot of the HR consultants' time and energy went into producing the right 'packaging' of information that made it able to travel into the sorting office and become effective. In other words, the documents that I introduce in my analysis are mostly documents produced by and for managers, such as a power-point presentation on the route-planning technology and its effects or a 'how-to- lean-the-sorting-office' booklet. Otherwise, they are documents produced in seemingly distant settings such as the Danish and EU Parliament and a Danish consultancy house. While their production as well as their immediate consumption may seem far away from the everyday work practices of postal workers and managers, my intention is to show how these documents are in fact enacting the present reality as well as the possible futures of the postal workers. Danish Law, for instance, prescribes in fine grained detail matters that would normally be considered within the boundaries of a company's own jurisdiction. This counts for instance the quality levels of mail delivery (number of days a week and timeliness) as well as the demand for an external contractor to monitor this on a regular basis.

Although the documents are different in character, my reading of them has been similar. First of all, I have been interested in tracing the social reality and identities as it is presented within the text itself. Second of all, I have contrasted the social reality and identities of the document with other possible versions present within the organization. One example of this is found in the analysis of the customer, chapter 7. Here I show how the legal foundation of TDP and the consultancy report pave the way for a free market and a particular customer to go with it, which is, however, quite different from the version of the customer encountered by the postal workers driving their route.

Different places – one organization?

While my main engagement during my fieldwork has been with the distribution centers, the postal workers and their managers, I have also been to other places and participated in events within the larger framework of Distribution. I have taken part in internal education programs, a management seminar in a fancy conference center and a HR event in the woods. I have visited the noisy sorting centre in Copenhagen and just beside it, the Head office with its wide majestic corridors. Based on this amount of fieldwork, I could argue to have achieved a pretty rounded view of the organization of TDP as a whole, or at least the organization of Distribution. However, I am not convinced that this is in fact so. When reflecting his fieldwork in the Daresbury Lab, Law describes how he felt that he was never really able to be the right place at the right time; that he was constantly 'missing out' on important events, that he should have been a more eager ethnographer (Law 1994: 40-47). Law's experience mirror mine: that there are still a lot of things that I do not know about TDP, that I still need another interview, another visit to yet another office, that perhaps including the department of marketing would have made my account more rounded. This might be partly true but most

of all I choose to follow the conclusion of Law that the underlying assumption of this sense of 'missing out' can be explained by the empirical fact that TDP no more than Daresbury Lab is one place. There are in principle endless places in TDP relevant to my interest, each defined by different modes of ordering, leaving the impression of the organization as a rather discontinuous place or what Law terms 'a pastiche' (Ibid.: 40). While the people I have talked to or observed have been concerned with the same thing – mail distribution – they have been so in quite different ways. Comparing the HR manager with the postal workers or the developer with the team leader, they know about and act on the task of postal distribution in highly disparate ways. With different ambitions, a different theory and methodological set-up, I will not defy that one could produce a different version of TDP. Maybe even a version displaying an organization of singularity. After all, this is done and redone everyday by management representatives working hard to align the different business sections, budget practices, work flows etc. But it is also quite obvious that it takes a lot of effort to keep this unity together.

The organizational order that I have tried to create, however, is not one of unity or singularity. Attending to the many different places, actors, events and controversies of TDP, showing how the organization of well-being and productivity comes in different versions existing alongside each other, I have tried to reopen the black box of TDP's apparent organizational unity. In the last paragraph below, I reflect on how the writing up of my analysis is a way to both represent this inherent multiplicity and at the same time to recast some kind of organizational order.

On the writing-up of my analysis

The snaplogs do not simply serve as a productive method but also as a specific tool of re-presentation. I have organized my analysis around four snaplogs, which I have picked out because I found them suitable as devices to prompt and organize a range of important themes running through my empirical material. As such, the choice has not primarily been a choice of one picture over another, although I have had aesthetic preferences. To put it differently: I was looking for pictures with an agency. In my first attempts to sketch out the analysis, I drew a square at the center of the paper symbolizing the picture and then I marked by a range of thin lines how it was connected to a range of other events, interview statements, observations and text documents and noted at the same time the kinds of controversies the picture might carry. From this mind-map process, the four pictures of my choice were as follows: A View, A Bike with a Kickstand, A Customer, and A Cake.

Taking the snaplog-picture as the point of departure, each analysis unfolds by the articulation of its wider context specific configurations of well-being and productivity. Some of the chapters may be more about productivity than well-being or vice versa, but the one is always treated in light of the other. As such, the chapters share the same overall theme and focus. At the same time as they clearly overlap, the pictures spur different stories and different versions of well-being and productivity. I tend to see the result of my approach as a patchwork or, to stay in a more visual metaphor, as a kaleidoscope. Each time one turns the tube, the pattern will change. Nonetheless, some of the elements are kept from one turn to the next. Something is recognizably the same and

yet it looks different in the company of new shapes and colors. Within each analysis as well as across the four chapters, I might treat the same work procedures, the same objects, and the same persons and yet they take on different meanings, roles, and functions as a result of their new setting. For instance, in the first chapter, which takes the picture of the view as the point of departure, the outdoors is defined both as a specific locality; as a geographical position in a computer and by its work practices minutely measured and orchestrated. In the course of each chapter, people as well as artifacts achieve multiple identities. At least this is my ambition; to show how both the organization of TDP as well as its various actors are the same and yet different. In the course of my writing, I have deliberately tried to play with and relate what would normally be considered different positions, levels and scales of analysis, thus mixing the micro and the macro, the practices with the discourses, the human with the non-human, the voices of management with the voices of the postal workers, the external with the internal. Writing up a patchwork of different places and actors, an image of postal work is re-assembled, suggesting a possible (new) order out of its inherently multiple and distributed character.



Chapter 5: The view



This picture shows a water hole in a green field on the edge of what appears to be a pine forest. The green tree tops softly frame the horizon and a row of bushes with flowers blooms here and there. Various hues of green dominate the color scheme. The sky appears somewhat overcast but the light indicates that the sun might break through the clouds at any moment. It looks like early spring. Small trees characteristic of wet lowland areas thrive close to the water, some of them expanding into the water. In contrast to the gray, lonely tree withering away beside them, they seem to be in the process of gradually taking over the waterhole. By the bank closest to the viewer, two black cows are grazing with their heads down against an equally black and muddy water bank. Had it not been for the green field scattered with white flowers growing knee high around them, offering them a background of contrast, the two animals would have been more or less indistinguishable. A wooden picnic table with benches sits 10 meters from the bank, inviting passersby to rest for a moment, to enjoy the scenery and its tranquility together with their picnic lunch. The benches, however, are empty. The only creatures present are the inattentive cows.

It could be a summer holiday snapshot taken to document: look how pretty everything was. On the other hand, this water hole and its green setting are somehow too ordinary to be framed and displayed in the family album. This scenery is what one can expect to find anywhere in the Danish countryside. It is more like an everyday view than a view of something extraordinary. However, this particular view has been framed exactly because it is considered extraordinary; only the standard of reference is not the holiday snapshot. According to the brief and precise log accompanying the picture, "There is no better view along the delivery route", this view is comparatively extraordinary within the setting of postal work. This is not how doing the job normally looks. This is something remarkable, and therefore qualified to illustrate a good workday. Exactly this view, this site, stands out. Yet, reading the log, this site is framed as a non-work place. As the text says, it is a view that

appears along the route. While driving the route and doing their job, this is what the postal workers can see if they choose to turn their heads and look. The view is not work itself. The work is up on the road with the eyes of the photographer passing by.

A striking aspect of the picture of the view (and the many similar snaplogs of nature) is its ability to render work invisible, while at the same time urging the spectator to re-establish the connection, asking the simple question: what place is this? The postal workers are outdoors, but what does this mean and in what ways is this place connected to the formal organization? While the non-work feel of the outdoors might suggest that being outdoors equals being outdoors the organization as such, the picture of the view is nonetheless framed in order to show a specific relation between the postal workers and their work: that of a good workday. In that sense, it is already a picture of not just any place but that of a workplace. The ambition of the analysis undertaken here is to track how this specific visualization of the workplace is made possible and what kind of network it supports. The answer will be found in postal worker statements stressing that especially the outdoors is a place of individual freedom. But it will also become obvious how the freedom of being outdoors is nonetheless part of a highly formalized organizing effort. In particular this comprises the route planning system, whose technology of standardization and practical difficulties raise classical matters of concern (within organizational theory), such as the definition of a fair day's work, the adaptability of technology and humans and, not least, issues of control and work autonomy. In this sense this chapter serves to sketch some of the recurrent dilemmas constitutive of the organization of postal work as well as of this thesis.

Picture perfect

Using the resources of a subsequent group interview in the Country Team, the difference between work and the view is at first confirmed. I ask them to describe what they see in the picture and one of the informants tells me the story of a piece of marsh-land that has been fenced and turned into a grassing area for cows, now tended by a local team of cow-tenders, "It is rather beautiful up there, a really nice place to drive by", so she concludes. When I ask how this relates to a good workday, this is exactly where work and the view are distinguished from each other:

- “ P1: Actually, I find it rather funny since the picture is taken from up where it is really shitty to drive. It is taken from Acorn road and it is simply impossible to get around there.
- P2: Then it is great that you can see such a picture!
- P1: So, the prettiest and the best that is the picture.
- P2: Yes, it is the view of it
- P3: Yes, but this is also the reason why it gives him such joy when he...
- P1: ...Yes, when you see something like that. Up there you have to walk your way through or pull the bike. It is really lousy.
- P2: You can use the bike to get around.
- P1: I have to walk when I go up there with parcels. You cannot drive parcels by car.
- P3: So this is also why, considering all the inconvenience, it inspires you when you look at all this.
- P1: Yes, I like it too.
- I: 'Considering all the inconvenience' – so it is a kind of counterbalance?
- P3: Yes, I would say so.”

The beautiful scenery framed in the picture acts as a kind of naturally given compensatory element. It compensates the postal workers for the inconvenience of the job itself; the fact that they have to carry the parcel when walking their way through instead of driving. In this sense, the view is not really part of their job, but is defined as something outdoors of it. As they literally put it, the view is already a picture: something beautiful to watch, possible to reach by eye, but inevitably distant.

What underscores this sensation of distance as well as a kind of unrealness, is the partially ironic commentary accompanying a subsequent photograph apparently taken at the same and place, only from a different angle. It frames shrubbery standing in the same waterhole. Following-up on the preceding snapshot, the log goes: "If only the shrubbery was not under water". 'If only', then it would have been picture perfect. But it is not, since the shrubbery indeed is under water. In this way, the impersonalized and in some ways detached feel of the view, also present in the interview conversation, is confirmed. The enjoyment of the route lies in a picture, which is, however, imperfect, since shrubbery ought not to stand under water. The perfectness of the view framed in the first picture is punctuated and suspended by the irony of the commentary to the second picture; showing that the photographer knows that there will be an audience watching and reading.

This makes apparent the oscillation of the photograph between, on the one hand, the view as something very specific: the view of exactly this marsh, at this place, with this specific history and this specific role to play in relation to the job executed –and on the other hand, the more general statement about the beauty of it that taps into conventions of what is to be considered worth photographing and hence worth showing people. The relation to nature and its generalized aesthetic qualities is performed by the medium of photography and at the same time, the photograph offers a rather specific visualization of postal work. The question is how the connection between work and the view is in fact established? Since the pictures are all taken in the generally beautiful and charming month of May, I wondered whether this had an effect on the motifs chosen. Would they have been taking as many pictures of the outdoors, had they carried the camera during the month of November? Is the outdoors always considered a compensatory element? There were two rather different types of answers to this, expanding the possible versions of the outdoors: One type of answer stressed that the outdoors can indeed play different roles according to weather and time of year; the other type of answer added a rather different set of distinctions that seemingly abandoned the outdoors as a matter of nature and weather altogether.

The outdoors as a condition of work

Debating whether the role of the outdoors in the snaplogs depends on the time of year, my informants did not quite agree. One of the postal workers in the Country Team just loves nature and the access to experience the change of season. It does not matter whether it is summer or winter to her. However, she suggests that there is a significant difference between the two seasons that affects her job, "As hard as it is during winter, just as nice is it during summer". One of her colleagues jokingly suggests a hypothetical picture of a delivery van stuck in a pile of snow, pointing out that the outdoors is not merely a matter of aesthetic qualities but simply a fact which makes the job as a postal worker more or less easy. In this sense, the outdoors becomes inextricable to the work task itself. It is not just an externality that the postal workers happen to pass and may choose to enjoy for its compensatory qualities. The outdoors inevitably surrounds the postal workers, defines their work place, and determines their work at all times – rain or shine. Or snow. The many physical injuries caused by the previous two winters of snow and ice in the North Town

Team, as well as in TDP at large, are but one example of this. Icy sidewalks and bulks of snow manifest themselves as serious, physical hazards and time consumers. This winter, the distribution manager himself found it necessary to put his limbs at risk in order to help out and keep up with the performance goals of his center. At his office he offers me a vivid image of himself partly bumping, partly sliding through rugged surfaces of ice and snow, using the force of his stretched out arms and legs to support the moped in order to keep it straight and running. The vulnerability of postal work to the weather is made crystal clear. The hardship of winter time physically exhausts the postal workers and at the same time it leaves them unsatisfactory behind schedule. On top of this came the usual absenteeism because of people falling ill. Visiting the North Town Team in early spring (March), a hand written oversight keeping track of who had had the last half day off, revealed that it had been more than 3 months since anyone was able to work less than planned. The half day off represents a flexibility otherwise executed routinely, when the number of postal workers present surpasses the amount of mail to distribute. The latest half day off had been distributed by lottery. Yet, when talking to the postal workers, it becomes obvious that ‘the outdoors’ has more to it than the distinction between the pleasures and the obstacles of nature. The outdoors is not just a matter of season and weather. It is also described as a place with a specific quality that both offers the postal workers a sense of freedom and delineates a certain relation to the formal organization.

Being outdoors – being free

- “ P1: Also, it is in contrast with what we do in here. To enter a distribution center is like entering a wasp’s nest in the morning when there is full throttle and everything And then when you get out and you are sitting on your bike or in your car.
- P2: Then it is just calm.
- P1: Then it is just calm! And it is perfectly quiet. There is no one but yourself and if you turn on the radio that is the only company you have – and the people you meet on the way”

The description establishes a distinction between the outdoors as somewhere calm that contrasts with how it feels to be inside. A description resonating with the North Town Team: While it is hectic and noisy inside – although also entertaining due to the postal workers’ tendency to chat and joke with their colleagues while sorting the mail – the outdoors is presented as a place where they can breathe more freely. One of the postal workers in North Town even demonstrates how it feels to enter the outdoors by taking a deep breath.

Having spent a number of mornings in the distribution center with the postal workers observing the daily sorting process of the mail, I know exactly what he means. The time from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. in the morning is intense and busy. This is when one should never call the Team Leader to talk or try to arrange for an interview. Either she will not answer the phone or, if she does, the sound of her frantic voice and the obviously heavy activity in the background will call for an excuse for being an ignorant researcher, unknowledgeable of the production processes of postal distribution. As the only one in the room sitting I have been observing in the midst of the apparent chaos, people walk back and forth while they talk or rather shout to be able to communicate through the heavy noise. The noise of yellow boxes being moved and firmly stacked as they are emptied of mail; big metal cages rolling from one end of the concrete floor to the other; small parcels being sorted and thrown, hitting the bottom of grey plastic containers, and on the top of this, the radio constantly playing popular

music, which is however, hardly distinguishable. No one rests and no one ever sits. There is constant activity and motion. I notice that the sounds change a bit as time passes during the day. From the first hectic sounds of the sorting of yellow boxes that ensures that mail for each particular route is properly distributed among the postal workers to the softer sounds of the postal workers standing in front of their shelves, busy sorting mail into the grey pigeon holes representing their route, each little compartment marked with a sticker of the street name and number in question. Once the sorting process is this far, everyone seems more at ease and starts to talk and joke. As they sort the mail into the grey pigeon holes, they gradually get a clearer picture of how their workday will be and of whether they will be able to sort the amount of mail and leave for their route in due time and hence finish off their workday within schedule. Every movement, every effort of coordination, every comment, every sound is directed towards the point where they will be able to leave the center. When they finally close the door to their car or get on their bikes this is described as entering a different space and time. As one of the postal workers from the Country team puts it:

“ You are just you. You can have thoughts of your own when you are out there because delivering mail becomes a routine, because it is the same thing you do day after day. You might think: ‘oh, when we were on holiday, that was damn nice!’ or ‘Now that was a shitty day yesterday, why did it go wrong?’ You can reflect on all these things.”

In contrast to the hustling and bustling inside the distribution center, when driving their routes the postal workers are able to ‘mind their own business’, one might say. As the postal worker explains in the above quote, she can preoccupy herself with thoughts that have to do with her life in general. Or as one of the postal workers from the other team explains: “When you are out, you have the freedom to be you”. When the door to the car is closed or the bike is on route ‘the outdoors’ becomes a place of their own. To be outdoors, driving the route, they add, no one interrupts; no one keeps an eye on them. They are their own masters.

Personalized Places

The experience of freedom associated with being outdoors seemingly has to do with the feeling that the route is their route. They identify with the route. Starting up the snaplog interview in the Country Center, for instance, I ask the informants to present themselves by name and seniority, and they themselves suggest adding the number of their route to the presentation. And in both teams, when presented to the snaplogs, it stood out how they were trying to establish between them where the picture had been taken, its specific geography, but not least who had taken the picture, i.e. who was driving this particular route. The first comments in the Country Team on the two pictures of the waterhole go like this:

“ P1: It is Thomas that has taken them.
P2: Yes, it is on number 9.
P1: It is the Castle More”

The outdoors and its particular geographies are connected to specific people and it is this connection that tends to transform an abstract outdoors into a rather personalized geography. This

transformation is performed for example, when the postal workers have lunch. While adhering to the rule of a total of 20 minutes for lunch break, to be scanned in the portable phones, the postal workers decide for themselves when and where. Most of them seem to pick places along the route that they specifically prefer. Just like the picture of the beautiful view, other apparently uncharacteristic snaplog- pictures, for instance, a small path following a well-trimmed hedge or green shrubbery along a pebble road are framed to show exactly this: favorite and in that sense personal places along the route. The picture of the small path is where the photographer usually pauses to eat lunch whereas the green shrubbery is preferred because it serves as a hiding place for taking a pee. Driving with one of the postal workers, I am introduced to several favorite places. One of them is the lunch place under the shade of a big tree, another is a private garden where she wants me to see and smell the beautiful roses growing there. In yet another place, we take our time to pat the small kittens and in an old ramshakled farm there is the eighty year-old man, whom she keeps an eye on. She worries he might have died since she has not seen him for a while. But the mailbox has been emptied and I see him lurking behind the shades before we leave, apparently still going strong. And then there are the places with the particularly nice customers who offer coffee or hot chocolate on a cold winter's day or the places with the aggressive persons just waiting for an opportunity to file a complaint. There are the places where she has to take particularly good care of the traffic because the steep driveway creates a dangerous spot of lousy oversight and the places where she backs up the car because the narrow space of the courtyard would otherwise give her trouble turning the car around. She has been driving this route no more than 3 years and yet one can tell by her knowledge of it, her way of driving the route, that she has already turned it into her place. Another story goes that one of the grand old men of the team routinely eats his lunch at an old inn, sitting in the kitchen. Having been driving the route for 20 years, and his father before that, as described in a conversation with the Distribution Manager; his route is his kingdom.

The freedom of routine

Not everything depends on the place and the fact that the postal workers are able to make it their own. To be more precise: doing so involves a very significant component already touched upon above. It is about routine or rather: routine and time. Below, I will be citing at length in order to show how the route, the time and the routine are mutually constitutive. Simultaneously, the quote will contribute to the understanding of the notion of freedom. It is taken from an interview with the so called 'well-being coordinator' of the team, which I conducted while he was sorting the mail into his shelf. Standing beside him in the middle of the team working, it was possible to involve some of his colleagues in the conversation. In the citation below this is exactly what happened. The coordinator left it up to his colleagues to answer the question I posed: Why is it that people are so attached to their route?

“ P1: Well, I guess it is like ‘creatures of routine’.. It is probably because you know everything, you know it all. And when you know it all it runs easily; smoothly. You can tell exactly when you are done because you know how it is. It is harder when you are standing there and you do not know it. Then you do not have a clue. For instance, I use a quarter of an hour here. I am staggered by 15 minutes now, you know. Because we are sharing a route and so on. Then I have no clue when I am finished. But er... I just think the best solution is for people to keep to the fixed ways.

I: So, it has mostly got to do with time or what? Does it have to do with being in charge of your own time? Is that it?

P1: Yes.

I: ...more than it has to do with it being really nice driving in Birch Lane?

P1: I do not think that has so much to do with it.

I: So, it is not the place, it is time?

P2: Well...

P1: Okay, there are some places that you would rather drive than others.

I: Okay?

P1: I would not like to drive on Oak Street every day, you know.

I: What is that place – multi storey buildings?

P1: Yes.”

P1 continues by explaining how he would rather drive in a nice and calm residential neighborhood like most of his colleagues would, he suggests. “Someone has to do it but not me”, he adds, laughing. The well-being coordinator interrupts:

“ I think it is time that decides, more than it is the place. There might be a specific area where you like to drive, but otherwise er...it is time. When you know it, you can get it off your hands. That is: you get home in time”

This conversation indicates that the postal worker’s attachment to the route is not really a matter of geography, not even in its personalized form. It is the ability of the postal worker to estimate exactly how much time to spend on the route that makes it so important. When they know the route, they are able to predict when they can go home, so the logic goes. Returning for a moment to the significant distinction between the inside and the outdoors, this explains quite a lot. While the routine of driving the route gives the postal workers control of their own time, being inside the distribution center, on the contrary, leaves them exposed to a lot of noise, a hectic atmosphere and to what the informants during the snaplog-interview rather vaguely define as, “a lot of disturbances”. More specifically, the postal workers are subject to various negotiations of their time as long as they are inside. Inside, there are a lot of things that have to be worked out. Besides from the first sorting of the yellow boxes in accordance with the labels that stem from the big sorting machine in Copenhagen that matches teams with boxes, there is the manual sorting of the irregular mail into shelves and following this, the re-distribution amongst them of mail that has been misplaced.

But most importantly they have to consider the amount of work imposed on the team as a whole. If the mail is distributed too unevenly between the different routes, or if there is simply just a lot of mail in proportion to manpower, they have to figure out how to allocate the extra amount of work between them. It might entail calling in an extra postal worker but for the most part, it entails negotiations: Who can drive some extra streets in order to help out a colleague; who is willing to do a bit of overtime? Who should be able to drive a bit more than the amount of mail

in his shelf? These are exactly the kind of ‘disturbances’ the postal worker in the citation above is troubled with. It is the sharing out of work and routes that cause the relation between the route and time to lose its predictability and the postal worker to lose his routine and ultimately his sense of freedom. In contrast with this, once they are outside on their routes, they are untouchable. They are free to enjoy nature, their lunchboxes, their personalized spaces – their routines. As long as they are still inside, they run the risk of getting their routines, and thereby the control of their own time, scattered to pieces.

Outdoors as in ‘out of control’

The apparently defensive attitude with regard to the postal workers’ time and routines has given rise to some concern elsewhere in the organization. The citation below is from an interview with the HR manager of the postal area, in which he coins the notion of the outdoors as a place where the postal workers are basically impossible to manage:

“ Our situation is this: once the employees are out of the door, we have lost control completely. That is how it is. The time passing before the employee is back is controlled completely by the employee. Simply put, if the employee says ‘I cannot make it today’ and the Team Leader says, ‘I think you can’ the employee is always capable of proving that he or she is right. That is self-management with a vengeance. We have no control of working hours”

When the postal workers leave the distribution center to drive their respective routes, they are considered out of reach. This concern mirrors quite neatly the freedom experienced by the postal workers: Freedom as in ‘minding their own business’, escaping surveillance and becoming their own masters. Also worth noticing, is how the notion of freedom and the corresponding lack of control, from the point of view of the HR manager, is translated into a matter of time. It is not first and foremost the postal workers who are perceived as impossible to control, but their time. When the postal workers are outdoors driving their routes, they apparently seize control over time and as a result time escapes the control of the organization. Time seems to be something to possess, loose or possibly conquer. In this sense, time becomes a battlefield and in the case of the outdoors, it is considered to be a terrain of battle particularly beneficial to the postal workers, at least according to the HR manager.

However, the outdoors cannot be defined as a kind of safe haven for the postal workers in which they can mind their own business; enjoy nature and their lunch boxes and escape the control of the organization. Considering the tight management of the outdoors, as it is currently performed by TOR, a recently developed ICT system, the outdoors can hardly be characterized as a space of individual freedom beyond the gaze and control of the organization. Rather, the freedom of the outdoors appears to be already attentively accounted for and disciplined. At least this is what TDP seeks to ensure, currently resulting in intense local battles and negotiations going on somewhere ‘behind the scenes’ or at least alongside the beautiful and peaceful snapshot sceneries. In the following, a whole different picture will come into vision: the outdoors as it looks like when translated into the exact and standardized workload and work time imposed by it.

TOR and its ambitions

TOR is short for “Transport Og Ruteplanlægningssystem” which in English translates into: Transport And Route-planning-system. I stick to the TOR abbreviation, though, since I find the name and associations with the Nordic thunder god evoked by it rather fitting. No doubt the system is a powerful actor and has had a massive influence on the daily organizing of postal work and consequently caused a lot of ‘rumble’. The question and main conflict being a matter of world views: Who carries the ‘true’ version of the outdoors and its routes? Due to the many ‘heretics’, a lot of effort has gone into the conversion of disbelievers or at least into securing a co-existence which bottom line will create is a higher level of productivity. Before entering the present conflicts and negotiations accompanying TOR however, let us stay with the more neutral and straightforward description of the system.

TOR is characterized by a complicated calculating and optimizing core able to calibrate various data in order to determine the most efficient way for the postal workers to deliver mail. The data TOR seeks to combine stem from databases both from inside TDP and from public databases. The most significant database, defined as “the spine” of TDP by the System Manager (one of the main architects of TOR), is the address database containing all mail receivers in Denmark defined by route and sequence as well as by their service category. Nevertheless, the database lacks one important feature namely the x-y coordinates. They are added from a public address database. Lastly, GIS-data (Geographical Information System) are supplied by the National Survey and Cadastre. They consist in digital geographical maps that show the necessary details on roads and bike paths. The specific capability of TOR is to translate all these data into route maps and various data reports used for the planning and ongoing management of the distribution of mail. The overall ambition is, “the standardization of the distribution unit” (Slide presentation, DIS). According to the System Manager, the intention is also framed in the catchy and well-known phrase: “Work smarter, not harder”, placing TOR among a number of initiatives in TDP implemented in accordance with Lean principles. Hence, TOR can be considered as but an element in the general development towards standardization and a corresponding automation characterizing TDP. TOR is special however, in the sense that the previous automation has aimed at the process of pre-sorting mail. This is currently concentrated in two big centers in Denmark. One center in Copenhagen and one in Aarhus, both hosting huge but few machines that replace the work of hundreds of people. The black and white photographs in the hallways of the sorting center in Copenhagen, picturing long lines of women in front of grey shelves busy sorting mail, serve as illustrative of the extreme contrast to the robots, conveyor belts and highly advanced computer technologies that are now taking care that every letter is guided towards its proper intermediary destination: The local distribution centers. 40.000 letters are sorted in one hour demanding but a few attentive eyes and hands along the long bodies of steel and see-through hard plastic windows to secure that this level of productivity is constantly upheld.

TOR for its part aims at standardizing and partly automating the part of TDP still dominated by people, namely the division of Distribution and its around 16.000 postal workers, equaling 8000 full time positions (Post Danmark 2010). There is a clear understanding among top management of the possibilities yet to be seized with regard to productivity gains from a further standardization of Distribution that is; the translation of letter volume to exact measures of work effort and time. Let alone the fact that the main part, 60 percent, of the total expenditure within Distribution is allocated to the so-called ‘outdoors-time’, there has been a great deal of interest in getting a firmer hold of exactly this time span and its level of productivity. In this respect, the worries of the HR manager are also a worry of TDP in general and the reason why TOR has been introduced. With TOR, the relation between time and work effort can be controlled even when the postal workers

are outdoors driving their routes. Despite TOR's rather young age, the system has already been defined as a success seen from an economic point of view. An aggregated estimate has it that so far TOR has saved TDP the sum of 34 mio. DKK (DIS 2011). An important reason for this is the reduction in kilometers driven. Considering the total number of routes in Denmark the TOR system keeps track of about 8000 routes. By using TOR, TDP has been able to save no less than an estimated number of 6 mio. Kilometers. This contributes to a more environmental friendly mail distribution but obviously also to a reduction in work hours and other resources such as car maintenance and petrol. Further advantages include: the adherence to quality levels since they are part of the overall TOR calculations; the ability to stay within agreed work hours avoiding over pay; and a precondition for defining future products and services with regard to their production costs and the corresponding pricing, so called "geo-marketing", placing TOR as an important driver in the game of increasing market competition. Specifically in relation to the digitalization of route geography, TOR is able to simulate in advance the consequences of changes in route structures. In the view of this, the System Manager considers TOR not merely to be about standardization and optimization but at the same time to be a more flexible and responsive solution. A solution necessary when facing what he terms 'hard times' of TDP, characterized by a continuous decline in letters and corresponding instable budgets. Contrary to 'the good old days' when routes (and budgets) were more or less fixed, routes are now being re-cast up to 2 times within a year adding minor adjustments along the way on top of that. When using digital simulations, the process in itself will be more expedient but it will also be able to suggest a range of alternative route patterns when one might need to adjust to temporary minor in- or decreases in mail volume locally.

Scripting the optimal route

Forecasting the amount of mail to be distributed from the distribution center within the coming year, the TOR-system calculates the best possible way – that is, the least time and resource consuming way – to deliver mail within a given area. The information needed for this calculus, as mentioned above, is the combination of various databases combining geographical data with address specificity. What is not elaborated above, though, is an equally central feature of TOR, namely a timeframe defining and measuring in minutiae each motion performed along the route, covering the motions of humans as well as non-humans. The latter concerns the speed of the various vehicles in use; mopeds, bikes or cars, obviously giving the postal workers larger geographical areas to cover if they drive by car rather than by bike. When it comes to the human side, the postal workers, the system knows and shows exactly the time supposedly spent on a number of motions. In small boxes on the screen the number of seconds estimated for each postal worker to perform a number of predefined tasks appears: to grab the mail in his bags, to drive particularly long driveways, to drop the mail into the mailbox or to contact customers in the case of a parcel delivery. Knocking on doors waiting for an answer is a real time consumer. TOR also tells how much time it takes to drive between addresses, differentiating various roads by their specific quality so that the speed and therefore the time consumption is carefully adjusted. It obviously makes a difference whether the route is laid out on a concrete freeway or in town or whether it is but a small pebble road in the countryside. TOR takes the physical characteristics of each particular road into consideration and in addition, it takes account of traffic laws.

Differentiations are also made between addresses. The various service goals are part of this in order to settle logistically which address to visit before the other. First of all, this concerns the service goals set by law demanding day-to-day delivery and a fixed deadline by the hour for

distribution of letters and parcels addressing industry and private persons, respectively. Second, TOR factors in the service goals paid by the customers such as early deliveries at 8 or 10 am.

All of these data are calculated and translated into the specific geography and logistics of the route, which, by motions, physical particularities and service obligations, end up exactly fitting a full workday: 7,24 hours. Once fixed in geographical space, the information is shared and combined with the central address database of TDP that feeds the central sorting machine, providing for its ability to read and translate the address and postal code of each letter into its unique geographical location and hence into its specific distribution center and route. In other words, by using TOR the whole process of 'letter production' is aligned and turned into measurable and manageable time: from its arrival in the red public mailboxes to the subsequent journey where the letter is labeled and defined by laser beams in the sorting center after which it is sorted into a yellow box defined by postal codes and team; transported to its proper distribution center, distributed among teams and team members; stacked, transported and later grabbed by the postal workers in the black canvas bags in order to finally end its journey by entering a particular mailbox. Because of TOR, every step in this process, now also including the time outdoors, is made visible, measurable and accountable and hence managed in order to make the process as cost-effective as possible. Consequently, when being outdoors enjoying the view, patting kittens or pausing at favorite spots, the postal workers are driving a landscape already defined in its particular time and geography. The roads driven and the sequence of the houses correspond exactly to the script set up by the mail, pre-sorted and stacked in their bags.

A pinch of common sense

In principle, the system is perfect. Meticulously calculated and estimated by TOR, the outdoors is represented in its most optimal version. If only fed with the right information, it is able to lay out routes like no human would ever be able to. As the System Manager explains, with a mix of pride and fascination, besides holding together a large variety of information, TOR is characterized by its dynamic and sophisticated calculative 'core' giving it the ability to deliver a variety of outputs as an effect of the same input. TOR performs reflexively. Before the introduction of TOR, the postal workers themselves executed this reflexivity. In a route recast one would typically invite around four experienced postal workers to lay out the new routes of an area. They would move some streets from one route to another, but as the Area Manager of Development states, "it was only stopgap measures since they did not throw everything up in the air and ask: how smart can this be done?". According to him, the postal workers tend to be far too conservative. TOR, on the other hand, has no history and preferences and does not 'think' in terms of old route structures. TOR only thinks in terms of efficient distribution of letters from A to B. TOR always sees the outdoors geography anew and is thus always able to lay out the most efficient routes anywhere and at any point in time.

Originally TOR was intended to create readymade routes. Time and experience however, has shown that this is far from reality. The Manager of Development admits that there are a lot of instances where TOR, regardless of its immediate perfection, will fail. The routes created and visualized in TOR like fine red lines criss-crossing on a map might look perfect when printed on paper; but in the hands and eyes of the postal workers, the optimal routes are destabilized as they enter a long process of hard and time consuming negotiations. This explains why the Manager of Development does not define TOR as a standard, but more flexibly as a "supportive tool", thus establishing the human factor as a decisive component in the planning. More precisely, he introduces what he terms: "common sense" (in Danish: "sund fornuft"). The optimal route is not merely the output of a TOR calculus but is rather seen as a matter of "forging together the best of two worlds", to borrow the expression of the local Team

Leader. To bridge what is considered to be a potential conflict between man on one side and machine on the other. In the following, I will identify some of these conflicts and ongoing negotiations and at the same time I will demonstrate how the co-construction of the outdoors is more complicated than the classical and bipolar struggle between man and machine. Far more actors are involved and kept together in the course of creating optimal routes and it is not just the reality of the outdoors that seems to be negotiated. Along the process both TOR and the humans involved are mutually transformed. What I will be attending to in the following, is how the system configures not only geographical maps but also disputes over geographical realities, the definition of a fair days work as well as over the transformation of the humans involved; Planners, postal workers and team leaders. It might be that the vision of TOR needs a pinch of common sense to attain its proper 'flavor', but simultaneously the world views of humans are revised: they are asked to change; to learn to think and see like TOR. Only in this way will the optimal standardization of routes be truly optimal.

Route logic(s)

A key dispute concerns geography. It might be that GIS is a very flexible tool, but it has one elementary downside to it: a flat geography. This makes TOR unable to distinguish high from low hence failing to account for a whole dimension that is quite essential when delivering mail by bike. As the Regional Planner explains:

“ In principle, TOR is just a calculator that can do a lot of calculations at the same time and in that way find the cheapest way of transporting or driving from a to b. It does not take hills into account, when it is uphill or downhill or... In TOR the geography is flat. There are roads on a map, and this is where TOR is moving about. Then it is obvious that TOR is not able to consider when it is a lot of uphill on this one. In that case you have to see to that the route is laid out in a way that you go downhill with filled bags and uphill with empty ones”

TOR might be a splendid calculator but since it does not envision the routes in 3-D, a compensating effort has to be made by humans in order to make up for this. Being responsible for a whole region of distribution centers, obviously the Planner himself is not able to know every area by its hills and valleys. The 'you' mentioned in the citation above, which is the 'you' that will have to make sure that the routes are driven in the right direction, will usually be the postal workers themselves. This is where their specific local knowledge comes in handy in order to make sure that hill tops are climbed primarily when the bags are as light as possible.

Another geographical aspect of relevance to optimal route planning is the fact that geography is not static. Regardless of its reflexive calculative core, TOR is not able to know when bars are put up on a path normally used for short cuts impeding the postal bikes with big bags on each side to pass. And while TOR might show the width of a road, it does not reveal possible roadwork or the level of traffic. Crossing a busy road a number of times to visit houses on both sides not only poses a health risk, it also consumes considerable amounts of costly work time.

Yet another peculiar geographical concern produced when TOR, to use the expression of the Manager of Development cited above, 'throws everything up in the air' is that of neighborhoods. Colloquially, a neighborhood is characterized as such due to its coherence and internal similarities

compared to other areas. This might be due to a nearby locality such as a big square; that the street names are all thematically ordered carrying the names of birds, composers, politicians etc.; or it might be due to a certain style or architecture used for a larger housing area. When TOR ‘throws everything up in the air’ configuring the geography of the outdoors anew, this means that neighborhoods do not exist. The Planner is skeptical towards this. As he concludes: ‘it has no logic’. It might be optimal in a ‘theoretical world’ as the one set up by TOR, but as a postal worker driving the route it is considered ‘a mess’ if neighborhoods are all of a sudden split up. He elaborates:

“ When I present a suggestion (a new route on map), if there is too much mixing, too much mess, they will turn it down. They will say, ‘no, this will not work’. But if it is by and far coherent and the logic of the route is reasonable, they will say, ‘well, this is worth considering’”

Once again human judgment is called for. When I ask the local Planner to explain how he judges this; what he means when he talks about ‘seeing’ whether the routes of TOR are coherent or not, he explains by drawing on a piece of paper: a road with 3 side roads on each side. Then he draws up a line representing a route like the ones TOR might lay out. The line runs down the first side road, skips the next two and then crosses the road to drive one and a half out of the three roads on the other side. The postal workers will simply not accept a route like that because it splits up what is considered inseparable. While the Planner might not know particular local neighborhoods by their architectural specificity and detail, what he is able to see and judge is the way particular streets are split up and dispersed onto several routes. On the screen the logical routes are shown as small, colored clusters of thin lines with as little interference from other clusters as possible. This is what he is looking for in order to prevent what he confirms to be clash between the ways of humans and the ways of TOR.

Romantic anachronism

As I interview The Planner, I all of a sudden remember the gesture of the System Manager. He pointed to his head and said, “up here, it makes no sense”, as an argument why the optimal routes of TOR tend to hit the wall in practice. Pointing to his head, obviously imagining it to be the head of a postal worker, he suggested the limitations to reside in there; in the frame of mind. The optimal route then, becomes a question of attitude. In particular the ‘old’ postal workers, who have been in service for 20, 30 or even 40 years are problematic. They are considered ‘non adaptable’. A characterization often used among management representatives in TDP. The older postal workers are stuck in their habitual ways, romantically attached to customers and places, which is basically out of tune with the ways of modern postal distribution. As the Manager of Development puts it:

“ I usually say, in the Morten Korch movies, the postman walks around shirt sleeved, carrying but a bag and this is all he has got, mail wise, you know. But this is not our world. Postal work is ruthless. You might have to lug one and a half ton of mail today, which has to be distributed on the route in mailboxes standing at the roadside. It is simply like that, it is hard work”

While modern postal distribution is characterized by 'hard work', the Manager of Development contrasts it with a romantic image of the postman strolling along, maybe even whistling, while he visits one house after the other, chatting with everyone he meets. The Morten Korch movies, which he refers to, are all representing a society long gone. A society of the 1950's: small townships, the striving peasant as the main character and a 'Gemeinschaft-like' atmosphere. The general high level of trust is symbolized exactly in the friendly and carefree postman acting as a true community helper. It is interesting how this description of postal work mirrors the snaplogs and many of the accompanying stories told by my informants: The tendency that the hardships of work disappears in favor of an effortless and carefree existence in close relation to nature and the friendly customers.

Following the explanation of the Planner as well as the ones given by the local shop steward, the trouble with TOR as to its lack of geographical logic, however, is not merely a question of individual attitudes or conservative romanticism. At least this is but one side of the story. The problem is also related to productivity and quality. When TOR splits up streets and neighborhoods, two or maybe more postal workers have to share roads and this makes everyday coordination harder. Even though most of the mail is already sorted before it arrives to the distribution center, there is still mail that has to be sorted manually in order to be allocated to its proper route and postal worker. When up to three people are responsible for driving a given road for example, the ones pre-sorting the mail upon arrival at the center have to know about this detailed division in order to sort it properly. Furthermore, in case of possible faults detected in the stacks of machine sorted mail, essentially everyone else in the center has to know about the division in order to re-locate the letter by the right shelf, route and postal worker. Correspondingly, this poses the risk of increasing errors. Still another aspect is getting to know the route. According to the shop steward, no obvious 'logic' to the route will make delivery more prone to mistakes for the newcomer. This counters the general conception of TOR as a system that makes it comparably easier to introduce routes to new employees, by way of easy access to detailed maps and lists of address sequences.

The point I wish to make is not one of judging who is right and who is wrong. Surely, the concern for keeping neighborhoods together might be a matter of human frames of mind: when one of my informants prefers to drive the residential neighborhood rather than the storey buildings, it has nothing to do with expediency, but pure and simple taste. At the same time 'messy' routes are de facto harder 'to sell' to the postal workers which is also due to the extra effort of coordination and immediate challenges to quality and expediency posed by them. What should be clear and hopefully even clearer in the following, no matter which version chosen, the geographical representation offered by TOR has not been able to stabilize the terrain of the outdoors.

A fair day's work

Another area of dispute in the wake of the introduction of TOR is its particular performance of fairness. The reason TOR is considered optimal is not due to its extraordinarily complex, precise and economically favorable time-motion calculations alone. As stressed by the Manager of Development, it is its ability to be fair. Contrary to humans, the TOR system is able to make the routes equally long and in this manner do everyone justice. However, the fairness and equality produced by TOR, based on the perfect premises of mathematical calculations, paradoxically ends up producing a problem of 'irregular' individual differences. When laying out the routes exactly

alike, the underlying premise is that the postal workers are alike. The standardized route takes a standardized postal worker as its premise. On this background, individual differences all of a sudden come to pose new challenges in securing a fair day's work in everyday practice. As coined by the Planner:

“ This was one of the fundamental ideas of the system. It was that it should not make it individual because the routes must be equal. But the problem is that this is not how a workday is like in a distribution center. Because people are not alike”

TOR installs the classical economical principle, ‘other things being equal’ and thereby produces a lot of exceptions to the rule. Apart from calculating optimal and fair routes simultaneously, TOR is laying bare the many individual differences between postal workers. Differences that have of course always been there but that are now made visible and hence constituted as a territory necessary to manage. The local Team Leader in North Town confirms this when I suggest that TOR is unable to take account of individual differences:

“ No, but you have to do it all the same. You have to say, well we differentiate between... we have different types of employees. We do not just have 20-year olds. It is self-evident that someone who has delivered mail for 30 years has worn-out knees. Well, he simply cannot perform the same way as someone right out of school playing football every weekend. To some extent you have to be able to allow for this (...)”

She continues by noticing that these considerations of course have to be executed within certain limits; limits defined by productivity measures. The definition of ‘fair’ finding itself somewhere in between old and worn out knees and the company concern for having their money's worth. Obviously, this balance is not an easy one. It has been the question and classical matter of concern running through theory of organization and management since its very inception. What is interesting is not that this conflict is articulated as such, but rather the way it comes into existence. How the conflict is sought to be stabilized by TOR and how this stabilization shows to be in need of close and continuous attention.

One way of tackling it has been in terms of system features. New features have been developed and made available for Planners and local managers to make certain restrictions to TOR; “locking the system”, as they call it. For instance ‘a lock’ can be established in order to keep certain streets together while casting the routes. Hence avoiding the clash of logics as described above. Or it might be the ability to cast lenient routes aimed at senior employees to show consideration for the worn out knee. In my team they have even locked the system to create longer routes in order to meet the characteristics of exactly the 20-year old youngster. According to the Planner, despite these rather new and more flexible features in the TOR system, not every particularity can be accounted for in TOR and correspondingly a whole terrain is left open for negotiations and management. Even the locking of the system itself; ‘pushing the button’, takes negotiations to be followed through. What is characteristic of TOR seems to be the large amount of work and energy put into making the optimal system truly optimal. This is visible in the time consuming process of route re-casting itself, but also in the day-to-day work organization and management. Below, I will look into both these features.

Optimizing the optimal: adjusting realities

In liking with the general tendency in TDP to formalize and standardize every process and act by the smallest components, a manual for the optimal route re-cast process has been produced: 106 pages in all, with the subtitle, 'Lean Distribution'. It defines in every detail who should be involved, what they should do, how and when. It is basically a handbook in project management and lean thinking. Its rationale is to detect and eliminate processes that do not add value. According to the System Manager of DIS, however, this is not indicative of how the route recasts are currently run. Not anymore. To him, the manual is a symptom of the unrealistic expectations attached to TOR from the beginning that it would be a 'stand-alone-system', requiring simply one to one implementation. Today, he stresses, it is locally defined how the process is run and highly dependent on the relations between the local Planner and the managers and teams in question. He suggests the actual success of a recast to depend on the level of dialogue:

“ SM: [...] when she [i.e. the other Planner] has found a picture of how the world looks like today: if the routes that TOR defines to be the longest are in fact the longest in North Town; and the routes that are the shortest are in fact the shortest ; and those things that take a long time, take a long time in the system too, so that everything fits, in order to have a picture of reality...

I: She does this in a dialogue?

SM: Yes. She does this in a dialogue and there are places where they are really good at going into a dialogue and there are places where things happen a bit too quick. Where you simply, it is slap bang and er... depending on whether you take your time, there will be less backlog later on”.

Firstly, what is underlined in this quote is that in order for TOR to perform its best, the system-version of reality needs to be aligned with the version of the postal workers. Secondly, the appropriate means for this alignment is thought to depend on the technique of dialogue. According to the quote, the dialogue should be established between TOR and the local actors (the postal workers and their Team Leaders) in order to make sure that, at the end of the process, the routes of TOR are in fact “a picture of reality”. Apparently, the upper hand in this configuration of reality is given to the postal workers. They hold the answer to whether the routes defined as the longest are in fact the longest in North Town. In this respect, the outset for the dialogue is for TOR to gradually learn more and more details about reality every time the routes are being changed. Or differently put: the goal is for TOR to gradually adjust to the ways of thinking and seeing offered by its human teachers.

According to an official slide-presentation of the TOR system, the process of dialogue and learning is framed as an opportunity for local team members to be involved and to gain increased influence. However, the fitting of realities is not a simple one way street where knowledge is flowing from one actor to the other, from human to machine. Just a dot later in the same slide, still under the headline: 'Good reasons for electronic route recasting', the implementation process is defined as, “(...) a radical recast where present differences, customs, old habits and personal attitudes are being reduced” (DIS 2011:slide 12). In other words, the aim of the dialogue is not just a matter of optimizing the world view of TOR, its geography and logistics, but just as much an attempt to, in the course of a recast, even out the 'differences, customs, old habits and personal attitudes' embodied in the human participants. Following this, it is obviously not just TOR who is expected to change and learn. The humans involved are likewise transformed, and besides the postal workers this includes as well the Planners and local managers. While examining the challenges of the

Team Leader more elaborately in the sections to come, I will first try to demonstrate the point of ‘reversed’ adjustment by a couple of examples concerning the Planners and the postal workers specifically.

‘Supportive tools’

The profile of the Planner is presented as one of extraordinary expertise spanning regular organizational boundaries. As described in the slides:

“ [the] system is hard to use and demands a highly developed expertise and routine among the Planners with regard to knowledge of the production, economy, ITC, management and the ability to cooperate across the organization and across hierarchies (...)” (DIS 2011, Slide 36)

Since TOR itself is a complex integration of various fields of knowledge, the competent Planner too needs to carry a truly complex and nearly inhuman profile. Because TOR draws together facts on budgets, work time, motions, quality levels and geographies, the Planner too is urged to work in accordance with this ‘big picture’, hence crossing regular organizational boundaries of expertise as well as hierarchies. Listening to the descriptions of the Planner’s own practice, he does act as a boundary spanner, only in most cases the ‘spanning’ is based on his efforts to minimize the side effects of TOR in order to make the routes look and act as what he terms: “reasonable” to the local managers and postal workers. Working under time pressure himself ‘the big picture’ will often be superseded by the need for workable results:

“ (...) you can put a lot into the system, but this is also costly time wise, so the question is where to spend your time. Should you spend it on the preparatory work or should you say: ‘we will do it manually’. This is a trade-off you have to do all the time, you know”. (Interview, Planner)

Since there are just a few Planners in each Postal Area, the Planners have to support several distribution centers simultaneously. Considering that a single TOR calculation can last up to 1 hour, the Planner always weighs advantages of the perfect calculation against the workability and deadline set by local production demands. Including his/her own. So called ‘manual’ recasts sometimes turn out to be the better choice in order to make sure that the new routes will actually be accepted locally.

As described previously, the intention when involving the local knowledge of the postal workers is to catch system inexpediciencies as soon in the process as possible. It is a recurrent problem, however, that the postal workers tend to overlook various aspects. As the System Manager points out:

“ When people are bringing mail there are so many things they are not really aware of, but that just has to be in a specific way. So, even if you ask them, they will not be able to answer”

When I ask the Team Leader about this lack of explicitness, she explains it by the individual differences between postal workers. Some prefer a written list of the sequence of streets to visit, others would rather have the route map printed from TOR and yet others would prefer a verbal explanation. Each person knows and sees the route differently. While some are highly visual, others may need the words or even a couple of try-outs before they actually know a new route. As a consequence, it is not a straightforward matter to let the postal workers have their say, to let them teach TOR. In many incidences they do not know what they should have noticed on the map before they are actually confronted with the obstacles of a new route, .

What I wish to draw attention to here, however, is not merely the fact that the specific practical and embodied knowledge of the postal workers is hard to explicate, complicating the formal ambitions of greater decision latitude among the postal workers. Interesting is also how the wording of the System Manager seems to translate the matter of influence and decision latitude into a lack of ability among the postal workers: “When people are bringing mail there are so many things they are not really aware of, but that just has to be in a specific way”, meaning that if the postal workers do not learn to think like the system, they will not be able to notice and correct what TOR needs them to notice and correct. In other words, the practical and local knowledge of the postal workers needs to adjust to the calculative logics and visions of TOR for the fitting of realities to actually succeed.

Returning to the characterization made by the Development Manager, calling TOR a ‘supportive tool’ to stress the centrality of the human actors and their common sense, the above suggests that the roles are reversed or at least that they are of a far more dialectical character. The humans involved in TOR enter into a continuous dialogue; they are on the lookout for creative workarounds in daily planning, they are gradually learning how to see the route and its reality according to the needs of TOR. Activities suggesting that the human actors too are playing the part of ‘the supportive tool’. This goes not least for local managers, left with a specific and outspoken responsibility to make TOR work. A responsibility framed as a matter of both ‘selling’ and ‘decision making’.

Selling TOR, managing change

The System Manager as well as the Manager of Development are consistently framing the TOR-problem as a matter of ‘selling’: Selling the new routes to the postal workers. Or, in the jargon of management theory, it is defined as a matter of ‘change management’. In the official slide presentation there is a section of slides concerning the evaluation of TOR, among other things focusing on the implementation process. It reads as follows, “To reduce project costs, the activity of change management was taken out of scope. This would prove to be a mistake” (DIS 2011: Slide 38). It was ‘a mistake’ because the postal workers proved to show a great deal of ‘resistance’ and ‘mistrust’. Had there been a more consistent focus on managing these reactions, turning them into a more productive and cooperative ‘curiosity’ among the postal workers, it would have made the implementation process shorter and hence less expensive, so the argument goes. The amount originally budgeted for development and so called ‘roll out time’ has been exceeded by no less than

32 mio. DKK. In effect, the task and challenges of ‘rolling out’ TOR is left with local management. As we are discussing the matter of individual differences among the postal workers visualized by the system, the Planner states as follows:

“ (...) normally it is they (the Team Leaders) who are responsible if they have an employee who is slower, who has to have something taken off every day. And the other way around, if they have somebody who is very fast and who can drive more, they have to make a decision”

In other words, when TOR, in one way or the other, does not correspond to the reality of the postal workers, it produces a terrain for local managers and their ability to make decisions. They are introduced as the ones to fill out the missing links, asked to take on more responsibilities. Responsibilities have to be met in a certain manner, however. Not any kind of decision will do. Proper management, proper decisions have to be in accordance with facts. This is what the local managers are trained to do and to value. Good management practice should always be based on how the world actually looks like; meaning how it is presented by the calculative systems available, TOR itself being an important source of these facts. The problem is, as illustrated, that these facts are exactly what seem to be contested.

Managing ‘facts’

An example of this is a recent tool, A printed sheet of paper produced by TOR, which neatly presents the various time percentages estimated for each activity along the route and correlating this to the actual time spend (as registered on the portable phones of the postal workers). One of those sheets representing a week in January 2010, presents the surplus of 9,7 percent in work time as a fact. According to this, the postal workers should be both satisfied and calm since they adhere to goals that are even higher than TOR would expect. Talking to both postal workers and the Team Leader, what they are actually experiencing, though, is a very rough wintertime, where everyone does overtime and things run far from smoothly. ‘It is complicated and hard to explain to them’, the Team Leader tells me, referring to the 9,7 percent. I cannot help thinking that no explanation or ‘selling scheme’ would do the trick. The ability of these so called ‘facts’ to gain strength in practice, indeed to travel even the short distance from the computer of the local Team Leader on the first floor to the shop floor down stairs, is poor. When presented to the postal workers, the facts are either ignored or disbelieved because they do not correspond to their perceptions of reality. As a consequence of the recent recast, the postal workers even had the experience of defeating the facts of the system. The team succeeded to convince management that the visiting percentage of the routes as calculated by TOR was far below the actual level, in the end resulting in the Head of the distribution area himself appointing an extra route to the team. “It was provable – focus on facts – we need an extra hand”, as the well-being coordinator proudly concluded.

It becomes clear with this example that facts are used not just as a tool for management, but also as objects of contestation and opportunities of resistance. Facts may talk back. Hence, facts do not exactly make the ground firmer under the feet of local managers; they rather seem to demand a lot of extra energy from all parties to make facts work as an outset for decisions and action, for expedient work practice.

Managing things

Furthermore, the facts of the route to be managed are not merely the assemblage of facts related to TOR, but also the mundane facts of things, people and their relation. When asking the local manager for an account of the recent recast, she tells a story that involves various actors, human and non-humans, and an attempt to align them or at least to keep them momentarily together in what she describes as a demanding process of 'step by step planning'. Considerations like: When is the Planner to be contacted for a first draft of the present state of 'reality' of the routes and their estimated time frame? Which team members should be particularly closely involved and at what stages? When should the first draft maps printed from TOR be evaluated? When should more printed address labels for the shelves be ordered? Who should put them up? When should the shop floor be refurnished in accordance with the new route structure? When should keys for staircases be redistributed among team members? A lot of tightly coordinated tasks and activities are necessary in order to do the route re-cast in practice. If a single thing fails, the whole structure collapses and mail will not be delivered in time: missing labels, missing keys for staircases or mopeds, or the lack of the appropriate shelf structure will all serve as potential hindrances. In a group interview with 4 team members, I am told the story of how the team, just the day before new routes were supposed to start up, had to take desperate measures: they pushed a whole section of shelves through the room to create the necessary space for the new team structure created by TOR and incorporated by the grey shelves. According to the team members, management had not taken proper action. Reactions from the other teams who had correspondingly less space were fierce, but the shelves finally staid in their new positions and the new route structure came into reality. The story adds physical space and its materialities as well as inter-team relations to the list of 'things' to manage in the process of re-casting routes.

Work-time revisited

As mentioned above, the planning of the routes was previously the task and responsibility of every team, but it has now been included in the portfolio of local managers, making them particularly responsible that routes always correspond with work hours. On the one hand, this implies protecting TDP against costly overtime, but on the other hand, it implies ensuring that every postal worker is in fact spending a full workday of 7 hours and 24 minutes on his route. One would expect this to be an easy task, since this is what TOR is taking care of. As described above, the core business of TOR is to make routes, motions, and work time correspond,. However, while TOR might be calculating on the basis on local budgets, these budgets are but estimates and as a result of this, the amount of mail on any particular day might vary, in reality shifting the responsibility of work time calculation from TOR to the Team Leader and his or her team. From my various observations in the distribution center, I have noticed that making mail volume correspond with work time becomes a very acute theme for debates, conflicts and hence daily management. At short morning gatherings on the shop floor that last around 10 minutes or so, the Team Leader asks the team to meet up to make sure everybody is able to drive their routes, given the amount of mail in their shelves. If a postal worker is short of mail compared to his time, this means that he or she is obliged to offer his time to a colleague. At least this is the aim of the Team Leader. The following exchange of words stems from a recording of a regular stand-up meeting on the floor that makes it evident that the routes and its work time, which the TOR system was supposed to standardize and fix are anything but standardized and fixed:

“ TM: Well, we have some mail sorted and some people are packing up. I will start with those who have been offered an extra moped. That is 37 and 38 – what does it do for you, considering that you will not have mail taken off [i.e. moved from this route to another]?

P1: I do not know. I have never driven a moped before (smiles).

TM: Since it is you out there on a moped, I am full of hope and confidence!

P1: Yeah yeah, I will manage, no problem.

P2: I will manage too.

TM: That is good! We have 4 routes left that normally have a piece driven by number 30 and that is: 31, 32, 34 and 40. Is there anybody who wants to offer some help?

P3: I am taking Meadow Road from house number 40.

TM: Yes, anyone else who has got something to offer?

P4: I have my bags loaded in Bilberry Street today, too.

TM: Yes, but will you be driving that on your own?

P4: Yes, I will drive that on my own, but when it comes to helping out others...

P2: Steve will be taking the strain off himself! (Laughter).

TM: Well, that is perfect... is there really no one else willing to help a colleague?

P5: What was it again?

TM: 31, 32, 34 is still lacking help now and I do not know if Thomas will need even more...?

(Everyone is discussing who needs help the most)

TM: ...but Thomas is really having a big problem here with 34, not only is the route too big already, now the town square is also lying around here...[the town square area is also part of route 34 this particular morning]

P6: For one hour extra I will drive it all!

(Silence)

TM: Okay, I must say it is a bit disappointing that there is no one else [to offer their help]”.

Even though every route has been measured in detail already, the slightest irregularity in the amount of mail (as in the example above where the postal worker of route 30 is absent) destabilizes the fixing of work and time, which once again becomes the responsibility of the team and local team leader to handle.



Chapter 6:

The Bike with a kickstand



This close up shot from above shows a part of an object that can be readily identified as a bike. A yellow bike parked on a grey ground using its black, solid looking but partly rusty kickstand. Rust is also visible on the inside of the chain guard as well as on the chain and on the back wheel between the spokes. All the parts are only partly visible, but enough so to leave the impression that the bike could need some proper care. White reflectors run on the inner circle of the black tire and can be discerned on the pedal closest to the viewer. Both shine a bit from the flash light. It is obviously an indoor picture. In the top left corner of the photograph, a small wheel is visible between the two yellow bars. Something on wheels is placed beside the bike. The wheels are of the kind that can be blocked or unblocked by the use of a foot to make them roll or stay put.

Although the picture frames only part of its object, it is obvious that it is a bike. It is not necessary to see the rest to know. The pedals, the wheel, the chain and the certain holding together by the yellow bars are the assuring essentials. Of course the picture does not reveal whether the bike is functional; whether one can actually drive it. The steering wheel could be missing and so could the seat. But this is not important. The framing and the zooming makes the spectator take notice of something else. Of the many details that make up the overall impression that this is a bike, it is the black kickstand which stands out, placing its platform on the ground exactly in the golden section. The short log accompanying the photograph only accentuates this focus, "A good bike with a kickstand", it says. The composition of the picture and the text guide the viewer's attention to this small, black metal thing which normally gains neither credit nor much attention in everyday life, and certainly not in organizational studies. Only here, it is made visible and thereby important in relation to a specific matter of concern: a good workday. But how is this so?

On the productive delegation between bike with kickstands and bodies

The kickstand is not crucial to the functioning of the bike, as are the wheels, the pedals or the chain. Without these, there would be no bike and thus no means of transportation, obviously relevant in the business of postal distribution. On the other hand, the kickstand is quite useful. It is what causes the picture to be not just a picture of any bike, but a special kind of bike. That is, a parked bike. Mimicking the thought experiment of Latour (Latour 1997) as he was confronted with the door and the striking door closer in La Halle aux Cuirs¹, the inference could be drawn that the bike without the kickstand would take much more effort. The effort of a body, a wall, a tree or some other vertical object stable and strong enough to carry the weight of the bike. In this comparison, the body would have the obvious advantage over the wall or the tree since the latter are not mobile. Interchangeable, but not mobile. One cannot count on there being a tree or a wall wherever one goes. In their absence the ground will have to do the job. That would require even more effort and it would risk damaging the bike as well as endangering people passing who might trip and risk falling. The body seems to be the most flexible solution. It is always there when needed, which is not always the case with walls and trees; and it can be alert to winds or other factors such as bullies who find amusement in tipping over people's bikes. The human body would be an accommodating kickstand. As is the case with the alternative human door closer in La Halle aux Cuirs, however, the use of a human kickstand would be both costly and in the end also less stable. The human may fall ill, be distracted and will by no means be able to stand up *ad infinitum*. The human will need breaks and alternative support will be needed. Moreover, it is important to consider that this is not just any bike but a postal bike and it is not just any human but a postal worker. What characterizes the relation between this exact bike and the human kickstand is that they have to be able to perform the job of postal distribution. They are not meant to simply solve the task of stabilizing bikes, they are meant to deliver mail. The competence delegated from the postal worker to the kickstand represents a shift from human to non-human resources, which is absolutely necessary in order for postal work to be executed. The kickstand makes it possible for the postal worker to transform the bike into a standing or rolling bike, just by way of the technology of the hinge and the small effort of a kick. And more importantly, it makes it possible for the postal worker to transform as well: from a body with a bike to a body without a bike, thus expanding the body's mobility; its ability to be somewhere else than the bike. At every driveway, the bike is transformed by a kick in order for the body of the postal worker to approach the mailbox on foot using hands and arms to hold the mail and on return to trot the pedals and hold the steering wheel. So kickstands are important in order for the postal worker to change, to vary his or her different mobilities and bodies which is crucial for driving the route and for the delivery of mail to the mailboxes along the way. In this sense, the kickstand is what makes the workday possible, at the same time explaining how this apparent minor object can catch the attention of the camera. Nevertheless, the mere acknowledgement of the shifting of competences between kickstand and human does not account for how the photographed bike with kickstand visualizes a specifically good workday. It calls for something more: the specification of what 'bad' might be in the world of bikes, kickstands and postal distribution. How would this look like?

When I turn to the group interview, the distinction between good and bad kickstands proves to be a matter of incorporated work routines and time. But also 'larger' concerns, such as changing product portfolios, are associated with the distinction: the fact that letters are gradually being replaced by heavier material in need of more solid support than is offered by the little, black kickstand. Furthermore, as I continue expanding the network beyond the meaning making of the postal workers, actors such as battery technologies, standardized pallet measures and future markets appear to be part of the picture. These are all matters of concern negotiated and

tentatively stabilized in the development of a new electric bike. Despite the immediate material quality, functionality and stability of this new bike, its introduction seems to leave open the no less important question of the proper postal worker to go with this bike of future markets.

The expediency of an old kickstand

According to the interviewees from the Country Team, the kickstand in the photograph is an old version of kickstands within postal distribution. Today it has largely been replaced entirely by a big square metal stander carrying small rubber wheels that stabilizes the bike by lifting up and supporting the whole front wheel of the bike. An entirely different technology which takes the weight and force of the body to push forward the stander by the use of one foot and leg, whereas it is easily released by touching a metal 'handle' with the feet. The purpose of this alternative model is to avoid the bike from losing its balance under the weight of the mail. According to the postal workers interviewed, the kickstand in the photograph cannot carry as much weight as necessary. Although they are experiencing a general decrease in letters, the amount and weight of newspapers and advertising materials is increasing, thereby turning the small black kickstand into an inefficient and risky business. It carries the risk of potential exposure of mail to the wet grounds, the wind, passing cars and not least the physical effort of re-establishing the bike with mail. The following story and dialogue shows what the risk consists of:

- “ P1: I have tried to park my bike up on King Street on those fine wheels. It was good when I left the place. Then I leave for number this or that and when I return...
P2:it is gone!?
P1: ... it had continued out on King Street! The letters were all over King Street in both directions. Then a lady comes up and says, 'Are you all right, are you all right?' 'Yes', I said, 'I am fine'. She asked if she could help and I said, 'Would you help so the letters do not fly away?' They were spread out, lying in a long line. They are ordered according to number, you know. So I had to scrape it all together again, to keep it in a stack. Shit, there were so many letters! And the cars in both sides, they were just waiting, all the mail spread all over. So, that was real fun”.

What is interesting about this story is that it illustrates the importance of bike-stability and the risk the postal workers are exposed to if it fails. But it is also a comment that argues against the new version of the kickstand. The episode occurred despite the new and improved model and 'those fine wheels'. No doubt P1 would rather keep the small kickstand. But why? Basically, it is because it is much easier to use. She can activate the hinge, she explains, even while she is still biking. In that way she is able to keep up the pace. One of her colleagues supports her by adding that the old kickstand makes it possible to get off and on at either side of the bike whereas the new kickstand technology forces the postal worker to stand on the left side of the bike when parking. The left hand side is the only possible position for the foot to activate the 'handle' that forces the big metal stander forward. In short, the old kickstand allows the body of the postal worker to approach the bike and thus the mailboxes along the route in a more flexible manner, allowing them to do the route in a smoother and ultimately faster manner.

The picture of the kickstand equals the pictures of mailboxes, the picture of the trimmed hedge and even the picture of the dog. These snaplogs are also produced in order to display situations in which the body of the postal worker and the tools and materialities of work are harmoniously

concerted. The picture of the mailbox illustrates a good workday due to accessibility. Access can be provided in several ways: by the simple fact that the mailbox has been emptied in advance in order for today's mail to slip easily into the mailbox, by the absence of staircases; or due to the fact that the mailbox is big enough to contain small parcels. If the latter is not the case, this necessitates a series of steps: the writing of a notification slip to the customer; transporting the parcel on bike all the way through the route; and finally on the return to the distribution center, the registration in appropriate forms and the shipping off of the parcel to the local postal office. On the contrary, once the parcel hits the bottom of the mailbox, work is done. Owing to a new law passed in 2011 (Postlov 2010) that demands that every mailbox is placed at the property line of every house and downstairs in each staircase, accessibility has generally increased, putting a definitive end to for instance the climbing of stairs and the corresponding worn out knees. The picture of the trimmed hedge also points to matters of accessibility. As the photographer explains, it enables her to back the delivery van all the way up the long driveway in order for her to reach the mailbox placed on the side of the house, simply by stretching her arm out of the open window. The alternative solution would be to leave the car and walk the distance on foot while carrying the weight of the mail, a rather time consuming and exhausting exercise in the long run. The picture of the dog shows a happy dog. It sits patiently in the courtyard behind the fence licking its mouth awaiting the doggy treat in the pocket of the red uniform. No reason to say what it means when the dog acts differently; when no doggy treat or fences for that matter are able to hold dogs from taking a bite of a postal worker's limbs. Judging by the tons of doggy treat bought by TDP each year, placed in big plastic bins in every distribution center for postal workers to fill their pockets with, dogs are not just a man's best friend but pose a serious health risk. To one of the informants precarious dogs mean that she will simply stay in the car and deliver no mail at all.

When the kickstand allows the postal workers to keep up pace and jump off the bike as they choose; when the mailbox receives happily what it is offered, when the hedge makes way and the dog does not bite, it equals smooth operation and ultimately it means productivity. As such, these pictures make a quite different point than that of the beautiful view. While the view made work invisible, the kickstand and its snaplog siblings bring work practices up front, represented by its various tools and materialities. I will argue that the two kinds of pictures are not necessarily opposed but rather act as each other's prerequisite. The link is that of routine.

What is routine?

“ Well, I guess it is like ‘creatures of routine’ It is probably because you know of everything, you know it all. And when you know it all, it runs easily; smoothly. You can tell exactly when you are done, because you know how it is. It is harder when you are standing there and you do not know it. Then you do not have clue. For instance, I am using a quarter of an hour here. I am staggered by 15 minutes now, you know. Because we are sharing a route and so on. But let alone that, then I have no clue when I am finished. But eh...I just think the best solution is for people to keep to the fixed ways”.

The quote above is from the interview with the well-being coordinator and seem familiar because I presented it in the analysis of the outside. I have chosen a revisit, though, in order to investigate

a little closer the matter of routine. To this particular postal worker routine, as in, 'to keep to the fixed ways', means knowing when to go home. In this sense, and following the analysis of the outside, routine is appreciated because it enables the postal workers to finish work as quickly and with as little effort as possible. Routine tends to co-produce a notion of the postal worker as someone disengaged. The snaplogs of the kickstand, the dog, the hedge, and the mailbox, however, seem to suggest a different version of routine. Routine is not a simple matter and it is undoubtedly more than a mere individual act. As I will show in the following, routine takes on a number of guises in practice, suggesting various possible relations between the postal worker, the work task and the organization at large.

Contested routines: sorting by hand or not

I will use Steven, or rather the act of sorting mail by hand, as an example. Steven has been a postal worker all his life, as his father before him. He has been driving the same route, or at least the same neighborhood, for years and he knows every bend of the road, every address and every person behind every mailbox. He belongs to the group of elder postal workers, who are generally considered hard to manage, since they do whatever suits them. Being a bit of a hardliner, he has a rather bad reputation among his colleagues. I too have felt his initial skepticism as he refused to partake in the snaplog-session, explicitly doubting my intentions. I was properly on an errand for management. But as time passed and he got used to my face and my presence in the team, I managed to get a bit closer. As I am hanging around in the mornings, I notice that he always sorts everything into his shelf including the stacks of presorted mail coming from the sorting machine in Copenhagen. At first I am surprised that no one, especially the team leader, does not comment on this, since pre-sorting small letters into the shelf by hand has not been allowed for more than 10 years. In fact, it has been considered grounds for firing since the presorting of standard mail was delegated to the big sorting machine. When I talk to Steven he explains that special rules have been made for people driving country routes or visiting high storey buildings. Based on tests run in another distribution center, which showed time consumption to be an even draw between the two styles of sorting, exceptions to the rule have been made. In some cases, they are allowed to do the sorting by hand. Steven waves demonstratively the moped key in front of me to indicate that his behavior is completely legitimate (mopeds equal long distance country routes).

In so many words, the question of hand sorting or not is potentially (still) a big issue, a subject of contestation and conflict. It is able to stir the blood of team members and irritate higher-level managers, as well as catch the attention of this researcher. The managers shake their heads and seem partly surprised, as I tell them that, after more than 10 years, it is still a subject of debate 'on the floor'. They too refer to the test results produced some years back that showed that hand sorting has no proven advantage compared to the prescribed method. Hand sorting only matches the sorting machine if one compares with a very experienced postal worker. To newcomers hand sorting is far from the most effective method. The postal workers refer to the same results, but they tend to reach a different conclusion. First of all, they elaborate on all the practical advantages of presorting by hand: When they sort by hand, they can keep together all the different kinds of mail (newspapers, magazines, letters and irregular mail) in one identifiable stack for each address, using the biggest letters to mark the distinction between addresses. Once on route, this prevents them from having to reach for several bags to visit one mailbox: one that contains the machine sorted mail and another the irregular mail sorted by hand. On top of this, there is the issue of the weather. As one postal worker rhetorically asks, "Where do you always get nice weather?" It never rains indoors, whereas outside on a rainy day, every time they

open up the bags in order to search for and grab the mail, raindrops hit the paper and gradually soak the mail. “There might be an important contract among the letters”, a team member adds, suggesting management to be careless with regards to this. If they only have one bag to open, the problem is greatly reduced. Secondly, referring to the question of time, they argue as follows:

- “ I: It has to do with the time, does it not?
P1: Yes, but if you can do it just as fast, right. I mean, I have driven the machine sorted and to me it does not take any longer to sort it into the shelf. It does not take any longer; it is exactly the same. But those who like to sort by hand, they find that it takes much longer to drive it separately. It also depends on the housing area. But when these methods are forced onto you people say: it is just as fast to do it the other way, why can't we just do that?
[...]
P1: It also has to do with – since you mention self-management – the person driving the route on the particular day thinking: ‘it will simply be easier to do it this way, I know it’. If someone then comes up and tells you, ‘you cannot do that, you have to do it the way we tell you to’, self- management is gone. And then you get annoyed that you have to do it. ‘Why do I have to do it when it takes more time?’ “
P2: They tested it in Esbjerg [a city in the western part of Denmark] and it worked over there!
P1: (laughs) Yes”.

When the team members discuss the matter of time, the question of hand sorting or not turns into far more than a practical issue. Or maybe more precisely, far less so. In the quote above, the specific and practical benefits of the hand sorting routine is translated more or less unnoticeably into a matter of principles and predefined interests: Standards or not, routines or not, which side are you on? And this goes both ways. Among managers, the preference for hand sorting is perceived as a symbol of the general resistance against work standards and thus productivity goals; while among postal workers, the rigid do's and don'ts are seen as the perfect example of the general stupidity of standards as well as managers. As a result, work routines have a hard time becoming anything but a subject of negotiation and conflict between managers and postal workers. The official work standards of TDP and the cherished work routines of the postal workers are, however, not necessarily each other's opposite.

Routine as second nature

Returning to Steven, he explains why presorting by hand is absolutely crucial to him: since he knows his route so well, being almost able to do it blindfolded, he needs to be sure that every stack of mail for each address is complete when he commences his route. Otherwise, he assures me, he will miss out on something along the way, unable to tell which of his customers were supposed to have received the newspaper still left in his bag. He points over his shoulder saying, ‘it is all in the spine’. The productiveness of the work routine thus lies in an effect similar to that of the autonomous nervous system: actions are taken as an immediate response to stimuli presented to the body, without the interference of the brain and the consciousness. The finger rapidly redraws from the flame; the foot executes the hinge of the kickstand; the body with bike approaches the correct number of the house and the mailbox; the fingers grab the next stack of mail in line, tacitly

informed by the demarcation of the largest letter; the hand knows how to avoid the sharp edges of the letter flap and the aggressive dog inside. The standards, the tools and the body are all attuned in order to execute one single action: to deliver mail in time. When the postal worker likes the routines, when the routines allow everything to run smoothly, it is not despite of work standards. On the contrary, work standards are the prerequisite of the routines.

Talking to the postal workers, this is nevertheless a difficult link to establish. When I have asked about their relation to standards, I have received few and similar stories: the stories of the standards that simply make no sense, the banning of hand sorting being one of their favorites. Observing postal work, it is nevertheless obvious that numerous standards make up their everyday work. Only they are rarely identified as standards. It is not until the standard breaks down and the attunement of body and standard is challenged that they are noticed and become debatable. The kickstand, the hedge, the mailbox and the dog are thus all pictures of work that runs smoothly, but that also represent a potential difficulty: the old kickstand contains a story of the new and far less expedient model; the mailbox is exemplary, but it also calls attention to the many problematic ones; the driveway is cleared, but might as well impede the approaching car; the dog is happy, but it might bite. They are all pictures of 'smooth operation', and appreciated as such, but their visualization simultaneously depends on their potential break down. In a later group interview, I deliberately wanted to test this connection. After having discussed the hopeless managerial decision on hand sorting, I asked them to define more specifically the characteristics of 'a good standard':



I: What makes a standard good or bad? Can you answer that?

P1: Well, it depends on how you judge it...

P2: ..It depends on what standard it is.

P1: ..what standard it is.

P3: If it is something that you can use, if it is, 'Wauw, this is a damn good standard, we can really use this.' Or otherwise, 'this standard was not any good'".

In short, the answer is: it depends. It depends on what they have to use it for. As pinpointed only a little later by one of the other postal workers: "It is a method for carrying out work, like a tool that has to work all the time. Like when you have some screws, it is no use if you get a screwdriver that is too big, you know!" A standard is judged similar to how a tool is judged; when the screwdriver does not fit the screw, it becomes problematic and hence visible as a standard. On the other hand, when the standard works, when the tool fits the work at hand, it is able to create a harmonious relation between the body and the work task, making the tool slide out of focus, into the back of the head or more precisely, following Steven and the logics of the autonomous nervous system: into the spine. Thus incorporated and routinized, standards are no longer external work prescriptions. They are shifted the body and expressed as competent behavior. For sure, when it comes to productivity, there is an issue of age and decreasing physical stamina, as described in relation to TOR/GIS, but generally it is a fact that new postal workers are slower than older ones. The biggest advantage with respect to pace and productivity is routine. Defined by the work task at hand, routine is the effect of the reciprocal attunement of the body to the standards and the materialities of work, which tend to transform work and work standards from something outside the postal worker into a second nature.

As a complete newcomer to postal work, I serve as a perfect example. When I was asked one morning to help out sorting into the shelf, it would take me minutes to find the right compartment for each letter. In contrast, the experienced postal workers beside me carried out a smooth hand-eye coordination: one look at the address to tell the hand exactly which compartment in the grey shelf to visit, all the while they would be engaged in conversations of all sorts; including giving recorded

interviews to this researcher. The seemingly simple movement proved to include the integration, the incorporation, of a whole range of different information, standards, and skills: the address on the letter; the specific color code of streets matching the colored stickers of each compartment; small round, red stickers telling if a resident has moved; the ability to slide letters or newspapers into the narrow compartments without pushing the mail already sorted further back and out of vision, hence risking to leave them behind when the bags are packed. As I was standing there in front of the shelf with a letter in my hand, asked to do the pretty simple task of matching mail with the proper compartment, all these standards and information would act as obstacles, making my body both slow and ultimately of very little help. To me, the standards comprised in the task of hand sorting were completely unnatural since my body had not yet attuned to their specific materiality and their 'toolness'. I was far from a productive body.

Changing routines – routines of change

So far, the analysis has produced evidence of a rather harmonious relation between the various standards of work, the practices of routine and the organizational goals of productivity. The postal workers' snaplogs even seem to stress that productivity equals well-being. The smooth operation and the swift execution of work that evolves as the standards are incorporated and transformed into unquestionable routines are basically what make a postal worker both productive and satisfied. However, this harmonious state of affairs is challenged. New winds are blowing that represent present market changes as well as the fantasies of future ones. The kickstand in the snaplog is an old standard, whose limitations the postal workers are indeed also aware of. Although easy to use, although capable of creating a flexible and productive body, when confronted with an increasing load of mail, it fails to provide the most essential of all: bike stability. As a consequence, the kickstand and the routines of the postal workers have to change. Below, I follow the rationalities and practical measures taken in the development of a new electric bike. This entails an attempt to outline a stability and routine of postal distribution, while at the same time taking into account the risks and insecurities of future markets. The question is what kind of market the bike affords? What kinds of routines are called for? What kind of productive body? In other words; what kind of future TDP and what kind of postal worker are delineated in the making of the new bike?

(Re)introducing old kickstands and new choices

I was introduced to a developer of equipment and I decided to set up an interview to know more. To begin with, I was a bit disappointed, discovering that she was recently hired and for that reason not involved in the development of the new kickstand. She had acted a part in the re-introduction of the old one, so she explained. This came to me as a bit of a surprise. By the time the snaplogs and the group interviews were conducted, management had deemed the small kickstand out of business due to an increase in mail volume that exceeded the capacity for stability of the small kickstand. The official argument to remove the stander was physical health, since the weight of a falling bike can jeopardize the limbs of the postal workers. According to the developer, however, the employee representatives demanded the small kickstand back, referring to the advantages of its expediency when compared to the metal stander. Their wishes were answered. As the developer explains, the old kickstand was reintroduced, but on a voluntary basis:

“ It [the old kickstand] might not be found on all the bikes. It is up to the individual postal worker whether he wants it or not. Now, it is voluntary, but it was not when I first got here. Back then, they [the postal workers] were not allowed to use the small kickstand”.

As a consequence of this, the postal workers that are accustomed to the old kickstand are once again allowed to use the small kickstand with all its advantages of bodily routines and expediency. But the reintroduction also produces a worry among management. The small kickstand is only able to hold the weight of the bike towards the end of the route when it has been relieved of most of its weight. In other words, it takes more than the kickstand to secure the appropriate stability. This is what makes management worry. The introduction of individual choices of action and the potential risks that go with that:

“ Management is forced to look more closely into the matter, which implies knowing how the kickstand is used, how these persons use it, how they act in their work environment. In order to make sure they do not all of a sudden call and say, ‘I am lying here and I have broken something because the bike tripped over’... or something like that”.

If the postal workers do not act in accordance with the limitations of the kickstand, they expose themselves to the risk of accidents and TDP to extra costs in terms of potential sick leave. ‘You are allowed to use it to a certain extent’, so the official recommendation goes. Quite clearly, a potential lack of control results from the presence of the small kickstand. Who is to define the limit of ‘to a certain extent’ in practice? In an interview that I conducted with the shop steward in North Town, he stressed that, ‘we have learned how to prevent the bike from falling when we park it’. The ‘we’ refers to the experienced postal workers with 25 years of practice. In other words, owing to their extensive experience, they are able to secure stability no matter the amount of mail. Only stormy weather changes that fact. The developer on the other hand, points out that the limit should be drawn by 25 kilos. Any heavier, the small kickstand is not stable. At the distribution center I never witnessed anyone who weighed their bags, though. The scale had been removed because it took up too much space. And even if it had not been removed, it would not have been the solution either. On departure for the route, the bike weighs up to 45 kilos and thus the weight of 25 kilos is reached while driving the route, leaving miles apart the scale to consult and the bike to be weighed. Left to ensure bike stability as well as health and safety measures is but the judgment of the postal worker. Only this is once again about to change.

New measures of bikes and stability

In October 2011, the first electric bikes were launched in Aalborg, a town in northern Jutland, and over the coming years, the electric bike will completely replace the traditional bike. The launch in Aalborg was part of the municipality’s ambitions to ‘go green’ and at the same time it helped demonstrate the environmental ambitions of TDP. As opposed to the alternative of the moped, the electric bike uses no gas, it is far more long lived and easier to repair. Furthermore, current prognosis has it that the new bikes, due to their speed and their ability to carry more mail, will cut short every route by about 20 minutes, hence strengthening overall productivity. Adding to this,

the new bikes will save the postal workers a lot of physical strain since the electric motor helps transport what was previously left with the bodies of the postal workers to handle. For that reason, the labor unions are very positive, only complaining that the bikes were not introduced several years ago. All in all, electric bikes seem to be a good and solid solution for the future. Good for business as well as for the physical well-being of the postal workers. The old kickstand, however, will have to go. When it comes to the issue of bike stability, the electric bikes carry but one possible solution, relieving management of their worries altogether. With the disappearance of the old kickstand, the freedom of choice will (once again) disappear. The developer explains:

“ [...] on the new bikes, you do not have the side-kickstand [i.e. the old kickstand] because we have increased the weight possible to carry on your bike. So for the time being, we do not think that it makes sense to allow for the side-kickstand. At least three quarters of your route will have heavy weight so it will not be worth it getting an alternative kickstand [...]”.

While the old bike would carry 45 kg at the most, the new bike takes up to 60 kg. Furthermore, a small trailer able to carry no less than 45 kg, which sums up to 105 kg all in all, will supplement it. In this game, the choice of the small kickstand will make no sense. The simple cost benefit analysis presented by the developer concludes that to equip all bikes with a choice would be too expensive to outweigh its advantages of expediency. There is only the big metal stander to rely on when it comes to ensuring the stability of the new electric bikes. Although the introduction of electric bikes thus seems rather straightforward, since the bike knows how to combine and stabilize several interests at a time, the developer ensures me it has been a very complicated matter indeed. More actors have been involved; the picture of bike stability is a ‘bigger’ one.

Ensuring “the bigger picture”

Electric bikes might be widespread and accessible to consumers today, but making an electric bike fit the demands of postal distribution is an entirely different case. For one thing, there is the law. Laws that regulate the size of the trailer have been consulted and built in so to say. Likewise, laws that regulate the use of electric bikes have been decisive. In the latter case, TDP has been granted an exemption. On normal electric bikes in the market, the electric part is not allowed to be running unless the pedals are in use. Confronted with steep hills and the weight of 105 kilos or even up to 130 kilos if the second model, the three-wheeler, is used, a new feature has been called for: the ability to use the force from the electric motor while walking the bike. With the dispensation in hand, it is now possible to use the motor capacity to pull the bike up to a speed of 6 km/hr. Another, and even bigger, issue has been to find the appropriate batteries. The developer has been compelled to take on the role as the battery expert of TDP. She has had to get detailed knowledge of the mix of chemicals inside the batteries in order to judge their effect and to cross examine this in relation to the way the batteries are to be used in practice: Are the batteries of such a condition that they can be used for a whole day 300 days a year? Can they be recharged daily no matter if they are only partly discharged? And how to discard them once they are worn? The developer has to take account of the whole product cycle of the batteries. This is part of her training and professional knowledge as a machine engineer:

“ Well, I have the knowledge of material when it comes to what to develop. Do we need to develop a walking cart that can take 35 kilos or are we to develop one that can take 120 kilos, you know. What route to take? How should it look like, how stable should it be? Is it supposed to drive 360 days a year or should it be capable 14 days a year, you know. This is what I might have contributed, to say: well, going down this path will bring us nowhere. We have to choose a different route”.

This professionalized approach to the development of material is actually quite new within TDP; at least when it comes to the material developed to be used by the postal workers. Her predecessor and many other employees at the higher levels of TDP have as their point of departure the knowledge and experience from previous employment as postal workers. “Well, we have many... you have seen for yourself, we have many anniversaries”, the developer states, letting me know that this tends to produce a rather reactionary approach to the challenges at hand. Production demands have changed and that calls for, what is defined by the developer as, “a bigger picture” than what was previously the case. The developer is not the only one to point to this potential conflict. The clash between ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’ is a recurrent controversy. To insiders, there is a general skepticism and distrust towards outsiders simply because of their lack of postal experience, while newcomers for their part take on an almost stubborn attitude, insisting that they see things more clearly compared to the rigid and unfruitful traditionalism set forth by ‘insiders’. When I started up my research project, I met a distribution manager recruited from a big private company. He was clearly experiencing the pressure and skepticism from the insiders and at the same time he was busy presenting exactly this as one of the biggest weaknesses of TDP. The tendency to act like one big, homogenous family should be defined as a sign of ill health, so he suggested. To him, it meant nothing whether he was to manage postal distribution or any other kind of production. ‘Apples or pears – it makes no difference to me’, as he illustratively stated. His brand was that of professionalism, just like the one promoted by the developer. The question is what this might mean, what consequences does ‘professionalism’ have to the decisions made, to the bike and kickstand developed?

The inherent virtues of materiality

In the case of the bike, it means being committed to the inherent qualities of the material at hand: The metal of the kickstand and its abilities to carry weight; the chemicals of the batteries and their endurance over time. Metals, weight, chemicals, time. These are all abstract measures. They are scientific measures and invariable as such. They do not depend on the specific context of use; they do not care if it is a context of postal distribution or any other. It is a matter of physics and chemistry. Returning to the old kickstand and the worries among management in relation to its reintroduction, the developer takes a quite different stance. While she acknowledges individual choice and responsibility to be a *sine qua non* when it comes to any kind of technology whatsoever, it does not affect her role as a developer. Relating specifically to the kickstand-debate, she sums up her position as follows:

“My approach was that, as long as you make sure the material will last, it is up to management and your own responsibility to make sure you use the material appropriately. No one tells you your car will last if you drive it into a wall at 70 km/hour, right. You will have to use the material properly [...] So, one thing is what you can use the material for and what it will stand up to. Another thing is that you yourself contribute to make your work environment as safe as possible”.

In other words, technology does leave room for choice – for instance the choice of driving your car straight into a wall, or using the kickstand on a fully loaded bike with all the risks implied – but it is beyond the responsibility of developers and as such beyond the responsibility of the given standard, the given material. According to the developer, ‘good material’ has to do primarily with knowing and adjusting to its inherent qualities. Can this metal kickstand in fact carry the weight it is supposed to? How long will these wheels be able to last? What does it take to produce a battery that is to be used every day of the year compared to only once in a while? These are her concerns; the qualities of the material itself. Everything besides that, all the possible and impossible human actions surrounding the technology is defined as being outside her sphere of responsibility. This is all up to management and the users, the postal workers, themselves. She leaves the politics, the behaviors of humans, and the specificities of postal work, to other parts of the organization. To be professional is exactly to be able to draw this line. ‘The bigger picture’ which the developer has been recruited to ensure, is thus defined by its ability to enact a focus as narrow and ‘clean’ as possible, unpolluted by the practices of postal workers and the interests of management.

In spite of her professional ideals in the development of the bike, various different actors do play a part in the construction of a good and stable bike. Stable as in being able to stay put when the postal worker leaves the bike and stable in the sense that it can be trusted to run without complications to production. For the developer to create a stable bike it takes a lot more than abstract calculations of weight, time and material qualities. As I have already mentioned, the developer has consulted various laws in order for the bike to be accepted by the authorities. Likewise, battery experts and the experiences of the German post have been included in order to decide on the best choice of batteries. And there are more things and humans to consider: traffic laws, unions, management, health and safety issues, including knowledge on human physiology and the particular work processes, which involve the bikes all the way from the initial loading of the bike until the final bulk of mail has been delivered. In other words, developing a stable bike is by no means a de-contextualized matter. In order to stabilize the bike, very many actors have been involved and translated into the bike’s functionality. In the following, I will zoom in on two of those actors: future markets and the postal workers.

The bike of future markets

“When we started the project, we said that it only involved replacing the bikes that we had and nothing more than that. But as we were working on it, we found out that we had to look ahead. To say: what might be the use of this material. To make sure that we do not merely develop for the purposes of the here and now. It has to work also in, say, 5 years-time, when we have different products or something completely different to distribute or what do I know”.

The new electric bike is good when it comes to carrying a great many kilos, but according to the developer, it is also designed to carry the weight of future markets, so to speak. The question is how to define this market and what its weight might consist of: the weight of what? At the moment, the future market is one of the biggest issues of the organization, lying heavily on the shoulders of top management. Restructuring of departments, leaning management structures, employing efficiency programs to cut administrative costs are but some of their answers to the current pressures (Post Danmark 2011b). The financial results show evidence of a business in continuous decline, both with regard to mail volumes and earnings. It is clear that the existing market is more or less disappearing. People send still fewer letters, digital communication takes over and projecting this general tendency, there will simply be nothing left to distribute, no weight for the bikes to carry.

The practical answer to the general challenge related to the development of new bikes has assumed a very specific form: the transformation from the basic technology of the canvas bags that presently contain the mail to an alternative system of hard plastic boxes. The boxes are placed like the bags: One to go in front of the bike; two at each side of the rear wheel carried by a strong metal construction and finally the supplementary trailer that may contain yet another box. But how is this related to the challenge of future markets?

The decisive difference between the bags and the boxes is the compatibility of the boxes with the measure of euro-pallets. The smallest box in the front measures an eighth of a pallet and the biggest equals a quarter of a pallet. While the black canvas bags are highly suited to carry mail, the boxes are distinguished by their potentially universal use, since pallet-measures are used in most industries. The boxes can thus potentially distribute whatever, as their worth is translated into a universal language employed across businesses and borders. As the developer explains:

“ If you buy a truck today, it is tailored for pallets. That is, you can transport so and so many pallets in your truck. The same goes for our cars for parcels and the smaller vans. Everything is standard measure. Everything is measured by containers, the measures of containers, things like that”.

Recently, and in line with this, TDP has acquired one of the leading national haulage contractors within the market, counting around 600 trucks and 800 employees. This will help strengthen the possibilities of cooperation within the group PostenNord but it will also strengthen the comparative position in the market of logistics (Post Danmark 2011b). In other words, when canvas bags are replaced with plastic boxes measured by pallets, this helps align TDP with the conditions of the market, including the markets of the future. The generalized language of pallets represents not merely a set standard. It contains simultaneously the flexibility of potentiality: the, in principle, endless materialization of goods; be it food, groceries or clothes.

So, the electric bikes and their new box system becomes part of future markets by a standard that corresponds to a universal measure. The next question is: What happens to the postal workers? Two different possible roles are sketched out. Following the developer, the question is whether the future postal worker is simply a human robot or if he should be able ‘to do a lot more’. In the following, I will investigate this current tension by describing in more detail the experimental set-up, its results and the reasoning that surrounds the testing of the electric bikes in practice.

Testing bikes, documenting productivity

Before releasing the bikes in Aalborg they have been tested over a period of two years comparing the productivity of a test team, which drives ordinary bikes, with the productivity levels that follow from the use of electric bikes. The overall purpose has been to produce a valid estimate of the productivity gain from the bikes. The test reports reveal that the productivity has been estimated by a range of measures that mostly have to do with the time spent: Time used on the route, number of deliveries/hour, average speed, and time spent to deliver for depots (DIS/Udvikling 2012d). But also the usability of the bikes depending on various types of routes (countryside versus town) is included, which calls for qualitative inputs such as the experiences of the postal workers (DIS/Udvikling 2012b). Up to this point the developer and her team of co-developers have given the bike all their best, integrating external demands, work flows, future markets etc. into the materialities of the bike. Every possible weakness has been identified and taken into account. Otherwise, the bike would have ended up being unreliable and instable. The postal worker is the last actor and source of information added, before the release of the bike. This is so, simply due to the fact that the bikes are not automated. They do not run unless there is a postal worker present no matter the perfection of the material developed. As such, productivity levels are the measure of the collective efforts of postal worker and bike. In the course of the test, it is obvious however, that the new bike and the postal worker do not always form a productive collective. They rather end up in unproductive fights.

Negotiating bikes and bodies

As part of the testing, the test team has been asked to report their experiences with the new material, writing them down on yellow post it notes day by day. In meetings with the team, the test overseer has asked the team for elaborations including ideas to improve the material. Comments as well as ideas for improvements that have found their way to the test report. A range of pros and cons are listed relating to the various parts of the bike, primarily associated with the various elements of the box system (DIS/Udvikling 2012c: 3). The cons outnumber the pros by far and they include for instance the following comments: The hard plastic material of the boxes tend to hurt the wrists when they grab the mail; the slippery surface of the compartments inside the boxes makes the mail slide; the boxes make a lot of noise when driving; one leg hits the box placed at the rear wheel when walking; the addresses are hard to see because the plastic compartments is vertically constructed. Things like that. Some things can be changed without further ado, while others are rejected. A rubber covering will reduce the noise and maybe also soften the edges of the plastic box. The partition inside the box will be made smaller and there will be more horizontal shelves added to separate mail, and to reduce the space for the mail to slide (Ibid.5-8). When I ask the developer whether the postal workers' feedbacks have produced any surprise, she brings forward the case of the lid. The lid is made of a soft plastic material, in liking with the material for a running jacket: Light, water proof and, not least, flexible. It can be opened from all sides and it can be folded and put away easily without taking up any space. To the postal workers, the lid turns out to be too flexible. "It was almost too good", as the developer puts it. When it comes to the lid, it is important to postal workers that it, besides from keeping the mail safe and dry, can be served with one hand. Because of its soft and flexible material, this is not possible which entails that the postal workers have their work processes slowed down. As a consequence, the lid will be changed.

But it is not necessarily the material that ends up being revised and changed. So do the postal workers. Here and there in the report, which is primarily an internal document for the developers, comments are added in italics. The inputs of the postal workers are reflected indicating whether the developers find that something should be done about it, and if so, what the appropriate action might be. One example concerns the three-wheeler. The postal workers have found the big boxes placed on the front carrier to be too hard to load and unload. They are heavy and releasing the wheels of the boxes from locked to unlocked position is difficult and has to be done by hand. The comment from the developers goes: “remember that the foot must be pressed against the box when it is pushed onto the carrier” (Ibid.:3). In other words, the appropriate action lies not with the developer or in the transformation of the material itself. The necessary change is located in the body of the postal worker. Correspondingly, the developer acknowledges that it may take a certain amount of training on the part of the postal workers to be able to use the new bike. In the quote below she comments on the adjustments going on as part of the testing:

“ Of course there is something about starting up a test. It is never easy because the bike does not look exactly like the other bike. Breaks and cables and so on are differently placed compared the old bike. The postal workers have to get used to working with this new bike. In start-up phases, when we have tested, you will always have small ‘hick-ups’ or whatever you call it, where there has to be a degree of training involved”.

The placement of the breaks and the cables on the new bike is one of the things complained about which is mentioned in the report, but similar to the boxes of the three-wheeler, it does not produce a reaction from the developers. The brakes and the cables will not be changed. Instead, the postal worker has to learn to become the proper body to go with the new cables and brakes. The standards of the new bike require a new body and new work routines to become functional and productive. Compared to the introduction of new material as for instance the batteries, the advantage of the bodily appropriation is that it takes only a few days or at the most a couple of weeks, according to the developer. The batteries on the other hand, have been tested for more than 10 years before they went into a two-year test period within TDP and ultimately qualified for the label: “the best and most solid batteries you can get”. In other words, it seems that the postal workers are in effect considered the most flexible part of the new bike, the ones capable of adapting in order to create in the end the proper functionality, stability and productivity of the new bike. The question is what kind of postal worker it takes to fit the new bike?

The bike of future postal workers

“ I: Developing new material, and we are talking new work routines too, new ways of working. Have you considered that it might end up meaning a whole new postal worker?
D: Yes”.

While a great deal of consideration has been put into the material side of the bike, including its future prospects, it is obvious, when I ask the developer about the role of the postal workers, that this has been offered far less attention. Nevertheless, it has been a recurrent theme in the group of developers, but also a slightly unpleasant one. When I ask the developer to reflect on this, she sketches out the

present dilemma: the human robot on the one side and the postal worker able 'to do more' on the other. Reflecting on 'the human robot' she finds other countries such as Sweden and Australia to be on this path already, referring to the ways in which they frame the demands for future postal workers according to their physical traits and capabilities. If the postal workers are to fit the pallets and weights of future mail distribution, they have to display a certain bodily profile. As of yet, this is not the case in Denmark, but the developer recognizes that it might be the consequences of the present development:

“ D: So, when you ask: what is an employee expected to be able to do today, it will end up being a standard for employees. You have to be able to this and this.
I: Otherwise you do not fit the pallets?
D: Right”.

However, as I visit the official website of TDP, a quite different picture of the postal worker appears from the description of the job as a postal worker and the expectations attached to it. Accompanying the picture of a lone postal worker biking in what seems to be a green field with big blue skies in the background, is the underlining text, “As a postal worker you get a lot of influence, exercise, early days off and you become part of a professional community”. And it continues with the rhetorical question, “Would you like a job that involves big responsibilities and decision latitude in your everyday work? Do you enjoy mornings and are you service minded?”

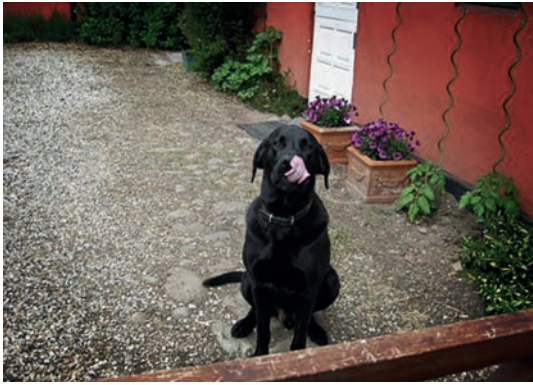
There is not a word to indicate the increasing physical demands imposed on the postal workers or the tendency outlined by the development of new technologies and increased automation that tasks and choices are removed from the job. The official text and picture of postal work is closer to the romantic fantasies of the whistling postal worker of the past than to the present (and future) reality. The weight of the bike and the physical strain has been reduced to 'exercise' and the statement: 'big responsibilities and decision latitude' would certainly benefit from some elaboration and nuances. But talking to the developer, it becomes clear that it fits her ideas of the alternative work role quite well. In the quote below she refers to the discussions within the small group of developers:

“ Some of us think that there will be two different kinds of postal workers. There will be the negative robot character that goes out and delivers. What he gets, is what he does. And then there is the one, who is outgoing in relation to the customers along his route. And I think, well, you cannot simply ignore your customers when you are out. I think you have to help sell your company the name. If you have a question to your postal worker, why do you not receive your mail, or something like that, you do not expect him to say to you: 'you can call this number, and they will tell you why you are not receiving it'. You expect a certain response, that you can in fact get an answer. That way you will also consider him to be a friendly postal worker, instead of the standard reply: (she hits the table with her hand) 'There you go: call this number'”.

The developer stresses that it would serve TDP the best if postal workers were responsive towards customers. Encountering an unfriendly and basically uninformed, unskilled postal worker only produces dissatisfaction among customers jeopardizing the overall image of TDP, so the developer argues. A robot seems a poor business strategy. The problem, so the developer reflects, is that the development of new bikes and the postal workers expected in their wake were never framed as a matter of business strategy:

“ In the course of development of this system [the bike with boxes], we have been lacking a person, who could handle our image. You know, we don't have....We have a design handbook but it manages the size of the logo, where it should be placed, what colors it should have, and things like that. There are no other guidelines for this. Now it [the bike] will be as we have decided. Then they can complain about it”.

Bike development has been organized primarily as a technical matter from the beginning, a matter of material qualities and usability with the purpose of creating stable and productive bikes. The robot, the dissatisfied customer and the bad image of TDP enter the scene as more or less unwanted bi-products, which might be discussed among the developers but which are nevertheless left for alternative parts of the organization to take care of.



Chapter 7:
The Customer



In the picture a smiling, waving person is standing in a garden. A woman, dressed in white colors. She wears a t-shirt and the shining sun makes its white color seem even brighter. In her left hand she holds a long handle and both hands wear gloves of some sort. At her feet in front of her, a piece of brown bare soil stretches out, forming a contrast to all the green. Apparently, she is tending the garden, pausing for a moment to send off the friendly gesture to the photographer passing by. As if they know each other well. The waving woman stands in front of a small cottage with a black roof. White barred windows run from floor to ceiling covering the front of what looks like a summer cottage. The house faces a covered verandah and a green and well-trimmed lawn. There is a set of basket chairs on the terrace nicely placed around a table. No one sits there, the waving person seems to be alone. In the background to the left, almost hidden behind bushes and trees, however, the dark contours of a neighboring house are visible. The place is not remote. Small blooming bushes placed with regular distance in the green lawn expose their white and purple colors. Big green leafed trees are framing the whole scenery. Judging from the garden work, clearly aiming at cultivating the kitchen garden, and knowing the season for blossoming rhododendrons, we must be talking late May, early June.

As opposed to the picture of the rusty bike with a kickstand, it is perhaps more apparent what makes this part of a good workday. Having someone wave at you this friendly and eagerly is bound to make you feel well. But who is this person in the picture? Judging from the picture, the woman is in her late 50's, early 60's and she is probably not obliged to go to work anymore. The time of day, the summer cottage and her age give you this impression. She is probably a pensioner, which gives her the opportunity to tend the garden in the middle of the day and wave at postal workers. People still in the labor market rarely enjoy such activities. A fact which makes an actual meeting between the majority of mailbox owners in Denmark and their postal workers a rare event. Of course there are Saturdays when most people are home for the weekend all the while the postal

workers, according to Danish law, still have to deliver mail. Generally speaking, though, getting waved at as a postal worker is something special, making the woman in the picture a pretty but also a rather rare sight. Although there is still a whole nation of potentially happy addressees covered by the guarantees of universal delivery, they are far more invisible these days compared to the situation only a generation ago. The picture of the waving woman in the garden might thus serve not only as an expression of a good workday, but also as an entry to reflect on the general changes that have taken place in the structures of Danish society and subsequently the changing role and character of its infrastructure. As will become obvious in the following, nice addressees, no matter their increasing invisibility and rarity, still mean a lot to the postal workers and moreover they are becoming increasingly important to TDP in the role of the customer. A customer whose needs are to be met by TDP or alternatively, and this is a rather decisive difference from the past hundreds of years, a different distributor in the market. From a previous status as state bureaucracy enjoying monopoly status, the Danish postal service sector has been liberalized. Due to a range of EU directives implemented since the late 90's, the prime challenge to TDP, and its European counterparts carrying the obligation of universal service, has been to adapt to a situation of full and free market competition. One single market, the mobility of labor, services and communication and not least, the interests of the European citizens have been the argumentative pillars. However, although postal workers, TDP as well as the EU seem to act and organize in the name of the customer, its introduction is not as straight forward as it might seem. The waving customer in the picture above, the customer of the law and the customer of the internal organizing efforts of TDP are not necessarily identical or even compatible. They carry each their own logics, practices and problems. This chapter will illuminate these differences by following the various versions of the customer to demonstrate that even if the image of and the recent rhetoric around the customer seem both important and forceful, the waving customer and the corresponding market to match her satisfied expression is (still) a rather fragile construct in the business of postal service.

The nice people

Turning to the photographer herself who participates in the group interview, I learn that this particular woman is always nice, greeting her as she stops by with the mail:

“ I know what this is. I took the picture. I was driving up the road and then she drops everything and stands there waving. Mail is coming, right. And she is always so nice and waves. So as I drove back, I said: ‘Tell me, could you wave once more, I need a picture of you?’ She always does that when I drive by. She waves and comes over to talk. But they all do that. It is the same when you go by car, they all wave”. (Snaplog Interview, Country Team)

By staging this picture of this particular woman waving, the photographer wanted to make the general statement that the people she visits along her route are usually nice and that this is an important part of her having a good workday. The text supporting this goes, “When happy customers are waving”. As such, the customer is indeed present in the daily work of postal workers. The term customer, however, is not frequently used. During the entire interview with the country-center team, the customers are simply addressed as ‘people’ (Danish: folk), which is reflected in

my choice of headline. The term ‘customer’ seems to be applied primarily when communicating with outsiders such as myself, rather than a term used by the postal workers internally. However, this does not mean that the postal workers are unaware that these ‘people’, the customers as I will continue to term them¹, play a specific part in their daily work; as someone to treat with due diligence and a generally accommodating attitude.

A little later on in my research, I happened to take a ride with the photographer in question. Observing her relations with the people along her route, it was obvious that keeping up a good and cheerful relation was an important part of her delivery. She reflected on this herself defining the job of a postal worker as ‘a service job’. As she visited in part the addresses of private businesses, she would actually meet her customers in person. No matter how brief the single visit, in a few minutes time she was able to chat up several of the people present, whether it was in a carpenter’s workshop cracking corny jokes or in the office of a larger enterprise. I could not help admire her enthusiasm and spirit as she charmed her way through without compromising the demand for speedy delivery. Tailing her from the car and up to the house, I almost had to run to keep up with her. Quite obviously her charm paid off. A secretary looked up at her and then at me saying, “Now you see why I just love my mail carrier?!”

No doubt, this postal worker is not representative for all postal workers. As she pointed out herself, not every postal worker takes such joy in customer contact, not everyone sees it as ‘a service job’. In other words, to her, the difference is defined by individual attitude and flair. Although the personality of the postal worker surely plays a role, there are several important factors defining the possible relation between the customer and the postal worker that go far beyond personality, and even beyond an actual physical encounter. When talking to the postal workers, the impression from my first reading is confirmed: it is becoming still harder to establish the customer relation. The conditions of the relation are changing, posing an apparent paradox: an increasing absence of the ‘real’ customer on the one side, while on the other, an ever growing attention towards the customer within the law, the liberalized market and the internal organizing efforts. Exactly this paradox, will be the point of departure in the analysis to come.

‘A half remark’

“ I: What does it take? Do you even have the time to establish a proper relation if you say hello?

P1: Usually you meet the same people. The relation is build up over some time. At least this is how it has been for me.

[...]

P2: In the beginning, you do not talk that much, but bit by bit they come up and ask you stuff and then you can begin to talk to them.

P3: It is not like you stand there talking to them for 15 minutes, right. It may be just a, ‘Hello, nice weather today’ and then you move on. A half remark on the way. In most cases this is what makes you build a relation to people and know who they are. ‘Today my daughter is coming’, says old Mrs. Hansen. She looks forward to that”.

Following the quote from the Country Team above, it takes time to get to know the customers. It takes quite a lot of time, because the single encounter in itself is only brief. Little pieces of information are given, while further details and the response of the postal worker might have to wait until the following day or even the day after, depending on whether there is any mail to deliver

for the particular address. The verbal exchanges between customers and postal workers consist mostly of courtesies and chit-chats on the variations of weather, or maybe a couple of jesting remarks like, ‘why don’t you come round and clear my driveway as well?’, when someone is busy clearing away snow. No matter how much you define your job as a service job and yourself as an outward person, time plays a decisive role in shaping the customer relations. As coined by one of the other postal workers in the group interview, customers who are eager to chat incite a degree of calculation:

- “ P1: You also want to move on. Knowing how many homes you can make, while you are just exchanging a few words with some people, then it is a lot of time”
I: So, it becomes a bit of cost-benefit analysis while you are talking?
P1: Yes, you tend to rush a bit. I think most of us do”.

Talking to customers equals a potential waste of time. No matter how enjoyable the contact with customers may be, the postal workers have to consider the risk they run by talking. Talking to customers does not occur in the official time frame of TOR, and the postal workers themselves must compensate for the time ‘wasted’ on talking to customers. Appreciating the customer contact, this is, nevertheless, what the postal workers are often willing to do. As this postal worker makes clear:

- “ I: How come you enjoy talking to people? Do you not think, well now I just missed out on 5 addresses?
P: I think it is nice. I simply have to run a bit faster in the places where there is no one outside.”

Choosing to spend the time talking, this postal worker has to make up by running a bit faster in other parts of the route. Another strategy employed, following the Snaplog interview from North Town, would simply be to try to avoid certain customers. In any case, it is an individual time management of very tight margins.

Keeping an eye out

However, it is not only time that they have to consider. Although this postal worker is generally keen to talk to customers, and tries to take her time, simple rules of courtesy are also playing their part. As she states, “People come out, and I can hardly role up the window in their face, you cannot do that”. If a customer insists on talking, it is the responsibility of the postal worker to end the conversation as gently as possible in order not to come across as impolite. While the postal workers might be working under very strict time limits, the same does not go for the customers; especially not the elderly customers living by themselves. To some of these people, the postal worker is their only human contact in the course of a day. And the postal workers are well aware of this. One customer around 80 or 90 years old, so I am told, keeps his daily newspaper simply to make sure that someone will actually stop by and see if he is okay. If he does not pick up his newspaper, it will be a sign of warning to the postal worker. In one incident she did contact the neighbors as she saw the paper was still lying there as she arrived the next day. Luckily it was mere forgetfulness.

Another version of the keen eye of the postal workers is found in the stories about their general watchfulness. That they tend to keep an eye on people’s houses while they are driving their route.

With a certain sense of pride, I am told how they, or at least some of their colleagues, have been drawn into police investigations as witnesses to burglaries or even murders. Driving their route day after day they cannot help to notice if something sticks out, if something seems out of the ordinary. They react when dodgy cars are parked in unusual places and write down their number plates just in case.

These various kinds of 'social service' unofficially attached to the repertoire of postal work, however, are becoming still harder to sustain. This becomes obvious not least in comparison to the stories available among both managers and postal workers referring to 'the good old days': The days when you would find postal workers regularly enjoying coffee and cake or other and stronger liquids in the company of customers. A practice that would take up not just minutes but hours of a workday. One of the distribution managers tells me that previously around payday, the postal workers would generally return in a rather mellow state, since they had been offered a glass of this and that in many of the homes. Another rather telling story was offered me as I visited the office of the area staff. A female employee who had been working as a staff member in TDP for around 40 years, still remembered a rather peculiar phone call that she had had around 25 years ago: an older lady calling to ask what was keeping her mail man. She was eager for him to come, since she was really missing her bread! It turned out that the mail man had fallen ill and was thus not able to deliver the bread that he apparently brought along by default. With the introduction of TOR and the general automation of production, these kinds of customer relations have been pushed completely out of the picture. There is simply no time. An exception to the rule would be the story of Steven still clinging to his personal routine: enjoying his lunch in the kitchen of the local inn. In general though, lunch and liquids (mostly water or coke to keep up blood sugar levels) are consumed on the road and postal workers as well as their customers will have to settle with a distant wave, a smile and a half remark as they pass by.

The disappearance of postman pat?

Another dimension, which has recently been added to the altering of the customer relation, is the fact that all mailboxes should now be placed at the property line. This affects especially the homes that have long driveways. Before the new law, the postal workers were obliged to walk the distance from the drive way all the way up to each house and mailbox, increasing the probability of encountering the customers in person. Moving the mailbox up to an allowed maximum distance from the box to the house of 50 m. (Postlov 2010), it takes the deliberate and physical effort of the customer or the negligence of work standards by the postal worker, to sustain the daily chit-chats. In other words, the law increases the physical distance between customers and postal workers, making the nice customer harder to encounter and the idea of postal work as a service job rather difficult to maintain. As I talk to some of the team members in North Town about this change, I expect them to regret it, since they will no longer be able to talk to the customers and as a result lose an important work value. The well-being coordinator, however, finds it a general relief that they do not have to do the driveways any more while another, unimpressed by the apparent 'betterment', suggests that it will make no difference. The routes will be equally expanded and the apparent relief thus evened out. The overall workload will be the same. I try once again, however, to make them reflect on the change that it will make when it comes to their customer contact. Being a postal worker will become simply less 'cosy', as I put it. The following exchange of words, which I could not help note word by word, resulted from this: The harsh comment from Derick goes, "Cosy?! This is not bloody Morten Korch!". Slightly surprised by his outburst, drawing on yet

another fiction of postal work, which also presents the mailman as the local community helper, I add, “So, there is no Postman Pat anymore?” One of the quite old postal workers who only comes in on a part time basis is also listening in on the conversation. He turns around from his shelf, smiles and notes, “I am still here!” I laugh and notice the modest amusement among his team mates closest by. His name is Pat.

What is rather striking about this small incident, I will argue, is the clarity by which it illustrates the drastic changes of postal work and maybe also the slight bitterness attached to this change. The change from a role as a community helper to the role of a plain wage earner working under conditions corresponding to that of the industrial worker. Highly standardized work, measured by minutes and with a primary focus of getting the job done, rather than caring about its particular content. If work hours are matched by proper salaries, it does not really matter if the time is spent chatting to customers or simply encountering an increased number of mute mailboxes. Following this, the swift delivery of immediately accessible mailboxes finally relieves the postal workers of the cost-benefit analysis of chit-chat. What should be added here, though, is that this tension of Postman Pat on the one side and the industrial worker on the other is played out differently across the different distribution centers. The picture of the waving woman is not coincidentally taken by the team working in the countryside and the harsh comment by Derick is uttered in a more city-like environment. The difference between countryside and city is something which affects the relation between customers and postal workers. It is quite simply a matter of the number of encounters that you have when you drive country and city routes respectively. In the country side, people still work as farmers and are thus at home when the mail arrives. In the city you have the high storey buildings with mailboxes gathered at the ground floor, making it rather unlikely to come across anyone at all when delivering mail. What I have found, though, is that although Postman Pat may be disappearing and more rapidly so in a city environment, the customer is still present in the daily work. Only it is a customer defined by other measures than that of a personal encounter. Cutting across the differences of towns and countryside respectively one finds the customer relation to be mediated by a variety of things. Things such as mailboxes, hedges and letters. These things carry a quite elaborate knowledge about the customer and to the postal worker they serve to distinguish between the nice and the disgruntled variants of the specie, even if they rarely meet the customers face to face.

The signs of an emptied mailbox and a trimmed hedge

The point is that a roomy mailbox or the fact that it is simply regularly emptied forms part of the customer relation. When the hedge is trimmed and the sidewalk has been cleared of snow and ice in order to make way for the postal worker, this is seen as a kind of communication: a caring gesture. Just as the postal worker may show some care in a special attentiveness towards irregularities in the neighborhood, the customers may express their care by trimming their hedge. As I have given color to in the previous chapter, a trimmed hedge is appreciated because it makes work run more smoothly. But it is also appreciated as an inter-relational gesture. As one of the postal workers in the group interview go, “The hedge has been trimmed so that the van may back up without bumping into everything. They are very kind to do that [...] and she has cut it so early that now they have had to cut it again”. The customer trimming her hedge and doing it so early on in the season that she has to repeat the procedure is seen as a personal gesture of consideration. Conversely in the case when one finds the mailbox which cannot close due to the overflow of mail. Besides the extra work involved in having to return mail to the sender, this particular condition of the mailbox is read as a sign of the personal character of the addressee, “he is simply god damn

indifferent”. No matter how many slips of notice written, no matter if they knock on the door to deliver a registered letter, there is no reaction. Next thing you know, the police and the social authorities will be coming around, the team members agree.

A second way to relate to customers is through the mail itself. Accompanying a very experienced postal worker from North Town on his bike route, I learn that when he is to match a letter to an address he does so not merely by reading the address: the name of the person, the street name, number and postal code. He is able to identify the receiver simply by looking at the hand writing of the sender. In other words, if the address for some reason might be incomplete, he is able to fill out the missing links, simply due to his experience: due to the fact that he recognizes the hand writing of the sender or in other instances the specific type of mail. Both point him to the mailbox normally receiving exactly these types of scrawls or this specific type of mail. In the Snaplog interview with the North town Team this kind of mediated customer identity is confirmed, “Sometimes you do not even have to read the letter. You can tell who it is from and then you know exactly who it is for. You know who usually receives these kinds of letters. It actually never fails”. Delivering mail to a house over a longer period of time gives the postal workers a pretty good impression of who lives behind the doors of this house. Despite the standardized character of addresses and postal codes, which ensures the single letter its ‘geographical singularity’ (Postlov 2010), the mail reveals a rather precise picture of the identity of the addressee without ever involving a conversation or a physical encounter. Knowledge of the customers is gained simply by letting letters pass through their hands and under their eyes. Consequently, one of the postal workers reflects that this is exactly why she would not wish to work as a postal worker in her own town, “just think what I would come to know about my neighbors!”, she states. It would simply mean knowing too much.

Despite the general picture given of the pressures currently imposed on the customer relation defined mainly by the time pressure instigated by the strict calculations of TOR, the postal workers still seem to be able to establish some kind of relation to their customers. Even if they do not manage to meet in person, they read other possible signs that give the customer some kind of identity; the type of mail, the character of the mailbox or the general possibilities to gain access. In many cases the customer even gets the upper hand compared to for instance the adherence to work standards. A satisfied customer may legitimize what would officially be deemed ‘cheating’.

Workarounds

As already described, there is a certain workaround when it comes to the timeframe allotted for each customer. When every visit is calculated to last more or less the same, it does not correspond with the particularly talkative customers, thus inviting the postal workers to take adequate measures: redistributing time among customers according to their particular needs while compensating by running a bit faster in some stretches. What I wish to attend to next is not so much the matter of time as the way in which other standards of postal distribution invite a certain degree of workaround. In order to keep customers satisfied, individual flexibility is called for. This is the case in the incident presented below, which occurred during my bike route:

The postal worker and I are driving in an area of terrace houses as a woman approaches me. I am helping out and I have just dumped the allotted mail into her mailbox. She is the owner of two houses placed just beside each other, she explains, and she is not satisfied. The houses still have each their mailbox, which means that she receives some mail twice. I stress that I am only helping out and suggest that she mentions this to the postal worker. As he comes over, it seems as if they

have discussed it before. The problem, apparently, is that the houses are still recorded as separate land registers, which explains why the sorting machine allots automatically a pile of mail for each address. When the address is printed on the mail, they have to deliver it, no matter if the customer wants it or not, he explains. To change it, she will have to call customer service. Listening to their conversation, though, it appears he has actually tried to make up for it himself up till now. Knowing her situation he has kept the one pile in his bag. The problem, so they agree, is when substitutes or this helpful researcher drive the route following blindly the demands of the printed address.

In the TOR/GIS system the customer is inscribed beforehand defined by address, the geographical positioning and the particular housing facility. But this version of the customer does not necessarily mirror the real customer. This leaves the postal worker with a dissatisfied customer and an awkward situation. Nevertheless, he is not able to do anything about it. By bending the rules, however, the postal worker regains his competence and acts as a buffer between the different versions of the customer: The customer inscribed by the machine-imprinted address on the one side and the real customer on the other. And he is not one of a kind. Another example is agreements between individual customers and their postal worker about leaving parcels at the door step. Without filling out the correspondent form that specifies this agreement and thus settles the legal responsibilities of TDP, this is not allowed. Because the postal workers appreciate happy customers, exceptions to the rules are introduced. Similarly, the old lady on the 4th floor receives her mail in hand, although it ought to be put into her mailbox placed downstairs. Knowing the lady to be walking-impaired, the postal worker bends the rules, works around them, in order to meet the needs of the customer. This special service also has an institutionalized answer. The old lady may apply at her local municipality to be granted the extra service referring to her disability, which is then attested by authorized specialists. No matter if the official agreement is in place or not, the postal worker may still choose to walk those extra stairs. Yet another example, which might also be framed as the workarounds of the customer, is related to the so-called QSM letter. On behalf of the independent German Agency 'Quatas GmbH', a small chip registers the flow of the letter through the whole process of clearing, sorting and delivering and serves as the data for estimating the overall quality levels of TDP, i.e. the delivery time. On the floor, a great deal of attention is paid to those QSM-letters and the trained eye of the postal workers have learned how to spot them and they generally notify each other of its presence. In the North Town Team one of the team members has been notified by one of his customers that he has volunteered as a 'chip-letter customer'. He is always very attentive and careful when handling the mail for this particular address, he explains triumphantly. By way of the customer alliance the postal worker is offered the upper hand when it comes to tackling the quality standards, being able to always demonstrate officially his dedication to due delivery and at the same time making his customer happy.

The above negotiations of work standards and customer needs, however, also happen to result in quite different outcomes. Sometimes the postal workers may use the rules and inflexibilities of the system against customers considered to be particularly burdensome. Customers that tend to be generally dissatisfied by the service delivered, only waiting for a reason to file a complaint, may be met by an equally contrary attitude from the postal worker. With a satisfactory grin on her face, the extremely service minded postal worker, whom I tailed, told me that she had recently refused to leave parcels at the door step. Unfortunately, so she told the customer, she was not allowed to. In this case sticking to the rules, refusing to work around them, offers the postal worker an ability to differentiate their level of service facing the nice and the notoriously disgruntled customers respectively.

In so many words, the customer plays a decisive role in the workday of postal workers. It is an important part of having a good workday to keep customers satisfied by delivering good service. Apart from delivering mail in due time, this service consists of building relations with the customers. It means getting to know them and to read from the various things surrounding them

– their houses, their mailboxes, their hedges – how they are doing and whether they can be roughly characterized as friendly or not. As such, the customer relation becomes a quite personalized relation. It involves knowing a lot of, even intimate, details about the customer and it involves doing what they can to compensate when the version of the customer produced by TOR and the sorting machine clashes with the customers that they know of. Across the two teams this personalized relation to customers and the ambition to deliver good service is, however, quite similar. Apparently, it has a distinct collective character and carries a certain name. They call it ‘Professional pride’.

Professional pride

Professional pride is what the team in North Town refers to when they explain how they have worked their asses off over a period of 4 months, doing overtime, dispensing with the normal days off, falling ill because of overwork etc. Confronted with the harsh conditions of winter time with piles of snow and icy sidewalks, the postal workers in North town tried to keep up with their normal service standards although they were in fact understaffed. When I ask why they have kept up with the situation for so long, the answer goes, “professional pride”. Due to the official work time agreement they could have chosen to leave when they had worked full time plus half an hour. But they did not. They chose to stay put, to do the extra hours and get mail out. On the one side, they fiercely defend their officially inscribed rights vis a vis management and on the other side, they are immediately willing to disregard the very same rights when it comes to accommodating the needs of the customer. I experienced a similar expression of pride in work, during a short conversation with Steven. Cited from my observational notes on the floor, it went as follows:

“Do you know what this is?” Steven takes a small white envelope from a compartment in his shelf and turns towards me. I look at the small and rather neutral looking envelope in his hand. I suspect it might be a QSM-letter, with a little chip inside, explaining the contended expression in Stevens face. He spotted it and now he can make sure it will have no negative effects on service levels. But it is not a QSM-letter. I zoom in on the address and read aloud, “Mary Sørensen”. “I know someone by that name” I add, trying to figure out what he wants me to notice. “Never mind”, Steven says and puts the letter back into the shelf. I am not supposed to know about the person. It is confidential. Nevertheless, he lets me know that she is catching a plane for Egypt today and that in the letter is the pin code for her credit card. I notice yet another and similar envelope in the same compartment. It is probably for her husband. They are eager to receive their mail today, Steven suggests. I check with the big clock and note that it is pretty tight. I wonder if Steven will be able to reach their mailbox in time. In a short glimpse, I imagine the uneasy waiting in this particular home; bags all packed and ready to go. Steven has taken up sorting into his shelf. He knows that he is the only one who can deliver the answer to their uneasiness.

What I wish to highlight by these examples, and these are but a few, is the commitment that the postal workers put into their work task, leaving the impression that maybe Postman Pat is not entirely gone. While the single postal worker complies with the various performance goals set by the organization of TDP, while he is satisfying the individual customers, sometimes even by bending the rules, he is not merely doing a good job. He is not merely a good employee. At least, so I will argue, the frame of reference employed to judge this should be expanded beyond the organization proper. When the postal workers are driving their route, they are simultaneously consolidating and upholding a complex network of relations cutting across the societal body. They are acting as a crucial part of national infrastructure and as such they carry the interest of the state in their black canvas bags. Their ‘professional pride’ is not least constituted due to the present and yet highly historical fact that they are serving the crown.

Postal workers by national law

TDP is appointed by law the obligation of universal delivery within the Danish national borders. As stated in the law, TDP is obliged to, " [...] provide a countrywide good quality distribution of addressed mail at reasonable prices and appropriated the needs of the users" (Postlov 2010, § 1). TDP is thus to deliver mail to every citizen in the kingdom of Denmark (not counting Greenland and the Faroe Islands) 6 days a week, no matter their geographical position, no matter how demanding it might be to get through. Rain or shine, as the saying goes. The prices of this delivery must adhere to a countrywide standard and must be executed in the obligatory printing of national stamps, carrying the name 'Danmark'. Additionally, TDP has to run a range of post offices and administer a number of public mailboxes following a measure of geographical proximity in order to make postal service accessible to the general public. Neither prices nor distance may come in the way of the general interest of the law: to secure citizens their right to a decent postal service. The verbal elaboration of one of the snaplogs showing a car on its way through a light green wood embraces the consequences of this obligation quite illustratively. This postal worker starts his route driving about 2 kilometers down a small private pebble road in order to visit a single address. The picture was meant to illustrate the enjoyment of this particular stretch. My reason to bring it up, is to illustrate the consequences of universal service. As I am bumping down a similar road, sitting next to another postal worker of the same team, I cannot help thinking that the general complaints on the price of stamps are unwarranted. Compared to all this effort, 8 DKK seem rather cheap. Buying the stamp, with the possibility to vary the timeframe of delivery according to prize, choosing either A or B service, Danish citizens have the right to use, not only the service of the postal worker and his car or bike, but the whole networked effort of a very fine tuned system set up for one purpose only: to deliver the single letter in time. With the choice of a category A service, this means less than 24 hours. Equally defined by law, one finds a quality measure saying that at a minimum, the postal workers have to deliver 93 percent of the mail correctly. At the TDP homepage the general impression is confirmed that mail is indeed delivered in due time. PDK has even set its own standards a bit higher than the ones defined by law, aiming at 95 % due delivery. So, following from this, the pride invested by the postal workers in delivering mail in time for their customers, is a virtue already inscribed by law, supporting the weighty twin argument of securing citizens' rights and the infrastructure of the nation.

As such, TDP is by no means an ordinary enterprise and correspondingly, postal workers cannot be defined as mere wage earners. Although they are unskilled workers, the postal workers carry some of the characteristics of a profession: they hold the monopoly of universal service delivery, they adhere to a duty of secrecy and specific quality measures defined by the state. Characteristics, which one would normally encounter exclusively within traditional professions or civil servants such as lawyers, doctors and police officers. The most obvious sign of this specific status is the yellow emblem that the postal workers carry on the chest of their distinctive red uniforms: The crown and the postal horn. This symbol has been the trademark of Danish postal service since its establishment by King Christian 4th more than 300 years ago and in the present law it is still mandatory for the given universal service provider to bear. When the postal workers carry the emblem and the uniform, when they do their job servicing their customers, automatically they become part of the state.

The well-being coordinator told me a rather indicative story of the symbolic and yet highly practical importance of the uniform. He was a still young and inexperienced postal worker as he arrived at the gates of The Ministry of Defense. The most closed off area that you can imagine, so he stressed. Nevertheless, as by magic, the big metal gates went wide open as he approached. The simple sign of the red uniform had given him an access that would have been otherwise extremely

hard to attain. On the reverse side, driving a route, helping out, I clearly felt the effects of my own blue coat. The fact that I did not carry the red uniform made me appear suspicious. What was I doing on private property? Whenever I met someone on my way to the mailbox, at that time still placed quite a stretch from the sidewalk, I felt obliged to explain what I was doing: just helping out. I lacked the clear sign of the red uniform, revealing who I was and what I was doing in this place. The uniform, on the contrary, would have immediately justified my presence. Everyone would have known by a single glance that here comes a civil servant, appointed by state and upholding national infrastructure.

The value of a letter

Well, probably most people do not consciously reason like this, but if one returns for a while to the waving customer and the explanation given by the photographer, it becomes obvious how the happy customer does go beyond a personalized encounter, “I know what this is. I took the picture. I was driving up the road and then she drops everything and stands there waving. Mail is coming, right. And she is always so nice and waves [...]”. When the woman in the garden waves at the photographer, the gesture and the smile is not aiming exclusively at the specific postal worker, one could argue. The joy of the customer is due to the fact that mail is coming. The sign of the red uniform in the landscape tells her so. The customer relation is established, as is the joy of the customer, by the fact that the postal worker performs an important task, a duty of the state, which makes sure that relations and communications are sustained, mediated by the mail in the bags. Without their presence, the mail would not reach its destination, the link between the sender and the receiver would fall apart as would, in a larger scale, national infrastructure.

However, the character of this infrastructure is changing which shows quite clearly in the nature of the content in the black canvas bags. Apart from regular letters, one finds an increasing load of advertising matters, so called addressless mail. The addressless mail is a type of mail that does not carry a particular addressee but simply aims at ‘anyone’. As already touched upon in relation to bike stability, while the amount of letters have been drastically declining by 9 and 10 percent per year in 2009 and 2010 respectively (Post Danmark 2011), the share of addressless mail are on the increase. The question is how this change affects the customer relation? What it means to the sense of professional pride and the general appreciation by the customers of the service provided? On the floor, while sorting, Pat reflects that sending an old fashioned letter has a certain value. If you send a written invitation for your birthday, it communicates a degree of sincerity that does not an e-mail does not contain, so he argues. As I am interviewing the Production Coordinator (PC) of the same team, I ask him to comment on this:

- “ I: I talked to Pat about the letter, the value of a letter compared to advertising matters and stuff like that. Does it make a difference?
PC: To us?
I: Yes, to you, but maybe also to the receiver?
PC: Those who receive it always say that it is a load of rubbish. But they probably read it anyhow, I reckon [laughs].
I: The advertising matters?
PC: Yes.”

What the production coordinator seems to suggest is that customers generally consider the advertising matters as a product of low quality, a product they do not really care to receive. “There is more value in delivering a letter”, so the production coordinator confirms. As opposed to the addressless mail, the letter is a unique product. If it disappears, there will be no immediate equivalent in store. Admittedly, the offers of the week also have a certain timeframe attached to them, but nevertheless they are a mass product, that will not change no matter which mailbox it hits. It might create a certain degree of dissatisfaction if it overlooks the sticker on the mailbox proclaiming ‘advertising matters, no thanks’, but apart from this, there is no differentiation needed. A traditional letter, on the contrary, stays a valuable product only if it is actually read by the addressee. It is defined by its uniqueness. Based on a survey among 1000 Danes, a catchy campaign is currently run by TDP (Post Danmark 2012b) stressing exactly the specific qualities of the letter. As they put it:

“ The letter has a hundred years of history as a credible and earnest means of communication. The personal letter is still able to establish new ties and expand existing relations” (Post Danmark 2012b)”.

Comparing letters with e-mail, E-boks, E-banking and SMS, the overall conclusion from a recent survey is that 50 percent of the Danes prefer to receive their information (counting pay-checks, insurance papers, bills, advertising etc.) by letter, whereas only 24 percent all in all prefer e-mail (Post Danmark 2012a). An information which is important not least to companies who wish to reach their customers effectively and at the same appear ‘exclusive’, ‘sincere’, ‘personal’, even ‘trendy’, as it is argued (Post Danmark 2012b). This particular profile of the letter, however, depends not least on its increasing rarity and in the sorting office, the specific effect of its increasing trendy-ness does not appear particularly attractive. The alternative of the advertising matters filling up the canvas bags pose an organizational as well as a physical challenge to the postal workers. And yet there seems to be no alternative.

‘A product like any other’

I have come across several stories about the unpleasant and dull work processes posed by the advertising matters. Only recently, the postal workers have been relieved the time and work effort of manual sorting. As many other work processes, this has been automated, only the difficulties have not disappeared. From an observational note, I will try to illustrate how the advertising matters still come across as ‘misfits’ in the otherwise very smooth production system of TDP.

I follow my informant to a small shed outside the main building. Inside, four postal workers have gathered around a big metal cage, containing bundled pieces of advertising matters. It is a cold morning and we are breathing white clouds. One of the postal workers is leaning over the edge of the cage. Reading the printed piece of paper attached to each bundle, she tries to find the right bundles for her route. But they have been thrown in haphazardly and the paper is not immediately visible. She has to put in quite an effort to turn around the 10 kilo bundles. I notice her bent back and the tension in her arms as she lifts and turns one bundle after the other. I wonder if this is normal procedure. While she is searching and struggling to find her way through the stack, some of the other postal workers approach the cage from a different angle. When anyone of them comes

across a bundle belonging to some of their colleagues, they shout out the number of the route, and lift it up for them to receive it. It takes quite some time and comes across as a rather hard-favored affair. The toiling and tugging, hanging heads down on the edge of the cage, are miles apart from the prescribed and exemplary working positions of the lifting body in the picture that is laminated and exposed on the noticeboard inside. And it is far from the feel of smooth operation enjoyed by the postal workers.

This might not be the general procedure accounting for every distribution center. Some might have organized it better, differently. Nevertheless, it is indicative of the effect of the advertising matters. The Manager of Development (MD) tells me that a recurrent suggestion for improvement posed by the postal workers concerns precisely the organizing of advertising matters. They want to change the unhandy bundling and the corresponding need to re-bundle in order for them to fit the bags. While it is appreciated as a good suggestion, it is nevertheless deemed unrealistic. It will cost too much for the external provider to change the technology of his sorting machine, leaving the postal workers to deal with the inconvenience. Returning to the interview with the Production Coordinator, however, it seems the postal workers are in fact learning to live with this inconvenience. Quite pragmatically, he suggests that he and his colleagues have learned to accept the change in mail types. Without the unhandy bundles, they would simply be out of a job:

“ I think people have realized that it is a product like any other. Whether it is a letter or a parcel or an advertising matter, it is paid for just the same. I do not think that people are as sick off them as they used to be”.

Facing a dramatic decline in letters to deliver an increasing amount of advertising matters has quite simply been the strategy that has managed to keep TDP in business and the postal workers in their jobs. Following from this, up till now the reduction in number of employees of 10 % from 2009 till 2010, has been realized primarily by natural turnover (Post Danmark 2011:18). But it does seem to pose a challenge to the previous work content as well as to the possible relation that the postal workers are able to establish to their work as well as to their customers. It seems the pride in delivering a unique letter is gradually being replaced by a principle of simple survival. Mirroring the cynicism displayed by some of the team members in North Town, the pride and ethics of Postman Pat has to make way for a more pragmatic logic: As long as one works 7 hours and 24 minutes and gets paid accordingly, it is of less importance what is in the bags. At least the postal workers have to learn to appreciate the fact that advertising matters are indeed ‘a product like any other’.

However, talking about ‘products’ and ‘survival’ does not seem to fit the rationality inscribed by the red uniform and ultimately by national law. TDP still acts the part as national Universal Service Provider. What I will be showing in the following, is how the apparent shifts in customer relations, products and what would seem an altered configuration of professional pride can be appreciated only when adding a further nuance to the picture, namely: the liberalized European postal market.

Adhering to law, creating a market

As mentioned above, it is not a new story that TDP is closely related to and regulated by the state. Even the international regulation of postal services has quite a long history related to the establishment of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) in 1874 that still has the objective to improve

the efficient operation of the postal service worldwide². The newness of present regulation is due to the fact that the obligation of TDP to provide universal service, counting from the deadline of 31st of December 2010, is being executed within a fully liberalized European postal market. Following the common European ambition of a single market to increase trade and the mobility of goods, labor and information across nations, the European countries have been gradually liberalizing their national postal services. And it is quite an important market too; both financially and judged from the people employed within the sector. According to the latest survey of the sector, the turnover of the European postal services sums up to 70,2 billion Euros counting a workforce of no less than 1,62 million people (Copenhagen Economics 2010: 21). Starting with the directive of 1997 (Directive 97/67/EF) and followed by the additional directive of 2002 (Directive 2002/39/EF), the latest directive of 2008 (Directive 2008/6/EF) finally framed a fully liberalized European postal market, removing the remaining rights to operate with an area of reserved services³. The full liberalization, so the official intentions go, will better the cross-European trade and overall economy. But just as importantly: it is believed to benefit the European citizens (European Commission 2002). Following the rationality of classic economic theory, the European laws basically support a free market of full competition between a wider range of service providers, believing it to result in better and cheaper services for all European citizens. Or should I say 'users' or even 'consumers'? Reading the various legislative documents, in the quest for 'meaningful competition' (Danish: 'ægte konkurrence') (European Commission 2008: 8) the citizens of Europe have had their identities redefined or at least supplemented by either the identity as users or consumers. One might say that without users and consumers there would be no 'meaningful competition', no market. In general, what is rather striking when one reads the surveys, the European Commission-reports and the EU directives, is how much effort it takes to create this free and real market. Reading the accounts of the current status of the market, it comes across as surprisingly irregular and even intractable. At least the opening of the market has not as of yet produced the level of competition expected. As expressed in the latest detailed overview of the current market situation, "The actual level of competition today appears to be below what could theoretically be possible under the current market opening" (Copenhagen Economics 2010: 80). The market is generally pictured as the natural state of affairs, governed by a set of predefined 'laws'. Had it not been for all sorts of anomalies treated and analyzed in the various reports, such as incidents of subsidizing, discrimination, rebates, licenses etc. (Ibid), seemingly, there would be no problems. Nevertheless, these various anomalies are currently constraining the natural functioning of the market, necessitating that a strict eye is kept on the state of affairs, to monitor, to measure, to evaluate and possibly sanction when the rules of the free market are violated or the service quality is below the standards set by law.

The European courts, the member states and the customers

Several actors are involved. The European Commission, the European courts, the national authorities and various specialists are called upon to act their role, in the process summoning a whole array of activities such as accusations, court-cases, evaluations, quality levels, measurements, methods-development, reporting etc. Following the recommendations of the Copenhagen Economics-report, the Commission is suggested to act far more offensively in order to, "[...] establish clearer case law at the European courts" (Copenhagen Economics 2010: 16). Bit by bit, so the argument goes, these competition cases and their various outcomes will help define the do's and don'ts of the market, thus drawing the legal lines of a European postal market in the making⁴. In

a recent case from the Danish Grand Chamber TDP received a preliminary ruling stating that they did in fact not

Besides the EC and the court rooms, a decisive actor of this new market is the close supervision and regulation by the member states. This is a stance found both in the Commission report (European Commission 2008: 5-6) as well as in the latest report mapping the developments in the European postal market (Copenhagen Economics 2010). In the latter the recommendation on state regulation goes as follows:

“ We recommend that all countries prioritize a strong and independent NRA⁵, not least in light of the current process of updating national postal laws to transpose the Third Postal Directive – as well as to comply with the ensuing duties regarding the monitoring of developments in the sector” (Copenhagen Economics 2010: 15).

The market of real competition has to be regulated and tended a bit like a kitchen garden for it to grow and prosper; to even exist. And apparently the nation states are defined as decisive and effective ‘gardeners’. The strong authority of the state, according to the quote, should help to transpose EU law into national law, but just as importantly, they have to make sure that the market of postal services is kept adequately transparent and monitored in order for it to be compared, evaluated and regulated. Inscribed by law, member states are thus obliged to report regularly to the EC on current quality levels and not least to keep track of and ensure visibility as to the precise costs of the universal delivery services. According to the EC report, the current accounting standards are still very varied and inconsistent making it difficult to compare the detailed values and expenses of each operator (European Commission 2008: 6).

Last but not least, there is the issue of the customers. They too have to be looked after, even invented. This may seem a rather funny stance, given the banal fact of the waving customer. She does indeed exist and as I have just presented in great detail above, she plays an important role in the workday of the postal workers. However, the reason for claiming that the customer is being ‘invented’ is that the waving customer may not be the right customer to go with the market in question. If she is simply happy with the service she is currently receiving, if she has no further needs, this will potentially pose a problem as to the creation of a free market. If there are no needs for the free market to fulfill, then what are the reasons for competition and further product differentiation? As an appendix to the aforementioned Copenhagen economics-report, one finds a case study on ‘the willingness to pay’, demonstrating quite well the fragile character of the European postal consumer (Copenhagen Economics 2010: 232). Asking for customers preferences, the researchers have put up various future scenarios of possible service levels counting: the closeness to a post office, number of delivery days and whether bulk mail is included in the Universal Service Obligation (USO). They argue for their choice of methodology as follows:

“ The reason for choosing stated preference techniques for the case study is that we want to measure a price for a product that does not exist on the market: We cannot observe how consumers react to a postal business that brings out mail only three days a week. Therefore we need to ask the respondents” (Op.cit).

In other words, they try to delineate the possible customer to match the possible market of the future. If no customer wishes to pay for a given service, for instance a betterment compared to the current 5 day-minimum set by EU law, there would be no reason for the operators to try to compete in this area, to fulfill this need. Correspondingly, if the customers are willing to pay quite a significant amount to prevent local post offices to close and move to bigger cities, this is equally important, strategic information to the operators. In case of the private customers, the survey covers only Austria and as is discussed widely in the report, all sorts of methodological weaknesses may be identified in the study (ibid.:234). However, this is not my point. The far most interesting is the way in which this survey and surveys similar to it (see also RAND Europe 2011) are currently trying to identify the appropriate measures and methods to identify and evaluate the needs of the customers. Measures and methods which, so I will argue, do not merely represent the customers' identities and needs. In their experimental nature these reports significantly shape the identities and needs of the future customers. Furthermore and equally decisive, by adding value to the service provided surveys like this help create the crucial link between the customer needs and the market. Rather than simply asking for the preference for 5 or 6 days of delivery, the survey creates an explicit connection between the service provided and individual needs by the mediation of a price. As it is framed:

“ We do not wish to ask consumers directly if they prefer three, five or six days of delivery because they would generally prefer six days a week. Therefore we need to establish the relation between price and delivery” (Ibid:232).

Creating this relation is the true innovation since this is a link, which has not previously been established. Coming from a role as citizen and receiver of a universal service, previously it had no point to reflect on the price of postal delivery. In Denmark, where there is a standard of delivery interval of 6 days which is above EU-levels and a generally excellent service level of around 95 % due delivery, it comes across as rather irrelevant to wonder about alternative solutions and more competition. However, in order to create a market, this is a link that has to be established and the first step is currently being taken by reports like this. Setting up 'hypothetical scenarios' they help create the future market and the customer needs to go with it.

Turning stones: Organizing transparency and 'cost objects'

Equally important for the market to come into being are the various measures of internal re-organization taken by the national postal distributors themselves. As evaluated by the Commission, this is a process already set on track by most postal operators:

“ Driven by gradual market opening as provided for by the Postal Directive and the challenge of competition, incumbent postal operators continued during the reporting period to modernize their operations and to undertake major restructuring efforts to increase efficiency. Postal operators are increasingly moving towards a market-driven and customer-oriented provision of postal services” (European Commission 2008: 8).

Diving back into TDP, they follow quite unequivocally the general tendency as identified by the Commission: Major changes in the organizational structure have been undertaken in order to respond to the challenges of the opening of the market and the introduction of the customer. Departing from the structures of a traditional bureaucracy, various organizing modes and business models normally employed in the private sector have been adopted. This counts an increased departmentalization in distinct business units with separate management and budget responsibility and not least a general competitive attitude between and within each of the departments, making the various postal areas, for instance, compete for recognition and resources. When it comes to management concepts, Total Quality Management and the Business Excellence model were introduced in 1998 and implemented under the working title of, Total Involvement in Quality (Danish: Total Involvering i Kvalitet) and only a little later, around year 2000, this was supplemented by the principles of Lean Management. Both concepts are presented as organizing principles that have as their point of departure the role and commitment of the employees combined with an elaborate effort to connect all work practices and every part of the production process to the demands for quality products set forward by the customer. A third and recent event, which has fuelled the market and customer oriented restructuring of TDP, is the fusion with the Swedes in 2011, forming a joint Nordic enterprise with the name of Posten Norden A/B owned by the Swedish state (60 %) and the Danish state (40%). The latter especially has initiated a process of ‘turning every stone’, as expressed by the distribution manager, whom I interviewed in the country-side center. He was clearly busy. Apart from him acting as an internal assessor in the Business excellence model, his teachings as part of the current revival of TQM among the postal workers and additionally his participation in a management education program, the recent introduction of the principles of ABC-analysis (Activity Based Costing), had showed to be fairly demanding. The principle of ABC analysis is to be able to put a price tag on every activity of TDP, in order to determine the actual cost of the end service or product, so he explained. Symptomatically, in the terminology of ABC-theory the delivery provided by the distribution center and the postal workers can be defined as ‘A cost object’. Along these lines and issued from ‘above’ a recent and specific task for the distribution manager has been to report on the economy of every car: when it starts in the morning, when it is parked for the night, how much gas it uses, how many kilometers it runs in a day etc. And similarly, he explains, he has been asked to re-evaluate whether the bonus of certain employees mirror the tasks that they perform. If the bonus does not correspond to the value of the job done, or if the job is not done at all, the bonus will be removed. The Distribution Manager reflects:

“ We are in full competition at the moment and this is why we have to focus on everything! I have to focus on the bonuses. If they do not...well, then I will have to remove the bonus, if they do not live up to it 100 %. To save money. Okay, he doesn't: zip – gone! And this one: gone! It is not official. It is like that. You are simply turning all the stones you can at the moment”

The quest for visibility and explicitness to every activity and process in order to define its specific cost and value respectively, thus matches precisely the general framework of the European law and market: to be able to set the price of the universal services and thus determine as accurately and fairly as possible the bill to be paid by local government and ultimately the tax payers for the universal service delivery. If tasks or activities are not worth it: zip goes the money. Ultimately, the universal service will no longer serve to distort ‘real competition’ by favoring the old national operators. Introducing the logics of the market is not merely a lesson taught to higher management

or reserved to the tasks of distribution managers. The basic framework and mindset is presented also to the individual postal worker who is supposed to take account of the market and the customer in his everyday activities.

Delivering what the customer wants

One example is the new initiative launched in the Distribution area of my focus. They call it, Spot a Customer and it is presented to the postal workers one morning in North Town by the eager project manager as a matter of 'becoming the eyes and ears of TDP'. While driving their routes the postal workers are encouraged to be aware if competitors are servicing customers that TDP might take ownership of, or if current customers have 'logistic challenges' that TDP could answer to. In any case the postal workers are asked to call up a specific number and if the tip results in a new customer or extra sales (after being taken up by the sales department) the effort is rewarded by fruit baskets or gift vouchers or even a cash bonus if large scale sale is involved.

A different and less locally embedded example of the introduction of the customer to the organization of postal work is the Lean program. The intention of Lean is precisely to establish the preconditions of the employee's commitment to continuous improvements; to find ways of eliminating the waste of everyday work processes. 'Work smarter not harder', so the catchy slogan goes, promoted by small posters hanging in the hallways of North Town. Kaizen, Gemba, Value Stream Mapping, post it notes, the kaizen board, stand-up meetings. The vocabulary as well as the tools of the originally Japanese production system is by now a rather integrated part of the local practice in the distribution centers. The stand-up meeting is an obligatory part of every team leader's daily tasks and the well-being and production coordinators are expected to back it up, being educated to run the meetings themselves. More importantly and linking it directly to the efforts of marketization: the customer is the guiding principle of all of these activities. It is the customer who defines what is smart, what should be improved, what should even be produced in the first place. Following the logics of the market, if there is no need for a product then there will be no willingness to pay for it, and thus no sustainable business. As I participate in a course for the coordinators, we are presented with a film, which spells out this unquestionable guiding principle of the customer:

A guy receives a call from a friend and they agree for him to come over. The main character then starts making coffee and we witness him in every step of the process: as he takes the coffee pot from the coffee machine, as he approaches the sink, lets the water run for a while, fills the pot, pours the water into the machine, finds the coffee tin in a cupboard, measures the correct amount of coffee, how some of the coffee misses its target and ends up on the kitchen table. We watch as he turns on the machine, as he goes to the sink to find a cloth, dries up the wasted coffee, takes out mugs from the cupboard and finally how he opens the door to his friend, who is invited over for a cup. And then we witness the final peak: the friend as he turns down the offer, asking instead for a cup of tea. While watching, quite a few of the coordinators in the room comment on what happens, spotting the various incidents of waste. The running water, the distances between the objects producing superfluous steps, the spilling of the coffee and the subsequent wiping and finally of course the disastrous result: that the friend did not want the coffee after all. They laugh. The whole production process including its result has been futile.

It is a message as clear as crystal. Furthermore, it corresponds quite well to the working logics of the postal workers. As extensively treated in the previous chapter, the postal workers generally

appreciate when work runs smoothly and effectively; when the work tools and work tasks are finely adjusted, when time and resources are not wasted. In this sense, the postal workers are already extremely Lean-minded, allowing for the obvious logics of the film on coffee making to be readily transferable to postal delivery. However, it is not quite as simple as that.

Learning to Lean

As part of the Lean-course introduced above, the participants are asked to do a fictive Value Stream Mapping (VSM): to analyze a specific workflow. In the Japanese vocabulary this is defined as 'going to Gemba', to describe the status of current affairs i.e. 'As is'. This is the precondition that makes it possible to detect the instances of waste and eventually to reorganize the workflow in a more efficient manner, designing the production process for the future i.e. 'To be'. Divided into smaller groups, they are handed a bunch of variously colored post-it notes and placed in front of a big empty white sheet of paper hanging on the wall. The various activities and actors and the time frame are written on the notes and placed in succession to indicate the workflow step by step: Two postal workers on an early shift handle the sorting of small parcels. They start work at 6 am, the truck with mail coming from the sorting central arrives at 6.12; they receive 590 parcels in two metal cages and transport them from the parking lot into the center. Then they do the first sorting by teams followed by a second and more detailed sorting for each route. Each sorting takes 25 minutes. They do a bit of tidying up before they take a 10 minutes break to smoke and lastly they approach their own shelf to concentrate on their route. 7.45, 35 minutes after they have finished, each team member collects the parcels to fit their route, using 4 minutes each. The 'waste' is rather easy to detect and everyone in the group is eager to demonstrate that they see it. The smoking break is one of the first elements that they unhesitatingly cut off: 2x10 minutes. Then there is the waiting for the truck, the two sorting processes leaps to the eye and finally the time slip from the two men finish until their teammates are in need of their effort. Clearly a lot can be done to lean the process. In the end quite a lot of time and money are saved. Even so, the MD is not quite satisfied. Apparently the group's use of the post-it notes does not unfold as prescribed. The information on time consumption and the number of men involved, the so called facts, should have been written on separate and differently colored notes, to be placed underneath the actual work activities. The smoking break, so the MD adds, he would not even consider part of the work process. It belongs instead to the fact-category. There is a lot to learn. In the group, a bit of the initial steam seems to have come off. Lean, it seems, is not just about improving local work processes. It involves the mastery of a new language and a range of specific methods, all serving to create a certain view on things. According to the MD, Lean should be characterized first and foremost a new way of thinking rather than a set of tools.

'Get in the helicopter' – and what do you see?

Taking the story of inefficient coffee making in his own home as his point of departure, which matches nearly too well the film shown to the course participants, the MD propose Lean to be about deploying a certain kind of vision:

“ Then one day I said to my wife: why is it that the coffee tin is placed over here? And she said that she really could not say. It had probably just ended up in that spot when we moved in. And, of course, we moved it over here and rearranged it. Basically you can spend years without noticing things like that. Not until you get in the helicopter and get a bird's eye view on things and say: Now I want to focus”.

It is a vision about seeing everything from above, creating the perfect overview. The question is, however, what one sees from up there? Or rather what should come into vision? Following my observations of the course, a whole range of stand-up meetings in North Town and listening to the explanations of the MD, this overview turns out to be a rather contested issue. What they should be seeing, according to the MD, is more than their shelves, their daily practices. If they keep on fronting the shelves and their daily tasks, they will become what he calls: ‘workshop-blind’. In this sense, it is not simply a matter of overlooking the relation between the coffee machine and the coffee tin in the restructuring efforts of a small kitchen, taking this to be analogous to the daily workflows of the single team. Taking the customer as the point of departure, so the DM suggests, the postal workers have to initiate a ‘reversed thinking’, back tracking the various steps in the production process in order to align them to the needs of the customer. As such, the ideal overview, the ideal ‘whole’ that one is to see from the helicopter, is a picture imagined to represent the whole organization of TDP.

As the example from the VSM-rehearsal should indicate, the specific visual identity of this ‘whole’ in question is by no means a simple matter. It takes certain competencies, additional training and, according to the DM, it is generally very hard for the postal workers to assume. The postal workers will often come up with suggestions for improvements that are ‘silly’, so the DM suggests, exemplifying as follows: they suggest that the truck with mail should arrive 15 minutes earlier. Although this would seem to make sense to the practices in the center, in the bigger picture, it would put an immense pressure on the overall logistics as the sorting central is to cover not just one but all the distribution centers in the area within a very short time frame. It is common sense, as the DM suggests. Lean is common sense. However, it seems the senses of the postal workers stemming from their immediate work experiences have a hard time forming part of ‘the whole picture’. At least it takes a certain displacement of their view for it to work out. They have to leave their shelves, they have to get out on the floor, to establish a certain distance in order to be able to reflect rather than simply act. They have to reflect the facts of production presented on the Lean Board. They have to reflect the general story of decline in letters and subsequent job insecurity. In short they have to reflect the logics of the market. Getting in the helicopter, producing an overview takes a postal worker that knows about work in a different way. At some point in the Lean-brush up course one of the clearly skeptical participants, whom I recognize as the Shop Steward in North Town, asks who decides where Gemba is? What he indirectly suggests is that there may be several versions of the current state of affairs. That the vision of the ‘whole’ enacted when participating in a VSM or a Lean board meeting is not necessarily the same as the one enacted by the postal workers in their everyday work.

Different versions of customers: senders and receivers

Besides from the general controversy of defining ‘the whole’, an equally central controversy exists when it comes to the notion of the customer. Talking to the MD as well as the person responsible

for Lean in DIS headquarters, I learn that officially TDP operates with two customers: the sender and the receiver. Following Lean thinking, though, it is the sender who attracts prime attention since he or she is the one who pays. The degree of potential waste or value for that matter should always be judged in relation to the willingness of the customer to pay. Quite obviously, when following the postal workers, the customer is pictured first and foremost in the role of the receiver, the people they meet and service along the route. According to the MD, this is the source of a current schism, as the following interview excerpt will illustrate:

“ I: If you see the customer as the one you visit in order to deliver mail, then what may be the downside to this? You could argue that it is in the interest of the paying customer that the receiving customer is happy, that is: receives the letter.

MD: Well, in principle there are not that many downsides. That way of thinking works rather well. The downside may be attitude-wise. And this goes for a lot of the old postal workers. They are very keen to service their customers.

I: hmm.

MD: And we have had this debate: well, this is not servicing, this is to deliver service beyond reason [Danish: over-servicering]. You are giving the customers something which they have not paid for”.

Although the MD generally finds the service provided by the postal workers to be in line with Lean principles, he points to the danger of delivering too much. Too much compared to the price paid that is. When the postal worker, as described above, chooses to take those extra stairs in order to deliver the mail in the hands of the walking-impaired lady on the 4th floor, according to Lean this is not good service but ‘over-service’. Using the happy smile on the face of the waving customer does not count as the official sign of good quality service of TDP. The MD and the person responsible for Lean in the central HR department do recognize that there might be an issue of image when it comes to the measure of a smile. As they both reason: most receivers will become senders at some point, and in a state of market competition the good service of a postal worker might just make the receiver choose the services of TDP over its competitors. In this sense the difference seems possible to bridge. At least when both sender and receiver are conceptualized within the framework of the market: as a customer of needs and the capacity to choose. Notwithstanding the attempts to even out the difference between the sender and the receiver, it is not a difference to be simply overcome by the means of Lean or any other kind of internal organizational effort or strategy. It is a paradox pointing well beyond the organization, as it is already a standing conflict instigated by law between ‘customers’ individual needs’ and ‘citizens’ universal rights’, respectively.

Citizen or customer?

At the same time as the EU legislation aims to create a free market it also inscribes the interests of the citizen defined by the claim to universal delivery (Directive 97/67/EC § 11). As stated by the European Commission: “postal services provide along social benefits which cannot be quantified in economic terms” (European Commission 2008: 3) The market should not be of a nature that will end up discriminating certain parts of the population due to their geographical position and equally the services will have to meet a certain set of quality measures irrespective of the economic muscle of each and every citizen. The law is framed to create a socially balanced outcome of the market liberalization and it does so by defining its citizen by the generalizing measure of universality. On

the other hand, and as described above, one finds in the law an equal interest in meeting what is defined as the particular 'needs' of the citizens, renaming them in this process as users/consumers. This spurs the interest of the service providers, including TDP, to uncover those needs and as a response to their variability, to adapt the services provided. Taking the inscription of the individualized user as the point of departure, this is a process that produces still more flexible and differentiated services. The 24-7 postbox service is one such example. On the TDP website this service is presented to provide exactly a flexibility defined by a range of choices and possibilities hitherto unheard of. As a registered user you may decide which box facility in the country you wish to use and once the parcel arrives (a text message will announce this), you can choose to collect the parcel whenever you see fit. Furthermore, from case to case, you can decide whether it should rather be delivered to your address and then change it back again for the next delivery. It is all up to you! And it is quite sensible too, when one thinks of all the trouble generally posed by the fact that people are not at home when the parcel is delivered. In those cases the parcel is returned to the post office and collected by the customer anyhow and for no reason a lot of resources (i.e. delivery) have been put into the product. All in all the invention of postboxes seems to be a win-win situation. At least if one is able to play the role of this particular 'you'/user. The user has to be physically capable and additionally invest the resources necessary to come to the box facility: the time, the means of transportation and the expenses to go with this. And if one wants the parcel at the door step, the order has to be re-defined by self-service using the internet. Flexibility and choice comes only at a certain price and effort. This goes as well for the users that stick to the old ways and their universal rights. When the universal services become increasingly rare as still fewer people tend make use of them, such as parcels delivered directly at the door, inevitably the prices will rise. This is the logic of supply and demand and this is the argument of the Director of communication in his newly established blog, as he tries to explain to disgruntled customers why the prices of mail delivery keep on rising. In a market of transparency it is of crucial importance that the price paid actually reflects the actual costs of production, so he adds.

However, a full blown customized postal service also takes a very important ingredient: citizens aware of their new role as customers. Compared to the urgency of the market agenda in TDP and at EU level, the consciousness of the customers as customers is still frail. As treated above, the market opening in the EU has not created the expected competition. This may be explained by the comparative advantage in technologies, material and infrastructure displayed by the former nationalized providers, but it also points to the fact that the customers still choose the regular national providers. Or rather, and this is at the heart of the matter: they are probably not even choosing. A recent phone call for the Distribution Manager in North Town illustrates this quite well: A very agitated man had called him up explaining that the postal worker had driven on his lawn with a moped leaving wide and deep muddy tracks in what was previously a perfect green carpet. The distribution manager asks the man to check the letter. At first the manager does not succeed in making himself heard. The angry man goes on and on about how he is very disappointed with the postal worker and TDP as such. In the end, however, the manager succeeds in establishing the fact that the printed emblem with the horn and the crown is missing from the letter. It is a letter delivered by someone else, a different distributor. An apology is due. The point is, so the manager reflects, that a lot of people still consider mail delivery to be state service. They have not yet realized that TDP is now operating in a market counting also other players. Similar to the hardships posed to the statisticians on EU level, as they are trying to measure and forecast the 'willingness to pay' among European customers using a range of imaginary scenarios, the proclaimed customer of TDP also seems to be a rather imaginary and frail construct. Quite obviously the man on the phone had not yet considered the fact that in the course of the day several mail distributors are visiting his mailbox. He basically still considered himself a citizen of universal postal delivery.



Chapter 8:
The Cake



This is a close up picture of a cake on a white table, which could be a kitchen table, judging from the rims of a sink barely visible to the left hand side, and a breadboard visible to the other. The cake is halfway eaten. Obviously, someone has already delighted in the sweet taste of the caramelized coco-topping combined with the simple egg, sugar, flour kind of base. Judging from the size of the missing cake piece, there have been more than one enjoying the pleasure. I know the cake to be a so-called 'dream-cake' and a real classic. It is not extravagant, just a plain homemade cake. In addition, it is obviously a cake that has been transported. In the picture, and as an extra feature of the roasting pan containing the cake, a see-through plastic lid with grey handles can be seen; highly practical. It has been pushed aside in order to cut the cake, but it is still in the picture. Fastened onto the lid is a yellow note with some scribbles, not readable to the camera. Probably it is a little message to the cake-eaters, which stresses that the donator is not present to enjoy a piece for him/herself. In other words, the cake has arrived on the table as a gift and friendly gesture towards the photographer and his/her cake-eating companions. The witnessing camera, it seems, wants to document not just the cake but exactly this gesture.

It is a phenomenon known from many work settings; the obligatory almost ritual sharing of cake. In my own work place, the cake is always introduced on Fridays, creating a quite particular atmosphere among my colleagues. A little extra something to mark that we share not just the cake but also the fate of being part of the same work place. The cake is duly commented and the donator complimented, especially if it is homemade or features a certain extravaganza such as toppings of berries or whipped cream. The latter demonstrating the extra time and resources invested to make the colleagues happy. The only written rules surrounding the cake is the cake list hanging on the whiteboard displaying who is the next in line. It reminds us all: if one eats, then one also has to bake. One bakes to please the colleagues, but also in order to deserve something

in return. It brings an order of reciprocity to the community. An example of classic gift economy sustaining the order of the community.

In postal work it is no different. Exchanging cake is also part of the simple confirmation: we belong together. In the country team they have taken no less than 3 pictures of various cakes. Conversely, in the team of North Town no cakes have been framed, but as part of another snaplog one finds the printed cake list hanging on the side of a grey shelf. Considering the cake list it does nothing more than simple planning; it matches the task of cake-baking with particular persons and dates within a certain time interval. To the team members of North Town, however, it seems to act as more than a simple planning tool. During my first visit to the distribution center, the team members point to the cake list in order to explain how well they are doing in their team. And equally so, the list seems to have caught the interest of local management. The list is appreciated because it has been established on the team's own initiative, without the involvement of management. In other words, one finds a common line of reasoning across managers and postal workers that cakes and not least self-managed cake-lists are signs of a well-functioning team. A socially well-functioning team. What I will be investigating in the following are the differences present when it comes to this apparent similarity. While both team members and managers put a great deal of emphasis on the role of the social, it is nevertheless as if the cake, including the cake list, belongs to two different networks displaying quite different logics. A difference which is not least visible in the often futile attempts of the managers on both local and area level to access and manage the particular sociality of the team. The realm of the social is mostly sealed off; by explicit opposition, by silence or simply by the effects of the formal work organization itself. The social is something which the postal workers would want for themselves. Managers are not on the cake list. Nevertheless, there are also signs of displacement in this general set-up. It is as if it is becoming still harder to make the sociality of the team, including the cake, serve its traditional purpose: to demarcate the difference between workers and managers. The helpfulness and the mutual care among team members is time and again destabilized by the formal set-up of the self-sustained team as well as by unforeseen work pressures and time-management structures that paradoxically operate by a principle of individual performance. So, while the cake generally serves to confirm the solidarity between team members constituted by their antagonistic relation to management, it is but one part of the picture. The following analysis will illuminate what happens when the social is mobilized by the team, by local management as well as by HR-initiatives aiming to increase well-being.

The tone of a good team

As mentioned in the method section, I was admitted access to teams that were both considered well-functioning teams. I was eager to find out how the postal workers would frame this themselves; what they believed to be important in order to be characterized 'a good team'. Across the two teams the inter-personal relations is stressed as crucial and in addition to pictures of cakes, several snaplogs have been produced showing the team or some of its individual members to tell this story. In the country team they characterize a good team as follows:

- “ I: What makes this a good team?
P1: That we get on with each other.
P2: I think so, too.
P1: ...and that we talk a lot. We spoof each other and say things”
(Snaplog interview, Country Team).

In a good team, communication is smooth, people like each other and quite importantly, there is laughter and joy. The tone is, so they suggest, not always ‘fitted for the drawing room’. In the country team they point out that it takes some accommodation as a newcomer:

- “ P1: A lot of us have been around for several years now. Martin is probably the last to arrive. Otherwise, we have not had any new people for the last 2-3 years.
P2: And he is getting the hang of the tone.
P1: yes, he is learning”.

Becoming a true member of the team implies mastering a certain tone, a certain way of communicating. You should not be too sensitive. I recognize the description from my time spent in North Town. Apart from the fact that talking often equals shouting, because of the noisy environment, the things said often have a teasing tone and a fairly straight forward vocabulary. When reading interview transcriptions, it becomes obvious that I too tried to pick up on the tone. All of a sudden I was swearing a lot. Not deliberately, but simply because I somehow sensed that this was the way to talk in order to become accepted.

The cake of a good team

I might as well have tried to bake a cake, since this is obviously another way to belong. But since I was not on the cake list it was not really an option. Spending my time in the sorting office on a Friday morning, I was nevertheless invited to share the cake with the team members; a cake that had been awaited all week. From the fair amount of talk concerning the cake – stressing once again the fact that they organized the cake list completely by themselves and discussing for instance whether the next on the list would deliver a homemade variant or if he would simply go to the nearest petrol station – I was quite astonished as I discovered how the actual sharing of the cake went off. The cake was simply placed on a small separate table and the team members would go and grab a piece for themselves and then go on with their work. The cake did not institute a brake, no one sat down to have a longer chat, nothing out of the ordinary seemed to happen. Comments on the cake were however announced while working. Although it was not homemade, most of the team members seemed satisfied. Some policing went on as to how many pieces each of the members would eat. I noticed that one of the youngsters ate at least 4 pieces. When I commented on this another team member added that the energy was probably needed, since the youngster would usually keep a very high pace all through his route. When the team left for the route there was still some cake left. Everyone seemed to have had their fair share.

In comparison, the Country Team does not have a cake list, but apparently homemade cake occurs quite regularly. They use colleagues as guinea pigs for cake-experiments, so they jokingly suggest. In relation to the specific photograph of the cake, the story goes as follows: One of the colleagues, Ingrid, has just turned 50 and for her birthday the team sent her flowers. As an expression of gratitude, she baked the dream-cake and added the yellow thank-you note. It is added that Ingrid's husband used to work in the team but that he is now in a different center. Talking to the Country Team, I generally get the impression of a quite homely atmosphere; that they might see each other in private, but that is not the case. Apart from spontaneous Friday barbecues, their knowledge of each other and the friendly atmosphere stems from the fact that they have worked together for a long time and that they are part of a comparatively small distribution center, they add. It has not always been like that. The identity as ‘a

good team' is a fairly new achievement. Before, they were many more people, and some of them both had a generally negative attitude and were the types who think they know better:

“ P2: And that is not fun at all, when people are negative all the time, no matter what. It affects everybody.

P1: No matter what you said to them, everything was negative.

P3: It was because, you know, they wanted to be in charge and then they did in fact think they knew better. They wanted to be fully in charge of their work day.

P1: To their own advantage!”.

The former team members characterized by their negative attitude have been 'removed' and together with the relatively new team leader, the country team has managed to become a good team: A team dominated by egalitarian principles where everyone may have their say and no one dominates the agenda at the expense of others. What I consider particularly important to notice is the very last comment in the above quote. It indicates that the general bad vibrations of negativity stemming from the former colleagues are not simply disapproved of because of the negative atmosphere created. It was also unbearable since it made it impossible for the team to ensure a fair coordination of work between them.

An ethics of helpfulness

In North Town a specific snaplog picture and the subsequent dialogue stresses exactly that a friendly tone is part and parcel of the mutual exchange of help and ultimately of getting work done. The picture in question foregrounds an elder male colleague and carries the title, The grand old man. From the title, I expect it has something to do with the person's age, but that is not the case. 'The grand old man' in the picture is framed because he is always helpful, so the team members agree. I have chosen to cite at length below, since the passage shows how helpfulness is considered to be closely intertwined with work itself and furthermore since it illustrates quite vividly the tone and atmosphere of the team:

“ I: You claim it is a good day because 'Peety' (the nickname of the team member in focus) is helpful. Do you stress this because the others are not?

P1: No, that is not really why.

P2: Maybe it is because I am not at work!

P3: When some of us are not around, then it is really on wheels (laughter).

P1: No, we are usually quite helpful to each other.

P3: ...we are having a real good time in our team!

I: What does it mean to be helpful – what is it that you can help each other with?

P3: To tidy up all the time. To take care that there is order around yourself and the team.

That letters go to the municipality and to the (p.o.) boxes. To collect leftover letters from the other teams and make sure they are distributed to the respective tables.

Common obligations like that. A lot of people are involved and help out.

P1: It does not look as if they talk much...we have a very friendly atmosphere in the morning. I really enjoy it. I will gladly go to work every morning when Martin is there. You bet it is going...

P4: Only you do not get to say much!

P1: ...but we are really amused by Peter's animal sounds (general laughter)”.

Not only does the citation show quite clearly the cheerful tone characteristic of the team. It also shows that the cheerful attitude and the commitment between team members are not merely based in having fun. Sharing the fun means as well sharing the common obligations of the team such as keeping the sorting office tidy or taking care that misplaced letters find their right shelf in the team. It seems one cannot have the one without the other. Another example of this connection between 'the social' and work is found in another snaplog picture from the team framed by the text, "Busy on a Saturday morning". I am curious to know why they would choose to frame busyness as part of a good workday and again the social relations pop up:

- “ I: How is a busy Saturday morning related to a good workday?
P1: It has nothing to do with being busy. It has to do with the set-up. If you look at the picture they are all steady people. There is some ping-pong. There is a lot of ping-pong. They are having fun that is for sure.
I: so this is why it can be fun to be busy or what?
P1: Yes, then it works. Then it does not matter if there is a lot to do. If there is this ping-pong. Am I right?
P2: Absolutely agreed!”.

A good workday may be busy, but if the team members are only light and cheerful and the people steady, meaning that they can be counted on to do their part, then busyness is not necessarily negative. In a good team people help each other out, have fun and as a result of this get things done. Another little incident to illustrate the mutuality of work and sociality: One morning in the sorting office, I notice how the private thermo flask hidden in a small plastic bag in Steven's shelf, is taken out and a cup is discretely served to his team mate, Pat, standing just next to him. Coffee is shared, but nothing is said. I cannot help to ask why Pat deserved this particular gesture from Steven, who is generally not regarded as the friendly type. 'He does something for me and I do something in return', Steven straight forwardly replies. In so many words, a good team is one that works by logic of reciprocity enacted in a compatibility of sociality and work. Or as quite beautifully put by the well-being coordinator, "This is an ethics that we share, we help each other out if there is something extraordinary that has come up" (Group Interview, North Town).

A good team and its antagonist

In North Town particularly, the mutual exchange of help and support characterizing a good team, and this seems to be quite crucial, is executed in line with the logics of the cake-list: preferably without the involvement of management. With ill-concealed pride in his voice, one of the team members characterizes the North Town team by the following lines, "An atomic bomb may go off, but in our team, more or less, we will get things done". Another team member adds that unfortunately this seems to be disregarded by management. Only rarely do they in fact notice how the team successfully manages the daily coordination themselves. When describing a period in time now a few years back, the preferred role of the team leader is presented as follows:

“ P1: It has changed because at one point we had the liberty to solve the workday the way we saw fit. And it turned out that we managed this without problems. But of course it was freedom with responsibility. We helped each other out. There were not many who went home having done overtime.

P2: No.

P1: Things were on the roll.

I: Where are we time-wise?

P1: This is two years ago.

P3: Well, yes one and a half.

P1: One and a half will be my guess. And then...a fine period where everything went smoothly. The team leader (TL) just had to do what we told him and if there were some things that we could not handle in the team as for instance applying for permission to establish a depot, you would ask the TL to do it. Small things like that. We do not have the authority to do that. The task of the TL was simply to follow up on these issues that we had. And otherwise just keep an eye on us and nurse us a bit. And they were told so as soon as they arrived in the sorting office, they were replaced pretty often, they were told that, ‘in this place you are not supposed to do anything but what we tell you to’ (laughter). By the way we did...well, is it wrong?

P4: That is how we see it. It is not said out loud, but that is how we see it”.

What is suggested is more or less that the primary role of the team leader is to keep away from the daily work practices of the team. No interference is needed, since the team knows exactly what it takes and moreover, they manage within the preset timeframe, so they stress. True or not, the comment surely serves to support a certain team-spirit and identity: a community of competent and steady members confronted with an organizational set-up that cannot really be trusted. While the leaders may come and go, the team members are always there to take care of things. It is only if there are issues that go beyond the authority of the team that the leader comes in handy. As such, the team has a quite clear-cut idea as to what kinds of issues belong to their side of the fence and what does not. If the team leader knows how to respect this, there will be no problems.

At the time of the snaplog interview the team is apparently quite frustrated. The present distribution manager is characterized by having the general attitude, ‘trust is fine, control is better’, as summed up by one of the team members. The effect of this is that the team is instructed how to execute their work right down to the last detail, “If you are told which hand to grab the toilet paper with then...honestly it is so awful. It is so degrading!” he passionately continues. As I ask if this has to do with the introduction of a range of new standards, they decline. It has to do with the distribution manager and his attitude. Before, there would be room for individual ways; a certain flexibility in the execution of work. With the new distribution manager, the individual variations have become a cause of dismissal.

Old lines of conflict and worker rights

Clearly, the above adds to what has already been treated at length in the preceding chapters: The collision between generic work standards implemented ‘from above’ and the local knowledges and practices of individual postal workers and teams. In North Town this tension is readily translated into a matter of a dictatorial distribution manager and a general wish for team leaders to keep their

distance. In other words, the centrally defined work standards and, one might add, the identity of the team, are generally understood within a framework of labor conflict. Although the team members do recognize that the standards are not the invention of their local managers, they nevertheless hold them responsible if they prove to be inefficient or simply silly. As pointed out by the shop steward, this is an ancient story, which he identifies as a general climate of mistrust:

“ Shop Steward: Many of the problems over the years stem from...well, mistrust: ‘Now they will no doubt’, ‘what is this good for?’, ‘What will they do now?’ and ‘what are they going to use this for, is it a way to get to us?’ And it is the same thing the other way around. It is so hard. There is not much room for negotiation...

I: Right. This is old or what?

Shop steward: It is real old. It stems from the time when the unions were strong. Back then it was... Well, you can tell from the agreements that we have as ‘specials’¹, they do not exist anywhere else. Basically. They [the union] were real strong. They could really lead them a merry dance, because they could simply say, ‘we are civil servants, you cannot do anything’. And they [management] fell for that somehow”.

According to the shop steward, the Union of the then publicly run TDP has historically been characterized by a great deal of power and strength. A strength that is mirrored not least in the favorable agreement of 1996 when the civil servants were converted into the so-called ‘specials’ in order for TDP to be registered as a private company Ltd. It might be that the employees lost their statutory right to life-long employment as civil servants, but according to the shop steward, it was an agreement that more or less mirrored the terms of the civil servant. If ‘the specials’ are fired, for instance, they are entitled to no less than 3 years pay and once they reach the age of pension, the right to a considerable sum awaits them. Considering the latter, when looking into the annual account of TDP, 17 mio. DKK are currently tied-up for this purpose (30 mio. DKK in 2009), while no less than 686 mio. DKK have been paid out in 2010 already. Additional 134 mio. DKK are tied-up for seniority bonus (Post Danmark 2011). As I was accompanying the experienced postal worker of around 50 years of age on his bike route, he told me how exactly the promising pension had made him stick to TDP and give up the recurrent dream of returning to his original trade as a toolmaker. He figured he would not find a job with similar benefits.

In the everyday affairs of management, the elaborate rights of the employees manifest themselves in a variety of ways. In the interview with the distribution manager of North Town he complains for instance about the recurring meetings (once every fortnight) in the local work council, the main work council and the safety committee, which he finds to be more of an empty gesture that takes up everybody’s precious time. In addition comes the task of work scheduling, which takes quite an effort in order to stick to the agreement. Work schedules have to be announced at least 6 weeks ahead and if changes are made, for instance in cases of less work than planned, this has to be communicated at the latest on the 26th in the previous month. If it is not, TDP is obliged to pay the postal workers by the overtime tariff. Similar principles count in the day-to-day management handled by the team leaders or rather by a variety of forms. In cases where the postal workers have asked for a half day off, in order to be able to attend a private birthday party for instance, a signature from the postal worker is needed confirming that he or she has in fact agreed not to work. If the signature is not obtained and manually registered in the SAP-system, TDP will be obliged to compensate the postal worker. A different form takes care of the incidents where postal workers have not registered on their portable phones when they finished work. Again,

the local team leader needs a personal signature as a confirmation that the missing work end time is but an error. Otherwise it will be registered as overtime and paid for by TDP. These are but some of the examples indicating that quite often the burden of proof lies with TDP, not to mention the effort of local management to keep track of work schedules, possible past or future deviations of time and work load and the many forms to document the character of these deviations, everything to be sure that the rights of the employees are properly adhered to.

The current line of conflict between management and employees as well as the sense of team-spirit, including the homemade cake, are constituted and become so effective as the result of a particular context and history in which the union has played a decisive part and the postal worker as a worker of rights serves an emblematic figure. With the introduction of self-sustained teams, however, the quite different set-up makes it increasingly difficult to understand and act within the organization if one sticks solely to the old lines of conflict. This counts both postal workers and managers. In the following I will investigate the official ideas and intentions surrounding the self-sustained teams as well as the both central and local initiatives on creativity and top-performance that act to support the management of the team. This will send me into the woods as well as on a one-day course for postal workers. Also, I will spend some more time with the local team leaders. Like any middle manager, the expectations, tasks and on-going challenges of the team leader serves a rather exemplary case when it comes to the overall tensions of the organization. In TDP they already have a word for this: manager of production versus manager of humans, and in many respects this will also serve a quite suitable theme for the following.

Self-sustained teams

In line with TDP's engagement with the Business Excellence Model, the self-sustained teams have been part of the organization since 1998, addressing especially the ambition to manage and develop the potential of the human resources. In the official manual from 2007, the team organization receives the following introduction:

“ The Self-sustained team (SST) is a basic principle of organization in TDP. Team organization builds on the conviction that the best results are created through motivated and committed employees who engage in the challenges of TDP, and that results are best created when pulling together. Employees who are acknowledged and respected as independent and competent individuals can and will take on the responsibility to reach common goals” (DIS/HR 2007: 5).

The team organization aims to embrace the individual postal worker's commitment and skills and at the same time it aims at achieving better results as in a more productive and competitive organization. When combining this with the official story (from the homepage), where the introduction of team structure is presented as a way for TDP to tackle the fierce labor conflicts dominating the organization during the 80's and early 90's, the teams may be seen as a gesture towards the employees, offering them more autonomy in the daily organization of work. A gesture, also considered to make the job more attractive both to present postal workers and to potential applicants, so the argument goes. The dissatisfaction of the team members in North Town and the argument that they are left with practically no self-management, may be directed at this avowed aim.

They are disappointed not to have been offered the autonomy rightly belonging to the team's *raison d'être*. However, the self-sustained teams have not been invented in order for the employees to be autonomous, but rather to strengthen the link between individual performance and organizational goals.

Organizational alignment

In the manual of 2007, which is a revision of the previous version, the primary goal seems to be to clarify the organizational role of the team. More precisely: to clarify how the tasks and performance goals of the self-sustained teams may be aligned with that of the business unit. The manual thus elaborates on the performance profiles of the business unit, the local managers and the team, respectively, indicating how the results and development of one profile overlap and affect the performance of the other (Self-sustained teams 2007: 11). Inspired by the business excellence model, each profile covers 4 aspects according to which everyone has to perform: 1) Tasks 2) Goal Management 3) Cooperation and 4) Results. With regard to the postal workers, the task aspect covers all the basic tasks of being a postal worker: sorting mail, delivering mail, maintaining route lists, servicing p.o.boxes etc. Additionally, there is a range of tasks defined as 'administration/coordination', which addresses the various activities within the team clearly related to Lean principles. This counts the daily planning of production, including the planning of holidays, it counts having a structure for meetings, the obligation to participate in ongoing improvements, keeping the facts of production on the Lean board up-to-date, and keeping the sorting office tidy at all times. But it also addresses for instance the introduction of new team members and the importance of everyone in the team knowing about the values of TDP. 'Goal Management' stresses the team's 'business sense' and their ability within this framework to understand and get involved in the processes that will lead to the fulfillment of their goals. 'Cooperation' aims at the ability to establish and adhere to certain meeting structures as devices for the team's decision making. In this lies as well attentiveness towards the general well-being of team members. Finally, 'Results' refers to the team's ability to deliver within the set framework of budgets and to perform according to the various service goals for letters and parcels respectively.

The team profile is primarily defined as a management tool for evaluating the team according to each category. This is done on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the best possible result. Looking for instance at the profile of North Town, they are categorized in the top end in nearly every category, which amounts to a 'green' profile. There are but a few yellow fields indicating that there are still some improvements to be made in the particular area. One of those yellow fields reads as follows:

“ Goals and a status on these are followed up on the teams own initiative. The team makes plans to handle possible variations from the goals. The team understands the connection between the performance of the team, the business unit and the overall performance of the company” (Team Profile 2009).

Rather than a self-sustained team characterized by its autonomy, the manual depicts the team as one who knows how to act not merely in correspondence with its own goals but in accordance with the goals and overall situation of TDP. The question is how they are supposed to achieve this desired alignment?

Mobilizing the social

A lot seems to depend on the cooperative aspects of work and a different postal worker to go with it. The Manager of Development has put this rather clearly:

“ I usually say: you receive your pay check. With this pay check, I have bought not just your legs and arms, I have also bought your head. When you come here, you also have to think. You have to take part in the community. You have to take part in the self-sustained teams. We work in teams, you know. Someone might prefer to bail out and say. ‘I am not interested. I just want to deliver mail’. That does not work. That is not what you are bought to do. You have been bought to participate in a community in order to deliver the best possible to our customers, to the best possible price. It is the whole mindset that includes asking, ‘why are you here? If you are only here for your own benefit, then you should not be here. Then you have to find someplace else’”.

Postal workers of today should not simply fulfill a specific task, but also actively engage themselves in the community of the team, simply because it makes better results. From the official manual it is clarified that, “The self-sustained team requires the employee to be committed and involved in the development and improvement of the team’s ways of creating results”. In order to specify what this means it continues, “[...] it is expected that all employees actively participate in team meetings or similar and express their attitudes, meanings and ideas, which may help improve the cooperation achieving the team’s goals” (DIS/HR 2007:16). In line with this, the team leader in North town stresses that the path to become self-sustained does not depend on the postal workers’ ability to take care of predefined tasks. According to her, what characterizes a self-sustained team is:

“ [...] The way they handle things internally, their behavior. All sorts of things. If you only discuss whether this person drives this parcel up to this point...self management to me is about being attentive towards the colleague who sits in the corner feeling down and who may need some support or rest in his daily work or something like that. You take that kind of responsibility. You do not just take on the work tasks; you take on the social aspects that we [the team leaders] normally take into account. And that is a matter of experience. It is about cooperation and dialogue. That is part of it. Otherwise you cannot claim to be self-managed”.

To be self-managed, according to the team leader, goes beyond the mere work task and addresses the ways in which the team communicates amongst them and not least whether they are able to take care of each other. To spot when someone is ‘feeling down’ and could need a little extra help. The ‘mature’ team knows how to take responsibility of these ‘social aspects’. Her account makes it almost impossible to differentiate between the attentiveness towards the sociality of the team and the sociality as it is described as appreciated by the postal workers. As shown above, the postal workers appreciate the team organization, since it offers them the pleasure of chats and jokes as well as a practical support in their daily work. And they also stress that the team is no grab-bag. In many respects, the postal workers thus share the understanding of the Manager of Development, who believes the team organization to have acted an antidote towards an otherwise dominating

individualism among the postal workers. The well-being coordinator in North Town suggests that the team structure has finally got the better of what he terms an: ‘I-culture’ previously dominating TDP, while the shop steward indicates that before the team structure, more postal workers were left to their own devices. Considering the official goal of organizational alignment, however, the social obligation of the postal workers is mobilized by management in manners which seem to point well beyond the logics of mutual helpfulness between team members. Although it comes across as rather unspecified what it means when the manual requires team members to, ‘be committed’ to ‘actively participate’, to ‘express attitudes, meanings and ideas’ and ‘to improve corporation’, these activities are framed in a quite specific way. This is where the market re-enters the scene.

Understanding markets and establishing ‘cultures of improvement’

From an interview with the distribution manager and team leader in the Country Center, the problem, apparently, seems to be that the postal workers have an inadequate mind-set. They do not understand that TDP is now operating according to market conditions. I will be citing at length below to show the two different positions that the distribution manager and his co-manager, the local team leader, draw up, staging as they speak an imaginary dialogue between the viewpoints of the postal workers on the one side and the managers on the other. The red color marks that the postal workers being ‘quoted’, the blue represents the arguments of management, while the black serves to ‘set the scene’:

- “ DM: The employees do not understand that we have to make a profit.
 TL: No.
 DM: ‘But we are owned by the state!’ You cannot explain it to them. Some of our leaders even cannot seem to get it; that we have to earn a big profit.
 TL: No.
 DM: ‘Now listen, it does not really mean anything’. ‘Yes! We are in a situation of competition!’ All the stuff about the old État...’We have to deliver goals and economic results in order to survive in the long run’. ‘But, we have always been here!’
 TL: They are not interested.
 DM: ‘We have always been here’, ‘But mail is disappearing!’
 TL: But they do not get that either. There are but a few, very few. Last Monday, Dorris [a postal worker] said to me: ‘Shit Karen [the Team leader], if we had not had the local papers and the direct mail, we would have had nothing to drive today! ‘No’, I said, ‘Could you please tell your colleagues that!’ Because it is like, then there will be nothing left to drive, then we will have no jobs”.

In this fictive dialogue the postal workers argue that since they work for the state there is no sense in the aspects of competition and profit. Referring to their experience, their argument is that they have always been around. Mail has always existed and postal workers have always been there to carry it. How would that possibly change, so the postal workers suggest. But it will change, so the managers contest pointing to the increasingly smaller stacks of letters. The Distribution Manager eagerly illustrates by measuring out an imaginary pile between his hands, corresponding the volume of the previous Monday. It is less than half a meter wide and surely, I must admit, it does not seem as a lot of work, knowing the number of members in the Country team. The postal workers have to realize this too. If a profit is not created, in the end there will be no mail to

drive at all. They will end up being out of a job. But they cannot, they will not, so the team leader continues. The challenge, so the leaders explain, is to make them 'think differently' although this is, so she team leader reasons, 'against their general upbringing'. They both hope to create 'a culture of improvement' in the country team. A culture, which will mark a different way of thinking and working within the team that points well beyond existing work procedures. As expressed by the Distribution manager:

“ The process, the learning that has to take place is that we have to become more efficient in the already existing. We have not raised the culture of improvement in this first round. Maybe if we run this two times more within different areas. But when it comes to creating potential for improvements and generating some ideas about responsibilities and new work methods and creativity, we have not taken the lid off yet. One of my points of critique is that we have not been keen enough to tap into the culture of improvement, to follow through on this. We are not that far yet”.

In turn this depends, so it is argued, on the ability of the postal workers to give up their usual routines and conceptions. The Distribution manager refers to a metaphorical lid, suggesting that once the lid is removed, a hitherto unseen well-spring of resources will reveal themselves in the shape of new areas of responsibilities, new work methods and general creativity. The team is to become the center of innovation and competitiveness if only each member learns to acknowledge the market conditions, the basic job insecurity to go with it and thus the need of ongoing change. What the DM refers to more specifically are the experiences from a recent HR-initiative focusing on the ability of teams and their managers to deliver 'top-performances'. The following will take the reader to a HR event in the woods, hopefully making clearer along the way what is expected from the leaders and employees supposed to deliver the top-performances of the increasingly competitive TDP.

Top-performances out of the box

The HR department of the distribution area has arranged for their managers to participate in a kick-off event introducing the next round of so-called 'top-performance weeks'. The idea, so the HR manager explains, is inspired by a Danish supermarket chain, which has had a great deal of success in increasing their productivity through the involvement and creativity of their employees. In fact, they have been ranked by the private agency 'Best Place to Work' the third best in Denmark. The HR manager aspires to do something similar and introducing the top-performance weeks is a way forward. The first top performance week had the quality levels as its particular focus, while this second event aspires to improve the well-being of the employees. The aim of the day is to inspire local leaders to assume the challenge of the week in a creative way, not to be limited by old habits. When the week is over the results from the different centers will be compared, based on measures ranging from levels of absenteeism to the number of suggestions for improvements generated by the employees and finally a winner will be announced. In the last minute I have arranged to participate in the event, thus joining the distribution managers and team leaders invited from all over the distribution area. The following is based in my observations:

We arrive to a perfect setting: a clearing in the green woods, blooming fields, a timbered farm, a horse whinny, the shining sun. The HR consultants already present have arranged for two bonfires and everyone is equipped with some dough and a stick to roast it over the fire. Small battles are fought to conquer the best spot, people are cheerful. The head of the HR department steps up on a small tree trunk to welcome everybody. He explains that the special setting is a way to mirror that top performances are all about doing something unusual, to break the known physical and mental boundaries. To be able to top perform, you have to think out of the box, to give up your old habits, to be innovative, so he proclaims. Then the word is passed on to the next in line; the special guest star from the successful Danish supermarket chain. He starts out by stressing that the most important factor to success is to involve and engage the employees. In his company, this resulted in a fantastic rise in productivity: 24 % from one day to the next. But it takes a leader who has the courage. It takes a leader to literally take the lead and to inspire the employees. ‘Do you know what happens if you are sitting on a horse, and you do not trust that it will make it over the jump’, he rhetorically asks, pauses and waits. The silence is massive. It will definitely stall, he continues. He talks with great enthusiasm and rhetoric skill, several times trying to involve the postal managers around him. The answers to his inviting questions are mostly mocking or completely lacking. The managers are busy looking into the fire, taking care of their bread. Some are standing shoulder by shoulder, arms crossed, just watching. All keep silent. No one cracks. Until the distribution manager from the country centre finally reveals what they are going to do for the coming top performance week, “The most important thing is to have fun. We are going to have fun!”.

The social as in out of the ordinary

In the house magazine of the distribution area, under the headline “There are many roads leading to well-being”, the HR manager evaluated the top-performance week on well-being with the following words:

“ In week 25 it seethed in a lot of distribution centers. People were brainstorming, riding camels, barbecuing, singing songs, painting pictures and planting cress. All this in order to focus on the fact that pleasure in work may also be about breaking the normal setting, doing things out of the ordinary” (DIS/HR2009:1).

The week proved to be a success because the local leaders and employees managed to do something different; to break away from ordinary work procedures and routines. In fact they did so by having fun instead of working: by painting, riding camels and singing. Following the agenda of ‘top-performances’, the well-being of the team, their sociality, their creativity and fun are all different words for one and the same: an extra-ordinary realm existing somewhere outside work. This does not mean, however, that it is irrelevant to productivity. The energy found in the fun and games should not simply result in more singing and painting. The assumption of the HR Manager is that creativity and fun are related directly to the economic results of the postal area. In the house magazine the HR Manager continues, “I consider well-being and pleasure in work as the foundation for creating solid and long lasting results” (Op.cit.). Somehow it is possible to tap into these extraordinary resources in order for them to influence positively the level of performance. The HR Manager calls on the postal workers and managers of the area to keep the energy somewhere

inside, to store it, in order to use it at some other point. Soon enough the energy will prove to be of use, for instance when the distribution area launches the yearly survey of employee satisfaction. Once again this will call for the creativity of the employees in order for them to come up with new ideas to raise the general level of satisfaction.

Humans of creative potential

Although I did not witness in person the many activities of the top performance week, I take the event in the woods to be indicative of the potential controversy regarding the above version of the social. With regard to the HR event, it was quite toe-curling to witness. I cannot help thinking that it called for a different audience; a local manager of a different kind. Judging from the short walk from the parking lot to the clearing, this was already obvious. While the local managers were small-talking or discussing the trouble with production the same morning, we encountered little wooden signs put into the ground. The first sign said: "I am positive". The group briefly noticed the sign, confirming that they were on the right track. No one commented on what it said though, they simply went on chatting. The next sign read: "I am flexible", again no comments. We passed one sign after another saying: "I am curious", "I am ready", "I am brave", "I am open", "I am up for change". I was tempted all the time to read out loud while the small group of managers simply followed directions and talked about everyday things. To them the event seemed to be first and foremost a pleasant break in an otherwise busy work day. The identity imposed on them by the wooden signs as well as the subsequent pep-talks created no resonance whatsoever. As I took part in the one-day course on creativity for postal workers, as referred to in the introduction, a quite similar scenario played out. The short and straight forward evaluation of the course offered by a member of the North Town team goes, 'It does not have any relation to our everyday work'. And in this context this is not meant as a compliment. Symptomatically, I was able to participate in the course without revealing my identity as a Ph.D. While we were being creative doing comic-scenes, improvising crazy interviews and celebrating our mistakes by raising our hands in the air, it made no difference who I was. On the little piece of masking tape placed on our chests one would read not our normal names but the profession of our childhood dreams. Our specific backgrounds were irrelevant. In this particular room we were simply humans with a lot of creative potential. It was not until the present teams were asked to come up with specific suggestions as to how they would continue their work with creativity and well-being in the sorting office that we became postal workers and Ph.D. respectively.

Both events match the attitude of the distribution manager in the country center, as he proudly proclaims that to him it makes no difference whether he manages 'apples or pears'. When it comes to good management practice, it is one and the same irrespective of context. Quite obviously he takes this as a sign of his professionalism. In the context of postal work, however, the generic versions of management and the sociality of the postal workers seem to be part of the trouble. To the postal workers sociality, fun and creativity is not a matter of simply being human.. Rather, it is intrinsically connected to the specificities of postal work, including the already existing dilemmas of work organization and conflicts with management. The focus of the remaining parts of this chapter will be to investigate how these dilemmas and conflicts pose themselves to the local team leaders and how they serve to challenge and destabilize as well the 'team-spirit' of the team.

Dealing with humans

While the area manager and the HR consultants in the woods may find it generally difficult to convince local management to change their practice from ‘production management’ to that of a more ‘holistic approach’, to use the words of the area manager, the team leader of North Town serves as an exception. She is a young and rather inexperienced team leader with the taste for creativity and human development, including her own. She describes her job as a team leader by stressing that although she appreciates the most dealing with the employees, they are also the most demanding part of her job:



I: What takes up the larger part of your energy in your job as a manager?

TL: Everything which has to do with the relation to the employees. I know I said that I found this to be the most fun part, but it is also the hardest. Because you have to deal with humans. You cannot really predict what is going to happen. You have to have a lot of different skills. You have to be able to intervene when ‘the bull-elephants’ collide and you have to listen when there are problems. You have to deliver a comforting shoulder when something is on the wrong track at home. And sometimes you even have to act the role as social councilor and help to make life hang together.

I: And that is...you also have to take care of that?

TL: At least you have to be able to do a lot of things, it is no use if you have too few facets as a human yourself, because then you cannot contain all the facets that they have, that they bring along”.

As described by the team leader, her job is extremely complex, because it means dealing with human beings in all their complexity. Demanding not least, so she argues, that her own humanity, her ‘facets as a human’, come into play as part of her professionalism. In order to bring a more human face into daily production, and clearly inspired by the top performance framework, the team leader is planning to introduce some more ‘fun and games’ in the sorting office. This is especially needed, so she reflects, due to the recent hardships of wintertime, which demanded the postal workers to work extra hours. Her proclaimed goal is to remain what she terms ‘the most grinning team in the house’. But certainly, making way for a more human face to management and production does not equal a disregard of productivity. Besides taking into account the value of ‘the width of a smile’, the team leader adds that alongside having fun the team has to deliver results. Again productivity and the sociality of the postal workers are presented as closely related. In daily management practice, however, the connection is not easily established.

A team leader of time-control and sausage rolls

The following ethnographic snapshot is written as I followed a different team leader of the same center. Additionally, the situation may be more conflict ridden than usual, since some of the team members had recently received an official warning from the Distribution Manager regarding their work performance. Nevertheless, I take the incident to be rather exemplary. The episode goes as follows:

7.15 AM: I have just arrived in the team leaders office and we are about to take the usual round of good mornings. On her desk lies a registration form from DIS headquarters. They have required

her to do a time-study on the various work processes of the postal workers while sorting. I notice a quite peculiar but nice smell filling her office. She points to a shelf behind her and there is a dish filled with sausage rolls. She has baked them for the team. I know from informal conversations that it is important for her to gain the trust of the team and apparently the sausage rolls are expected to play a role in this. We leave the office and I follow her down the stairs. In one hand she holds the time registration form in the other, the homemade sausage rolls. Walking behind her with the smell of sausage rolls in my nostrils, I cannot help feeling we are about to beard the lion in its den.

Once in the sorting office, the team leader's extraordinary effort does not serve to fulfill its intended purpose. Quite similar to the proceeding mornings, the general tone of the team members is sarcastic and aggressive. One wants to know what she is up to, while another suggests that the reason for her friendliness should be explained by the fact that the evaluation of the team leaders is due. It smells like a crawler, someone adds. Still another regrets that she did not bake a cake. The team leader manages to keep a stone face.

The story is wonderfully telling, since it shows the dilemma of the team leader so clearly and not least how it leaves her in a vulnerable position vis á vis the team. With one hand she has to literally test and control the team members doing a time-motion study, registering every work process by its start and finish. With the other hand she offers them sausage rolls baked and brought directly from her own kitchen, showing them her good intentions. She plays what the other team leader terms 'all human facets' hoping for a similar gesture: an access to the sociality of the team. Notwithstanding this, she manages to become but a representative of management which per definition, and especially considering the given circumstances, cannot be trusted.

Returning to the official manual on self-sustained teams, the dilemma of the team leader is only emphasized. In several instances there are explicit references to managerial authority as constituted in the historic agreement of 1899 between Danish labor and management. Accordingly, it is stressed that, "members of a self-sustained team do not carry any authority of management", and a little later, "the right and duty to manage remains even when the team is involved in the decision making and in improvements at all levels of the team. Tasks may be delegated, but the responsibility always lies with the leader (DIS/HR 2007:14). When the team does not manage to live up to set rules, to meet performance goals or have trouble cooperating, the leader has to intervene. The team leader has the right and the duty to do so. The trouble is, following the example above, that the local team leader is only rarely offered the opportunity to access the dynamics of the team to be managed, thus making it quite hard to take upon them their rightful authority.

In the team leaders own framing, access or the lack of it is framed as a matter of (dis)trust and as a matter of personal relations. Symptomatically, as I want to know more about some of the conflicts in the new North Town team, the team leader refuses to share with me any details arguing as follows, "I will not go more into it, since it goes deeper than that, because there are some personal issues down there". As I will show in the following, what may seem a matter of personal issues of the postal workers or the ability of the leader to use all her human facets, should be considered an effect of the overall work organization. In particular, the existing working time agreement plays a decisive part.

The vulnerability of the team leader

I left the team manager at the end of chapter 3 (The outdoors) in a rather difficult situation trying to sort out the sharing of routes between team members as the standards of TOR had proved to be inadequate. This is in fact quite symptomatic. Being left to their own devices, this is where she

and her fellow team leaders seem to find themselves quite often: trying to make the team distribute work among them, and in doing so tempting to access the social dynamics of the team that she knows to be crucial to the execution of work. Sometimes it works and sometimes she is left with unclear statements or reluctant silences. The team leader is only rarely offered an open invitation to enter. Both the individual estimations of time and workloads and the internal economies of help exchanged between team members are mostly kept within the framework of the team, sealed off from management but nevertheless representing a crucial component in the coordination of work.

And the team leader, as clearly stated in the manual, carries the overall responsibility. If the postal worker is unable to drive the route within work hours it is the obligation of the team leader to see to it that someone else is there to help out. Worst case, mail will not be distributed. Given the working time agreement the postal worker is allowed to go home as soon as he/she has worked fulltime plus half an hour. No matter what. Thus, the team leader has to make sure that the work load of the single route represents exactly the work hours of each postal worker. If not, she has to alter routes and re-distribute workloads among team members before they leave the center. Once out the door, it is too late. But what if no one wants to share their estimates with her? What if no one offers to help out? Of course there are measures that can be taken against very obstinate postal workers, but in practice it is hard to do anything about the silence. According to the observational note referred to here, the team leader ends her attempt by stating, "Okay, I must say that it is a bit disappointing that there is no one else [to help]". In the specific incident none of the team members found that they had the time to offer an extra hand to a colleague and the team leader is left with a moral appeal to the team members, trying to buy into the help economy of the team. Without any success. As the members of the North Town team reason, the effects of the working time agreement is that they can simply lean back. They can stay completely at ease, since due to the working time agreement it is no longer their responsibility to make ends meet. It lies with the team leader, they point out. But when it comes to the acclaimed easiness of the North Town Team it is not that convincing. The vulnerability of the team leader produced by the dynamics of the self-sustained team and the working time agreement, also expose the team to a great deal of pressure.

The vulnerability of 'team-spirit'

How to help each other out is not necessarily settled by referring to the official working time agreement. When a colleague needs help, someone else will necessarily have to work a bit harder, thus tapping directly into the 'general ethics of helpfulness' of the team; the logic of reciprocity. Although the overall responsibility belongs to the team leader this does not quite seem to settle the potential conflicts: who deserves help and who has the resources to offer it? This kind of conflict is clearly mirrored during the second group interview with the North Town team. At the time the group has been fused with another team and according to the team leader the level of conflict is high, "They fight about what one can, will and should perform when working", as she explains. During the interview I tried to make the team reflect on this possible dilemma posed, when negotiating time and work load amongst them:

- “ I: You mention that it is of great importance to the team leader to make sure that work hours are fully utilized. But what about the colleagues? When one makes a statement about work load and time, then you affect you colleagues, how..?
- P1: ...Yes, but again it is the leader who must make sure that the resources needed ...
- P2: ...That is not it, Jimmy.
- P1: No no, but if I can just explain. You take the decision about the route that you drive. And then it is the team leader who must display an overlook as to how many man-hours are needed on that particular day. And this can vary from one route to the next. It may be that I am in need of some extra help, but Harry for instance, comparing to the amount of mail he has got for his route, well it fits, so he will not....
- P2: ... I think Mette sees it from our point of view, how we feel about it.
- P1: Yes, that will be the next question alright.
- P2: That is why we have chosen not to take it up in plenum. We do not discuss whether we can make it or not, when we gather for our short stand-up meetings. Since, this is exactly where there may be some group pressures. Someone may feel that they do not dare to say no. And we do not want that. That is why we want the leader to come to each of us and take the dialogue with us in person about what we are able to drive and what not”.

The excerpt illustrates the in-fights between team members revealing the general tense atmosphere, but even more interesting is how the two postal workers try to solve or rather dislocate their internal conflict: by shifting it onto the team leader. Since the new team is not able or willing to share work between them, they turn to the official agreement for help. They turn to the old line of conflict between leaders and employees, claiming their rights as individual workers. And yet it is quite clear that this strategy is not sufficient to stabilize the social relations of the team. The ethics of helpfulness between team members is still present working as a point of reference, agreement or not. The following passage is rather indicative in this respect:

- “ P1: When the team leader comes down and asks, ‘can you make it today’, and you go, ‘Yes’, then you wear these [he places his hands at each side of his head]. You wear blinkers, you do your own route. Afterwards you do not go and ask someone else, ‘do you want me to take an hour for you, because I can see that you have a lot today’, that is not how you do it. You have substitutes or some extra people in the team to take care of that, in order for you to finish off within set time [...].
- P3: Well, it should be mentioned that once in a while I have... Bobby for instance, last week he had an appointment at the dentists. 12 pm or 11 am. Whenever. And he was going for his normal route, there was nothing to do. Then I went out and did 75 homes for him. I drive nearby.
- I: Is that something that you are asked to do by the team leader?
- P3: No no, that is something I do when he is in a tight corner. Then I just go. I am close by, I am the only one close by, I can just go and take some of his. And I do that sometimes, when he is in a tight corner. And the team leader does not interfere. It is just something I do to help him out as a colleague”.

No doubt the little heroic story about helping out a colleague in an hour of need plays a part in the conflict ridden relation. The one receiving the extraordinary help belongs to the old North Town team and it thus serves to demonstrate, how well-functioning the former North Town team really was, compared to the present situation when the new members, so it is insinuated, are far too

egoistic to display a similar team-spirit. No matter the truth of this, it is interesting how this little statement serves to stress the difference between on the one side the help offered and distributed by the hands of the team leader and the help offered and received beyond her jurisdiction; quite in line with the logics of the cake-list. And when it comes down to it, although the two postal workers might seem to disagree, they basically share this overall framework: that there is a clear cut difference between the sociality as it is mobilized by the team leader and the sociality of the team proper. The ultimate purpose of this distinction is for the latter to be kept safely out of management reach.

Meanwhile, the vulnerability of these distinctions and social alliances is equally obvious. The team is put in a real dilemma. On the one side they are tempted to give in to their individually defined formal rights, to put on blinkers and let the leader take responsibility. On the other hand, this would also imply taking on management definitions when it comes to settle the content of a fair day's work. As clearly shown in the first analysis, this is not something the postal workers would want to leave with management, or indeed the calculations of TOR, to judge. A fair day's work is rather judged by local knowledge and as such evaluated and negotiated between team members by the simple logic, "I do something for you, you do something for me in return", to repeat the words of Steven. Conversely, if the team indeed wants to stick to a fair days work as a local and negotiated effect they also potentially leave open to management the social relations of the team, normally considered their last resort. In the above, this is framed as a problematic of 'group pressures'. Judging from the ways in which the organization of TDP is currently mobilizing the social, this suggests that inviting in the team leader, to become a truly self-sustained team, introduces matters of concern that goes well beyond the local and work oriented distribution of help within the team. It takes the concern of future markets, of general job insecurity and the necessity of learning and perpetual change. It requires giving up routines and standards, it takes creativity and fun beyond work. It takes, in effect, a whole different postal worker.

Self-sustained as in human 'buffer' – aligning the unalignable

Getting close to the end of this chapter, I would like to return momentarily to the overall ambition of the self-sustained teams as defined in the official manual, in order to re-situate the team within the overall organizational framework. Slightly reframed, this was to develop and make use of the human resources in the best interest of the organization. The key word seems to be that of alignment. The question is whether it is at all sensible, considering the current state of affairs, to claim that there is indeed a single organization to use as a measure of alignment? As I have discussed with both the area HR Manager as well as the Manager of Development, TDP is characterized by a highly specialized and sectorial organization. As the latter states, "We do not have the overlook telling us what our gains [those of Distribution] may cost in other parts of TDP. Only a very few have this kind of overlook. So it ends up being a bit of a silo-approach". There are several examples of the downsides to this: as when Marketing sold the distribution of triangular letters. It showed this was physically impossible to handle with the current apparatus of production. Or there is the story about the telephone books that were to be distributed within a very tight timeframe. The weight and the volume caused the postal workers a lot of trouble and a huge load of overtime, resulting in a very expensive compensatory bonus for each postal worker. Apparently, the one hand knows not what the other is doing. And yet so much is said about alignment; so much energy is put into rationalizing the perfect flow of production. Seen from the point of view of production management, this is where the self-sustained team truly comes in handy. As elaborated by Manager of Development:

“ And usually, it is us working in Distribution who adapt. Because the process starts all the way out there in the Sales department and then it has to go through...if it is a letter, it has to go through Sorting, Transportation etc. And then in the end we have to act as buffers out here. We are the last... We are the only ones that may save the process in the end, you might say. So that is why it is so important that everyone is in on this”.

The engagement of the postal workers within the framework of the self-sustained team, so the Manager of Development stresses, is crucial since it may act a veritable buffer against all sorts of production irregularities. A human buffer equipped with the amazing ability to cooperate, to flexibly adjust, to learn, to come up with new ideas, to be creative and possibly have fun doing so. Or in short: to align the un-alignable. It suggests that the self-sustained team and the postal worker to go with it form a kind of organizational emergency equipment. And indeed this is also the impression that I have from the floor. When the team leader has lost track of normal route patterns, when even TOR has to give in, then it lies with the team to work things out. While team members are discussing and negotiating in order to find a workable solution, they are not just handling the social relations of the team, balancing off their rights and duties respectively settling the definitions of a fair day's work. Their very sociality and humanity serve to contain the tensions and catalyze the whole organization of TDP, including its future potentials. Or at least this seems to be the intended strategic role of the self-sustained team.



Chapter 9:
Conclusion
- Bringing work back in

Concluding themes

Although the reader might feel overwhelmed and slightly dizzy from the just finished visit to the Danish Post, in this concluding chapter I will continue in the kaleidoscopic fashion and discuss the empirical analyses one after the other. Each conclusive section will address a particular theme relating to the overall research focus: the organization of well-being and productivity and yet a recurrent topic running through these sections is 'the work task'. Following from this and as pinpointed by Socio-technical-theory scholars, the work task becomes the outset as well the result of this organization analysis (Miller 1976). Although of a fundamental unsettled nature, the work task serves as the specific and practical outset regarding the question: how to best organize postal work? How to best settle the fundamental dilemma of well-being and productivity? Revolving around this topic, I will address the following themes: 1) standardization and control; 2) routine and organizational change; 3) on enterprise and the primary task and 4) worker sociality, autonomy and resistance.

After these themes, I will attempt to characterize what I call 'the trembling organization' of TDP. This finally leads me to discuss the relevance of re-viving the much forgotten notion of 'work task' as a fruitful point of departure for the analysis and critique of modern day organizations. I will relate specifically to the discussions and 'crisis' currently experienced within the psycho-social work environment field, but the basic argument retrieved serves just as much a remark on the critique raised within critical management studies.

The View – standardization and control

The outdoors as pictured by the postal workers give the immediate impression that their relation to work is equally external; that the postal workers are not simply spending their time outdoors but that they are somehow located 'outside' the work organization. When talking to the postal workers they do seem to frame the outdoors as an element that compensates for the everyday work setting otherwise dominated by a lot of physical hardships. Nevertheless, the outside is a constitutive part of daily work since it poses the very conditions under which to work: rain, shine or snow. The most important aspect of the outdoors, however, seems to be the sense of freedom attached to it. The outside time is enjoyed by the postal workers since it is a time of their own; defined by their own thoughts, places and not least routines. In this sense, the well-being attached to the outdoors mean that work disappears from view, that the postal workers are able to 'mind their own business', so to speak.

As a direct response to this attitude towards work, managers at all levels have a general distrust of the postal workers and their willingness to contribute and to do a proper job. They consider the sticking to routines a defense mechanism that serves to resist necessary adaption to changes. In the eyes of management, the outdoors represent a constant challenge of coordination and control.

When the postal workers drive their routes away from the distribution center, they are more or less out of reach and thus potentially unproductive. TOR is developed as a solution to this alleged problem. TOR measures and prescribes in minutiae detail how the bodies of the postal

workers should behave once outdoors, thus confronting and quite clearly bending the habitual ways, geographies and local knowledge of the postal workers. In other words, TOR mediates a rather traditional conflict of interests between workers on the one side and managers on the other, which seem to place productivity and the well-being of the postal workers in a relationship of mutual exclusion. While the postal workers seek to protect their routines and hence their sense of freedom from management interference, TOR on the other hand, tries to redefine the nature of routes in order to increase general productivity levels.

Following Mintzberg, one could argue that this state of affairs follows from the recipe of standardization. What may be gained in efficiency and productivity from the fixing of work methods, so Mintzberg suggests, is lost due to the labor relation of notorious tension that is simultaneously produced. When following predefined standards, workers' skills and autonomy will inevitably be neglected leading to general dissatisfaction and continuous labor conflicts (Mintzberg 1983).

Having labor conflict as the point of departure is indeed relevant when it comes to the standardization by TOR. But as I will argue in the following, this tends to simplify the actual effects of TOR. As a standard it is neither as univocal nor as powerful as the rhetoric of opposing interests has it. Rather than interpreting the resistance of the postal workers as an expression of opposite interests per se, it can more appropriately be seen as indicative of the imperfect knowledge of TOR and its according lack of functionality. Revisiting the original arguments of scientific management put forward by Taylor, which can be seen as the founding rationality of TOR, I will illustrate how the actual effects and functionality of TOR may indicate a managerial attitude and approach that is significantly less context sensitive than Taylor's regime.

TOR and Taylor

The basic idea of scientific management, according to Taylor, was to find the one best way i.e. the most cost-effective way to perform any given work task, be it shoveling or handling pig iron. As opposed to the old way of organizing, this would not be based in the experience and knowledge of management or workers' 'rule of thumb' but by close observations by engineers of the given work task: first, in order to identify the 'elementary operations or motions' (Taylor 2004: 41) of each task and second, to designate for each of them its optimal execution. In the case of coal shoveling, this would mean to find out exactly the optimal size of the shovel according to the material at hand, how to place the body in order to best put in the shovel and take it out again, how much weight to load each time, when and how many pauses for each workman in order to keep up a steady pace and level of productivity all through the day etc. etc. With TOR it is not the 'science of shoveling' (Ibid.: 22), but the principles are just the same. TOR introduces 'the science of postal delivery' with a strict division of labor between that of management and workmen, in which management does all the planning and only the responsibility of execution is left with the workers (Op cit.).

Equally similar is the basic assumption when it comes to the attitude of the workers. According to Taylor, workmen were lazy by nature and furthermore 'systematic soldiering' was produced as a result of the traditional piece-rate system organization. As argued by Taylor using a range of examples, the piece-rate system made the workmen speculate against it, in order for them to work as little as possible for the highest possible pay. As Taylor puts it, "The greater part of systematic soldiering, however, is done by the men with the deliberate object of keeping their employers ignorant of how fast work can be done" (Ibid.: 7). Returning to the worries of TDP management, they clearly share the view that the postal workers tend to try, and also often succeed in, winning

the battle against management when it comes to proving how much time any given route takes. With the introduction of TOR, this has, however, changed. Serving as an unquestionable yardstick, it is possible to judge the single postal worker as either lazy or possibly overly productive. A common yardstick of 'fairness' is produced, leaving once and for all the continuous confrontations between team leaders and postal workers out of the question. Following Taylor, the original ambition of introducing scientific principles to the management of work was to be able to finally settle the widespread labor conflicts at the time. With a pre-set definition of a fair day's work and a pre-set and not least fair level of pay to go with it, there would be no reason for the workers to strike and the unions to bargain, so Taylor argued (Ibid.: 49). The scientific measures were believed to 'calibrate' and even out previous differences between the parties¹. At least this would be the ideal situation. What is striking about the analysis of TOR is that despite the far-reaching standardization of time and motions produced by TOR, the identity of the work task and its boundaries proves to be far less resolved and clear-cut in practice. The definition of a fair days work is re-politicized.

Introducing the social

Among management in TDP it is gradually acknowledged that TOR is not a 'stand-alone-system' and that far more money should have been spent on the implementation process, on so-called 'change management'. The postal workers have generally been very skeptical and reluctant to take onboard the routes of TOR, finding them to be both inadequate and unfair. TOR needs some more 'selling'. The team leaders are urged to facilitate dialogues with the postal workers in order to make sure that everyone has had their say. The implementation process implies more involvement of the postal workers, so it is argued. In this respect what goes on seems to follow the principles of Socio-Technical-Systems Design, at least in its later variants. As Cherns puts it:

“[...] a production system requires a social system to integrate the activities of the people who operate, maintain, and renew it; account for it; and keep it fed with the resources it requires [...]” (Cherns 1976: 784).

Quite like the ideas of TDP management, Cherns considers 'the social' a sphere for redesign and intervention (selling, dialogue, participation) in order to gain the effects of productivity. Effects already pre-determined by the technology of the production system, which for its part stays unquestioned. When the postal workers are invited in for more participation, it can be seen as but an effect of the demands posed by the technical mode of production. The postal workers, the leaders, the planner and the dialogue thus play the part as 'supportive tools' in the course of route-recasts. In the implementation process the crucial distinction of scientific management between planning and execution, also inscribed in TOR, collapses. And this counts not only the process of route-recasting itself. Planning and re-planning go on almost every morning in the sorting office due to the various fluctuations of production. Although tentatively excluded from the settlement of a fair day's work and its proper execution, the postal workers and their knowledge of the route is (re)introduced as a precondition of the functionality of TOR.

Mutual learning – a new working compatibility

The role as ‘supportive tools’ to a black boxed technical system is, however, not the only truth about TOR. The attempt to involve ‘the social system’ in the optimization of TOR as a tool for coordination and control also ‘re-opens’ the basic standards of TOR. The geographies, times and workloads as calculated by TOR are negotiated fiercely in the course of a route recast, in reality serving to both supplement, specify and bent the standards of ‘a fair day’s work’. The relation and identities of TOR and its human counterparts are both mutually constitutive and far more complex than both Tayloristic and Socio-Technical-Systems perspectives would have it. In the negotiations of the work task both TOR, local managers, planners and postal workers are being transformed. The postal workers become experts in so-called ‘local knowledge’ and are asked to teach TOR about the 3rd dimension (uphill and downhill) as well as the contingent geographies represented by road works. Conversely, the postal workers have to learn to ‘see’ like TOR in order to know what kind of worker participation and ‘local knowledge’ is crucial for TOR when doing a route recast. If the postal workers do not attempt to adapt to the vision of TOR, their inputs will not have the effects wished for. Rather than seeing TOR and its human collaborators as two distinct ontologies of highly differentiated qualities, it seems more appropriate to regard them as parts of a ‘working compatibility’ (Strathern 2004: 35). Not always of an effective kind, though.

Control by standardization – beyond ideologies

The question is how to evaluate the working compatibility of TOR and the role of the postal workers? Is the introduction of TOR and its standardization of work a way of depriving the workers altogether of autonomy and individual judgment, sacrificing at the same time the prime source of well-being: the freedom of their individualized routes? A story of increased alienation as Braverman would have it (Braverman 1974)? Or is it an example of how one may positively integrate the social and the technical and as such create an equilibrium in which the hard edges of technology are ‘softened’ by the introduction of the postal workers’ increased participation and influence, as it is suggested by socio-technical systems theory and the System Manager in TDP?

Rather than evaluating the situation of TDP from a general ideological position by asking whether standards cause alienation and de-humanization of postal workers or not, I will suggest a more pragmatic and empirically sensitive angle to it. Judging from the rather vulnerable and negotiable nature of TOR, I believe a whole different attitude towards the standardization in TDP is called for. One that does not rely on pre-established notions of ‘standardization’ as per se de-humanizing or indeed as something managers have invented to compel workers to increased productivity.

The multiple effects of standards

One might say that TOR has come a long way to fulfill its original ambition: to become the perfect planning solution. It is increasingly learning from the postal workers and at the same time it integrates still more knowledge and information from various parts of the organization. Its version of work thus becomes increasingly all-encompassing, more powerful as in harder to reject.

On the other hand, while the power of TOR lies in the alignment and control of a lot of actors: budgets, time, motions, routes, geographical data, addresses, the sorting machine, Planners, depots, keys, shelves, postal workers, teams and local managers, it takes only a pair of missing keys or the silence of the postal workers during a morning meeting to destabilize TOR. It seems that the more things and humans TOR needs to align, the more potential incidents of powerlessness are equally displayed. As the expression goes, ‘putting a spanner in the works’, referring to the automated production of Fordism, it takes but a minor disorder to bring the whole production process to a hold (Grey 2009: 42).

As shown in the analysis of TOR, standards are both far less effective and far less univocal, as are the practices and agendas of the postal workers. In the case of TOR, a lot of work practices and performance measures are predefined and fixed in the name of ‘best practice’; however, new spaces of responsibilities for postal workers and managers alike are simultaneously being produced. The team and its abilities to coordinate work practices between them, to self-manage, are called for, leaving open avenues for rather complex outcomes and interpretations beyond the simple logic of external management control.

Furthermore, ‘standardization’ should not be considered in the singular. Standards come in various versions and produce various effects. In TDP one finds several kinds of standardizations. Some of them which stem from the formal bureaucratic structures, from complex technologies such as TOR but also from the various low-tech standards that inhabit the everyday work setting of the postal workers: the grey pigeon holes, the yellow plastic boxes on wheels, the heavy metal cages etc. etc. They might not prescribe the movement of the postal workers in every detail such as is the case of TOR, but they nevertheless serve to create a certain order by making some practices irrelevant and others more likely. They too afford certain postal workers, certain definitions of the work task, certain mechanisms of coordination.

Lastly, and partly foreshadowing the analysis of the kickstand-snaplog, I will argue that in many cases standards are even indispensable to the postal workers in their daily work as they aspire to do a proper job. When discussing standards it is important to relate it quite closely to the specific work that they are aiming to define and coordinate; whether the standardization offered is actually making work easier to execute or not. In the case of the postal workers, their main objection against TOR is not ideological in character but pure and simply a matter of functionality. If TOR does not know how to depict a workable route, they do not object against a generalized notion of standardization. They object simply because the standards offered are silly and ineffective. Management is expected to manage and standards to standardize, but they have to do it sensibly. In reality, this kind of pragmatism was already the outset of Taylor (Grey 2009, Kjær 2012). Although Taylor did try to find one best way to do work, this was based in a detailed study of the particular work process and the particular workmen handling it (Taylor 2004: 24). And despite the slightly condescending tone, characteristic of the pronounced class differences at the time the postal workers’ own work ethics resembles much Taylor’s arguments for scientific management:

“ The average workman will work with the greatest satisfaction, both to himself and to his employer, when he is given each day a definite task, which he is to perform in a given time, and which constitutes a proper day’s work for a good workman. This furnishes the workman with a clear-cut standard, by which he can throughout the day measure his own progress, and the accomplishment of which affords him the greatest satisfaction” (Ibid.: 42).

When the postal workers feel free driving their route, it does not mean that there are no standards at play. However, they are almost invisible exactly due to their workability and deep integration into work practices; their literal incorporation. So when the postal workers are reluctant towards TOR or other types of standards it is not because the postal workers' 'lack motivation' or 'resist change', as management tends to frame it. When the postal workers contest the realities of TOR, they do so in the name of productivity; defending the delicate workability of the everyday organisation and the quality levels of mail delivery.

The Kickstand – routine and organizational change

Compared to TOR, the bike with a kickstand is a different kind of standardized production technology but equally decisive for the workday of the postal workers. This becomes manifest when considering the challenges of change confronting the whole organizational arrangement of TDP. The question arising from the analysis of the kickstand, so I will argue, is where the correspondent organizational change of TDP should come from? Where to look for the flexibility needed in order to safeguard future productivity?

What I would wish to draw forward is the unsolved problem of the role of the postal workers and their routines. To the postal workers, their routines represent a perfect harmony of well-being and productivity. To management, in contrast, the postal workers' routines are generally considered dubious and to be equaled with what Taylor would define as 'rule of thumb' acting against the overall productivity goals of the company. Postal workers' routines thus often serve as a cause of conflict; the routine of hand sorting being just one example.

As I will argue, there is a need to resurrect, however, the routine of the postal workers, including a different understanding of the 'nature' of the routines. Rather than seeing them as counterproductive and mainly individual rules of thumb, they should be acknowledged as a quite necessary ability of the postal workers to act not against the organization but on the contrary as an absolutely integrated part of it and moreover, not necessarily as an anti-thesis to change. In order to qualify the notion of routine, I will be taking rounds with March's twin concept: exploration and exploitation (March 2001) and relate it to more recent research on routines as generative systems of action (Feldman & Pentland 2003, 2005, 2008).

The 'good standards'

Compared to TOR, the snaplog picture of the kickstand suggests a rather harmonious version of the relation between work standards and the postal workers. While the standard of TOR enacts a landscape of antagonism and extensive negotiations, 'the good bike with a kickstand', makes it obvious that standards come in quite different versions enacting different outcomes. Standards are not just standards. As put by the postal workers themselves, the decisive point when it comes to standards, is that it depends. It depends on its particular use. Like the relation between screw and screwdriver, the standard and the work at hand need to be compatible. If fitted together properly,

the job can be executed smoothly and effectively, and the screwdriver, representing the standard in question, may even deserve the label 'a good standard'.

The snaplog picture of the old kickstand is precisely a picture of a good standard because it serves a functional tool ensuring that work is executed swiftly and effectively. In concert with the snaplogs of a trimmed hedge, a happy dog and a range of mailboxes, the old kickstand suggests a quite particular relation between the well-being of the postal workers and their productivity. Following the human relations school, the well-being of the workers is mostly presented as a prerequisite of productivity. If the workers are given the right attention and care from management, if they are allowed a certain degree of decision latitude and to socialize with their fellow workers, they thrive and consequently they will be more productive. In the case of the postal workers it seems that this relation is more or less reversed, or rather the two are completely integrated: when the standard and the bodies of the postal workers are finely attuned, expressed in the act of routine, the postal workers are at the same time productive and well. The tools become second nature as they are integrated in the spine. Conversely, when the kickstand does not work, when the tools and the work at hand are badly attuned, the postal workers are neither productive nor satisfied. This is when they start complaining, this is when work is stalled and they are staggered in time, this is when their routines are broken. As pointed out by one of the postal workers, this is why, "the best solution is for people to keep to the fixed ways".

Exploitation, exploration – and generative routines

Rather than framing the routines of the postal workers as a problem of control and lack of productivity, as is typical of TDP management, one could argue that the routinized behavior of the postal workers is in fact an example of what James March has defined as exploitation: a perfect attunement between organizational goals and individual action with the result of, 'refinement, production, efficiency, selection', to name but some of the characteristics attached (March 2001: 71). Exploitation defines a process in which the code of the organization is swiftly learned by its members who then act accordingly creating what March terms a situation of equilibrium (Ibid.: 75). In this framework, the postal workers' routine would not be seen as an expression of postal workers' idiosyncratic preferences or indeed a threat against productivity. As March points out, exploitation is 'crucial' to organizations. However, he also suggests that it may prove to be counterproductive for organizational productivity in the long run. It produces a potential 'suboptimal equilibria' that may end up being even self-destructive. To balance off these downsides, so March argues, it is important for the organization to include the dynamics of 'exploration', i.e. the flexibility offered from 'experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, innovation' (Ibid.: 71), which enables the organization as well as its individual members to go beyond the present code in order to eventually change it. The bigger the diversity between the knowledge of individuals and the organization, the bigger potential for organizational change (Ibid.: 79).

The framework of March thus offers an argument for re-appreciating the postal workers' routines, regarding them as expressive of 'exploitation' and thus a highly effective way of acting within an organization. But, and there is a but. Especially when confronted with so-called 'exogenous environmental change' (Ibid.: 80). In these circumstances the exploitative dynamics may acquire an even 'degenerate property'. There is a logical appeal to March's argument, and the TDP management seems to share it: change cannot occur if nothing 'new' is added. If there are only highly routinized employees with the exact same knowledge as that of the organization, none of them will be able to become something different.

Following the work of Pentland and Feldman, however, the alleged reproductive mechanism of exploitation is not necessarily as simple and indeed reproductive as March would have it. By the inspiration from Latour (1986)², routines are framed as the performative (action) version of the ostensive and prescriptive character of standards (Pentland & Feldman 2002: 100). In other words, when organizational members may be acting according to the code (the standard), the actual performance of the code may prove to produce a variability of results. As they proclaim, “organizational routines are widely misunderstood as rigid, mundane, mindless, and explicitly stored somewhere” (Pentland & Feldman 2008: 236). Routines in Pentland’s and Feldman’s view are ‘generative’ and as they state, “enacting them naturally and inevitably gives rise to new actions (performances) and sometimes new patterns of action” (Ibid.: 240).

As pointed out by Feldman and Pentland, this suggests that the clear-cut distinction between exploration and exploitation may well be irrelevant since change and stability respectively are not foreign in nature but both depend on context specific enactments: some enactments may prove to produce change, some may prove to produce stability (Feldman & Pentland 2003: 729). Following this, whether standards and their routines lead to change or stability is an empirical matter and not something to be determined in advance.

With regard to ‘the good bike with a kickstand’, one may well argue that an equilibrium in March’s sense has been found. Only it is not the same equilibrium established across the spines of all postal workers. Quite in line with the evidence of Feldman & Pentland, postal workers usually develop their own little routines in relation to any given standard. Just one example: while one postal worker is able to release the kickstand while biking, another is simply too short to do this and will need to establish a different routine handling the same tool and standard. Each postal worker tends to have his/her own ways of enacting the overall standard, in effect creating a range of hybrid versions and suggesting that standards may be framed by a singular code but is in fact enacted in the plural.

Adding to this, when a postal worker carries out work by the help of a specific tool and standard they always do so within the larger framework of the organizational setting, what Akrich terms ‘the geography of delegation’, adapting their practices to a whole range of information and actors at once. As described in the example of hand sorting, the simple action of fitting a letter to the right shelf is comprised of information and bodily skills made up of a whole range of different standards, including the role of work time, the number of colleagues present, the weather, whether someone asks questions etc. etc. Following a performative perspective, any standard, any script, should be grasped not in itself but in its actual enactment within a wider geography of delegation.

More or less the same point can be found within workplace studies (Heath & Button 2002, Suchman 1995). Also dedicated to study ‘the practicalities of workplace activities’, they show how the roles, rules and formal prescriptions are actively performed and bent in the everyday work of employees. The ‘official’ version of work (the standards, prescriptions, rules, codes) is usually never capable of revealing what is actually going on, so it is argued. In her article: “Making work visible” Lucy Suchman argues, for instance, that how people actually work is ‘the best kept secret in America’ (Suchman 1995: 56).

Change and the question of agency

This inevitably lends a different interpretation when it comes to the routines of the postal workers and how to evaluate them. According to the generative notion of routines, they are both far less

mindless, far less stable but also, and this is surely an important message to the management of TDP, far more productive than their general reputation suggests. In fact, as pointed out by Feldman and Pentland, the routines are so important to organizations that they represent a realm for management to potentially ‘capitalize’:

“Managers may or may not want to capitalize on this inherent capability of routines, but they cannot erase it unless they are willing and able to ‘kill’ the routine through total automation” (Pentland & Feldman, 2008: 240).

As they explain, capitalization is, however, only possible if management does not tighten the structures and standards so much that no leeway is left for the agency of the employees. The stance of Pentland and Feldman is in general to make way for agency. Arguing against what they find to be a research tradition predominantly preoccupied with routine as structure, they wish to bring ‘agency, and therefore, subjectivity and power back into the picture’ (Feldman & Pentland 2003: 95) understanding routine as ‘collective human activities’ (ibid.: 97).

While I find a great deal of resonance between the work routines of the postal workers and the framework presented by Pentland and Feldman, it also leaves me slightly disappointed. If the benefits of postal workers’ routines are presented primarily as a matter of individual agency, it will not solve what I believe has created the misconception of routines in the first place.

When management in TDP disapproves of the routines of postal workers, it is because they represent the uncontrollable and thus unproductive agency of the postal workers as opposed to the set structures and standards of the organization. And when Pentland and Feldman, on the other hand, praise routine it is because of its agentic potential as opposed to the standards of the organization. While representing opposite standpoints towards routines they subscribe to the very same logic; the opposition between the organization and the employee, between structure and agency.

But most importantly, what seems to be the outcome of the division is that primarily the one side is left open for future intervention and indeed ‘capitalization’. Following from this, Pentland and Feldman publish a paper ‘on the folly of designing artifacts, while hoping for patterns of action’ in which they suggest that in order to change organizations one should address ‘action patterns’, i.e. the agentic qualities of routines, rather than artifacts. (Pentland & Feldman 2008: 235). In TDP it is also the humans, which are aimed at. The routinized postal workers are generally scorned to be far too conservative, too uncontrollable, too rigid and too defensive and accordingly targeted by a whole range of management initiatives that either try to enforce a tighter control or to employ methods of a more ‘humanizing’ kind as the chapter of the customer and the cake both display.

The inadequate motivational structures of the postal workers as well as the potent agencies of routines should both be appreciated, so I will suggest, as the effect of a particular organizational set-up: of given procedures and standards, material and humans, markets and prospected futures. The routinized postal workers might be considered a problem to the organization but he/she is at the same time a product of the very same organization. When trying to frame and locate change, it takes a far broader and more distributed notion of the ontologies in question, the acknowledgement that human agency is only one element in the wider geography of delegation between actors of different kinds.

Meanwhile, only very few in TDP seem to wonder if there might be a connection, other than that of opposition, between the specific material and structural setup of TDP and the ‘attitudes’

of the postal workers. In the development of a new bike and kickstand, the connection becomes painstakingly clear. Although never officially politicized.

A technical solution

As described in the analysis, the snaplog of the 'good bike with a kickstand' is framed and appreciated because of its functionality and expediency; it serves a crucial part of postal workers routine. The small kickstand, however, has been more or less exchanged with a new and far bigger version since it no longer serves its original purpose: to keep the bike safely parked under the weight of the mail. Despite a decrease in general mail volumes the different kind of mail, represented primarily by heavy advertising matters, call for a different solution. A different technical solution and consequently it is placed in a department of TDP peopled by engineers primarily. A lot of efforts, expert knowledge and testing are invested in the development of just the right bike to solve the present problem of stability, but also to anticipate the future. The anticipated future as it is expressed in the box system representing the international standard measure of pallets and the in principle indefinite things to be distributed. In the development of the new kickstand and bike, change thus receives a material answer. Change is, so to speak, built into the material. The only aspect left more or less untouched is what kind of postal worker and routine this bike affords? The most likely scenario, according to the developer, is that of the robot.

A new bike – a new postal worker

The larger part of the analysis, which focuses on the process of bike development, is based on a single interview and a couple of test reports. One might argue that this is rather 'thin' and insubstantial data. I rather take the frail voice and apparent insecurities displayed by the young female developer as an acute expression of the above problematic: that the technical interventions stemming from her work are having far bigger implications than her voice and official position in the organization would imply. No doubt, I could have had interviews supporting some of her visions of the future TDP, but this would not change the fact that in the organization it seems that she and her small crew of co-developers are fairly alone to establish the link between the material developed and the postal workers of the future. The developers seem quite aware that the new bike and its ability to drive longer routes, to carry much heavier loads of mail and to be operated in a less flexible manner than the old version, inevitably calls for a postal worker with the attributes of a robot; only it does not belong to their section to deal with this. The thing is that it does not belong to any section. Within TDP at large it seems there is neither an organizational acknowledgement nor any action indicating that the development of a bike may become anything but a matter of fact: a technical problem calling for technical solutions.

In the case of developing and introducing a new and different bike to postal distribution, however, both standards and bodily routines are clearly up for change and a new geography of delegation is suggested. New possible equilibriums of well-being and productivity will have to be settled somewhere in between bike-scripts and bodies. Probably it will not take long until the postal workers get used to their new companion, re-gaining their normal flow and expediency. Probably it will not take long either until those exact routines and postal workers are under attack for being resilient towards change.

The well-beings, productivities and politics of a kickstand

This analysis demonstrates how a strictly technical matter of developing the best possible bike, is already highly social and political; that a seemingly small-scale and quite mundane artifact such as a kickstand entails in fact rather ‘big’ as in strategic organizational issues. When one changes bike and kickstand technologies one also mingles with the wider geographies of postal distribution: its organizing principles, its future postal worker, its future markets and following from this, the possible configurations of well-being and productivity. Surely, the alternative is not to simply stick to the old kickstand. Tools, bodies and routines do have to change. As a consequence of the dramatic decline in letter volumes and the introduction of new products to distribute, the work task itself is changing and new kinds of fittings between ‘the screw and the screwdriver’ will have to take place. As will be taken up in relation to the analysis of the customer, no one is even certain if it will be a matter of fitting screws and screwdrivers to stay with the allegory of the postal workers. Notwithstanding this basic uncertainty, or rather because of it, it is crucial to acknowledge that the routinized postal workers are in fact key assets to TDP. That postal workers are not displaying a bad motivational structure and working against the organization but to a large extent act as its ‘natural’ extension serving to accomplish a certain ‘ethics of office’ (Du Gay 2008).

The Customer – on enterprise and the primary task

The general uncertainty concerning the future of TDP is also key to the analysis of the waving customer, only the need for change is inscribed in a far more lucid and fragile actor compared to the old bike with a kickstand: The customer of the European postal market. The instability of the old kickstand, so it shows, is not least caused by the liberalization taking place across the European postal sector. The decline in letters and subsequent increase in other types of mail cannot be explained away by its electronic alternative alone but lies with the fact that TDP no longer holds its previous monopoly. TDP has been liberalized by law and ‘the customer’ has entered the scene as yet another agent to challenge previous stabilities.

A happy customer is simultaneously constitutive of a good workday for the postal workers and the lead principle of the modern business of postal distribution. As the analysis of the happy customer-snaplog has attempted to elucidate, the two are, however, not the same. There are several versions of customers at play at once and each of them defines differently the primary work task, the productivity and the role of the postal worker. Each of them represents quite different modes of organizing.

As a result of the latest management initiatives, represented by for instance Lean, the customer of the free market seems to be gaining prime attention. Every activity in TDP, so it is argued, is to be aligned in order to target the specific needs of this individualized customer of choice. As illustrated in the analysis, the needs of this customer is neither particularly individualized nor clear, and the flexible and responsive work organization ideally sought for tends to assume a principle of ‘one best way of organizing’. As an ironic consequence, increased unclarity arises regarding the definition of the primary task of the organisation. The following pages will seek to elucidate and discuss the organizational paradoxes and uncertainties created from the co-presence of different notions of the customer, stressing especially the effects of the pervasive, however highly fragile notion of the customer of choice.

Competing roles and ethics of postal workers: wage earner and civil servant

Taking the work of present day postal workers into account, it is evident how the demand for increased productivity, as defined by TOR and dictated by the general pull towards automation and standardization in TDP, has challenged the previous practices and ethics of postal work. Among experienced postal workers this is indeed mourned. Not only do the postal workers have to move faster, visiting more addresses, delivering more letters pr. hour. The increased pace also enacts a different customer relation: a relation that sometimes has to be avoided altogether or at least managed pretty tightly in order for it not to become counterproductive, not to take up too much time. The old man waiting at the gate for today's mail potentially acts a threat to productivity. This is where the community helper of the past is left with an ironic commentary in response and the wage earner to take his place. Or should I refer to the 'robot-character' suggested by the bike-Developer, since this image in fact seems to be the most appropriate when the job of a postal worker is to simply empty the bags into a range of mailboxes as quickly as possible.

Still, the strong commitment of the postal workers to their task – getting mail out in due time and often bending rules and standards in order to deliver what they believe to be proper service vis á vis their customers – does not seem to fit a synical wage earner logic. Employing a Weberian framework, a certain 'ethics of office' can be identified (Du Gay 2008) expressed in the postal workers' pride in work and their commitment towards their customers.

As pointed out in the analysis, the postal workers themselves are not inclined to use the term 'customer' at all. They talk of 'people': the friendly people, the angry people, the complaining people, the old people, which they encounter driving their routes. As is argued in the analysis, these 'people' and their importance to the work of postal workers, however, should be framed as more than a matter of personal relations. These 'people' still form part of a bureaucratic mode of organizing lending to the postal worker the role as a community helper, a modern day version of Postman Pat. When the postal workers are eager to deliver mail in time, they are not simply adhering to the work performance measures of a private company. They commit to a code of conduct instigated by national law. Once they put on their uniform they take care of national infrastructure, acting as civil servants and relating to the people on their route as citizens of rights at the same time. This ethics of office, I will argue, forms an integral part of the effective work routines as described in the previous chapter. When the postal workers aim to achieve the best possible fine-tuning of body and tool with the aim of doing 'a proper job', this is inextricably linked to serving the state and embodied in the smile of the waving customer. In line with Du Gay, rather than interpreting bureaucracy as an abstract, all encompassing and not least coercive rationality, bureaucracy should be seen as a contextualized, practical and organized effort affording the people working in it a certain ethical conduct: an ethics of office with specific tasks and duties attached. As Du Gay puts it, "[...] the ethical attributes of the bureaucrat are the contingent and often fragile achievements of a particular organized sphere of moral existence" (Du Gay 2008: 136). Although the organization of postal distribution may appear to be mostly in line with traditional Taylorist production principles, the overall measure and organizing principle of postal work, 'due delivery', is still defined by national law. This is what explains the extremely tense atmosphere in the sorting office, this is what literally 'drives' the postal workers.

Adhering to law, however, has also come to take on a quite different meaning. By EU legislation and transposed in Danish law, the European postal market has been fully liberalized expecting the former national providers to compete in a free market. The customer of needs and choice is introduced. Although the law text still insists on specifying and thus securing the universal rights of the citizens of Europe, referring to a rationale of social equity, the needs of the customer of

markets is basically seen as coinciding with the interests of the citizen. The liberalization is believed to bring both better and cheaper postal services to all. The introduction of a free market and the new customer to go with it proves to be far less straight forward than the political intentions would imply. A range of paradoxes are co-produced: one relates to the identity of the market and the customer to go with it, while others relate to the re-organizations in TDP and the ways in which it serves to alter or at least destabilize the primary task of the postal workers. I will attend to the former below.

The fragility of markets

Following research done in the sociology of markets represented by for instance Callon (1998), the postal market is not a natural state of affairs existing in its own right, but a particular arrangement, ‘a socio-material agencement’ (Callon 2008: 38), which takes the concerted effort of a whole range of actors to come into being: laws, humans, agencies, technologies, knowledges and procedures. The postal market is no exception. Over the last 15 years, it has taken a great deal of effort from a range of actors at all levels counting both the European Commission, EU courts, evaluation reports, consultancies, a revised accounting system, extensive work re-organizations of the universal service providers and not least a particular kind of customer of preferences and choice. As mentioned, the official goal inscribed in the European postal regulation is to assure, by the mechanisms of the market, that the citizens of Europe get access to both better and cheaper postal service. Although product differentiation and increased choice is the general trend in the development of new postal products in TDP, the customer of preferences and choice is not necessarily representative of the actual customers who are only about to discover that they are in fact supposed to be choosing. As Callon writes on Homo Economicus:

“ He can exist and proliferate provided that he is adequately equipped with the appropriate prosthesis and plunged into an environment in which the managerial textual and institutional resources and aid needed to survive as an individual are accessible and conveniently arranged” (Callon 2007: 142).

Contrary to classic economic theory, which above all defines homo economicus by its autonomy and ability to choose, the version suggested by Callon is a far more socially embedded creature with no other identity than the one afforded by its present circumstances. This homo economicus is thus potentially disabled and capable of playing the part required of him only if the necessary equipment is available. The customer calling to complain about the appalling carelessness displayed by the postal worker who has left deep muddy tracks in his lawn has obviously not been adequately equipped. He still perceives himself more as a citizen than as an autonomous Homo Economicus of free choice. Similarly, European evaluations that regularly monitor the developments in the market produce a set of parallel results showing that apparently the former nationalized providers display but a slowly declining market share. The exogenous pressure and ‘necessity’ of the market, referred to when re-structuring is set forth in TDP, is thus a fairly frail construct. Following Callon, the external pressures are just as much dependent on the (re)actions of TDP in order to come into being.

Organizing for the customer

The market opening is taken up and translated by the previous publicly run national providers as a problem of internal organization. As a response to the intentions of a free and open market, the national providers struggle to provide greater transparency when it comes to the actual costs of work processes and products in order to support a fair and market based competition. Besides different principles of accounting and budgeting, this also calls for an increased awareness among local managers and postal workers towards effectiveness and productivity in the everyday organization of work. In the article by Du Gay and Salaman (1992), they describe how 'the idea of the customer' is materialized and achieves its powerful effects in the single organization, private as well as public, by a range of management techniques and re-organizing efforts. The article more or less mirrors what is currently going on in TDP: How companies are divided into divisions acting as quasi-firms; how management recipes such as TQM are taken up in order for the organization to become more enterprising; how various survey technologies are employed in which the (dis)satisfaction of the customer comes to function as a kind of 'manager' dictating what to be improved, and not least how the overall approach of management towards the employees becomes a relation defined by what Du Gay and Salaman defines as 'controlled de-control' (Ibid.: 625) calling forth the engagement, responsibility and creativity of the single employee while at the same time tightly aligning it with the overall purpose of the organization.

Also in TDP, the customer has come to act as an abstract idea. An organizational trope by which management is currently seeking to change the previous bureaucratic structures (and mental frameworks) of the former public TDP. The aim is to become an enterprising private company flexibly capable to adjust and re-adjust by the ebbs and flows of the ever-changing market. This is most clearly expressed in the implementation of Lean management, which has the end customer as its guiding principle. Starting from the need of the customer, work is organized by back-tracking every step of the production process in order to locate possible moments of waste. Waste defined by the actions and processes that represent no value to the customer. Both managers and postal workers are trained to follow this credo and to a large extent the basic logic makes perfect sense also to the postal workers. They too want to do work as expediently as possible and in the best interest of their customers. While the basic logic may seem unifying and as mere 'common sense', as suggested by the manager of development, it enacts a range of paradoxes when it comes to the actual identity of the customer and, so I will argue, a displacement of the work task.

A generalized customer and a generic task

First of all, the customer of Lean and the customer of the postal workers are not necessarily the same. Although TDP officially operates by a twin notion of the customer – the sender and the receiver – the logic of Lean and the principle of waste-elimination automatically put an emphasis on the paying customer, the sender. Based in their work practice, the postal workers relate first and foremost to the customer receiving the letter. This produces, as the manager of development frames it, a problem of 'over-service' and to the postal workers a need of regularly bending the rules and standards in order to continuously deliver what they believe to be good service. Different notions of the customer collide in daily work practice and the trope of the customer set forward by Lean does not seem to afford the organizational alignment intended.

Second of all, in the everyday work of the postal workers, the autonomous, singularized customer of individualized needs presents itself primarily in the guise of undifferentiated mass-

products. The ethics inscribed in Lean, to deliver a good and targeted service to customers, is rather hard to establish in a situation when the postal workers are increasingly handling addressless advertising matters targeting any-one. The free market generates first and foremost a job of increased physical strain and a gradual disappearance of the old fashioned letter otherwise inscribed with pride and urgency. As pin-pointed by James Meek in his eminent comparative analysis of Dutch and English postal distribution (representing a fully privatized and a still nationalized postal service respectively), the consequences of a liberal market tends towards creating a business of distributing: “ [...] the maximum amount of unwanted mail at the minimum cost to businesses” (Meek 2011:9).

Supported by the development of the new bike and box system, the increased amount of addressless (and unwanted) advertising matters appears to be only the beginning of a fundamental change in the primary task of TDP. Rather than ‘mail delivery’, general ‘delivery’ will be what comes to define the task of postal workers, who will potentially end up with the unspecific title of ‘deliverers’. As expressed by the bike-Developer, the box material was chosen exactly to be able to transport just about any-thing. In this sense, it becomes less obvious to organize along the lines of Lean principles having the customer as the overall signpost. This does not imply that Lean as a concept generally implies an unclear notion of the customer, but it stresses that in order to work out as intended a specification of the exact customer or customers is crucial. As long as the customer stays an unspecified ideal type the relation between the goal of production and production processes become detached rather than aligned. Otherwise put: the work task stays unclear.

The primary task and the question of management

In parts of the Socio-Technical-Systems Design literature there is a continuous discussion and theoretical elaboration on the role and character of the work task. Rice, who was one of the key researchers of the original Tavistock group, talks about the ‘primary task’, which defines the core matter of concern to any organization with regard to its survival (Rice 1963). In the article by Raymond Hunt (1976), “On the work itself: Observations concerning relations between tasks and organizational processes” inspired by the tradition of socio-technical-systems theory, he sets out to define the basic taxonomy of the work task and its relation to organizational structures. Based on previous research, Hunt outlines four different possible framings of task taxonomy: 1) its physical nature defined by what is termed ‘stimuli properties’ 2) behavioral requirements meaning what actions are expected by the performers 3) What people actually do 4) the skills necessary to perform the task (Ibid.: 104). By following the descriptive approaches of the four categories, one arrives in the end at what Hunt terms ‘a synthetic task’, which may then serve to designate what Hunt calls an organizational task model defined as follows “[...] an organization’s task models depict its formalized understanding of its work and of the most suitable ways of doing it” (Ibid.: 106). The task of modeling can also be aimed at covering the whole organization, a so-called ‘extended work task model’ which is believed to picture the overall organizational structure defined by its various task-elements and their inter-relations (Ibid.: 108).

Although task oriented in its outset, Lean is introduced to the postal workers just as much as a ‘process tool’ and a particular way of thinking. An ability of reflection which can be put to use confronted with, in principle, any kind of task. Furthermore, its alleged ability to create the ‘whole picture’ of postal work, for instance expressed in the process of Value Stream Mapping, represents but one possible version of postal work. Its acclaimed universal overlook excludes the specific knowledges and practices of the postal workers, affecting not least their version of the customer.

One of the main messages of the task-literature is that organizational and management theorists should not be preoccupying themselves with the modulation of organizational structure and performance without due reference to the specific work task of the organization in question. As put by Hunt, “the effects of different organizational designs are relative to the tasks being done in them” (Ibid.: 101). In other words, it is not possible to coordinate and control organizations if there is no clear understanding of exactly what is being organized. This does not mean that the task and the overall goal are identical (Ibid.: 107), but it does imply that without a clear picture of the work task (or work tasks, since there might be different tasks across organizational divisions) any kind of overall goal will be hard to pursue. Teasingly addressing management and management theorists, Hunt contests that management do not have quite as much choice and influence as they would normally like to think and that this might be the reason why the work task holds no currency in management circles:

“ [...] work never has had a really good name. For all its greater rectitude, it has not typically been perceived to be as much fun as play, for instance. For management theorists to be disinclined in their thinking about the determinants of organizational matters to accord a serious standing to work and to favor instead more exotic and even self-congratulatory ingredients is, therefore, understandable. And anyway, the very thought of some kind of situational constraint on social design and action somehow tends to offend our ingrained human sense of freedom and rationality. Among managers this attitude is typically manifest in the illusion that subject only to their personal wisdom and insight, they are perfectly free to shape organizational affairs in whatever ways they wish. Unfortunately for this viewpoint, the moral of our story is that, if not completely determined, organizational processes are importantly constrained by influences associated with the tasks on which they work” (Ibid.: 113).

Organizing for the work task - a question of complexity and specificity

This critique, I will argue, can be readily applied to many of the re-organization attempts and management programs within TDP. Indeed, as pointed out in my research field, it seems to address a general weakness within both management and organizational theory: To overlook the work task in favor of an interest in organizational structures, processes and performance goals. Although claiming to focus on the customer and as such the ‘raison d’être’ of the organization, the notion of the customer becomes far too abstracted and at the same time too particularized to grasp the complex realities of postal work, which contains in effect not just one but several ‘customers’.

Most importantly, it seems to overlook the already present commitment of the postal workers to the customer, in the role of the citizen. In the process of introducing a new mode of organizing which follow the logics of enterprise, the old qualities of bureaucracy and its correspondent work ethics are neglected as old fashioned and expensive ‘over-service’ per se. The actual practices of the postal workers, however, indicate that postal workers act highly committed, responsive and service minded in their relation to the customers. Employee qualities which are otherwise deemed crucial to the establishment of an enterprising organization (Du Gay & Salaman 1992, Salaman 2005, Rose 1999, Law 1994).

Adopting a ‘work-task stance’ should not be taken to imply yet another organizational ‘recipe’: some uniform and universal principles for organizing. Although work task models are considered interesting in order for managers to take better decisions (Miller 1976: 91), they are not intended to end up with ready-made solutions. When defining the primary task, the socio-technical-researchers call for a basic humility and not least a great deal of empirical sensitivity: The work task is first and foremost a heuristic concept to be constantly arrived at (Miller 1976: 89). Considering the current situation of TDP, in which the traditional work task of mail delivery and indeed the very existence of TDP is up for change, more than ever, sensitivity and humility are called for.

The Cake – worker sociality, autonomy and resistance

The focus of the cake-analysis concerns the identity of ‘worker sociality’, or rather the identities, and how they are organized and managed in the name of productivity. In a different manner of speaking, the theme of this chapter is the ambition within TDP to become more agile and flexible, moving towards more of a post-bureaucratic mode of organizing, as opposed to what is considered within TDP to be the stiff and traditional ways of bureaucracy. The role of the customer and the market plays a decisive role in this transformation and in many ways the analysis of ‘the cake’ expands on what the previous chapter touched upon, namely the internal organizational consequences of enterprise. Only in the cake-chapter, the focus is primarily on the consequences to labor relations; how both local managers and the postal workers are being challenged and made increasingly vulnerable by the introduction of sociality as a strategic means to increase productivity. The big question is how to interpret this. As vividly described by both CMS scholars and within governmentality studies, the introduction of ‘humanness’ to production is a rather dodgy and dangerous affair since it exposes (and exploits) not merely the physical resources of the worker’s body, but the very subjectivity, life and soul of the employee to a calculating rationality; at the same time as it presents itself as a measure of empowerment and increased worker autonomy (Alvesson & Willmott 2002, Rose 1990) When taking into account the actual effects of the humanizing mode of management within TDP, this overall framework does not seem to fit. My attempt in the following is to sketch out how this is so and what other kinds of possible framings there might be in store. Specifically, I will present and discuss the theoretical (and normative) distinction established between bureaucracy and post-bureaucracy as a matter of ‘exclusion’ and ‘inclusion’ of worker subjectivity, respectively (Thompson & Alvesson 2006, Maravelias 2007), questioning whether the latter should be framed as ‘high-inclusive’ and potentially all-encompassing or possibly deserve a more modest and not least contingent signature. This would also imply, so I will argue, an equally contingent and empirically sensitive approach to the critical call for true worker autonomy.

Beyond ‘Banana time’

In the sorting office I was quickly attracted to the sharing of cake out of curiosity to find out what to make of it. In the article ‘Banana Time’ by Donald Roy (1979), I found a both relevant and

inspiring framing but also an occasion to locate a decisive difference to the case of TDP. In the article, Roy describes in fantastic detail how the informal social interaction, the horse playing and joking between a small group of industrial workers act as compensatory devices in an otherwise alienating work setting. In the course of a workday they share a banana, share a fish, go to the window, drink coffee and towards the end of the workday they enjoy a coke taking turns buying a round. The next day the very same activities are repeated with minor deviations. As argued by Roy, the exchanges and activities serve as a ritualized structure by which the group demarcate themselves from the rest of the factory, especially the foreman. And not least do they serve as markers of specific 'times': 'Banana-time', 'Coke-time' and 'Horseplaying-time' serve as ritualized structures to give the otherwise monotonous workday a taste of meaning and purpose (Roy 1979: 161-63). The sociality of the small group is thus characterized by its highly informal character, leading its own life outside the logics of production. Moreover, and unlike the lesson of the human relations school, Roy reflects that the level of productivity and the strong informal ties of the group seemed to have no obvious connection (Ibid.: 166).

As I started out my investigation of the cake network, it seemed the cake was baked, shared and eaten as an expression of a more or less similar strategy as that of Banana time: to confirm and strengthen the social ties of the team apparently unrelated to their particular work situation and not least confirming an antagonistic relation towards local management. Managers are not on the cake list. As I spent more time in the field, it became quite clear, contrary to the conclusion of Roy, how the sociality of the team cannot be separated from work but rather acts as a precondition of its execution. When team relations are harmonious, when the postal workers are relaxed and have fun in the sorting office, it paves the way to also coordinate and share the burdens of work between them. The logic of reciprocity inscribed in the sharing of cake becomes an important ingredient in what I would term the general 'help-economy' of the team, the exchange of favors and work efforts according to the individual deficits and internal balances. A mal-functioning team, so it is suggested, is characterized precisely by dominating individuals with a prime interest to feather their own nest, in turn resulting in bad cooperation and meager results. Good cooperation on the other hand, equals getting work done, producing good results and a corresponding pride in work.

It is obvious why the organization of TDP would find an interest in targeting not merely the time and physical resources of the postal workers but also their sociality. All the while the team members are having fun and feeling well, they are equally delivering better quality to satisfy customers and the bottom line. While 'the good team' as described by the postal workers, and the attempts to organize on/by 'the self-sustained team' may seem as if they are addressing the same sociality and link to productivity, this is not the case. The social is taken up within two quite different networks.

Managing worker sociality – invoking extra-ordinarity

When addressed by management and in particular the HR department, sociality is presented as a generic human quality and thus as something which exists and should be nurtured in specific realms outside work. In the woods, in the creative space of a one day course, in play and fun. Sociality becomes a realm of extra-ordinarity and yet something potentially present in every one of us, as a trait of human-ness. Although closely connected to productivity, its connection to the specific activities of work is non-existent. The top-performance week, aiming firstly at the local managers but later introduced as well to the postal workers, serves as a perfect example. The 'T' literally inscribed in the signs in the woods indicated the identity of the local managers to be defined by

their general openness, their readiness, their curiosity, their taste for change. It addressed each one of them as a unique individual and in their capacity of whole human beings. Quite the same individual as was addressed at the one-day creativity course aiming at the postal workers. In childish play they were invited to become themselves.

Friendly management and wider smiles

This agenda of 'human-ness' pressed by the HR department has in fact succeeded in becoming a generalized truth influencing how managers conceive of themselves and what they are supposed to be doing. Even if 'social' initiatives are often pushed back by the planning efforts of everyday production, the team leaders attempt to facilitate the human potentialities of the postal workers by the introduction of fun and games, competitions and the like. Increasingly so, it is becoming part of what defines a professional leader: to know and manage the postal workers as human beings by the use of the leaders' own human capabilities; their 'human facets'. The goal is to help establish strong and healthy social relations among team members in order for productivity to run smoothly. Quite in line with the old truth of the Hawthorne studies, the width of a smile and productivity goes hand in hand under the auspices of 'friendly management'.

Post-bureaucracy, the whole human being and the question of all-inclusiveness

Following Critical Management Studies, the HR events in TDP and the professionalization of local team leaders can be characterized as examples of normative or even neo-normative control since both seem to operate by targeting and possibly accessing the subjectivity and authenticity of the single employee in order for them to act not simply in line with the company but in effect transgress the company (Fleming & Sturdy 2007). From the perspective of organizational learning, TDP is trying to trigger the explorative dynamics of the organization (March 1991). Classic to what has been termed post-bureaucratic modes of organization, the postal workers as well as the local leaders are becoming relevant not simply due to the role ascribed to them by the organizational hierarchy but due to a whole range of 'extra-role issues' previously excluded from production (Thompson & Alvesson 2005: 106, Maravelias 2007). The creativity, games, play and fun, and not least the increased interest in the 'sociality' of the team, are perfect examples of this. Symptomatically, Thompson & Alvesson distinguish bureaucracy from post-bureaucracy by the terms: 'low-inclusive' and 'high-inclusive', respectively (Ibid.: 107). As extensively covered in the research field, it is the high-inclusive post-bureaucratic mode of organization which has recently been targeted a lot of critique within critical management studies. The all-encompassing inclusion of the 'full person' is considered even more dangerous than the de-humanization of traditional bureaucracy, so it is argued. The subtle mechanisms of freedom and power; a 'controlled de-control' (Du Gay & Salaman 1992:625) sets the employee free at the same time as this freedom is expected to be managed by the employee in a way that corresponds the ambitions of the company. This is when the normal boundaries of private and work life become blurred, this is when the commitment of the employees becomes too much, causing stress breakdowns, this is when the very soul, heart and minds of people are enrolled in the logic of capitalist (self) exploitation. Within both CMS and governmentality studies, the rhetoric is often very persuasive and often highly dramatic. According to Rose for instance, the changing character of the employment contract is but

one aspect of a larger and seemingly all-encompassing neo-liberal form of government, 'a larger pattern' in which 'we all, modern men and women, have become entangled' (Rose 1990: 9) since it operates by going 'into the very interior of our existence and experience as subjects' (Ibid.: 11).

The exclusionary effect of high-inclusiveness

The post-bureaucratic management programs introduced to both postal workers and local managers do not seem to reach quite as far, though. In the example of the event in the woods, the quite simple answer to HR is irony, silence and arms crossed. The participants found it irrelevant and thus simply stopped paying attention. Following Contu, this could be read as an expression of 'de-caf resistance', of course (Contu 2007). Although the local managers were seemingly disinterested and protected behind their shield of silence, they were in fact still playing their part in the overall capitalist logic of the event. This would be the argument of Contu, and it is a hard one to disprove since it works by a logic of notorious suspicion: It is there, the subtle coercive powers, even if one does not see them. Considering both the event in the woods and the creativity course for postal workers, I am more inclined to conclude that it is just like the leaders and the postal workers state themselves: irrelevant. Some may be irritated, some may complain to have wasted their time, while others, and this counts both local leaders and postal workers, did find some enjoyment in the extraordinary and entertaining set-up, but bottom line is that the HR events succeeds in becoming no more than a distraction from the everyday hassles in the sorting office.

The reactions against the HR programs, so I will argue, cannot be grasped simply as a matter of subjugation or resistance, compliance or non-compliance, simply because this notoriously implies a reduction in analytic scope. As pointed out in my research field focusing strictly on the intentions and effects of management programs overlooks a whole range of other 'factors' currently organizing the possible identities and possibilities of the postal workers. In other words, when arguing that a post-bureaucratic mode of organizing is particularly 'high-inclusive', targeting and controlling the whole human being, this does not seem to catch the fact that the 'I' on the signs in the woods and the dream-identity written on a piece of masking tape are also highly exclusive. The identities suggested by the sign and the masking tape both fail to address that the humans finding their way on the path in the woods or inventing comic scenes in a class room are defined not merely by their general humanity but by the tasks, worries and thrills that go with their respective organizational roles.

Exactly these work roles will be the focus in the following. While the above suggest that they serve as a 'protection' against managerial interference (Thompson & Alvesson 2005: 106), the co-presence of the obligations inscribed in the self-sustained team and the bureaucratic/taylorist production measures also tend to produce an increased vulnerability counting both local managers and postal workers.

Dilemmas and new vulnerabilities: The team leader

I will address the challenges of the local team leader first. When it comes to the idealized ambitions and abstract rhetoric surrounding the concern for team sociality – 'creativity' and 'wider smiles' – this neglects that the organization of postal work is still defined by traditional management authority, as clearly implied by the work time agreement. In the practical attempts to establish a self-

sustained team, this comes to pose an obstacle not least to the local team leader. While she is trying to make them act collectively responsible, the work time agreement defines the labor relation as an individualized relation between the single postal worker and management. The fact that it is still the overall responsibility of the team leader to make sure that everyone delivers a fair day's work incites the team to play the old game of workers' rights. The postal workers can lean back and let the team leader fry. The postal workers are more or less free to step in and out of responsibility, knowing that, at the end of the day, the team manager will carry the burden of possible production irregularities. Once the postal workers ally themselves with the pace and bureaucracies of production, the team leader is truly left to her own devices: her personality and abilities as a home-baker. Or alternatively, to stick to her bureaucratically inscribed role as a leader of authority. The powerlessness of the team leader thus created can be seen as the result of the postal workers' effective resistance. As their way of using bureaucracy as a protection against management. As I will suggest the powerlessness of the team leader is rather an effect of a general lack of structures and artifacts to support the workings of team organization. Besides the work time agreement, also the level of noise, the short time spent inside and the strict deadlines attached to the job makes team cooperation a hard exercise for all parties.

Dilemmas and vulnerabilities: the postal workers

The postal workers also feel the pressure. While the team leader's appeal to the ethics of helpfulness seems to fail its mission, the social dynamics of the team are being re-configured nevertheless. Although managers are not on the cake list, it is becoming increasingly harder for the postal workers to keep their sociality to themselves, so to speak. The very existence of the different kinds of sociality and mutual help might in some stretches make it easier for the postal workers to resist management interference. They may choose to 'slide' back and forth between the different logics, but it also implies a more complex maneuver. The official offer inscribed in the self-sustained teams (to take on more responsibilities, to corporate, to come up with suggestions for improvements and demonstrate engagement in work) resonates the ethics of the team and the single postal worker so much that distinctions become hard to sustain, and also potentially costly. If they simply turn their backs, refuse to share their thoughts and exclude open negotiation, they are also left to accept the versions of a fair days' work that come with the specific (and limited) knowledge of TOR and the team leader. And the alternative is not particularly attractive either. Becoming the postal worker of 'creative human potential' implies that everyday production issues and controversies leap out of focus, only to reappear as the responsibility of the self-sustained team and the single postal worker to handle. A creative, corporative, socially well-functioning and committed postal worker is at the same time a postal worker that acts as an organizational buffer compensating the malfunctions of production and bureaucratic formal structures. Literally, the self-managed postal workers are asked to incorporate and balance off the tensions and ambiguities of a liberalized TDP while at the same time getting mail out in time. No wonder they tend to keep silent.

Post-bureaucracy and worker autonomy re-visited

Returning to the critique raised against high-inclusive post-bureaucratic modes of organizing, I will argue that the problem is not one of an all-encompassing subtle form of management. Rather it is

the unsettledness and dilemmas created when the humanizing form of management collides with the obligations inscribed in the work task at hand and the tayloristic/bureaucratic structures supporting this. Comparing to the self-regulating groups of the English mines the self-sustained teams in TDP never come to serve, as Cummings puts it 'the basic building block of concern' (1987:627). According to the work time agreement and the tayloristic and bureaucratic principles dominating the organization of production the teams become more of an add-on, however, still serving to obligate the postal workers and thus putting them in the dilemmas described. Trist and Bamforth describe the problem of automation in the mines as a mismatch between the work task at hand and the choice of work organization. The automation of mining forces the workers to work as isolated individuals, although the proper execution of the work task in effect takes a great deal of coordination. The unoptimal situation created, both production-wise and related to the psychological well-being of the workers, is described as 'isolated dependence'. In the case of the self-sustained teams the problem is more or less the same, only in reverse. The work task of the postal workers is defined primarily by its individualized nature, but is forced into a collective structure by the self-sustained team. A self-sustained team, which has not the work task but in principle the alignment of the whole organization as its primary function. As a result of this, what I will term an 'organizational dependence' is produced, defined not least by the abstract production demands of tomorrow. In every day work practice, however, the postal workers have but the opportunity, authority and competence to relate to the mail filling up their shelves in the here and now. The effects produced i.e. the task unclarity and internal 'personal' conflicts, are left with the postal workers and the local team leaders to settle. Calling for increased worker autonomy in a situation like this does not seem the proper solution. At least it will take a rethinking of worker autonomy for it to become less of an idealized, abstract and not least individualized realm existing somewhere outside/in opposition to the work organization. Increased worker autonomy may be a good principle of work organization, but only in so far as it supports directly the execution and performance goals of the work task at hand.

Bringing work back in

- reframing bureaucracy and post-bureaucracy

A trembling organization

The overall impression of TDP when reading my analysis is a rather blurry picture defined by different tendencies pulling in seemingly divergent directions. Firstly and most predominantly a continuous standardization and automation following classical taylorist principles, secondly a traditional bureaucratic form of organization stemming from TDP's past identity as a public organization, and thirdly a pull towards increased flexibilization with an array of 'classic' post-bureaucratic features, entailing the increased involvement of workers in the daily coordination of work; indeed as key to productivity. Many different versions and relations between well-being and

productivity are afforded from these co-existing modes of ordering. It is as if the organization is trembling. The work task, the postal workers, the leaders, the material, the market and the customers are underway to becoming something else. It is a fact that nothing is what it once was and also true that TDP has not yet found its possible new and more stable 'self'. Although TDP tries its best to re-create the importance and aura of the letter, it is hard to imagine that written letters on paper will ever become a key form of communication. Indeed the very aura established around the letter as 'authentic' and 'sincere' is only possible due to its increasing rarity. As a result TDP is gradually losing its societal importance as the key infrastructure of communication. My supervisor one day suggested a possible title: "TDP at death's door" implying exactly that the very product itself as well as its previous work organization are changing and possibly disappearing altogether.

And yet, despite the many and unsettled versions of work co-existing, TDP displays a simultaneous stability and hanging together-ness, 'a productive slippage' as framed by Law & Moser (2003). The most obvious expression of this is the constant running through it all: the postal worker in his car or on his bike (electrified or not) driving mail from A to B 6 days a week satisfying the needs of citizens and market customers alike. The bags may be heavier, the routes longer, and the everyday planning of work more demanding from the increased fluctuations in mail volumes, but delivering mail is still more or less the same. I might be accused of romanticism but this is surely not my intention. What my empirical results suggest is not a resurrection of the postal worker per se, but rather a due attention towards the work actually being done day by day, no matter the 'exogenous pressures' and 'future insecurities'. There are still letters, magazines, newspapers, advertising matters being distributed every day by a postal worker. With the attention firmly directed at the challenges of 'change' this is, however, a fact rarely appreciated among TDP management. Instead, the demand for change is translated into various management recipes and techniques each proposing their universal solution to the problem. As a result, the work being done is black-boxed, disregarded as a triviality, and attended to only when it breaks down. Depending on the management framework employed, different diagnosis and answers to the problem are suggested and as a result a range of dilemmas, tensions and vulnerabilities on the part of the postal workers and the local leaders are produced. Because of the simultaneous existence of the tayloristic production logic and the bureaucratic structures, which still dominate the organization and performance goals of postal work, the flexibility suggested by the self-sustained teams ends up being on the part of the humans entirely. The postal workers are in effect asked to act the last resort and buffer when everything else tumbles. Sometimes they succeed in refusing this new work role, at other times they do negotiate and cooperate and thus serve to balance off the many demands and tensions within TDP: the decrease in mail volumes, the instability of otherwise fixed routes and work time, new definitions of customers etc. When the postal workers 'comply', however, this is not simply because they have been subjugated by an all-encompassing form of management targeting their very souls; or indeed because the hard core standards of work have been sugar coated, 'charismaticized', by visionary management rhetoric. Being part of the divergent organizational set-up of TDP, notwithstanding, the postal workers are still focused on the work task at hand, to deliver mail in due time, and in practice this has become still harder to do 'wearing blinkers'. Surely, this does not make the exposure of the individual postal worker any better, but it suggests a different outset of critique and alternatives beyond management and a call for more worker autonomy.

Bringing work back in

The key question of this thesis has been to find a way to understand the co-existing modes of organizing and not least their enactments and specific effects to the everyday practices of postal distribution. The ‘diagnosis’ produced from the analysis is, however, far from clear-cut. At least I am not able to answer whether the one organizational mode is better, as in more effective or more or less humane than the other. Indeed, the outset as well as the result of my analysis suggest that this question should be re-framed altogether. The point of departure when discussing pros and cons in relation to ‘bureaucracy’ vs. ‘post-bureaucracy’ necessarily has to be the work at hand. In other words: the effects, positive as well as negative, produced from any given mode of organization will have to be evaluated in context as they are inextricably linked to what is being organized. By taking as point of departure the work task, this thesis has produced an empirically generated and thus specified outset to revisit a range of classical dilemmas and debates of management and organization theory, serving to twist and turn them and thus (re)locate the outset for analysis and critique. In this sense my analysis serves to contribute to a re-contextualization and -specification of management and organization studies; an ambition to ‘bring work back in’ (Barley & Kunda 2001) when deciding and evaluating on how to best organize in the name of productivity and worker well-being.

The work task – in between functionalism and network-heuristics

To have the work task as an analytical point of departure is both a pragmatic and yet highly complex endeavor. A tension which is also mirrored within the task-literature itself. On the one hand the work task and the work task model, is presented as a highly functionalistic tool for management. Laying out task models for the whole organization pretty simply supplies the manager with a more adequate and complete picture of the organization and thus a better chance to coordinate and control its performance (Hunt 1976). On the other hand the work task is described less as a distinct ontology of work and more as a processual tool for the organization to recursively settle the inherently unsettledness of the work task. As put by Hunt tasks are:

“ [...] complex multidimensional things, not at all simple to describe or define. Tasks appear in many different forms and they interconnect with a wide variety of other basic phenomena and constructs from which they need to be discriminated, but not isolated” (Ibid:102).

Following from the open system perspective of Socio-technical-systems theory the work task is a contingent matter to be recursively arrived at. This latter tenet is exactly the point of departure as well as the result of this analysis. With the resources of Actor Network Theory I have sought to (re)assemble postal work as a highly complex and distributed phenomenon enacted by a range of ‘factors’ both inside and outside the organization: the nature, the bikes, workers’ rights, the team structure, hand sorting, the customers, route technologies, the market, European law, and I could go on and in so doing in effect repeat my network-analysis. Taking the work task as the point of departure entails an appreciation of the organization as a complex human-technological make-up. And this has quite important analytical and political

consequences. It means recognizing that the postal worker of TDP, conservative or flexible, is not an individual exogenous element of the organization but part and parcel of it. It means that worker well-being is and should be addressed as an utterly organizational phenomenon. It means that the possible 'subjugations' of the workers cannot be explained by management powers alone. It means that no matter what kind of organizational recipe is followed change cannot come from any one element; human or non-human. Taking the work task as point of departure indeed is a call for increased complexity and against the tendency to single out any aspect of work organization. And it is a demanding call. It serves to question the fundamental way in which expertise of management and production technology has been built, following the specialization and separation of different realms of knowledge. And it serves, at least temporarily, to destabilize the fixed geography of labor conflict.

The work task and political action?

For this very reason, and as touched upon in the research field, the work task has been criticized as an impossible point of departure for political action within the psycho-social work environment. To repeat the gloomy words of Allvin and Aronsson:

“ Hence, our conceptual understanding of a work environment presupposes a relatively well-defined job with a set of relatively well-defined conditions; conditions that, furthermore, may be treated within an established order of negotiation. Any attempt to broaden the concept beyond these considerations runs the risk of obscuring our understanding of it and, above all, of undermining the order of treatment that ultimately is the very purpose and legitimacy of the concept” (Ibid; 104).

When the work task, the job, disintegrates so does 'the order of negotiation', the very landscape within which the betterment of working conditions were previously sought for. While there might be reasons to talk about general job-disintegration, as does both Allvin and Aronsson and work-task theorists such as Oldham and Hackman³, there is also a tendency for them to paint a rather broad brushed picture of the developments within the labor market, focusing mainly on how jobs dissolve and become boundaryless (Allvin et al. 2011). Less attention is given to the ways boundaries, for instance the ones of life and work, are simultaneously re-performed, as demonstrated by Christensen (2008). The debates about boundaries and where to 'draw the line', is in every respect a fine indicator that the notion of the job, its time as well as its space (as opposed to what it is not) is by no means an outdated matter. Certainly among postal workers time, space and the negotiations of responsibilities of workers and managers respectively are continuously put on the agenda. In other words, although disintegration and dissolution of traditional positions might be the immediate result of a distributed notion of the work task, the traditional distinctions still seem to work as a common point of departure. The difference is that we cannot presume beforehand, how the lines should be drawn. Time, space, hierarchies and the interests of employees and employers respectively cannot serve as fixed entities. The investigation, or rather the configuration of work and its corresponding psycho-social work environment have to be considered an ongoing, specific and practical accomplishment; a matter of ontological politics (Mol 1999).

Within the framework of these pages and based in these specific empirical findings, the political aim and result of 'bringing work back in' is first and foremost to propose an alternative to the widespread tendency to make work organization primarily a matter of individual attitudes, reducing organizations to 'realms of meaning'. Having the work task as point of departure is at the same time a call for a de-individualization, de-humanization even, of the field of organization and management theory counting as well its critics.

Abstract

The well-being of employees is currently a central matter of concern both in public and private companies. If employees do not feel well, in the last instance they might experience a burn out or fall ill from stress and thus add to the highly costly yet ever growing number filling up the statistics of this modern epidemic. In short, well-being is key to productivity. For sure this is not a new story, but at the core of organization and management theory: how to best organize the human resources of production balancing off the need for increased productivity and the preservation of physical and mental resources of the worker? In contrast to classic principles such as Taylor's scientific management, it seems today generally agreed that well-being thrives when work is organized by principles of 'flexibility', 'learning', 'empowerment' and 'creativity'. However, at the same time workplaces and organizations are under an enormous pressure towards standardization and optimization. This dissertation investigates empirically competing or intersecting ways of organizing well-being and productivity, with an analytic outset in the work task, departing from historically generated, however still prevalent, dichotomies and normativities of standardization and flexibility respectively.

The empirical case of the dissertation is the organization of postal work in a big and formerly publicly run distribution company in Denmark. Based on an ethnographic field work and the employment of an auto-photographic method, the dissertation investigates how the current and simultaneous efforts of standardization and flexibility configure the well-being(s) and productivities of postal work. The theoretical framework is primarily informed by Actor Network Theory and the dissertation attend to a detailed investigation of how well-being and productivity are enacted in the daily work practices and the constant shifting/delegation going on between the inscribed postal worker of work tools, standard procedures and management programs on the one side and the routinized bodies of the postal workers on the other. Most of the time this results in 'working compatibilities' silently enacting bodies-with-standards that are both productive and well. At other times, however, controversy and conflicts arise, pointing to the fact that the presence of multiple modes of organizing are not always productive.

The empirical chapters departs from selected auto-photographs that prompt different unfoldings of the way postal work is organized – or sought organized – and the way well-being and productivity arise as effects of these organizations. In this unfolding the analysis proceed on a tension between phenomenological and actor-network theoretical readings of empirical material creating a patchwork-like assemblage of postal work. This involves a stitching together of highly mundane, corporeal practices and material such as bicycles and kickstands, personal experiences, the researcher's interpretations, the technical scripts of electric bikes, the norms of postal workers, the discourse of management and the political-economic developments of European postal markets. Through the empirical chapters, the dissertation depicts postal work not as a story of standardization versus flexibility, but as a constant 'juggling' and balancing act between them. This is not a story of humanization or the opposite, it is both at once. It is not a story of stabilization or perpetual change, it is both at once. It is a story of the hanging-togetherness of an organization that displays multiple versions of well-being and productivity as well as multiple controversies as a result of this. Depending on the stakes one has in this complex organizational set-up, whether one is the postal worker, the local manager, the HR consultant or perhaps the customer, preferences will differ, and indeed this is an important discussion. What is the better way to organize postal work? The analysis presented in the dissertation will not deliver the answer to this, but hopefully make the discussion a more qualified one, by displacing old truths. Having as point of departure and final emphasis a heuristics of the work task, the thesis aims to contribute to a specification of organization theory, HRM and work environment theorizing, which otherwise tend to have lost its primary object: work.

Resumé

Medarbejderes trivsel er et centralt anliggende i både offentlige og private organisationer. Hvis medarbejderne ikke trives kan de i sidste instans 'brænde ud' eller blive syge af stress og dermed føje sig til det stadigt stigende antal af stressramte, der fylder statistikkerne. Trivsel bliver på den måde nøglen til virksomhedens produktivitet. Dette er på ingen måde en ny historie men udgør kernen i organisations- og ledelsesteori: spørgsmålet om, hvordan man bedst kan organisere de menneskelige ressourcer i produktionen i en balancegang mellem behovet for øget produktivitet og en hensyntagen til medarbejderens fysiske og psykiske ressourcer. I kontrast til klassiske organiserings principper, såsom Taylors scientific management, synes der i dag at være generel enighed om, at trivslen blomstrer, når arbejdet er organiseret efter principper om "fleksibilitet", "læring", "empowerment 'og' kreativitet". Men på samme tid er arbejdspladser og organisationer også under et enormt pres i retning af standardisering og optimering. Med et analytisk afsæt i 'selve arbejdet', forsøger denne afhandling at tage afstand fra dominerende dikotomier og normativiteter, når det handler om at forstå standardisering og fleksibilitet. Alternativet er en empirisk undersøgelse af, hvordan forskellige organiseringsmåder konfigurerer trivsel og produktivitet forskelligt.

Det empiriske afsæt for afhandlingen er organiseringen af post arbejde i Post Danmark. Med udgangspunkt i etnografisk feltarbejde og en auto-fotografisk metode (snaplog), undersøger afhandlingen, hvordan standardiserings og fleksibiliserings bestræbelser konfigurerer trivsel og produktivitet i post arbejdet på forskellig måde. Den teoretiske ramme er primært informeret af Aktør-Netværks Teori og fokus er en detaljeret undersøgelse af, hvordan trivsel og produktivitet bliver balanceret og forhandlet i postarbejdernes daglige arbejdsrutiner og den kontinuerlige delegering af kompetencer, der foregår mellem arbejdsredskaber, standarder og management programmer og postarbejdernes rutinerede kroppe. For det meste er resultatet af den løbende afstemning mellem mennesker og teknologi en 'working compatibility', en funktionel sameksistens, som både har produktivitet og trivsel som deres effekt. Andre gange opstår der kontroverser og konflikter, som peger på at sameksistensen af forskellige organiseringsformer ikke altid er produktiv.

Hver empirisk analyse tager afsæt i et auto-fotografi, som ansporer til at udfolde billedets organisatoriske sammenhæng, dets placering i et større netværk, med fokus på hvordan trivsel og produktivitet opstår som effekter af disse organiseringer/netværk. Analyserne bevæger sig i spændingsfeltet mellem fænomenologiske og aktør-netværks teoretiske læsninger og skaber et patchwork-lignende indtryk af postarbejdet. Cykler og støtteben, forskerens personlige oplevelser og fortolkninger, de tekniske scripts for el-cykler, postarbejdernes socialitet, ledelsesdiskurser og programmer samt den politisk-økonomiske udvikling af et frit europæisk postmarked bliver så at sige 'syet sammen' til en ny helhed. Gennem de empiriske kapitler, viser afhandlingen hvordan organiseringen af postarbejdet ikke kan forstås som en ensidig historie om standardisering versus fleksibilitet, men som en konstant 'jonglering' og balancegang mellem dem. Det er ikke en historie om humanisering eller det modsatte, det er både og. Det er ikke en historie om stabilisering eller evig forandring, det er både og. Det er en historie om hvordan flere forskellige, overlappende og modsatrettede versioner af trivsel og produktivitet formår at 'hænge sammen' og udgøre en samlet organisation, om end også at producere en lang række kontroverser. Afhængigt af hvem man er i dette komplekse organisatoriske set-up; om man er postarbejder, den lokale team leder, HR-konsulent eller måske kunden, så vil præferencerne være forskellige. Der vil være mange forskellige bud på, hvad der er den bedste måde at organisere post arbejde. Afhandlingen leverer ikke svaret på det spørgsmål, men kan forhåbentlig være med til at kvalificere diskussionen af det. Udgangspunktet så vel som afhandlingens endemål er at pege på arbejdsopgaven som en organisations-heuristik, der dels kan finde anvendelse i lokale forhandlinger af trivsel og produktivitet, dels har til hensigt at bidrage til en præcisering og specifikation af organisationsteorien, HRM-feltet og arbejdsmiljø forskningen. Felter som alle har en tendens til at have mistet et ellers fundamentalt omdrejningspunkt: selve arbejdet.

Notes

Chapter 2

- 1) According to Weber, bureaucracy was closely connected to the creation of western states and their general modernisation. It was a precondition to their success (Maravelias 2007). However, it has been Weber's iron cage, which has gained general attention, while the uses and ethical aspects of bureaucracy have been more or less overlooked (Du Gay 2000; Du Gay 2004).
- 2) The surprise of the researcher's is a contested matter. Gillespie points out that this has been exaggerated in the central subsequent account (Dickson and Roethlisberger 1939) in order to produce a more convincing story. As Gillespie states, "The objectivity of the findings seems to be guaranteed by the researcher's confessions" (Gillespie 1941:3). Re-reading the original reports, Gillespie points out that both researchers and managers were aware of and interested in the psychological factors in advance (Ibid.: 47).
- 3) According to Mogensen, this role of the manager is however not a specific product of the 'humanization' of production alone. It was already an ambition of Taylor. By the introduction of scientific rules and 'a fair days work' he had already tried to dismantle the general conflict between workers and employees workers (Mogensen 2000: 6-7; Taylor 1967: 10).
- 4) Critical management studies address a far broader range of management theories and practices than the ones associated strictly with Human relations and Human Resource Management. As pointed out by Alvesson, Bridgman & Willmott (2009) it addresses as well more specialist areas such as marketing, strategy, accounting or even the role of the natural environment (see for instance chapters 6 and 20).
- 5) This is already an aspect being debated within CMS (see Alvesson & Willmott 2002, Costea et al. 2008, Mumby 2010).
- 6) Around 1965, the tension between the psycho-social perspective and the socio-technical resulted in the splitting up of the original research group at the Tavistock Centre of Research, which following the socio-technical branch, resulted in the final break away from the human relations school (Eijnatten 1993: 30).
- 7) The model is based on the combination of data stemming from national self-report surveys conducted in Sweden and The United States in the early 70's, covering random sample of the working population (Karasek 1979: 289).
- 8) Although the analysis takes the point of departure a Swedish context, there is reason to assume that the general arguments are also relevant in a Danish context. Following Nielsen (2001), a common tradition across the Scandinavian countries can be found, not least stemming from the fact that work environment issues have been taken up as part of the formation of the Scandinavian welfare states (Nielsen 2001: 10).
- 9) Translates into: Knowledge about the work-environment
- 10) See: [www. Arbejdsmiljoviden.dk](http://www.Arbejdsmiljoviden.dk)
- 11) I will not go into a discussion and critique of neither Weick nor Wenger, but reading Weick (1995) and Wenger (1998) they both struggle to conceptualize how to incorporate a notion of structures/institutions/society into their theories. Not to mention the notion of power.

Chapter 3

- 1) In *Actor Network Theory and After* (Hassard & Law 1999) Latour produces a quite different and skeptical account of ANT, regretting the conception and growing institutionalization of ANT as another sociological theory tending to repeat the dead-end debate of agency versus structure (Latour 1999).
- 2) In the methods chapter I will discuss in depth the question of the role of the researcher, suggesting in line with Gad & Jensen that voicing the field and delivering good descriptions does not necessarily take an invisible/'weak' researcher, as Latour himself suggests (Gad & Jensen 2010; 64).
- 3) This insight has been developed already by Foucault in his studies of power, proclaiming that hierarchies do exist, only they are not the ones to explain the dynamics of power. Rather, echoed in the ANT-stance, they are the ones to be explained (Foucault 1980).
- 4) In the methods-chapter I will elaborate in more detail what kind of consequences this particular standpoint has had to my research.
- 5) In the book *We have never been modern* (1993), Latour argues that our so called modernity is based in the purification and oppositional logic of different spheres of life: the natural and the social, the human and the non-human, the mind and the body etc. Distinctions that are not simply given but rather products of what he calls our 'modern constitution' closely linked to the invention of modern science and its various sub-disciplines. A constitution, so Latour argues, that needs to be re-vised since it leaves us blind to the hybridity of our inherent pre-modern world.
- 6) The rather entertaining and highly polemic text "Epistemological Chicken", by Sociologists of Science Collins & Yearly frames the problem of ANT as a matter of epistemology, criticizing especially the introduction of non-humans as actors. They believe this to distort their prime argument: that 'putting humans at the center' is the only remedy to challenge the special authority of natural scientists and the idea of their privileged access to nature as an independent realm (Collins & Yearly 1992: 310).
- 7) In Latour's text, "The Power of Associations" he does not explicitly discuss work standards or routines, but more generally the order of the social. Since standards are also a way of employing a certain 'order' involving both humans and non-humans (see Berg & Timmermans 2000), the overall message is however compatible.
- 8) Pentland and Feldman primarily talk about 'routines', but in their definition of the ostensive dimension of routines i.e. the generalized, prescriptive codification of behavior often supported by artifacts (Pentland & Feldman 2005: 796-797) this seems to come close to the 'program' dimension of work standards/tools/technologies.
- 9) According to Law, the concept of modes of ordering is inspired by Foucault's notion of discourse and their affordance of certain 'conditions of possibility', only modes of orderings are operating in a 'scaled down version' and acting out a less forceful order than is normally the case in Foucault's studies (Law 1994: 21-22)
- 10) Following a performative ontology or what Mol chose to reframe as 'praxiography' or 'enactment' (Mol 2002: 32), the object of arteriosclerosis (as any object) does not exist 'outside' the organization of it, i.e. the diagnosing and curing, but comes into being as a consequence of it.

Chapter 4

- 1) In an interview with Latour, conducted as part of a recent book about Latour and his work (Blok & Jensen 2009), I could not help noticing the following comment (my translation): “Today I would not spent as much as one minute fighting against the distinction between fact and values, in the meantime it has become irrelevant” (Blok & Jensen 2009: 228). Following this, what I am after is not the ‘actual’ position of Latour, what he ‘really’ thinks on the matter. I rather use his texts, his ways of reasoning, as resources to stage my own position. A strategy often used by Latour himself, proposing, however, the danger of over-simplifying the contested position (Blok & Jensen; 2009: 237-238).
- 2) An ethologist studies animal behavior.
- 3) Perspectivism might also share the basic notion that reality does not come as objective representations. But, as has been pointed out by for instance Mol and Strathern (Mol 1999, 2002, Strathern 2004, Gad & Jensen 2010), perspectivism still holds the idea that there is indeed an object of study, existing beyond any given perspective, before the knowledge of it.
- 4) As a little intertextual curiosum, Latour uses the very same example in his text: the education of the perfume-conaisseur (the nose) as does Antonio Strati, professor of organizational aesthetics in his introduction to aesthetics in the Sage Handbook of Research (Strati 2008). Needless to say they reach quite different conclusions (see Mogensen 2010).
- 5) Latour draws on Despret’s (and Stengers’s) philosophy of science (Latour 2004; 217, Despret 1999). The English versions of this philosophy are displayed in the text on sheep referred to here, in the article: “The body we care for: figures of anthropo-zoo-genesis” (2004a) as well as in the book: *Our emotional make-up – ethno-psychology and selfhood* (2004b).
- 6) Haraway’s critique aims primarily at Latour’s early science studies in the 1980’s, which she finds to reproduce the victorious story of the (male) scientist. In Latour’s latest text on the body (2004), his notion of the body and thus the role of the researcher comes rather close to the position of Haraway.
- 7) Actually, I like the expression in Danish better: ‘at stikke fingeren i jorden’. Translated into English it would go something like this: ‘to put your finger into the ground’. The tactile connotation makes very good sense when it comes to the physicality of postal work: the rhythms of work, the tenseness as well as the laid back attitudes as it shows in the bodies and the sounds of voices and things. It is a rhythm that you can observe in the passing of time, but the physicality of the job, so I experienced, is best understood by getting involved in doing the job yourself.
- 8) According to the annual report of 2010, around 12.000 employees out of a sum total of 16.206 employees are employed as postal workers (Post Danmark 2010).
- 9) TDP has around 19 distribution areas covering the whole of Denmark. Each works as its own unit with separate budgets, a responsible Head of the area and support staff to service the distribution centers covering the area. Distribution areas vary in size, thus counting a varied number of distribution centers. According to the annual report, there are 300 distribution centers operating. Currently, however, there is a general tendency to close down smaller distribution centers in order to save money on operating costs, so this number may well have changed.
- 10) When reflecting my interview method I will elaborate what it means to treat my informants as a role/persona and why I have chosen to do so.
- 11) In the other case organizations within the WESP project (the Danish primary school and a big international bio-tech company), of course it was not the perspectives and practices of postal

workers but the ones of teachers and chemists that were in focus.

- 12) According to Grimshaw and Ravetz, the scarce use of photographic methods within ethnography is largely due to the dark imperial history of anthropology. Classic anthropology used the photograph as a visual representation mainly to document the strangeness of ‘the others’ (Grimshaw & Ravetz 2005). Today photographic methods are re-introduced and considered to bridge the representational distance between the researcher and the field.
- 13) It is worth noticing that in Pink’s work, especially in the book *Doing Sensuous Ethnography* (2001), there is an inherent tension between on the one hand stressing visibility to be a method of its own specific qualities when it comes to accessing the embodied lives of the informants – and on the other hand the standpoint that the research media, visual or not, does not pre-define what kind of sensorial access is produced. For instance Pink presents the traditional research interview to be an equally fruitful access to sensory categories (see chapter 5).
- 14) The interest in doing ‘comparative’ research across the 3 cases was stronger than the fact that self-management is a word with little resonance in the context of postal work. I compensated by translating ‘self-management’ into: “events of decision making, discretion, judgment”.
- 15) Some energy has been put into categorizing the combination of photos and interviews under the varying terms of: photo-driving, photo-elicitation, photo-voice, photo-novella (see Harper 2002; Warren 2005). According to Warren, the distinction is one of validity; whether the validity is based in a precise and authentic account of the inherent meaning of the photo (i.e. auto-driving and photo-elicitation) or whether validity is based in the ability of the method to make the voices of hitherto silenced perspectives heard (photo-voice and photo-novella) (see Warren 2005: 867-869).
- 16) The thingness I am addressing here is connected to the object in focus. For another dimension of the objectness of photography, see for instance Edwards and her analysis of the material forms of photos and their importance to the meaning of the image beyond semiotics and iconography (Edwards 2002).
- 17) When combined with an interview, and not least the ambition of tracing the meaning making of the individual informant, this thing-ness is easily abandoned in favor of an interest in the invisible and intangible dimensions of human experiences and emotions conveyed as the researcher tries to ‘look through’ the photograph (Schwartz 1989: 122).
- 18) The research done by Hurdley on mantelpieces is equally interesting, since it succeeds in taking into account the objects framed. Although she conducts interviews to elicit photographs, the objects displayed, including the empty spaces between them, are all explicitly part of the analysis (Hurdley 2007)
- 19) See appendix for an overview of my interviews, when and where they have been conducted and whether they have been fully, partly or in rare instances not transcribed at all.
- 20) I will address more thoroughly the question of the different places of my fieldwork in a section below.
- 21) A position represented by for instance Steinar Kvale, having phenomenology as his epistemological underpinning (Kvale 1994; Kvale & Brinkman 2008).
- 22) The part of the route planning process going on in the center is potentially hectic and conflict-ridden, since both physical and procedural changes considering the routes are implemented and for this reason the team leader was not keen to have me around.
- 23) As argued by Du Gay, the Weberian ethics of office has a lot in common with the framework of ANT. Du Gay draws forth especially the work of Michel Callon who shares with Weber the ambition to show that any particular agency, any personae, is always the result of a particular ‘agencement’, as for instance the particular set-up of a market or an organization (Du Gay 2008: 141)

- 24) I am aware of the grandiose vocabulary, which may seem out of place, considering that I am referring to a bunch of interviews. Self-evidently I do not contend to be able to change a whole discourse simply by positioning my informants in a particular way. Nevertheless, I believe it matters and that it has effects as to the knowledge I have ended up producing in the particular context of TDP.
- 25) Since most mail is now sorted by machine, there are only small amounts of mail that need to be sorted manually into a grey shelf representing each postal route. Given the routines of experienced postal workers, however, they find the old method, sorting everything into the shelf by hand much easier and faster. Although reports have documented that the time used is the same when it comes to experienced postal workers, no one is allowed to hand-sort; thus the controversy.
- 26) In the following I will attend only to the part of the writing going on after the field work, involving a deliberate representational and analytical effort. As pointed out by Emerson et al. there are many issues as well when it comes to the writing while still in the field: how, where and when (Emerson 1995: 16-29).

Chapter 6

- 1) Latour uses the example of a striking door closer in a conference hall in order to demonstrate a particular geography of delegation. He illustrates how much effort and competence there has in fact been shifted into the material of the door and the door closer. Only when the situation is altered, when the door closer strikes, it becomes obvious that it takes a quite different human user in order for the door to serve its original purpose: to keep the door closed (and cold winds out) and yet possible to reopen in order for people from the outside to enter (Latour 1992).

Chapter 7

- 1) The term 'people', so I have reasoned, become too generalized an expression to use in this text while the deliberate choice of the term 'customer' has the effect to help me show in this analysis more clearly how something apparently similar takes on a variety of meanings and effects.
- 1) The UPU plays, according to their official website, an, 'advisory, mediating and liaison role' in the international postal sector. It currently counts 191 member countries from all over the world that have obligated themselves to transpose the rules and guidelines of the organization into national law. Since 1948 UPU has cooperated closely with UN in order to create a global postal service network which is both effective as well as socially and environmentally viable (see www.upu.int)
- 1) Before the third directive the national operator (TDP in Denmark) had the reserved right to deliver letters below the weight of 30 grams.
- 1) An example of this can be found in a recent court case from the Danish Grand Chamber in which a preliminary ruling finds that TDP did not act against consumers interests nor misused their dominant position when they won over clients from a competitor by reducing prices below the actual costs (Grand Chamber 2012, Case C 209/10)
- 1) NRA stands for: National Regulatory Authority

Chapter 8

- 1) The term is translated from the Danish word: 'særlig' and it is the official term used for the former civil servants.

Chapter 9

- 1) As pointed out by Chris Grey, Taylorism entailed a pragmatism making it possible to coordinate work in huge factories with employees of a wide variety of nationalities as well as a certain 'ethics' (Grey 2009: 39).
- 2) In the text referred to, "The Powers of Association", Latour uses the distinction between ostensive and performative to describe two quite different approaches to the study of the social. The ostensive is related to having a generalized theory of the social and its various parts (ontologies) while the performative is based in a principle of association where identities, action and the social as such are only given by the associated effects of heterogeneous elements. As I will argue below, the notion of agency put forward by Pentland and Feldman does not quite establish the same associative character, which produces a range of problems to the understanding of routine.
- 3) While the diagnosis might be similar between Allvin and Aronsson and Oldham and Hackman, the basic interest of the two is quite different. While the former are worried about the future of worker protection and health, the latter wonder how productivity and quality levels might be sustained, as the structure of jobs and task dissolve/disintegrate (Oldham and Hackman 2010: 478)

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Appendix

Overview of empirical data production within The Danish Post (Distribution)

The table is organized according to the various locations I have visited within the organization, and according to what kind of data produced and when. I have been in contact with my field on and off over a period of more than 2 years, from March 2009 till September 2011. In this period I have visited the following locations (not counting the locations of various events, courses and seminars):

Table 1

Area Management Department of Distribution, North of Copenhagen.
Central Management Department of Distribution, Copenhagen.

Table 2

Local Distribution center, 1 – North Town

Table 3

Local Distribution center, 2 – Country side

Interviews total:	17
Observation-days, approximately:	17

Table 1

Area Management Department (DIS)	Date	Interviews	Observations	Transcribed
	27.3.09	HR Manager		X
	4.6.09		Kick off event for managers: 'Top Performance Week'.	
	8.-9.6.09		At the Area-HR Department	
	15.9.10		Management seminar for team leaders and distribution managers	
	3.11.10	Area planner. About the route planning technology		X
	12.11.10	Manager of Development, about Lean and route planning		X
	24.11		Lean Course for well-being and production coordinators	X
Central Management Department (DIS)	Date	Interviews	Observations	Transcribed
	27.10.10	System Manager on the route-planning-technology		X
	27.10.10	HR consultant, on Lean		X (partly)
	4.11.10		TIK-Course for postal workers -	X
	7.9.11	Developer of Equipment (bikes)		X

Table 2

Distribution Center (1)	Date	Interviews	Observations	
	3.3.09		First encounter with distribution manager + team meeting	
	24.3.09	Distribution Manager (1)		X
	24.3.09	Team Leader (1)		No
	23.4.09		Driving mail by bike	
	25.6.09	The North Town Team Snaplog interview, a good workday		X
	26.8.09	Shop stewards (Danish: TR + SR)		X
	23.- 25.6.10		Observation, shop floor.	
	23.6.10	Well-being- coordinator		X
	24.6.10	Production –coordinator		X
	3.- 6.8.10		Observation, team leader	
	18.1.11	The North Town team on self- management and the route		X
	18.1.11	Team leader (2), on route planning and self management		X

Table 3

Distribution Center (2)	Date	Interviews	Observations	Transcribed
	11.3.09		First encounter with the Distribution manager and the teams	
	22.5.09	2 postal workers from the Country Team		X
	03.08.09	Distribution Manager + Team Leader		X
	11.08.09	The Country Team Snaplog Interview		
	20.8.09		Bringing mail by car	

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