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PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AND IDENTITY IN NEW MEDIA COMPANY

In the studies dealing with IT-companies the work organisation has been claimed to differentiate from the traditional models based on hierachical structures and strict division of labour. The professional division of work has been claimed to be substituted for work teams representing different disciplines and professional identities for company or team identification, which is called "post-professional organisation of work" (see: Casey 1995). However the data analysis of this study dealing with a new media company showed that there was a strong orientation to division of labour and professional territories due to the company aiming at efficiency and economy.

This article deals with professional competence and identity shaped by work organisation: it is based on a case-study. Work organisation is target-oriented planning and non-intended mutual organising in work processes. Management of companies is the primary deisigner, which is legitimated by the institutional position. In addition, employees also carry out intended organising, but the range is narrower. Work is organised in interaction and employees shape their activities in relation to other employees and management. In this study, the dimensions of work organisation are division of work, working methods, control and professionalisation, which arose from the analysis. The working methods consist of company-specific and profession-specific patterns. The control covers the management of employees and activities, which is carried out in many ways, for example in decision-making of the management, in the recruiting practices and via self-control of the employees. The division of work is implemented by decision-making and in every-day activities in the work site. The professionalisation and division of work are engaged, because division of work shapes – among other processes – professional competence and identity. The basis for professionalisation is the compeence over the methods, cultural practices and institutionalised knowledge in the expert field.

The data and analysis

The company was a medium-size organisation employing hundred young professionals and the business was defined to be "the multimedia and Internet-based service solutions supporting the business activities of customers" (a presentation in web-sites and in customer magazines). [1] In the phase of the data collecting, year 2000, the new media companies were young and small or medium-size, but expanding; the company under investigation was exceptionel in the sense that it had been long-standing – over five years - compared to the other companies in the business line. The administrative structure of the company was based on departments of graphic designers, audio-video designers, scriptwriters and programmers, which followed the general work division in the field. The personnel administration and management were organised applying this structure. Support acitivities were sales, marketing and consulting, which are not included in the analysis. Private companies and public organisations were the customers.

[1] The usual definition for new media or multi-media is "computer-based and interactive communication".

The data - interviews - were collected applying the methodology of action research: the purpose was to apply the research results in developing profitability of the company and well-being of the personnel. The data collecting was shaped on the basis of this purpose, because the manager of personnel was the mediater of employees for the interviews and the discourse of developing purpose framed the themes in the interviews. It is probable that the professionals interviewed were more positively oriented towards management than the "average" employees and it can be assumed that the most critical issues were passed. However, the interviews also contained critical and contradictory perspectives. The themes were loose, which provided the interviewees with the opportunity to define approaches and themes of their interest. In the analysis of the data, I did not aply the approach of action research and, thus, it did not shape the interpretations produced from the data.

The purpose was to get multidimensional data and, thus, the group being intervieweed consisted of every professional group and gender. Ten persons were interviewed: one personnel manager, two graphic designers, one audio-video designer, two programmers, two scriptwriters and two project managers. The interview of the personnel manager focused on the issues and themes dealing with the company; her perspective was based on her position between the layers of management and employees. The rest of the interviewees focused mainly on their own work. The ages ranged from 25 to 47; the programmers and the audio-video designer were male, the personnel manager was female: the graphic designers, scriptwriters and project managers were equally men and women. They had been studying in universities and polytechics; however, only part of them had completed their degree, which was common in new media companies. The disciplines were media studies, data processing, literature and arts, social sciences, administration and philosophy. The themes in the interviews were the motives for work and career, work orientation, management of the company, work culture, work organisation and the relationship between work and leisure. The complementary data were the annual report of the year 2000, brochures for customers and customer magazines. These documents supply, in addition to information, data for PR purposes. Because of that, they lack the multidimensionality and contradictories, which are characteristic for the interviews. Their primary function was to provide complementary data.

The data was analysed applying grounded theory, which supposes the conceptualisation being based on the data. In practice, the theoretical construction is based on the interaction between the data analysis and theoretical frame of the researcher (Strauss – Corbin 1998). The interviews of the personnel manager, the project managers and the programmers & content providers (= the graphic designers, the audio-video designer, scriptwriters) were analysed in separate units, because the issues being discussed diverged to some degree. This was related to their differentiated position in the division of labour and in relation to customers and management. The work of the programmers and content providers was autonomous and based on half-institutionalised professional knowledge. The project managers coordinated project teams and negotiated with the customers, which strongly suggested work-related dependence on them. The position of the personnel manager was between the employers and employees. The project managers and the content providers and programmers identified themselves as employees: they emphasised the autonomous decision making of the management and the artificiality of employees to participate on decision making in "big issues". In this paper, the analysis of the work organisation is based on the whole data, but the interviews of the programmers and content providers supply the data for studying professional identity.

The theoretical frame was constructed in the analysing process, and in this process, the approach emphasising the particular model to organise work in IT-companies was substituted for the frame of "governance". The idea of "governmentality" generated by Michel Foucault (1991a, 1991b) affected on the theoretical frame, but the analysis is not "Foucaultian", because it is constructed on

the basis of the data analysis. Governance is not a theory dealing with organisation, but rather a conceptual approach of modern society and existence. Governance is a historically constructed way of analysing and acting, which permeates the society and with which people aim at adapting to the world but also at actively channelling their activity towards the desired goals. [2] Especially work organisations are the sites, where the methods and constructions of governance are practiced.

Financial management and streamlining

The company had grown from a small workshop to a medium size company of 100 employees in few years. The growth, increasing competition and uncertainty of profitability had altered the management and work organisation. The objectives and methods of work were shaped coherently commercial instead of fragmented purposes and practices. The increasing personnel and activities in the company were systematically organised complying with the principle of efficiency. Working methods were reshaped, work division was implemented and professional competence of personnel was defined and shaped under control. Work was organised following the principles of efficiency, economy and orderliness.

The processes are interpreted applying the theoretical frame of governance. The main dimensions of governance are financial management and streamlining. Financial management consists of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Measuring and evaluating time, space and activities are aimed at commensurable and controlled work, which provides better opportunities for planning and anticipating. In this study, the most often used method for financial management was resource allocation of work performance, estimating and measuring the time needed for work projects by project and by employee. This resource allocation was carried out because of profitability.

"This is totally different from the former job I had, the constant budgeting and calculating. Everything is estimated, these hours are for this project and these for that. Processes are defined beforehand. All the activities are calculated." (man, scriptwriter)

The goal to control the growth of the company suggested the financial management of work: in this process the knowledge and information of the activities, costs and income were systematically profited.[3]

Streamlining provides methods for governing fluently work organisations. A variety of methods and practices are applied, but the most general methods are firstly dividing and differing activities and secondly systematically coordinating them. The duties and tasks are differentiated and the activities of the same type are connected, which are constructed in division and specialisation of work. The different activity fields are linked and the methods and practices of work are standardised in order to control the unity. The systematic organisation is aimed at decreasing the casuality, which weakens efficiency of activity. Governing is realised in practicing special technologies, which are aggregates of methods applied in different levels.

In the company, streamlining was realised applying the matrix method of work organisation. The employees and activities were divided and differentiated into professional units and the streamlining was carried out in temporary projects linking the activities and labour. The works – assignments from customers - were done in project teams, which consisted of professionals representing

[2] The definitions of governmentality are "a collective mental state" by Mitchel Dean (Dean 1999, 16) and by Nikolas Rose „ a way of life" (Rose 2000, 283).
[3] The other studies support this interpretation (Alvesson 1995, Kolehmainen 2001, Nousiainen, Engeström, Tarkka 2002).

different competences – graphic designing, audio-video designing, programming and scriptwriting. The project managers were responsible for coordinating and managing the project teams.

“ The organisation is two-fold. First, the organisation of professional groups constitutes the structure of the company. Second, the project organising is temporary, consisting of different professionals, who do the job.” (man, programmer).

The division of labour was crucial in the process of institutionalising the work practices: it complied with the model of job descriptions being established also in other new media companies, which created commensurability. The job descriptions were established and mutually related to each other. In this process, the intraorganisational and extraorganisational relations were institutionalised. The professional roles and their mutual relations being defined, the structure and processes of the organisation became more transparent and controllable.

Personnel management: promoting and controlling professional competence

The standardisation of work methods, the division of work and professional differentiation was supported by the personnel management, which followed the new logics of the company by applying the special methods of the discipline. Financial management is the most apparent form of efficiency and economy, but personnel management, as well, complies with the same logics (see: Townley 1998). The core of the personnel management was to recruit and keep such personnel, which provided profitability. “The strong increase of the company was supported by promoting focused competence of the personnel,” was written in the annual report in 2000.

The processes of recruitment, intra-organisational training and working methods promoted the target-oriented competence. The competences needed in the company were defined following the system of disciplines; the institutionalised knowledge fields were supposed to fit in the division of work and professional profiles. Governance is practiced implementíng a particular, historically shaped epistemology, which constructs legitimation for knowledge and contexts of knowledge (see: Rose 2000, 29-30). The activities in work organisations are diverged, categorised, and organised following the system of disciplines, and the ideal is functional knowledge in relation to the line of activity. The disciplines are expected to be mutually related and, thus, contribute to the entity of the organisation. Professional job descriptions were labeled with mastery in particular disciplines, for example programming and graphic design, although the professionals’ degrees were often incompleted. Appropriate, institutionalised discipline was defined as the recruitment requirement even for new job descriptions: for example university studies in literature or in communication for scriptwriters. They were included in the system of disciplines, and during that process the employees mastering the particular discipline were legitimated to master the work field in the division of professional work. The establisment of disciplines in relation to division of professional work complied with the common model in the new media companies.

In addition to the mastery of discipline, quality of organisational adjustment was regarded important. Appropriate professional competence, willingness to training and quality of adjustment were the criteria in recruitment.

“ A suitable person for our company is provided with average intelligence and he/she proper schooling. He/she has to be interested in this business, because the field is quite new. He/she has to fit in the “band” and be open and good. Such an average, but still a personality.” (woman, personnel manager).

Higher education studies of the job-seekers provided information of the adjustment ability in addition to the professional competence: it suggested a conforming and extrovert employee. All organisations follow with same logics: people adapt themselves into organised spaces and relations (Foucault 1977, 184) and adaptation to a schooling organisation refers to adjustment in a work organisation.

Intraorganisational training and particular methods for organising work were inclined to develop the professional competences and uniform quality of the competences. The professional competences of the recently recruited employees were often insufficient, which related either to incompleted degrees or lacking work experience; the intraorganisational measures were aimed at promoting the professional skills. The profession-based organising was supposed to disseminate the competences of the experienced professionals to recently recruited young employees; the divergent professional skills and knowledge were uniformed by collegial learning and intraorganisational training. [4] The standardisation of the competences was crucial for the financial management and anticipating the advancement of projects, because insufficient competences made the anticipation difficult and delayed the advancement of projects. In addition, there was a risk of varying quality of the work.

The method to temporarily establish teams was supposed to prevent the specialisation of the young professionalisation, because stable teams would have provided them with professional specialisation. And that would open up for them good positions in employment negotiations in labour market. [5] The personnel manager recognised the knowledge as resource in power relations and strove for controlling the competences of professionals.

"The basic rule is that no-one specialises. If specialised professionals leave the company, much of know-how is lost. We break up teams, when the production is done, and them we establish new ones. That is one method to keep the competence uniform." (woman, personnel manager).

The standardisation of competences institutionalised professioning, working methods and division of work: the control of competences and qualities supported governance. Standardisation provided the company with business credibility, because institutionalised competences and professional job descriptions indicate stability and reliability for customers, who apply similar definitions for professional work. The management of personnel stressed on controlling function: the goals for recruiting and organising work were also inclined to direct and circumscribe.

The methods cannot, however, totally control the development of professional competences. The competence of the employees is not the property of a company, although work-sites are important spaces for professional learning. The character of work practices and relations does not allow absolute dominance and the people under control are also able to deal with it and even stepside it. Power is always assosiated with counter-power (Foucault 1980, 51,119). In addition, methods of governance are bound to the situation, environment, current targets and interests and, thus, the influences of them might turn into consequences, which were not intended. Restricting specialisation of professional competence might turn into shortage of specialised labour. Controlling the competences and characteristics is quite complex in dynamic fields, because

[4] In IT-companies learning by doing – either in informal or more organised way – is common (See: Kolehmainen 2001, 42-43), because the technology is particular and the level of expertise is varied.

[5] In customer magazines, the specialisation of professionals was slightly emphasised. „For each production, the most appropriate professionals are chosen". The different conceptions concerning the specialisation of professionals is related to the divergent purposes and receivers of the texts and talk. When marketing professional services, the specialisation and tailoring is often emphasised, although the services might be standardised due to the tight competition in the market.

changes in the market and demand might make the yesterday's recruiting criteria inappropriate today. After all, professional employees are.

Governance: collective and individual perspective

Shared interest

Governance was not one-way dictating implemented by the management, because practicing power and power relations are related to context. However, management has better opportunities for applying power, which is tied to the relation between institutions in working life and power. Management is located in knots of institutionalised relations, which reinforces the opportunities to exercise power. Relations of power and historically shaped institutionalised relations of production touch and support each other (Foucault 1980, 139-142). In work organisations, management is legitimated to intervene in work organising, which sets up changing working methods. The issue of organising of work is negotiated with employees, which is framed by the conditions in the situation. Management takes into account the possibility of resistance, and because of that the one-way dictating is not the appropriate method. In the new media company, the approval and support of the employees was necessary for the organisational changes, although they originated from the initiative of the stockholders and management. The professionals approved the new approach to organise work and complied with it in their own activities.

The professionals supported the striving for profitability and standardisation of working methods, because they considered it reasonable, particularly in this business field of uncertainty. "I know the financial aspect well enough. The budget defines how to do the work." (man, audio-video designer). In 2000, the business of new media was considered to focus only on entertainment, and, thus the activities in the field were interpreted not to be "real work". In addition, profitability of the business was suspected. The professionals emphasised that the business of the company was decent – producing competent services for customers and doing proper work. They strongly wanted to stand out from the light-minded competitors in the field and emphasised the reasonable management in the company: striving for working time of eight hours, competent professional work, proper products for customers and profitable business.

"Compared to our competitors, we are a much lesser degree in publicity. It is a considered decision: this is not hype but reasonable work. Focus on doing – not talking. " (man, programmer)

In work organisations, mutual understanding and agreement concerning principles, targets and practices is the basis for governance, because the actors are dependent on each other when striving for their own and shared aims (see: Hosking & Morley 1991, 66-70). Professionals hold work-related interests, which they can realise in work sites. The shared objective is the continuity of work and economics, which is profited by employees, managers and stock holders. However, the concensus is always incomplete despite of the institutionalisation of targets and ways of action, because the employees, managers and stock holders have also divergent and even contradictory interests. The consensus is constantly renegotiated (Parker 2000, 85-90).

Self-governance and professional identity

The professionals were active in the new way of analysing and acting: governance was realised, in addition to the collective actions, in the form of self-governance, in other words self-controlling and self-designing. The duty of the project managers was to control the time tables and labour resources in projects, but the most crucial form of controll was, however, the professionals' responsibility for

their own duties. The responsibility was accompanied with independence and freedom from "bossing", which the professionals appreciated. They planned their works and time tables, but it was strictly framed by the shared time tables and resources. "The management is flexible, provides liberties, but initiative-taking and responsibility are required as well. The management trust on the professionals." (man, programmer)

Adjustment to organisation - relating and assimilating own activities into the organisation - is the basis for individuals and activities being situated in mutually related spaces (Foucault 1977, 28, 184). Self-governing is accompanied with freedom of individual. This freedom is related with the question of power, because individual freedom suggests subtle governing (Rose 2000, 73). Self-governing of employees is a positive form of control: it it efficient and does not require much labour and other resources. Uniform control practiced by superiors or by non-human control methods (for example electronic instruments), which focuses on all employees in the same way, can not take into accout context-related issues as self-governing of employees does. Self-governing is, however, linear and uncertain, because employees have different interests being related to varied contexts and targets. The interests and ways of acting and analysing might also be mutually conflicting.

The other side in self-governance is designing oneself: self-control is meaningful in the processes of shaping oneself. Nikolas Rose (2000, 91) argues that the significance of working life for employees has extended from the field of economy into psychology and the work organisations are crucial arenas for shaping self. [6] In the society emphasising the significance of paid work, designing professional identity is important in self-shaping. Professional organisations are important sites for designing these identities, because they provide socally and culturally appropriate environment, epistemology for disciplinary constructions and, thus, opportunities for methods and patterns for self-shaping. Designing identity is based on parallel processes of constructing memberships to adequate disciplines and groups and standing out from discipines and groups being evaluated inferior or "wrong" (see: Rose 2000, 46). The professionals of programmers and content providers reinforced their professional identity by underlining the special competence and mastering the discipline: emphasising the particular way of analysing, which was highlighted by accentuating the difference to other groups. They described the particular character of their profession by describing the inability of the other professionals to master the particular discipline. The professional identities were not company-specific, but based on conceptions in publicity. The specialisation in discipline was the core for contructing the professional identity. "When the project manager and scriptwriter make the draft, it is based on written text, because it is produced applying their professional competence. They don't recognise the aesthetic point of view: it is not visual, it is an illustrated text." (man, graphic designer).

When disciplinary particularity is emphasised, it often causes problems in interaction between professional groups. In the company under investigation, the phenomenon was recognised in two ways. First, the existence of problems was denied refering to the organising methods. The ideal for project management model was autonomy of the professionals as regards to their work fields: the basic rule did not admit intervening in the work field of the other team members. In other words, the division of work was supposed to prevent conflicts. "We have all our own duties and tasks and I think it makes it work. You take care of your own business and there's no conflict." (woman, graphic designer). The more common way was, however, to emphasise the conflicts between the professional approaches: the professionals analysed the shared work in different ways. "Conflicts

[6] The argument is supported by the observations of reality, but it must be critisised for being one-sided. Working life is multidimensional and the opportunities for self-designing are limited.

are common, for example between scriptwriters and programmers. Contents do not fit in technology." (woman, scriptwriter).

The negative consequence of division of work and designing professional identities was the mutually diverging and conflicting approaches, which caused problems in streamlining the work. The phenomenon is not new: according to some other studies dealing with the work organisation in IT-companies, professional differentiation weakens the opportunities for mutual interaction and the workmates are often considered as obstacle for creativity in work (Kolehmainen 2001, 62, Nousiainen 2002, 54-57, Engeström 2002, 59). The phenomenon is related to institutionalisation of work organisations: the logics contains differentation of work and professional roles in the process of growth and establisment. In the process of institutionalisation, activities and roles are divided into different systems, which follow their own logics and, consequently, have often difficulties in interaction with other systems.

Contradictory interest: cracks in governance

The programmers and content providers considered creativity to be the core of their professional identity. For the content providers it was artistic creativity, which has been structured in the particular institutes for education and in constant engagement in arts. The programmers defined their creativity to be technical and intellectual professioning. For content providers it was realised in "visions", as programmers suggested to experience and knowledge. The identity based on creativity was constructed in the interviews by emphasising the creativity in work and, on the other hand, complaining the minor opportunities for creative work. The frames of labour resourcing and the requirements of the customers standardised the work and the opportunities for realising oneself in work were often too limited.

"It would be nice to say that my work demands creativity. It is not that, this is work. It is providing standardised solutions, the professional competence is that you can do proper work. About 10 percent of the total work provides opportunity for creativity, but most often it is updating sites. And the customer companies strictly comply with their graphic standards." (man, graphic designer)

The core of the programmers' and content providers' work was the tension between the creativity-based identity and the standardisation of work. Their professional ambition often ranged above the limits set by the resources. Following the strict schedule often caused poor performance and they felt that it damaged their professional prestige. The solutions were to lower the standards of professioning or to work overtime. " I could perform my job in eight hours, but with no opportunity for self-realising." (man, audio-video designer). They expressed the need for more creative work and had dreams of taking a break for artistic experiments with no financial constraints. The standardisation of work is a common phenomenon in IT-companies, which due to the institutionalising of business activities (see: Kolehmainen 2001, 37, Tarkka 2002, 28). The research and development activities were also in the process to be institutionalised: it was, as well, streamlined. New inventions are not necessary as regards to profitability, but the ways to develop production, which increase productivity and profits. Innovations are not the creative activities, which are free as regards to institutional structures and relations, but new solutions in the frame of business goals.

The professionals hold also interests and activities, which were not in line with streamlining and financial management: striving for creative work. Work organisations provide the employees with activity fields for realising their interests, but the interests have to follow the business goals. However, the business, environment and intererests are not stable: they are reshaped due to

changing environment, which influences in the ways of acting and analysing. Governance has sometimes to give way to other ways of acting and analysing. Standardised working methods and competence might be insufficient in relation to changing markets and demands; professionals' creative approach might fit better in markets, when standardised products do not anymore satisfy customers.

Conclusions

The organisation of work shaped the compentence and identity of the new media professionals, although general patterns and disciplines of expertise – shared widely in society - framed this process. The methods for organising work were based on governance – financial management and streamlining - which strove for efficiency and economy. The intended and non-intended influences of governance shaped the professional competence and identity: the influences were contradictory, because they reinforced, but also directed and limited the competence and identity.

Financial management and streamlining uniformed professional work and competence by standardising the working methods and skills. The professional work was standardised by limiting the working time and defining patterns and models for work, which did not provide opportunity for creative work. Because of the need to standardise the quality of the work, the management of the company favoured intra-organisational training and collegial learning. However, the management also strove for controlling the compentence, because specialised expertise provides employees with extra tools as regards to employers. The opportunities for specialisation, which would have supplied more competence than needed, were limited applying methods of organising the work.

The professional identity was both reinforced and weakened as a consequence of the streamlining and financial management. The division and organising work according to the professional discipline provided the employees with the basis for shaping the competence and identity. However, the standardisation of work limited the opportunities for creative work, which was the core in their professional identity.

To conclude, professional identity and competence is shaped and constantly reshaped in intended and in non-intended processes in work organisation. However, the environment is part of these processes, because phenomena in society and particularly in markets influcence in the solutions for organising work. Governance is the common way to act and analyse, but in parallel exist also other ways of acting and analysing, which do not strive for economy and efficiency.

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