IDENTITY REGULATION AS ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL: PRODUCING THE APPROPRIATE INDIVIDUAL*

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes the regulation of identity as a focus for examining organizational control. It considers how employees are enjoined to develop self-images and work orientations that are deemed congruent with managerially defined objectives. This focus on identity extends and deepens themes developed within other analyses of normative control. Empirical materials are deployed to illustrate how managerial intervention operates, more or less intentionally and in/effectively, to influence employees' self-constructions in terms of coherence, distinctiveness and commitment. The processual nature of such control is emphasized, arguing that it exists in tension with other intra and extra-organizational claims upon employees' sense of identity in a way that can open a space for forms of micro-emancipation.

INTRODUCTION

Conceptualizations of organizational control have tended to emphasize its impersonal and behavioural features with scant regard for how meaning, culture or ideology are articulated by and implicated in structural configurations of control. Mintzberg's (1983) review of control structures, for example, identifies five means of coordination, each of which is concerned principally with such configurations. Yet, the coordinating and controlling of organizing practices is hardly restricted to the design and implementation of impersonal, generally bureaucratic, mechanisms, where issues of identity are less overtly addressed.

A couple of decades ago, Ouchi (1979, p. 840) observed how 'present organization theory . . . concentrates on the bureaucratic form to the exclusion of all else'. Since then, interest in organizational culture and symbolism has undoubtedly increased (*Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1983; Alvesson, 2001; Frost et al., 1985, 1991; Gagliardi, 1990; Martin, 1992; Parker, 2000; Pondy et al., 1983).

Ouchi's observation remains salient, however, as the literature on 'structure' and 'design' remains largely de-coupled from studies of culture and symbolism; also, much work on culture itself adopts a bureaucratic-engineering approach wherein its constituent elements are treated as building blocks in organizational design (Barley and Kunda, 1992). Other, less mechanistic and technocratic perspectives on organizational culture or ideology have often interpreted corporate values principally as means of legitimating objective social control (Burris, 1989); and, finally, illuminating studies of the negotiation of identity at work (e.g. Collinson, 1992; Knights and Murray, 1994; Kondo, 1990) do not focus upon the management of identity as a medium of organizational control.

In contrast, we are here concerned primarily with how organizational control is accomplished through the self-positioning of employees within managerially inspired discourses about work and organization with which they may become more or less identified and committed. As Deetz (1995, p. 87; see also Knights and Willmott, 1989) puts it, 'the modern business of management is often managing the "insides" – the hopes, fears, and aspirations – of workers, rather than their behaviors directly' (Deetz, 1995, p. 87). Consider, for example, the now widely used terms 'leader' and 'team leader'. The commonsensically valued identities associated with such discourse, which appeal to the positive cultural valence assigned to discourses of supremacy and sport, have replaced less 'attractive' titles such as 'foreman', 'supervisor' or even 'manager'. We interpret such moves as symptomatic of efforts to secure organizational control through the use of cultural media – in this case, the positive and seductive meanings associated with leadership (and teams, see Knights and Willmott, 1987, 1992) that are more congruent with 'postmodern', postFordist times, when, arguably 'there are far fewer identity givens . . . and more frequent changes over the life course' (Albert et al., 2000, p. 14). As Albert et al. (p. 14) suggest:

> . . . it is because identity is problematic – and yet so crucial to how and what one values, thinks, feels and does in all social domains, including organizations – that the dynamics of identity need to be better understood.

We seek to draw attention to identity as an important yet still insufficiently explored dimension of organizational control. Drawing upon the work of Simon (1945), Tompkins and Cheney (1985, cited in Barker, 1998, p. 262) forge an important link between the process of identification and the idea that rational decision-making, or the exercise of discretion in organizations, is bounded. 'Organizational identification', they note, effectively acts to 'reduce the range of decision' as choice is, in principle, confined to alternatives that are assessed to be compatible with affirming such identification. From a managerial viewpoint, 'member identification' presents a less obtrusive, and potentially more effective, means of organizational control than methods that rely upon 'external stimuli'.

This understanding resonates with recent interest in managing organizational culture and the 'informal' qualities of workplace organization. Notably, advocates of 'strong corporate cultures' have sought to persuade managers that 'soft is hard' and that 'all that stuff you have been dismissing for so long as intractable, irrational, intuitive, informal organization *can* be managed' (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 11) – for example, by shaping and influencing processes of organizational identification through the mobilization of diverse corporate cultural media

(Kunda, 1992). Although we do not share the faith and enthusiasm for managing culture that has been exhibited by consultants and practitioners during the past 20 years, we concur with their understanding of its increasing significance in circumstances where established bureaucratic controls have been found insufficiently responsive and adaptable to intensifying competitive pressures (Willmott, 1992). In general, however, analysts of organization have not explored this terrain. It is notable, for example, that in Whetton and Godfrey's *Identity in Organizations*, the issue of *managing* employee identity and identification is examined directly in a single chapter by James Barker, who references few studies aside from those undertaken by Cheney and Tompkins and their co-workers (e.g. Barker and Tompkins, 1994; Cheney, 1991; Tompkins and Cheney, 1985).

When exploring processes of organizational identification, it is relevant to temper an attentiveness to the oppressive effects of 'concerted' forms of control with consideration of expressions of employee resistance and subversion of such control (Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998). We reject any suggestion that management is omnipotent in its definition of employee identity. The organizational regulation of identity, we argue, is a precarious and often contested process involving active identity work, as is evident in efforts to introduce new discursive practices of 'teamwork', 'partnership', etc. Organizational members are not reducible to passive consumers of managerially designed and designated identities. Nor do we assume or claim that the organization is necessarily the most influential institution in identity-defining and managing processes. Nonetheless, we concur with a number of other commentators (e.g. Barker, 1993; Casey, 1995; Deetz, 1992; Knights and Willmott, 1989; Kunda, 1992) who argue that identity regulation is a significant, neglected and increasingly important modality of organizational control,[1] especially perhaps in larger corporations and those that are more readily located in the New E-conomy in addition to the longer established province of the professional service sector.

A continuing preoccupation with 'formal' and 'objective' aspects of control reflects the dominance of a positivist epistemology and a widespread self-understanding of management as a neutral technology or branch of engineering – a view that is routinely articulated and legitimized in functionalist forms of organizational analysis (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). This self-understanding largely disregards or marginalizes the issue of how control mechanisms are enacted by organizational members (Barnard, 1936; Weick, 1969). It is assumed that control is achieved by designing and applying appropriate structures, procedures, measures and targets; and, relatedly, that resistance to these mechanisms is symptomatic of 'poor design' or 'poor management' that can be rectified by restructuring and/or training or staff replacement. Those working in interpretive and critical traditions of organizational analysis, in contrast, have paid attention to the negotiated and problematical status of allegedly shared meanings, values, beliefs, ideas and symbols as targets of, as well as productive elements within, normative organizational control (e.g. Barley and Kunda, 1992; Kunda, 1992; Mumby, 1988; Ray, 1986; Rosen, 1985). Such studies have shown how managers may promote, more or less self-consciously, a particular form of organizational experience for 'consumption, by employees' (e.g. Alvesson, 1993, 1996; Kunda, 1992; Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Willmott, 1993). But these studies have not focused *directly* upon the discursive and reflexive processes of identity constitution and regulation within work organizations. Our concern is to appreciate how mechanisms and practices

of control – rewards, leadership, division of labour, hierarchies, management accounting, etc – do not work 'outside' the individual's quest(s) for self-definition(s), coherence(s) and meaning(s). Instead, they interact, and indeed are fused, with what we term the 'identity work' of organizational members. Identity work, we contend, is a significant medium and outcome of organizational control.

Of particular relevance for our analysis is an emergent literature that is attentive to how control is exercised through the 'manufacture' of subjectivity (Barker, 1999; Deetz, 1992, 1994; Hollway, 1984; Jacques, 1996; Knights and Willmott, 1989; Rosen, 1985; Weedon, 1987). We are, however, eager to avoid seduction by 'stronger' versions or interpretations of this literature, in which dominant discourses or practices are seen to place totalizing, unmediated constraints upon human subjects (Newton, 1998). One intended contribution of this article is to advance an understanding of identity construction as a process in which the role of discourse in targeting and moulding the human subject is balanced with other elements of life history forged by a capacity reflexively to accomplish life projects out of various sources of influence and inspiration. A second, related contribution is our specification of the different means of pursuing control in work organizations through the regulation of identity. We regard identity regulation as a pervasive and increasingly intentional modality of organizational control, but we do not suggest that this is unprecedented or that it is necessarily effective in increasing employee commitment, involvement or loyalty. Indeed, its effect may be to amplify cynicism, spark dissent or catalyse resistance (Ezzamel et al., 2000). In the absence of counter-discourses that interpret the mechanisms of regulation as intrusive, 'bullshit' or hype, however, we can anticipate not only instrumental compliance but also increased, serial identification with corporate values, albeit that such 'buy-in' is conditional upon their compatibility with other sources of identity formation and affirmation.

In the next section, we position our attentiveness to identity regulation within the context of contemporary 'post-bureaucratic' efforts to introduce greater flexibility and self-organization within workplaces. Illustrative empirical material is drawn from studies conducted by the authors, as well as from the rich accounts available in the literature.

IDENTITY REGULATION IN CONTEXT

Discourses of quality management, service management, innovation and knowledge work have, in recent years, promoted an interest in passion, soul, and charisma. These discourses can also be read as expressions of an increased managerial interest in regulating employees 'insides' – their self-image, their feelings and identifications. An appreciation of these developments prompts the coining of a corresponding metaphor: *the employee as identity worker* who is enjoined to incorporate the new managerial discourses into narratives of self-identity. A commonplace example of this process concerns the repeated invitation – through processes of induction, training and corporate education (e.g. in-house magazines, posters, etc) – to embrace the notion of 'We' (e.g. of the organization or of the team) in preference to 'The Company', 'It' or 'They'. Although courting hyperbole, the sense of a shift in the modus vivendi of advanced capitalist economies is conveyed by the understanding that:

> The relatively stable aesthetic of Fordist modernism has given way to all the ferment, instability and fleeting qualities of a postmodern aesthetic that celebrates difference, ephemerality, spectacle, fashion, and *the commodification of cultural forms*. (Ezzamel et al., 2000, p. 156, emphasis added)

This 'ferment' is expressed *inter alia* in the destabilization of identity, as something comparatively given and secure, and an increasing focus upon identity as a target and medium of management's regulatory efforts. As cultural mechanisms are introduced or refined in an effort to gain or sustain employee commitment, involvement and loyalty in conditions of diminishing job security and employment durability, *the management of identity work becomes more salient and critical to the employment relationship*. In these circumstances, organizational identification – manifest in employee loyalty, for example – cannot be presumed or taken for granted but has to be actively engendered or manufactured.

Currently, there are struggles in the workplace around a number of identity-intensive issues, including the feminization of managerial roles, the shifting meaning of professionalism and the internationalization of business activity. The increased numbers of women occupying managerial and professional positions traditionally populated by men (and infused by masculine meanings) has disrupted the earlier taken for granted identification of management, men and masculinity. There are also pressures to make sense of, and re-order, the relationship between gender and managerial work, partly through a 'de-masculinization' of management (Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Fondas, 1997; Gherardi, 1995). Knowledge-intensive work, especially in the professional service sector, spawns conflicting loyalties between professional affiliation and organizational responsibility that compound difficulties in retaining bureaucratic means of control (Alvesson, 2000). International joint ventures and other kinds of complex interorganizational arrangements (e.g. partnerships) render issues of social identity associated with national, organizational and professional affiliations more salient (Child and Rodriguez, 1996; Grimshaw et al., 2001). More generally, the complexities and ambiguities of modern organizations make the struggle for securing a sense of self a continuing and more problematical as well as self-conscious activity (Casey, 1995; Jackall, 1988; Knights and Murray, 1994; Watson, 1994). As Casey (1995, pp. 123–4) reports in her study of Hephaestus Corporation (a pseudonym), a world leader in the development and manufacture of advanced technological machines and systems,

> employees increasingly refer to themselves, not as physicist, engineer, computer scientist, but primarily as a Hephaestus employee with a job designation indicating team location . . . Without a union or a professional association, and only the official Hephaestus social or sports club, employees find that there is nowhere to go (at work) except to the team's simulated sociality and relative psychic comfort.

Identity becomes a locus and target of organizational control as the economic and cultural elements of work become de-differentiated (Willmott, 1992). The picture is not necessarily as bleak as Casey paints it, however. Employees are also being encouraged to be more creative and innovative, and are therefore being invited to

question and transgress the 'iron cage' of established 'Fordist' or 'bureaucratic' control mechanisms. It is romantic or nostalgic to assume that the existence of firm anchors for identity construction is an unequivocal benefit or, relatedly, that their loss is self-evidently disadvantageous. Great fluidity can present opportunities for what has been termed 'micro emancipation' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996) when employees have greater scope for arranging their own schedules and working practices, albeit with the parameters (e.g. quantity and quality targets) set by others. These changes invariably involve the removal of some oppressive restrictions even when or as they are accompanied by increased stress and job insecurity. At the same time, emancipatory practice based upon the politics of identity, such as the membership of a work group or team, is precarious and can result in the substitution of more totalizing, 'concertive' forms of control (Barker, 1999) for bureaucratic, supervisory methods of job regulation. As Axford (1995, p. 207) has observed, identity is 'capable of service in more suspect causes . . . because it is grounded in nothing more compelling than the legitimation of difference, rather than in institutional scripts which give meaning and legitimacy to certain kinds of behaviour more than others'. In the context of work organizations, the language of liberation and self-actualization may be promulgated as a seductive means of engineering consent and commitment to corporate goals such that the 'feel-good' 'effect of participation and "empowerment" disguises their absence' (Casey, 1995, p. 113). Flexible activation and de-activation of a set of identity elements is increasingly on the agendas of human resource strategists and developers'.[2] New forms of control may be seen to involve or solicit a *processing of subjectivity* in order to constitute employees who are not only more 'adaptable' but also more capable of moving more rapidly between activities and assignments where they may occupy quite varied subjective orientations or subject positions, especially within self-managing, multi-functional work groups or teams (Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998). In turn, increased flexibility and 'multiskilling' can be accompanied by, or stimulate keener questioning of, established hierarchies and practices, and can create pressures and opportunities for the removal of constraints upon the exercise of initiative and responsibility. In principle, such movement may foster forms of micro-emancipation. In practice, however, the fluidity and fragmentation of identity may render employees more vulnerable to the appeal of corporate identifications, and less inclined to engage in organized forms of resistance that extends their scope for exercising discretion and/or improves their material and symbolic rewards.

Having pointed to some relatively far-reaching social and organizational changes affecting constructions of self-identity, a few qualifying comments are called for. It is important to check any inclination to assume that the trends sketched above are already universally established. There is certainly space for debate and doubt regarding how significant the claimed changes are (Gray, 1999; Ruigrok et al., 1999; Warhurst and Thompson, 1998). There is also a danger of exaggerating the fragility and 'vulnerability' of subjects to the discourses through and within which they are allegedly constituted (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Newton, 1998). We do not argue that the production of subjectivity has changed radically during recent decades. We argue, nonetheless, that contemporary developments make processes of constructing and securing identity an increasingly relevant focus for conceptual and empirical analysis.

Studies of identity that have a direct bearing upon organizational control include analyses of institutional and other macro level phenomena (e.g. Albert and Whetten, 1985; Christensen, 1995; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994) as well as studies that concentrate upon individuals and forms of identification and subjectivity (Alvesson, 2000; Deetz, 1992). *Identity regulation* encompasses the more or less intentional effects of social practices upon processes of identity construction and reconstruction. Notably, induction, training and promotion procedures are developed in ways that have implications for the shaping and direction of identity. When an organization becomes a significant source of identification for individuals, corporate identity (the perceived core characteristics of the organization) then informs (self-)*identity work*. Analyses that focus directly upon processes of identity (re)formation and regulation have been governed by one or more of the following overlapping and interrelated ways of constructing and exploring identity: central life interest, coherence, distinctiveness, direction, positive value and self-awareness.

'Central life interest' refers to questions about a person's – or a group or a social institution's – feelings and ideas about basic identity concerns and qualities. The question 'Who am I?' or 'What are we?' calls for a response in terms of some dominant or defining identity. In the context of work organizations, this may be answered in terms of, for example, professional or occupational affiliation (e.g. engineer, electrician) or organizational position (e.g. head of the production department), but also in less formal terms, e.g. 'highly interested in ideas and experiments' or 'a people manager'. 'Coherence' describes a sense of continuity and recognizability over time and situation. A sense of identity is understood to connect different experiences and to reduce fragmentation in feelings and thinking. It counteracts or closes the possibility of responding to contingencies with limitless plasticity. 'Distinctiveness' means that somebody is definable, by herself and others, as different to someone else. Such a characteristic, sometimes deemed to be unique (e.g. a genius), is shared with others (e.g. men, employed), but still different from others (women, unemployed, retired). A fourth aspect is 'direction'. It implies what is appropriate, desirable and valued for a specific subject. The identity or self-image of a person offers guidelines for decision-making (Mitchell et al., 1986). A 'manager' manages. Implications for action may be vague, but nevertheless they make some routes appear reasonable and others less so. A fifth aspect concerns 'social values'. Identity is invariably related to self-esteem as aspired-for identity is attributed a positive social meaning. Conversely, one's enemies, but also others who serve as objects of comparison, tend to be seen and described in less positive terms (Turner, 1984). A sixth aspect is 'self-awareness'. Identity is also an 'object' of self-consciousness. An awareness of self-identity (see below) is a medium and outcome of how a person feels, as well as how she thinks and ascribes value (Hassard et al., 2000).

Giddens' concept of 'self-identity' usefully differentiates such concerns from those who study 'personal' or 'social' identity as a comparatively conscious set of self-images, traits or social attributes, although the concepts overlap and share common elements. Following Giddens, self-identity is conceptualized as a reflexively organized narrative, derived from participation in competing discourses and various experiences, that is productive of a degree of existential continuity and

security. 'Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person . . . self-identity is continuity (across time and space) as interpreted reflexively by the agent' (Giddens, 1991, p. 53). The reflexive construction of self-identity is assembled out of cultural raw material: language, symbols, sets of meanings, values, etc. that are derived from countless numbers of interactions with others and exposure to messages produced and distributed by agencies (schools, mass media), as well as early life experiences and unconscious processes. It forms a complex mixture of conscious and unconscious elements, an interpretive and reflexive grid gradually shaped by processes of identity regulation and identity work.

In comparatively stable or routinized life situations, the narrative of self-identity runs fairly smoothly. Identity work is comparatively unselfconscious, albeit contingent upon life history and the unchallenged position of the hegemonic discourse(s) through which identity is reproduced. In conditions of late modernity, however, identities are comparatively open and achieved rather than given or closed, as we noted earlier (see also Giddens, 1991; Willmott, 1994). Roles are improvised rather than scripted. Given the accomplished and sometimes precarious nature of contemporary identity, much, if not all activity involves active *identity work*: people are continuously engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness. Specific events, encounters, transitions, experiences, surprises, as well as more constant strains, serve to heighten awareness of the constructed quality of self-identity and compel more concentrated identity work. Conscious identity work is thus grounded in at least a minimal amount of self-doubt and self-openness, typically contingent upon a mix of psychological-existential worry and the scepticism or inconsistencies faced in encounters with others or with our images of them. Such tensions are stopped, or at least suspended, when a receptiveness to identity-securing positions and routines is matched by corporate and managerial opportunities for investing self in organizing practice. At the same time, such suspension is itself subject to disruption. When a familiar feeling tone, associated with the sensation of 'being myself', becomes unsettled, feelings of tension, anxiety, shame or guilt arise. Occasionally a sense of contradiction, disruption and confusion may become pervasive and sustained. Intensive remedial 'identity work' is then called for, perhaps even of a therapeutic kind. When such identity work fails, tensions and the possibility of breakdown follow.

Managing continuity, including typical or familiar levels of emotional arousal, against a shifting discursive framework provided by socially established truths about what is normal, rational and sound is the basis for identity work. Such monitoring work – involving strains and identity uncertainties – is well documented in Watson's (1994) study of managers in a large UK company. One manager accounts for his work situation as follows, illuminating a situation that calls for identity work: 'I really do wonder what my bloody job is sometimes. I say to myself "I am in charge of this office and the office in Birmingham" but then I ask whether I'm really in charge of even myself when it comes down to it. I get told to jump here, jump there, sort this, sort that, more than I ever did before I was even a section leader' (p. 29). In this example, the manager clearly experiences himself as a target of contradictory identity regulation as he, while institutionally positioned as a fairly senior manager, feels himself being managed much more than ever he was as a

IDENTITY REGULATION

Discursive practices concerned with identity definition that condition processes of identity formation and transformation

prompts

informs

IDENTITY WORK

Interpretive activity involved in reproducing and transforming self-identity

responsive or resistant to

induces

accomplished through

re-works

SELF-IDENTITY

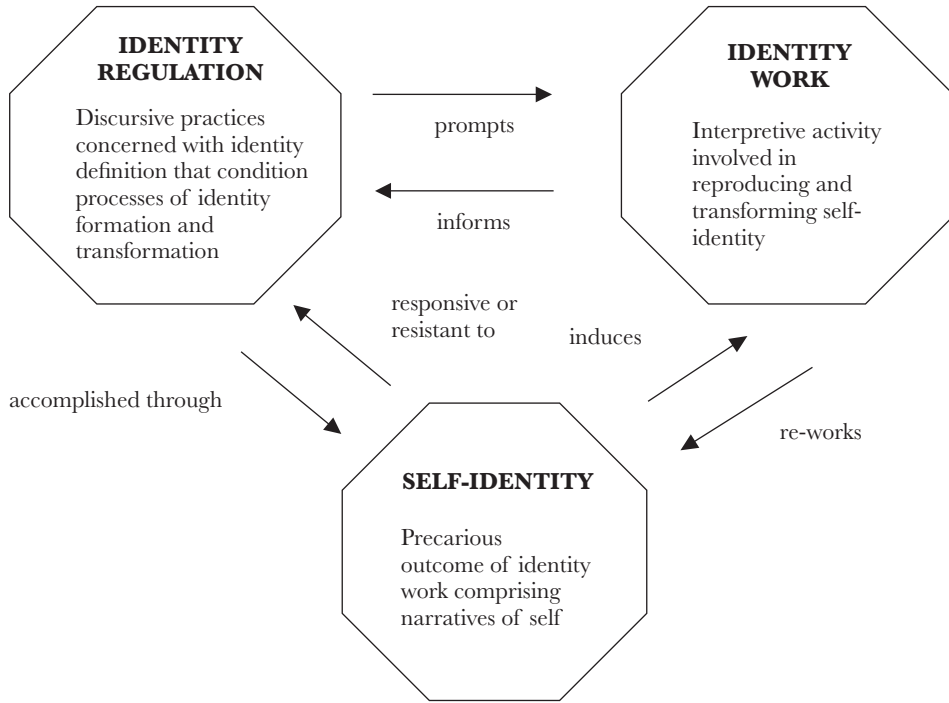Precarious outcome of identity work comprising narratives of self

Figure 1. Identity regulation, identity work and self-identity

section leader. At the same time, he hints that the strains and frustrated expectations associated with his managerial position are producing an unwelcome and probably unfamiliar level of tension or emotional arousal that leads him to express doubts about 'whether I am really in charge of myself'.

Our understanding of the relationship between self-identity, identity work and identity regulation is summarized in Figure 1. There, we indicate how self-identity, as a repertoire of structured narrations, is sustained through identity work in which regulation is accomplished by selectively, but not necessarily reflectively, adopting practices and discourses that are more or less intentionally targeted at the 'insides' of employees, including managers.

The three elements in our model are equally important. It is relevant to bear this in mind as we now consider regulation.

IDENTITY REGULATION AS ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL

We have emphasized the role of discourse in processes of identity formation, maintenance and transformation. Through attending to, and mobilizing discourses, we identify ourselves as separate independent entities; and by engaging (other) discourses we embellish or repair our sense of identity as a coherent narrative that is attentive to the concerns summarized earlier. As Hollway (1984, p. 252) has noted, social practices 'depend on the circulation between subjectivities and discourses which are available', including those discourses that address the world of

work and organization. The 'availability' of discourses is contingent upon gaining access to, and mobilizing, resources institutionalized in practices that are represented through such concepts as 'corporate cultures', 'work and professional ideologies', etc. But discourses also depend upon the interpretation and inventive powers of employees. Employees are not passive receptacles or carriers of discourses but, instead, more or less actively and critically interpret and enact them. For example, Watson (1994, pp. 114–18) reports resistance to attempts by senior managers to promote and establish a discourse that represented employees in terms of the *skills* they were deemed to possess rather than the *jobs* that they occupied. Employees, including many managers, challenged this move by problematizing the sense and the 'truth' of the 'language reform' desired by senior managers. They sought to defend a more traditional, counter-discourse, stressing the value of job security for maintaining morale, but did so by appealing to a hegemonic discourse of corporate performance, arguing that it would be adversely impacted by lowered morale.

   As Watson's study illustrates, there is generally some scope for articulating discourses to construct situations in ways that render actions (or non-actions) more or less reasonable and legitimate, at least within the terms of a particular worldview. That said, in any given situation, possibilities of using language to make differentiations and to structure (social) reality are not limitless. They are constrained as well as enabled by material conditions, cultural traditions and relations of power. Management (and others) act, more or less strategically, to introduce, reproduce, influence and legitimize the presence/absence of particular discourses. The meanings of, and membership within, social categories and claims about how the world is plausibly represented are constant sites of struggle where identities are presented, resisted and fought over (Clegg, 1989). Inter alia, ideological and disciplinary forms of power operate through (a) the supply/restriction of availability of discourses, (b) the frequency or intensity of their presence, and (c) the specific linking of discourse and subjectivity (O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001).[3]

   The management of discursive presence through varied and repeated exposure to ideological messages has been explored in a number of studies (e.g. Alvesson, 1995; Kunda, 1992; Rosen, 1985). It is not, however, merely the availability of discourses or even the frequency of their articulation that is important for pursuing organizational control through the regulation of identity. Of critical importance is the *linking* of discourse to processes of self-identity formation and reproduction. Regulation through the management of identity is conditional upon the strengthening of this link. Yet, to repeat, discourses may be produced and circulated without 'sticking' to their targets. The next section considers how discourses are more or less intentionally used to accomplish this control in contemporary management/organization contexts.

Targets of Identity Regulation
Despite a growing number of studies of cultural-ideological modes of control, very few have sought to explicate the specific means, targets and media of control through which the regulation of identity is accomplished. At best, broad-brush categories such as cultural, ideological, bureaucratic, clan or concertive control have been identified and supported by reference to examples or types of discourses. There is a need for something in between, showing the diverse ways in which identity regulation is enacted. To that end, we present a preliminary and certainly not

exhaustive overview of how identity is influenced, regulated and changed within work organizations. It is our hope that this overview can facilitate a more focused orientation and agenda for the empirical analysis of identity regulation.

1. *Defining the person directly.* Explicit reference is made to characteristics that have some validity across time and space and that distinguish a person from others. These characteristics suggest expectations of those people who occupy the social space that is thereby defined for them. The more precise the definition, the less vague are the implications. For example, if a person is addressed as 'a middle manager', s/he may 'manage' but perhaps primarily through following impera- tives from above. A '*male* middle manager' may do so with a stiffer upper lip (indi- cating masculinity) and may want to conceal the element of subordination for himself and others (cf Laurent, 1978) without deviating from the imperative of being below the top. 'A male 50 year old middle plateaued manager' may manage with slightly less enthusiasm than before he was identified as 'plateaued'. This kind of control may emerge from the operation of formal procedures (e.g. appraisal) or it may be used in informal ways (Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998).

2. *Defining a person by defining others.* A person (or a group) can be identified indi- rectly by reference to the characteristics of specific others. In a study of advertis- ing agencies, reference to other agencies as amateurish, insincere and sometimes duplicitous tended to be interpreted as implicitly communicating professionalism, honesty and openness as significant and desirable attributes among the members of the researched agency (Alvesson, 1994), even though these positive qualities were not explicitly expressed. In a US insurance sales organization, populated solely by men, managers and others emphasized that the work was not suitable for women. A manager said that he would never hire a woman. This portrayal of the other as lacking the necessary psychology for the job (e.g. 'killer instinct') ensured that the job and appropriate jobholders were constructed as masculine (Leidner, 1991). Indirectly, the salesmen were constructed as 'real men'. In turn, this identi- fication invited them to accept conditions that might otherwise have been experi- enced as frustrating and negative.

3. *Providing a specific vocabulary of motives.* A particular interpretive framework is commended and promoted by management through which employees are encour- aged to understand the meaning of their work. Through a particular vocabulary of motives (Mills, 1940), including archetypes and stories, a set of reference points about what is important and natural for a person to do becomes established. Earlier we gave an example from Watson's (1994) study where senior managers sought to displace a 'jobs' discourse with a 'skills' discourse. In a fast-growing com- puter consultancy company, the management tried to develop a non-instrumental orientation on behalf of the workers by emphasizing workplace climate and corporate pride (Alvesson, 1995). Social motives – having fun, working in groups, feelings of community – were stressed. Criteria for recruitment and a multitude of social activities supported this orientation. Instrumental motives were overtly de-emphasized. The relative absence of hierarchy was stressed and the significance of pay was played down. As one senior manager said in an introductory course for recent employees: 'I do not persuade people to work here by offering high wages, nor do I retain them by out-bidding other employers. The wage should be

fair, but not more than that'. This kind of signalling invited employees to construct themselves as intrinsically motivated rather than pay-oriented.[4]

4. Explicating morals and values. Espoused values and stories with a strong morality operate to orient identity in a specific direction or at least stimulate this process. This involves the sorting and ranking of alternative moralities and defining oneself accordingly, in a more or less coherent way. Self-managing teams may, on occasion, generate a strong consensus about values, leading to a close identification with the value system created. As Barker (1993, p. 436) concludes, 'if [workers] want to resist their team's control, they must be willing to risk their human dignity, being made to feel unworthy as a "teammate"'. A rather different example of this process is provided by Jackall (1988) when he shows how strong feelings of morality, although accepted or even celebrated in other life contexts, are understood to be misplaced in the business world.

5. Knowledge and skills. The construction of knowledge and skills are key resources for regulating identity in a corporate context as knowledge defines the knower: what one is capable of doing (or expected to be able to do) frames who one 'is'. Education and professional affiliation are powerful media of identity construction. The extensive use of management education programmes, for example, presents self-images of people who have been recently appointed or promoted as managers. Watson (1994, p. 5) describes one of his key tasks as a consultant/researcher to be 'identifying ways of encouraging all their managers to see themselves as "business managers", rather than as specialist or departmental managers' (see also Knights and Willmott, 1987). Casey (1996) reports how team membership and work area displaced occupational identification as a greater emphasis was placed upon the acquisition of skills to perform multiple functions. Knights and Morgan (1991) and Sveningsson (2000) contend that 'strategic management' as a field of knowledge and practice encourages the construction of managers as 'strategists'. An important measure of a manager's competence then becomes the capacity to articulate a strategy discourse and thereby 'pass' as a strategist.

6. Group categorization and affiliation. One frequently powerful way of regulating identity is through developing social categories to which the individual is ascribed. The dividing up of the social world into 'us' and, by implication although more or less clearly pronounced, 'them' creates or sustains social distinctions and boundaries (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Turner, 1982, 1984). By engendering feelings of belonging and membership, a sense of community, however contrived this may be (Alvesson, 1995; Rosen, 1985), can be developed. Casey (1996, p. 331) argues that 'the devices of workplace family and team manifest a corporate effort to provide emotional gratifications at work to counter the attractions of rampant individualism and consumption'. Being a team member and/or a member of the wider corporate family may then become a significant source of one's self-understanding, self-monitoring and presentation to others. This kind of identity regulation works through social events and the management of shared feelings more than through linguistic distinctions or cognitive operations (cf. Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989). Group categorization can occur without any references to specific values or a distinctive content.[5]

7. Hierarchical location. In most organizations social positioning and the relative value of different groups and persons is carved out and supported by repeated symbolism (Kunda, 1992; Martin and Siehl, 1983; Sculley, 1987, Ch. 1). Superiority/subordination in relation to significant others is central in answering the question 'who am I?'. Hierarchy in organizations is often formally based, but status distinctions between different communities and functions can also be central for the regulation of identities. Some progressive organizations avoid conspicuous hierarchy symbolism, celebrating its progressive, egalitarian character (Alvesson, 1995). Hierarchy is, however, typically still expressed, albeit in more subtle and often contradictory ways that call for complex negotiations of identity in terms of superiority/equality/subordinateship (Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998). A less explicit version of this is informal rankings. These may be intra- or extra-organizational. In progressive companies where the explicit, formal, internal hierarchy is downplayed there are frequently efforts to construct the entire company and its members as élite, e.g. through being an organic, adhocratic, leading-edge company rather than a 'bureaucracy', implying that organizational members are ahead of the rest of the competition in their orientations and capacities.

8. Establishing and clarifying a distinct set of rules of the game. Established ideas and norms about the 'natural' way of doing things in a particular context can have major implications for identity constructions. The naturalization of rules and standards for doing things calls for the adaptation of a particular self-understanding. There is, for example, in many companies, an established but unspoken code of proper conduct as a 'team player':

> A team player is alert to the social cues that he receives from his bosses, his peers, and the intricate pattern of social networks, coteries, and cliques that crisscross the organization. . . . He is a 'role player' who plays his part without complaint. He does not threaten others by appearing brilliant, or with his personality, his ability, or his personal values. He masks his aggressiveness with blandness. He recognizes trouble and stays clear of it. He protects his boss and his associates from blunders. (Jackall, 1988, p. 56)

These rules of good corporate citizenship are not 'values' or morals in the sense of a clear statement of what is good or bad. They are rather a network of meanings and guidelines for 'getting by' in ambiguous, politically charged social settings. They offer guidance on what is natural or necessary for corporate work to function. In a study of a global retailer that pursued a disastrous strategy of diversification into a variety of brand-based strategic business units, a recovery strategy was based upon the widely disseminated slogan and recipe of 'simplify, focus, act' (Ezzamel and Willmott, 1999). By learning and acting upon such 'rules', a collective sense of identity and purpose may be forged, thereby smoothing operations in the work context.

9. Defining the context. Through explicating the scene and its preconditions for the people acting in it, a particular actor identity is implicitly invoked. By describing a particular version of the conditions in which an organization operates (e.g. the market situation) or the zeitgeist (the age of informational technology), identity is

shaped or reinterpreted. When, for example, globalization is said to lead to massive uncertainty, harsh competition and rapid changes, then it is implied that adaptability, anti-bureaucracy and enterprising qualities are valued. In turn, this definition of the context invites employees 'to acquire capacities and dispositions that will enable them to become "enterprising" persons' (du Gay, 1996, p. 27).

To summarize, identity may be a more or less direct target for control as organizing practices address the actor, the other, motives, values, expertise, group membership, hierarchical location, rules of the game, the wider context, etc. The nine modes of regulation may grouped into those that focus respectively upon:

- *The employee*: regulations in which the employee is directly defined or implied by reference to the Other (1 and 2).
- *Action orientations*: regulations in which the field of activity is constructed with reference to appropriate work orientations (3, 4 and 5).
- *Social relations*: regulations of belongingness and differentiation (6 and 7).
- *The scene*: regulations indicating the kind of identity that fits the larger social, organizational and economic terrain in which the subject operates (8 and 9).

These nine modes of regulation offer a broad view of how organizational control may operate through the management of identity, primarily by means of discourse. We have stressed that regulation is not just targeted at individuals and groups per se, but may work indirectly and may be accomplished, in more or less focused ways, through diverse media of control. That said, it is important to appreciate how our specification of modes of identity regulation is an analytical device intended to bring a degree of order and clarity to complex and pervasive processes of organizational control. In practice, these forms of identity regulation occur simultaneously, and may contradict as well as reinforce each other. Moreover, to reiterate our earlier discussion, employees may be more or less receptive or resistant to identity-oriented or identity-consequential modes of organizational control.

Organizing practices and discourses may have implications for identity without being narrowly or exclusively dependent upon the precise self-understanding of the individual. An assembly line or a McDonald's outlet, for example, operates without presupposing a fine-tuned self-identity as an assembly-line worker. Nonetheless the work organization and its associated discourses have consequences for self-identity as the employee positions his or her sense of identity in relation to them. To be of significance for the regulation of identity, practices and discourses must have valency – whether affirming or negating – for its framing and fixing. This implies a certain intensity of meaning and some amount of emotionality (relating to anxiety, enthusiasm, involvement, etc.). Even wages as a motivator and source of meaning assume a strong value attached to money and its uses, which is then supported by an identity in which consumption or accumulation is central. The potency and influence of the media of regulation is always conditional upon organizational members' receptiveness to them. Discourses may be comparatively familiar and readily interpreted within an ongoing identity narrative and associated emotional condition; or they may be experienced as disruptive of it. Kunda (1992) gives the example of the corporate propaganda or 'bullshit' that continuously promotes the values and virtues of the organization. The influence of propaganda as a regulator of identity may increase, diminish or may even backfire.

People may distance themselves from the company as a key source of identification and draw upon the occupation, subunit or non-work sources of self-definition ('I am a family man rather than a career person'). In the latter, the 'loop' to the left of Figure 1 takes precedence as responses illustrated by the arrows to and from the box labeled 'identity work' become less significant. When there is discontinuity, the identity narrative is actively explored, defended or modified – either temporarily or with longer lasting consequences. Here, the 'loops' in the upper and right parts of the figure are dominant. Of course, discourses are rarely experienced unequivocally as confirmation/continuation or disruption/discontinuation. Different discursive elements may point in different directions as ambiguity persists. In the following empirical cases, a number of the modes specified earlier are reviewed. The first case illustrates concentrated identity work in response to a threat, while the second describes a confirmation of ongoing identity constructions.

TWO ILLUSTRATIVE CASES

Case 1. The Angry Worker: On Refusing to Say 'Business'
A young worker in an industrial company was asked to report to the marketing manager who tried to persuade him to say 'business' instead of 'product' when referring to the crowbars produced by the company (from Alvesson and Björkman, 1992). It was part of a corporate effort to make the firm more 'market oriented', to make people in production recognize that there are customers buying the 'business'/'product', and to create a common orientation across the different areas of the company. This attempt to adopt the term 'business' instead of 'product' encountered sustained resistance from some employees. According to the shopfloor worker,

> Roland (the factory manager) has also been brainwashed with that term. I am convinced that the expression originates from the marketing manager. I have nothing whatever to do with the 'business' crowbar. It is the marketing side which has to do with the business. *There* it is a matter of business, but not *here*. I am not interested in getting closer to the market. I have enough to do as it is. [The marketing manager] tried to impress upon me that it is a matter of businesses, not of the product. He tried to find out what kind of person I am. I thought it was a damned thing to do. His job is to deal with the market. He should not come down here and mess with me, that's the task of my own boss. Roland also thought it was a bit unpleasant. (He was also there). One wonders what kind of people they have up there.

This example illustrates how an episode may trigger intensive identity work, in which a particular identity is defended and strengthened against experienced attack. (Other outcomes could have been an active embrace or passive acceptance of the regulative effort, or simply disregarding it without any reaction.) Inter alia, the worker expresses his basic sense of (work) identity: somebody working with physical objects ('I have nothing whatever to do with the "business"'); coherence: the refusal to comply with a vocabulary indicating another orientation and attitude to work – he sticks to his knitting ('I am not interested in getting closer to the

market'); distinctiveness: he is very different to the other person ('There it is a matter of business, but not here'); commitment: he works with production ('I have enough to do as it is'). In general, the situation is defined (or re-constituted) in terms that are defensive and protective of a sense of identity regulated by estab-lished, but now questioned, organizing practices. This is accomplished, in this case, through a pejorative construction of the other, who is allegedly responsible for brainwashing, interfering, almost bullying a worker who, in any event, is consid-ered to be outside his jurisdiction.

In terms of the modes of regulations indicated above, this brief example exem-plifies an attempt to change the rules for the game (8) – the concern to become more oriented to the market and the customer. The marketing manager tries to establish the subordinate positioning of the worker by calling him to the manager's office and instructing him about what language to use (7). Relatedly, the episode may be understood as an effort to rank different kinds of knowledge (5): produc-tion is subordinated to marketing knowledge. These aspects of hierarchy and ranking are reinforced by the fact that the factory manager was also present during the episode. However, the outcome of the intervention is, contrary to intention, a reinforced identification of the worker with production and the factory. Market-ing is viewed as 'them', rather than 'us'.[6] It is the strength of identification with production work that informs the worker's emotionally charged response to pres-sures to embrace an upgrading of marketing and customer talk. The exchange invited a reorientation of the worker to become a market/business-oriented person, receptive to the signals/requirements from marketing. In response, his identity work takes the form of a process of defining the self (1), the other (2), a certain morality (4), group belongingness (6), illegitimate hierarchical relations (7) and the rules of the game (8).[7]

Case 2. Processing Managerial Subordinates: The Case of an Information Meeting
The situation is an information meeting in a business sector of a large industrial company. The president has gathered 100 individuals to inform them about a re-organization. He introduces the meeting with a rhetorical question 'Why are you here? It is because you are managers in this company!' (The following day the remaining personnel receive similar information, in groups of 500 people.)

The meeting continues with the president asking the audience 'what is the best way to organize ourselves?'. He does not directly address the question for the next 30 minutes. Instead, he describes various aspects of the entire company, its his-torical development, its size and its strategy. He then states some general princi-ples about how to organize. 'Decentralization' and the need for personnel 'to decide for themselves' and to provide 'feedback' are mentioned several times. The president uses the word 'we' frequently. He then informs his audience about the overall structure of the new organization, in which three divisions are central. The new divisional managers talk briefly about their respective units. The staff of the business sector are then introduced: they stand up when their names are called. After a few questions, the meeting is over (from Alvesson, 1996).

At this meeting, managerial identity is explicitly and visibly confirmed. Those present were identified as 'managers', not as employees, co-workers, subordinates, engineers and marketers, etc. The identification of those present as managers accentuates certain ideas and values about the job. This is done by invoking

broadly shared contextual meanings associated with the term 'manager': it is a question of responsibility, loyalty, work morale, results orientation, being positive about changes, etc. Related to these meanings are references to feedback and self-determination as important elements of the re-organization. The meeting serves to remind the audience that they should perceive the planned reorganization as 'managers', and that this has specific implications. That employees in the company had grown weary of frequent reorganizations made it even more important for the president to appeal to an identity that carries with it a responsibility to assume a positive attitude towards change.

Our commentary on this case has already incorporated reference to the focal persons, a vocabulary of motives, a set of values and social belongingness to the category of managers, (see 1, 3, 5 and 6 above). There were also implicit references to 'non-managers', i.e. those employees who were absent from this meeting (see 2), thus reminding those present of their shared, exclusive identity in relationship to the rest of the personnel.

During the course of the meeting, the 'managers' were interpellated primarily as subordinates. Despite talk of 'we', and indications of a shared group identity as managers, they were treated as passive recipients of the new organizational design upon which senior management had autocratically decided. They were not encouraged to take an active role in the decision process that had preceded the meeting, nor were they encouraged to become involved during it. Four hierarchical levels were signalled and corresponding identities presented (mode 7 above). Further, the framing of the reorganization in the context of the firm's world-wide business had the effect of playing down the relevance of the audience's local knowledge of the specific situation (modes 5, 8 and 9). In interviews with members of the audience, they indicated that the president's address and the organization of the situation were familiar and to a degree reassuring, despite the hierarchical distance between themselves and the top manager being strongly felt. The meeting did not seem to trigger transgressive or innovative identity work, but instead appeared to facilitate the maintenance of established identities (that is, it fuelled ongoing identity constructions).

DISCUSSION

Identity regulation may be pursued purposefully or it may be a by-product of other activities and arrangements typically not seen – by regulators or the targets of their efforts – as directed at self-definition. Media of regulation may be strategically employed; or they may be produced by actors in their everyday interactions as part of cultural traditions and institutionalized patterns of behaviour. Our two illustrative cases show how the two modes may coincide. More or less conscious actions by senior managers are expressed in relatively mundane contexts in which identity regulation may not be at the forefront of managers' minds.

Analyses of organizational control have tended to focus upon one or more neatly integrated and dominating types of control or continua between two or three types. Friedman (1990) counterposes 'direct control' – a detailed specification of tasks with close supervision where, in principle, employees' sense of identity is seemingly irrelevant – against 'responsible autonomy' which involves mobilizing

or developing employees' capacity to exercise discretion in ways that are consistent with corporate values and priorities. The issue of identity is unexplored. The presentation and comparison of theories 'X', 'Y' (McGregor, 1960) and 'Z' (Ouchi, 1981) is also largely silent on the issue of identity regulation and identity work. It is indicated that management arrangements more or less automatically produce a certain kind of work orientation. The practical application of such types of control is rarely located in the interplay of dense networks of groups, acts, events, cultural meanings and symbols that are mobilized in processes of identity work, processes which may create a large discrepancy between intent and outcome.

To further explicate the complexities and dynamics of identity regulation, we make an analytical distinction between three patterns of identity regulation – 'managerial', 'cultural-communitarian' and 'quasi-autonomous' – that, in practice, are frequently intertwined. By focusing upon these three interacting 'sources' of inputs to identity regulation, process aspects are highlighted and uncertainties in terms of (temporary) outcomes are taken seriously.

Managerial theory and arrangements supply discourses through which self-identity is constructed and maintained. For example, 'leadership' is 'effective' when it coalesces and regulates identity, de-activating alternative constructions. Indeed, leadership has been conceptualized as the management of meaning (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). As meaning is contingent upon identity, managing meaning is integral to managing identity.[8] Managerial and corporate regulation may reduce anxiety for employees when it assists them in coping with ambiguity or when undertaking focused, productive work. Less positively, the domination of managerially orchestrated identities implies limited space for critical reflection (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996), places constraints upon ethical judgement (Jackall, 1988) and exerts a strong corporate grip over people's lives (Deetz, 1992). It may also encourage and sanction a new inflexibility when employees become devotees of a particular set of meanings (Barker, 1993). On the other hand, standardized constructions of top managers may act to demoralize or constrain, rather than facilitate, the work and interaction of organizational members (Willmott, 1997). Managers are the 'recipients' and 'bearers' of powerful regulative efforts that may be counter-productive when transmitted to the shopfloor, as was evident in the case of the angry worker.

Cultural-communitarian patterns of identity regulation emerge from broadly shared understandings and convictions; they may be organizational in origin and effect, but are more often occupationally/societally rooted (Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998). The case of the angry worker (see earlier) illustrates how a factory-based identity (albeit one to which prior managerial practices may have contributed) frames a response to managerial regulations that are sensed to threaten it. Cultural-communitarian inputs may oppose, support or work independently of management-driven identity regulation. Organizational cultural control is generally anchored in broader, historically derived collective patterns of belief and legitimacy. Managerial action takes place within, rather than above, these patterns. For example, Whittington (1989, p. 298) notes how the managers in his study 'were able to synthesize patriotic, paternalistic, professional and religious ideals into local ideologies supporting their private purposes' – purposes that were themselves fashioned from these and other identical resources.

What may be characterized as *quasi-autonomous* patterns of identity regulation can be conceptualized as moves towards 'micro emancipation' (Alvesson and

Willmott, 1996).[9] The circulation of a plurality of discourses and practices through which identities are formed makes it more likely that identities are only partly or temporarily regulated by management-driven or other group-controlled processes of regulation. Other processes are present that may discredit or impede managerial identity regulation, as in the case of our angry worker example. The struggle to forge and sustain a sense of self-identity is shaped by multiple images and ideals of ways of being. This presents both opportunities and difficulties in changing/reconstructing identities in a liberating direction. Preconditions include (1) a combination of elements of stability/integration with elements of change/plurality, (2) a space as well as resources, for critical reflection, and (3) a supportive form of social interaction (Payne, 1991; Willmott, 1998).

Poststructuralists have developed a concept of process subjectivity to point towards a way of transgressing the disciplinary effects of regulation (Deetz, 1992; Weedon, 1987). Central to this process is a willingness to acknowledge the disunity of the 'I' and the associated urge to deny discontinuity and fragmentation and/or the compulsion to restore the ideal of sovereignty. One must bear in mind that micro-emancipation is not only an intellectual project; it involves emotional labour (Fay, 1987; Willmott, 1998). Providing 'counter-discourses' to managerial regulations and socio-emotional support through groups and networks is important, but what can be accomplished by this alternative organizing should not be exaggerated nor should the problems arising from contradictory pressures and identifications in corporate settings be minimized. As 'the unity of the I is risked', Deetz comments, 'the fixed self/other/world configuration gives over to the conflictual, tension filled antagonisms out of which objects are differentiated and re-differentiated and preconceptions are given over to new conceptions' (Deetz, 1994, p. 30). The letting go of an illusory sense or ideal of integrity and autonomy creates space for enacting and exploring what has previously been suppressed, contained or 'othered'.

Some aspects of contemporary organizations can facilitate this possibility. Organizations are multi-discursive or at least settings open to the multiplicity of ideas, vocabularies and practices of the contemporary world.[10] This is so not only because of the complexity of task requirements, the multitude of centres of power and social identities, but also because increasingly complex and dynamic operations – as in social life itself – demand adaptability and employee adoption of a variety of subject positions. The case of the angry worker is illustrative. The managerial intent is, of course, not to transform the person into a businessperson but to encourage a broadening of the workers' mindset so that marketing aspects are incorporated – such as working flexibly to meet orders – into the worker's sense of his responsibilities as an employee. The use of business vocabulary is, we suggest, intended to loosen an identification with established, production-centric discourses of factory work. However, it is naïve to assume that identity can be pushed in any direction without inertia, pain, resistance and unintended consequences, as the case of the angry worker demonstrates. Such resistance may be an unreflective response contingent upon communitarian forms of control, but the interplay between managerial regulatory efforts and belongingness to several 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) speaks in favour of a continuing and potentially expanding space for micro-emancipation and quasi-autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Our purpose in this article has been to highlight and explore the significance of identity regulation for processes of organizational control. By exploring the linkages between organizational control and identity regulation, we have developed an analysis of identity work that circles around the interplay of self-identity, identity work and the regulation of identity. To this end, we have:

- Located the regulation of identity within the contemporary, post-Fordist context of discourses and practices that are significant for identity work, arguing against tendencies to compartmentalize or neglect identity in analyses of organizational control.
- Outlined a conceptual framework for the analysis of identity regulation and different responses to it, focusing upon the interplay between regulatory interventions, identity work and self-identity.
- Specified some of the means, targets and media of identity regulation through which organizational control may be accomplished.
- Illustrated how modes of identity regulation are enacted by reference to two brief case studies and numerous other examples.
- Differentiated three common patterns of identity regulation.
- Argued for, and tried to develop, a conception of micro-emancipatory possibilities.

In conclusion, we draw out some methodological and theoretical implications of our analysis. Theoretically, our discussion invites analysts of work organization to pay greater attention to, and to contribute towards, an emergent literature that places processes of identity (re)formation at the centre of social and organizational theory. More specifically, our analysis urges students of organizational and management control to incorporate within their conceptual frameworks an appreciation of the dynamics of identity regulation. This invitation is no less relevant for many 'radical' perspectives on work organization (e.g. labour process theory) than it is for more mainstream studies of organizational functioning. In taking up this challenge to pay greater attention to processes of identity (re)formation in organizational control, we have commended theory that understands the processes to be fluid, unstable and reflexive – a condition that presents opportunities for microemancipation as well as openings for 'new' forms of subordination and oppression. Methodologically, our discussion suggests the relevance of in-depth and longitudinal studies based upon participant observation, or at least semi-structured interviews, for investigating processes of identity regulation rather than, say, survey-based research or closed ended interviews. To illuminate processes of identity regulation, it is important to examine their contextual product in some detail and over time. In this way, it is to be hoped to penetrate and interrogate processes of organizational identification in ways that are illuminating and empowering for those who are affected by these 'new' media of control.

NOTES

[1] Of course, it has long been noted how bureaucratic control mechanisms tend to attract and (re)produce 'the bureaucratic personality' (Merton, 1940) whose identification with the office and its procedures precludes the possibility of taking responsibility for actions that are not directly authorized by the rules. The intent, but not necessarily the effect, of new, cultural mechanisms associated with 'the post-bureaucratic organization', in contrast, is to produce employees who find meaning in corporate values, and who do not simply comply with established rules and procedures to ensure better coordination and flexibility but are committed to processes of 'continuous improvement'. The role of the 'professional', 'competent' manager now extends to taking responsibility for scoping and shaping others' identities so that they are more receptive to such commitments. Managers are themselves also more or less intended targets of identity regulation, as well as 'managers' of their own identities (Jackall, 1988; Watson, 1994).

[2] It should be emphasized that the term 'element' is not deployed in this paper to indicate a fixed psychological trait but to convey the presence of qualities that link together life history and everyday experiences in distinctive complexes of feeling, valuing, thinking and fantasizing. Each element stands in a dynamic relationship to other elements as they are mobilized in regulative efforts and routine identity work.

[3] It is frequently argued that subjectivity is constituted within discourse, which implies that there is no 'external' relationship between discourses and subjects. While not arguing that people are (actually, or even potentially) autonomous in relationship to discourse, we prefer a less totalizing and deterministic notion of discourse. We allow for the inclusion of elements to work on or with subjectivity. Notably, there are somatic and tacit aspects of social interaction and human development and that a more totalizing or 'muscular' concept of discourse inadequately appreciates. Recognition of the significance of discourse as a way of understanding identity does not exclude consideration of other aspects.

[4] It is rather common that instrumental rewards are downplayed, at least rhetorically, in knowledge-intensive companies (Alvesson and Lindkvist, 1993; Kanter, 1983). In identity terms, this means that people are constructed as committed, dedicated professionals, etc.

[5] That this does not necessarily include a distinct value represents one difference compared to what we covered in point 2 above. Another difference is that there is not any direct reference to a 'them' (the Other).

[6] This distinction was pervasive and strongly felt by many in the production department of the company (Alvesson and Björkman, 1992). The example could, of course, be interpreted as a case of interdepartmental rivalry, although the acceptance of the production manager of the business vocabulary tends to contradict this interpretation. It is worth noting, however, that the focus upon identity favoured here does not stand in opposition to a group-conflict view. Negative relations between units or functions invariably involve identity issues: social identities are highly salient in group conflicts.

[7] This example also confirms the (late) modern condition of the worker who is less deferential, more sceptical. A non-authoritarian, questioning attitude was reported to be common among the worker's cohort and exemplary of the spirit broadly fostered by Swedish socializing agencies during recent decades, partly related to social egalitarianism, the welfare system, low unemployment and relatively secure employment conditions. A supervisor in the factory compares younger and older workers: the younger are more mobile, more creative, perhaps too much so, he says. They sometimes lack inhibitions. They are a bit lacking in respect, they question things not only once but several times: 'Why should it be like that?' 'Why don't I get a pay rise?' Many of the older workers do not say anything: 'Thank you. May I go now?'. But, equally, our production worker is not rigidly caught in an anti-management discourse.

Although clearly resistant to the demand by the marketing manager to change his orientation, he refers to his immediate manager in comparatively sympathetic terms, including the use of his first name.

[8] It is relevant to note here how the research interview itself acts as an open-ended input to identity work. Research interventions such as interviews or questionnaires do not measure the 'truth' of identity but interactively provoke its articulation and may stimulate a reappraisal of identities (see Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000).

[9] We have used the rather clumsy phrase '*quasi-autonomous*' patterns of identity regulation to indicate that the sense of autonomy arises from the tension and associated zone of indecision associated with the presence of competing identity-regulating discourses. This 'autonomy' is 'quasi' in the sense that it is socially organized through an engagement with 'the other' rather than something that is essentially given and 'liberated' through resistance.

[10] The attendant risk is one of being pushed around by the multitude of agencies and discourses constructing an 'open', malleable subject taking different forms according to functional demands. This may include unquestioning loyalty to the group or corporation (Barker, 1999), an enthusiastic adherence to any new management fashion concept, chameleon-like willingness to serve the whims of any client willing to pay, and, more generally, an unreserved acceptance of whatever discourse is currently in circulation, etc.

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