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Scope of Action as Scene of 'Everyday Drama'

A study in a Finnish newspaper. An institutional and critical perspective to the interpretation of empiric material.

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Abstract

Occupational psychology deals with the work of an individual person with all its characteristics and implications, but refrains from meddling with the structures and dynamics of the employer organization. Organizational studies, on the other hand, are very little concerned with the work of a single employee and its impacts on the individual. This paper describes how the 'grey area' between the disciplines can be covered by integrating the action regulation theory, an approach of occupational psychology, with the institutional and critical perspective of organization studies. Scope of action, the pivotal area of the action regulation theory, is examined with results derived from an ethnographic study on the scope of action of journalists. As both the business and the subject of the study were experiencing a transitional stage, an institutional perspective is applied in the analysis of the results when describing the present state. The results are analysed from a critical perspective in order to achieve the emancipatory aim of the study. The paper is an example of how problematic dichotomies in organizational studies and the organizational dynamics they contain are viewed within the framework integrating occupational psychology and organizational theory. There are two dimensions in the scope of action of journalists: editorship and context of action. The emancipatory approach of the paper distinctly highlights power that is institutionalised into the context of action, as well as the many forms in which power is exercised.

Keywords

Context of action, critical perspective, editorship, institutional perspective, scope of action.

Introduction

Critical Management Studies (CMS) is a comparatively young discipline, although it has its roots in the 1930's, in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, which was based heavily on Marx, and it has been said that all critical studies still refer to Marx at some point (Parker 2002: 125-28). Parker (2002: 115-17) sees that the achievements of the CMS have remained on a theoretical level, as there are few empirical studies conducted, in which a critical approach has been applied. Parker (2002: 120-22) also sees that there have been difficulties within the CMS, regarding attitudes towards practical research: It has been feared that criticality may suffer, if changes approved by management are accepted as such (cf. Fournier and Grey 2000). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000:128-30) have identified the same problem and suggested a 'minimal version' of critical studies, one with few ambitious objectives of change. Alvesson and Deetz (1996; 2000: 130-41) consider the small amount of empirical research to be the greatest shortcoming of the CMS, and also Thomas (1999), as he addresses the distortion of the stakeholder theory, calls for further empirical studies with a critical approach.

A Finnish newspaper organization and its dynamics as a research subject appears both topical and interesting in many aspects: In the aftermath of the 1990's depression, Finnish newspapers were hit by a severe decrease in newspaper advertising and a loss of subscribers, which weakened profitability, and recovery from this has taken more than ten years — in advertising volume, the level of 1990 was not reached until 2004. The long-lasting financial recession of the papers offered good premises for managerialisation to spread also in newspaper organizations.

This article is based on a study, which by its own small contribution amends the relative lack of critical empirical research*. The study was inspired by CMS, and the author deals with their subjects based on experiences they gathered from the theoretical reflections of the study, as well as from the analysis of the fairly extensive empirical material. The aim of the study in question was to analyse from a

critical perspective, how Finnish newspaper editors, as typical semi-professionals (e.g. Beam 1993), build and safeguard their professional identity and their occupational image within the dynamics of a newspaper enterprise organization (Beam 1993; Gade and Perry 2003; Pollard 1995; Russo 1998). The starting point of the study was the viewpoint of an 'ordinary' agent, a newspaper editor.

The ownership of Finnish regional newspapers has during the last couple of decades been concentrated in the hands of media conglomerates, as regional owners have given up their possessions. At the same time, local ownership and management have been replaced by professional managers trained to technical-rational thinking, and managerial fads have rapidly been applied with the help of consultants: A change of eras has occurred in regional newspapers within ten years. Technical development has created a situation where the boundaries of different media and also their agents are blurred; this so-called media convergence creates pressures in the job descriptions of editors in the traditional print media, when a media conglomerate owns both print and electronic mediums.

A detailed analysis of the results is, due to the specific nature of circumstances, relevant only in Finnish publications, but the author feels that this study also bears general interest. The author began to take interest in writing the article, as recent literature on organizations seemed to be focused on the same basic questions, which caused them headaches during the entire research process: Solutions concerning theoretical basic assumptions and the paradigm of the research are not 'just theoretical' contemplations, but also choices that pester the researcher during the practical research process, as the researcher has to take a stand regarding the pivotal dichotomies of organizational research, such as structures-agents; determinism-voluntarism; descriptive- prescriptive; and organization-individual (Kelemen and Hassard 2003; Reed 1996; Reed 2003; Tsoukas and Knudsen 2003; Westwood and Clegg 2003). In addition to this, some recent publications concerning the problems of the institutional approach appealed to the author, and encouraged the writing of this article.

The material for the study was gathered in a Northern Finland newspaper, established in 1899. The circulation of the paper exceeds 80000, making it the fourth largest daily newspaper in Finland. Since the 1950's, the paper has been politically independent. The company employs approximately 300 persons, about 100 of whom are editors. The financial output of the paper has, after the 1990's long-lasting and deep depression in the newspaper business, again been excellent — the paper has been and still is one of the most profitable in Finland.

The last incentive to writing this paper was given by an article by O'Leary (2003), 'From paternalism to cynicism: Narratives of a newspaper company', which fell in the hands of the author only when the study was already in the revision phase. The subject of O'Leary's research was the Courier (a pseudonym); the size of the newspaper is not revealed in the article. Based on the text, it can be concluded that the paper is regional, but being led under new management towards national level. The article is interesting for several reasons. Despite great differences in both size and culture regarding the operational environment, O'Leary's subject corporation seems to have been undergoing a transitional stage quite similar to the one that the corporation this study focuses on, and one could almost unambiguously end up in O'Leary's narrative constructions: paternalism, profit, career and cynicism.

Like O'Leary's newspaper, also the subject company of the author had, two years prior to the beginning of the study, for the first time in its history, contracted a professional manager, one not belonging to the owning families, and also one with virtually no experience in the newspaper business. The managing editor, who soon afterwards took over the management of the editorial office, came from a major national newspaper and was considered 'a top expert in his field'. As head of marketing, the new managing director hired his former employee, who also was a novice in the business. In the board of directors representing the owners, a total change of generations occurred: While the members of the former board of directors had served in their positions for decades, the most senior member in the present board has taken his place only in 1997. According to the 100-year history of the company, the management of the corporation relied earlier more on intuition rather than calculations, more on emotion than reason. The new management started to talk about profitability, efficiency, strategy, customer orientation, growth etc. The new managing editor begun to emphasise national visibility. The new management started also cutting off 'the slack': The first lay-offs were carried out, as 40 persons were fired for 'productional reasons', although the profitability of the paper remained one of the best in the country. The new management started an extensive project carried out by consultants, which included strategy and commitment training for the entire staff. So many similar events took place in O'Leary's subject company, that without effort one comes to think of a phenomenon of institutionalisation, one called isomorphism by DiMaggio and Powell (1991a; 1991b), which crosses even national borders.

The subject of the study was selected on the basis that it was considered one of the last regional papers, whose ownership had not – yet – been transferred to national media chains. The newspaper was seen to represent regional identity and to be more of an institution rather than a business. O'Leary comments on the same matter:

The paternalism narrative depicts the Courier [pseudonym] as a social institution and not as a profit-making organization, one in which there is a sense of continuity (and discipline) that arises from employing generations of the same family.

As the study started, it however became apparent that it had fallen on a transitional stage: The institution was turning into a business, exactly in the manner described by O'Leary. In terms of institutional perspective, the sources of legitimacy were changing: Legitimacy had been founded on ideological and regional interests, but after being affected by the phenomena of the 1990's, it now seeks foundation in technical-rational thinking. In a transitional stage between eras, the professional thinking and interests of journalists meet with the new objectives and working methods of the host organization, in a way that is interesting from the viewpoint of organizational research: The professional culture of journalists, born in a paternalistic institutional context, may not easily give in to technical-rational "managerialisation" — the interested parties do not share a common language (Alvesson and Berg 1992: 182-83). It remains yet to be seen, to what extent the practices of the new era are purely ceremonial, but it is unlikely that tensions can be avoided (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Scope of Action

Already during an early phase in the study, it could be seen that the different disciplines do not easily cross their set boundaries: Regarding the expectations and interests an individual has of his/her work, organizational studies merely settle for giving a summary of studies in occupational and organizational psy-

chology. Marsden and Townley (1996) state this to the point: 'Organization theory is essentially theory of, and mostly for, management; it has much less to say of and for those who are managed.' As early as in 1980 (231-35), Watson warned about concentrating on systems, structures and cultures on a general level, seeing that this would lead to a loss of touch with the working individuals and their problems. Clark (2000: 82), on his behalf, remarks that - - -'far too many of the case studies in strategy are from the perspective of the storyteller (e.g. the chief executive and the academic) therefore overplaying the capacities and freedom of movement available to most persons'. As this study focused on the viewpoint of an 'ordinary' agent, when addressing the questions that directly concern the work of an individual, the author decided to rely on studies in occupational psychology, in particular the German-originated action regulation theory (Aronsson 1983; Aronsson and Berglind 1990; Frei and Udris 1990; Hacker 1986; Ulich, 2001). As the structures and dynamics of an organization, power in particular as the most essential, are scarcely addressed in occupational and organizational psychology, the author aimed to cover the 'grey area' in the field by combining the organizational-theoretical and occupational-psychological approaches (Figure 1).

The concept of scope of action in the action regulation theory starts from the expectations an individual has of his/her work, the characteristics of good work (Volpert 1990), and these formed the basis for a set of leading questions for the first interviews in the empirical study; opening the interviews with themes that were familiar to the journalists proved helpful in getting started and in creating a positive atmosphere for the conversations.

According to the action regulation theory, there are two leading principles concerning the work of an individual: the hierarchical structure of work and feedback (Volpert 1979). The hierarchical structure of work means that a person's job should include tasks on the lowest, or sensorimotor level (routine); on the middle, or practical level; as well as on the highest, or intellectual-creative level. When a job is learned, it can be mastered on the lower levels, enabling capacity on the higher levels to be released for the benefit of learning new things; this being the key to all learning. Feedback refers to an ongoing process of comparing the work and the results of action with the goals, and also, to a possibility to make corrections when necessary.

Figure 1 shows the scope of action at the intersection of the objectives, interests, duties and responsibilities of both an organization and an individual, which often are in conflict (Leitner 1999; Ulich 2001: 175, 190). Volpert (1990), among others, states that by arriving at his social point of reference, he reached an area that can be called the boundary between the immediate scope of action of an individual and the area of the interests of an organization, which is where the theory stops. This 'no man's land' and its use as an aid in analysing organizational dynamics lies in the focal point of this study.

The scope of action includes the following elements, which all influence one another: The phylogenetic need of an individual for autonomy; the material element; the self-expressive dimension of work, concerning intrinsic satisfactions; and the impact work has on identity. Daudi of the organizational researchers has used the term scope of action, and he has described it as the phylogenetic strive of an individual for freedom of action and for the pursuit of his/her own interests (Daudi 1984: 163-64, 286-88). As strategic means in these endeavours, the individual resorts to hiding his/her predictability and to coalitions that are beneficial in the prevailing circumstances. Daudi also sees the scope of action as an instrument of power: It is used as a tool and an object of trade when bargaining for benefits with other interested parties in the organization (Daudi 1984: 342-43). Borrowing the term scope of action from Daudi, Holmer-Nadesan (1996) applies it, as she analyses the struggle of individuals who strive to protect their identity under pressure created by several conflicting discourses.

Watson (1980: 64-8) does not use the term scope of action, but he distinctly highlights the material element the scope of action includes. He sees a conflict of principles between employees and employers: Employees sell their labour and give up their personal autonomy for the compensation offered by the employers, and do this while trying to minimise effort and to maximise personal payback. Employers, on the other hand, attempt to maximise their payback by utilizing the potential they pay for as efficiently as possible. Watson draws attention to two different types of contract. The official contract of employment (explicit contract) covers only matters that are most relevant at the time the contract is made. The contract evolves as new practices are established, yet changes in it are explicitly agreed upon only rarely. As time goes by, the employee starts to interpret that the non-material benefits of the work (among others autonomy, mental satisfaction, breaks, a possibility to attend to personal matters) are included in the contract. Thus, an implicit contract is formed, it in a sense being the expression Watson uses for describing the subjective scope of action of the action regulation theory (see Figure 1).

The action regulation theory focuses explicitly on the self-expressive aspects of work. The questions concerning identity and work have been extensively covered by Casey (1995), Knights and Willmot (1999: 52-4), as well as Thompson and McHugh (1995: 327-58) among others, and from the perspective of occupational cultures in particular, by Trice (1993) and Van

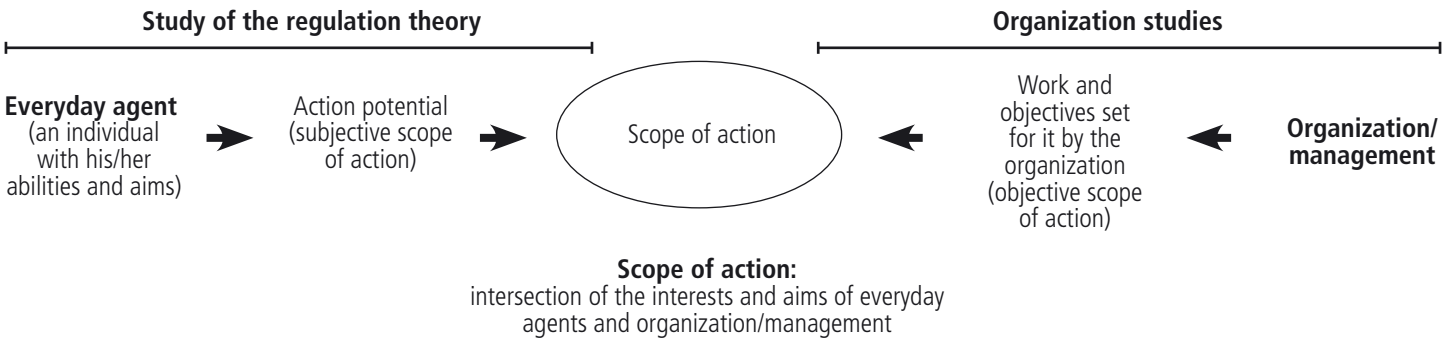


Figure 1. The focus of the study

Maanen and Barley (1984), to mention some. The wide array of problems concerning identity can be addressed here only when it comes to the professional identity of journalists, as it appears in the empirical study.

Academics skirting the scope of action

Some well-known scholars in organizational studies can be interpreted as referring to the scope of action, although different expressions are used. Clark (2000: 83) states that - - - 'are [the case studies in strategy] therefore overplaying the capacities and freedom of movement available for most persons'. Hardy and Clegg (1996) skirt the concept as they reflect on power: 'The gap between the capacity to labour and its effective realisation implies power and the organization of control. The depiction of this gap is the mainstay of some Marxian traditions of analysis, particularly of alienation. - - - Management is forever seeking new strategies and tactics through which to deflect discretion'. Also Grint (1991: 131-32) recognizes the scope of action in the relations between the management and those who are managed: In order to gain power, the management must lead those who are managed into action, and this provides those who are managed with an opportunity to interpret their circumstances and interests when they decide on their actions. It is interesting to notice, that scholars in the field of critical discourse analysis also refer to the scope of action in their own way (Fairclough 2005; Phillips 2003). As Phillips states: 'The result of these limits of discourse [one discourse against another] is a substantial space within which agents can act self-interestedly and work towards discursive change that privileges their interests and goals'. Fairclough, on his behalf, mentions 'the latitude available within the 'pattern' of organization for variation in habits of action'.

Also Reed (1997) implicitly refers to the scope of action, as he writes on social agents and - - - 'their attempts to defend or enhance their assets within enduring hierarchies of economic, political and social power'. In the previous quote, Reed hits the core of the organizational dynamics included in the scope of action: People strive to retain their scope of action or to widen it, and in these pursuits they are faced with the interests and objectives of the organization, and also with the notion that an increase in efficiency is a built-in feature of the capitalist system (Watson 1980: 67).

The previous notions of both Reed (1997) and Watson (1980: 64-8, 115-16) can be reduced, using the concept of the scope of action, as following: People try to maintain and widen their scope of action – whether in terms of the instrumental (pay check, working hours, strain) or the self-expressive (job satisfaction, personal challenges and development) value of their work (see also Fox 1980). In this, they are met with organizational control: An organization accepts only those changes in the scope of action which improve efficiency and thus increase the financial outcome of the company. Volpert (1990) states that organizations are oversensitive to workers' aspirations for expanding their scope of action. He talks of a paradox in the discourse on motivation: Initiative and enterprise are emphasised, yet when individuals start to show these qualities, they are met with a constraining reaction on the behalf of the organization, as the qualities are seen to pose a danger when it comes to coordination (read: supervision). According to Volpert, capacity of action is created, while at the same time obstacles for action are set.

The scope of action is a particularly sensitive area for companies undergoing a transitional process. People put up resistance, when they feel that changes – along with possible threats - are aimed at the scope of action they have secured for themselves during the course of their employment. (Daudi 1984: 321; Watson 1980: 236-38, 252-57). Watson (1980: 253) sees this as natural, although resistance to change in the lower levels of an organization is often considered as neurotic behaviour or irrational conservatism. An organization responds to individuals' pursuits of widening their scope of action by supervision, which relies on power. In the intersection of organizational and individual interests, the scope of action also is an arena for power struggle, expressively described by Daudi as 'the power of the discourse, and the discourse of the power' (Daudi 1984: 336). No matter how adverse the conditions, people have nevertheless always shown amazing persistence and ingenuity, when it comes to taking hold of their scope of action — no wonder this is also the case in modern organizations (Holmer-Nadesan 1996; Salaman 1979: 146, 151). Even the most sophisticated methods of control have their weaknesses: Rules are required in supervision, but these can never cover all instances, thus leaving room for adaptation, which people take advantage of in order to expand their scope of action (Clegg 1998; Grint 1991: 131-32; Hardy and Clegg 1996).

The scope of action is not static: If an organization takes back an expansion in the scope of action of an individual, a search for new boundaries begins instantly. The scope of action is also relative: That which constitutes as a wide range of freedom of action by some is considered limited by others. Also, people in different life situations and ages have different notions of their scope of action; and the overall state of the organization (mergers, re-engineering, and changes in general) also affects the ways in which threats concerning the scope of action are experienced. Depending on the interpretation of situations and the threats they pose, people favour either the collective or the individual scope of action (Daudi 1984: 208-10).

Basic assumptions and method

In the study this paper is founded on, the basic assumptions, or the paradigm, were selected based on the purpose and the aims of the study, as well as on the orientation of the researcher (Tsoukas and Knudsen 2003). According to Mills (2001), Morgan, who emphasises the incommensurability of paradigms, has also identified an 'osmosis' between paradigms, as a researcher moves in his/her 'intellectual universe'; yet the researcher must state his/her position clearly for the sake of the academic community and the readers.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) regard ontology, epistemology and method as links in the chain of basic assumptions and as the logical order of selection, the first link in any case being the purpose and the aim of the study (Kelemen and Hassard 2003; Scherer 2003; Westwood and Clegg 2003), which include the question: Whose point of view is applied while conducting the study? (Jermier 1998; Wicks and Freeman 1998). The article by Adler (2002) on the matter is aptly named 'Critical in the name of Whom and What'. Also, the concept of human nature as it is defined in the study must be added to the chain (Burrell and Morgan 1979: 6). The deduction pattern of the author is shown in Figure 2.

The aim of the study was emancipatory from the viewpoint of journalists: It focuses on the ways in which an organization with its structures, practices and power mechanisms either restricts the scope of action of journalists, or prevents them from realizing that they themselves contribute to the 'freezing' of practices that are unfavourable to them.

Neither understanding nor the emancipation that follows it can be attained, if the present state is not described and ana-

lysed. An institutional perspective proved indispensable for getting a hold of the practices and beliefs established during the 100 years of the company. It may be typical for the practical phase of the research process that empiric research and theory intertwine: The institutional perspective was applied to support the theoretical construction only after the first weeks of observation, as mentions of the institutional character of a regional newspaper kept coming up in literature concerning the subject enterprise. A regional newspaper enterprise seemed however to fit well in the criteria set by Hatch (1997: 83), regarding the use of an institutional perspective in organizational studies: There are significant barriers to entry in the business, it is controlled by few major agents, and its operations are regulated by laws or other public norms that are commonly accepted. After the study was conducted, confirmation for the usefulness of the institutional perspective was provided by an article by O'Leary (2003), which gives an example of the isomorphism of the institutional perspective (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b), and also an example of a regional newspaper as a 'social institution'.

The purpose of the study, as well as the position of the subjects, directed the author towards a critical perspective: Critical management studies traditionally start from the viewpoint of others than those in the managing positions – and usually of those, who in one way or another are in a subordinate position, and also, often unaware of it themselves (Adler 2002; Johnson and Duberley 2000: 129; Nord 2002). As Jermier (1998) puts it: "'Thus, the inescapable question for a critical theorist is: Whose side are you on?". Antonacopoulou (1999) reduces the CMS to one common nominator: - - - 'despite the reflexive mode of the critical approach, one element has remained unchanged within critical theory over the years, its focus on people.'

The ontology of the study is critical realism (Ackroyd and Fleetwood 2000; Clark 2000: 76-5; Fairclough 2005; Sayer 2000: 11-2). According to critical realism, even the social reality and the causal forces it contains exist independent of us, yet people by their actions can have an impact on the structures. Causality does not stand for a direct cause-effect relationship, because several interfering variables, the actions of the agents as the most important, affect the consequences. Critical realism seemed to be well suited for the purposes of practical organization studies, particularly when a specific point in time is concerned: People enter as agents into an organization, where structures and relationships often go back a long time (Ackroyd and Fleetwood 2000; Johnson and Duberley 2000: 150-75; Reed 1997). The ontologies of the critical and institutional perspective do not conflict with critical realism: They all explain the evolution of structures in their own way, yet up to this point institutional studies have shown little interest in raising an awareness which would aim at creating changes in the structures (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Reed 1997; Willmott 2003). The material impacts of social structures cannot be ignored in studies which focus primarily on agents, and these material impacts reflect the realistic ontology: One who has been fired can hardly regard the organization only as a discursive creation (Ackroyd and Fleetwood 2000; Tsoukas 1994).

The epistemology of critical realism emphasises the notion, that the social world is constructed in an open system, where positivist methods, which are based on law-like regularities, do not apply. Due to the emancipatory nature of the approach, a researcher who applies critical studies assumes and makes public the values that are being advocated while interacting with the subjects. (Adler 2002; Alvesson and Deetz 2000: 1-3, 131-34, 151-53; Jermier 1998; Johnson and Duberley 2000: 190-92; Watson 1980: 226-27; Wicks and Freeman 1998). Social phenomena are born of the meanings people give them, and they cannot be measured by any scale. The phenomena can be described and explained, and being dependent of conditions and contexts, also understood to some extent. The ontology of critical realism rejects naïve realism but also the post-modern interpretation: A social reality does exist, and it is socially constructed but not merely socially constructed (Ackroyd and Fleetwood 2000; Fairclough 2005; Fleetwood 2005). Based on this notion, subjectivist epistemology can, according to the conception of reality in critical realism, be connected to realistic ontology, contrary to the 'orthodox' definition of the paradigm by Burrell and Morgan (Johnson and Duberley 2000: 179-90).

The epistemology of the study leads to an idiographic method (Burrell and Morgan 1979: 1-7; Guba and Lincoln 1994). The method of collecting material that was regarded as best suited for the study addressed here was ethnography: Following the old ethnographic tradition, the researcher took to the field in order to look around and ask questions (Alvesson and Deetz 2000: 75-6; Atkinson and Hammersley 1994; Thomas 1993: 10-2).

Theoretical reflections on the basic assumptions of the study, together with feedback from the field work, led to the basic construction, or the paradigm, shown in Figure 2 (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Johnson and Duberley 2000: 8-9, 68; Kelemen and Hassard 2003; Mills 2001; Tsoukas and Knudsen 2003). Also in this case, one must take into account that researchers do not end up in their paradigms objectively; they cannot escape their scientific 'penchants' (Mills 2001) or personal biographies, which at least subconsciously have an impact on the study due to the values and attitudes they contain (Alvesson and Deetz 2000: 3; Johnson and Duberley 2000: 175-79; Tsoukas and Knudsen 2003). When constructing the paradigm, I found that power, emotions and trust are not among the topics that attract most attention in organizational studies; when supplementing to these topics, the author has been 'do-it-yourself men' (Tsoukas and Knudsen 2003: bricoleurs). My sources, when dealing with the problematics of power, have among others been Clegg (1998), Daudi (1984), Grint (1991), Hardy and Clegg (1996), Mumby (2001), Salaman (1979), Seier (2001) and Watson (1980). Regarding emotions, the author has turned to Fineman (1996) and Freese (1990), among others. The basics of trust have been acquired from articles in compilations by both Kramer and Tyler (1996) and Lane and Bachmann (1998).

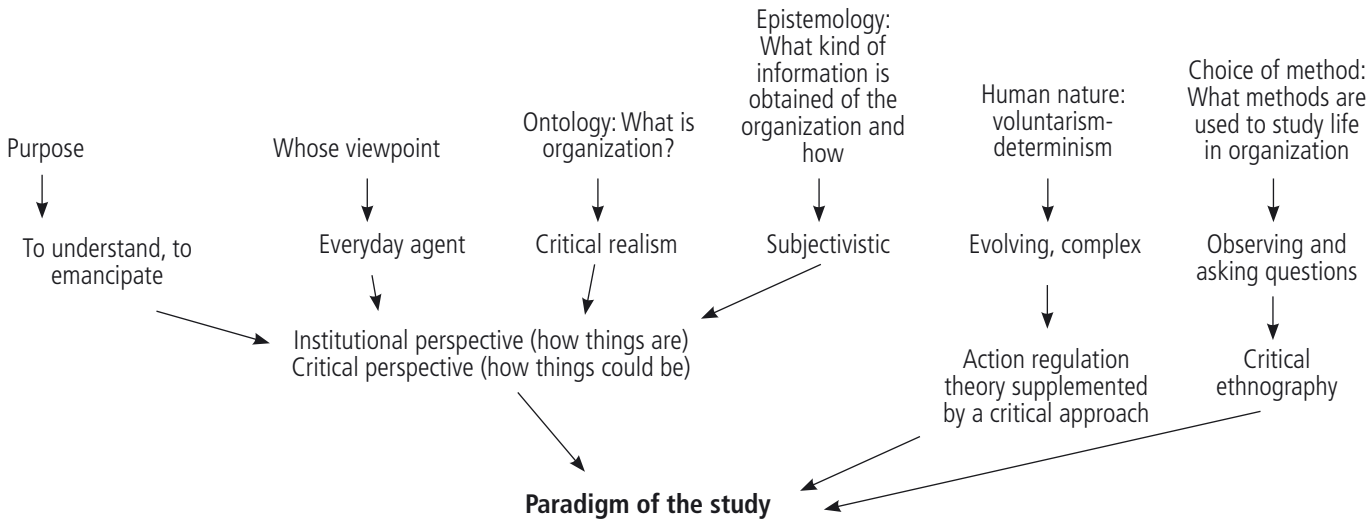


Figure 2. The deduction chain of the paradigm

The empirical study

Due to the emancipatory purpose of the study, the approach that was applied was critical ethnography, such as described by Thomas (1993), for example. Also Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000: 135-45), relying heavily on Thomas, have laid the basis for the approach used. Alvesson and Sköldberg present the triple hermeneutics applied also here: Simple hermeneutics being the interpretation of a person of him/herself and of the social reality shared by individuals; double hermeneutics being the interpretation of a researcher when striving to understand the reality as interpreted by individuals for themselves; and triple hermeneutics including, along with the previous, a critical interpretation of unconscious processes, ideologies and power relations – the chapter usually missing in the agenda of the mainstream studies.

Fieldwork in 2004 consisted of observation, interviews and discussions in several kinds of contexts. Also written material was used, the 100-year history of the company being the most fruitful among it, as it presented concretely the institutional character of the newspaper. Other written material to be mentioned included staff magazines, annual reports, business brochures, staff registers and publications regarding the newspaper business.

The primary observation period lasted for six weeks, but the actual presence on site was extended due to interviews and discussions. Considering the long professional career by the author in newspaper enterprises, the observation period can be regarded sufficiently long for the purposes of the study. For comparison and specifications, another regional newspaper was observed for two weeks. The observation started by monitoring the morning meetings of the editorial office and continued until the evening. Due to the tragic terrorist attacks in Madrid (March 11th, 2004), as well as during some other hectic news nights, the observation sometimes went on late into night. The days included several discussions with journalists at work: by the coffee machine, at lunch, in the smoking room; with a cultural reporter in a town orchestra concert; as well as with some journalist informants on 'no-man's land' in the evening. The observations were recorded in a diary.

The interviews were semi-structured theme interviews, and they took place in the conference room of the newspaper company. There were nine journalists interviewed, representing different age groups and both sexes. The interviews that were taped were conducted twice: For the first time, at the end of February in 2004, for the second, in October 2004. Both interviews lasted for approximately one and a half hours.

The 'catalytic' leading questions for the first interviews were created on the basis of the characteristics of good work (Volpert 1990) as presented in the action regulation theory, but previous observation had already supplemented to the outline based on the theory (on the significance of theory in ethnographic organization studies, see e.g. Ackroyd 2004 and Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 135-36). The leading themes constituted of autonomy, feedback, command of work as a whole, variation and versatility, the social and collegial aspects, as well as the meaningfulness of work and learning (Ulich 2001: 104-18, 189-95; Volpert 1990). From outside the theory, mainly from the sociology of work, pay check and material factors (Fox 1980; Watson 1980: 64-8), continuity of work (Herriot et al. 1998: 39) and emotional factors (Fineman 1996; Frese 1990; Volpert 1990) were added to the initial themes of the discussion. The selected themes helped in getting the interviewees in touch with the topics of the study with ease. The fact that the interviews could be conducted during working time obliged to speed up the interviews with solid preparation.

The first interviews were transcribed from the recordings, cleansed of so-called expletives, and sent to the interviewees for checking. The second interviews were led with the help of a loose 'manuscript', with both general and personal questions, where conclusions drawn from the observations played a significant role. In the general part, the interviewees were informed of the things which, in one form or another, had come up in all interviews during the first set, and these topics were discussed. The personal part concentrated on examining more profoundly those topics that had come up only in the interview of the person in question, or had come up in a way which differed from the others, and therefore required specification.

As described, the first interviews were begun theory-originated, but towards the end, the emphasis shifted on topics brought out by the interviewees. The form and content of the second interviews varied considerably depending on the person. The second round of interviews proved absolutely necessary for several reasons: The interviewees were given clear feedback on the first

interviews, which further improved the confidential atmosphere for discussion that had been established; new topics that had proved essential could be examined closer, supplementing to the choice of topics based on theory; during the second time, the researcher could make further observations of the facial expressions and tones of voice of the interviewee, as topics previously addressed were brought out in new light and also catalytically, confronting the opinions of the interviewee with those presented by others. The second set of interviews was also transcribed, and comments were asked either by e-mail or by phone. No substantial corrections were made by the interviewees. In the newspaper selected as the reference subject, seven interviews were conducted; for these the leading questions were constructed based on the experiences gained during the interviews in the primary subject company. Almost 500 sheets of written material were gathered by the interviews altogether.

From interviews to themes, from themes to categories

The abundant material acquired by the interviews and observation remained for a long time 'one grey mass', refusing to unfold. Through persistent listening and reading, the statements started little by little to find their place in specific topic areas, addressed by working titles in the early phase, and as time went by, in groups which could be called themes. Forgetting the several weeks of 'desperation', the author could write that 'the themes, problems and questions that were interesting from the viewpoint of the study were relatively quickly and clearly discovered in the material'.

The following 19 themes were identified in the material:

Autonomy	Ownership
Company image and changes in it	Possibilities to have influence
Economical depression	Producer and outsourcing
Editorship (the 'mission' of a journalist)	Power (discourse of change, economical depression, incentives)
Emphasizing national perspective	Professional pride
Feedback on work	Scope and potential of action (of job description)
Growth	State of the press
Identity as a non-official	Tendency towards entertainment
Isomorphism of the newspapers	Trade union of journalists
Micro politics of power	

Themes were combined and some titles were changed for more descriptive ones. Figure 3 shows the themes and sub-categories, which merge into two main categories describing the scope of action of journalists. As can be seen in the figure, the themes could be divided according to the way they affect the job and working, either directly or indirectly: The former was called editorship, the latter, context of action. The main category of editorship was formed, when the themes directly relating to work had been separated into two groups, which were called the sub-categories of professional identity and characteristics of good work, while their qualifiers were called dimensions. The title 'editorship' was born in a manner typical to field work: Expressions gathered under the working title "mission" began to take on concrete and cohesive content during the analysis of the material, but the common nominator was still missing. As the interviews were time and again interpreted, an answer given by one of the interviewees begun to feel increasingly important. When asked of commitment, the journalist replied: 'It definitely is the editorship I'm most committed to'. It did not take long before editorship was the only 'correct' title for this main category!

Out of the ten themes grouped in the main category of context of action, five sub-categories were formed: (1) the depression of the 1990's and its after-effects, (2) the ownership of newspaper enterprises, (3) interpretations of the newspaper business and the state it is in,(4) power, and (5) producers and outsourcing as fads.

Interpreting the results

Editorship

The characteristics of good work -sub-category of editorship corresponds to the established concept of the scope of action, which in the action regulation theory is referred to by the German terms Handlungsspielraum and Tätigkeitsspielraum (Hacker 1986; Ulich 2001). Spielraum as an expression is, linguistically speaking, to the point, as it translates literally as room for manoeuvre. The terminology, however, is miscellaneous: Expressions Freiheitsgrad der Handlung, or freedom of action, and autonomy (also in Germany) are used, although autonomy is one of the dimensions of the scope of action (Hacker and Richter 1990; Oesterreich 1997; Semmer 1990; Ulich 2001: 191-95). In occupational psychology, the word control is internationally used (also in the form job control), and in the same meaning as the widely understood scope of action (Frese 1989; Johnson 1989; Miller and Birnbaum 1989; Oesterreich 1999). Investigating the connection between the strain of work and stress, Karasek (1981, 1990) refers to the same concept by the expression job decision latitude. The characteristics of good work -sub-category, illustrated by the previous different denominations, comes in the case of the study very near the situation, where the subjective and objective scopes of action coincide: The journalists are happy with their expectations regarding their work, as well as with the working conditions, not counting feedback, the handling of which had reached a deadlock situation in the subject company.

As to feedback, three different types could be clearly distinguished: feedback from the management, the colleagues and the readers. The two latter can be passed by mentioning that both were seen to come up very rarely. Considering the fact that the paper has more than 200000 readers, it was amazing that the journalists felt that they hardly received any feedback from them. This is a good example of the ceremonial nature of certain things, for the staff magazines bursted for several years with articles emphasizing customer orientation. Feedback from the colleagues was scarce – and not too heartily missed either. This seems weird, as it is generally believed that in expert professions feedback and support from the colleagues is particularly important. When more profound inquiries were made in the matter, it did however come up, that feedback and support from the colleagues is received within the closest work community during the course of work routines – and it is so natural, that mentioning it is overlooked even when asked. Feedback from the colleagues is, however, by no means extensive, leaving an obvious source for enriching the work untapped.

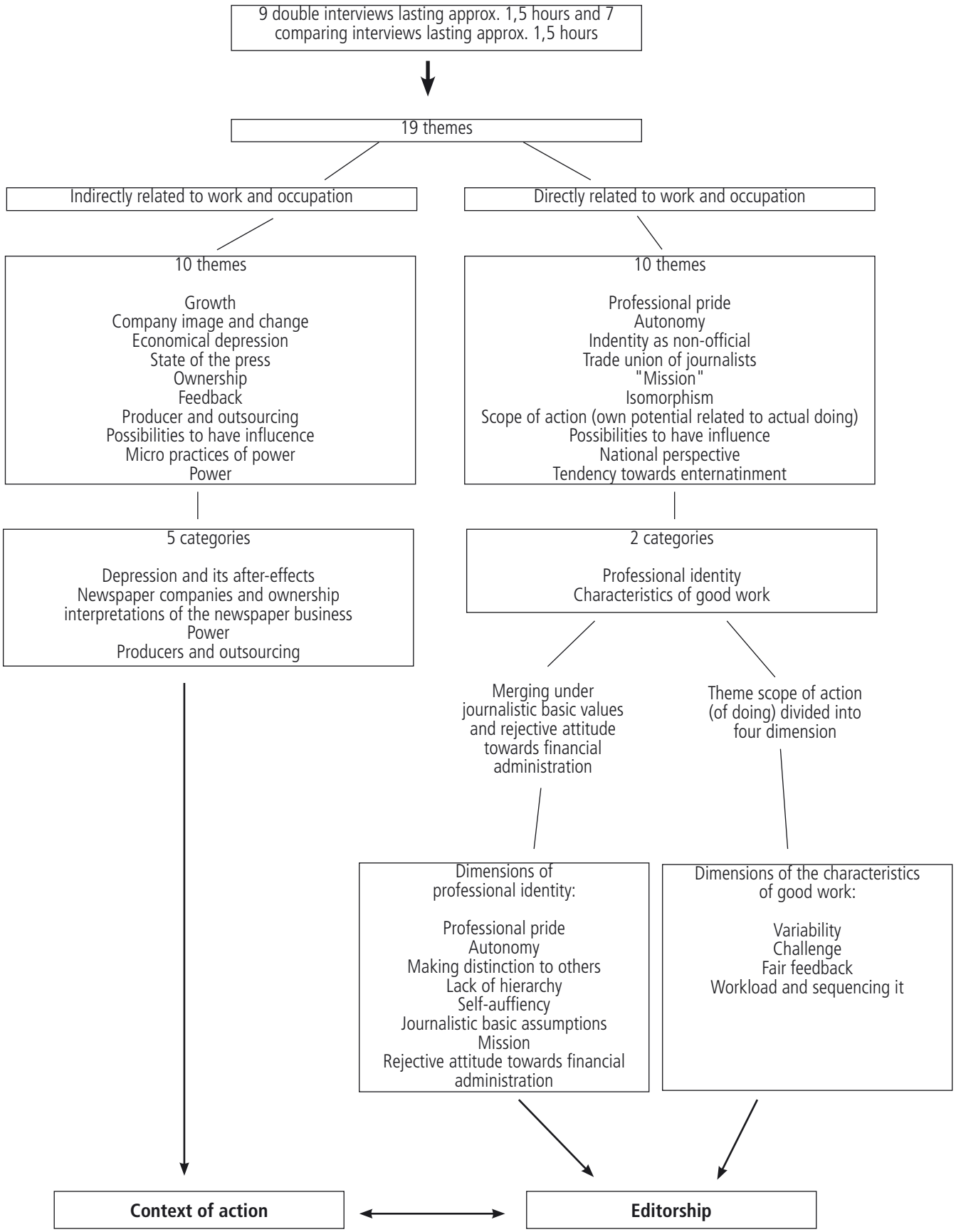


Figure 3. From themes to categories

On the other hand, when it comes to feedback given by the management, the study did provoke some thoughts. Two significant features could be noticed regarding problems related to feedback. First, that some academics see feedback, along with autonomy, independent of other factors, meaning that a 'surplus' of positivity in other factors does not compensate for the weakness of autonomy and feedback (Ulich 2001: 104-08). Secondly, feedback proved not only to be feedback on work, but a form of exercising power. In the morning meetings, which were called 'morning devotions' by one of the interviewees, brickbats and bouquets were handed out – and mostly brickbats. Those giving the feedback, the managing editor and his closest assistants, could, by formally evaluating the work, and in a 'neutral' way, show to whom the right to be right was institutionalised (Alvesson and Deetz 1996; Clegg 1998; Hardy and Clegg 1996; Marsden and Townley 1996; Seier 2001). At the same time, the content of the newspaper and the manner in which it was edited could be directed as wanted, without having to make specific decisions that could have aroused criticism or at least conversation. When giving nominal critique on the stories, the management of the editorial office could also, cloaked in the guise of criticizing the story, express their opinions on the journalists (the so-called face value). The journalists did not name this to be a question of power – and 'power is most effective when it is unnecessary' (Hardy and Clegg 1996). Irritated facial expressions and emotional comments revealed clearly, that the journalists sensed the exercising of power, which was hidden in the guise of feedback, the manoeuvring of their work, and an attempt to make them vie for favour. The meetings were educational also in other ways: As important as it was to listen to what was said and who said it, it was to see who never said anything, what were the expressions like on the faces of those listening to what was said, and who were not present – ever.

Another problem area concerning the way editorship was experienced was the dimension of journalistic basic assumptions. Some of the journalistic basic assumptions or values are based on institutionalised rules and practices: The Freedom of the Press Act, international guidelines and ethical norms, and in Finland, the Council for Mass Media with its resolutions form the basis for the good professional practice for journalists. The good journalistic practice includes specific features depending on the type of the newspaper, as well as on the regional and other agendas of a paper. The journalists in the subject paper saw, that the paper has, during the past few years, clearly and intentionally been led in three directions, which are criticised by the journalists: The paper is being turned into a more entertaining one, nationality is emphasised at the expense of regionality, and appearance, at the cost of content, has become a way to please the readers. If the conflicts concerned only factual matters, they could be resolved through discussion. The problem, however, is more profound: The conflicts are not merely 'technical', for resisting the tendency towards entertainment and superficiality is, for journalists in regional newspapers, one aspect in building their professional identity, and to this end, a distinction is made between the home paper and others, mainly afternoon papers and tabloids (Russo 1998). When it comes to the identity of the journalists, the management can hardly create changes by, for example, instilling a new organization culture (Alvesson and Berg 1992: 182-83). When the conflict is prolonged, there is a danger of a phenomenon that can be compared to alienation, which Richter (2003) calls 'inner resignation' (orig. German: Innere Kündigung).

No problems were noticed regarding autonomy, which is often described as the most important goal for journalists (Beam 1993; O'Leary 2003; Pollard 1995; Russo 1998). Even if this were true, we must remember that journalists, to start with, perceive their autonomy within the framework of their own professional culture and the institutionalised traditions of the paper. As stated in the previous paragraph, autonomy can also be restricted by feedback inconspicuously, in a manner which resembles brainwashing. Journalists throughout the world are particular of their autonomy also when it comes to the marketing department and any attempts to interfere by outside forces (Gade and Perry 2003; O'Leary 2003). In the case that was studied, the journalists felt that both the management of the paper and the journalists had been able to maintain their freedom of action well in this aspect.

Disregarding other details, it can be concluded that, apart from the problems addressed previously, the journalists were content with the way their editorship was realised, and this was confirmed by a limited survey for the interviewees, conducted during the study, in which also commitment that had become a fad was studied. No-one admitted being committed to the publishing company, and only few to the paper. Everyone stated that they were primarily committed to their work, and after that, to their work community. In this study, job satisfaction was the result of three interrelated factors: satisfaction from work, professional pride, and sense of duty, which came up distinctly during observation, and which O'Leary (2003) in her study has called 'a greater sense of responsibility'. Referring to the lately popular discourse on trust, it must be stated that this feature, persistent in Finnish working life, is more than readily interpreted as trust by the management (Sievers 2003).

Context of action

According to the study, editorship is the scope of action, which the journalists themselves strive for: To be allowed to express oneself without restrictions from the organization or any outside forces, and also in reasonable conditions and under tolerable working pressure – while being paid once a month for this self-expression (cf. Daudi 1984: 309).

Editorship is however also dependent on structures, which in this study were called context of action as the second main category. Context of action refers to the structures and practices, which limit the scope of action wanted by journalists, but also create premises for action. The context of action is an extensive complex, which includes the branch of business the company operates in and its business logic; the publisher organization with its resources, relations and practices; and the editorial office of the newspaper as a sub-organization within the publisher organization.

Within the context of action, also present time phenomena were addressed; of these, the 1990's depression of the Finnish economy surprisingly became one of the most important findings in the study. The depression came up already during the first interviews, although by economical indicators, the depression should have been passed no less than ten years earlier, and in the 100-year history of the subject company, published in 1998, it is stated that 'the paper got through the depression with only a scare'. Depression with its causal forces is a typical example of such a social phenomenon, as described by the terms of critical realism: The events it causes and the way they are experienced depend on the substratum the context provides. The journalists saw that the depression had been used as a deterrent and an instrument of power at least in the following 'actions for securing efficiency and profitability': The selling of copyrights to the publisher company (to ease the exchange of stories between papers), outsourcing projects (a producer system, where

producer-journalists can easily be 'persuaded' to become entrepreneurs), and the first lay-offs in the history of the company in 2002. Although no journalists were laid off, they were led to understand that 'the depression can come again, and in that case also the strength of the editorial office must be considered'. The selling of copyrights (and also those of the future generations of journalists), which had been established as a part of professional identity in Nordic newspaper culture, for a small lump sum compensation was explained by the elected representative of the journalists, using the typical defence mechanism of rationalisation: 'We didn't want to slow down the development.' To be labelled as resisting development belongs to the managerial rhetoric, which is used to fend off potential inquiries as to from whose viewpoint 'development' is defined, by provoking guilt beforehand (Salaman 1979: 171-82).

The depression was an instrument of power that could be easily identified. In several micro practices, however, power was hidden – also from the journalists (Clegg 1998; Daudi 1984: 340-42; Seier 2001), and some of those micro policies are mentioned here. The incentives system based on individual rewards that had been applied was, according to the interviewees, based on a favourite system, and it disregarded the fact that the paper is every night the result of collective work – and wage has forever been used as an instrument of power. Many decisions on financially insignificant matters (turning down dictating machine - and other small acquisitions, postponing the acquisition of graphics programs which would make working easier, skimping in educational expenses) were among the things where it was nice to show and wield power – although at the same time, the paper, which was among the most profitable in Finland, had paid hundreds of thousands of euros to consultants for a strategy project, and bought small printing houses and free distribution papers for a million euros. The latter strategy for growth, "the one which was agreed on together", had been named as a prerequisite for the strategy project by the management (Alvesson and Deetz 1996; Knights and Morgan 1991; Levy et. al. 2003; McAuley et al. 2000).

The last-mentioned of these is related to an essential aspect of the context of action: What is the business logic in the business in question and who defines it? It came up in the study, that business logic and the basic forces affecting it were not even addressed when strategy was discussed. Although the core of the business logic of a regional newspaper is market dominance, nothing was spoken of it, nor threats aimed at it. Also the journalists had institutionalised the interpretation of the business, along with the definitions of strategy, to the sovereign competence and authority of the management (Alvesson and Deetz 1996; Knights and Morgan 1991).

In the study, it was unambiguously perceived, that journalists are not even interested in taking part in the interpretation of the business and the potential changes in it. Thus, the journalists did not realise themselves, that the context and its interpretation play a crucial role regarding their own scope of action. In the terms of the study, it is a question of the dichotomies structure-agency and determinism-voluntarism. Context is an important intermediating and influencing mechanism, because people perceive their context and the possibilities and limitations of action it provides within the framework of their individual interpreting resources: There is a certain amount of freedom of action, but people's capability to see 'how things could be' instead of 'how things are' varies greatly (Cruickshank 2000; Sjöstrand 1993a).

The study reflected on the reasons why journalists, voluntarily, leave all interpretation of context to the management, and by doing this give up a significant part of their scope of action – and the determining of the future prerequisites of their job. One reason for this must be the contempt of all economical and administrative matters, or bureaucracy, by which professionals prop up their occupational identity (McAuley et al. 2000). Other reasons can be sought in the defence mechanisms of identity; features of rationalisation, denial, rejection and even intellectualisation could be detected (Aronsson 1990; Casey1995 passim; Sjöstrand 1993b). Defence mechanisms, referring to discussion on burn-out, are also a resource: People can use them to maintain a feeling of control (Aronsson 1990). The author, however, started to call this even somewhat fatalistic attitude 'the Willmott phenomenon', as he had during the course of the study come across an article by Willmott (2003), where he writes: 'Employee hostility towards, or scepticism about, participation schemes is then viewed, from the standpoint of critical science, not as evidence per se but, rather indicative of institutional relations of dependence in which employees have been historically excluded from participation in key decisions.'

Discourse of change, a phenomenon churning in most enterprises these days, was classified under the context of action and its category of power. Despite the wide usage of the word discourse, it is ill-suited in this case, as there is only one active party in the discourse: The management talks and the journalists listen (as expressed in the study, 'take blows hanging in the ring ropes'). Discourse of change resembles a Tibetan rosary: It does not begin or end anywhere. Discourse of change does not even want to deal with concrete issues: A consensus could be reached by dialogue, but this would mean losing the key element in the discourse of change — power. The needs for change are explained or specified no more than the actions — one simply must change; like putting a number on people's backs as in a race and telling them to run for their lives without telling them in what direction or for how long, running only for running's sake. One of the interviewees expressed the discourse of change and the power included in it to the point:

It seems to be the goal that everyone stays on their toes, and at the same time this everyday work is being turned into such extreme business, that only a chosen few have the knowledge necessary even to master the terminology…

The statements of the management in staff magazines, annual reports and interim reports contained also typical banalities in consultant jargon, which, according to journalists — like all professionals in general — belong in 'semi-journalistic' publications of economic entertainment, if they must belong somewhere:

We can't turn back the clock.
We must run faster to even stay in this place.
The rest of the world won't stop if we hit the brakes.
The slow get eaten by the quick.
The only thing that is permanent is change.
If you don't grow, you die.

The interpretation of the context of action is an essential aspect of power. As Mumby (2001) states:

Sense making is not simply the product of mutually shared assumptions and interpretive procedures, but rather is shaped by the political context in which it occurs. Sensemaking and the creation of intersubjective structures of meaning exist in a dialectical relationship with organizational relations of power. Organizational power is defined in terms of the ability of individuals and groups to control and shape dominant interpretations of organizational events.

Quoting another scholar, Mumby writes:

One of the most interesting features of this research [Gephard 1992] is the extent to which dominant, institutionalized mean-

ings appropriate and thus neutralize alternative, oppositional interpretations of events.

There seems to be an unwillingness and also incapability institutionalised in the professional culture of journalists even to attempt the oppositional interpretations mentioned in the previous quote. In this way, the power of the management preserves and grows within the institutionalised everyday routines that are accepted without question.

Context of action and voluntarism

The action regulation theory, which plays an important role in this study, includes a clear definition of the human nature: An individual is capable of development and evolves in and by his/her work. The paradigm of radical humanism by Burrell and Morgan, which forms the foundation for the critical organization studies, is weighted towards voluntarism in the voluntarism-determinism dichotomy (Burrell and Morgan 1979: 6, 32-3). It is interesting to see that for example Grint (1991: 17) uses the dichotomy deterministic-interpreting; is the word interpreting chosen, because voluntaristic has felt too strong in the present-day working environment? Although this study is emancipatory in its aims, even the term interpreting for describing people's pursuit towards preconditions for self-determined action seems bold in the light of this study.

In a key role regarding voluntarism lies the prevailing context, in which people's active actions take place (Cruickshank 2000). The agents can influence structures that limit action and create possibilities for it, both discursive and non-discursive, through their context, which is the organization and its relations (Ackroyd 2000; Ackroyd and Fleetwood 2000; Fleetwood 2005; Porter 2000; Pratten 2000; Reed 1997; Reed 2003). Research supports the usefulness of critical realism in this kind of a study: 'People make their own history but not in the circumstances of their own choosing' (Sayer, quoting Marx, 2000: 115). Different theories in practical research use different expressions for structures which appear similar, according to their approach: According to the critical theory, social structures are man-made constructions, but as time has passed, they have petrified (historical realism) into ones sustaining an imbalance in social power relations (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Willmott 2003); critical realism comes near the conceptions of the critical theory, but does not carry as distinctly the political stigma of the critical theory, which dates back to the 1930's — with its layered ontology, it focuses on the causal relations of institutionalised social structures, intermediating mechanisms and people's experiences (Clark 2000: 68-82; Sayer 2000: 11-20; Tsoukas 1994); according to the institutional perspective, structures are the result of institutionalisation — people act as they are supposed to act (Scott 1995b; Sjöstrand 1993a; Sjöstrand 1993b), whether the underlying construction mechanism of institutionalisation is regarded as either coercive, normative, cognitive or isomorphic (DiMaggio and Powell 1991b; Scott 1995a: 33-62; Sjöstrand 1993a; Sjöstrand 1993b).

Addressing the problem areas of the institutional perspective, Sjöstrand (1993a) poses the challenging questions: 'Is an institution an organization or a system of rules? Does it correspond with ideas of human freedom of action or with more deterministic views?' Also Reed (2003) is sceptical, seeing that realism easily emphasises social structures at the expense of the individual. As all organizations are also institutions in a certain way, Sjöstrand's question can be specified based on this study: What chances do people's voluntaristic actions have in the practices of organizations that are thoroughly institutionalised and under the pressure of managerial rhetoric? Sjöstrand (1993a) joins the critical view in drawing attention to the way people act within an institutionalised environment: People believe that they are individual actors (cf. Willmott 1993).

As the study started from an emancipatory purpose, it is not easy to get a grasp on the voluntarism-determinism dichotomy. One question, rarely brought up by scholars, cannot here be elaborated further either: To what extent do people really want, despite their alleged phylogenetic need, to do more than what is necessary, i.e. to fulfil the obligation of their explicit contract in order to ensure sustenance for themselves and their families? More than twenty years ago, Fox (1980) stated, that to the great chagrin of sociologists, work for most workers is an instrumental activity, which does not play a major role in their lives and in their self-expression.

A pointless circle of contradictions is also often created: Some claim that people don't even want to participate, and others claim that no difference can be made by participating anyhow.

Conclusion

In the original study, the scope of action of journalists was examined extensively and from several different perspectives within the theoretical framework, and the results of the empirical study were analysed in detail. The study was emancipatory by nature, and it aimed to provide journalists with resources for interpretation, particularly in the dialogue on the context of action with the management of the paper. The application of the results in this aspect has started actively: The author has been asked to act as opening speakers in several regional journalists' meetings. Is the fate of critical research also on a more general level depicted in the fact that no requests have been made by the management of newspaper companies (Fournier and Grey 2000; Parker 2002: 128-33)?

Within the frame allowed by this article, the author has been able to present only those observations, which are interesting from the viewpoint of organizational studies in general, and in particular, from the viewpoint of critical research. The journalists are very happy with their actual work, and their scope of action more or less corresponds to the action potential as evaluated by the journalists themselves. Autonomy, the dimension valued most by professionals themselves, is indeed realised well according to the own estimate of the journalists, but the study showed that it is realised within the 'institutional tube' of the context of action. Journalistic basic values are essential elements of professional identity, now about to end up in conflict with the technical-rational policy of the management. Another problematic dimension of editorship is feedback, made particularly problematic by its use as an instrument of power: The power is hidden in 'objective and neutral' criticism.

When editorship, from the perspective of the journalists, is realised well on the average, does it compensate for deficiencies in the other main category of the scope of action, the context of action (cf. Ulich 2001: 104-108)? The journalists themselves are more or less content, but a scholar examining the situation from a critical perspective cannot be, because he does not focus on what is but what could or should be (Jermier 1998): Editorship and context of action cannot be separated, they need each other. By leaving the interpretation of the context of action voluntarily and entirely to the management, the journalists settle for pursuing editorship within the limits assigned to them by the management — when some of the informant journalists realised this, we began to call the phenomenon 'the doctrine of predestination' when with them. This institutionalised and one-sided right of interpretation includes, hidden and invisible, also

power — power being most effective, when it is not even noticed (Daudi 1984: 234; Hardy and Clegg 1996; Mumby 2001). The interpretation of the context of the subject enterprise echoed a description by Knights and Morgan (1991) in their article on strategic discourse: The management of a newspaper enterprise interprets threats in the business, and based on this creates strategic questions, which no-one else can answer but themselves; other parties remain in the role of spectators.

The interpretation of context is important from the point of view of the journalists, because the resources of a newspaper enterprise are allocated on the basis of the interpretation of the prospects for development and the strategy process that is based on it: how much is invested in the paper and how much in other operations; what kind of salaries can the company afford to pay; how much is invested in the education and working conditions of journalists; will resources accumulated during fat years be saved for lean years; is there capital and willingness to fight people's burn-out before it hits, by striving for Volpert's (1990) notion of 'human-friendly work'?

When examining the context of action and the way journalists relate to it, we arrive at the basic questions of critical research. If the journalists themselves are more or less happy with their work and their scope of action, why seek interpreting resources for the dialogue promoting change? When we look for answers for the question, the weakness of the critical studies conducted so far is revealed: Research conducted within the walls of academic chambers, being often valuable per se, has mainly been conceptual, paying very rarely attention to the needs and opportunities of an 'ordinary' agent (Alvesson and Deetz 1996; Alvesson and Deetz 2000: 207-10; Clark 2000: 82; Marsden and Townley 1996).

As Antonacopoulou (1999) states, critical studies focus on people. But what is it that people want or have been led to want —as asked already by the Frankfurt School (Macey 2000: 139-40)? Critical researchers should not draw on questionnaire studies on job satisfaction, which have been repeated for decades (Frese 1990; Fineman 1996), but they must lay their basis on what they think is right (Jermier 1998; Wicks and Freeman 1998). Researchers must not settle for merely recording what they hear, they must be able to bring out even that which the subjects are unable to express in words: A critical researcher must make heard the voices of those who have been silenced and those who keep quiet.

One of the most important basic assumptions is, whether human-friendly work, development and self-expression have value per se, or are they pursued only if they are believed to improve efficiency (Schallberger 1990; Volpert 1979). The action regulation theory and the critical theory meet in the notion, that the former very explicitly (Karasek 1979; Kohn 1980; Oesterreich and Volpert 1999; Ulich 2001: 145-48, 467-72; Volpert 1982) and the latter at least implicitly (Adler 2002; Alvesson and Deetz 2000: 8-9; Alvesson and Willmott 1996: 37-40, 188-91; Jermier 1998; Thomas 1993: 3-9) believes, that positive experiences people have in work have a positive influence on both their physical and mental well-being, and also on their lives as well as their inputs as individuals who build the society.

Another important question is, whether we consider acceptable organizations' aspirations to change people with the commitment jargon included in corporate culture, strategy projects, lifetime learning and other managerial fads: Can 'Systemwelt' colonise the 'Lebenswelt' (Burrell 1994; Jermier 1998)? This is one part of the contemporary phenomenon, which Alvesson and Deetz (2000: 209) call 'managerialisation of the world', and to which they see critical research to be an antidote.

Managerialisation is one element in the discourse, in which the themes include globalisation, competitiveness, productivity, job enrichment, change, lifetime learning, TQM, QWL, and so forth (Alvesson and Deetz 1996). Managerialisation, which has taken over also the public government, is a breeding ground, where the social and financial elite have a typical hegemony (Alvesson and Deetz 2000: 87-8; Hardy and Clegg 1996; Mumby 2001). Hardy and Clegg (1996) write:

'- - - where a structure of power relations is fully legitimized by an integrated system of cultural and normative assumptions' (Hyman and Brough 1975: 199). According to this view, the ability to define reality is used by dominant classes to support and justify their material domination, thus preventing challenges to their position.

Even the study on a small enterprise presented here gives us full reason to repeat the previously asked question: What are the prerequisites for the voluntary action of an 'ordinary' person under the pressure of the 'iron cage' of the contemporary time? Critical organization studies can answer the question in two ways: either by raising hands up in the air, or by feeling even more relevant than before!

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