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Abstract

In the last decades, the number of temporary services offered to organizations on a commercial basis by external consultants have increased significantly. New arenas for expertise have been established, replacing hierarchical co-ordination with market co-ordination. Through a juxtaposition of management consultants and temporary employees in Sweden and the USA, this paper discusses how expertise and authority in these external and temporary services are constructed. We argue that they are social accomplishments, continuously constructed and re-constructed in local relations between client organization and service provider.

Introduction: New Arenas for Temporary External Services

For quite some time, organizations have been hiring external professionals when in need of expert services in accounting and law. During the last decades, however, there has been an increase not only in the number of services provided by external professionals, but also in the variety of services offered in less professionalised fields of competence. We have seen a wave of externalisation of organizational, managerial and administrative services. A number of temporary services are now provided by external rather than by in-house employees on regular contracts. Consequently, where there used to be bureaucracies there are now markets and business relations. The providers of this service also offer similar kinds of services to large numbers organizations. This aspect of the modern organization of temporary services is discussed here by focusing on two of the most ubiquitous forms of services offered to organizations on commercial basis today; management consulting and temporary administrative staffing.

The recent upswing in the market for organizational and administrative services may be seen as related to the discourse on organizational structures and social change in modern times. There is now an intense debate concerning the extent to which we have moved beyond tradition and a sense of relative security (cf. Adam, 1995). In social science and among practitioners alike, images of an uncertain and fragmented future society are evoked. Many of these images stem from post-modern or post-traditional perspectives which, even though they are increasingly being subject to criticism and qualification, they have not lost momentum. Much current theorising in social science is concerned with the decline of the belief in pre-given or natural order of things, the development of fragile social structures and contingent communities (see e.g. Bauman, 1995; Beck, 1992; Heelas, Lash & Morris, 1996), and the prevalence of risks with global reach (Beck, 1992). The vocabularies and techniques of risk, as noted by Rose (1996: 320), make possible novel ways for the expert problematization of fields of work, and open up new roles for advisers, educators, and managers of risk. New languages and techniques become available for organizations to make their future appear more controllable.

These techniques, however, are not only constructed within organisational hierarchies. More often, they are cultivated and co-ordinated on markets. Organizational slack (e.g. Cyert & March, 1963; Thompson, 1967) as a strategy for uncertainty reduction has been abandoned in favour of downsized, anorectic organizations. In the name of rationalisation, services are bought from specialists when needed. This saves time and energy and reduces the risks associated with quality of performance and regular employment contracts. According to Pfeffer & Baron (1988: 263), 'taking the workers back out' of their organizations represents perhaps the most visible and pronounced trend in the structuring of work arrangements. This trend also includes, we may add, a preference for reduction of formal levels of hierarchy, an emphasis on flexibility rather than rule-following and images of a more permeable boundary between the inside and the outside of organizations – as denoted by increased use of sub-contracting, temporary working and consultants rather than a permanent and/or in-house expertise (Garsten & Grey, forthcoming). The 'post-

bureaucratic trend', as Heckscher & Donnellon (1994) have it, invites market dynamics into what used to be intra-organizational matters and seeks to rid the organization of activities that are not directly linked to its focal service or product.

In the world of organizations then, the challenges and risks of entering global competition are closely linked to a managerial discourse that favours loosely formed constellations rather than fixed and stable structures. Network organizations and virtual organizations alike propose amorphous and continuously changing constellations, where job responsibilities, lines of authority, and even the definition of what constitutes an employee are shifting (see e.g. Davidow & Malone, 1992; Reich, 1992). March (1995) has drawn attention to the 'disposability' of contemporary organizations, that is, the tendency not only to reorganize, but also to dispose of organizations and to reinvent them when they appear not to perform successfully. Even in the world of the relatively stable and inert organizations then, notions of instability and uncertainty constitute a significant part of current organizational discourse.

From Hierarchies to Markets

These perspectives challenge existing notions of institutional and structural stability, arguing instead that many of the institutions and structures of today are relatively contingent and fragile phenomena. Whilst the extent to which these tendencies make a break from preceding structures of modernity and relative stability may be questioned, we may agree on the fact that they interpenetrate and compete with processes of institution- and tradition-maintenance and rejuvenation of boundaries and structures. Moreover, they bring in their wake a market for temporary expert services. "In times of uncertainty, the expert rises to prominence," Hochschild (1983: 75) argues.

Accordingly, *Konsultguiden* (1998), a listing of Swedish consultancies, states that the market has never been better for firms who sell management consulting services or offer temporary staffing solutions. An increasing number of service providers feed on notions of fragmentation and contingency in order to create a market from which to distribute services that would render organizations and individuals within them more adaptive and efficient. Oftentimes, management consultants are demanded as keynote speakers at conferences, providing their images of the character of changes the world is going through. They also publish frequently, on issues widely read and discussed, hence influencing public discourse on matters of contemporary and future change (Huczynski, 1993; Furusten, 1996, 1999a). Oftentimes, these expressions not only convey perspectives and theories of a more or less politicised and apocalyptic character; they also offer solutions to coming crises. Likewise, temporary employment agencies position themselves as offering the means for keeping firms 'lean and mean' and for avoiding the high costs of long-term work contracts. Therefore, we see that while

ideas and their diffusion is an integral aspect of globalizing processes, a concomitant commodification of such knowledge takes place.

The nature of the knowledge of management consultants and professional temporary employees is also of a kind that facilitates for professionals and experts to share ideas and experiences across space and time. For example, consultants at McKinsey or Arthur Andersen may relatively easily find their way through the global network of offices, and may also be hired to work on particular projects in another country. Their knowledge is rather of a kind that may easily be lifted out of local contexts of interaction and reorganized across large time-space distances, a process that Giddens calls the 'disembedding' of social systems. Likewise, individuals who work for temporary employment agencies have knowledge of a kind that may often be easily transferred from one office to the other without losing its value. This may be facilitated by the fact that organizational fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) are now more global and homogenised, which would mean that the same ideas and forms are recognised by those who move within these fields.

While organizations may have a lot to gain by outsourcing certain functions, those who provide service also gain a certain power. The expert has access to a specialised field of knowledge that may be denied to the layman. To the client, the contact with the expert may be a unique experience - an interaction in which the expert makes authoritative interventions that may have far-reaching ramifications for the organization (Hannerz 1992: 121). However, as Hannerz notes:

... this sense of domination may not be fully reciprocated. Because of the difference in perspectives towards the relationship, the expert may not quite recognize his power. For him, the world may be divided into a multitude of delimited fields of knowledge. He, for his part, deals only with one particular kind of facts of life, in a long series of relationships. The expert-client relationship is for him mostly a routine. In some instances, at least, there may be dominatedness without intentional domination.

In expertise-dependent organizations, this interrelationship may thus be significant. We may also see, that while the management consultant may represent one end of the continuum as regards the distribution of power, the temporary employee moves along the scale to a larger extent, and may sometimes even end up at the other end of the continuum.

The organizational and administrative competence that management consultants and temporary administrative personnel represent are of great importance for modern organizations and for particular networks of organizations. Based on the service they provide organizations not only manage to run their daily business, they also plan for their future. This kind of competence used to be local and incorporated in the bureaucracy of single organizations. Today, it is to a larger extent commodified and offered on open markets. The building on a relation of trust

between client and service provider, in which expertise and authority may be established, becomes crucial.

The Construction of Expertise

The two concepts 'management consulting' and 'temporary staffing' may be seen as two sides of the same coin: organizational and administrative services offered to organizations by external experts on commercial basis. The service that the external expert provides is by definition temporary. Yet, there are important differences between them. Management consultants can appear in many various forms, ranging from specialised experts (Greiner & Metzger, 1983), 'organizational therapists' (Schein, 1988), 'merchants of meanings' (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1988) to 'organizational witch doctors' (Clark & Salaman, 1996). Likewise, temporary employees may be professional, such as physicists or engineers, or they may be clerical staff with little professional training, such as switchboard, receptionist and secretarial services that enable the organization to be more flexible. A temp is generally not supposed to change the work practices at the client organization. A consultant is often expected to do just that, or at least to provide an alternative point of view.

Still, a large part of the services that 'consultants' provide resemble those offered by temps. Services such as 'management-for hire' may be provided by a temp agency as well as by a management consultancy. There are also a number of services that consultants do that aim to examine or investigate rather than to suggest or promote changes. Thus, the border between these services is not always clear. However, to focus only on their differences limits the understanding of the phenomenon of 'outsourcing' of competence from hierarchies to markets and tends to gloss over their common characteristics.

The ways in which the temporary service providers present advice and solutions to the client is a critical point for the development of expertise and authority (cf. Giddens, 1990). With the increased significance of expert knowledge, one of the major challenges is to overcome the gap between lay and expert knowledge and to create and maintain trust. In this regard, it is obvious that there is a competition between different suppliers of strategies for the establishment of trust. Actors on this market have to play their role as experts convincingly. Clients are likely to have to deal, not only with the uncertainty encountered in their field of business, but also with the uncertainty of not knowing which of the competitors on the market possess 'the best' expertise. It is in the relation between expert and client that expertise is constructed. Hence, there is a strong relational component involved in the process.

Standardised and Versatile Expertise

The notion of expertise is a disputed and problematic issue. In relation to management consultants and temporary employees, we suggest that expertise is that mix of knowledge, experiences, competence, skills and talent that makes someone an expert of management or whatever area in question. The expert rarely controls this complex him or herself, but rather has control of the access to the bundle of knowledge and ideas needed to solve a particular problem. He knows how to get hold of, manipulate and present knowledge and ideas to the layman. Moreover, expertise is not an objective capacity that is generally applicable in all situations in all organizations all over the world. Instead it is more likely to be described as a constructed capacity or social accomplishment that takes on different meanings in different social networks and situations. In these networks different interpretations of what expertise is believed to represent may very well occur.

Management consultants and temporary employees differ in the kinds of expert knowledge they offer. To complicate the picture even more, they also differ among themselves, in offering a great variety of expert knowledge. The 'temps' studied typically work as clerical, accounts or data processing staff although in other cases skill levels will be much higher than this. Lately, though, the trend has been for the temping business to attract even skilled professionals, such as engineers, accountants, and physicians. Here, however, we are mostly concerned with temps who work in clerical or administrative positions. The temps, who are largely female although with a growing male presence, are placed via a temping agency with various client organizations who can thereby fill their labour needs 'flexibly' (Garsten & Grey, forthcoming). In broad terms, we suggest that while management consultants claim to offer specialised knowledge of organizational dynamics, techniques and instruments for transforming organizations and behaviour within organizations, temporary employees as a category offer none of these. Instead, they have the experience, skills, and personal characteristics that enable them to adapt to a variety of situations and client needs. Their expert knowledge is hardly of the kind we generally associate with expertise, but of an acquired skill to be versatile, or 'flexible', as current market discourse has it.

For management consultants, the claim to provide expertise is based on the access to and control of specific knowledge. This knowledge can take many forms. It can be intellectual, philosophical, methodological, technical or procedural (cf. Werr *et al.*, 1997; Kipping & Amorim, 1999). It can also be presented, silent, set in use, or be built on own experiences, ideology, science, standards, or fashion. And it can be felt, believed, thought, proved, experienced, taught, discussed, or practised (cf. Sparrow, 1998). It takes the one or the other form depending on the situation. Hence, there is not one form that is more objectively true than another form is, since it is a matter of its social relativity (e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

The expert knowledge of management consultants is thus composed of a mixture of ingredients. But what do management consultants do in order to compose relevant expert knowledge that is also possible to sell? And how do they construct their position as providers of expert knowledge? The C.E.O. at a consulting firm

with about 24 employed consultants representing different disciplines, from physicians to PhDs in Management, said:

It is very important to feel "yes, now something has happened here, we have to revise quickly by developing a new form of technique or getting a new instrument or to train our consultants so that they, to a higher extent, can handle this situation".

According to him feelings are important, feelings of what actions are relevant, but also a competence in transforming these feelings into techniques and instruments, and knowing how they can be duplicated and taught. From the quotation it can also be read that consultants handle situations through the knowledge of relevant techniques and instruments. But how do they develop this kind of knowledge? The same respondent described this process by saying that "techniques are developed by what you - in one way or another - already have, but in one way or another need to upgrade". This means that there must be some basics that consultants have to learn, and when they know this they have developed an ability to "see that something is happening". According to the informant, when all consultants in a firm have developed this ability they all have the capacity to see what is going on. When the same observation has been made at several occasions, it is a signal that it is time for the firm to act:

In some way we then have to sit down together and say that we have to upgrade now. I may not see the need for this if I am alone out there and cannot relate it to discoveries made by other colleagues. If we are more people, then we can sit down and say "what we have done in this way, maybe we should do it in another way, or what if we add this or that?", then we will get the effect that is required now.

Where does this ability to feel, to see, to transform, to duplicate, and to teach come from? As pointed out by several of our respondents, represented in the quotation below by a senior at a small consultancy (about fifteen consultants), it is not easy to pinpoint the origins of the expert knowledge that consultants travel in:

A massive know-how is accumulated in your head, body, in your bookshelves, in your fingers, feelings, smell, and hearing. My point is that it is a know-how that is completely different from technical know-how. A clever chief physician, in contrast to an ordinary physician -who has the same technical knowledge - has the sense, fantasy, feeling, and experience. What is this? Yes, surely he is likely to have seen a lot more patients and made more diagnoses than his colleagues, and the odd combination "funny, he has a blue and a red ear, damn I saw this once seventeen years ago at the Uddevalla hospital!" It is this competence, not the remembering, but the ability to combine. It is an enormous know-how that is accumulated.

Experience combined with a sharp intellect seems to be what is required to develop the expert knowledge of senior management consultants. Another senior consultant who now works alone in his own firm meant that experimentation together with experience is the way to develop the right feeling for the job. He said:

I learn by myself that when I approach these problems in this way then this will happen, and when I do it in this way that will happen, and now I have seen a pattern, when I do this I will not become successful, but when I do that...

There is probably a difference in how smaller and larger consultancies operate in this regard. The smaller the organization the greater the importance of each individual. In a larger organization it may be more important that the consultants act with some kind of common profile, or the point of working together in the same firm can be questioned. It has, for example, been observed that the larger the consultancy the greater the need for standard operating procedures (e.g. Werr, 1999). The large American consultancies, such as Andersen Consulting and McKinsey & Co, have central training camps to which they send all juniors employed at all their different offices in different nations - all for the purpose of teaching them the McKinsey or the Anderson way of consulting. The routines in a middle-sized Swedish firm seem to be quite different, which comes across in the words of the C.E.O. of the firm:

We have a considerable budget for collective competence development. Once a month we have a collegial meeting where we spend half a day on, what could it be called? Stimulation! We invite lecturers from different disciplines we believe are topical and we don't only let us be lectured, we reason and we do it in the form of a dialogue. At this meeting all are expected to participate. On top of that we have about two nights a week, when it is more voluntary, different...it can be system theory or other subjects we believe there are reasons to look more closely at. Moreover, a couple of times we have had a series here, three times two days, when half of the firm goes away and the rest keeps the positions at the office, and when we have worked with Lee Vansina who runs an institute for executive development at the University of Leuven in Belgium.

In this firm, these meetings have two purposes: one is to give the consultants a reason to plan for being at the office all at the same time at least once a month, and the second is to provide input on what is going on. The C.E.O. also remarked that the competence development is very individualised. An alternative to going to the Belgian institute could, for example, be to participate in an expedition to the Himalayas, if this is what this particular individual needs at that particular time. This means that most of the development of the expert knowledge they use when they consult takes place in the firm, both when they run their projects and in

discussions at internal seminars and on informal occasions. Nevertheless, it also means that the experts sometimes need space for reflection on their work. So, for management consultants, the individual capacity to reflect upon every single situation is believed to be of great importance. Even so, they underline that there must be a core of competence behind it, or there will be nothing to reflect upon. A senior partner of a small consultancy (about fifteen employed consultants) expressed this in the following way:

When you ask how we learn and how we create instruments and how we develop methods, I can say that much of it happens here in this house in meetings between different consultants, when we spend time discussing tools, instruments, and methods and the like, and when we design.

Temporary employees share with consultants the built-in mobility of work. In moving between client organizations, they constantly transgress organizational boundaries. The local particularities of each client organization provide the base for the construction of knowledge of a more universal applicability. This organized mobility is an important aspect in the development of expertise in temping. Annalee Saxenian has said about the open labour market in Silicon Valley, that

Learning occurs in Silicon Valley as individuals move between firms and industries, acquiring new skills, experiences, and know-how. It occurs as they exchange technical and market information in both formal and informal forums, and as shifting teams of entrepreneurs regroup to experiment with new technologies and applications. Learning occurs as firms of different sizes and specialisations jointly solve shared problems. Above all, learning occurs through failure, which is as common as success. (1994: 23-24).

In the same manner, temps learn as they move between client organizations. They acquire skills, experiences, and competence across a wide range of organizations and markets; above all, they learn how to make use of different skills in different organizations. In other words, they learn to be versatile, or 'flexible'. Transferable skills are often thought of in terms of their capacity to be used in different contexts without losing their value (Hannerz, 1990). This transferability and flexibility refers not only to a particular skills bundle but also to attributes of the self. Empirical work on temporary workers (Garsten, 1999a, 1999b) is illustrative of this.

The temp agencies will have hundreds, if not thousands, of temps on their books at any one time and the extent to which agency staff know the temps personally is limited. On the other hand, the agency does know a good deal about the requirements of client organizations, at least where these are regular clients, and will seek to ensure that particularly difficult jobs or clients are dealt with by 'good temps'. Good temps, unlike the mass of the temping staff, will be known to agency staff who will go to some lengths to keep a good temp on the books of the agency. The attributes of a good temp are not so much skill as the capacity to fit in with whatever organization they are assigned to. Flexibility is often described, by agency

staff and temps in Sweden, in UK and in the US alike, as a readiness to adapt to the needs of the client. In a popular self-help book for temps, the temp is given the advice to:

Be a Gumby. Temping is an imprecise art and a lot of different people, moods, and circumstances are involved in its creation. ...That's why Gumby-like flexibility is such a valued commodity. If you can bend – work sometimes when you don't really want to, stay later than you were booked, sometimes all night, or be nice about a cancellation at the last minute – suddenly you make that long-odds gamble less risky for all (Hassett, 1997: 100).

Thus what is at stake is the transferable self, rather than transferable skills. That a person can be relied upon (by the agency and the client) to perform in a predictable way (to fit in, adapt, do a professional job) is to be a good temp. Which is another way of saying that trust is achieved. Symptomatically, the staff at one of the big staffing agencies in Sweden sometimes refer to the temps as 'chameleons', with a capacity to adapt effortlessly to the needs of the customer (Garsten & Grey, forthcoming).

Social competence appears as an important skill in providing external organizational and administrative services. Without the social matching – no relation, and hence no authority is placed on the skills of the service provider. Through the maintenance of this relation, a measure of organization, or hierarchy, is brought back in, although on a more flexible basis. It may be said that flexibility is provided by all sorts of external experts, but in different forms. Temps and large consultancies tend to a larger extent to provide standardised services, performed by flexible employees, where the expert knowledge itself is located in the providing firm, rather than in specific individuals. The meaning of flexibility is, however, slightly different. Temps offer services that the client organization could very well have co-ordinated in-house, while management consulting may represent a competence lacking in-house, as it were.

Taken from the other side of the coin - the perspective of the temp - there are also understandings of what constitutes a 'good job'. Although this will partly be an issue of 'personalities', the temps report that large companies and companies which regularly use temps (which may or may not be the same companies) are good jobs to be on. In the former case, reflecting the points made earlier, it is because such companies were relatively predictable in how they behaved and the tasks asked of the temp. They have learnt what it means to be a client organization, in addition to being a manufacturer or vendor of products and services. In the latter case, it is because the expectations of what could reasonably be asked of the temp would be realistic. So the good job, like the good temp, turns out to be bound up with the trustworthiness of each as being flexible towards each other. Interestingly, these two notions have a tendency to self-fulfilling effects: agencies wish to keep good temps on their books for use in their most valued clients and will seek to accommodate the temp's desires. The

temp prefers to go to a good job, and in such jobs it is easier to be seen as a good temp because these are the large, predictable organizations that habitually use temps. And, of course, it is such clients who are most valued by the agencies. The lynchpin of this set of relations, which may be considered as paradigmatic of post-bureaucracy, is the strong interdependency and trust generated between the different parties involved such that the most impermanent types of employment are rendered at least relatively predictable (Garsten & Grey, forthcoming). In the case of management consultancies, however, predictability is not always what consultants provide. At least not in the case of small and middle-sized consultancies.

To sum up, there are several competencies that temporary, external providers of organizational and administrative services need. In common for most kinds of external service providers is the relational aspect of every assignment. They all need to develop skills of how to fit in and to adapt to the needs of the client. The provider of non-standardised management consulting need to be experienced, intellectual, self-confident person who has developed feelings for what works and what works not. This gives the freedom to experiment and to be reflexive in every single situation. There seems to be more similarities between the forms of consulting provided by large consultancies and temp agencies since they both, to a larger extent than small and middle-sized consultancies, commodify and standardise their services. In common for all categories of experts is, however, social competence as a core component in the construction of expertise in different situations. The consultant may be the expert, but if there is no readiness to fit in with the client organization, the service may not be given authority by the client, and thereby not regarded as relevant. The power of the expert to state the problem and provide solutions is, in such a case, not strong enough. Consequently, authority and social competence go hand in hand as important components in the construction of expertise.

The Construction of Authority

Those who count as experts often have the more influential say in what constitutes a problem for the organization to be solved, and to formulate and provide the solutions to the problem stated. In the interface between the expert and the client, there is much that moves the client into uncertainty and that gives the expert the upper hand. Concepts, models and standards have a symbolic resonance about them that signals that the expert is better equipped to both understand and handle the situation. These concepts, models and standards suggest the power that rests in the hands of the expert and the vulnerability of the client in defining the problem (cf. Hannerz, 1992: 122). As one consultant put it:

To hell with all fads, damned models and words before you know the problem. When you know the problem and you have the solution, then you can start to label together with the employer, then it has a great striking power.... And that is what language is for, to communicate. So, the negative view of fads, especially when I hear them pronounced by

those damned young consultants when they stand there and draw up models made by others which they do not comprehend, they do not have them in their spine, you see it when you look at them...But when you have developed a project together with the client organization and found a model...I believe it is damned good to label some of these things in terms of fads and well-known models since it becomes powerful.

This was said by a senior in a middle-sized Swedish consultancy. In his mind, their market does not consist in technified management products. Instead, the solutions that his firm, and others, who work in a pure process mode, offer is described as a silent competence that is communicated through social interchange. It may very well happen that their toughest competitor in getting projects is the client himself:

Of course you build your know-how on different ways to look at problems since problems return...but you have to be careful with the technical knowledge and to make models out of it since when you see a problem in one company and we decide to do this or that...and then come to a new organization with similar problems, then it is not for sure that it is the same solution (that will work). The situation is different, the leadership is different, and their competence is different. I cannot suggest a solution that requires high competence if they do not have it.

As with temp agencies, the expertise of this consultancy often resides in 'knowing' what the client organization needs in terms of staffing. The services offered are often presented as a sort of staffing 'help' to organizations. According to a brochure aimed at prospective client organizations, Office Angels (the UK branch of Olsten Corporation) claims to offer "A pool of skilled workers" and "to respond to requests for a variety of office staff for temporary, contract and full-time positions". A Swedish temp agency President stated that "We want to provide flexibility for the client, to be their rubber band." With broad experience of personnel matters in various organizations, temp agency staff have acquired a skill in understanding what the problem is, and in suggesting solutions to those problems. Sometimes the client is in need of a 'rescuing angel', as an assignment co-ordinator had it. Such a person fills the void that a regular employee left, or adds additional capacity in peak periods. It may happen that sickness strikes at a critical period, when the temp agency may be able to offer a quick solution:

Completely healthy collaborators.
Whenever you want.
With guarantee.
(Authors' translation)

As Ahrne (1994:20) says, positions within organizations are still to a large extent independent of individuals. There must always be someone who can act as a substitute for another. Advertisements for temporary personnel, such as the above, highlight this notion of substitutability at the same time as they emphasise

uniqueness of the skill bundle, thus adding a competitive edge to the message. When substitutability is stressed, the message is that knowledge and experience may easily be transferred from one context to another, often with some kind of guarantee attached to it (Garsten, 1999b: 610).

At other times the problem may be one of finding the person with the right kind of skills repertoire to do a particular assignment. As the above mentioned brochure has it:

Central to Office Angel's philosophy is its belief in individuality and the power of people. Wholly rejecting a 'conveyor belt' approach, the consultants focus their efforts on carefully and sensitively matching the skills and personalities of candidates with the needs of the clients.

At yet other occasions, it may be that the client does not know what their need is. Here, a continuous relationship between the client and the temp agency may be vital, since it opens up a sphere of definition of the problem, and hence a business opportunity, for the temp agency. This again marks the importance of social competence in the construction of expertise. The same goes for management consultants, since it is rare that consultant firms are involved in pure 'beauty contests' in which more potential providers of a service are involved. Instead their projects are likely to develop through contacts and relationships. In building these relations, firms and individuals compete, but once there is a social match it seems as there is not much competition left, at least not for this particular project and during the contracted period. Both the consultant and the client have an interest in making sure that the relation will not be too long, since the external expert then risks to be 'internalised'. As an experienced buyer of consulting services at a large Swedish state owned telecom firm declared:

There are all the time lots of consultants knocking at the door. Some of them have an interesting profile, and you might date them for lunch. Then, if they are nice and still interesting you might consider continue talking to them and sometimes it happens that we hire them for projects we had no plans for. The need for this service develops in the discussions with the consultant.

Hence, the problems that need to be addressed often appear and are made explicit in relations between expert and client. The expert has the upper hand in defining and labelling the problem, yet he needs the collaboration of the client in order for the service offered to gain authority. As mirroring this way of thinking about external services, temp agencies are consciously abandoning the label *personaluthyrningsföretag*, or temp agencies in favour of *bemanningsföretag* or staffing services. This change is meant to signal that the solutions they offer are of a broader character than they used to be. Whereas there used to be a relatively strict division between providing temporary personnel and recruiting, the large temp agencies of today claim to offer a variety of solutions to the problem of staffing in general. As mentioned above, outsourcing of activities to temp agencies now also

tend to involve central business functions. Hence, the distinction between the services of temps agencies and consultancies is becoming increasingly blurred.

Conclusion: Temporary ties as a social accomplishment

In the above, we have discussed some aspects of the social construction of expertise in the fields of management consulting and temping. The tendency to 'bring the workers back out', or of externalising expertise, draws our attention to the relational aspects of expertise construction, suggesting that it is, at least in relation to consultants and temps, a social accomplishment. We have suggested that the prevailing post-bureaucratic trends in organizing bring with them a market for expertise. This expertise is often of a kind that can easily be lifted out of one particular, local context and put to use in yet another, without losing its value. These mobile experts have the upper hand in stating the problem and providing solutions to them. The construction of this expertise rests on the capacity of the expert to fit in with, adapt to, respond to, and create and sustain a relationship with the client – in other words, it rests on a degree of social competence to be there, just in time. If the social component is not there, there is little chance for the expertise to gain the authority needed to conduct this kind of business.

Social competence and authority are built in various ways depending on the type of expertise provided. First, the construction of expertise provided by experts who work with a rather specialised and commodified expertise, tend to a greater extent to be built on rather standardised and well-structured components. These may be the large consultancies and temp agencies, offering specialised and commodified services and de-individualised and exchangeable persons. Second, the construction of expertise provided by small and middle-sized management consultants, on the other hand, tend to be built more on the individual capacity of the single expert. The expertise is embodied in the individual rather than in the firm he represents. Still, standardised components are of importance, but not in the delivery. They follow established professional codes for consulting, although they tend not to use membership in professional associations as a base for their authority (Furusten & Brunsson, 2000), and they improvise on standardised well-known management techniques (Furusten, 1999b). Although 'pure' management consultants and 'pure' temps may represent rather different forms of expertise, in practice the boundaries between these services are blurred. In some cases it happens that they are changeable, which means that the expertise delivered has similarities even though it is framed different. Thus, standardised building blocks are crucial for these kinds of experts. However, without a social match the expert is not likely to be authorised by the client to state problems and suggest solutions.

Following from this, it can be argued that although hierarchy as a co-ordinating mechanism is abandoned in the externalisation of expert services, it is reconstructed to some extent through the establishment of close relationships, rules, standards, and associations. However, it is a temporary and flexible hierarchy,

built on relations of trust in authority and expertise. So, although the co-ordination and control of organizational and administrative competence to a larger extent is left to market mechanisms in modern organizations, hierarchies are not abandoned.

We suggest that the temporary services of management consultants and temporary employees depend on a strong relational component. Expertise and authority in these relations are built up, defined and legitimised in on-going relations between experts and client. We view the establishment of temporary services as a social accomplishment that takes on different meanings in different social networks and situations. For the expert to achieve authority for the problems and solutions presented, a great deal of social competence is needed. The services of management consultancies and temporary employment agencies provide ways of governing and structuring work and organizations that are gaining increased significance in organizing processes. They represent ways of reflecting upon and utilising notions of uncertainty and destabilisation of social structures and institutions. In the process, their own identity as spokesmen and providers of temporary expertise is constructed.

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