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DISCIPLINING THE PROFESSIONAL: THE CASE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT*

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ABSTRACT

Despite its rapid growth in recent years, Project Management has received very little critical attention, particularly when compared to the more 'hyped' managerial fashions such as TQM (cf. Wilkinson and Willmott, 1995) and BPR (cf. Grey and Mitev, 1995; Grint, 1994). My intention in this paper is to critically examine the ongoing construction of Project Management as a professional discipline in modern organizations. Drawing on an understanding of 'discipline' based in Foucauldian work, I will briefly trace the historical construction of Project Management as a form of managerial knowledge, outlining the key models and techniques which make up contemporary Project Management. Through an empirical study of the articulation and reproduction of Project Management within two Financial Services institutions, the everyday construction of Project Management as an 'objective' and 'abstract' body of knowledge will be described. I then contrast this with the embodied and power-laden operation of Project Management, with disciplinary effects not only on those employees whose work is restructured in line with Project Management principles but equally upon self-professed Project Management professionals themselves.

INTRODUCTION

Largely unremarked in critical circles, Project Management has spread in recent years from its traditional dominance of the fields of construction and engineering into sectors as diverse as education, IT, media, health care, and surgery. As more and more employees across industries find themselves redefined as 'project workers', it is disturbing to find so little critical attention paid to the implications of this shift for both employees and organizations. The rise and rise of the professional Project Manager has taken place on the back of a number of contemporary tendencies in work organizations, including the use of IT to restructure business processes (Hammer and Champy, 1995), the current popularity of 'self-managing work teams' (Manz and Sims, 1987), the flourishing interest in 'knowledge workers' (Blackler, 1995) and the emergence of the project-based

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organization (Galbraith, 1973; Hobday, 2000). Increasingly, the field of Project Management has promoted itself as a universal and politically-neutral toolkit of techniques appropriate for any type of activity in any sector, enabling the tight control of discontinuous work processes, with particular potential for the control of expert labour. My argument in this paper is that the claims to professionalism made by proponents of Project Management serve to establish significant power effects within organizations, imposing a form of discipline both on those subject to Project Management systems of control and also those involved in managing and promoting 'professional' Project Management.

To gain some critical purchase of the professionalization of Project Management, the paper will start with a brief overview of ongoing debates over professionalization, developing a Foucauldian understanding of the professionalization process. This serves as a framework for an analysis of Project Management, tracing its theoretical origins and its development as a profession. Drawing then on empirical work in two Financial Services organizations, 'Buzzbank' and 'Lifelong Assurance', I will argue that the expansion of Project Management in each organization relies heavily upon its promotion as a *professional discipline*. The paper is organized around the dual meaning of 'discipline', examining first the objective body of knowledge and expertise underpinning the field of Project Management, before considering the disciplinary operation of Project Management as a system of training and (self-) control. In keeping with the modern professions, the scientificity and objectivity of the Project Management discipline is fundamental to the attempts of staff to legitimize the expansion of their influence and control within each organization. A key element of this endeavour involves the development of a coherent ontology through the constitution and enforcement of a terminology specific to Project Management. Through various disciplinary technologies, a specific mode of rationality is then instilled in the subjectivities of staff, which enables such staff to adopt the position of Project Management 'professionals'. This professionalism affords improved security and status to certain staff, which at the same time implies associated insecurities and loss of status outside the circles of Project Management. However, conformity to professional standards in both knowledge and conduct enables a form of control to be exercised over technical and managerial staff, sanctioned by senior management.

PROFESSIONALISM, FOUCAULT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINE

Much of the early sociological literature on the professions derives from the *trait* and/or the *functionalist* approaches. The *trait* approach to the professions concentrates on an inductive compiling of an exhaustive list of features which constitute the core elements of a profession; that professions are essentially intellectual, learned, and practical, for instance, or strongly organized internally (Flexner, 1915, cited in Becker, 1970). The *functionalist* perspective attempts to remedy the atheoretical nature of the trait approach by suggesting that what distinguishes professions from other occupations is the importance of the expertise or knowledge they possess for the functioning of society as a whole (e.g. Barber, 1963). The social and economic rewards secured by the professions, from this perspective, are explained and justified by the societal value of professional knowledge. The focus of the professionalism debate shifted substantially in the 1970s with the emergence of a

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critical perspective (Freidson, 1970; Johnson, 1972). Drawing on neo-Marxist and Neo-Weberian perspectives, this work fiercely criticizes the tendency in traditional approaches to ignore issues of power and domination in accounts of professionalism. This critical perspective understands professionalism as 'the institutionalised form of the control of occupations' (Johnson, 1972, p. 38), focusing its attention on an analysis of the exclusionary and demarcationary tactics of 'occupational imperialism' (Larkin, 1983). The value of this approach is its breadth of vision, encompassing the symbiotic relationship between the professions and a matrix of capitalist institutions, including the state, the labour market, bureaucratic organization and the education system. However, such critical work is frequently undermined by lapses into Marxist determinism; thus Larson's otherwise sophisticated analysis defines the main function of professionalism as 'the reproduction of the relations of production and the class structure by disguising their real nature and even their existence' (Larson, 1977, p. 239). Ironically, in this way the critical perspective reproduces the functionalism of traditional, uncritical work, by acknowledging the social and economic contribution of professional knowledge to the operation of capitalism.

This functionalism of both traditional and critical perspectives may be contrasted with the *interactionist* conception of professionalism as negotiated and indeterminate (e.g. Becker, 1970). The interactionist perspective distinguishes between the abstract, morally desirable 'ideal-type' of professionalism, and the everyday conduct of the professional him/herself. Interactionists thus argue that professionalism involves not only professional knowledge/expertise but equally importantly the *enactment* of what may be termed 'professional spirit' (Becker, 1970, p. 88). Becker therefore emphasizes the processual, performative nature of professionalism, where 'to be accepted one must have learned to play the part' (Becker et al., 1961, p. 4). The value of this approach is underlining the role of professional *conduct* in the ongoing construction of a profession, from the white coats of the medical profession to the pomp and circumstance of the law. A second contribution of the interactionist position is to underline the *social construction of professional knowledge* (Abbott, 1988), by highlighting the processes through which professional knowledge is created, articulated and legitimated. From this position, it is argued that critical approaches are frequently guilty of reinforcing the view of professional bodies of knowledge as naturally occurring entity and self-evidently worthwhile.

As Willmott (1986) notes, each of these perspectives contributes to our understanding of professionalism at the same time as bringing certain limitations. The critical position tends to lack the interactionists' sense of professionalism as an ongoing achievement, neglecting the process by which a field must continually construct itself as a productive discipline and thus attempts to establish a monopoly over truth so as to establish its legitimacy as a profession. At the same time, the subjectivist perspective of the interactionist may legitimately be criticized for divorcing the micro-politics of professionalism in action from broader issues of power and domination in society (Saks, 1983). I will argue here that Foucauldian conceptions of power/knowledge and discipline (Foucault, 1973, 1979, 1980) and the work of Foucauldian writers (e.g. Fournier, 1999; Grey, 1998) may offer a useful perspective to relate micro and macro aspects of professionalism, as well as providing a more coherent theoretical foundation for debates. In line with Foucault's earlier work on power/knowledge, it may be argued that in representing the world

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in certain ways, professions produce certain forms of knowledge and enable a particular material ordering of the world (to the exclusion of alternative ways to 'make sense' of reality). Thus a professional body of knowledge – its rules, formulas, models, techniques, dedicated terminology, and so on – serve to construct a world in keeping with the ontology espoused by the discipline. This relates to the interactionist argument that the legitimacy of a profession rests upon its claims to monopolise expertise which in some way embodies the 'truth' of a reality. Moreover, Foucault's work on power/knowledge, discipline and the self reflects the importance of *professional conduct* in the construction and maintenance of a professional identity; as Fournier emphasizes, 'being a professional is not merely about absorbing a body of scientific knowledge but is also about conducting and constituting oneself in an appropriate manner' (Fournier, 1999, p. 287). As counterbalance to much of the critical school, Foucauldian work emphasizes that these norms of knowledge and conduct also act as a form of *discipline* over otherwise autonomous professional labour. Implicit in this is the disciplinary constitution of subjectivity whereby careful socialization and the inculcation of self-discipline in professionals replaces the traditional reliance on direct forms of control in the labour process. Thus induction into professions, in terms of both knowledge and conduct, serves to construct a specifically 'governable' subject controlled through self-disciplinary mechanisms. The adoption of a Foucauldian perspective makes it explicit that moving beyond a neo-Marxist focus on the exploitation of professionalism by the powerful entails an obligation to 'consider the ways in which social order is reproduced through the *co-production* of both the notionally powerful and the powerless' (Grey, 1998, p. 31; emphasis added).

Building on the Foucauldian perspective outlined above, a distinctive perspective on professionalization emerges which can be understood through the central concept of *professional discipline*. In this light, two aspects of Project Management will be examined in detail below; firstly, the construction of Project Management as a 'discipline', and relatedly, the 'disciplining' of project managers themselves. In the first sense, a Project Management 'discipline' can be understood to exist insofar as the field can be associated with an abstract and apparently objective body of rules, with a specific language and ontology. However, the Project Management discipline should not be seen to exist merely in this abstract, ideal form; rather, discipline should be seen as inscribed in texts, practices, technology and, crucially, in the subjectivities of those individuals instructed in the discipline and/or subjected to the practices. The situation is summarized succinctly by Fournier, who argues that 'Professionals are the target of professional rationality, they are both the governor and the governed' (Fournier, 1999, p. 285). It is this *double-edged* nature of professional discipline which will be developed below in the context of Project Management; that the increase in security, status, material rewards and social influence afforded by professionalization is intrinsically linked to the subjection of such professionals to a significant level of discipline and domination.

THE EMERGENCE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT AS A PROFESSION

Project Management first came to popular attention in the management literature in the late 1950s (Gaddis, 1959) although its 'heyday' is widely seen to be the late 1960s and early 1970s (Winch, 2000). In brief, Project Management promises

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a system which can deliver 'one-off' undertakings 'on time, to budget, within scope' (Morris, 1997), through the planning and control of variables including resources, cost, productivity, schedule, risk, and quality. The technicist foundation of Project Management is evident not only in its seminal texts (e.g. Cleland and King, 1968; Lock, 1968) but also in the sectors where the original Project Management techniques were developed. As Morris (1994) notes, the majority of the groundwork was done in US defence and aeronautics in the 1950s, from the Manhattan Project, developing the first atomic bomb, to the widespread use of Project Management in the Apollo space programmes (Harrison, 1981) and in US defence programmes, spurred on by the demands of the Cold War (Gaddis, 1959). From this concentration on technical projects, Project Management techniques have proliferated in the past 40 years, not only within technology and engineering, but also expanding into areas as diverse as education, health, social services and the arts. The past decade is seen by many within and outside the field as a time of renaissance for Project Management, as issues of flexibility, knowledge management, innovation and professionalism have come to the fore in the managerial consciousness. Proponents of Project Management are keen to ascribe this expansion to the growing recognition throughout industry of the success of the Project Management approach. However, a number of wider influences can be pinpointed which have encouraged this growth in Project Management, ranging from the forceful marketing efforts of Project Management consultancies to the support and legitimation of academia, the media and, crucially, the State through the action of various government agencies.

This recent return to fashion has undoubtedly benefited the professionalization efforts of the Project Management field across the globe. The various Project Management associations in the USA, the UK and elsewhere, have explicitly modelled their professionalization strategy on other, more 'established' professions. The nature of this strategy reflects the traditional functionalist/trait conception of 'professionalism' held by key players in Project Management associations; identifying characteristics of established professions and attempting, by imitating these, to convince other parties of the societal 'worth' of the field. The professionalization project therefore involves a number of parallel initiatives, including the formal internal organization of the occupation, the promotion of accredited training programmes, attempts to expand credentialism within job markets for Project Managers and the development of a core 'Body of Knowledge'. The progress of Project Management across these initiatives has so far been very uneven. The efforts made to form institutional supports through professional associations have indeed resulted in the emergence of professional bodies in many developed countries, as well as a European association. The growth in popularity is evidenced by the mushrooming membership of professional associations; the US-based Project Management Institute (PMI), for example, reporting an increase in membership from 8,817 in 1992 to over 60,000 by 2000. While systematic and 'academically-grounded' training in Project Management has expanded, the provision of this has not extended far beyond consultancies and private organizations, and still lacks the support of dedicated university courses in both the USA and Europe. Where Project Management has become an accepted element of Further and Higher Education courses, this has not extended to licensure backed up at a governmental level. Although most governments in developed countries support and encourage the use of Project Management models, nowhere does this entail restrictions

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on practitioners in the form of mandatory qualifications. Slightly more successful have been attempts to develop a coherent 'Body of Knowledge' (BoK) for Project Management despite the continued discrepancies and implicit rivalry between the Body of Knowledge of the PMI in the USA and that of the Association of Project Managers (APM) in the UK elsewhere.

METHODS

The research involved detailed case studies of two major Financial Services organizations in the UK, as part of a wider project examining ongoing changes in the Financial Services sector (Hodgson, 2000). The organizations were selected so as to represent both long-established and new and innovative elements of the sector. The first organization, *Lifelong*[1] is one of the oldest (and largest) Life Assurers still in existence. When studied, Lifelong was undergoing a number of major changes in strategy as it struggled to shake off negative publicity over its part in various scandals in the Financial Service industry. *Buzzbank*, by way of contrast, had been in operation for less than a decade and was widely celebrated in the media as being part of the vanguard of new competitors transforming the banking industry, mainly through the extensive use of new technology in the form of sophisticated marketing techniques and call-centre technology. In both organizations, managers, especially senior managers, appeared convinced of the importance of Project Management structures and techniques. Several interviewees attested to the crucial importance of Project Management not only for IT but for the future performance of the organization as a whole – a senior manager at Buzzbank defining Project Management as the first 'critical success factor' in the departmental strategy. In both Lifelong and Buzzbank, the recruitment of staff with Project Management knowledge and experience, including consultants and contractors, was prioritized by Senior Management, with the expectation that they should directly or indirectly pass on this expertise to existing and permanent staff. Nonetheless, this influx of staff was widely resented within Lifelong, leading to ongoing political disputes between existing staff and the incumbents, versed in Project Management. Buzzbank employees, in contrast, appeared largely accustomed to discontinuous project-based working; nonetheless, even here there was some resistance to ongoing attempts to formalize the management of projects.

The intention in selecting such diverse organizations was, in the first instance, to draw contrasts and indeed continuities between distinct organizational philosophies and cultures within one specific sector of industry. In each organization much of my time was spent within IT departments. In both organizations, IT was seen as the repository of Project Management expertise. Over a three-year period between summer 1995 and spring 1998, a number of visits were made to each organization during which semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees at all levels of the organization from senior management down, focusing in particular on employees involved in project-based work. Over a dozen extended interviews were conducted in each organization. The research also included a full background search on each organization and its historical evolution, guided where appropriate by contacts within the organization. In addition, the interviews in Buzzbank were supplemented by a number of two-day periods of non-participant observation where I was able to shadow a number of project

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teams. These observation periods also allowed time for less formal (and at times less confrontational) discussions with project managers and team members in the course of their everyday activities.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT AS A 'DISCIPLINE'

The development of Project Management into a profession depends to a large degree on the representation of Project Management knowledge as an objective, coherent, self-evident and effective discipline. Many writers on Project Management therefore present their field as gradually converging on a generic model of the Project Management process, complete with common ontology and a standardized terminology globally recognized by professional project managers. Morris, for instance, notes that 'it was only in the mid-to-late 1980s that sufficient inter-industry exchange of project management expertise and practice had occurred for a multi-industry, universal model of best project management practice to emerge in any kind of robust form' (1994, p. 307). Although the PMI and the APM differ in their definition of the 'Body of Knowledge', both set out a broadly similar model, require knowledge of techniques (such as *Project Life Cycle*, *Budgeting*, *Scheduling*, etc) and management skills (such as *Control and Co-ordination*, *Leadership*, etc.). Despite significant efforts in this direction, and the development of a vague consensus over what Project Management should be, it appears that the development and enforcement of a unitary model has had limited success; in IT alone, it was recently estimated that there may be up to 1000 different Project Management models in publication (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 10). As Morris et al. note acerbically, 'If the professional project management societies cannot agree the elements of a project management BoK, how credible is the idea of professionalism in project management?' (2000, p. 156).

These ongoing problems with unification are frequently defended by recourse to Project Management's relative immaturity as a discipline, and calling for further rigorous research to achieve this perfect model. These assertions are less convincing when set next to the regular declarations of management gurus throughout the twentieth century that we are on the brink of finally 'discovering' the universal 'General Theory' of Management (Jacques, 1996). These dreams of unification reflect the positivist leanings of the field as a whole, and stem from management's ill-fated attempts to mimic natural science. As Giddens memorably warns, those who expect a 'social-scientific Newton' to revolutionize this young field 'are not only waiting for a train that will not arrive, but are in the wrong station altogether' (1993, p. 18). More cynically, the development of a universally accepted model is hindered by the survival instincts of innumerable academics and consultancies who rely upon product differentiation in order to market their own models, applications and services. As such vigorous marketing constitutes a major source of Project Management's recent expansion, it seems likely that the 'the search for the holy paradigm' (Hackathorn and Karimi, 1988, in Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 9) will continue for the foreseeable future.

One consequence of this fragmentation of the field is that any attempt to analyse Project Management which reflects on the discipline *in practice* is open to the criticism that it is unrepresentative of the 'true' nature of Project Management. This criticism, however, reproduces the highly questionable assumption that

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there exists a 'true', unitary Project Management 'out there' to be studied. Instead, I would argue that while the various incarnations of Project Management – in construction, in computing, in social services etc. – share elements of the functionalist and technicist rationale which underpins the field as a whole, they cannot be understood as deviations from some 'ideal' model. By the same token, the key texts cited (Cleland and King, 1975, 1988; Harrison, 1981; Kerzner, 1995; Lock, 1968) are generally those most frequently referenced and recommended in the literature, which cannot be fully representative of the field but which should provide a substantial overview of the main themes of Project Management.

Throughout the past 50 years, the arguments behind the promotion of Project Management techniques have remained remarkably similar, referring to the increasing uncertainty and complexity of the modern world (e.g. Cleland and King, 1968; Kerzner, 1995). Similarly, despite the proclaimed novelty of the Project Management approach, most textbooks (e.g. Cleland and King, 1975; Day, 1994; Kerzner, 1995) return to 1916 and Fayol's *Elements of Management* when attempting to define the responsibilities of the project manager: *Planning*, *Organizing*, *Commanding*, *Co-ordinating* and *Controlling*. Despite trenchant critiques of these principles from a number of writers (Hales, 1986; Mintzberg, 1973), they are evident in slightly adapted forms in the vast majority of Project Management guides. Thus Morris states unequivocally that Project Management is the same as 'any other kind of management, except that one moves through a predetermined life cycle. Everything else, at this level, is covered by general management practices – planning, organizing, controlling and so on' (1994, p. 307). Very little deviation from Fayol is evident in IT-based Project Management; for example, the standards of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers state: 'Software project management is the process of planning, organizing, staffing, monitoring, controlling and leading a software project' (IEEE, 1987). While later texts, such as Cleland and King (1988) tend to add more fashionable concerns, such as 'leadership' and 'entrepreneurship', much of the field remains bound up in an archaic Classical model of business administration. What distinguishes the Project Management approach therefore is a resurrection – indeed, an exhumation – of the modernist emphasis on comprehensive planning, linked to a reassertion of the importance of strict managerial control and professional self-discipline.

Control and the Project Life Cycle

The key effect of the application of Project Management models and techniques is enhanced control over the conduct of employees, based on the objectification of those subjects involved in project work. As Metcalfe argues in one of the few critical studies of Project Management, the quantification and detailed planning involved in Project Management serves to 'enhance the "calculability" of individuals through developing measures of routine predictability and control' (1997, p. 309). This calculability is largely made possible by the delineation of a general model for the process of project work, which is commonly defined as the *Project Life Cycle*, or PLC. The PLC is effectively the cornerstone of Project Management, representing a standardized model of the stages of a project said to represent the 'natural and pervasive order of thought and action' (Cleland and King, 1975, p. 186). Other writers are more authoritative; Morris, for instance, states 'to achieve the desired project objective one must go through a specific process. There is no exception to this rule. The process is known as the Project Life Cycle' (quoted in

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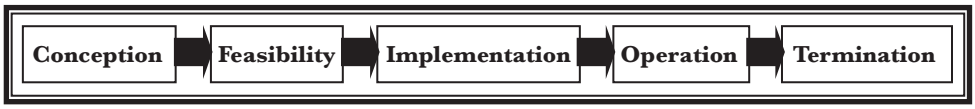

Figure 1. The project life cycle (PLC)
Source: Adapted from *BS6079 Guide to Project Management Part I: Project Management Principles* (1994)

Cleland and King, 1988, p. 19). Although precise definitions of the PLC vary, the generic concept is an article of faith for the entire Project Management field, as Morris et al. note; 'There are many variations on this simple, core sequence, yet essentially the statement absolutely holds for all projects . . . This life cycle is the one, single feature which unquestionably distinguishes projects from non-projects' (1998, p. 2). Importantly, this presentation of the PLC as universal and thus inevitable does much to undermine resistance to the Tayloristic fragmentation of project work and the maximized surveillance and control of project workers it facilitates.

For the purposes of illustration a model will be adapted from the British Standards Institution (BSI, 1994). This model (Figure 1), in common with the models in most other Project Management texts, includes five basic phases, here defined as: *Conception*, *Feasibility* (including *Definition* and *Development*), *Implementation*, *Operation* and *Termination*.

A range of technical procedures, associated with the planning and control cycle, have been developed over the past 50 years and pertain to the progressive stages of the PLC. The *Conception* of the project, setting out key requirements, is the responsibility of the client, whether external or internal, and as such is largely seen as outside the ambit of the Project Manager. The objective of the *Definition* phase, however, is to operationalize this *Conception* by breaking down the client's general requirements into individual project components, before verifying these with the client. The *Development* phase is then concerned with setting out the means by which each project component will be achieved, in terms of allocating resources and responsibility. This is then set out within the *Work Breakdown Structure* (WBS) which, drawing on Systems Theory, provides a representation of the flow of work over the course of a project, along with guidelines for identifying flaws in the system. The WBS thus acts a framework for timescale and manpower planning, budgeting and the subsequent monitoring and evaluation of the project. A number of techniques have been developed to operationalize the WBS so that it may be used for purposes of control and evaluation, including Gantt Charts, the Critical Path Method (CPM), Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT), all of which accentuate the quantitative, calculable basis of project work. What should be emphasized throughout is the emphasis on technocratic, comprehensive planning and the quantification of intangible aspects such as duration and risk.[2]

Once authorized, the subsequent *Implementation* stage involves the administrative and technical aspects of initiating the project in line with the plan. The project manager's duty here is to control the development of the project through the use of the same techniques as the previous phase; the same systematic, quantitative planning techniques are employed to ensure visibility and accountability in the control and evaluation stages of a project. Thus techniques such as PERT and costed versions of the WBS are referred to throughout the project as flexible

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representations of the project plan against which the actual progress of the project and the performance of staff may be judged. More recently, a range of IT applications such as Microsoft Project have been developed to assist in the monitoring of the progress of projects, automatically requesting and logging status reports from team members and alerting the project manager if these are late or incomplete. Thus the comprehensive planning process in the Development phase is fundamental to the tight control of the project in operation, based on quantitative specifications which enable performance to be readily and continually assessed against given standards. Finally, the *Operation* phase involves the initiation or handover of the project outcome, followed by the *Termination* of the project itself.

In practice, this planning/monitoring model is experienced by many members of project teams as a totalizing bureaucratic control system; as one team member in Buzzbank complained:

> It's all 'Have you done this? Have you done this? Have you done this? Have you got it signed off . . . ?'

As tasks are broken down and allocated to staff in a quasi-Taylorist fashion, both bureaucratic and technological means of monitoring are used to augment the individualizing effects of the discipline, frequently at the expense of the autonomy traditionally exercised by the expert/specialist employee. In Lifelong, for example, teams of skilled IT staff were given daily deadlines which were broken down at times to hourly and even half-hourly deadlines. Not only does each team-member have his/her own task and individualized deadlines for completion, but performance in terms of quality can also be specified in a quantitative form. As Bresnen (1996, p. 264) argues, this reflects 'a well-established pattern of discourse that has served to privilege the more commercial and pragmatic aims of improved project co-ordination and control at the expense of traditional powers and autonomy'.

The Project Management Model in Operation

Beyond the Taylorist control of project-based staff, what should also be emphasized is the direct effect that Project Management's 'Body of Knowledge' has on the practice of Project Management in contemporary organizations. In both subject organizations, project-based staff echoed the general assumption that a generic Project Management model does exist with rules that can apply to *all* project-based work in any context. What also became apparent is that a significant number of employees of all levels tended therefore to compare their own flawed procedures with some ideal model of Project Management. More importantly, without mentioning any other organizations by name, they generally implied that this ideal model was being implemented impeccably somewhere outside their own organization. Thus one head of department, explaining recent changes in Buzzbank, self-deprecatingly explained:

> We became a lot more formal in a lot of our projects – they're still not as formal as a lot of those outside, but for Buzzbank they are!

Whether or not this 'ultimate' Project Management is actually being implemented, I mean to suggest here two implications of the 'perfect', universal model. Firstly,

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the ideal model can be seen to correspond to the notion of the 'correct' solution, entirely in keeping with the positivist doctrines of technical rationality. Secondly, it reinforces the belief that greater formalization can overcome the difficulties of complexity and rapid change; as Townley notes with regard to technicism in HRM discourses, 'this discourse is maintained, even intensified, when faced with evidence to the contrary' (1994, p. 140). Similarly, rather than question the effectiveness of Project Management, failures in one's own Project Management system are then interpreted as down to one's imperfect implementation of this potential panacea. In both Buzzbank and Lifelong, managers were keen to play down their expertise in the area of Project Management, usually with humorous self-deprecation and veiled references to the relative competence of their competitors in this area. These insecurities highlight an important element in the power effects of such a discourse; by constructing an ideal model of the discipline of Project Management, the potential for improvement can be represented as limitless. The Buzzbank head of department, for instance, routinely criticized the gap between ideal-type Project Management and the relatively informal project system in operation until then (which in the eyes of many staff had proved fairly effective). The failure of Buzzbank staff to comply with the basic structure of the PLC (Conception, Feasibility, etc.) *in itself* justified his ongoing mission to formalize Project Management protocols throughout the company; to 'professionalize' the use of projects.

The disciplinary effects of the PLC become most clearly visible, ironically, where the PLC structure is violated. As one Project Manager explained, steps in the PLC may be omitted, but only when:

> you justify why you've dropped the steps you have – if you differ from the standard it's *because* . . . so obviously you only get the confidence to do that through experience, and security comes from that

The importance of 'experience' here is clear – only those who have 'internalized' the discipline are able to deviate from the structure. Evidently, this 'internalization' is a cumulative process, reinforced by months of prior technical training, scientific education, and daily discipline in the Project Management framework. Moreover, the final comment, 'and security comes from that', hints at the means by which such disciplines may achieve such a fundamental change; namely, that such discourses provide a level of security against the complexity and unpredictability of the outside world. This lends weight to research which has pointed to the importance of Project Management structures as a 'social defence' i.e. a set of rituals which 'allow practitioners to deny their feelings of impotence in the face of daunting technical and political challenges' (Wastell, 1996, p. 25). Thus the certainty the model provides reaffirms the identifies of those engaged in 'professional' project work, while simultaneously causing anxiety over the employees' ability to match up to the tight demands of Project Management structures.

Before looking in more detail at the disciplinary operation of Project Management, it would be convenient here to summarize the arguments outlined so far. Firstly, it has been argued that the creation of a 'discipline' of Project Management centres on the development of a Body of Knowledge, based around the Project Life Cycle and associated techniques. Insofar as a generic model exists, it is based on comprehensive and detailed planning linked to the systematic surveillance of task execution and the control of employee discretion. Moreover, the

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existence of a generic Project Management 'Body of Knowledge' as an active construction of Project Management employees acts as a constant yardstick against which their own practices must be compared and evaluated. Even where these models, procedures and techniques are contravened, this is only justifiable if the project worker has successfully internalized the disciplinary structures and restructured themselves in line with Project Management thinking, a theme I will develop below.

DISCIPLINING PROJECT MANAGERS

Despite the increased levels of control, both project managers and project team members identified project work as more prestigious than other duties insofar as it embodies a 'professional' approach to work. Interviewees in both organizations directly linked Project Management and professionalism; as Buzzbank's head of Business Analysis boasted, their reputation for professionalism relied upon their strict conformity to Project Management structure:

> We always do written terms of reference, we always write a report, we always define our recommendations, so there are a number of stages we always go through, which the business doesn't require but again we think we should do, in order to be *professional* and do it properly.

The efforts outlined above to constitute Project Management as a 'cognate discipline', with a unified model and set of procedures are crucial in establishing this aura of professionalism. The representation of Project Management as a neutral, transferable body of knowledge, serving only to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of organizational projects, is instrumental in what Metcalfe (1997) refers to as the 'ideational' control effects of Project Management. By adhering to positivist, functionalist values, Project Management can gain legitimation as a professional discipline. The Foucauldian conception of professionalism, emphasizing the relation between *knowledge* and *conduct*, is reflected in senior management's concern that they 'change the mindsets' of staff in Buzzbank and Lifelong by training in the Project Management Body of Knowledge. As shall be seen below, inscribing the discipline of Project Management onto the subjectivities of 'professional' employees relies on a number of aspects of professional discipline, including the enforcement of a specialized terminology and the insistence on the neutral, generic nature of the discipline.

Discipline and the Enforcement of a Project Management Ontology

A critically important aspect of the discursive construction of Project Management is the strict enforcement of a specific terminology. This may be interpreted in two complementary ways. Firstly, the ability to understand and employ the required terminology is a particularly conspicuous aspect of the *professional conduct* expected of initiates, as well as implying a level of knowledge/expertise. Thus to be recognized as a 'professional' project manager, the individual needs to demonstrate cognisance of the body of knowledge, indexed in terms of his/her ability to articulate themselves using the Project Management terminology. Secondly, the enforcement of this terminology acts to reinforce the ontology of Project

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Management upon those subject to the discipline. As Morris et al. perceptively note, 'The Body of Knowledge . . . reflects the ontology of the profession; the set of words, relationships and meanings that describe the philosophy of project management' (2000, p. 156). Successful enforcement of Project Management terminology effectively controls the discursive resources available to staff in their subjective attempts to make sense of and articulate social reality within the organization. Opinions and positions expressed which do not reflect the accepted ontology can thereby be marginalized as 'lacking expertise' and thus 'unprofessional'.

The disciplinary effects of terminology became personally apparent in interviews with the senior Project Manager in Lifelong. Throughout our interviews, he was fiercely specific to the point of dogmatism on the terminology to be used not only by his subordinates and colleagues in the division but also by myself in our interviews. In the first interview, drawing a model of Project Management with the criteria and techniques he employed at each stage, he emphasized with some force that these were the terms that I was to employ from then on. As a consequence, the substance of the subsequent interviews was largely restricted to 'objective' matters, as various critical issues regarding power, control, resistance and similar themes were either inexpressible in Project Management terminology or else were transformed into mere 'technical' issues. This concern to clearly demarcate the boundaries of Project Management terminology, particularly in communication with others, appeared widespread in project-based staff of both organizations. The immediate effect of this is to reinforce the representation of the world within each organization in Project Management terms; in this case, as fitting in with the PLC framework and the Body of Knowledge.

Terminology was perceived as absolutely central to management's attempts to train staff in the Project Management approach. Hence one Lifelong manager, explaining the reason for his employment, began by stating bluntly that all the staff in the department, with the exception of one other manager, had no experience of the world outside Lifelong and were ignorant of even the basics of Project Management. Providing an example, he was evidently appalled that many could not even distinguish between 'problems' and 'requirements'. He stated with evident disgust:

> Some of them'll say 'We've found a "problem" in Version 1 so we've worked it out and now we've got a "requirement"!' and that's absolute CRAP!

In both Lifelong and Buzzbank, staff had been strategically recruited to instil the discipline of Project Management into unruly, informal processes and more importantly, into unruly, informal employees. As he explained, the goal was not merely to enforce rules:

> . . . it's a question of changing their mindsets.

Without reducing this solution to simply the enforcement of a terminology, this statement does provide a significant insight into what precisely is implied by the discipline of Project Management. Implicit in this assertion is a profound understanding of the foundational importance of language in identity construction. Moreover, it is clearly understood by at least some senior Project Managers how language may (indeed, *must*) be employed to instil this discipline in employees at a 'deep level'.

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The effect of professional language, then, is to monopolize the representation of processes in line with the Project Management model, by attempting to sanction certain articulations of organizational processes, while delegitimizing as 'unprofessional' those which do not subscribe to the Project Management ontology. The power effects of this are of particular importance given Project Management's promotion of the 'neutral' functionalism upon which its models, ontology and claims to legitimation are founded.

The next step, examined in the following section, acts to obscure the political nature of this process by emphasizing the abstract 'objectivity' of the professional discipline.

Discipline and the Obscuring of Power Relations

It is important to note that, in the Project Management literature, the discipline of Project Management is generally promoted as centring on an abstract discipline, i.e. one which is transferable to individual managers through training and experience and then applicable in a range of diverse situations. The extraction and distillation of this knowledge is directly related to the principles of Scientific Management, 'changing all subject-dependent knowledge into knowledge in an objective form' (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 7). Several managers' description of Project Management as a 'toolbox' is a key example, underlining the 'neutrality' of the discipline, as well as its transferable, generic nature. The same theme can be discerned in different metaphors; for example, the same manager later described the information made visible by Project Management techniques as 'a bit like the speedometer on a car'.

The dissemination of generic Project Management knowledge amongst *all* managers was therefore seen as a feasible and worthwhile objective in both organizations; hence one senior manager in Buzzbank stated that the short-term aim was to:

> establish 2–3 project managers who don't have teams. They can then find things that need to be done, and solutions that may be found outside the organization, in private consultancies.

The expansion of the Business Analysis (BA) department within Buzzbank was emblematic of the encroachment of Project Management throughout the organization. BA had existed within the IT division for several years, dedicated to Business Process Re-engineering, but under its present head, the department had transformed itself into what he termed 'a kind of internal consultancy', existing as the organization's 'Centre of Excellence' for Project Management and acting as the training centre for the production of 'flying' project managers. The Head of BA explained:

> A lot of people internally come to BA for experience of project work, because you get quite a lot of people in the line out there who have experience of managing people, and may have a management background in banking, but they haven't done much in the way of project work, and there's such a lot of change going on that people need to be skilled in lots of areas.

Candidates with an 'aptitude' for Project Management were therefore selected internally and initiated in Project Management techniques and processes. The

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ancillary of this responsibility for Project Management development was the 'missionary' role of the Business Analysis department. An analogy can be drawn here with the insistence in the rhetoric of Human Resource Management that 'if HRM is to be taken seriously, personnel managers must give it away' (Guest, 1987, p. 51). A similar responsibility is adopted by the BA department, the head explaining that:

> A lot of people come to us either on secondment, or on a permanent basis for one or two years or whatever for that experience and then go back out into the business . . . what we want are people who want to learn as much as possible about project work, and then to take that back out into the line.

What is significant here is the notion that Project Management is understood throughout Buzzbank as a form of expertise which exists *independently* of the context, as a valuable, even critical 'add-on' to employees' experience of banking, insurance, mortgages, investment and the numerous other Financial Services specialisms. Like 'management skills', it is seen as essentially abstract and therefore able to be transferred and applied in almost any organizational context.

In Lifelong, this transferability of Project Management was forcefully defended by one Project Management consultant, who interpreted a general inquiry about his background as a challenge to his competence in the Financial Services sector. After stating that his background was in managing projects in manufacturing, he paused, then added aggressively;

> A. . . . and there's NO difference between that sort of environment and this one!
> Q. No?
> A. NO! None at all!

The vehemence of the response reflects the relationship between Project Management and the subjective construction of a valued identity. At one level, this indicates the level to which the reputation and very identity of the interviewee as a consultant in Project Management depended directly upon the belief in the transferability of Project Management as a discipline. More fundamentally, such examples serve to underline the importance that the discipline should be perceived as unthreatening by both its practitioners and those outside the discipline affected by the processes and techniques themselves.

This purported neutrality and technocratic objectivity is a crucial element of the power effects of Project Management. A key effect of this representation is to underline the objective nature of Project Management as a 'mere' technical function without an agenda of its own, divorced from political values and far removed from moral or ethical concerns. Here, Project Management resembles the field of management more widely in that both draw upon their (apparent) basis in technical rationality and positivist science to support claims to professionalism. As noted above, a significant advantage of this tactic is the image of a neutral and objective professionalism that scientism bestows, regardless of its actual relation to scientific practice. Thus, similarly to mainstream management, Project Management can be said to rely on 'the twin features of an appeal to science and the claim of neutrality' which Grey argues 'provid(e) a strong basis for professionalisation'

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(1998, p. 14). This de-politicization of Project Management is fundamental to its success; as Metcalfe argues, '[Project Management] is effective because workers internalize and accept its control rationalities' (1997, p. 315).

DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper has been to subject the phenomenon of Project Management to critical attention, focusing on the twin themes of *professionalization* and *discipline*. Firstly it has been argued that Project Management knowledge tends to epitomize and reproduce a particularly technicist and instrumental form of modernist rationality. A key intention of Project Management models and techniques is to enhance the calculability and visibility of those engaged in project work, enabling a direct form of control. At the same time, the field of Project Management is engaged in a conscious strategy to achieve professional status, earning not only organizational influence but equally material rewards for the professional Project Manager. However, a Foucauldian analysis of professionalism and professionalization might emphasize the links between *professional knowledge*, the construction of a *professional identity* and the maintenance of forms of *conduct appropriate to a professional*. Through a discussion of developments in both organizations, I have emphasized the double-edged nature of professionalism, subjecting employees to both traditional systems of direct surveillance and an intensive form of self-discipline, while at the same time providing (relative) subjective security linked to increased material and symbolic rewards. More problematically, this security is typically attained through the objectification and instrumental manipulation of other subjects in line with technical rational goals.

A Foucauldian understanding of power/knowledge has been adapted here in an attempt to overcome dualistic understandings of how professional knowledge and professional power interrelate through the disciplining of the professional self. Attempts to construct Project Management as a profession are dependent upon its development as a *discipline*, not only in the sense of a 'field of objective scientific study' but *also* as a 'form of training and control'. A key element of this enterprise is the development of a Project Management 'Body of Knowledge', both universally and as an active construction of Project Management employees, against which their own practices must be evaluated (and, typically, are found wanting). This disparity between the ideal and the actual means that failures in the application of Project Management are frequently interpreted as merely failures in *implementation*, which not only leaves the basic discipline itself unquestioned but also implies that the required remedy must be to enforce Project Management more strictly in future. The dissemination and enforcement of a terminology specific to Project Management serves two purposes. Firstly, it structures the discursive resources of project workers such that their representations of 'reality' must conform to the basic Project Management model. Secondly, in doing so it privileges the constructions of those who have mastered the terminology and marginalizes the interpretations of those 'non-professionals' outside the discipline, whose constructions do not conform to the Project Management model. Although these may clearly be understood as power effects, the presentation of Project Management as an objective and transferable technical discipline, as a 'toolkit', is

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fiercely defended in both organizations and acts to obscure this operation of power. Project Management thus represents an unusually powerful means to intensify the control to which the employees are subject, in terms of both the levels of visibility and calculability it affords and at the same time the inculcation of a reflexive form of self-discipline.

Two final caveats bear underlining. Firstly, it is important to emphasize that professional self-discipline and 'responsibilization' (Grey, 1997, p. 1998) imposed by the construction of Project Management as a discipline does not exclude, and should not be seen as progressively replacing, more direct methods of surveillance and control. As Fournier points out, 'these new softwares of control rely on a complex interweaving between bureaucratic logic and the autonomisation of conduct' (Fournier, 1999, p. 293). This dual nature of Project Management, operating through both professional discipline and direct control, produces an interesting and at times contradictory nexus of power relations in the organizations examined. However, the burden of control falls disproportionately within project teams; many junior team-members interviewed saw very little 'professional' about their lack of autonomy and the intensive surveillance to which they were subject.

Secondly, it should be emphasized that the current inability of Project Management to match the professional status of, say, accountancy, does not undermine its effectiveness as a means of disciplining employees. I would draw a comparison here between the incomplete efforts of both Project Management and mainstream management theory to constitute themselves as professions. As Grey notes, the curious failure of management to achieve professional status does not hinder its ability to impose a level of discipline upon wave after wave of MBA graduates. Highlighting the social control effected by management education, he argues that the case of management should not be viewed as an example of a 'failed professionalization' but rather as a 'successful responsibilization' of managers; the dubious 'professional' status of the modern manager leads him/her to discipline him/herself even more rigorously than would the 'true' professional. Equally, within Project Management, early attempts to professionalize have already served to enforce a mode of discipline over managers and staff, and this discipline is continually reinforced despite, and as a partial result of, Project Management's lack of professional status in society as a whole.

NOTES

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[1] The names of the organizations have been changed to protect confidentiality. In addition, some organizational details have been omitted at the request of the companies for fear that they might enable their identification.

[2] As Nandhakumar and Jones note, 'Even if these techniques are treated primarily as a necessary fiction to present an image of control . . . their instantiation in manuals and software packages . . . provides a powerful incentive for their adoption' (2001, p. 195).

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