

Hybrid Controls in Project Organizations

Abstract

For the past decade, project organization has become increasingly central to management and organization studies, particularly as these seek to discern the contours of post-modern organizations. Yet, these contours frequently seem to be sighted without bearings on the current realities of project management. In this paper we take such bearings, using data derived from a detailed qualitative, ethnographic enquiry into the experience of project management. Project managers from France speak authentically about the experience of being a project manager. From this data we construct the contours more sharply. Rather than being a harbinger of an autonomous and more democratic future, free from extant bureaucratic organization controls, we find that project management has distinct modalities of control that we outline in the paper: behavioural, calculative, organizational, professional and corporate. Indeed, rather than foreshadowing a future transformational form, we find traces of a much older design: that of Tocqueville.

Keywords : Project, Organization, Control, Power, Bureaucracy, Political Regimes

Résumé

Depuis 10 ans, l'organisation par projet est devenue peu à peu centrale dans les recherches sur le management et les organisations, en particulier celles cherchant à discerner les contours de l'organisation dite post-moderne. Toutefois ces contours sont souvent dépeints indépendamment des réalités communes du management de projet. Dans ce papier nous cherchons à prendre en compte certaines de ces réalités en utilisant des données issues d'une enquête ethnographique qualitative détaillée au cœur de l'expérience du management de projet. Des managers de projet français y parlent de façon intime de leur expérience. A partir de ces données nous tentons de construire les caractéristiques de l'organisation post moderne de façon plus nette. Plutôt que de préfigurer un futur plus démocratique et autonome, libéré des contrôles de l'organisation bureaucratique, nous proposons que le management de projet comporte des modalités diverses de contrôle, créant des hybridations spécifiques. Il s'agit alors moins d'anticiper une forme organisationnelle nouvelle que de décrypter dans les hybrides actuellement en construction les traces de formes plus anciennes et toujours pertinentes de gouvernance et de régimes politiques. Le travail pionnier de Tocqueville nous permet d'entrer dans ce débat.

Mots clés : projet, organisation, contrôle, pouvoir, bureaucratie, régime politique

Introduction: A World of Projects

Project management, in the lay sense, is an inescapable aspect of being human (Schütz, 1967). Our humanity is collectively represented in histories and stories of various projects: schooling, university, lovers, partners, children, families, work, life and death – the human condition. Each of us is an individual self-steering projectile operating in a field of force too complex to grasp most of the time, our trajectories assigned by randomness as much as by class, gender, status, and those resources that we can control. While we all have life-projects and seek to manage these, only some of us are explicit project managers.

To be a project manager is a relatively specialised activity: it is to assume a responsibility for the management and accomplishment – the completion – of various projects characterised by their finitude, their scope, and their contractual particulars. Usually, but not always, these are commercial projects – they are projects where, above all else, a one is expected to make a profit – as well as a bridge, a building, a tunnel or a discovery. There are myriads of such projects and every project tells a story, often many stories. Sometimes these are stories of desires attained, sometimes of regrets that must be lived with, sometimes of dreams accomplished or nightmares produced. There are innumerable and remarkable stories of people who have revelled in glory, and a feeling of accomplishment, or have been deceived or punished. But this is not how, in recent times, organization theorists have seen these project managers; instead, they have regarded them as circuit breakers for bureaucracy, a short cut from the modern to the postmodern, from bureaucracy and hierarchy to post-bureaucratic professionalism and collaboration (Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994).

Early commentators on 'new-form organizations' or 'postmodern organizations', such as Hydebrand (1989) or Clegg (1990) had presumed a connection between the past of modernity and bureaucracy and the future of a project-based postmodern organizational world. At base, their conceptions of post-bureaucracy seemed to combine elements of an organic structure (Burns and Stalker, 1962) with changed modalities of control shifted to more indirect and internalised forms, as writers such as Heydebrand (1989: 345) and Sewell (1998: 408) suggest. Elements of empowerment and self-reliance formed the basis for an elective affinity between project management practice and ideas of post-bureaucracy centred on unobtrusive peer-based teamwork controls (Sewell, 1998; Barker, 1999; also see Black and Edwards, 2000; Fairtlough, 1994; Miles and Snow 1996).

It is easy to see why project management may appear to be a beacon for jaded organization theory. It is clearly an activity not wholly contained within bureaucratic corporate hierarchies: it occurs in field and laboratory settings; outside the formal structuring of organizations, and often involves the coordination of complex networks and inter-organizational relations. Yet, despite its appeal to postmoderns, project management includes a strong hierarchical dimension, vertically defining objectives and responsibilities, which serve as an instrumental legitimization of project action.

At its strongest there have been claims that a 'projectified' society of organizations (Lundin and Söderholm, 1998), run on project management principles, is emerging. However, we wish to suggest in this paper that there is little evidence that mainstream project-management can serve as a talisman for future organizational design aspirations. Project management, as it is currently practiced in typical cases, does not mean the abolition of the much-criticised abstraction of hierarchical organization, but its recomposition and reconfirmation. Rather than project management being based on respect for alternative abstractions, such as equality or justice, or even participation, it practices purposive decision-making that combines authority with objectives and control with efficiency. Thus, as we shall argue, the everyday life through which project managers enact organization remains deeply embedded in the mundane particulars of a world of hierarchy. New organizational forms – to be new – cannot be an organizational variant on the same bureaucratic theme as before. If postmodern organizations are to arise like a phoenix from the ashes of present project management they will do so not out of necessity but conviction. And there will have to be a large bonfire. As we shall suggest, it would have to justify consuming at least the insights of Tocqueville, as well as the more readily inflammable insights of this paper.

Organization Theory and Project Management

If one asked project managers to think of themselves and their work in the terms of organization and social theories such as we embrace – that is to say, in terms of power – they might well look amiss. As simple scientists or engineers, they know little of these conceptions and their concerns. Their world is one of rationality: their task is to unfold the reason embedded in the design, the plan, and the contract, to achieve the goal. To do this they draw on a project management body of knowledge and project management models. The latter are software tools that are widely used with the aim of delivering projects on budget, on time, on quality. They provide standardised generic practices for project management premised on idealised representations of project methods and formalised organizational practices (Rälsänen and Linde, 2001). In turn, they emerge out of a project management genealogy that traditionally embodies a "well-established pattern of discourse that has served to privilege the more commercial and pragmatic aims of improved project coordination and control at the expense of traditional powers and autonomy" (Bresnen, 1996: 264). In turn, its core texts, such as Cleland and King (1968) and Lock (1968), build on ideas that derive from classical theories of management, such as Fayol (1949).

At the core of project management is the central concept of the project life cycle. The concept stands as an idealised representation of any and all projects as being comprised of five phases: conception, feasibility, implementation, operation and termination. The emphasis is on technocratic planning that seeks to be a comprehensive system, employing techniques such as PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Techniques) and CPM (Critical Path Methods), and software tools such as Microsoft Project, which can be used to monitor project progress. Rational tools are aligned with rational procedures of project reporting.

The professional work of project management draws heavily on the PMI (Project Management Institute), created in the United States at the end of the 1960s. Professionals, particularly in the management of major projects, gather to formulate a management model linked to the logics of organization for each project. However, it was not until the start of the 1980s that a real panel of specialists was created: with an ethical code, clearly identified knowledge, and certification. The aim was to unify project management practices via a unique and standardising paradigm. And this standardisation led to the definition of criteria that allowed for the identification and classification of project types. Projects were to be listed according to the size of the team, the international dimension in the organization, the regulatory and professional tradition of the sector of activity, for example. Project management is practised in many diverse organizations: from small businesses that arrange local wedding, meetings, and conventions to major multi-national corporations that project strategies far into the future. From the point of view of a professional project, such diversity means standardising the expertise required of those in charge of the model. Consequently, project management has been subject to the classical strategy of professionalization as social closure, according to Weber's (1978) model.

Not surprisingly, in a heterogenous professional field, it is the prestigious professions that make the running in this professional project. For instance, in France, the AFITEP: *Association Française des Ingénieurs et Techniciens d'Estimation de Planification et de Projet* developed a synthesis of the methods and procedures of project management practices. It transmitted these via project methodology and management-training programs, complete with certification (see Midler 1993 on AFNOR¹ NF X 50-107). Such standardisation is increasingly reflected in the segmentation of project types, allowing one to build activity/actor matrixes, according, for example, to project size. Further, within the body of knowledge of project management, there is a "who does what" reasoning that rationalises roles, enabling an official division of responsibilities at different stages of the project.

As organization theorists, how should we confront this certitude, this rationality? Armed with our ideas of bounded rationality we might caution project managers that rationality would always be situational, always infused with power. As Foucault (1977: 27-28) says "power produces knowledge . . . power and knowledge directly imply one another . . . there is no power relation without the creative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations." In such a view rationalities and powers are fused. Different power actors will operate in and through different rationalities. The different rationalities will have their different rules for producing sense. In fact, sense cannot be separated from the ensemble of rules that constitute it – and it's obverse – as such. Rules are always constituted locally by actors, rather than being the objective instantiation of a general principle or law. Whatever regularities occur empirically will always be situational. Such ideas were first charted in Clegg's (1975) empirical account of project management in action, drawing on data derived from records of project management site meetings.

¹ AFNOR is the French Association for Normalization, producing and establishing norms of quality for products and processes.

Studying projects in process is one approach to capturing their dynamic but, as a project comes into being as elapsed time, this process becomes history – however contested it may sometimes be. Most of the disputes that occur around projects concern the nature of such elapement, how it is materialised in relation to some imagined project aim. Sometimes these aims are quite tangible, in the form of detailed CAD/CAM projections. Other times they are an aspiration, such as the desire to put a dog in space or a man on the moon. What relates the most tangible and the most intangible project aspirations is the simple fact that none ever comes into being without imagination of some projected outcome. No imagination is ever materialised without a minute and detailed organizational apparatus of disciplinary power: techniques of drawing, CAD, representation, reading of technical texts, and their translation into prototypes and actions. Driving the detailed capillary networks of disciplinary power, the project manager turns imagined entities into material realities, making real the history of a project first projected in the abstract. Abstraction becomes reality when project managers assemble powers to make it happen. Project management is thus both a political and a governance project. As a political project it makes a difference – it accomplishes things that would not otherwise exist. In terms of governance it constructs a complex but temporary apparatus of instrumental support for the professional work that will make that difference.

Project management, while organizationally enacted, is professional work: because of increased disciplinary training in project management methods by professional associations, its organizational division of labour are increasingly based on a small number of sophisticated technologies and software. These aid standardisation. There is a move from past methods of organization linked to criteria such as tradition and craft to disciplinary skills, specialisations and standards. Such a strategy for the creation of a "project management" profession offers commercially independent accredited sources of legitimacy and power to its practitioners. The standing of being a member of a profession comes from outside of the employing organizations, via the professional associations. To the extent that professionalism becomes organizationally legitimate for employers then the project profession appears to gain status. It offers an alternative source of career status to that of progression through the hierarchical ranks of bureaucratic management while clearly co-existing with these. The opportunity to build a professional career as a series of projects clearly requires organizational contexts in which to operate and perform. These organizational contexts will obviously produce different contexts in which to produce a career from those Weberian bureaucracies at the core of 'modern' organization theory (Clegg, 1990). It is, perhaps, for these reasons that some influential reports (<http://www.doi.gov/asp/futurework/execsum.pdf>) regard the future of work as increasingly likely to be constructed on a project basis, as contingent and staffed by just in time workers.

Remote Control or Post-Bureaucratic Projectified Futures?

We can now introduce our central question: given what we know of project work as it is presently practised by members of the project management profession, to what extent does it provide a sound empirical basis for the anticipation of a post-bureaucratic projectified future?

Contemporary managerial discourse and practices for the past decade have been characterized mainly by the emergence of political and organizational models that, whatever else they might be, have been opposed to "bureaucracy" as their "other". That is to say, they have sought to define themselves against bureaucracy: they have been termed, variously, post-bureaucratic (Heckscher and Donnellon 1994), postmodern (Clegg, 1990), post-modern (Alvesson 1992) or, because they "take entrepreneurship a stage further" (Kanter 1990: 280), even post entrepreneurial (Kanter 1990). The models define themselves through "check lists" of criteria (Osborne and Gaebler 1992) as well as through the ideological apparatus they convey (Du Gay 2000).

Slightly lagged with the emergence of this dualism anti-bureaucratization in these modelling endeavours has been another tendency. Organizations should no longer be illuminated by a unique view of power, governance and managerial roles. It matters not whether these are bureaucratic or anti-bureaucratic in their principle of articulation. The field of organization studies has been depicted as relying increasingly on paradoxes (Lewis 2000). The call has been made to go "beyond dualisms" (Reed 1997) into the analysis of "hybrids" such as network forms (Blanchi and Bellini, 1991; Burt, 1992; Castells, 1996; Chaston, 199; 1996; Contractor and Lorange, 1988; Ebers, 1997; Häusler, Hohn and Lütz, 1994; Kogut, Shan and Walker, 1992; Nohria and Eccles, 1992; Powell, 1987; 1998; Powell, Koput and Smith-Doerr, 1996). Hybridity has become fashionable: for instance, Ackoff (1994) depicts new "hybrid political regimes", composed of "democratic hierarchy". In relatively uncertain frameworks of power (Clegg 1989) hybrid forms combine opposite cultures and roles in a more or less stable structure (Courpasson 2000), organizing "circular" forms of decision-making (Romme 1999). Entrepreneurial-hybrid-network-soft-control (Munro 1999) appears to be the result of complex interlinkages between impersonal and subjective instrumentations, for which project management is a typical example. As political machinery it contains, at the same time and in the same place, the soft and the hard side of management. Let us now consider some of the organizational reasons why project management – which is certainly not a new discovery – might be seen in this light.

Project management tends to be done in places often physically separate or remote from corporate organizations under instructions that these organizations produce elsewhere. However, being remote does not necessarily entail autonomy: it can mean remote control. The systematic use of procedures and formalisation by corporate bodies is an acknowledgment of a degree of autonomy of those involved in projects and an attempt at their remote control. The conditions under which project management is practised are symptomatic of the political centralisation that corporate organizations seek to exercise, even over many project sites at a distance. In fact, such organizations are specialist in exercising power at a distance, through intermediaries and by remote control.

Remote control of any agency is problematic, especially when projects are designed to be innovative. Innovation requires agents to exercise discretion rather than perform authorised actions. Innovation may be experienced in any aspect of organizational projects: relations, processes, products, or forms of production. One particular form of innovation, common in large-scale project work, entails project managers working in collaborations managed by multiple organizational partners. Under such circumstances innovation policies will be structured around specific collaboration agreements. Sometimes the use of increased formalisation, defined as “quasi-judicial” in the project process, will be considered as a substitute for hierarchy in such processes. Such procedures allow for rational argument, favouring dialogue between the corporate hierarchies and members of the project team, as well as the internal resolution of potential litigation.

Formalised procedures often have to handle rarely predictable project outcomes. Consequently, organizations must design systems to transform “unknown situations into plans of uncertainty” (Michaud and Thoenig, 2000, 9). While uncertain situations can be managed, unknown situations usually can only be dealt with through intuition (Michaud and Thoenig, 2000), which, by definition, may not be available when needed. Organizations standardise behaviour to allow for the creation and sharing of “substantial and procedure-based” know-how (Michaud and Thoenig, 2000,10), usually through “soft bureaucracy” (Courpasson 2000).

Soft bureaucracies are characterised by “the expansion of liberal management based on decentralisation and the ‘marketisation’ of organizations and autonomy . . . hand in hand with the development of a highly centralised and authoritarian form of government” (Courpasson 2000: 159). The decentred and market elements are oriented towards innovative action that is, organizationally, a far cry from bureaucratic systems defined by centralisation and the omnipotence of impersonal procedures. A soft and hybrid system of project-based democracy is increasingly seen as the most efficient means for managing semi-autonomous projects, subsidiaries and services in larger organizations. Soft systems rationalise the move of certain prerogatives away from central services to operational units while legitimising those functions kept within the discretionary part of central activity: the selection of project directors and bosses, the management of “key” projects, the granting of funds (for R&D in particular).

The resulting organizational form enables the combination of disparate elements of two systems: first, a system of regulation by codification and rigid procedures, which is likely to lead to consistent behaviour. The bureaucratic element in such codification is designed and implemented by exogenous actors: R&D directors, company head offices, and project management specialists. Thus, being involved in a project means respect for the official rules and procedures, where one knows, approximately, how the other protagonists will react in whatever unforeseen circumstances. This is clearly not so far from the notion of confidence but closer to a notion of the production of relatively stable, acceptable, cognitive structures, strengthened by an accumulation of individual and collective experience in project management. Combining a procedural system and a cognitive system is not as

far as it may seem from the bureaucratic ideal. It is based on the power of project management to produce instrumental action seemingly independent of context. Project management of innovation authorises specific actions in a relatively foreseeable universe from which value-considerations, typically, are excluded. (One thinks of the Manhattan Project, various experiments in bio-genetics, and cloning technology, for instance.) Competitively, as a part of a corporate portfolio of projects, any specific project will be assigned hurdles and milestones that must be met or exceeded if the project manager is to retain organizational confidence.

The second disparate element is a system similar to that which Michaud and Thoenig (2000, 138) define as “common knowledge”, involving “common reasoning which concerns both the ‘effects’ to generate and the means to produce them”. For project processes to be successful, the various protagonists must check that they share the same conception of the project, its success and the criteria required for its success. Often these will involve new forms of governmentality designed to achieve coherence based on project cultures framed in highly normative and performance-related terms to create collective economically self-interested actors (Clegg et al, forthcoming). Although such project management systems are not necessarily united in what Giddens (1984) calls “co-presence contexts” they involve a sharing of common opinions and even values, which, unlike systems based wholly on codification, allow managers a degree of freedom to face innovation challenges. However, degrees of freedom also imply degrees of tension, centred on the legitimacy of project action.

Hybrid Legitimacies

The legitimacy of project leaders exhibits a fundamental tension. A project leader, like a “normal” hierarchical head, has a reserve of legitimacy, once nominated by his superiors. Ultimately, the fundamental reasons for nomination (specific skills, being an “inventor/innovator” behind the idea, or just the sheer randomness of opportunity) are less important than the fact that the team members consider the project leader as part of the central governing system of the organization. Thus, one part of their legitimacy is based on status-hierarchy.

Project managers are not only leaders, however, but are also responsible for the success of a potentially important mission, given the resources put at their disposal. From then on, the project leader, assessed on a capacity to lead a team towards this success, has a certain power over the other team members. The success and commitment of one depends on the success of another, and visa versa. In the project, nobody has the right to fail and this pressure to succeed shapes the legitimacy of the project leader, qualifying the status-hierarchy into a “quasi-hierarchical” role where the personal – rather than the task – status is enhanced.

These two key resources however (organizational nomination, leading to status-hierarchy, and pressure to succeed, leading to personal status) are also counterbalanced by certain sources of de-legitimation. The first can be found in the extreme power that project management affords classical

hierarchies to grant or refuse the resources required for the project. It creates a form of official dependence, since the project requires resources it is not capable of supplying itself. The second source lies in the fact that the project leader is still in most cases part of the hierarchy: the position of project leader can come up against stable and solid hierarchical structures able to dismiss those who manage to be recalcitrant.

The tension between the personal and the hierarchical means that project authority is based more on interdependence than on hierarchical status. Consequently, the position of project leader will always veer towards being personalized: one obeys such and such a project leader in such and such a way because of the way that such a project leader manages to communicate, coordinate and control the pressure to succeed. Yet, simultaneously with this personalization, a project leader's authority also has elements of the impersonal because it results from an organizational nomination. Yet, to the extent that the project takes place at some remove from the centres of power, out in the capillaries of its micro-systems, then its personal embodiment will tend to over-determine its legitimate positioning within the overall formal networks of power.

The perceived proximity of the project with the centre of the organization, the more or less innovative or strategic character of the project and the degree of control it is under, even the person behind the idea behind the project – all these will have an impact on the intensity and nature of the authority of the project leader. Team members know that, at least for a while, they may be dependent on the project leader for their personal evaluations.

Projects typically occur in locations that are either physically or metaphorically remote from corporate bureaucracies, whether in field settings such as exploration or construction, innovative “skunk-works”, or R&D projects. Such remoteness poses particular organizational tensions for corporate hosts of these projects. The challenge is to reconcile the system of project authority with those structures of power embedded in the corporate body. The exercise of hierarchical power is far from being structurally linked to clear project systems of legitimised authority. Hierarchical power depends on bureaucratic legitimacy embedded in routines and rules while project authority requires creativity and innovation in the accomplishment of objectives, rather than adherence to strict rules. Besides, as experienced project managers know, such strict rules are merely resources for creativity and innovation in their interpretation and negotiation (Clegg, 1975). Hence, external regulation meets project governmentality in a highly personalized bureaucracy.

Framed in between the desiderata of externally imposed regulation and inter-subjectively shared governmentality, project management creates and imposes codes while at the same time as it organizes and makes formal a number of negotiable exceptional possibilities (concerning deadlines, for example). It is based on a number of written supports, whose aim is formally to state the required actions, yet it must always leave room for innovation and creativity, disciplined by governmental norms. Thus, project management can be considered a hybrid between the centralised enactment of

rules and procedures and a capacity to create the future. That this is the case can best be seen in the “intimate histories” (Zeldin 1995) of project management that we have been collecting for many years. From such short stories we build our theory.

Building theory from short stories

Ideally, since at least Socrates, it is generally agreed that theory should be explicit, universal and abstract. That is to say, it must be such that no reasonable person working from its given presuppositions could fail to reach the conclusions that it recommends, through steps in argumentation that all can follow and are applicable everywhere, and that stand apart from concrete exemplars of the theory. As Flyvbjerg (2000: 38-9) notes, Descartes and Kant supplement these three criteria with two more: theory must be discrete and it must be systematic. That is to say, it must not depend on a context outside of its own protocols and it must be complete, with a set of systematic relations between its elements. Finally, theory should be complete and predictive: that is to say, potential ranges of variation in its elements must be specified and their effects prefigured, making possible precise predictions.

These six criteria define an ideal type of science but they do not define what social scientists actually do when they do science. The reason is paradoxical but simple:

[T]heory that makes possible explanation and prediction . . . requires that the concrete context of everyday human activity be excluded, but this very exclusion of context makes explanation and prediction impossible (Flyvbjerg, 2000: 40).

The reasons are evident: context-dependence implies an open-ended contingent relationship between contexts, actions situated within them, and any interpretation that may be made of them. It is through stories that we give context to experience. Stories tell us who we are and where we belong as well as where we are going. In short, they illuminate imagination and imaginatively construct histories.

As researchers, we have collected storytelling data on project careers – who wins and loses, using what strategies and rationalities – in real contexts and situations. Such stories often start from little things, from things close at hand to the individuals, focusing on detailed descriptions and accounts of everyday experience. What we search for are accounts of practical, bounded, situational rationality. In the small pearls of everyday experience we see dialogical themes for social science to engage with. Thus, it matters not that the sample of stories that we retell and retail are small – the human comedy is an infinity of stories – but how their themes illuminate significant tensions, themes, and paradoxes of this condition of human agency within structural conditions.

To interpret stories of project management *politically* requires one to interpret the experience of those behind it, the teams and their activities. In other words, over and above interpreting individual

biographies as personal work-stories, one should attempt to understand these in their political context, a context in which personal troubles assume a more public dimension. We draw out themes from a total of fifteen stories (see table 1) that we have collected in this project and feature two in particular. Well, we can imagine the reader scoffing but for our enterprise, no additional power would be gained by making it one or two hundred stories. Of course, if we were to increase the scale then we would have to decrease the words and convert stories into another kind of data – probably numbers. Numbers have their representational uses, and we will not deny this, but they are not required to replace the sometimes long, often intriguing, interviews that have peppered our research into the political aspect of projects. In our interviews we have investigated the reasons why a manager leads or entered into a project. We wanted to explore what they understand the firm expects in nominating them for such responsibility. The aim of the stories which follow is not to present personal melodramas, nor to present the backroom heroes, but to show that the project is in fact often the end of a saga, and the start of a fairly rapid and steady move towards calculable and easily controllable objectives.

Manager	Age ²	Type of project	Time ³	Post project	Disciplinary background
H.	50	R&D and manufacturing processes	3 years	Back to production management in a delocalised factory	Chemical engineer
M.	38	R&D in biotechnologies	5 years	Taken off the project	Doctorate in Molecular biology
J.C.	30	Construction of a factory in Eastern Europe	2 years	Taken off the project and then nominated as leader of another project in manufacturing processes	Civil engineer
M.C.	34	Implementing NTIC in HRM departments	2,5 years	Head of HR department in another company	Business school and Ms in NTIC in England
L.	47	Developing new business/products in a banking firm	2 years	Nominated business unit manager	Engineer + MBA
D.	37	R&D in microprocessors	1,5 years	Taken off the project. Replaced by a product manager in marketing. Back to R&D lab.	Computer engineer
J.L.	34	Reengineering of a production system in car industry	1 year	After a conflict with the factory manager, recruited to another firm	Doctorate in Mechanics
S.	30	R&D in pharmaceutical industry	2 years	After a technical success, nominated head of "advanced technologies" office in the R&D department	Doctorate in Pharmacy Doctorate in Microbiology
E.	30	Implementing new procedures and new reward systems based on flexible retributions	2 years	Conflicts with some decentralized HR Managers. Recruited after 6 months to a consulting firm	Business School Masters in HRM
M.P.	38	Leading a corporate project in order to create a "knowledge centre"	3	Not yet finished MP is to change job shortly	MA MBA
J.F.	38	R&D in nuclear energy: new processes in security systems	3	Head of a new project implying 3 nuclear plants in Eastern Europe	Electrical engineer
V.	46	Project Director in auto industry: a new design for convertibles	3	Nominated Head of Purchasing Department	Engineer

Table 1: Summary of 15 cases of project managers (data collected 1999)

Our analysis is thematic (Boje, 2001), moving between etic and emic levels of analysis, in a search for patterns (Spradley, 1980). We have selected the biographies of project managers as the domain for analysis and sought to create an inventory of contrasts between projects experienced in the past compared with present day conditions. From this inventory we identified key themes around the concept of control. Our interest in control was theoretically derived from the confluence of our interests in bureaucracy and domination (Courpasson, 2000; Clegg, 1981; 1975; Clegg and Dunkerley, 1980) and so was not entirely inductive. To be sure, we did look, deductively, for the themes that have preoccupied our professional work in the tales of these project managers, but as the data appendices demonstrate, the themes were also inductively there. To try and provide some flavour of the stories we draw on two in particular – those of Henri and Michel, providing two very different subjective views in response to a simple question: "Why did you become a project manager?"⁴

² At the beginning of the project

³ Extent of the project leadership

⁴ The full transcript of the interviews is available from the authors.

Henri is a new processes project manager for a large company in the food-processing industry. His tale recounts the gradual apprenticeship of a manager who little by little, began to understand project management in terms of control, a system in which all autonomy is rigidly supervised by the imposed instructions. Henri was 52 in August 1998 when we met him over a period of two weeks to hear him talk about his career as a project manager. Henri was initially attracted to project managing because he saw himself as a man of action, as someone who could get things done, who could leave his personal material stamp on the world. Henri is a doer rather more than a thinker, a successful man boxed in by the circumstances of his own history. He related an old-style approach to project management as well as providing us with a vision of the changes that occurred since the beginning of his career. Our second story concerns Michel, a research scientist. He describes his job as one "noted for its slow progress". His experience with project management illuminated the bureaucratic element of this management tool and the constraints and limits it can impose on those most resistant to control. When we spent half a day with Michel in September 1998 to discuss his position as research scientist and project leader in the field of plant resistance to herbicides, he was in his early-thirties. Michel did a Doctoral thesis in molecular biology and was then hired by his present firm. His career has been simple and fairly straightforward, but the role of project leader he feels is increasingly incompatible with that of a researcher, which led him to wonder about his future.

Autonomy, Intermediation and Power

Henri's last job was characterised by reduced autonomy. The company directors' budgetary and managerial concerns developed to such an extent that, under the threat of their own risk-taking, they could no longer trust their delegated project managers. This contrasted sharply with his earlier career. Henri was employed at the beginning in peripheral and relatively autonomous sites, in comparison with more impersonal centralised ones, and he was able to select and to lead his project teams more or less as he pleased. He was learning to become a project leader. For around 30 years, Henri experienced an increase in the bureaucratisation of complex industrial project management and the centralisation of decision-making units for all aspects of the projects he was supposedly responsible for: technical, managerial, and human. In learning to be a project manager Henri learnt also to become an intermediary: "A lot depended on feeling and how we got on with the others", he said of those early days when he first learned the project managers task. Later, when he gained the job that he had when we met him, it was these intermediary skills that were vital. "Overall, having accepted this job has proven that most of what I learnt technically during my previous jobs was not the most important in the eyes of the directors. What I mean is that by nominating me project director they hoped to benefit from my 15 years of management and control experience. That was what they wanted, that I was used to working with mixed teams, power struggles, in other words, intermediate and uncomfortable positions." As he says later in his conversation, he had learnt to control and to be controlled, to be an intermediary. There is an honourable and historically complex history to this role, as Zeldin (1995: 154-164) explains. Intermediaries, such as project managers, are like catalysts – they need other

intermediaries to set them off. They need mixed teams, finances, plans, and bureaucracies in the background that deliver the goods – literally. Being an intermediary historically has involved

a series of minute interactions in the presence of others. It means that force is no longer in total command. It means that the humble or the timid can contribute to great adventures without being too concerned who is superior to whom: a minute ingredient can have as much effect as a large one. Intermediaries inject an element of the unexpected into human affairs, which can have negative as well as stimulating results; and they are always tempted to demand too high a price for their efforts. But they flourish when they please all parties equally, when they oppress nobody (Zeldin, 1995: 161).

Project managers as intermediaries perform dual roles in organizations: they bring categories together but they also keep them apart, as Bloomfield and Vurdubakis (1997) suggest. Being a project manager is as much to do with people and the political relations involved in managing them and with financial – rather than engineering – techniques. As political intermediaries project managers seek to mobilise different people, systems and things in pursuit of common goals.

Henri manages power in two distinct and positive ways. For him, power is not a negation of the power of others but a positive force that enables others to achieve the histories that other's imaginations have scripted and power will materialise. First, he manages political relationships with those site workers whom he supervises. Little is said of these directly, but we can assume that a measure of his success in this regard is that nothing needs to be said: the relations are not macho, antagonistic and zero-sum. Anyway, there is no need for them to be – they are managed by formal documents that circulate everywhere they are required. "Only formal documents are sent, but that is their strength, the respect of the rules and regulations which in turn allows all those involved in the project to meet in committees and to know the position of things." When procedural rationality frames the truth of projects then people listen to its terms and debate flows within its parameters of normalcy – its modes of rationality. It is in this way that Henri self-manages the power that manages him. This is the power of numbers, of rationality, of finances, "to be supervised when working on high-stake financial projects, where mistakes are out of the question." As he goes on to say, "Autonomy exists if you can fulfil your duties; you lose it if you make a false move."

Henri's career path has not been easy: he sought willingly to learn more about the role of industrial project manager, only to be excluded for two main reasons. First, because of his age, second, because of the gap between hands-on management and the formal management systems he had to obey for eight years. The price paid was to sacrifice any attempts at innovation that arose during this time. This is important since it suggests, as a hypothesis, that the increasing systemisation and cost-control of project management led Henri to abandon innovation. In other words, the company directors prefer project leaders who concentrate on the rules and their objectives at the outset of any project. Leaders are not encouraged to propose better but more costly solutions to the strategy committee than those that are already in place. This is a sure sign of bureaucratisation, of strengthening rules

and existing methods to prevent any personal initiative that might risk destabilisation of the plan. The rule in the company is clear: continue working on what has proven to be successful for new production sites in the past and avoid wasting time studying expensive new possibilities whose outcome is uncertain. Bureaucracy comes into play whenever management constraints mean choosing reassuring paths and excluding what could be considered more adventurous paths, where the results are uncertain.

In such cases project management is the fusion of bureaucracy with indeterminacy. Companies use bureaucracy to codify and provide procedures, to accompany individual and group action. Such action is necessary for the project to make ground as well as to assess the level of success of the solutions implemented at the end of the project, and decide whether or not to use them again for future projects. In this light, the project becomes a tool for standardisation but its achievement is always contingent on "imagination" and "new techniques" – which must not fail. Thus, "the trend today is to find the perfectly organised and structured person."

For Michel, things are quite similar even if interpreted in a quite different way. His story is based on the search for a compromise between strong ethical values as a scientist and the necessary pragmatism of a manager. Michel's career shows how difficult it is to resist the powerful constraints of project management. This second story is like a clamp slowly suffocating an ambition ultimately judged incompatible with the concerns of the decision-makers whose job is to supervise Michel's project.

When a scientist considers project management a necessary step towards promotion a highly specific aspect of its political power is revealed. But, with such a promotion something happens to self-respect: scientifically, one loses it with no gain as a scientist-manager, except as a manager of milestones, deadlines, targets, and suchlike. As an emissary in a complex web, Michel has lost respect for himself as a scientist but found no power as a manager. It was not expected to be that way: "at the beginning I thought it was all very positive, that I would benefit from all the advantages of being a scientist without the negative points of being a leader". Consequently, in Michel's story we see project management becoming a managerial institution – a system which is both useful and efficient and which seeks to generate its own legitimacy. Project management legitimacy can be considered a tool of governmentality in Michel's case; the project is vital if he wants to move up and it is this fact that forces him to accept the conditions imposed by his superiors. It is not important in itself but in the political relationship it creates between individuals and an organization. It generates a situation where individuals are supervised, penalised or rewarded, selected, etc. It creates efficient and effective relays of power while it steals scientific self-respect: "they put us under pressure to go faster and faster. In the biotech field, the stakes are enormous, and the biggest change to date is that every day you hear 'where are you at now?'"

Michel had then to abandon scientific ways of working and adopt centralised tools of governance. Michel quickly discovered that decision-making power became held in the hands of an ever-present

hierarchy. He has become a managerial delegate, deluged to intermediate between the world of commerce and the world of nature. He doesn't really think of himself as a project 'leader'. As a scientist he experienced project management as a dispossession of disciplinary control. More precisely, our scientist accepts being severely and regularly supervised by a number of committees, he believes not only that he has no choice but also that this control may enable his disciplinary knowledge to succeed in the organization. Michel's experience would suggest that project management can be experienced as a process in which one has to give up something – respect based on disciplinary knowledge – and also remain pragmatic. What is given up is a scientific dream considered too costly and uncertain in favour of being pragmatic. "That's over now – the best way is the shortest way". The project managers as a specific group of experts largely elaborate these hybrid forms of governance of project management, between the scientific-entrepreneurial adventure and the managerial pragmatism/cynism. They act to some extent as "servants of domination", in terms similar to those foreshadowed by de Tocqueville (1961, 1996: 418), for civil servants, through their ways of finding solutions to the professional/career dilemmas that confront them.

Henri and Michel are typical of the many project managers we have encountered. Their professionalism is based less on the autonomy of leading project research so much as the will of corporate bodies. The mechanism is simple and relatively classical. It distils, essentially, to two principles. The first is the construction and acknowledgment of a model of required skills for successful project management. This model is mainly based on the ability to read, interpret and finally apply rules and procedures related to the project management system. Such elements are based on the choice of persons who have a rigorous managerial profile and also a "regulatory" profile, in other words, who respect the "rules". Those responsible for leading and governing innovation processes must base their actions on ethics that respect the quality and efficacy of procedures. A rule-guided context becomes a resource in decision-making processes and a protective system in case of contestation.

The second principle guiding the production of professional project management is that of situational and concentrated testing practices. The systems for the detection and steering of future project directors are based on tests, over relatively short periods, for easy assessment of individual efficacy. The project is clearly an obvious choice for this form of test: there is a concentration in time, and a clear situation (precise objectives, timing, evaluation sequences, a clearly defined team) that makes easier any judgment and decisions concerning the "potential". The elite is then selected according to their ability to meet the primary requirement of a "good" project director: managerial rigour and ethics. They will also understand the meanings of urgency and deadlines: take the fastest, shortest route, without worrying too much about the perfection of the modalities and especially the human costs involved. To that extent, project management may also be conceived as a managerial selection instrument, simultaneously enabling the control of outputs and behaviours as it seeks to drive selection of the "best employees" (Fincham 1992; Ray 1986), "reflecting the subjective face of selection" (Fincham 1992: 752). The subjective face demonstrates how those in positions of power to choose people do so in ways that legitimise their selection by showing that they "know what they

mean by the vague terms – natural leadership, soundness, judgment, character – that they employ" (Fincham 1992: 755). Essentially, the best employees will be people for whom project management has become both a science of control and an instrument of subordination.

Modalities of Project Management Control

The stories of project management represent it as a heterogeneous control system, covering several modalities, which generate distinct project tensions. We shall now distil these from the stories collected above. Typologies of such control are familiar in organization theory: one thinks of Edwards' (1979), for instance – but the distinction here is that we are dealing not with typologies of how management control manufacturing employees but of how responsible, autonomous project managers are controlled remotely (see also, Friedman, 1977). The first, which seems obvious in the history of projects, is *behavioural*.

Behavioural control

The project is an extremely powerful disciplinary system: it permits the creation of almost permanent real-life and decentralised tests of skill in a decentralised supervisory milieu authorised by the spatio-temporal concentration of each project and its daily interdependencies. It also occurs via the critical tests of communitarian project work that inevitably occur within teams each day: the decentralisation of control is therefore a means to build a management system based on the affirmative and positive autonomy of teams. Of course, such strategies produce tension as well as affirmation through the pressure the team puts on each of its members. The tension generated in the critical periods of projects is a powerful and legitimate means for observing how individuals behave when confronted by difficulties that affect both the whole team and individual members alike. Collaboration is therefore tested daily, which rapidly creates individual reputations.

One tension that follows from these conditions is vested in *superordinate/subordinate relations*. Because of the frequent turnover of projects and the consequent depth of diverse project experiences that members accumulate, they have considerable informal learning at their disposal, expressed in sharp and sometimes acerbic daily expressions of the worth of the current project, its management and relations. From such experience comes tension for the managers of projects that do not live up to the expectations of experienced team members. Resistance to project management is readily built on this basis, as knowledgeable members require better organizational control from their project leaders. Both "exit" and "voice" become easy strategies, exploiting mobility and migration between projects, and the judgements it prepares.

Calculative control

Control, whatever form it may take and the procedures involved, is closely linked to another management process: assessment through calculation. Making managerial action increasingly procedurally based, project management seeks to increase the knowledge that governing bodies may have of decentralised action linked to innovation. There is a double issue behind this concern for knowledge: that of assessing as carefully as possible all actions, critical events, decisions and the reasons behind the decisions, creating the contemporary figure of an "accountable manager" (McSweeney 1994); that of making the learning process easier through experience. This second logic is related to the learning process linked to experience resulting from past actions; even though obviously, to continue Duran's (1999) line of thought, this version of the learning process can be likened to the "disenchanted search for the causes" of a failure. Perhaps because this is less related to the "search for success" of project management than "avoiding unnecessary risks". In such views, Foucauldian arguments displace power from people to practices such as administrative accounting systems and calculative instruments that monitor performance (Armstrong 1989; Miller and O'Leary 1987) and embed these practices in the normalcy that is constructed for organizational systems of belief. Versions of "corporate culturism", in Willmott's terms (1993), legitimise the constraints imposed by managerial control (Fincham 1992). Sometimes, as Clegg et al (forthcoming) suggest, these create new codes and ethos of governmentality.

The aim of such control is therefore to "gain enough known-how to reduce the impact of a potential surprise" (Landau and Stout, 1979). At the same time, it does not mean that the powerful rationalisation project management permits can offer insight into the "real"; it also represents occasions for "fantastic" managerial simplification, which can mask the lack of familiarity and proximity of the managers with the members of the project team. Such simplification is clearly illustrated in those aspects of project management almost entirely based on the search for and assessment of efficiency. It produces a judgement that is supposedly rationally argued; this judgement depends on both the search for knowledge, precise information, as well as a possible transformation of the mechanisms and working methods of project teams. The best example of this is the often-sudden change in authority of the project leader. This can be explained by the systematic search for facts and figures. The hierarchical control of projects basically seeks to check that the objectives fixed at the outset have been respected. If the project manager has successfully integrated this notion of checking, s/he knows their task is to alert the governing bodies as early as possible to warn them that the objectives will not be reached. This can allow for an adjustment in the objectives before the assessments. If they do not do this they cannot argue that the objectives were unrealistic or poorly thought up. The power of the project leader to so argue resides in clear knowledge of rules and procedures, an ability to anticipate discrepancies and to fix meetings with the governing bodies. Respect of rules and procedures gives project leaders a certain power in the innovation process. Seen from this angle, traditional project management is a long way from liberal models of entrepreneurial governance. Instead, it promotes a new bureaucratic model, one that benefits from personalised respect for the rules and ability in their indexical enactment.

If the intention of corporate bodies is “only” to look at the results of project management then those working on the projects also understand the controlling procedures to be a way to know via which mechanism such and such results have been obtained. The problem with project management is that today it can seem a technocratic instrument, disconnected from the project manager’s operational control procedures. Innovation policies suffer because of the increasing distance between a “pure” logic of control based on systematic and situational “audits” of performance (Power 1990) found in project management and the logic of improving actions that a “less pure” negotiated or even concertive control (Barker 1993) would allow. Steering in the name of efficiency produces increased external control of innovative action. Thus control becomes a managed rather than a learning process: innovation is surrendered to routines and creativity may suffer.

Organizational control

Project management is a system for controlling costs and achieving objectives. It represents a form of supervision, run by clear procedures whose viability is based on the use the project members make of them. Control procedures are pervasively and powerfully embedded into the regular and efficient reporting of actions and decisions made. Reporting is essential to the project mission and is considered by the governing bodies an indication of the successful operation of the project. The professional managerial figures who create such reports are clearly distant from those situated in the entrepreneurial model depicted by some “revolutionaries” (Peters 1987, for a critique of which see du Gay 2000). Project managers are intermediaries between a rule-governed organizational body and local rationales. They have to completely understand organizational constraints and purposes to be able to transform imagination into exemplification. To do so is not a question of technical expertise or creative abilities alone – it is a matter of being more bureaucratic than the bureaucrats, of going beyond the rules, of being able politically to translate these to all the different project actors. Bureaucracy is created as an artificial distance between persons and organizations, partly thanks to intermediate experts such as project managers (Kallinikos 2001).

Tensions, between representation and that which is represented are embedded in this requirement, however. The panoptical requirements of project reporting requires making visible through figures that which has transpired, which frequently leads to representation strategies that gloss local action and activity to those at a contextual distance. Not to put too fine a point on it, they can sometimes lead to “Cooking the Books” (Clegg, 1975). The onus to report at regular, routine and fixed intervals can be too demanding for some project management performance in the short term. Better to gloss favourably, with the ambition of the project recovering lost ground, due to the very bureaucratic professionalism of the project managers involved, as evoked above.

Professional control

The *professional* constitution of the group of project managers and its modality is expressed in tensions surrounding collegial professional relations. Project managers watch not only their projects and staff (who in turn watch the project managers and the projects, as we have suggested, through their own modality). They also exercise surveillance over each other and observe one another. A kind of reticular professional supervision is created. Each project is new, so gradually the project managers shape the rules under the tutelage of those project members whose instantiation brings the rules into concrete existence. Progressively, project leaders rapidly normalise practice-based expertise models.

The tension generated here is that while such action creates new resources of legitimation for the rest of the organization it also creates a professional project for project management. Host organizations sometimes consider such developments negatively because of the way they create links between the construction of a group of competitors and the knowledge-management strategies of key organizational positions. The tension resides in the imposition of a model of organizational proprietary knowledge in terms of ownership and control, rather than the construction of a parallel model of competence, based on professional project experience.

Both project leaders and employing organizations are ambivalent towards this endogenous professional control. The control is a constraint, one that proves projects are not spheres of professional autonomy (at least on a management level). From the organizational perspective the managerial model that project management entails supposes a high degree of extra-technical and extra-scientific activities. These can sometimes delay the project as a whole. Professional control can also represent a supervisory resource, as it can supply project leaders with arguments at specific times to push, constrain, eject, or request members to comply in some way, with the support of the organization that is the corporate host.

The control of projects is therefore highly ambivalent, representing both a resource and a constraint. Where project leaders accept such control it tends to be because it helps them, thanks to its formal nature, in transmitting decisions, demands and obligations. Moreover, it is clear that the technological forms of project control generate a demand for efficiency. Project management is a control system, one that includes procedures that allow those involved to account for their acts, judge, and assess them. The control is considered as an assessment of actions and decisions taken during the project process and also as a form of awareness of these actions and decisions. The project manager therefore has to report regularly to his superiors to justify objectives and awareness.

Corporate control

Obviously, behind these registers can be found the assessments made by corporate bodies, which can come into play when choices need to be made at various steps of the innovation process. For

instance, when they receive negative feedback they have to decide whether to continue with the project, which means they have to continue investing. Project management involves political decisions in the innovation process, functioning to protect governing bodies from such weak beliefs. It also allows the rationalisation of choices concerning individuals. The strength of the control system in project management is the ability to eliminate arbitrary decisions at the periphery so as to overawe arbitrary decisions at the centre. Supervising a given project involves being responsible for information content and accuracy on the part of project managers.

Project management owes its success to its standardising qualities. Project management control methods are the result of classical management practices. In the project process, hierarchical authority is clearly not limited to a right to control: it is the very means of control itself. Control, however procedural it may seem, appears to find its place in organizations today as a required tool for managing innovation. It enables the standardization of innovation practices that were once divided up by the relative division of organizations. This division means that there exist in the very heart of the innovation process specific sector-based rationales for the profession, the experts brought into the project, the project leaders, as well as the corporate hierarchy.

Hybrid Control and Hybrid Political Regimes: Foreshadowing the Future?

While to many organization theorists project management may appear to be an innovation, for students of power, its modalities of control are based on major political features that were early foreshadowed in discussion of the constitutional political basis of modernity. In particular, one may note the way that projects tend to centralize organizations and concentrate power within governing bodies. For Tocqueville such centralization and concentration would always be accompanied by the development of a specific profession whose duty it was to control order and subordinate behaviours:

As the attributions of the central power increase, the number of civil servants representing this power also increases. Together, they create a nation within a nation and, thanks to government stability, come to replace aristocracy. Almost everywhere in Europe, the sovereign reigns both through the fear citizens have of its agents, and the hope they have of one day becoming its agents (Tocqueville 1961, 1996: 418).

Second, he regarded such professionals as simultaneously authorized to manage and to judge, a unity that describes perfectly the emerging practice of project managers. These practices, compared with the rule-tropism of bureaucracy, are increasingly sophisticated thanks to the pervasiveness of principles and control norms and the diffusion of pragmatic/cynical conduct within organizational members (Parker 1997; Courpasson and Dany 2001).

For Tocqueville, the most crucial paradox in politics is that between resistance and submission, between political action and obedience (Courpasson 2000b: 284). The Tocquevillian paradox leads us towards a singular approach to despotism, one quite different from Willmott's totalitarianism (1993).

This is a soft despotism, "degrading people without worrying them" (de Tocqueville 1961, 1996: 432), based on a recognition of intermediation between the political centralization of authority and the sovereignty of "free subjects" with respect to their singular destinies. It is the decentralization of a certain amount of discretion (to be accountable and responsible for one's actions/decisions) and the preeminence of a central power, distributed to multiple "servants" selected by those in power, thanks to specific administrative procedures designed to produce creative compliance (systems linking potential reward to risk within project management).

The political hybridization permitted by project management is based on a "weak democracy" where it is the administration of rules that gives managerial discretion to project managers and their counterparts. But this discretion does not diminish the central power of governing bodies; on the contrary, it strengthens it, because people accepting responsibility for projects are chosen in line with the rationale of the governing bodies, to act creatively within systems designed by them: they are instruments of legitimacy as much as of domination.

The Tocquevillian distinction between *administrative* and *political* despotism/democracy may be useful for understanding political regimes in post-bureaucratic/projectified organizations. In project management governing bodies give day-to-day administrative discretion to project managers. In so doing they found an endogenous political regime, compared to the bureaucratic side of project management, one that enhances operational project autonomy, job discretion and administrative/behavioural control. Governing bodies create adequate and legitimate control rules, such as selection criteria, monitoring ratios, and behavioural norms, founding an exogenous political regime. The hybrid is despotic in nature. It is fed by fear and clear and credible threats: the threat of being taken off the project too early for a project manager, for instance (see table 1) or by the feeling of powerlessness shared by so many individuals. It is sustained also by the political concentration of power in the hands of a minority – the classical definition of despotism, according to Montesquieu (1973: 31-32). But its hybridity resides in its sophistication and lack of capricious decision.

The hybrid is founded on the refurbishment of bureaucratic procedures rather than their renunciation, on the clever distribution and spread of control. The project profession we have analysed is trapped in the compliance duty it owes to governing bodies, because the latter have selected and elaborated the very conditions and criteria for the existence and legitimacy of the profession. Such hybrid despotism is also supported by the complicity of project leaders renouncing any will to govern collective bodies by pragmatically devoting their abilities to try and "govern" their destiny. In the post-bureaucratic organization, allegedly saturated by diffuse democratic feelings according to which everyone should be "businessed" (Peters, 1994), a powerful hybrid despotism is developing pervasively, based on the tricks of equality: for de Tocqueville, the rhetoric of "equality of chances" furnishes a precious resource, because it favours isolation:

I see a huge crowd of individuals, all alike and equal, turning round on themselves to find the small and vulgar pleasures needed to satisfy their souls. Each individual, cut off from the others, is unaware of the fate awaiting them . . . as for his fellow citizens, he is next to them, but cannot see them. Above this mass is an immense and tutelary power, responsible for their pleasures and fates. It is total, precise, regular, caring and gentle . . . thus, day after day, it reduces the need for, and the use of, a free-will . . . In times of equality, each individual is naturally cut off from the others: he has no hereditary friends he can turn to for help, no class to belong to; he is isolated and trampled on with impunity (Tocqueville 1981, 1996: 432-442).

Tocquevillean democracy is founded on constraints – the idea of a collectively shared commitment to simultaneously respect individual freedom and personal responsibility (Mill 1956; March and Olsen 1996: 2-3) – which may be strengthened by the political centralization of power: “equality produces indeed, two trends: the one leads directly people to an independence and may push them suddenly to anarchy, the other leads them through a larger, more secret but more sure way, to servitude” (Tocqueville 1996: 396). Contrary to contemporary discourses on organizational democracy, Tocqueville suggests that in a democratic society, stability and permanence comes from the centralized authority imposing rules on people. Because people are permanently transforming, evolving, moving, changing, the durability of governing authoritative bodies is the guarantor of a relatively stable political regime. The individualization of management, enhancing and rewarding mobility, flexibility, the abolishment of frontiers and the banishment of bureaucracy (Osborne and Plastrik 1997), is thus similar to the power of governing bodies – the political hybridization that projectified organizations may induce.

Conclusion

The project is a managerial institution comprised of a number of controls and procedures. Simultaneously, it centralizes innovative ideas and shifts a culture of individual knowledge ownership to organizational ownership. In a way, innovation becomes a matter for the organization rather than the individual scientist or engineer. Empirical findings concerning actually existing project management, teamwork, the delegation of responsibilities, and of course bureaucratization, demonstrate that project management does not entail the abolishment of hierarchical organization but allows the recomposition of certain aspects and the confirmation of others. Moreover, it neither abolishes control nor those tensions associated with it. Instead, it has distinct modalities of control, each of which generates quite specific tensions. These are not so much an innovation in organization form but a repositioning of some classic questions, first conceived by Tocqueville in his ruminations on democracy and organization form.

If the future will be a projectified society, as Lundin and Söderholm (1998) suggest, then it will not be one noticeably different from the pasts with which we are familiar, other than in the loss of a traditional conception of career – it will certainly retain elements of hierarchy even as it reconfigures them around

new project dependencies. We conclude that if the future of work and organization is one of projects, the contours will remain all too familiarly modern; even as they eliminate central notions, such as bureaucratic careers in favour of contingent work, and innovate new forms of governmentality, projects remain essentially arenas for remote control rather than the rehearsal of a post-bureaucratic future perfect.

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