Sub-theme 04: Diversity, Embodiment and Affect

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Embodiment and affect on site: Power in the shadow of power

> *I think, I still feel a craving even though I am getting older. I feel that*
> *it is so much fun! Now when young people are coming in and you see*
> *how they evolve and you get a kind of paternal role [laughing]… if*
> *you are not a dad at home, you can be one at work. Yes, that's how it*
> *is.*

If we asked the reader to guess the profession of the speaker of these lines, what would be the answer? Maybe construction-site manager would not be the first profession that would come to mind. Yet, the strong affect reflected in this quote was voiced in the life-stories of a large number of site-manager respondents from a variety of construction organisations in Sweden. The aggregated data from these stories invoked site managers as, in Lefebvre's (1991:168) words, being 'a specific body, a body capable of indicating direction, of defining rotation by turning round, or demarcating and orienting space.' The site managers in our data embodied the site: they appropriated and occupied all its spaces by being everywhere and relating to everyone – at the same time.

Against the backdrop of a mainstream view of the construction industry as male dominated and macho, traditional and resistant to change, the initial quote embeds a conundrum that resonates with questions posed in this sub-theme: 'When bodies are seen as central sites of power and affect what can be learned?', and 'How can affectual bodies resist to bring about change?' In our paper we explore these two questions drawing on in-depth life story

interviews with site-managers and their higher-level managers, a total of 40 interviews. We use two main theoretical lenses in our analysis of the data: a practice-based lens from e.g. Schatzki (1996, 2006), supported by Tengblad's (2012) notion of managerial-leadership practices. To problematise inherent practices of leadership in construction in particular, we critically review notions of masculinity and their applications to this field. In terms of the first question, we contribute insights from a field and a site that have hitherto been rather neglected by EGOS scholars, and which provide rich ground for practice and/or gender studies. In terms of the second question, we argue that the leadership practices developed on construction sites to a large extent govern belief systems, legitimacy and structural assumptions in the organisation, as well as the industry. This explains why in order to gain access to the managerial boardroom, construction managers have to have got their hands dirty on construction sites first (Löwstedt and Räisänen 2014; 2012). This paper therefore will provide some new insights into the dynamics of embodied power and affect by examining the day-to-day leadership practices of site managers.

Theoretical framing

Managerial practice theory
Recently, organisation scholars have highlighted a need to investigate managerial work as it is lived to gain insight into how expectations, meanings and values about work influence understandings and behavior in organisations. For example, Tengblad (2012) advocates a practice-based approach to the study of managerial work and leadership so as to include the complexity, heterogeneousness, uncertainty and unpredictability of organisational work places. Schatzki (1996, 2006) defines practice as 'open-ended spatial-temporal manifolds of actions' and argues that the structure, performance and contextual embeddedness of practices conjures fields of *action intelligibility*, i.e. ranges of possible actions that seem to make most sense for people to perform. In order to explore practice and sensemaking in organisations Alvesson and Svenningsson (2003) suggest the need for re-thinking the work of managers so as to take into account the "mundane", i.e. small acts that managers carry out every day such as listening and chatting, and which are often trivialised.

Embodiment, space and affect

In this paper we are concerned with the relationship and processes between managerial work practices and a specific spatial arrangement, namely how site managers embody space on the construction site. According to our view, spatial arrangements are not just there as a backdrop to bodily enactment; rather they interact with the bodies that *occupy* or use them through availabilities they afford, but also constraints they generate. To quote Pickering (1993:567) "material and human agencies are mutually and emergently productive of one another". What, then, can be said to characterize the interaction between spatial arrangements and the bodies that occupy them? Here, Lefebvre (1991) criticizes the notion of space mostly being viewed as an empty container waiting to be filled by content, and then ignored. Instead he proposed a post-structuralist view of bodies (human as well as non-human) and spaces as mutual interactants, implicating both production and and consumption of space. Or as he puts it "each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space" (1991: 170). Therefore, *embodiment of space* can be understood as the process in which a body (in and with space) produces and consumes space. Taking on this lens can provide new insights on everyday managerial work practices, as we hope to show in our paper. Based on our data, we see that managerial leadership on a construction site is a bodily activity just as much as a mental one; it is a question of *appropriating space on site*. Of course site managers do things with their bodies, but what we want to capture is more than the physical doing. What we see is a "being-in-the-doing" that wields power and affect, and which seems to define all our site-manager respondents, an omnipresence, which we hope to explore and theorize together with fellow participants of this sub-theme.

Embodiment and masculinity
Furthermore, embodiment of space in our context is far from a gender-neutral process, even though common thinking in organisational life often assumes a disembodied, abstract and universal worker. However, embodiment requires a concrete body with its specific gendered and class background. As argued by Acker (1990), masculine images of bodies pervade organizational processes and structures, and obscure the fact that the norm of the universal organisational individual is (a) man. It has also been argued that masculinity in organisations conjures power and organisational legitimacy. Hence, this view resonates with Connell's (1987) concept of of *masculine hegemony* in that a certain masculine norm serves to uphold male dominance and gender-segregation in organisations.

From a managerial perspective, masculinity has been viewed as inherently embodied in the managerial role from the outset (Kerfoot & Knights, 1998). Here, however, it is important to stress that there is not one form of masculinity, but many heterogeneous forms contingent on individual background traits and power relations (Collinson & Hearn, 1996). It is also important to stress that dominant forms of masculinity are contingent on historical conditions (Connell, 1987; Acker, 1990). Traits that have been described as characteristic of a contemporary predominant form of masculinity are: competitive, goal-oriented and instrumental (Kerfoot & Knights, 1998) values predictability, control and authority (Wajcman, 1998), and is strong, sexually potent, attractive, technically competent, and last, but maybe not least, has a family (Connel, 1987; Acker, 1990).

Moreover, and what is interesting in the contest of our data, a specific form of managerial leadership that is embedded in masculine ideology is *paternalism*. Connoted by an image of the protective father who in turns asks for loyalty and obedience from the family members. This paternal leader, he (and in our data also she) can be described to embody a virtue of authority and, what Fleming (2005) refers to as, "tutelage, succor, largresse and proto-religious deliverance".

Empirical framing in brief

Construction projects are complex and heterogeneous compositions, gathering a wide number of stakeholders from different spheres and professions and from different organisations, e.g. contractors, clients, subcontractors, architects, materials suppliers, craftsmen/women, municipal and governmental politicians, activists, and not least users. Many of these parties engage actively in the projects, individually or in teams, at different times, working in part as separate entities, but also needing to negotiate boundary interfaces, both intra and inter-organisationally (e.g. Styhre and Josephson, 2006; Dossick and Neff, 2010; Fellows and Liu, 2012). This diversity makes for a fragmented reality, composed of loosely coupled permanent and temporal organisations (e.g. Dubois and Gadde 2002; Gluch and Räisänen, 2009).

During the production phase, the various loosely coupled organisational entities involved have to ensure that production activities are tightly coupled according to planned schedules and processes. The hub that ensures communication, coordination and orchestration of all the

interfaces is *the site manager*, who then needs to be attuned to the different cultures, processes and tools of the different interacting professions (e.g. Dossick and Neff, 2010; Styhre 2012, Mäki and Kerosuo, 2015). According to Mustapha and Naoum, (1998:1) "The site manager stands at the heart of the building process. His [sic] ability will strongly influence the success or the failure of the project for the contractor, the professional team, the client and ultimately the general public".

Moreover, site managers have been depicted as the key-role in upholding a masculine ideology in construction projects. Styhre (2011) argued that a masculine ideology is rooted in construction work and permeates practices and behaviours in construction projects. He pointed out that many expressions of the masculine ideology are enacted through the role of the site manager, including that of the patriarch.

Research approach and method

The data draws on in-depth life-story interviews with 19 site managers, 20 closest higher-level bosses (who have all been site managers) and 1 foreman. Most of the typical construction contexts and project were represented, e.g. infrastructure, residential and commercial development projects. The data collection strategy was purposive: since we wanted to understand the unfolding of lived, everyday managerial practices on site, we asked top managers from large and mid-sized contractors in Sweden to name their "best" site managers. We did not define what we meant by "best", but left it to them to define. Not very surprisingly, the individuals suggested turned out to be middle-aged men with long careers in construction. We then requested our informants to also provide us with names of promising younger site managers, both male and female. This resulted in 19 site managers of whom 2 were women aged 30 to 40. The rest were men: half of them aged 50 to 65 and the other half 25 to 40.

The interviews were informal, taking the form of casual conversations, lasting from one to one-and-a-half hours each. They were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The location for the interview was either a meeting venue or the respondent's office on location; these premises were familiar to the respondents, and enabled us to get a feel for the spaces they

occupied and embodied. A brief interview guide was used to keep interviewer intervention at a minimum.

The respondents were encouraged to talk freely. Our prompts were open-ended; we wanted them to tell us how they generally went about planning and leading site activities, what tools they used, what issues arose, and how they dealt with them. We also asked them to evoke one or two recent specific situations and to describe these.

To mitigate the subjectivity inherent in such data, we also interviewed the site managers' closest higher-level managers and one subordinate. We were therefore able to somewhat triangulate the data. We found that the site-managers' perceptions of themselves and their accounts of their lived reality on site corroborated with their bosses' perceptions of them and the work they did.

A narrative approach was used to analyse the transcripts of the interviews. Narratives have long been viewed as fundamental forms of human understanding and sense-making, through which individuals structure and organise their experiences of the world (Polkinghorne, 1995). Drawing on Polkinghorne (1995) and Lindebaum and Cassell (2012), narrative analysis was applied on the data in order to identify and code the various fragments that made up the narrative. These fragments were then sorted under storylines that linked to the overall common plot concerning how the narrators managed their work and life situations. As we worked with the analysis, we continually referred back to the full transcripts, and related the specific storylines and fragments to the way the respondents portrayed their experiences as a whole, *gestalt* or life-world (Aarseth, 2009: 428).

Brief statement of intent

Previous studies of site managers represent these as embodying masculine qualities, being skilled planers, overseers, problem solvers and communicators, who manage to be everywhere at the same time – on site. Valuable jack-of-all-trades that are beneficial to the organisation, and whose masculinity and patriarchal traits are, we could argue, exploited by top management. Although there is a fair amount of research concerning gender issues in construction, most of these concern gender (in)equality in the industry; to our knowledge, no studies have probed deeper into the nature of masculinity focusing on its effects and affects in

and on construction. To our knowledge, no studies have looked at affect related to power in terms of embodiment in the context of constuction.

We believe these aspects have important practical and theoretical implications that we would like to explore together with fellow researchers in the sub-theme. Based on our data we see that by embodying paternal virtues and upholding an authoritative and autonomous leadership role, site managers significantly contribute to reproduce masculine norms in the construction industry; yet, and maybe but, it benefits the organisation to maintain and encourage this behavior in their middle managers.

This strongly resonates with the questions proposed in the sub-theme concerning the body as a source of power and affect and as a source of resistance to change. Furthermore, what we find interesting is that our data indicate that the site manager is not only an authoritative figure on the construction site, but also in the organisation and the industry as a whole. This view resonates with Connels (1987) and Ackers (1990) theories of forms of embodied masculinities as sources of power and legitimacy in organisations.

The site managers symbolise power and legitimacy in the industry by being put in charge of its key-constituent practice, i.e. construction work on site; and embodying the ideal masculine construction worker, i.e. being authoritative, autonomous and self-reliant. In this context, we would like to explore, not only how the site manager resists change in the organisation, but also go even further to explore how a body can affect the perceptions and beliefs governing the assumptions of what changes that need or do not need to be made in the organisation. In other words, we want to explore how the site manager influence the fields of action intelligibility in construction and how he or she can be seen as a body exercising power in the shadow of power.

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