Work, life and gender: A study of project-working individuals in two French companies

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Contents

Preface

This report is published as a result of the research semester we both spent at the Institut d'Administration des Entreprises, Université Aix-Marseille III, Aix-en-Provence, France, in 2000. It is a part of the ongoing research project "Project people: A study of individuals with the project as work form and life form.

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Stockholm in December 2001,

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1. Research problem and method

1.1 Projectification of society: An individual perspective

During the 1990's, projects have become an increasingly common form for work organisation in industry, civil services and service producing firms (Lundin & Midler, 1998). The reason for this development is primarily that many products and services has become so customised and complex that their execution is a unique sequence of actions, but also that the increasing pace of change in society results in an abundance of change and development reforms in organisation. From having been a rational methodology in construction and defence industries (Engwall, 1995) the project concept and the project form of organising has diffused into almost all sectors of society, to both small and large tasks, to external contract-based projects as well as internal change efforts. The basic reason for this diffusion seems to be that the project – viewed as a task specific and time-limited form of working – is perceived as a way of avoiding all the classic problems of bureaucracy that most "normal" organisations are struggling with (Pinto, 1996; Scotto, 1998).

In many industries and companies, the project is now the normal work form. This is obvious in cultural life, advertising, consulting, R&D etc, but also in several large corporations who executes numerous projects both externally and internally. Given this trend, one might assess that work life is becoming increasingly "projectified", i.e. that substantial parts of individual's work lives is spent in projects and similar temporary forms of organising. This is especially evident when it comes to individuals working in "project-based firms", i.e. firms where almost all operations take place in projects and where the permanent structure fill the function of administrative support.

While the project has been subject to extensive research from managerial and organisational perspectives (Packendorff, 1993, 1995), the perspective of the individual on the new forms of work has been almost totally neglected. The project has usually been viewed as a planning task, and big parts of the project management literature is thus just as de-personalised as organisation theory once was. Moreover, a usual point of departure is the false assumption that all projects are basically the same. If individuals have indeed been studied, they have exclusively been project managers, a category that is actually just a small portion of the total population of project workers. This line of research rests upon quite a weak empirical

base; while there are a lot written about how project managers should behave, there are very few descriptions of their actual behavior (cf Caldwell & Posner, 1998).

Why is it then of interest to study the project as a work form from an individual perspective? The basic argument is that the consequences of project work deserved to be studied in the same way that all earlier changes in work organisation and work life. There is since decaces, for example, a substantial line of research highlighting the consequences of industrial manufacturing, research that have yielded important practical consequences for how industrial work is organised to better suit the individual. In the same vein, office work and work in the service sector has also been investigated, and there is currently a number of studies going on, focusing on the work life of individuals. The individual perspective (cf Lindgren, 1996) implies the following in this study:

- That organisations and work life is studied through the subjective perceptions of individuals,
- That individuals are seen as existing in a cultural context, where their perceptions of work can differ depending on individual differences. This implies a focus on differences in the view of organisations, as compared to all the similarities usually put forward in organisational research,
- That descriptions of organisations and work life is made with the utility of the individual in mind, not from a managerial or organisational perspective.

As a work form, the project exhibits significant differences as compared to traditional employment in organisations. Project work implies new, unique tasks, temporariness, clear objectives, selected teams etc, and a projectified work life will thus become a journey through a number of such limited task- and social contexts (Lindgren & Packendorff, 1997). In comparison to the traditional view of work life, i.e. a sequence of a few employments with repetitive tasks, the project represents a more developing but also more precarious situation. This is especially obvious where individuals with temporary employment are concerned, but also for those working by projects with full-time employment as a basis. It is therefore of interest to analyse what the project as a work form imply for individuals in organisations.

The project is, however, not only an emerging work form with internal consequences for organisations. In the same way that traditional industrial

work practices have influenced how people live outside work (cf Abrahamsson, 1992), the project should also give effects on the life of individuals. As an established work form it can be said to contribute to (and being influenced by) the construction of new life forms in society, life forms that can be expected to be both different and similar to the present ones. The life forms of industrial society are mostly constructions of masculinity, built on principles like hierarchisation and specialisation (Hirdman, 1990), and the question is in which ways "projectified" life forms will contribute to conservation or change of these constructions. From a gender perspective one might expect that projects as life form implies partly other masculine constructions than industrial society (still few feminine), which means that the consequences for men and women can be put into question (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2001). A second area of interest in research should thus be to analyse how projects as a work form contributes to the construction of projects as a life form for men and women in society.

Departing from the two areas of interest identified above, two interconnected theoretical themes in this study can be stated. These themes are described below.

1.2 Project as a work form for individuals

The foundation of project management as a theoretical field is the conceptual agreement on what a 'project' actually is. According to this agreement, the project is a unique and complex undertaking subject to restrictive goal formulations in terms of time, cost and quality (cf Packendorff, 1995). By this definition, project work should be possible to separate from other forms of work, and it should also be possible to construct special methods for optimizing the performance of the project. The origins of project management theory can be traced back to U. S. defence industry in the 1950's (Engwall, 1995), where the time factor was the most essential when new weapon systems had to be launched during the arms races of the cold war. By time, the project came to be a widespread form of work even in commercial enterprises, and then other success factors such as cost and quality had to be taken into account. Together, these three factors (i.e. time, cost and quality) form the so called project performance triangle, which symbolises the insight that a realistic project goal must be a trade-off between time, cost and quality restrictions. Since the cost factor is often the most explicit restriction, the practice of project

management is usually to balance between time and quality within the non-disputable framework of the project budget.

When project work and traditional departmental work are compared, projects are usually positively described as the opposite form of work; hard to manage, often controversial but efficient and innovative (cf Pinto, 1996: 25). The message of such comparisons is that project management is something difficult and different that can yield important change and increased effectiveness. Compared to his colleagues in the ordinary hierarchy, the project manager is an individual that dare to be controversial and test new ideas in his endeavour towards delivering unique results within the restrictions of time, cost and quality. This does not imply chaos whiting the project; one important qualification for becoming project manager is the ability to plan and control all activities and resources despite the inherent unsecurity present in most project situations. The departmental manager, on the other hand, can always lean on established routines, predictability and hierarchical power when leading his repetitive activities. Since project managers usually have to use resources controlled by departmental managers a classic potential of conflict appears, where the project manager acts in the interest of the project goal and the departmental managers try to maintain repetitive efficiency in their routine-based structures.

From an individual perspective, work life is becoming increasingly "projectified." Most large industrial corporations use projects in complex production processes, as do small, advanced knowledge-intensive firms in IT, hi-tec, advertising and consulting. Moreover, the use of projects for internal purposes such as strategic change, quality improvement, re-organisation and systems implementation seem to be on the increase (cf Blomquist & Packendorff, 1998; Ekstedt et al, 1999). To many individuals, work then becomes a portfolio of a number of different teams, tasks and deadlines, often with insufficient coordination. If traditional theories on work satisfaction are applied (cf Hackman & Oldham, 1980), one might identify both potential advantages and drawbacks of project work, but then these theories were constructed for the improvement of industrial work environments in the 1960's and 70's. From such a perspective, project work mean specialisation on assigned tasks (this does not apply to project managers, however), being responsible for these tasks only, lack of feedback from customers etc; i.e. circumstances usually seen as not beneficial to work satisfaction. At the same time, almost all tasks in a project should be necessary and important, which in combination with the

inherent management-by-goals philosophy of project management makes work useful and self-directed. In addition, there are some specific aspects of project work not present in the literature on industrial environments, such as an abundance of deadlines, frequent changes of social contexts and problems of loose coupling between projects and their environment (Blomquist & Packendorff, 1998; Reeser, 1969). One consequence of this is the emerging development of separate Human Resource Management practices for project organsiations (Fabi & Pettersen, 1992).

It is not only the work content that has been subject to "projectification", but also the conditions for membership in organisations. An increasing part of the total work force have no long-term, full-time employment, but rather different forms of temporary assignments (Bellaagh, 1998; Handy, 1991) In between, there is a growing number of individuals being self-employed or being rented out by companies like Olsten and Manpower. Moreover, many individuals see their careers as more important than the different single positions they have from time to time (cf Lindgren & Wåhlin, 1998, Lindgren et al, 2001).

As the project becomes an increasingly common way to work and to view work, it also becomes increasingly obvious that it is not always as rational and stimulating as intended. Even project-based organisations end up in conflicts and internal politics, and there are usually many problems between single projects and their contexts causing budget overruns and delays (Pinto, 1996). The project – in its clear-cut form – does not suit all the different operations in which it is used, and in some cases traditional project management methods cause more problems than it solves (cf Blomberg, 1998). The same can be said about the tendency of "projectification" of organisations, where managers are constantly handling conflicts between project managers and departmental managers and prioritising between different projects. Parts of societal development (such as culture, art, European Union grants, academic research etc) are also becoming increasingly projectified, which implies a risk that short-term performance becomes more important than the implementation of long-term strategies, and that many projects become islands of their own without meaningful relations to their environment in time and space.

1.3 Projects as a life form: A gender perspective

Changes in the ways people work implies – as we have earlier noticed – changes in how people live their lives and relate to each other. Industrial

society meant a far-reaching hierarchisation and specialisation in society, which also came to characterise human relations insofar that traditional male norms on the importance of formal position and merits influenced how people interacted with each other. From a gender perspective, industrial mass production can be seen as contributing to a gender order that became manifest in the life forms of modern individuals. When new forms of organisation and work emerges (such as virtual corporations, distance work, projects) it is important to analyse in what way these will affect the life forms of individuals in tomorrow's society (cf Bellaagh, 1998).

By "life form" we mean how individuals and groups of individuals combine different "parts" of their lives, i.e. how salary work, family life, home work etc are related to each other (cf Jakobsen & Karlsson, 1993). Within groups, individuals can have complementary life forms, such as the traditional division of labour between men and women in households. From a gender perspective the concept of life forms is thus most relevant, since it implies studying not only how single individuals combine elements in their own lives, but also how their respective life forms are related to each other in the ongoing construction of family life, work life and home work. Jakobsen & Karlsson (ibid) are of the opinion that modern women try to construct their life forms so that work forms and love forms (i.e. their relation to their partner) can be integrated into a whole, even though it means some serious problems. The basis of these problems is that men usually choose "careerism" (Collinson & Hearn, 1994) in order to support their family, thereby separating rather than integrating family life and work life.

In a work life characterised by temporary, goal-focused sequences in varying social contexts, one might expect that the hierachisation and specialisation principles of the current gender order would be less reproduced than now (Hirdman, 1990). The question is then in what way projectification of work life affect the life forms of individuals, and how it contributes to changes in the gender order. While there are parts of project management thinking that could imply an increased importance of traditional femininities (such as teamwork, absence of hierarchies etc.) there are also tendencies such as an increased variation in workload, short-sightedness and goal rationality (i.e. already established masculine ways of thinking and working, cf Wahl, 1997). These inherent contradictions of project management thinking can be explained by the fact that the project form of working is handled differently in different industries and

organisations, but also by the sometimes overly positive rhetorics on the benefit of projects – rhetorics not always based on practical experiences. In a study of social work, Mulinari (1996) maintains that projects are constructed as a male phenomena, aming at establishing control over time and space and the rational planning for active change. The project is then the opposite of traditional "permanent" forms of organising, aiming at the taken-for-granted continuity of everyday life (i.e. a female way of thinking). As many researchers have pointed out, it is however important to remember that conceptions of what is male and female are not stable over time; they are every day subject to continuous reproduction or change by individuals in society (cf Billing, 1997, Calás & Smircich, 1996). It is thus more interesting to study what life forms and conceptions of gender that projectification reproduces and changes, rather than aiming for static conclusions concerning if the project form of working is masculine or feminine by nature.

To conclude, the notion of projects affect the way modern individuals organise everyday life and this organisinig implies that new conceptions of gender and new norms of living is constructed and re-constructed. One might e.g. assume that a projectfified work life can imply a re-construction of current norms of using time, so that individuals always have to prove their market value through success in new assignments while traditional values such as continuity, life ideology etc once again must be abandoned. One might also consider the possibility that such a development affects conceptions of life forms so that life is perceived as a sequence of different projects (employments, children, marriages, houses etc) that is handled through separation and careful planning. Recent studies of individuals' identity construction shows that many individuals (not all) partition their lives into separate "parcels" and construct different values and social roles depending on what parcel being handled at the moment (cf Lindgren et al, 2001). In that case, projectification has not contributed anything else than a re-construction of traditional norm systems of industrial society (albeit in a new disguise), and the hierarchisation and specialisation between what is considered as masculine and feminine norms will thus persist. Projectification might even make these differences wider.

1.4 Aim of the study

Given the discussion above, it is obvious that the study of projectified life forms from a gender perspective presupposes the study of projectified work forms, since work and life are interrelated in one way or another in each

individual. The inquiry should thus focus on individuals in projectfied organisations in order to reach interesting observations on projects as a work form, and the notion of life forms can then be introduced as an underlying theme in the empirical field work. The lack of theoretical insight in this area of research also calls for explorative case studies of individuals in order to identify as many interesting perspectives and themes as possible in the phenomenon of project work forms, perspectives and themes that can later be subject to further research. This means that the aim of the present study is

-to describe projects as work form from an individual perspective, and
-to analyse the relation between the work form and the life form from a gender perspective
-in order to develop themes
-to be used in the design of further research

1.5 The empirical investigation

The empirical study was made in May 2000 in two companies in southern France, which means that there were culturally specific project practices involved (as compared to subsequent research on Swedish conditions). One such expected difference was that the French project concept should be reserved for big,complex projects only (cf empirical descriptions in ECOSIP, 1993, Midler, 1993), while the Scandinavian project concept could be applied to almost anything. It appeared that this was wrong, at least in the two organisations that we gained access to; in company A even ongoing processes were called projects. A second expected difference concerned how people perceived important dimensions in project organising such as time, project leadership etc. We did not make that difference a part of the study, but it will be commented upon section 4.7 of this report.

To gain access to the companies, we needed recommendations from our French "home institution", whose representative asked earlier contact persons in companies about the possibility for us to contact them. In that way, we were able to make interviews with Alain and Edith. Based on discussions with them, we could then make a selection of employees. The selection criteria we used was that we wanted to meet people of at least 35 years of age (in order to have a family life), of both sexes (in order to be able to analyse gender differences) and experience of both project leadership and project work. This also worked out in practice, except for a

lack of female interviewees (due to last-minute cancellations and a lack of women in higher positions).

In company "A," in fact a recently downsized R&D division in a multinational chemical company, the former R&D director Alain put us into contact with the present R&D manager, who in his turn arranged a series of interviews during one day at the research centre at the plant in "A-sur-mer". The R&D division had had a project-based organisation for seven years, and that had been changed just a week before the four last interviews. Except for Alain, 55-year-old engineer, we interviewed

- Marc, engineer and project leader, 37 years old.
- Irene, engineer and project leader, 36 years old.
- Pierre, engineer and project leader, 38 years old.
- Gerald, PhD and technical specialist in projects, 57 years old.

Company "B" was a rapidly growing firm in the IT and electronics area, now expanding internationally with both hardware and software. Access was granted by Edith, 56-year old human resource manager at the headquarters in "B-ville". Six persons were recommended to us, but due to the intense activity in the company we were only able to make interviews with four of them:

- Paul, engineer and production manager, 37 years old.
- Jacques, engineer and production manager, 40 years old.
- Sophie, engineer and group manager, 36 years old.
- Georges, PhD and program mangement director, 50 years old.

All interviews lasted between one and two hours, and were tape-recorded. Before the interviews, all interviewees had been sent a short description of the research project and our general expectations on the interview by fax or e-mail. The individuals' own narratives were sought for, which meant that all interviews started out by the interviewee telling us his/hers own story of work life and project work. Then, more specific questions were raised and clarifications asked for. All interviewees were fluent in english (both organisations had that as a requirement for employment for managerial posts), and one of them actually appeared to be from Wales. But, naturally, it was not the same thing as inteviewing Swedes because dimensions and reflections are harder to understand from our side and also harder to communicate by the interviewees. There are also some limitations of the understanding of different cultures. Even if we have been in France several times for both shorter and longer periods there are still some expressions in peoples' way of behaving that we do not fully understand. There are, for

instance, different ways of living in Sweden and Provence depending on such things as climate and also the religion and the social role it plays. The analysis is of course affected by this cultural distance – we do not entirely understand the subjective and intersubjective reality in which our respondents live, but we might also be able to analyse their taken-for-granted situation with the fresh perspective of the cultural outsider.

Afterwards, interview transcripts were transformed into stories (see chapters 2 and 3), in which we tried to preserve the narrative style of each individual. These stories were sent back by e-mail to the interviewees. Both companies requested anonymity, which was not actually a problem since it is the individuals that are of interest here. We have also chosen not to have a separate introduction to the companies; instead, they will be described through the eyes of the individual interviewees. Since most interviewees have managerial posts, their real names will be anonymised in all published material from this study.

2. Individuals in organisation A

2.1 Alain

After 31 years at the R&D division at company A in A-sur-mer, Alain is now an independent consultant, living a free and less stressful life. A graduated chemical engineer, he pursued a successful career in the R&D division, a career that made him the only technical specialist in senior management. He starts ut to tell us about his old job as a research technology manager, in which he was responsible for reviewing the research portfolio, initiating blue-sky research, motivating the employess and evaluate the performance of the programs. He also kept close contacts with academich research at major universities and institutes. At that time, in the 70's and 80's, the R&D division was strictly hierarchically organised with a R&D manager, department managers, group managers, sub-group managers and employees. Their main concern was long-term development of new technologies and products, and there were not much pressure from the divisions connected directly to customers. Most research concerned the development of different plastics derived from oil, e.g. plastic films for food packaging and components for the electronics industry.

Over time, the pace of technological development in the industry increased, and so did competition from both traditional oil companies and chemical companies. The management of A decided to re-organise the R&D division to make it more effective in terms of its contribution to business strategies. Product development lead times were to be shortened, and the contacts between the market and the developers needed improvement. In 1993, this resulted in a project-based R&D organisation, where all important tasks should be carried out in projects. Alain became a research associate with almost the same areas of responsibility as before, but it appeared that he and his colleagues were now more strictly controlled than before. The R&D division was now under the command of a Business Manager via a number of Business Technology Managers (BTMs), people who ordered product development to be executed given current customer demands and market development. All projects should now be approved by the BTMs, which meant that most work now became goal-focused and short-term oriented. Over time, several senior managers also assumed the opinion that not all research had to be done inside A; a lot of research could actually be bought from external sources. The R&D division still had some degrees of freedom due to licensing; new inventions not needed within A were sold to other companies and the income could be used in R&D activities. As the

demands on effectiveness and cost reductions increased – some saw the R&D division as a generator of costs only – they had less time for selling licenses, and consequently a deficit occurred that could only be solved by staff reductions. Alain says that they went from over 150 employees to 120 over a few years, and at the time of the interview another reduction down to 70 employees was being implemented.

Alain himself was not hurt by these changes, but he strongly objected to the consequences. He says that the project-based organisation was a part of a major reorientation in A:s R&D strategy, a reorientation that could be most hazardous to the company in the long run. The company still benefits from a lot of old inventions, but he fears that competitors with more R&D-friendly managers will succeed in the long run. There is already a recruitment problem in the R&D division; young talented engineers seek employment elsewhere since they cannot find anly long-term security in A. After the recent merger with a competing firm, about 10.000 employees were fired, many of them technicians. After the retirement of the old R&D manager in 1997, Alain found it hard to collaborate with the BTMs, and he negotiated an early retirement package and left A. He still do some consulting for A and keeps close connections with the R&D division, but he is now looking for other positions in the industry.

Alain says that work in the new project-based organisation is different from before, in both positive and negative ways. The advantages is that the R&D work has moved closer to business, which is perceived as stimulating by many employees. Work has also become more effective and goal-focused. The drawback is increased stress and a tendency to work evenings and weekends to be able to deliver the projects in time. Project-based work has also become shortsighted, he thinks, implying a focus on deadlines instead of strategic development. No one seem to think of strategic matters anymore, instead there are just a lot of projects.

For the individual, the old hierarchic organisation implied a clear and common understanding of what a career was and how the individual was supposed to progress through working life. Fresh university graduates entered the organisation at level 8, and could then quickly move on to level 9. Most individuals stopped at level 11 (group or project leaders) or sometimes even 12 (technical experts and middle managers). Alain himself became the companywide example of the possibility to reach level 13 as a technician, a level otherwise reserved for managers of divisions and the like. In the project-based organisation, there are now project leaders and

employees, and to become a BTM it is better to be a businessperson than a technician. Consequently, those who want a career (most employees have their hands full of keeping their jobs) must leave the project-based organisation and go into the managerial hierarchy. They will then be required to move around worldwide in the company, spending exactly two years at each position. Many employees reject this scheme, since they cannot move around their families. Unless such a career is pursued, there are no obvious ways of getting promoted in the R&D division.

Projects are usually intiated by people from the business areas in collaboration with a BTM, and together they order a research effort from the R&D division. Without such "sponsoring" a project can usually not be initiated. Someone at the R&D division (earlier it was Alain) makes a preliminary study, checks out competitors etc. Since a good idea in this industry usually cannot keep you ahead of the competitors for more than six months, this study must be made in a hurry. Then a project leader (usually full-time) is assigned, who then composes a team within the R&D division. He/she can also use people from other divisions (such as production), but that requires negotiations with their respective managers. This implies that many scientists work with several projects at the same time, and Alain says that not all individuals are suited for such a work situation. You must be most effective and well organised during work hours, and decide what your priorities are. The company usually supports individuals who want to improve their ability to organise and plan, since this is essential to effectiveness in the project-based organisation.

2.2 Marc

Marc starts out by telling us that he joined A 11 years ago after graduating as engineer. He has spent his entire career so far in different technical positions, primarily in the polyethylene business. He has also worked as a technical expert in the licensing business. Until a week before the interview was made, he was project leader (PL) of an ongoing support project in the polyethylene plant in A-sur-mer. Now, there were no PLs anymore, he explained, since a new organisational structure had just been implemented.

He went on by describing how the project-based structure had influenced his work. According to this structure, all projects should be related to the business objectives in A, and one such objective was the production targets of the polyethylene plant in A-sur-mer. Marc was assigned the task of leading the support project for the plant, implying an ongoing responsibility

for the business-related objectives of the plant. Given this, Marc had to formulate more specific objectives, define activities and compose a team from the staff of the research centre. This meant that his responsibility was not limited to technical issues only, since he was also manager of the project group. He found this position exciting, since he worked close to the business managers and saw that the results of his work had immediate effects in the business.

The project-based structure was in fact a matrix, since the research center was divided into technical teams that held expertise in different technical domains. Team managers were the formal managers of the personnel, while the PLs coordinated their efforts in the pursuit of project objectives. Marc says that he could not choose his team alone; formally it was the team managers who were in charge of personnel assignment. Mostly, he could exercise some influence over personnel selection by negotiating with the team managers. If individual specialists are needed, he will have to make special arrangements to secure them.

Marc thinks that the more projects you are involved in, the less effective you are. When selecting his own project teams, he wants everybody to work at least 50% for his project, otherwise he is quite certain that they will give priority to something else. It is not unusual that people have two or three projects going on at the same time, and Marc has even heard of someone in the research centre that were involved in eight. If you have just one project, it is quite like an ordinary job, he says, perhaps better focused. In multi-project situations there is always the risk that different PLs and team managers present different objectives to the employee, causing situations that can be a bit difficult to handle. He calls this situation "a nightmare", a situation in which all people involved are dissatisfied.

He is satisfied with the overall structure of the project-based organisation, and thinks that the main advantage is that everyone can identify business-related objectives. There are of course people that long for the old, hierarchic structure and the freedom of action they used to have, but for the PL there is still a lot of freedom. Each individual decide how he/she will reach the objectives, and thereby becomes an active and responsible participant rather than just a tool for the manager. Another important issue is that there is no hierarchic relationship between the PL and the project member; it is a friendly relationship between two people that are in the same boat and share the same objectives. In the hierarchic relationship (i.e. the one between the employee and the team manager) there is assessment,

salary discussions, prestige etc. He tells us that in the hierarchic relationship there might be problems of handling the fact that the employee has superior expertise compared to the boss. In the project, that is natural.

Marc has not seen stress or exhausting work in his own project, but there are other projects with specific deadlines that must be met in which hard work is needed from time to time. The individuals in the project are given their own objectives, and it is then up to them to organise their work as it suits them. As a PL, he walks around and monitors that the project is progressing. Most personnel work with specific instruments or in specialised laboratories, so they all have their permanent physical location in the building. Project coordination takes place in meetings.

It is not easy to find distinct career patterns in project-based organisations, Marc says. It becomes a very flat career, where individuals try to get opportunities at the same level. The team leader is responsible for competence development, and might use his influence to put individuals in need of development to certain projects. Becoming a project leader was an important motivation factor for Marc.

When the interview is over, Marc presents the new organisational structure as a kind of epilogue. When evaluating the project-based structure, the business managers saw that in the polyethylene business there were 60 projects going on all over Europe. In other business areas, the situation was the same, causing reporting problems when dozens of project managers reported to one single business manager. The 60 projects were transformed into nine big projects, headed by newly appointed project managers. The 60 PLs remained in charge of their current responsibilities, now called "lead technicians", but they no longer have any contacts with the business manager. Marc thinks that this is a shame, since the motivating factor of being close to the business has now disappeared. He can also see a risk that business and practice are detached from each other again, slowing the information flow in the company. Such consequences must be avoided, he exclaims.

Finally, Marc tells us that he lives in nearby A-sur-mer with his wife and two small children. Most employees at A live in the area to be close to work and to avoid the traffic jams around the larger towns in the area. In the near future, he is going abroad for some work, and will take his family with him.

2.3 Irene

Irene starts out by telling us about her university education, that took place at the Ecole Superiure du Physique et du Chemie. It was a *grand école* with nobel prize winners in the faculty, and she graduated as engineer with a specialisation in polymere technology. She joined A in A-sur-mer immediately after graduation 1989, and has stayed there since then. When she applied for jobs, all companies sent positive replies, but she choosed A since it was a well-known company that she felt would be the right one for her. The current position as a project leader for a product development team is her fourth job at A. Like many other employees, she lives in A-sur-mer with her family, and she think that they will remain there. Her husband is working for another chemical company nearby.

Her project is a yearly one, aiming at supporting and developing the production in the polyethylene plant in A-sur-mer. The plant produce 200 tons of polyethylene plastics each year that are delivered to the customers as pellets. The customers are big industrial companies that use the plastics when producing consumer goods. Her role is to work with different improvements of the product, changing it according to customer needs and the technological development on the market. She works with technical support people that are in their turn directly in contact with the customers. Unlike what most people think, she says, there are a lot of possibilities to improve the product and to find new applications for polyethylene. Any improvement issue must be discussed with production management and customers, but it is up to her to see to that it is done. Her eight-person team has a resource of three man-years, and they usually work with about ten different improvement issues each year. Most improvement work concerns the high-quality plastics, the premium products that add vaule to customers (and, consequently, to A).

Irene thinks that she has a lot of freedom in her work, since it is up to her to define the project and to plan for the improvements. The project plan for each year must be approved by the Business Technology Manager, but she is the one that translates the long-term objectives into action plans and improvement issues. The plan consists of a number of improvement issues, and for each issue a deadline is defined. Deadlines are set in collaboration with customer service people and the sales team, which means that there are always some pressure from the market in her work. It is not unusual that the deadline is the point in time when the customer expects to receive the improved product, and customers usually participate in the

improvement work by testing refined products and prototypes. This means that deadlines are very important to meet, and that some parts of the work (customer testing) can take a lot of time due to other priorities in the customer organisation. Delays are rare, however, Irene says.

Having eight people from different areas in the team and three man-years as the resource means that most team members have other projects to work with as well. If they work with a high-priority issue, some might work full-time for a month or so, but the normal case is that they have several other projects going on. She describes this as a question of motivating people; technicians do not like to work with several studies and several managers in parallel, so she must motivate them go give her tasks priority. Otherwise they will finish the current study before going on to the next one. Her experience is that it is important to give the technicians direct responsibility for the studies, because that usually makes them feel much more motivated to assume difficult tasks.

Even if it is advantageous to give technicians responsibilities, you must still take your responsibility as a manager so that their workloads are reasonable. She says that everyone should be able to do their work in normal hours, and if there should be delays she must try to alleviate the situation by contacting her superiors. Sometimes they have to work in weekends, but that is always planned for in advance, never a fast solution to an urgent problem. Her view of planning is that it should be realistic so that there will never be any problems with deadlines, stress or work overload. Technicians might become quite upset if something like that should happen. She also monitors all activities in her project each week to make sure that nothing is lagging behind. Setting unrealistically high demands on employees is nothing she recommends, since a repeated use of such a philosophy would cause a lack of motivation in the team. She tries to care about her staff and contribute to their technical competence development.

She also says that she would like to work abroad for some time within A, but that it do not seems possible for the moment to do so, since it would be hard to find a job for her husband. Their children (4 and 7 years old) would be less a problem. She says that she and he husband has deciced that they shall both work full-time without sacrificing family life, and they do not want to end up in a situation where one of them would have to stay at home. It works fine, she says, but after spending time at work and spending

time with the family there are not any time left for herself. And it is the same thing for her husband.

2.4 Pierre

Pierre quickly states that he has worked for A in A-sur-mer for 12 years, all the time with new catalysis development. He joined A after graduating as engineer from a technical university. He has experienced both the old hierarchic organisation and the new project-based one, and he finds the latter to be the better. From the beginning he worked in a technical group specialised on new catalysis development, and after the reorganisation he became project leader in this field with responsibility fo several projects streching over a number of years. He thinks that it is possible to participate in many projects at one time, but then you must make sure that you are not becoming more heavily involved in one of them. If you do that, then the other projects will suffer.

He thinks that project-based work has many advantages. One such advantage is that people from different technical fields meet, solve problems together and create team spirit. Another advantage is that most work become focused on clear objectives. Pierre thinks that project-based work has been good for him; he has more autonomy and freedom in his work now than before. He knows what is needed in the business, and he acts according to that.

The drawbacks of project-based work is that professional relations are mostly limited to the project teams, which means less contact with other people in you own technical speciality. The permanent technical groups still exist, but more as administrative entities than as competence centras in different fields of technology. He thinks that the technical group for new catalyst development was once a source of identity for its' team members, now it is the projects. You need a common objective to build identity and team spirit, he says.

Some of his team members work full time in one project, while others work with two or three projects simultaneously. Even though the full-time situation is the best one, Pierre says, it usually works for people to work effectively in several projects at one time. Formally, everybody knows that the group leader is responsible for the staff and its development, while the project leader is resonsible for meeting project objectives. But in practice, there might appear situations where the individual feel surrounded by

several managers giving diverging orders, wondering who is actually the boss.

Pierre says that individuals are different from each other, and that it is up to them to find a way of working that is effective for them. Generally, there is not much stress in the research center, but if you work with four simultaneous projects with a lot of milestones, life can be quite stressful from time to time. Most people in the organisation seem to be able to combine work life and personal life, and Pierre says that the implementation of the project-based structure did not affect this. When he starts a project, he draws up a list of competencies needed, and then he negotiates with the group leaders in order to get the right individuals. Team members shall be competent when they enter the project; it is the task of the group leader to support their competence development. Most people develop themselves as technical specialists, but some choose to assume managerial responsibilities through becoming project leaders.

Pierre says that he prefers going on as a project leader in the future. If the project-based structure is changed into something more hierarchic, he thinks that the whole organisation will be taken 20 years back in time. He might consider other job offers, but it has to be advantageous for his career development and possible to combine with his personal life. His wife is an accountant at another company in the area, and must also find another job in that case.

Finally, he returns to the issue of deadlines and stress in project-based work. He says that there were actually a lot of deadlines in the old hierarchic organisation as well, and that delays must be handled in the same way as always; by discussing the problem with the boss and finding a solution together. A lof of stressful situations can be avoided if you have good plans; one long-term plan, one for each year, and one for each milestone.

2.5 Gerald

Gerald starts out by defining himself strictly as a scientist. He is from Wales, where he was educated in chemistry. He specialised in polymere technology and obtained a PhD. After post-doc work in Germany, he joined A in 1970, and came to work at their research laboratories in Manchester. In 1983, he joined the research laboratory in A-sur-mer, but he has also spent periods in far east countries. He says that he has been working with

the same fascinating subject all the time, polyolefins catalyis development. When asked about project-based work he says there have always been projects, but that the 1993 reorganisation implied a shift in project leadership from scientists to managers. Given that he was a scientist, he was never asked to become project leader in the new system.

Scientists are trained to be objective, he says, and that is something that is rarely demanded from managers. Managers and scientists are totally different professions, and it is accepted that managers are subjective by nature. This fundamental conflict has always caused a lot of reorganisations in research organisations. Management always try to overcome the conflict in different ways, and the centralised research department and the project-based structure are two such ways. The old method was comfortable to scientists, he says; it was like a university environment where interfaces between research, production and business were handled at higher levels. You could just go on doing research without worrying about such problems. But the guy actually being the interface, he had to get along with the other managers, otherwise the independence of research was threatened.

His main involvement is a project developing chromium catalysts, which is his speciality. They study the function of the catalyst, and try to make production of it so cheap and simple as possible. Despite the fact that the catalyst was discovered as early as 1930, it is still a fast-moving industry characterised by high competition. He says that it is very important to have the best catalyst on the market, and he thinks that his job is most interesting.

The project-based structure implemented in 1993 was a far too clumsy a system, with a single BTM monitoring 50 project leaders. The advantage, as Gerald sees it, was that scientists were left on their own without close supervision, they could do what they wanted. They were not exposed to short-term deadline pressures like the project leaders. The system worked reasonably well, but the current reorganisation into four or five project managers reporting to the BTM seems even more promising. It is inevitable that we scientists loose contact with the BTM, he says; we are too many, a hierarchical solution is necessary. Stress and deadlines have never been the problem in A, according to Gerald, but he has seen project leaders in important projects being stressed and even resigning. The individual must find a way to work by himself, and Gerald does not think that the project-based structure changed anything in practice.

Motivating scientists and defining attractive careers for them is a big problem in the industry, he says. Sometimes it seems that talented young scientists are encouraged to leave science to enter a managerial career. He sees this as a weakness in A, and he points out that other companies have designed career ladders for scientists. There, senior scientists are treated like strategic resources. In A, they tried a career ladder consisting of technical specialist, research associate, senior research associate, group research associate, in which the last one was almost on the same level as directors, but that disappeared in the project-based system. There is a need for senior scientists in the organisation, he thinks, keeping the organisation creative.

Projects are sometimes too short-term oriented, Gerald says; many development processes are much longer than the project. He tries to avoid situations in which he works for several projects. Back in 1980 he worked in two different projects with two different technologies and two different managers, and that was quite hard to handle.

He moved to France in 1983, since chromium catalysts were not used in A-sur-mer at the time and he was considered an expert on those matters in A. Now, one million tons of chromium catalysts are produced and sold in A-sur-mer. He does not feel far from home, he says, since he thinks that Europe is now like one single country. When he moved down from London he was 40 years old, and since they could not find suitable secondary schools for their children, his wife and children stayed in the UK. He is down in France on his own, he says, and he is convinced that they made the right decision on this matter.

There are big differences in culture between UK and France, he tells. When he first came down to A-sur-mer he was impressed by how effective it was and the results they had reached with only a small research budget. He also likes the french way of working; in London they only took care of a part of a project, and in France they participate from idea to constructing a whole plant, which is much more motivating. A British "engineer" is perceived as a narrow specialist, he says, while a French "ingenieur" is perceived as a general problem solver. Otherwise, differences in management style is slowly vanishing. When he came to A-sur-mer, the style was paternalistic, but it was quite effective. Managers walked around and shook hands in the morning, and even sensitive issues were discussed openly in the corridors. Now managers are distant; Gerald says that he meets his superior manager

about four times a year. It is easier to work in developing countries, he thinks; there you can pursue your idea without a lot of resistance.

When asked about the future, he says that at his age, most people have retired. When he becomes 60 three years from now, he can get his UK pension; he does not have enough money behind him to retire right now. The french managers retire early, some before 50 years of age. It is a way of distributing the immense profits caused by increasing productivity in the chemical industry, he says. He enjoys his work, and he is always open to propositions on how his knowledge can be used the future. He lives in A-sur-mer; "I want to be close to where I work, I learned that in London traffic jams".

3. Individuals in organisation B

3.1 Edith

Edith starts by describing her current work in B as change management. It is not issues on technology or business she is trying to change, but rather the conditions for the employees. As a Human Resource Management professional her task is to see to that all people in B can give their best in their daily work despite all ongoing changes. She says that some years ago, the need for restructuring the company was urgent. The organisation was like a spaghetti plate, expanding in all directions, leaving a lot of employees with multiple reporting duties and ambiguous rules. After implementing the program management structure – a change project that required a lot of efforts -, the organisation is still a bit chaotic, but now there is consistency and strategies behind. B wants to be a world leader in its core area, and that means continuous change and growth also in the future. A lot of important work is carried out in projects, but she says that there is still much to do there from a HRM point of view.

One part of her work is to coach managers to help them in their professional development. She says that the French way of discussing personal issues is to separate work and personal life, "we don't want to hear about personal life, we don't care." It appears that most managers she meet refuse to talk about their personal life, especially older (male) managers. One of the old managers, she recalls, spoke to her about his work for one hour before he even said the word "I". He talked about other people, the company, the business etc, and it took Edith one hour to get him to talk about himself. She says that she finds this old-fashioned and that an individual is not two separate persons, one at work and one at home. If she does not understand how key persons think and experience their life, she cannot work with change management. She thinks that in Sweden, the distance between work and the rest of life is not as big as in France.

The background of her current work is the B corporation, and she describes the company in some detail. B was created 16 years ago by five people working in a French electronics giant. They were developing a computerised application for telephone services, and started their own company since management in the electronics company did not take sufficient interest in what they were doing. From the original focus, the company expanded with different sorts of new applications of their original idea, both in GSM mobile telephone systems and in the banking sector.

Execpt for a special hardware component, they now also provide software applications. At the moment, about 3.000 people are employed in B worldwide, of them 300 engineers working with R&D. B still has its headquarters in B-ville in southern France. From having been a small electronics company, they are now trying to learn how to behave like a global company.

An important part of that change work is to redefine the corporate culture. B is still much influenced by the leadership of Marcel, the former CEO, who was also one of the founders. Even though he has left the management committee and bought a house in Spain, he is always around. For two years after his departure, the company has been without CEO, and the CFO has acted as financial CEO in the management committee. Marcel is a virtual CEO, she says. In the beginning, everyone was very close to him, and he threw numeorus parties and events all the time. Now, people still knows who he is, but he don't know everyone as he used to do. He is upset by that, Edith says, but he also understands that it can never be like it used to be again. She characterises him as "old-fashioned", and give examples such as his obsession with exactly following given hours of work; he can not understand how people can arrive too late and stay on in evenings. Even though he is over 60 years old, he is still very dynamic and performance-oriented, travelling around the world without being disturbed by jet-lags. At the same time as he strictly follows rules on work hours, he also gives a lot of freedom to those he really trust. Edith tells us that she used to work with internal communication, and he never saw the need to read even important reports and press releases before publicaton. So he is old-fashioned in some ways and very modern in others. Marcel is a most visionary man, she says, always in the future.

It is not only Marcel that does not recognize his company anymore, she says; there is a lot of talk about the "good old days" among those who has been with B from the start. The rapid growth through acquisitions and partnerships will continue – Edith estimates that the number of employees will increase by over 150% in three years time – so the question of changing the culture is most important and also very difficult. The staff is young – average age in the company is 32 years – and very typical for the region; proud, arrogant, outgoing individualists. Most employees feel that they have a lot of opportunities in B, so she feel confident that people will continue to be attracted to the company. The company is male-dominated; while there are no women in the executive committee and only about 10% on the level below, it is 50/50 on the production shop floor.

Big parts of the organisation is project-based, she says, and there are also a lot of one-time change projects being implemented from time to time. In R&D all work is project-based, and in marketing they have to participate in projects. In finance there are mostly internal projects that are not related to the overall project management process. In production the project form is used when new organisational forms or new technologies are introduced. Edith says that project managers are not seen as leaders, merely as conciliators or coordinators. To be a real leader you should have a managerial position and have a strong and pushy personality. She thinks that there is too much masculine toughness built into the notion of leadership in B, and that senior management use expressions like "virility" when describing leadership. "A career" is still the same thing as moving upwards in the managerial hierarchy, even though there are also formal expert career paths used to keep specialists in the company. She thinks that it is a hard task to manage projects and that project management should be a career in itself, but there seem to be a widespread notion in B that project management is not something hard or advanced. That is a mistake, Edith exclaims.

Employees in Bs are rewarded on an individual basis, and they move around a lot inside the company. Edith thinks that they should be at a job for at least two years, but that many employees move much more frequently than that. In addition, they join and leave different project groups all the time. Not so many employees leave the company, and there is a tendency of wanting to settle down in the area when they start to have a family. This also means that many are reluctant to work in B subsidiaries abroad. Most employees like to be in southern France, so they usually do not move to competitors based in Paris.

People work a lot in B, she says. Those that are affected by the new legislation on the 35-hour week – mostly shop-floor workers and lower-level salaried employees - are now given 22 extra days of vacation each year. The first proposal, that everyone should leave one hour earlier each day, was rejected by the employees, who claimed that they would stay the whole day anyway. And when the extra 22 days were added to their vacations, many felt that they did not know how to spend them. But now, most of them are very positive, Edith says. Personally, she thinks that it should have been wiser to leave one hour earlier to improve everyday life outside the job, but it must be up to the unions to decide that. The result is anyway that people do not work so much anymore; the current figure is 200

days per year. Then there are of course a lot of people that will not be affected by the legislation; qualified engineers, project leaders, managers etc. According to the culture, they should arrive no later than 8.30 and be accessible at work until 19 o'clock. We want them to stop at 20, Edith says, but many stay until 21. It is not accepted to arrive at 9 in the morning, and if you leave before 19 people would think that you were not doing your job.

Edith tells us that she feel a bit distant to the French culture, since her parents were foreigners. Earlier in her career she worked with HRM issues at another IT company, and she has also worked as a teacher. She says that she wants to be in control of her life instead of being controlled by others, but that she always reminds herself that unexpected things can happen. A lot of people want to control their lives, but they forget that they cannot have 100% control. So when a small problem appear, they feel it is a serious disturbance of their life plans. The result is, for example, divorces; one couple of three in France is divorcing, and in Paris it is every second couple. In the big cities women are more demanding and not so dependent on their husbands, she says.

Earlier retirement is becoming increasingly common. There is a rule in B that you can leave with 75% salary at the age of 57. Being 56, she says that she can retire the next year, even though she thinks that there is a lot of interesting work to be done on the future. As an example of her work she tells us about a change program that she implemented three years ago. The CEO wanted her to organise project teams around important change issues, and each team had members from all different levels in the company. The teams identified their own project tasks and used creative problem solving techniques to work them through. Edith describes this as an exciting and successful experience, but she also thinks that CEO support was necessary; many managers were reluctant to let their subordinates away to team meetings.

3.2 Paul

Paul starts out by telling us about himself and his professional background. He is 37 years old and currently production manager for memories (one of two production areas) at the B factory in B-ville. After his *baccalureat* he went to a technical university in Lyon for five years and graduated as master of engineering. He was then employed at a big electronics corporation as production engineer, and by time he became production manager. After seven years there he was employed by B and given the task

to start up their factory in Germany. When this was done he moved to B-ville and became responsible for industrial coordination, which implied managing a small, project-based department with responsibility for making all B factories to work according to the same standards. This task was important at the time since B had recently acquired another company, thereby increasing the number of factories from two to seven. Paul's role thus came to be to merge the two production organisations, a task that implied handling not only technical issues but also cultural differences and some conflicts. In the end, this merger process turned out successful, and Paul was 1997 given the position of plant manager at the B factory outside Manchester in UK. After two years there he wanted to return to southern France, and then became manager of one of the production areas at the B factory in B-ville with 50 employees.

He describes his work as production manager as demanding and time-consuming. The production of memories is going on all around the clock (three shifts), and they always have urgent orders to deliver. This means that he always must make priorities in their current work portfolio and make sure that every single employee is aware of these priorities. To secure this information flow and constantly reinforce the importance of top quality, they have daily meetings with all employees. He works about 12 hours every day, usually visits the factory once every weekend, and once a month he participates in the night shift. Since production is always going on, he must always be available, but he means that this is natural given his position as a manager and the economic benefits connected to this position.

He lives in a small town close to B-ville with his wife and his three children. The two elder children (now ten and eight years old) moved with them to Germany and Great Britain and went to school and kindergarten there. He mainly sees this as advantageous for them, since they picked up two foreign languages. His wife was also pursuing a career of her own when he worked at Thomson, but when they moved to Germany it was hard to find a job for her there. In combination with the fact that they then had two small children, it led to the joint decision that she should take the main responsibility for them instead of working full time. When they moved back to B-ville the second time in 1999, she gave birth to a third child. It takes him 20 minutes to drive from B to his house, and he thinks that living in a small town is the best thing for the family, not least for the children. The two elder children are becoming increasingly oriented towards friends and activities outside home, and he thinks that if the family should go abroad again, it must be when they are much older than today.

The employees in his department are mainly occupied by their routine tasks in the production process, but he can also assign them to project teams if necessary. He describes routine work and project work as two different ways of working, but that all employees should be ready to do both. Routine work is extremely short-term focused, and implies high speed, quality focus, a constant flow of information and usually some stress. Project work, on the other hand, is more long-term and focused on strategic issues, which means less pressure on participants and an opportunity to reflect upon important problems. Projects are usually used for development purposes, and organised through a number of milestones and status meetings. In between these meetings, there are different small teams working by themselves on well-defined problems.

Unlike himself, the employees have regulated work hours (35 hours per week since the new legislation), which means that the employees usually cannot be ordered to put in extra work hours just because a project is late and approaching deadline. The new work-time legislation has implied severe restrictions on over-time work, so it is in practice the responsibility of Paul to plan work so that his employees can perform their duties within normal work hours. A usual problem is when projects involve people from different departments, because then the manpower planning requires a lot of communication and coordination between managers. Even in these situations, Paul asserts, managers must take responsibility for the workload of their employees, but this is often very hard in such an expanding organisation as B. The reduced work-time has so far only meant that all employees have to do the same amount of work as before, but during a shorter time. As a manager, he cannot claim any such restrictions himself; whether it is a production order or a project that is late, he must put in the extra time needed to get it done.

For the employees, project work is a natural part of their employment, not a short-cut to advancement in the organisation. Projects can of course be seen as a competence development process, but it is up to the responsible manager to plan for that. Project work is also becoming increasingly standardised within B, since many managers have felt the need for a common way of approaching complex problems that can be understood and used by everyone in the corporation. This common approach rests upon a training programme called BRT (Barrier Removal Training), and all employees are expected to conform to the BRT framwork when working in

projects. According to Paul, this has been successful so far and also widely accepted in the organisation.

For managers, project management has become an increasingly popular career choice in B. Even though this career choice is not as established as the traditional managerial and specialist careers, Paul means that many young employees think of themselves as project managers rather than regular managers, and that they desire a work life consisting of projects rather than of positions. Paul usually participates in a corporate committee that reviews management development issues in B, so he thinks that this is a clear trend. He can also see that there is possibilities of advancement in project work, where young project managers take on responsibility for everyday, small technical projects while the more experienced are trusted to lead big complicated strategic projects involving a lot of social contacts.

With his experience from managerial work in Germany and UK, he thinks that project practies vary between different national cultures. French project work does not rest upon detailed planning like German project work do; French project teams end up in many more unexpected situations than German ones. On the other hand, he thinks that French project teams are better at handling such situations but that many of them could have been avoided by better planning. French project teams have also a tendency of anarchy, since people are not always doing what they have promised to do. In France, it is usually also normal to have open conflicts in the teams, conflicts that are immediately forgotten after the discussion have ended. British project managers try to avoid such conflicts by all means, Paul thinks; it is not unusual that they solve delicate matters before team meetings so that everyone will have consensus in the meeting and never start any conflict. Project managers in UK spend a lot of their time preventing and solving conflicts so that consensus can be maintained.

3.3 Jacques

Jacques was born in Marrakech, Morocco, where his parents worked and lived at the time. He spent his first 20 years there before he went to an engineering school in France. After five years he finished his university education in California with a masters degree in materials science. Two years back in Morocco followed, but then he was employed at a subsidiary of a Japanese multinational in northern France as a production engineer. He gradually advanced in the company, and describes these years as the best possible school in production management available. When he left the

Japanese company after five years, he was one of the senior production managers in the factory. Then he went for a MBA at INSEAD, whereafter he joined B three years ago.

At B, he started to work with different strategic issues, but he soon went over to production management. During one year he led one of the factories (the one of which Paul is now the manager), and then became manager of the other one. As a consequence of the rapid growth of B, he has now been asked to take a managerial post in Singapore for at least three years. He will leave quite soon, bringing his wife and three children with him. There is always a shortage of qualified employees in B, and as soon as something new happens they start to look inside the organisation to find the right people. He looks forward to the Singapore move, and thinks that the children will benefit from learning a new language and understand a new culture. His wife will take responsibility for the children, so he thinks that it will work out all right for the family.

Concerning project based work, most of his experiences are related to his work at B. On the surface, production in the factory seems like a routine operation, but in fact there are numerous projects going on all the time, since there is always new products to put into production. Jacques has a development team of eight people reporting to him, constantly working with different projects, and about half of them are industrial project managers. New issues are popping up all the time, he says, sometimes several issues during one single day. Some are small, some are big, some shall be delivered in two days and some are long-term issues during the next six months. Every issue is connected to one individual, there is always one who is resonsible for project progress. Jacques says that accountability and project ownership is essential, then it is up to that person to choose his team and decide how to go on with the task.

If the project is a fairly big one, a kick-off is usually organised. At the kick-off, the project manager is formally appointed and the team identified. It is not unusual that the team consists of people from other parts of B, and there are sometimes also people from the customer organisation. One or two representatives from the shop floor are usually appointed, but most of the team is external.

Jacques then goes on by telling us about the main project of his career in B, a project that he describes in terms like "exciting" and "amazing". The project was a big change project, involving business process reengineering,

and he thinks that someone should write an article about it. Such projects they must handle themselves, Jacques says, even though they of course can get assistance from the human resource management department and internal cost accountants. Normally, change projects involve some physical change like installing new machines, or they might at least lead to a clear decision on the subject at hand. But in this case, they could only work with people, whith their feelings and thoughts.

The project stemmed from a need to keep the 200 employees in the factory up-to-date and well organised in a highly competitive and rapidly changing environment. About ¼ of them are always involved in projects. Every six months Jacques gathered all involved during one day to get direct reports on all change issues in the factory, and they also used that occastion as a milestone for the subsequent six months. They asked themselves where they wanted to be in six months and then used brainstorming sessions to find out how to go there. Jacques says that it was important to always depart from customer needs in this discussion, so that change was not made for internal reasons, and he brought marketing people in during these sessions in order to keep the customer perspective alive.

When analysing the market situation for the factory, it appeared that they actually served two different markets with their components. One part was the GSM mobile telephone market, a very immature market where the customers mostly need services like on-time delivery, assistance, accuracy etc. Of course the customer wants good quality, Jacques says, but the key is service. Another part was the banking systems market, an established, mature market with long product cycles where all customers were primarily interested in getting a low price. Based on that simple analysis, two different workshops were organised; one for GSM applications based on cycle time, and one for banking systems based on cost reduction. A common theme for both workshops were quality improvement.

During the first six months, a new quality documentation system was constructed, and also a new training system for the employees. Basically these were very simple tasks, Jacques tells us, but you had to keep focus on them. Therefore, all projects that were not related to these issues were killed, and a lot of effort went into explaining to everybody the pusposes of change. Jacques says that he is very proud of the dynamics in the organisation at this stage; a lot of people discussed, brainstormed, communicated, launched ideas.

Their next insight was that their internal organisation was not adapted to the market as they had came to understand it. Jacques says that they could now identify two main processes that wer of importance to saitsfy customer needs. One such process was their traditional contribution to the rest of B, i.e. receiving orders and delivering the product. This process was called "time to money" and implied improvements of the efficiency in the whole production chain. The second process was less obvious but not less important. It was called "time to market" and implied improvements in how fast new products could be brought from idea to delivery. Unlike the first process, this one could not be controlled by the factory people alone, since they are merely informed about new product development through their participation in R&D project teams. Each function in the R&D process has their own milestones, and it was most important for production to be informed about them all so that the new product could be delivered as fast as possible.

It also appeared that the first process, "time to money" was actually two. The first sub-process was easy, recurrent orders and the second complicated non-recurrent orders (i.e. orders implying changes in the product). Normally, 80% of the orders were recurrent and 20% were non-recurrent. Jacques and his teams quickly realised that the biggest potential for improvement resided in order handling procedures, since there were no problems in production. What happened in order handling was that the same person handled both sorts of orders, which meant that when a non-recurrent order appeared, all subsequent orders were delayed while that one were handled. The order handling department were reorganised and the office space reorganised, so that different sorts of orders came to be handled by different teams. The team responsible for non-recurrent orders now also came to comprise technicians, developers etc. Before, each "profession" had resided in their own functional department. With the new organisation, all interface problems disappeared, and the problem of separating people with the same know-how from each other could be solved through recurring training sessions with the former functional teams. It was amazing, Jacques exclaims.

The result of the change project was astonishing. The time from receiving a specification of a new product until a sample component was being sent to the customer used to be about four weeks. When the change project started, they set the goal of being able to do it in one week. Jacques says that this was typically Japanese; you tell people what their objective is and that they have to do it, but you don't tell them how to do it. He quickly realised the

necessity of being persistent and "pushy"; after saying that it was impossible, the employees looked for every little single weakness in his reply. It was typically French, he says; they came up with a list of hundreds of reasons why they could not do it. Then they "offered" him to bring the lead time down by one week. He firmly replied by saying that he was not interested in any small improvements and that the objective was still the same. After a while they came back with a lot of ideas, and now they actually thought they could do it. Jacques says that he handles all projects like this; they have a nice and inspiring kick-off, but then it is hard work. They are of course always welcome to discuss problems with him, but if they show up at a milestone meeting without having solved their task he has to give them a hard time so that they will work on their maximum afterwards. They cannot come to me on the milestone and say that they could not do it, Jacques says. What would happen if we did that to our customers? Our customers are very demanding and dont take excuses for an answer, so why should we accept excuses internally?

Each time big projects like this are launched, Jacques wants to start with a simple, visible improvement that cannot fail. Then people will se that it is possible and go for harder tasks. Afterwards it is amazing, he says. "I give them the task, they work hard, and afterwards they are very proud of themselves. We close the group officially, invite some people, give recognition, go out for a nice lunch, and then we do something else." Projects should not be too long, he thinks, in that case the team members become tired and loose focus.

Jacques assures us that all this did not mean that his employees work additional hours on the average as compared to before. There is always a phase in a project when the team works hard and feel uncomfortable, he says, but when the work starts to pay off, everybody become proud. Normal work is not very efficient, and since people are very efficient when they work in projects they will not have to work additional hours. Project work is a way of making people reflect over old bad habits.

Three years ago, consultants were brought in to reduce cycle time, Jacques tells us. He worked with them a lot in the beginning and learned about their methodology. They simply gathered all actors involved around a table, and went through the whole production process in detail. They then defined the ideal process, and made joint decisions on how to go there. It is a very simple process that all my colleagues must master, he says. The cycle time consultants also went to other B factories, and in some cases factory

management refused to use the proposed methodology and failed in reducing cycle time. Jacques says that there are many methodologies around, and that the important thing is that you agree on one of them. Management has a big responsibility for the success of projects, he says. If a factory manager does not tell others how to work, their efforts will not lead to anything. And if a dedicated change manager goes to another job, it can be very difficult to replace him. If a change project fail, it will be hard to motivate people to do it again.

He adds that most people at B are young and change-oriented. Actually, it do not exist in the culture that people can resist change and just want to do the same job year after year. He says that he left out two years in his initial career story [above], years when he worked for an old company with strong unions. Even there, it was never a question to stop change, it was rather a matter of finding the right speed. You always have 10% who drives change, 50% who wait and see, and 40% who is just not interested at all, he says. It is almost the same thing wherever you are in the world, he says, and adds that you must use the same managerial methodology despite cultural differences. Of course cultures can be different, but if you try to explain lower performance by referring to culture you are actually trying to excuse your own bad management.

Jacques finishes his story by telling us about an important project experience he had while working for the Japanese company up north. He was responsible for a product line that stretched from one end of the gigantic factory to another, and he thought the line to be most efficient and well-kept. One day a senior manager from Japan came to visit the factory, and he agreed that the line indeed looked good. But it was far too long and far too slow, he said. When Jacques objected to that and said that there was almost impossible to make it shorter, the manager asked for a roll of tape. Jacques sent for the tape and handed it over. The manager then walked along the line until he reached the middle, bent down and fastened a piece of the tape to the floor. He then turned to Jacques and said "I will come back in six months. By that time, the line shall end no later than here." Once again, Jacques objected, but got the answer that it was up to him to figure out how to reconstruct the line. The first days he felt most bewildered, but when he gathered his supervisors and technicians and started to work, it appeared that many of the people working by the line on a daily basis had a lot of improvement ideas. Jacques structured the ideas, and they came up with an action plan for the reconstruction. Six months later, the Japanese manager came back, and Jacques presented the new line,

that now ended just before the piece of tape. Jacques was proud of having achieved something almost impossible, but from the manager's reactions he could tell that it had been most possible all the time. The point was that they had done it by themselves, that they had been able to do what seemed impossible by taking the task seriously and worked with the issue in a structured but creative manner.

3.4 Sophie

Sophie is an engineer in electronics and signal processing, and she has been working for 12 years since graduation. Her career started in a research department in a US-owned company where she worked for five years. After some years as a development engineer she became project manageer for technical development projects. She then moved to a Swiss company where she was appointed program manager; from her base in France she coordinated big telecom projects in South America. She has now been with B for three and a half years, most of the time as product development manager in the GSM department. In october –99 she became group manager with responsibility for applications connected to Oracle's operative systems.

All the time, she has preferred living in southern France in towns like Lyon, Valence and Marseille. Her husband also work at B in one of the production departments, and they have a three-year old daughter. She thinks that working hours for parents with small children is an important issue in B due to the rapid expansion of the company. Usually she work all day, picks up her daughter at the baby-sitter at 18.45 and goes home. After putting her asleep she works again. Weekends are usually also needed to get the work done. In addition, she travels to Canada every two weeks. She does not complain about this, she says; it is a part of her job as a manager and she can handle it.

In her new position as a group manager, she is not working actively in projects anymore, but her long experience of project work was an important qualification behind her promotion. She now has other people leading and coordinating the projects. A project, she says, is always based on an idea on a product that can fit the market. The person coming up with the idea – anyone can come up with an idea – can then undertake a pre-study, in which the market needs, the technical feasability and economic issues are analysed. When the pre-study is complete, the proposal is presented to the product committee, who reviews the pre-study and makes

a go/no-go decision on the proposal. The product committe is a group of senior managers with a lot of insight in product development issues, and Sophie also participates if the proposisiton concerns her own area of responsibility. If the proposal is approved, a professional project leader is assigned to the task of implementing the project. The project leader starts out by picking a team and they then work until the project is finished.

She says that qualifications for project work differ between departments. In her group, project managers must be technical experts. To get the position as a professional project manager, you must be a senior engineer with at least five years of experience, she thinks. A project manager must be rigourous, good at communicating and having the ability to see beyond the day-to-day work in the project team. Most project managers are actually more coordinators than they are leaders, but as the size, the risk and the strategic importance of the project increases, so do the demands on leadership abilities. If you are a program manager, coordinating a number of different projects, you must be a strong leader. In her group, a project manager is always working on one project at the time on a full-time basis, and that goes for the team members as well. She does not belive in working with several projects in parallel; it is more time-consuming and less efficient.

Sophie thinks that there is still need for much improvement in how people work in B. Given the current efficiency, too much efforts are put in by the employees, she says. In general, people working in projects are always under pressure, and they all work long hours. About eight to six weeks before delivery, the project teams start to work even harder. Herself, she works about 60 hours a week, and she thinks that most project teams are not far behind in this respect.

In her group, 80% of the employees are men. It is difficult to find women because of the technical skills needed, she says, and that goes all the way back to the technical universities where most students are men. When she set up her management team in October, she started out to recruit a program manager and a marketing manager, and it appeared that 80% of the applications were sent in by men. She wants more women, she says, and thinks that the development in this direction is encouraging but very slow. Women have sensibilities that men lack, they are more pleasant to work with, and they are usually very professional. The industry is dominated by men, and to make a career women must prove that they are even better. She thinks that due to structures in society it is hard for French

women to combine professional life, wife life and mother life in a satisfying way. It is much easier for women without children, she says, but for men the question of children is rarely even raised.

People working by projects should feel that they are progressing, she thinks. If you are a technical expert there you can become a senior technician and become involved in strategic technical issues. If you are a project manager, you can become a senior project manager, taking on responsibility for larger and more difficult projects. There is also the new position of program manager to strive for, which is a position that has become most important in B in just a short time. The program manager reports to the group manager and are responsible for all project activities in the area. Every six weeks they put their heads on the table, she says, when there is a product review with the CEO presiding. A program manager should have about 10-15 years of experience, and it is mandatory that they should have a background in project management.

Her project teams collaborate with project teams at Oracle, but there are never any mixed teams. She is responsible for two development centres – one in B-ville and one in Ottawa, Canada – and she and her program manager is constantly working with integrating the two. There is not so much experience of such inter-continental integration in B, and they try to work a lot with video conferences.

If you fail to meet a project deadline it is a big failure, Sophie says. A deadline is a commitment to both customers and colleagues within the company, and that must always be respected. Some years ago, project activities were not well-organised, she thinks, and commitments like that were seldom respected. There were no project management culture, no rigour, no know-how. Since then, management has worked hard in changing the attitudes, and several senior project managers have been recruited to support this change. In the two previous organisations in which she worked, deadlines were taken much more seriously, and she claims that the lack of structure was a consequence of the rapid growth of B. Management had to see to that everything necessary was done on a day-to-day basis, and there were no time to organise things thoroughly. An increased respect for deadlines will not mean extra work for people, she says; work will be smarter and more efficient, but not necessarily more time-consuming.

Throughout the company, a project management methodology called ARGOS is used. It describes all the necessary steps needed to take a project from idea to delivery. Sophie says that like all methodologies it needs improvement, but that people are trained in the methodology and that it works in practice. ARGOS has been used for four years in B, and has become a common language. She says that different individuals use it in different ways; one kind of people strictly follows the rules and become a bit too bureaucratic, while there are others that adapt the procedure in a smart way so that it suit their own projects.

All project teams report to Sophie, who as a group manager is responsible for taking care of the personal development and career of the employees. It is true that people rush from project to project, but if the manager has some common sense he can see to that people having delivered a challenging project can be assigned an easier one the next time. It is most important that individuals in B feel motivated, so she tries not to put a lot of pressure on people all the day, every day. There are of course highly experienced people that are wanted by most project managers, and she usually intervenes by deciding to what project they shall be assigned.

3.5 Georges

Georges holds a PhD from an engineering school in Paris, and have spent 20 years in the semiconductor industry before joining B four years ago. During the first years, he was fist responsible for quality and security on the corporate level, and since six months he is now director of the program management process in the entire company. This means that he defines what the program management process is, what role the program managers have, and how corporate strategy should be carried out in the programs. He is formally not the manager of the 80 program managers in B, but he monitors how the program management process is used in the programs, assisted by seven experts and auditors.

Program management existed before in B, he says, but it was not structured the way is it structured today. The process is now defined, it is strict so that everyone follows the same concepts, reports in the same way etc. Georges assumed this responsibility in order to make sure that it would be one single program management process for the entire company, and he deployed it. The process is not invented by B, it is a world-wide process based on well-known standards and models used in all big successful

companies in the industry. Of course it has been modified and adapted to the specific circumstances in B.

The program manager is responsible for a program, which means that he shall ensure that the completion of this program is made at the committed date, with the agreed performance and also within the limits of the budget. The program manager has a responsibility for the success of the progran, Georges says. He use experts of the company to achieve the objectives of the program. The experts, may they be developers, marketers etc will inform and report to the program manager the issues, the risk, the performance.

A program usually consists of several projects, Georges goes on, and project leaders report to the program manager. Projects under the same program manager always have something in common. The program manager will not drive simultaneously a program about product development and a program about new software or a program helping people with security or anything else. Program managers have strictly defined areas in which to operate. To become a program manager you need some seniority (at least five years experience), some expertise in the area of the program and high communicative skills. Actually, one of his first qualities is the ability to listen to others, Georges says. The program manager holds the key responsibility to achieve the objectives of all projects, and he must make priorities between different projects and move resources if necessary. Program managers usually have a background in project management, and Georges' team provides training for those advancing to program managers.

Many engineers in B go for a project management career, Georges says. There are several ways to recognize the abilities of an individual; he can be a very good manager of people or he can be managing a project with high efficiency. Either you are a manager of people or a manager of objectives. When promoted, one is called a manager, the other is called a program manager. The program manager is not responsible for people, he is responsible for achieving objectives. It is one way to be successful and to be recognized in the company, Georges asserts. 20 years ago, all ambitious people went for the traditional managerial career, but now they also go for a program management career. The two careers are considered equally important and desirable in B. The program manager position is a managerial position, while managing a project is a task among other tasks needed for the successful implementation of the program.

To ensure that the traditional hierarchy is not becoming more important than the programs, all programs are assigned a sponsor. A sponsor is a high-level executive in B who will serve as facilitator for the program throughout its execution. If the manager of the program needs help, generally the sponsor will bring help, Georges says. In an ordinary structure important issues could be prioritised down by someone who are responsible for several tasks, all of them being priorities. The sponsor and the program manager only have their single program to care for.

Georges compares program management to the coaching of a football team; the team consist of a number of skilled experts, and they have a captain, the project manager. But success can only be ensured when you have someone sitting beside the field. That guy is the coach, the program manager, the guy with the strategic eye. You need to have experts on the field, managers on the field, but beside you need to have someone looking at it from another perspective, Georges concludes. You can try to to have a football team without a coach, it might even work fine, but only as long as no problem appear. Another important difference between projects and programs is that a project involves only tasks in one single area. You can handle a project with a close team working on one subect. A program is when you have a team in France, another in Canada, another one in India, and your marketing is in America. The teams, the different projects, all belong to the same program.

Georges says that he has never worked for a French company, they have all been international. B is not either a French company, he says, since most of the equity is owned by foreign investors. On the executive level where he resides himself, all directors come from multinational corporations. Georges is responsible for having the same program management process worldwide, and that means that there shall be no differences between countries in that respect. Then the execution of tasks performed by each individual of course is different, since it depends on cultural barriers, he says. But the program management process is the same.

Late projects where people work days and nights is the opposite situation to program management, he asserts. If it comes to that situation, it means that there are no program management at all. The program management process identifies all the steps that will happen, all the risks that may happen, all the issues that you might encounter, so that you can predict that they will come and take appropriate measures before they come. If such things happen, the

program manager has not done his job. You always have to make a difference between program management and the execution of the program, he adds. If the part which is called program management is very short, it is not done properly, and when you go to the execution you will have problems. You can reach the last phase of the execution and end up in a mess because you do not have the resources, and people will have to work very hard. But this has not happened frequently, and it shall never happen if the program management process has been properly used.

Every single individual in the company has a boss and have to respect direction of the boss, Georges says. However, that individual is also a contributor to a program or different programs, and shall report progress to the program manager. If the program manager identifies a weakness or a risk, his task is to deal with the boss of the people, not the people themselves. Of course there can appear conflicts between the boss and the program manager, Georges admits, and that is of course also handled in the formal process. When a program is designed there is a sponsor, and since the sponsor is a senior executive the program is given immediate priority. We don't start a program because someone has a very brilliant idea and wants to do something, Georges says, the program gooes through different careful processes of evaluation and analysis. When a program is lauched, there is a committee with representatives from many functions in the company, and if they say" yes" they are are all committed to the program.

The majority of the program managers have it as their full-time job, Georges says, and he points out that it is a very challenging job. Sometimes the commitment is though and they need to have good communication to get the appropriate people at the right time, and they also need some luck. Georges has seen a lot of program managers getting other positions of leadership, it is a career step. Young people can lead projects, but never programs. Seniority means at least five years of experience, he clarifies. Some are more mature than others; in B there are people 28 years old that are very mature in their communication with others, and people 40 years old and still not mature enough. There is no difference between male and female program managers, he says. Their abilities in program management are independent of their sex. Every single individual manages his life. Women and men, they all know how to manage their life. If they accept a very demanding job, they know exactly what they are doing. It is a question of management; if you know how to manage a program, you know how to manage your life, Georges concludes.

4. Projects as work form: Thematic analysis

From the individual narratives in chapters 2 and 3, the aim was to identify themes to be used in further research, themes sprung from the individuals as representatives for themselves rather than for the organisations in which they happened to work at the time for the empirical study. By "themes" we do not necessarily mean dimensions in which all or most individuals were similar to each other; a dimension in which they disagree or differ should be at least as interesting as those in which they share the same opinion.

There are of course differences between the organisational contexts, i.e. between companies A and B, that will contribute to such agreements and disagreements. A is a R&D organisation inside a big multinational enterprise that has been subject to several wawes of downsizing and rationalisation. Traditional research projects have been subject to increased managerial control, and a lot of ongoing tasks has been labelled "projects" in order to fit into the project-based structure implemented in 1993. In company B, growth and expansion is always on top of the agenda, and there are projects almost everywhere in the organisation. All R&D and other issues in business development has been incorporated into the program management process, but tasks not suitable for project organising is handled in a "normal", ongoing structure. These differences on the organisational level are not so significant, and will be even less so when the new structure is implemented in A, a structure most similar to the program management process in B (except for the feature that the newly appointed project managers in A will not become subject to a detailed common procedure).

Given this, we came to identify a number of expected and unexpected themes in the narratives that should be of significance in further research. The first concern the role of the project manager – is he/she actually a manager or just a team leader? Connected to that is the notion of career – traditionally there is vertical careers and specialist careers, but how do people make a career in a project-based environment lacking hierarchical levels and stable positions? Time is also an issue; while some say that managers must take responsibility for the time planning of their subordinates, it is also evident that employees themselves are often confronted with time priorities themselves. An advantage with projects seem to be the possibility of brigding different parts of the organisations to each other, and there is no clear-cut image of what a project is; projects are used for both repetitive and unique tasks. The multi-project environment is

rejected by most interviewees, at least where the individual work situation is concerned. Cultural differences between countries do exist in project work, but it is usual that they are avoided through the use of standardised methodologies. One last theme is work and family; project work is time-consuming and temporarily expanding into family life. These themes are all discussed in some length and detail below.

4.1 Project managers – leaders but not managers?

Most literature and most practictioners in the field of project management repeatedly claim that project management is a hard and complicated task that must be handled by professional project managers. Since Gaddis article in Harvard Business Review (1959), project management has thus been subject to an increasing professionalisation. As shown by Engwall (1995), this professionalisation is consciously driven by the project management community. For a profession to be called a profession, it is usually required that it has a common, systematic and scientific theoretical basis, some sort of formal approval, some degree of professional autonomy in everyday work, and a code of ethics (cf Lindgren, 2001). In the case of project management, there is a theoretical basis as standardised in PMBOK, the formal university degree PMP and attempts at a code of ethics[1]. Project management can thus be seen as some sort of "semi-profession" like general managers, even though they are specialised in managing temporary organisations (Ekstedt et al, 1999). An important part of this emerging identity is the view of project management as a managerial task, usually supported by descriptions of mega-projects much more complex and much bigger than most usual companies, divisions or departments. One example is the notion of "heavyweight project managers" in car industry product development (Clark et al, 1988, Midler, 1993). Program management, on the other hand, is not described as a more advanced or "managerial" speciality, just as a necessity in some cases where there is a multitude of small projects with a lot of interdependencies (Turner, 1999). To sum up, project management literature portrays project management as a managerial task and project managers as just as important as general managers.

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[1] All these examples is taken from PMI (Project Management Institute), the U.S.-based international association for project management practititoners and theorists. PMBOK stands for the Project Management Body Of Knowledge, a document defining and structuring project management knowlegde. Universities that use PMBOK as a sort of curriculum in master courses in project management can be given the right to issue PMP (Project Management Professional) degrees to their students.

In companies A and B it is obvious that project management is indeed considered a hard and complicated task, and there is a widespread agreement that project managers should be carefully selected. At the same time, project managers in these companies do not have managerial status-i.e. they are not formally considered as managers, they are rather seen as technical experts possessing skills enabling them to coordinate and facilitate project work. They have been seen as leaders, however, which means that they should be capable of motivating and stimulating individuals and teams. Project management is a task among other tasks in a project (cf Georges' notion of project leaders as captains in football teams), while the "real managers" fill different functions in the project context. In A there are team managers responsible for groups of experts sharing the same expertise, and business technology managers (BTMs) governing the project structure from business-related objectives. In B there are group managers responsible for departments and program managers responsible for sets of projects. All these are "real managers", either of people or objectives, while the project manager is the active, efficient individual that gets the job done. The most recent re-structuring of A, where a layer of "project managers" were inserted between the project leaders and the BTMs, is an indicator that the notion of the project mananager as a leader but not a manager will persist.

4.2 Career paths in project management – do they exist?

Given that project managers are leaders but not "real managers", the notion of careers should be of importance. One way of looking at careers in project-based work contexts is to take project work for granted and analyse career progress within that field. In a study of the movie industry, Jones (1996) describe such careers in terms of competence development and increasing seniority. When you are a newcomer to the industry you will have to work hard in any project that you can be let into, and if you are successful you will then have a more secure position and be able to start and manage your own projects. In the end, you can work with strategic matters concerning the whole project network and perhaps be able to get a life outside work. This is of course a career with a multitude of different employers, where the individual acts as subcontractor to projects rather than to organisations. In many ways, Jones (ibid.) claims, a project-based career is a kind of serial entrepreneurship where gained knowledge, reputation, social contacts and financial resources is gradually developed through a sequence of ventures. The drawback is of course that the

individual becomes a "loner", a constantly moving person without stable emotional relationships in the workplace (Garsten, 1999, Söderlund, 2000).

The project-based career is not, however, a phenomenon existing among free-lancing, self-employed individuals, it can also be found in the guise of formal employment in organisations (Arthur et al, 1999, Cadin et al, 2000). As an employee in a project-based organisation, you might work full-time just as everyone else, but your work actually consists of handling various projects, in sequence and/or in parallel. Firms can also be seen as frameworks allowing for individuals to develop themselves in a project-like manner (Freeman & Gilbert, 1988). And there is also the possibility that individuals perceive their work progress in terms of projects even though they have not been formally involved in any, since their retrospective career story is organised as a sequence of important episodes and steps (Arthur et al, 1999). In that case, the project-based career is a narrative construct made out by the individual for the purpose of making sense of past events, a construct that becomes most important for the individuals' further actions. It should be mentioned, however, that the construction of past personal projects is just one possible narrative style when individuals make sense of their work life; the style of narrating is sometimes just as important as the contents of narratives when we try to understand an individual (cf Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001).

All individuals in the study are full-time employees, which means that they have a stable workplace and that they are not dependent on single projects for earning their living. They also share a quite traditional image of work life progress as upward mobility, i.e. that a career imply promotions to higher hierarchical levels, with increased responsibilities, managerial duties, financial rewards and better status. For people working by projects, this means that if you want a career, then you must at some stage leave the projects and assume a traditional managerial role. This is most evident in company A, where a system with 15 different levels is employed. Alain, the only scientist having reached level 13, is the sole example of an individual actually becoming a director without becoming a traditional executive. Gerald has his own suggestion concerning an alternative career path, but it is a career path for engineers as technical specialists, not as project-working professionals. In company B the career paths are less structured, but the same basic message appears; if you are going to make a career, then you must become a manager. In B there is actually some possibilities of promoting successful project workers; they can become

project leaders and program managers, but then there are only traditional managerial posts available.

One might of course ask the question if this is actually a problem. Most project workers in the study seemed quite content with their work progession, and it also seemed that those who wanted promotion could also get it if they performed well. The problem, as we see it, is not that project-working individuals cannot get promoted (they can), but that it seems to exist a widespread notion that a career is the same thing as upward mobility and that excellence in project-based work is not the main prerequisite for such upward mobility. When Georges describe how difficult it is to become a program manager in B, he is actually trying to convey the image that it is just as good to be a program manager as it is to be a director in the functional structure. And when Marc and Pierre complain about their actual degradation in the newly implemented structure in A, they are most aware that most of the jobs over them in the hierarchy are reserved for business-people rather than engineers. Even though careers in modern work life are better characterised by cycling, spiralling and boundary-crossing mobility that by upward mobility inside single hierarchical pyramids (Arthur et al, 1999, Lindgren et al, 2001) this has not entered the cultures of most modern corporations. In an organisation where upward mobility is the prime sign of success, those wanting recognition for project-based success might have to wait for a long time.

When it comes to the use of projects as a narrative style in making sense of career progression, the individuals differ quite a lot. The individuals in A, who have all been working almost exclusively by projects for many years do not describe their progression in terms of projects, rather as a series of positions. This is also the case for Sophie, who is the most obvious case of a project worker among the interviewees in B. The other individuals in B – Edith, Paul, Jacques and Georges – has spent most of their time in traditional managerial positions, but they tend to be more inclined to describe their work progress in terms of projects. This is especially obvious where Paul and Jacques, the production managers, are concerned; they both refer to big complicated change projects as an important source of experience and good practice. Is this perhaps an unexpected paradox – people working by projects describe their work life in terms of employment, while people working by positions tend to make sense of their progress in terms of projects?

4.3 Managing time: Managerial or individual responsibility?

One of the most evident key variables in project work is time. Projects usually aim at the completion of specific, extraordinary objectives with an identifiable end-point. Usually, the relevant end-point is not the end-time but rather the actual completion of the project task (a house without a roof is useless), but the end-point is nevertheless always expressed in terms of end-time. By having identified an end-time from the beginning, the project can be carefully planned and executed in an efficient manner. For the owner of the project, the end-time is when the desired result of the project can be taken over and utilised in further development. Since the project is also subject to demands on low costs and high quality (Meredith & Mantel, 2000), this means that projects are always in some sort of hurry, and that time-consuming mistakes should be avoided by all means. From an individual perspective, a problem of project work is thus how this time-related pressure can be handled, and by who it should be handled (cf DeMarco, 1997).

The traditional standpoint is that reasonable time limits can and should be handled by the project manager. In fact, methods for estimating, planning and monitoring time in projects are one of the most distinct features of project management knowledge. This means that the planner shall be able to avoid unnecessary mistakes, risks and disruptions, and that the individual project worker should feel reasonably confident that the project will be like a normal job. Most interviewees agree with this; projects must be well-planned and it is the responsibility of the manager to make sure that the flexibility and the extra energy that most individuals bring into the project situation is not taken for granted and/or over-utilised. This is especially important where those employees who are subject to legislation on maximum work hours are concerned, but it is of course also an important issue for everyone in the project. Realistic planning makes project work just like ordinary work, this line of reasoning seems to suggest.

At the same time, it is clear that it is not only a managerial responsibility to handle the consequences of time limits. Among the interviewees, there are two lines of reasoning pointing at the individual as responsible for his/her own performance. The first one concerns the managerial idea to put unrealistic demands on people in projects (cf Christensen & Kreiner, 1997). By setting a target unrealistically high, project members are forced to come up with new and creative ideas in order to reach it – if they use well-known

methods and refine current practices, they will fail. From the individual's perspective, this will of course mean time pressure. This pressure can only be alleviated through actually solving the problem, or admitting to the project manager that a failure has occurred. Even though such project work can be quite stimulating – and lead to a deep sense of work satisfaction in case of success – it is also clear that the individual has to assume a high degree of personal risk (cf Sennett, 1998). It is rarely the risk of loosing the job in case of failure, rather it is a risk emerging in the intersection between a high probability to fail and a high emotional investment in the project. As an individual you are responsible for solving seemingly unsolvable dilemmas, and to do that on your own. It is a managerial practice that put high demands on the manager's ability to recognise ambitious work and be fair when evaluating failures.

When presented to this problem for the individual, some of the interviewees go on by saying that time pressure is not only something that emanates from the project manager and is imputed to the employee. The employee is always responsible for performing his/her tasks within a reasonable amount of time, and according to most modern managerial principles and theories on work satisfaction individuals like to be autonomous and responsible for their own work. Managers cannot monitor how individuals use their work time, it is something the individual must do by him/herself. Some individuals are better suited for project work than others; they can plan their work hours, they make the right priorities, they work intensively when needed and they keep their work situation in order. It is an almost general agreement among all interviewees that many of the late nights and weekends spent in the office during a project is caused by bad planning and irrational priorities on the individual's behalf.

What is also interesting is the continuing emergence of some sort of "middle class" at the workplace, people sharing the executives' educational background and total commitment to the job, but who in terms of financial benefits and influence are just ordinary employees. At the same time they cannot claim to be a part of work hour legislation like traditional "blue-collar workers", and they are thus expected to work until the work is done. In this category we find many of the project workers today.

4.4 Project work: Living between technology and business?

A usual comment among the interviewees is that project work is a way of putting otherwise separated parts of the organisation together for a limited

time. To implement a complex task, people from different functional areas are needed, and from this temporary concentration of otherwise dispersed people, change evolves. The drawback is of course that projects – and, consequently, the concentration of people – is temporary and thereby might not influence long-term relations in the organisation. (Blomquist & Packendorff, 1998)

One of the main applications of the project form of work is R&D (cf Gaddis, 1959, Clark et al, 1988, Midler, 1993, Adler, 1999), which usually aims at developing technological solutions to existing problems in the market. While R&D and marketing is usually functionally separated in most organisations, it must be integrated in some way in order to ensure that technological development is linked to customer needs. Since the project is temporary by nature, an integration in the form of a project team does not mean that the functional structure is set aside, but that it nevertheless becomes an arena where important brigding between specialities can take place (Anderson & Larsson, 1998)

For the individuals involved in this study, brigding happens in different ways. In company A there has always been a clear functional separation between business (i.e. marketing and customer contacts) and technology (i.e. production and R&D), and Marc, Irene and Pierre agree that a main benefit with the project-based structure was that technical project leaders reported directly to the business technology manager (BTM). To them, the functional separation is something taken for granted, and the project stands for a kind of permanent matrix situation where engineers driving R&D can be direcly linked to marketing issues. A similar – but temporary – impact can be found in B, where ideas on new R&D projects in Sophie's area of responsibility must be closely linked to the market via the formal approval process in the program management process. The change projects led by Paul and Jacques is also involves this kind of brigdging, in the way that the internal short-term perspective of everyday manufacturing is temporarily replaced by a long-term perspective in which the production organisation is analysed in the light of customer needs and competition in the market.

4.5 Project work: Routine or exception?

A key element in almost all existing definitions of projects is that projects are unique, once-in-a-lifetime events, the opposites of routines and economices of scale in permanent organisational settings (Packendorff, 1993, 1995). While this might be historically true – many of the projects

usually referred to as landmarks in the annals of project management were indeed quite unique – projects of today can be seen as both unique and repetitive, both explorative and exploitative (Packendorff, 1993, Engwall, 1995, Blomberg, 1998). And even though the single project task can be seen as unique, it is not unusual that more or less standardised procedures or methodologies are used. The notion of uniqueness is of interest from an individual perspective, since it should seriously affect how individuals perceive their work and how they enact the projects.

Among the individuals, there are descriptions of all sorts of project situations, from projects looking quite like ongoing departmental work to almost unique renewal projects. In company A we find Marc, Irene and Pierre, who has been working as project leaders in a project-based structure with projects that seem similar to small departments. One example is Irene, whose objective is to support and develop the polyethylene plant, and who acts as project leader for a project with a yearly resource of three man-years distributed on eight persons. The project is not unique in itself, since it is an ongoing project, and it has no general deadline. However, it contains a number of small improvement issues that differ from time to time. Irene's way of reasoning sounds almost like a departmental manager, except for the project-like vocabulary on teams, deadlines, cross-functionality, plans etc. She is responsible for the development of the plant, and in her position she has been given a project as a tool for living up to that responsibility.

In company B, there are standardised R&D projects and non-standardised renewal projects. The R&D-projects, as they are described by Sophie, are handled in a routinised way, but there are always unique risks and unsecurities that are connected to technical progress. All projects are subject to fixed deadlines and budget restrictions, which means that the team will have to work until the project is finished on time and budget. Concerning the renewal projects (e.g. Jacques's business process reengineering project) they are entirely unique even though they are built from a general theoretical model. Such projects are mostly about changing people, and that makes each procedure (and also each set or objectives) unique. Jacques is also the most obvious example of a narrative where projects are described as hard, dynamic, risky and exciting experiences.

4.6 The virtue of the single project

From an individual perspective, the project is not necessarily the single work place at any point in time. In an organisational context consisting of a

multitude of projects in combination with a permanent structure, the individual is not likely to be exposed to only one project (cf Engwall & Sjögren Källqvist, 2000). Depending on the qualifications of the individual, one might expect that he/she would be involved in several projects in parallel besides also taking care of ongoing tasks in the permanent organisational context. The consequences of such a work life might be devastating for the individual; stress, coordination problems, multiple reporting duties, lack of autonomy etc.

Among the interviewees, there is a widespread agreement that individuals should only be committed to one project at the time. This rule is usually also followed where project managers are concerned. It also works the other way around, i.e. that there is always one single person accountable for each project. The reason given is that it is better for the project manager to focus on one issue at the time instead of splitting attention into several ones. The same reasoning is applied also to project participants, but here there are some diverging views. According to Irene and Gerald, most technicians want to handle different projects in sequence, and they are quite reluctant to perform experiments for several projects in parallel. At the same time, most small projects cannot afford to employ all necessary specialists on full-time basis. From an egoistic standpoint, the project manager then wants each person to work at least 50% for his/her own project, but the most practical solution for everyone is to have an equal degree of commitment to each project notwithstanding the actual distribution of work hours. In case an individual ends up with priority problems, it is formally the responsible managers that should solve the dilemma, but quite often it is the individual him/herself that instead add some extra work hours and put up with conflicting orders from different managers.

A multi-project environment is not only a problem of parallel tasks, it is actually also a problem of sequential tasks. An individual having worked hard for several weeks to meet a project deadline might find it difficult to attack another challenging project task the day after. For example, Sophie says that when an employee has been working hard on a difficult project, it is wise management to assign that employee to an easier and not so cutting-edge project the next time. Jacques is of the opinion that it is important to finish projects in a good way so that people feel recognised and successful, otherwise it will be hard to motivate them for a new project. While the individual should only work wih one project at the time, the impact of previous and upcoming projects must thus be carefully considered. The

notion of mixing "easy" and "though" projects in the path of the individual might, however, come into conflict with other priorities. If a project experience has been rewarding and successful for the individual – e.g. in terms of competence development, a technical innovation or career progess – it would be tempting both for the individual and the organisation to go on with another challenging project in order to further utilise the achieved results.

4.7 Cultural differences in project practices – a comment

As noted in the introduction to this report, it appears that while project management is presented as a general theory and a set of practices that are the same all over the world (Packendorff, 1995), many of the features of project work should be subject to cultural differences. Like many other fields of knowledge in modern management, project management is likely to suffer from american parochialism, i.e. that the theory is constructed in a specific cultural context but presented as if it was a general truth (cf Adler, 1991). Even though this study is not a comparative one in the sense that specific French attributes of project management is highlighted, we still want to make some small remarks on cultural differences in project work departing from the individual narratives.

One way of reasoning about this is to use the classical cultural dimensions of Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961). Project management rests upon a notion of individuals as both good and evil, both static and dynamic, while there are many cultures in which individuals are seen as non-changeable at all. Projects are also an expression of domination over nature – by careful and ingenious planning man is able to do even what seeems impossible. In other cultures, people perceive distinct limits for what the human being can do or they might even claim that man should not try to alter nature. Project work also implies a kind of individualistic team work, a focus on action and open-space interaction, and a clear emphasis on future deadlines rather than on traditions and past history. In all these dimensions, it seem that project management conform to a Western way of perceiving work and organisation. An example of the consequences of such differing perceptions is offered by Adler (1991: 43):

"Perhaps these different beliefs explain some potential problems when Americans work with Indonesians. Americans typically approach a project by outlining the overall goal and each of the major steps and then addressing staffing needs. Indonesians, on the other hand, first need to

know who will manage the project and who will work on it. Once they know the hierarchy of people involved, they can assess the project's feasability. Both cultures need to understand the project's goals and staffing arrangements, but the importance of each is reversed. An American would rarely discuss who will be the project director before at least broadly defining the project, while an Indonesian would rarely discuss the feasability of a project before knowing who will be its leader."

A similar observation is made by Lindbergh & Sandström (1997) who studied a big international project led by a major Swedish corporation. According to the managers interviewed in their study, there were different notions of time (the Spanish partners worked with a much closer planning horizon than did the Swedes) and also of managerial style (Americans were described as success-oriented, Swedes as problem-oriented and the British as cooperation-oriented). Another way of analysing cultural differences in project practices is to use the well-known dimensions of Hofstede (1991):

- Power distance. In culures with a small perceived power distance, the project might serve as a collaboration between equals where it is up to everyone to take initiatives and contribute with new ideas and perspectives. In other cultures there is a big prower distance, i.e. the project manager is expected to take all initiatives and issue decrees and orders.
- Collectivism - individualism. In some cultures, the project team might act as a coordinated organism, while in others it is perceived by its members as a consortium of individuals with individual goals and differing fields of expertise.
- Femininity – masculinity. In some cultures the project team can function as a democratic unit emphasising consensus and the general well-being of members. The most common view, however, is that the project is an efficient task force where the objective is the main concern.
- Uncertainty avoidance. In cultures characterised by a low degree of uncertainty avoidance, project work can be described as an exploratory and tolerant form of organising, while in cultures of high uncertainty avoidance it might be a disciplined, well-planned execution of activities.
- Long-term – short-term. In some cultures, the project cannot be isolated from its temporal context, i.e. it is seen as just another aspect of the eternal flow of events. In others it might be easier to focus on what will happen during the project period, thereby neglecting the project's pre-history and intended posterity.

Most interviewees seem to agree that there are cultural differences in project work, but that one generally try to avoid their practical consequences. This is most clearly put by Jacques, who says that cultural differences can never be an excuse for lower performance, and Georges, who says that all procedures must be standardised notwithstanding specific cultural characteristics. There is a general belief in standardised methodologies for project work, even though it seems that different individuals within the same company have different views on what methology that is actually the standard operating procedure.

Most examples of how project work differs between cultures concern relationships between people in the projects. Gerald describes the different professional identities of French and British engineers, and deducts different approaches to difficult innovation work from this (French engineers try to solve the whole problem, while the British focus on the parts of the problem that can be related to their own speciality). He have mixed feelings about that the French management style is more paternalistic than the British one, but he also says that that the possibility of adopting such a style is a major advantage of work in developing countries.

According to Edith, French people tend to be proud and arrogant, especially those in the south of France. They have a very masculine appearance, and usually separate work life and family life. Paul says that there is usually a tendency of anarchy in many project teams, since people promise a lot of things that they do not live up to and are not afraid of open conflicts. He compares this to German teams, where all work take place according to detailed plans, and British teams, where most conflicts are actually solved before meetings so that consensus can be maintained.

5. Projects as work form and life form: A gender perspective

In section 4.3 above, the notion of working conditions in projects as a combination between managerial and clerk work was introduced in the analysis of project as a work form. When turning towards analysing project as a life form, it is evident that such working conditions should also affect the entire life of the individual. Project work is like managerial work in the sense that it implies responsibilities and non-standardised work hours, but it is also like "clerk work" in the sense that it implies limited authority and specific work contents. As a life form, projects can then be seen as a kind of ongoing entrepreneurship; time-consuming, exciting but not always rewarding.

The notion of the time aspect in research on managers' life forms is well recognised. Jakobsen & Karlsson (1993) claim that managers and entrepreneurs have different life forms, but that they are alike in the sense that work hours are the same thing as the time needed to get the job well done. In order to combine such flexibility with the constant time needed for family life, the manager must have some help (i.e. a wife, a nanny, a grandmother) who can devote extra time to the family with the same flexibility with which the manager expands his/hers work hours. In practice, that partner is nowadays usually also pursuing some sort of career, which means that many individuals become squeezed between non-decreasing demands on the work hours needed to maintain a managerial job, and the increasing demands on the hours needed to care for the family caused by the partner also having to work long hours. Jacobs & Gerson (2000) claim that people are not working so much more today than in the past, but that new conditions in workplaces and society has nevertheless created a widespread sense of being overworked:

"Some workers, especially among the well-educated in the professional and managerial sectors, are facing enormous pressures to work more than they or their families would wish. They face severe constraints on working less and real penalties if they choose to do so. Other workers, and especially those with little education and limited white-collar skills, face the opposite problem – how to find enough work with sufficient pay to support their families and build a sense of security at home. (p. 93)

This description is also supported by the detailed empirical studies of managers' life forms made by Andersson (1993). The families studied

tended to divide the year into work periods and holidays, and during work periods most time went into work. The out-of-work time during work periods was limited (late evenings and weekends), and most of it was devoted to raising the children. The time left for developing the maritial relationship was very small, and so was the few hours available for friends, community work and just relaxing. The partner with the highest amount of work hours (usually the husband) did not try to work less in terms in time, but they tried not to move around so much when the children was very young, and they also tried to devote the time at home to those at home instead of working in the study. As Edith says, long work hours is an important factor behind the divorce statistics.

Even though there has been no extensive research on the life forms of project working individuals, the notion of time scarcity appears in several empirical descriptions of project organising. Project deadlines imply frequent outbursts of intense work periods (cf Christensen & Kreiner, 1997, DeMarco, 1997, Kadefors, 1997, Söderlund, 1998, Lindgren & Packendorff, 2001), which means that individuals in the project teams sometimes will have to work evenings and weekends in order to get the job done on time. This is also supported by some of the interviewees; Alain, Marc and Sophie all say that stress and long work hours before deadlines is not an unusual feature in project work. Others, like Irene and Georges, think that deadline stress might occur, but that good planning and monitoring is a good way to prevent such things from happening. A third category, personified by Jacques, claims that some stress and long hours can happen in projects if the task is challenging enough. And if the project is not challenging enough, it should be redefined.

In the analysis of life forms, the gender perspective is essential (Jakobsen & Karlsson, 1993, Lindgren, 2001). Life forms are constituted by institutional structures in society, structures that are reproduced by men and women in their everyday life, and these structures are closely related to what is seen as masculine and feminine. The traditional notion of men as workers and women as housewives implied a division of labour that is not so obvious today, but it still forms expectations on how men and women should behave at work and/or at home. What happens in organisations (e.g. management, technology) is still constructed as masculine phenomena, while what happens at home (e.g. nursing, providing, supporting) is still considered to be feminine. When men and women live in traditional life forms (i.e. as employee and housewife), the notions of masculinities and femininities become obvious because of physical separation and entirely

different life content. When men and women are both working in organisational settings, masculinities and femininities are constructed in daily interaction both at the workplace and in the family. We will therefore briefly revisit the stories of the interviewees in order to analyse in what way they express masculinities and femininities in their narratives – both at work and at home.

5.1 The individual stories from a gender perspective

5.1.1 Alain – a masculine sceptic

Alain, who has been more or less threwn out of the company, express some scepticism concerning the project form of working. Projects mean short-sightedness, he says, and he thinks that what once made the R&D division at A successful was the absence of short-sightedness. The increased "projectification" of the organisation has also implied a changed view of the R&D division; when all research is project-based, projects could actually be bought from external sources rather than being produced by an expensive in-house bureaucracy.

To Alain, the old hierarchic structure was a nice place to be. His notion of hierarchies is a traditional masculine one; they mean that all people know what they are supposed to do, whose direction they are supposed to follow and what criteria they will be evaluated against. In the new project-based structure this is not always clear, and not all people are suited for this new work context. Project work requires efficiency and expedience all the time, and that is a notion of masculinity that Alain feels sceptic about.

5.1.2 Marc – rationality, influence and careerism

For Marc, his work and his position as a project leader is most important. He thinks that the new organisational structure where the project leaders are disconnected from the business managers is a shame, since the motivating factor of being close to the business has now disappeared. He can also see a risk that business and practice are detached from each other again, slowing the information flow in the company. Such consequences must be avoided, he exclaims. Concerning his family life, he does not see it as relevant for his work. But when asked, he tells us that he lives in nearby A-sur-mer with his wife and two small children. Most employees at A live

in the area to be close to work and to avoid the traffic jams around the larger towns in the area. In the near future, he is going abroad for some work, and will take his family with him.

In his way of reasoning, Marc is reproducing many traditional masculinities of organisational life. He feels motivated by being influential and connected to the areas where the money is made (i.e. the business areas), and he does not like the thought of not having access to all important information. He does not include his family in his story (we had to ask about it), and he thinks that it is natural for his wife and children to move with him when he change job.

5.1.3 Irene – femininities in a masculine context

Irene starts out by pointing out that she has a prestigeous education from a *grand école*, which can be a manifestation of her need to be legitimate in a masculine environment. Like many other employees, she lives in A-sur-mer with her family, and she think that they will remain there. Her husband is working for another chemical company nearby. To her, his job is a natural excuse for her not to assume a position anywhere else. It does not seem possible for the moment to do so, since it would be hard to find a job for her husband. Their children (4 and 7 years old) would be less a problem. She says that she and he husband has deciced that they shall both work full-time without sacrificing family life, and they do not wand to end up in a situation where one of them would have to stay at home. It works fine, she says, but after spending time at work and spending time with the family there are not any time left for herself. And it is the same thing for her husband.

When speaking about project work, she is most concerned with human behaviour. Her task as a project leader is decribed in terms of her social coordination function, and she tries to adapt her project planning to the private lives of her team members. To her, project leadership is a question of motivating people; technicians do not like to work with several studies and several managers in parallel, so she must motivate them go give her tasks priority. Otherwise they will finish the current study before going on to the next one. Her experience is that it is important to give the technicians direct responsibility for the studies, because that usually makes them feel much more motivated to assume difficult tasks. Even if it is advantageous to give technicians responsibilities, you must still take your responsibility

as a manager so that their workloads are reasonable. She says that everyone should be able to do their work in normal hours, and if there should be delays she must try to alleviate the situation by contacting her superiors. Sometimes they have to work in weekends, but that is always planned for in advance, never a fast solution to an urgent problem. Her view of planning is that it should be realistic so that there will never be any problems with deadlines, stress or work overload. Technicians might become quite upset if something like that should happen. She also monitors all activities in her project each week to make sure that nothing is lagging behind. Setting unrealistically high demands on employees is nothing she recommends, since a repeated use of such a philosophy would cause a lack of motivation in the team. She tries to care about her staff and contribute to their technical competence development.

5.1.4 Pierre – modernising masculinities

Pierre thinks that project-based work has many advantages in terms of traditional masculine rationality and hierarchical simplicity. One such advantage is that people from different technical fields meet, solve problems together and create team spirit. Another advantage is that most work becomes focused on clear objectives. Pierre thinks that project-based work has been good for him; he has more autonomy and freedom in his work now than before. He knows what is needed in the business, and he acts according to that. In practice, however, there might appear situations where the individual feel surrounded by several managers giving diverging orders, wondering who is actually the boss.

Most people in the organisation seem to be able to combine work life and personal life, and Pierre says that the implementation of the project-based structure did not affect this. When he starts a project, he draws up a list of competencies needed, and then he negotiates with the group leaders in order to get the right individuals. Team members shall be competent when they enter the project; it is the task of the group leader to support their competence development. Most people develop themselves as technical specialists, but some choose to assume managerial responsibilities through becoming project leaders. Pierre says that he prefers going on as a project leader in the future. He might consider other job offers, but it has to be advantageous for his career development and possible to combine with his personal life. His wife is an accountant at another company in the area, and must also find another job in that case. In this way, Pierre reproduces a

feminine way of thinking about the relationship between work, marriage and family.

5.1.5 Gerald – rational scientist doing his duty

His self-definition is solely based on his profession; a scientist. The scientific profession is described in masculine and rational terms. Scientists are trained to be objective, he says, and that is something that is rarely demanded from managers. Managers and scientists are totally different professions, and it is accepted that managers are subjective by nature. He says that it is very important to have the best catalyst on the market, and he thinks that his job is most interesting.

The project-based structure inplemented in 1993 was a far too clumsy a system, with a single BTM monitoring 50 project leaders. The advantage, as Gerald sees it, was that scientists were left on their own without close supervision, they could do what they wanted. His argument here is based on a self-understanding where innovation at work is dependent on his freedom from disturbing contexts and independence of other people. There is a need for senior scientists in the organisation, he thinks, i.e. independent people who can do what they want without being limited by narrow-minded mangers.

When he moved down from Scotland in 1983 he was 40 years old, and since they could not find suitable secondary schools for their children, his wife and children stayed in the UK. He is down in France on his own, he says, and he is convinced that they made the right decision on this matter. His reasoning in this matter reflects a traditional masculine notion of work as the most important things in life (it appears that his French colleagues are better off financially than he is, so the money could not have been the main priority either).

5.1.6 Edith – feminine position in a masculine context

Edith do not speak so much about project work (even though she is actually running several change projects in B), she is rather concerned with the problems of relating HRM work (a traditional feminine managerial profession) to fast growth in a hi tech company. It is not issues on technology or business she is trying to change, but rather the conditions for

the employees. As a Human Resource Management professional her task is to see to that all people in B can give their best in their daily work despite all ongoing changes. She says that some years ago, the need for restructuring the company was urgent. The organisation was like a spaghetti plate, expanding in all directions, leaving a lot of employees with multiple reporting duties and ambiguous rules. After implementing the program management structure – a change project that required a lot of efforts - the organisation is still a bit chaotic, but there is consistency and strategies behind.

One part of her work is to coach managers to help them in their professional development. It appears that most managers she meet refuse to talk about their personal life, especially older (male) managers. She says that she finds this old-fashioned and that an individual is not two separate persons, one at work and one at home. She thinks that in Sweden, the distance between work and the rest of life is not as big as in France. Her way of reasoning here is typically feminine by nature, aiming for the integration of work and private life (cf Lindgren, 2001).

To Edith, the (former) CEO Marcel is the key to understanding the corporate culture in B. She describes Marcel as a patriarch, a dynamic and high-performing older man who has resigned without assigning any predecessor. Marcel is a virtual CEO, she says. In the beginning, everyone was very close to him, and he threw numeorus parties and events all the time. Now, people still knows who he is, but he don't know everyone as he used to do. He is upset by that, Edith says, but he also understands that it can never be like it used to be again. She characterises him as "old-fashioned", and give examples such as his obsession with exactly following given hours of work; he can not understand how people can arrive too late and stay on in evenings. At the same time as he strictly follows rules on work hours, he also gives a lot of freedom to those he really trust. Marc is a most visionary man, she says, always in the future, always working. In that way, Marcel is the archetype of the impressively strong and energetic entrepreneur, a most masculine archetype.

The staff is young – average age in the company is 32 years – and very typical for the region (a region acknowledged for its masculine heritage); proud, arrogant, outgoing individualists. The company is male-dominated; while there are no women in the executive committee and only about 10% on the level below, it is 50/50 on the production shop floor.

Edith says that project managers are not seen as leaders, merely as conciliators or coordinators, and they usually do not want to be reminded of that. To be a real leader you should have a managerial position and have a strong and pushy personality. She thinks that there is too much masculine toughness built into the notion of leadership in B, and that senior management use expressions like "virility" when describing leadership. "A career" is still the same thing as moving upwards in the managerial hierarchy, even though there are also formal expert career paths used to keep specialists in the company. She thinks that it is a hard task to manage projects and that project management should be a career in itself, but there seem to be a widespread notion in B that project management is not something hard or advanced. That is a mistake, Edith exclaims.

People work a lot in B, she says, and it seems to be a (masculine) ideal to do so. Those that are affected by the new legislation on the 35-hour week are now given 22 extra days of vacation each year. The first proposal, that everyone should leave one hour earlier each day, was rejected by the employees, who claimed that they would stay the whole day anyway. And when the extra 22 days were added to their vacations, many felt that they did not know how to spend them. According to the culture, they should arrive no later than 8.30 and be accessible at work until 19 o'clock. We want them to stop at 20, Edith says, but many stay until 21. It is not accepted to arrive at 9 in the morning, and if you leave before 19 people would think that you were not doing your job. It is clear that this way of perceiving work hours is not adapted to people trying to combine work with childcare or other interests. It is a masculine work context, designed by men for those who accept traditional masculinities in work life.

Edith also tells us that she feel a bit distant to the French culture, since her parents were foreigners. Earlier in her career she worked with HRM issues at another IT company, and she has also worked as a teacher. She says that she wants to be in control of her life instead of being controlled by others (to many men this might be less important as long as they are viewed as successful), but that she always reminds herself that unexpected things can happen. A lot of people want to control their lives, but they forget that they cannot have 100% control. So when a small problem appear, they feel it is a serious disturbance of their life plans. The result is, for example, divorces; one couple of three in France is divorcing, and in Paris it is every second couple. In the big cities women are more demanding and not so dependent on their husbands, she says.

5.1.7 Paul – always on duty

Paul describes his work as demanding and time-consuming. Production is going on all the time in the factory, so he has always something going on within his area of responsibility. He has been moving around between different companies and facilities throughout his career, and seem to find it natural to do so. He works about 12 hours every day, usually visits the factory once every weekend, and once a month he participates in the night shift. Since production is always going on, he must always be available, but he means that this is natural given his position as a manager and the economic benefits connected to this position. Work thus occupy more than 50% of his life (sleeping time included), and it also has to be flexible in the sense that he must always be ready to deal with upcoming issues.

He lives in a small town close to B-ville with his wife and his three children. The two elder children (now ten and eight years old) moved with them to Germany and Great Britain and went to school and kindergarten there. He mainly sees this as advantageous for them, since they picked up two foreign languages. His wife was also pursuing a career of her own when he worked at Thomson, but when he got a job in Germany it appeared to be hard to find a job for her there. In combination with the fact that they then had two small children, it led to the joint decision that she should take the main responsibility for them during the stay in Germany. When they moved back to B-ville the second time in 1999, she gave birth to a third child, which has meant that she has stayed at home with the children and he has adapted to very long work hours. It takes him 20 minutes to drive from B to his house, and he thinks that living in a small town is the best thing for the family, not least for the children. The two elder children are becoming increasingly oriented towards friends and activities outside home, and he thinks that if the family should go abroad again, it must be when they are much older than today. In a way, Paul has realised that he cannot move his family around right now, but that is a problem that will be solved as the children grow older.

5.1.8 Jacques – the high-performing masculine executive

At the time of the interview, Jacques has just been asked to take a managerial post in Singapore for at least three years. He will leave quite soon, bringing his wife and three children with him. There is always a shortage of qualified employees in B, and as soon as something new

happens they start to look inside the organisation to find the right people. He looks forward to the move, and thinks that the children will benefit from learning a new language and understand a new culture. His wife will take responsibility for the children, so he thinks that it will work out all right for the family. After accepting the job, he thus try to find arguments for the other members of the family (he do not mention his wife here, though).

Jacques then goes on by telling us about the main project of his career in B, a project that he describes in terms like "exciting" and "amazing". The story about the business process reengineering project is essentially a male one, a description of brave goals, hard work, tough leadership and proud success. "I give them the task, they work hard, and afterwards they are very proud of themselves. We close the group officially, invite some people, give recognition, go out for a nice lunch, and then we do something else." Projects should not be too long, he thinks, since team members might become tired and loose focus.

Jacques assures us that all this did not mean that his employees work additional hours on the average as compared to before. There is always a phase in a project when the team works hard and feel uncomfortable, he says, but when the work starts to pay off, everybody become proud. Normal work is not very efficient, and since people are very efficient when they work in projects they will not have to work additional hours. Project work is a way of making people reflect over old bad habits.

Jacques also find mistakes devastating; to him project management is an exercise in prestige. Management has a big responsibility for the success of projects, he says. If a change project fail, it will be hard to motivate people to do it again. He also admits that he left out two years in his initial career narrative, obviously because these years were spent in an unsuccessful organisation in which he had difficulties in reaching his goals. His initial narrative is thus a construct of success, a masculine account of a career trajectory moving forwards and upwards. Jacques has an individualistic view of project management, in which he is the center of success.

5.1.9 Sophie – a successful adaptor to masculinity

Sophie's narrative is an account of a successful career, but also of a high-performing life both at work and at home. She is an engineer who has

become a young female manager in a male-dominated company. At the same time, she is a modern mother with responsibility for her child. Her husband works at B in one of the production departments, and they have a three-year old daughter. She thinks that working hours for parents with small children is an important issue in B due to the rapid expansion of the company. Usually she works all day, picks up her daughter at the baby-sitter at 18.45 and goes home. After putting her asleep, she works again. Weekends are usually also needed to get the work done. In addition, she travels to Canada every two weeks. She does not complain about this, she says; it is a part of her job as a manager and she can handle it. She is fully adapted to the masculine way of working, and has been rewarded in terms of position, salary and status.

Sophie thinks that there is still need for much improvement in how people work in B. Given the current efficiency, too much efforts are put in by the employees, she says. In general, people working in projects are always under pressure, and they all work long hours. About eight to six weeks before delivery, the project teams start to work even harder. Herself, she works about 60 hours a week, and she thinks that most project teams are not far behind in this respect.

In her new position as a group manager, she is not working actively in projects anymore, but her long experience of project work was an important qualification behind her promotion. A project manager must be rigourous, good at communicating and having the ability to see beyond the day-to-day work in the project team. Most project managers are actually more coordinators than they are leaders, but as the size, the risk and the strategic importance of the project increases, so do the demands on leadership abilities. If you are a program manager, coordinating a number of different projects, you must be a strong leader. In her group, a project manager is always working on one project at the time on a full-time basis, and that goes for the team members as well. She does not belive in working with several projects in parallel; it is more time-consuming and less efficient (apparently a feminine notion among the interviewees, despite the taken-for-granted capacity of women of being able to handle several things at one time).

In her group, 80% of the employees are men, and it seems that even though she likes to work with women, it is hard for her to be a role-model of "feminine behaviour". It is difficult to find women because of the technical skills needed, she says, and that goes all the way back to the technical

universities where most students are men. When she set up her management team in October, she started out to recruit a program manager and a marketing manager, and it appeared that 80% of the applications were sent in by men. She wants more women, she says, and thinks that the development in this direction is encouraging but very slow.

Her perception of femininity is a positive one, but also based in traditional sterotypes. Women have sensibilities that men lack, she says, they are more pleasant to work with, and they are usually very professional. The industry is dominated by men, and to make a career women must prove that they are even better. She thinks that due to structures in society it is hard for French women to combine professional life, wife life and mother life in a satisfying way. It is much easier for women without children, she says, but for men the question of children is rarely even raised.

Her views of project work, careers and deadlines are dominated by masculine notions of rationality, hierarchy and managerialism. People working by projects should feel that they are progressing, she thinks. If you are a technical expert there you can become a senior technician and become involved in strategic technical issues. If you are a project manager, you can become a senior project manager, taking on responsibility for larger and more difficult projects. A deadline is a commitment to both customers and colleagues within the company, and that must always be respected. In the two previous organisations in which she worked, deadlines were taken much more seriously, and she claims that the lack of structure was a consequence of the rapid growth of B. Management had to see to that everything necessary was done on a day-to-day basis, and there were no time to organise things thoroughly. An increased respect for deadlines will not mean extra work for people, she says; work will be smarter and more efficient, but not necessarily more time-consuming. It is true that people rush from project to project, but if the manager has some common sense he can see to that people having delivered a challenging project can be assigned an easier one the next time. It is most important that individuals in B feel motivated, so she tries not to put a lot of pressure on people all the day, every day.

5.1.10 Georges – engineer of work and life

Georges only want to talk about his position as a program manager, and he do not see any reason to include himself as a person in the narrative. He is

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also most concerned about the usefulness of the interview to B – if it is useless, he could devote the hour to something more useful. His view of the organisation is that it is a dynamic system that must be shaped into perfection, and he is one of the executive engineers that will make it happen. He is self-assured and confident, but at the same time a humble servant to the shareholders of B.

Georges compares program management to the coaching of a football team (a popular masculine metaphor); the team consist of a number of skilled experts, and they have a captain, the project manager. But success can only be ensured when you have someone sitting beside the field. That guy is the coach, the program manager, making the strategy. You need to have experts on the field, managers on the field, but beside you need to have someone looking at it from another perspective, Georges concludes. You can try to to have a football team without a coach, it migh even work fine, but only as long as no problem appear.

In his world of organisational rationality, his program management process is the solution to all well-known problems of project implementation. Late projects where people work days and nights is the opposite situation to program management, he asserts. If it comes to that situation, it means that there are no program management at all. The program management process identifies all the steps that will happen, all the risks that may happen, all the issues that you might encounter, so that you can predict that they will come and take appropriate measures before they come. If such things happen, the program manager has not done his job. You can reach the last phase of the execution and end up in a mess because you do not have the resources, and people will have to work very hard. But this has not happened frequently, and it shall never happen if the program management process has been properly used.

Human relations at the workplace is described in a typical masculine fashion; all communication should be task-oriented, involve hierarchical relationships and respect formal structure. Every single individual in the company has a boss and have to respect direction of the boss, Georges says. However, that individual also contribute to a program or different programs, and shall report progress to the program manager. If the program manager identifies a weakness or a risk, his task is to deal with the boss of the people, not the people themselves. Of course there can appear conflicts between the boss and the program manager, Georges admits, and that is of course also handled in the formal process.

Georges also reduce the question of masculinity and femininity into a problem of performance and planning. Private life is something that individuals should take care of so that it does not affect work. Every single individual manages his life, he says. "Women and men, they all know how to manage their life. If they accept a very demanding job, they know exactly what they are doing. It is a question of management; if you know how to manage a program, you know how to manage your life."

5.2 Project as a work form from a gender perspective: Some notions

To summarise the gender analysis in section 5.1 and the work form analysis in chapter 4, we will here discuss some tentative notions concerning project work from a gender perspective.

Traditional and modern masculinities. From the discussions so far, one might conclude that project work is mainly another expression of established masculinities in organisations. Traditional values such as devotion to work, hierarchical thinking etc can of course also be found in project work. But it also seems that project work is partly a new set of masculinities, in which time becomes more important than hierarchy and short-term effectiveness is preferred over visionary statesmanship (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2001).

One-sided flexibility. Most project-based organisations is dependent upon flexibility due to rapid changes in the market, which means that the workload of the employees is not constant over time. It appears that this flexibility is essentially one-sided; work time must be expanded if the situation in the project so demands, but there are no accounts in our narratives of flexibility in the other direction. From a gender perspective this is in practice the same situation that managers have always been in; a masculine notion of work as something that must always be done at the expense of everything else (cf Andersson, 1993).

Individual responsibility for work time. Even tough most interviewees claim that there are some sort of limitations of work time, it appears that it is primarily up to the individual to define them. This is not only a consequence of the MBO (management by objectives) philosophy employed in project management, but also of something that we can all MBE (management by exception). Jacques narrative is a clear example of a

project which is defined as unique and important, and the goals were formulated beyond what was seen as realistic in the situation (cf Christensen & Kreiner, 1997). This means that individuals must have extraordinary capacities to work hard and efficient in order not to end up with an extraordinary high workload. Since all individuals in the study have families, it is actually the family that must handle working times in projects rather than the companies and managers who initiate the endeavours. If the individual had the same bargaining power as the companies/managers, this would perhaps have been less problematic, but that is rarely the case.

Planning for the project workers. There are some examples of feminine thinking in project management among the interviewees. Some say that they care about their personnel by not setting unrealistically high project objectives (i.e. Irene), and some also point at traditional masculinities as a practical problem (Edith, Alain and Sophie). This is, however, not easy in a context laden with masculinities, and Sophie is a clear example of the benefits of adapting to a masculine way of working. At the same time as she claims that she tries to make the burdens easier for her project staff, she is herself a living example of how hard work result in prestigeous positions.

The contextual impact of technology. Technology is an important factor behind the dominance of masculine thinking in the two project-based organisations studied. Both A and B were founded by technicians, has been led by technicians, and technology dominates a lot of the internal discourse. Feminine thinking is thus not only seen as subordinate, it is also perceived as something that belongs elsewhere. Even though A and B works with entirely different technologies, the result is the same in terms of production and re-production of masculine and feminine conceptions. Technology is about rationality, natural laws, efficiency, objectivity and many other virtues that are usually not seen as feminine. Corresponding instances of femininity, i.e. feelings, intuition, subjectivity etc, are consequently not desirable in a technology-driven work context.

6. Conclusions and implications for further research

6.1 Project as work form: Research beyond project-based companies?

For the individuals interviewed in companies A and B, project work is primarily a question of work content. They are all full-time employees with some degree of job security, and the fact that they work in projects do not usually affect their private life more than any other form of advanced engineering and/or middle-level management would. The work content is, however, quite specific for project work, even though there are of course features of "ordinary work" that resemble work in projects. Without any intention to describe project work as the opposite to departmental work (establishing such a relation is not the aim of this study, project work is rather seen as interesting in itself) and without any intention to generalise individual perceptions (one consequence of the individual perspective is that differences between individuals are seen as natural and important), the following circumstances identified in chapter 4 seem to be the most important in project as a work form in project-based organisations:

- Weak basis of authority – positions more important than projects. Projects are said to exist as an organisational principle in parallel to the permanent structure, but they are not seen as being as important.
- Career resource but not a career path. The skills gained from project work can be utilised in many ways in many positions. Project work in itself is, however, not a far-stretching career path.
- Time management an important qualification. Both project managers and project workers must be able to handle time pressure and to organise themselves. Such skills cannot, however, always protect them from deadline stress and long working hours the weeks before delivery.
- Creativity and innovation. Project work means to be creative and come up with new ideas, but there must be close links to corporate goals. There is a sense of working with the exceptional, even for those in routinised, ongoing support projects. In that way, projects become arenas for meeting individuals from other organisational units and professions.

In the beginning of this report, references were made to traditional research on individuals in organisations, e.g "work satisfaction" (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and the sociotechnical systems movement (Pasmore, 1988). Even though this line of research is in fact governed by the interest of designing effective organisations rather than helping individuals living effective lives, it provides influential accounts of what is important for individuals in industrial settings. For the individuals in this study, project work mean varability of tasks and needed skills, task significance, client feedback, feedback from colleagues and human interaction, all factors enhancing the perception of work satisfaction in industrial environments and indeed also in project work. This is not surprising, since the project form of organising is often positively presented as a complement or even the opposite to routinised industrial work. What might be surprising is that the potential drawbacks for the individual of project work are almost neglected and sometimes even viewed as positive features; stress, deadlines, workload-dependent work hours, etc. It seems that routinised project work is ascribed a lot of positive features as compared to routinised industrial work, but that the advantages of the latter are never used as arguments against the former. In that sense, project work might indeed be a "golden cage" where the individual feels so excited and stimulated that he/she accepts a lot of otherwise unbearable inconveniences.

Since the project-based organisations in this study is just one possible way for individuals to work by projects, there are of course other expected features of project work that were not found. One such feature is the absence of emotional affiliation to a permanent organisational context (cf Miller & Rice, 1967), another the social discontinuity caused by frequent changes of project teams (Bennis, 1968). Likewise, career issues has mostly been studied in settings without any stable organisational context (cf Jones, 1996). In addition, there are people whose employment in an organisation is temporary by nature (Garsten, 1999, Söderlund, 2000), and there are also a lot of non-routinised project work going on in organisations (Ekstedt et al, 1999). In further research, it therefore seem to be important to include other types of project-based work in the analysis – not in order to generalise, but rather to arrive at a wider image of what project as a work form is about. Such an expanded view of relevant empirical phenomena can be described in terms of routinisation and affiliation for the individual in the following way:

Project work as routine

"Temps" "Project-based routiners"

Affiliation to project only **Affiliation to permanent org. only**

"Free-lancing entrepreneurs" "Renewal project participants"

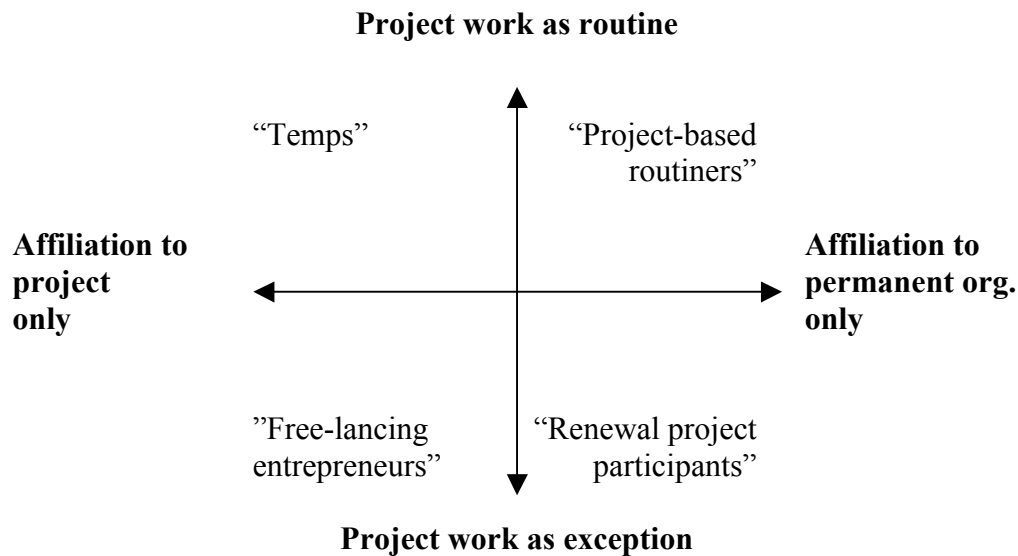**Project work as exception**

Figure 1. Different forms of project work situations

The individuals interviewed in this study can all be found in the right part of the figure, mostly in the upper right part. There are of course differences between the individuals in that they might interpret one and the same situation in entirely different ways and that they might end up in all these situations from time to time, but the point of the figure is not to outline a framework for sorting the interviewees into distinct categories. The reason is rather to identify possible further empirical cases and to discuss features that these empirical cases might exhibit. Apart from the "project-based routiners", who has been more or less covered by the analysis in this report so far, there are several features that one might expect from the other three ideal types.

Concerning the "renewal project participants" (Edith, Paul and Jacques), it is obvious that they work with projects as a part of their ordinary job, but that the projects are just temporarily a part of that ordinary job. Participating in a renewal project means working with long-term issues in parallel to everyday tasks, solving difficult problems under time pressure together with the usual colleagues. The affiliation is still the organisation, since that it what will remain after the end of the project, but the project can serve as an arena for learning and creativity and also as a stepping stone for the ambitious. In some cases there might be special project teams to which them members can commit themselves, teams that can serve as internal professional networks afterwards. The renewal project participants are likely to perceive the project as exciting and stimulating, but that

perception can be turned into its opposite if the new expectations are not fulfilled.

Temps (here used in the sense introduced by Garsten, 1999) are individuals not necessarily involved in projects, but who work with temporary assignments in their ordinary work. This means that they have some formal organisational affiliation to some sort of consulting firm, but that they spend their whole time in different customer organisations as temporary employees with routine assignments. Many temps work mostly by themselves without being surrounded by a team, and they are not expected to become permanent members of the customer organisation, which means that they keep/are kept at some distance (cf Lindgren et al, 2001). This kind of projectified work is not usually subject to deadlines, but it is still limited in time and implies a high degree of social discontinuity for the individuals.

Free-lancing entrepreneurs, finally, are often also working as consultants for customer firms, but they can also be specialists or artists who do temporary work for others on a self-employment basis. Since the tasks can vary a lot, each project is an exceptional one, and requires a lot of experience and creativity. The free-lancing entrepreneur can fill a usual consultant role, but he/she can also serve as sub-contractor to larger project organisations. They lack any organisational affiliation; instead they commit themselves to each project and build a professional network of other individuals in their "industry". This means a high degree of social discontinuity, and usually also deadline-related stress and an "invoice pressure" to generate enough revenues to keep the personal economy going even during periods between projects or in competence development. Their life is flexible and full of exceptions, and it can sometimes be hard to combine with a routinised private life. In a way, it resembles the classic entrepreneurial life path, but with the exception that they do not always start firms (cf Kupferberg, 1998).

6.2 Project as life form: A life less ordinary?

In the analysis of how femininity and masculinity is constructed in project work it appears evident that project work exhibits both similarities and differences, as compared both to other new forms of organising as well as traditional bureaucratic structures. The project work form originates from the needs of large, technology-based organisations to find systematic ways of handling exceptional operations, and as such it is masculine by nature both in theory and in practice. At the same time, project organising has

implied creative, flexible and non-bureaucratic work forms in a variety of industries and applications, thereby responding to decades of demands from the critics of bureaucracy. Like Alvesson (1998) we might thus conclude that the analysis of femininity and masculinity in this kind of work forms is not a straightforward one. The division of work between men and women is not especially visible (even though it exists), leadership is rather feminine by nature, and so are many of the characteristics wanted from those who shall work by projects. At the same time, it appeared that the project work form implies constructions of several traditional masculinities, e.g. control, total involvement in work and competitiveness. The individuals described a need for controlling and dominating the environment while implementing the project; being able to follow the time plan and the project budget was an important part of their identity as "project workers". Since time plans and budgets are always narrowly defined, a total involvement was required from all project participants implying e.g. long work hours and a readiness to work even during weekends with short notice (not unusual in high tech firms, cf Kunda, 1992, Perlow, 1997). The possibility to do that depends, however, on what life form project-worker has.

Behind the notion of life forms in this report lies the expectation that project work contributes to the construction of patterns in the lives of individuals, and that there is something special about project work in this regard. Given that project-based work can be described as discontinuous and time-consuming, it can be expected that the project working individual and his/her spouse must adjust their lives in certain ways in order to handle the demands of work. A similar way of reasoning can be found in Goffee & Scase (1985), who describe the lifestyles of female entrepreneurs as a consequence of their view of themselves, their marital relation, their entrepreneurship and their role as mothers. From their analysis, it also appears that depending on differences among the female entrepreneurs in these dimensions, they exhibit different ways of living. The same differences can be expected from different project-working individuals, since they are all different and experience different circumstances for their project-based work.

The gender perspective in this study implies an analysis of how project working individuals live their lives, and how they produce and reproduce masculinities and femininities in daily interaction. From this analysis of the individuals in the two French companies, it appears that project work implies a reproduction of several traditional masculinities, but also some

new ones. There were also instances of femininity, but it was hard for the individuals to uphold these due to the dominance of masculine technology in the two companies.

Concerning the lives of the individuals, they differ in the way they produce and reproduce masculinities and femininities at work and at home. Since the masculinities are the norm in these organisations, femininity is something different that is separated from the norm. And at home, the French society can still be said to be gender segregated in terms of what roles men and women play in family life. But the individuals seem to perceive these instances of integration and segregation differently:

Private life

	Gender integration	Gender separation	
Gender Integration			Georges
			Marc
Work life	Irene	Pierre	Alain
		~~Sophie~~	
Gender Separation		Paul	Jacques
	Edith		Gerald

Figure 2: Individual narratives on the relation between masculinities and femininities at work and at home.

From this scheme we can conclude that most individuals speak about their work as if it was gender neutral, giving equal opportunities to men and women. At the same time women like Edith and Irene try to live a equal private life, while most other individuals (mostly men) live a most traditional family life where the wife takes care of the children. The exception is Sophie, who upholds a managerial post at the same time as she is obviously responsible for her child.

In a society characterised by gender separation both at work and at home – a description that is valid in all societies due to traditional constructs of masculinity and femininity – all other positions in the scheme above are less likely to persist. Moving from a life situation where both work and private life is gender segregated is not easy, since both family forms and organisational structures are built on the separation of male and female and the primacy of the male. Still, many individuals try to live differently, e.g. by avoiding traditional gender structures in their marriages or by looking

for a professional context free from institutionalised expectations on how women and men shall behave. Some even try both these lines of development. But as long as these individual attempts at creating a life and/or work situation that is different is not supported by developments in society and business life, such positions in the scheme are still "rubberband positions" – as soon as you cease to stretch away from what is considered as "normal", you will inevitably be drawn back.

Given this analysis, a life in projects is living with entrepreneurship and managerialism at the same time. It is a life form that demands a lot of devotion and time, a life form built on masculine norms of work and life. For those who see gender separation as something natural, it is not a new life form and it does not mean anything new in practice. But for the rest, those who want equality at work and at home, or those who believe in equal opportunities or want to change their organisations, project-based work is a difficult challenge. Taken to its extreme, it can even be seen as a movement back to pre-welfare state work practices where regulations of work conditions was a matter of negotiation between the employer and the lone employee, and where the life conditions of employees did not matter to anyone.

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