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Introduction: recent trends in organizing

In the field of organizing, new kinds of relationships are emerging between organizations and employees, many of them relating to the global stretching of business and the increasing use of media technologies. These developments have stimulated actions of change, involving many aspects and issues, as well as debate and research among social scientists and the general public. As Jacobsson notes, it seems as though our perceptions of what is obvious and desirable in terms of organization and governance are changing (1994:11).

Hand in hand with transformations in the ways of organizing and on the labor market, there is a boom in the use of rhetoric to describe and define the ongoing process. For example, we are all "customers," "actors on the market," parts of the public sector become "exposed to competition" and have to "package" and "customize" goods and services. Concepts such as "lean-production," "outsourcing," and "just-in-time production" echo of a change of direction and logic. A choice of words with associative links to a neo-liberal political discourse characterizes the discursive flow. As Gustafsson (1994) notes, the urge to be efficient, rational, and diligent, are for senior managers not only a trivial must in order to survive in the business. The "morality of efficiency" is spreading to other aspects of reality than the clearly market driven, to areas which do not as easily lend themselves to be treated according to the same conceptual frame of reference. Nearly all societal happenings and processes are to be seen in particular kind of perspective; a perspective that speaks of practices that were earlier confined to corporate business in the private sector. As Gustafsson (op.cit.:184) rightly points out; "It becomes increasingly difficult for us, each and every one of us, to question the imperative of the efficiency moral. Even play is slowly being pulled into the sawmill [my translation]."[1]

The character of the concepts and images invoked derive mainly from the private sector and the particular kind of generalized conditions that apply for business-driven organizations. In broad terms, private sector organizations imply as well a particular kind of relation to the market and its actors, to customers and the supposed needs. The

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[1]We may note here, that Bellah et al in their study of American life (1985) argue that an outstanding feature of American industrial life is that the manipulative, achievement-oriented practices of the workplace and the practices and values that guide intimate relations with spouse, children, friends, community and the like, have become radically discontinuous in the kinds of traits emphasized and the moral understandings that guide individuals within them. With the coming of the managerial society, the organization of work, place of residence, and social status have come to be decided by criteria of economic effectiveness. Those same economic criteria further facilitate the growth of national mass marketing and, with it, expanded consumer choice (op.cit.:45-46).

"customization" and "packaging" of all sorts of products and services are gaining momentum in the public sector as well. What used to be relatively discrete or finite cultures (at least according to our general understanding of them) - the market on the one hand, and the public institutions on the other hand - are now becoming more complex and intertwined, and their boundaries blurred.

The market, whatever it is, is becoming more influential, it appears. Bauman (1988:807) argues clearly that the shift to post-modern society is premised on the replacement of older modernist and intellectual notions of rationality with the reality of the marketplace as the privileged pathway through which all traffic increasingly must pass. Clegg (1993:274) interprets this development in terms of an obligation such that "consumer freedom," premised on and geared to the market, has become the cognitive and moral focus of life, integrative bond of society, and the focus of systemic management. Such a conceptualization has major implications for our understanding of the role and appearance of power under new structural conditions. "In the post-modern world," Clegg (op.cit.:275) writes, "power consists less in the relational field of force in each circuit and more in the way in which the obligatory passage point of the market has become a 'black hole,' sucking in ever more agency and spewing out an ever more diffuse power as the pursuit of things becomes an all encompassing passion." Only for those for whom membership in the new order has either not been proffered or rejected where it was offered does power manifest itself in the traditional form of repression.

The use of an empowering rhetoric with utopian signature does not, however, mean that power has become forgotten or obsolete. On the contrary, it covers a new and equally significant economy and culture of power, in which a plethora of new competencies, skills, empowerments, and states of mind play the leading roles. Our failure to grasp it is because, again using Clegg's (op.cit.:275) phrasing, "The canvas is not fixed; the palette not given; the style not dictated. Representations can be fixed anywhere, anyhow, anyway. This is the post-modern democratic freedom of the market." Under such conditions, the continuous monitoring of one's competitive skills and impressions given off in the marketplace becomes a rational consequence of the commodification of professional identity.[2] [3] For "just-in-time personnel," whose services are bought on

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[2] I am here using the term professional identity in a rather loose sense, referring to a socially constructed sense of control over a more or less delimited field of competence.
[3] As a corollary, one may note that the way in which the new market conditions are described in Clegg's writing makes it appear as though the role of actors in shaping, altering, or opposing such things as "the black hole" of the market have been forgotten in the theoretical framework, leaving us with weak conceptual tools for actually understanding the new frameworks of power.

temporary basis according to a customer's need, the management of a professional image becomes especially important.

One aspect of current changes is hence the restructuring of the labor market towards higher degrees of flexibility and mobility. These enhanced powers have allowed employers to take advantage of high levels of unemployment and weakened union power to push for more flexible work conditions and labor contracts. Even for regular employees work schedules varying according to periods of demand are becoming more common. But more important for my purposes here is the apparent move away from regular employment towards increasing reliance upon part-time, temporary or sub-contracted work arrangements. The current trend is to reduce the number of "core" workers and to rely increasingly upon a work force that can quickly be taken on board and laid off when times get bad.

The result, as described by Harvey (1989:150-151) is a labor market structure of the sort depicted in the figure below:
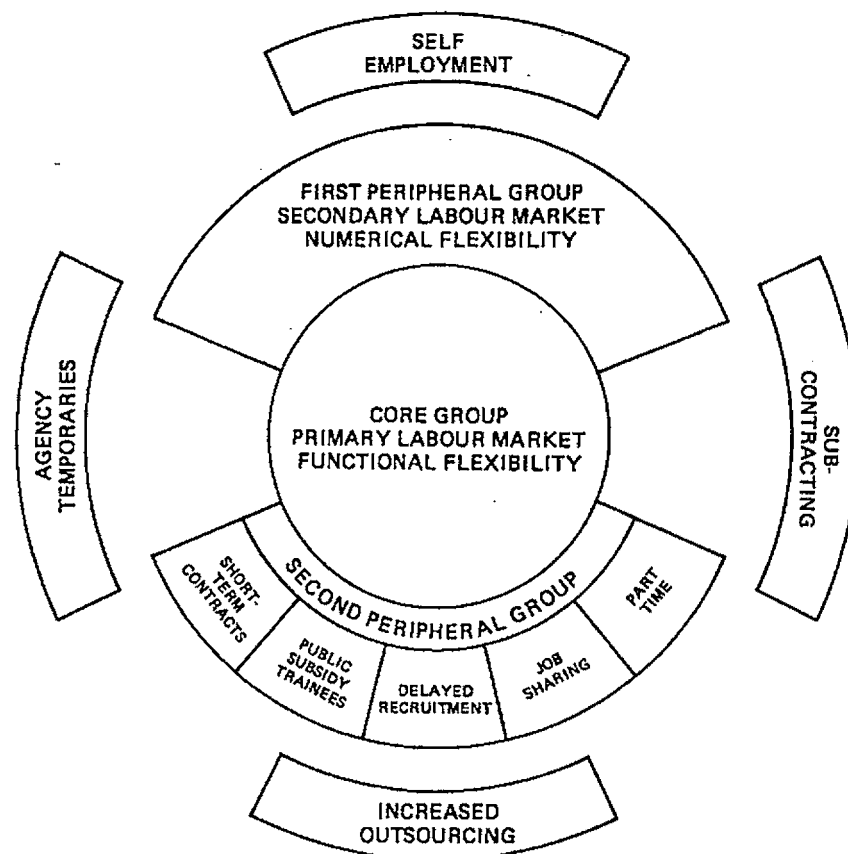
Figure 2.10 Labour market structures under conditions of flexible accumulation
(Source: Flexible Patterns of Work, ed. C. Curson, Institute of Personnel Management)

The core - a steadily shrinking group according to accounts emanating from both sides of the Atlantic - is made up of employees with full time, permanent status and is central to the long term future of the organization. These enjoy greater job security, good promotion and reskilling prospects, and relatively generous pension, insurance, and other fringe benefit rights. This group is nevertheless expected to be adaptable, flexible, and if necessary geographically mobile. The periphery encompasses two rather different sub-groups, the first consisting of full-time employees with skills that are readily available in the labor market, such as clerical, secretarial, routine and lesser skilled manual work. The second peripheral group includes part-timers, casuals, fixed term contract staff, temporaries with even less job security than the first group, and subject to greater numerical flexibility (Harvey op.cit.).[4] Temp agencies have found a nisch in providing temporary personnel, in way turning the idea of numerical flexibility into a business idea. As a manager at a temp agency recently told me; -We want to be an independent resource for large and medium-sized companies; their elastic band.

Another aspect of current changes is the increasingly influential role of large-scale organizations in producing and organizing the global flow of people, ideas, and commodities. Not least, they contribute to enacting and legitimating particular perspectives of the world; of preferable ways of organizing, of desirable professional skills and competencies across nations. The strong interest in organizational culture and the continuous efforts to promote a sense of commitment and belonging among organizational members may be seen as a reflection of the fickle character of many contemporary social formations. And because the reflexive bent generates in its turn constant demands for monitoring of actions and restructurings, this process can never be fully accomplished, but rather creates new needs for cultural management along the desired lines. (Bauman 1992:195). What, one may wonder, is it like to work as a temp, or "hired consultant" (as the preferred term in the line of business is) in an organization that offers an embracing ethos and sense of belonging to its members?

The increasing interest in organizational culture and the abundance of rhetoric on new types of organizing and new personal and interpersonal competencies, is also a consequence of the way in which the idea is marketed. Here, organization consultants, described by Czarniawska-Joerges (1988) as "merchants of meaning" play an influential

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[4]We may agree with Harvey that such flexible employment arrangements can sometimes be mutually beneficial. But the aggregate effects, when looked at from the standpoint of insurance coverage and pension rights, as well as wage levels and job security, by no means appear positive from the standpoint of the working population as a whole (op.cit.:151).

role. Burrell (1992:87) describes them as "seeking to provide the expensive but quick fix to an industrial and commercial audience who, ever hungry for novelty, are eager to consume different ideas before turning greedily to a newer fad in the relentless pursuit of busyness" (cited from Alvesson 1993:5). The idea of an embracing organizational culture works (at least tentatively) at odds with the idea of temporary relations and assignments.

Even though the discourse of organizing now covers a variety of organizational forms, certain ideas gain more momentum than others. To speak with Reich, the desired form of organization is now more like a spider's web (1992:89). "Strategic brokers" (Reich also calls them facilitators and coaches) are at the center of the network, but there are all sorts of connections that do not involve them directly, and new ones are spun all the time. All that really counts is rapid problem-identifying and problem-solving. Everything else - all of the more standardized pieces - can be obtained as needed. Office space, factories, and warehouses can be rented; standard equipment can be leased; standard components can be bought wholesale from cheap producers (many of them overseas); secretaries, routine data processors, bookkeepers, and routine production workers can be hired temporarily. In fact," Reich continues, "relatively few people actually work for the high-value enterprise in the traditional sense of having steady jobs with fixed salaries."

A similar conceptualization is that of "the virtual organization," inspired the possibilities of information technology to create communities of ideas, people and products beyond spatial and temporal boundaries. In this context, hierarchies in the traditional sense have no place. The virtual organization is rather more like a network of more or less loosely connected nodes of individuals, offices, or computers. In Davidow and Malone's view "the virtual organization" evades a clear structural understanding:

> What will a virtual corporation look like? There is no single answer. To the outside observer, it will appear almost edgeless, with permeable and continuously changing interfaces between company, supplier, and customers. From inside the firm the view will be no less amorphous, with traditional offices, departments, and operating divisions constantly reforming according to need. Job responsibilities will regularly shift, as will lines of authority - even the very definition of employee will change, as some customers and suppliers begin to spend more time in the company (Davidow and Malone 1992:5-6).

Within the business of information technology and computing, Apple Computer has elaborated what is often referred to as the informal hierarchy of an organization, at the same time downplaying the importance and value of clear, formal lines of hierarchy and communication channels (Garsten 1994). The importance of "networking" is a theme that

leavens all through the organization. As reflecting the approaching of lay thought to social science, which Giddens (1990) claims is a central feature of late modernity, the notion of networking as a verb and conscious activity occupies a central place in the organization. To have a wide network of contacts increases possibilities of obtaining information about what is going to happen. In order words, it constitutes a powerful resource, and hence a basis for power within the organization. The discourse of networking relates closely to the rhetoric of equality and change. It is ripe with positive connotations suggesting a "flat" model of organizing that emphasizes the role of each individual as an important node in the network, rather than one's position in a hierarchy. "The beauty of a network is that it has no center," John Sculley (1987:96) asserts. "It is a process more than a structure..." The network model of organizing is supported by Apple's technology, it is believed. This can also be seen from advertisements. During my fieldwork at the Swedish subsidiary in Kista outside Stockholm, an ad was designed in the shape of a network, where the nodes were made up by tiny Apple logos with the name of each employee of the Swedish subsidiary printed underneath. The title read; "Would you like to work in a network with us and tear down pyramids?" The lines which followed asserted that "The Macintosh... stimulates a flatter network organization where the integrated powers of individuals give the organization its strength."

Networks, it is assumed, have an integrating function, and imply a more democratic way of organizing. Much of the alluring capacity of the term may in fact be attributed to hopes that such a way of organizing would combine *Gemeinschaft* with *Gesellschaft*; a social formation characterized by organic unity, sense of belonging, and direct and closely intertwined relations with that of a mechanistic constellation of separate individuals with rational motives for group formation.

While my interest has earlier been focused on the core of "Apple people", my focus here will be mainly on the peripheral members of the organizational community, with the aim of moving beyond the particularities of Apple towards new field sites. The paper will explore modes of employment and belonging in the field of business organizations, and point to some characteristics of currents trends of organizing. The discussion will take as springboard the study of Apple Computer (Garsten 1994), and explore new aspects of the field. In particular, it aims to show how the centricity involved in the mode of organizing, both on a global and on a local scale, provides differential conditions for the creation and maintenance of a sense of belonging and community among the central nodes of non-exempt employees (employees on the regular payroll) and the surrounding network of contractors and temporaries. The way in which employees with different relations to the employer relate to the dominant discourse points to the dynamics and dilemmas of cultural management in global companies.

On the periphery: Area Associates at Apple

During fieldwork at Apple, I was sensitized to the character of relations between organizations and those employees who are temporarily employed or otherwise loosely connected to the employer. Among employees there was in broad terms a core of non-exempt employees, i.e. employees who were on the regular payroll, and a periphery of temporarily employed; temps or contractors.

The core of non-exempt employees can expect the same amount of wage each month, and they have generous fringe benefits, such as insurance contracts. They have (more or less) unlimited access to company locales, meetings, and information channels. By their own addresses on the electronic network, AppleLink, they have access to the vast amount of information that is distributed on the electronic network - a crucial factor to be able to perform successfully in the organization and keep abreast of organizational changes. On the headquarters campus in Cupertino, California, non-exempts can use the Fitness Center for free. They can also take part in classes or seminars organized by the company.

Besides regulars, there are contractors and temporaries who work for the company for a limited period of time. They have special badges, differing in color from those of regular employees. Often, temps are hired for administrative positions demanding little professional training and skill, whereas contractors are generally free-lace engineers or other skilled professionals. Many of them view their temporary assignment as an opportunity to get hired full-time.

Temps and contractors may in significant respects be said to be on the periphery of the organization, lacking the resources to articulate their needs. In many cases the activities of temporaries are separate, performed backstage, as it were, facilitating for regulars to do their job successfully (cf. Kunda 1992:209). Temps and contractors have more limited access to information channels and locales and are not allowed to participate in all company meetings, although they are often invited to take part in off-site team-building sessions and other social events. They have little opportunity to take part in classes or to attend seminars, not least because they are expected to do the job they have been called upon to do, rather than engage in learning activities beside the particular assignments they have. Rarely are they granted the same benefits as non-exempts in terms of using the Fitness Center, matters of insurance, etc.

There is thus a significant degree of centricity involved in the pattern of employment. The central nodes have easy access to corporate information channels, whereas the surrounding network of peripheral members are farther away from the informational foci.

What is interesting about this situation is the way in which knowledge and information is being even more tightly organized through dispersal, geographical mobility, and flexible workforce organization. The imploding centralization is strongly coupled to the fact that information plays the role of a highly valued commodity. Access to, and control over, information is important in the competitive struggle and implies the possibility of seizing an important competitive advantage, not least before reorganizations. "Knowledge itself," as Harvey puts it, "becomes a key commodity..." (Harvey op.cit.:159).

Despite the discourse of equality, then, individuals at Apple, and probably also elsewhere under similar work conditions, have differential access to information and knowledge, and hence for professional development.

Nevertheless, temporaries and contractors are expected, at least to some degree, to "fit in" with the work environment in terms of personality type and value-orientation. Unlike temporaries at another high-tech organization, described by Kunda (op.cit.), who are fully exempt from membership and its deeper implications, the "Apple culture" addresses each and everyone who are involved with the company, employees as well as developers, dealers and users, and may in this sense be viewed as more expansionist in its strivings. At Tech (company pseudonym), Kunda argues, temporary workers are not expected (or allowed) to become full-fledged participants in the organization or subjects of its ideology. In the managerial view, they are present in body and activity only and are not expected to share the experiences that members are assumed to have. The relationship is economic, and there is no managerial attempt to encompass or penetrate the self. "What is not expected from temporary workers suggests what is expected from others: an exchange that is more than economic" (op.cit.:209). At Apple, there is not only a transnational striving involved, but also a transorganizational one, wishing to embrace individuals ideologically on the basis of their common liking for the Apple products. While being structurally and in terms of access on the periphery of the organizational network, temporaries are embraced by the same ideological message as are the central nodes of managers and other regulars in the company.

An excerpt form my field diary may serve to illustrate the balancing act of area associates, a category of service personnel, many of whom are, or have been, temporarily employed.[5]

> At lunchtime in the middle of the week in November, the Greek theater in the Apple University building in Cupertino is the stage of a Stellar Luncheon. The Apple University has as one of its activities a Stellar Support Program, aiming at developing courses and activities to meet the evolving professional needs of the company's support staff, that is, area associates, area administrators, coordinators and receptionists. The official policy for Apple is to have no secretaries. In line with the company's vision, according to which Apple technology facilitates and changes the way people organize their work, it is believed that the traditional secretarial function is outdated. People who use Apple computers are expected to be able to organize their work by themselves, diminishing the need for the conventional tasks of a secretary. Moreover, the term secretary is imbued with hierarchical connotations ill-fitting with the image of Apple as being a "flat" organization with few hierarchical levels, emphasizing process, cross-functional networking and teamwork rather than a strict division of labor. The term Area Associate, or more commonly AA, is intended to overcome the negative connotations of secretary and to reflect the more flexible work organization of the company. In practice, however, the AA position is much like that of a secretary. The Area Administrator and the Coordinator position are also administrative support positions, only more qualified and better paid. Generally, they are the closest steps up the ladder for an AA.

> The AA position, it is often claimed, is also to be understood as something of a starting point for a further career in the company, and a position equally important to those of the rest of the work group. Imbued with images of the exceptional success and meteoric careers of the early employees, and with ideas about Apple as the place where almost everything is possible, many young individuals have their hopes set high. However, many AAs, the majority of whom are women, feel that the position, rather than being a stepping stone, has become a dead-end street. Opportunities for moving ahead from an AA position are few. Compared to other members of their teams, whom they see are engaged in an upward career, many of the AAs sense they are being left behind. Moreover, since a large portion of them are temporary, or "exempt," employees, which means that they are not on the regular payroll, but hired for a limited period of employment, it becomes even more difficult to advance. Such concerns are shared by a large number of people whose

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[5]The excerpt also appears in very similar wordings in Garsten 1994.

status and prospects are quite different from those of managers and individual contributors. Their experiences of Apple speak of both promise and doubt, and this ambivalence is seen to characterize much of their thoughts and actions.

The Stellar Support Program is a reflection of a concern with the career development of administrative support staff and an attempt to give them the skills and motivation necessary for moving along to other positions. It is also a way to professionalize work, by improving skills related to their jobs, such as office administration, project administration and technical skills, providing tips for success and enhancing their professional self-esteem. Interpersonal skills and networking are also given weight.

Today, the room is filled with over a hundred Stellar Support people. All but two of them are women, in various ages and of varying ethnic origin. Most of them work on the Cupertino campus, but they also come from other Apple offices throughout the Silicon Valley. The participants have brought their own brown bag luncheons, to enjoy as they listen to the speeches given by the organizers. Accompanying the rustling of the paper bags, they engage in hushed smalltalk as they are waiting for the program to start.

Today's subject is Career Development. Following a short welcoming and introduction by Sheila, the woman in charge of the program, her colleague Ellen proceeds with outlining today's program. They are to talk about the staffing process, about how an AA can get assistance with finding another position in the company. It is underlined that they will not, however, talk about the redeployment issue, compensation, and past experiences with staffing. Having said this, Ellen directly turns to concrete advising. The audience learns that as they are planning to move on, it is important to talk to their manager and their Human Resources liaison, that they know what area they would like to work in, and what kind of job they would like to have. It is also important that they prepare themselves for the interview and, of course, that they continue doing their best at their present position. "Apple is a very well-networked company," she says, "which makes it difficult to hide things about yourself and your work." Consequently, one should be open about one's qualifications and careful about one's position. The transition from one job grade to another and its implications of a salary raise, which is an important motivating force in applying for another position, is also clarified.

The next speaker, Colleen, also a young woman at Apple University, heightens their awareness of the great influx of people from outside. She asks everyone who

has joined Apple during the present year to raise their hands, only to show that these are in majority. 600 positions at non-exempt level were filled last year, she says, including the Fremont plant on the other side of San Francisco Bay. A huge number of people from the outside want to get in, she tells them, "sometimes it's just not the right fit, or whatever." But to encourage them a bit, having expounded on the difficulties of moving ahead, she claims that Apple people are given priority at job openings. The dividing line between Apple employees and external people, temporaries and others is stressed, in order to evoke a degree of confidence in those in the audience who are regular employees. However, although Apple employees have an advantage over other applicants when applying for new jobs, it is still very important to be prepared and not to take anything for granted, she emphasizes.

Staffing has meetings with managers at job openings, she continues, which implies that their relation to their present manager is indeed important. It is also important to make one's résumé "very attractive," and, stressing once more what the former speaker said, to be well prepared for the interview process. Again, the transition from one job grade to another that the shift from a position as Area Associate to that of Area Administrator or Coordinator entails, is explicated.

Following up on this subject, Fanny, the next young woman to speak, shows the audience an overhead with the text:

What do staffing and managers look for in a grade 35 candidate?

good oral and written communication skills
versatility
team oriented
strong Macintosh skills
experience in project coordinating
established Apple network

These are qualities that they can improve at their present positions, and in which classes are provided by the Stellar Support Program, she informs them. They are also listed in the *Stellar Support Update*, a bulletin published monthly by the Apple University.

Then it is time for Meg from the Resource Center to talk about its role in supporting employees. The Resource Center on campus can offer assistance with career development, career transition and redeployment. They are affiliated with a Career Action Center in the Silicon Valley area, and offer classes in job search strategies,

résumé writing, interview skills, transition process, and financial management. They also have a library to which employees are welcome, she tells them.

After the speakers have finished, the audience may ask questions. The issues raised are mostly of a practical nature, pertaining to the opportunities for career enhancement. Somebody wants to know if any of the speakers started out as AA. All three of them actually did. Commenting upon this, Fanny again gives the main reason for career advancement, saying "The most important thing at Apple is using your network." Overall, many of the questions are left unanswered, since the organizers do not know the answers, and since some of them relate to issues that had earlier been decided as outside the agenda. A woman in the audience then raises the issue of the large percentage of women in the company in general, and in particular the fact that all but two of the Stellar Support people in the room are women. She suggests that this would be a problem for the Stellar Support Program to look into. However, none of the representatives wants to comment upon her suggestion.

As the flow of questions ebbs away, the organizers announce that they have asked three women who have advanced within the company to share their experiences with the audience. Joan, the first young woman to come forward, emphasizes the role of networking. "Networking is really important," she says, and suggests that not only is the reach of the network important, but so is the quality of its relations. And in the pursuit of career advancement, even more so. The second young woman's advise to the audience is to get into as many informational interviews as possible, to "get out there and hunt!" The third and last to tell her story, Ramona, is currently sharing a position with another woman, what is known as "job-sharing." When she first got to Apple, she started as a temporary. Now she has a regular qualified administrative position and is taking evening classes towards a Bachelors Degree. Although she herself stands as an example of ambitious career advancement, she advises the audience not to forget to do the job they are in while they are job searching.

After we have heard the success stories, the lunch is over. The organizers divide themselves up to be able to answer any further questions that the audience members may have before they go back to their jobs.

Split loyalties

The Stellar Luncheon reflects some of the tensions that Area Associates have to deal with. The balancing act of tending to one's own career development while being loyal to the team and the organization is a tricky one. While some employees may feel satisfied with their positions, having no intense wish to move on in the organization, others who give their best at their present positions, hoping to be rewarded later on, feel left behind and let down when there is no room up the ladder, or worse, when a reorganization has left them without a job.

The Area Associate position is particularly subject to tensions, I would suggest, in that it promises to be a springboard for young, often female, applicants, who view it as a way to get in, rather than a position to stay put in. As the years go by, they are busy coping with the demands of their position, facilitating the functioning of the team, and often, there is simply no time and energy left for individual concerns and strategies. Likewise, outside of Apple, personnel advertisements for temporaries in general suggest that this kind of job offers a great deal for young applicants in terms of professional experience, social versatility training in changing work contexts and a platform for acquiring a more permanent position. Especially in response to current levels of unemployment, the vague prospects offered by such agencies may exert a relatively strong power of attraction for young people with little professional experience.

Area Associates are also in a vulnerable position due to the fact that their career moves are so intertwined with their relations to their managers. In addition to facilitating the job of managers; making appointments, going through mail, filtering professional contacts, making travel arrangements and organizing the day, she (or occasionally he) has to get along on an interpersonal level with the manager. The good-will of the manager is, as one of the speakers underlined at the Luncheon, important for one's opportunities for moving ahead with one's career. A satisfied and benevolent manager may facilitate for the AA to advance, while a dissatisfied manager would in worst cases get rid of the AA in the next reorganization, or be less willing to speak well of her or him. Although executives may dislike the thought of having any good employee transferred, the feeling often cuts even deeper when that person is his or her Area Associate. The two have worked so closely together that the relationship has often taken on personal strands, and the thought of having a stranger in that position may be particularly unappealing. The possessive feeling that managers may develop toward the people who report to them may thus provide a stumbling block for career change. This raises the more general issue of the conditions for maintaining professional integrity in organizations where social interdependencies rely on personal attachments and a strong sense of organizational community, especially for

categories of professionals in the more traditional and narrow sense of the term. Professional integrity may be weakened by encroachments by others groups, such as the managerial, who strive for control over the way in which professionals make use of their knowledge.

Hence, for many, marginality also involves being torn between commitments. During my fieldwork at Apple , Terry just got hired as a regular employee in an AA position. Before that she was working as a temporary AA in another group. Her excited gestures and keen eyes reflect her ambitious and energetic nature. She has a university degree in advertising, and would like to build a career for herself along those lines. However, she has found out that it is difficult to move on, the only way to go for AAs, as she sees it, being the Coordinator position. Moreover, her manager has explicitly told her he dislikes "turbo-AAs," that is, those who are too quick to look for other positions. She feels somewhat torn between her commitment to her manager and the team on the one hand, and her wish to take on new challenges and responsibilities on the other hand. Nevertheless, compared to temporary employment, she thinks regular employment has many advantages. She can go along on off-sites, her employee badge facilitates her movements on campus, she gets profit sharing, is eligible for the stock-programme, and she worries less about the future. Being able to take part in Communication Meetings, at which information about current organizational changes, challenges, or product introductions is revealed, makes her more dedicated to the company, she says. To her, enjoying the benefits and obligations of full membership at least for the time being compensates for the constraints attached to her role.

An older colleague of hers, Kay, promised her first manager to stay for one year in the position before moving ahead. Now she feels her misplaced loyalty made her lose a number of opportunities. Her experiences has weakened her attachment to Apple. "I see Apple as a means to an end," she says straightforwardly. She used to "burn the midnight-oil," as she expresses it, working 60 hours a week, only to go home to take care of her children. She now spends her free time studying, aiming at a university degree in history. Her experiences has made her re-define her demands and responses, so that some elbow room has been cleared between herself and the organization (cf. Goffman 1961:319).

The extent to which the work of an Area Associate is intertwined with that of the team varies between groups. The content of the job is subject to redefinition according to the particular demands of the character of work the team is undertaking, and the way work is organized in the group. Kay provides a complex picture of the AA as being in an ambiguous position as regards status. On the one hand she as an AA is considered a team member in the same way as the others. She is given a large amount of freedom to take

care of things the way she wants to, and is satisfied with her relations to her colleagues. On the other hand, she can seldom go with her colleagues on off-site conferences and the like, since she has to stay at the office to take care of daily issues and answer the phone. "An AA has to be an odds and ends person, very helpful and in addition something of a workaholic, for it to work out," she says. There is also a risk that one has to take care of "refuse," that is, tasks that the other team members would not bother to deal with. She regards herself as the glue that keeps the department together, although still not important enough to be invited to conferences. "Apple is covertly hierarchical," she claims, "and not good at promoting internally. Even Area Administrators look down on AAs. Being an AA is not a good career path, it's a dead-end street."

Kay's and Terry's arguments illustrate at once the emphasis on egalitarian teamwork and the inarticulate presence of hierarchy and authority. Overt signs of power and influence are barely visible to an outsider, but displayed in subtle cues that only those with a degree of cultural competence can read. It may be added here that employees do not always mention titles in discourse, but refer to their positions in terms of the team or project in which they work. And on business cards, titles are often indistinct and played with. In this way, professional identity and training is downplayed in favor of organizational roles and codes of conduct and expression. The hierarchical position of an employee is on the other hand suggested in the way in which access is given. Top-level managers are harder to reach, communications often being channeled and filtered by their AAs, while employees at lower levels are generally easier to access. Conversely, Area Associates themselves, especially if on temporary assignments, have more restricted access to meetings, information channels, and the like, than employees in general and top managers in particular.

The ambiguous member role of temporary workers is relevant beyond the case of Apple. It pertains to the changing relations of employers and employees in general and to the demands for a more flexible and unorganized work force in particular. From the perspective of differential types of connections to the employer, both loose and tight, the significance of continuously working upon, distributing, and legitimating the organizational culture becomes evident. Personal engagement, loyalty and shared visions become powerful sources for allegiance when the formal contract between employer and employed is fickle and flexible. Following Bauman, the volatile nature of contemporary social formations makes for incessant activities of cultural management (Bauman 1992:195). And because this can never be fully accomplished, there is a continuous engagement on the part of the managerial core in gaining leverage over the production of knowledge and the promotion of cultural values. Temporaries evoke reflections of organizational boundaries and boundary-drawing. During everyday worklife, they work

closely with other employees, often performing similar tasks. From an outsider, they could easily pass as insiders. Temporaries also contribute to the criss-crossing of organizational boundaries by their continuous entering and leaving, bringing in of professional skills and sense of identity and acting as representatives of yet another company who has offered its services. On particular events or in particular symbolic domains, however, the different badges they are wearing highlight their status as peripheral members, and the organizational boundary appears more clearly.[6] Their presence then serves as a defining contrast for others who are more fully part of the organizational community.

Changing contexts and professional development: a precarious match

Professional identity, too, is closely linked to boundary-drawing. Professional categories generally have an advantage in and are control of a certain domain of knowledge and activity, which they try to maintain as their particular characteristic and source of value. This entails staging a difference between themselves and others and reinforcing the idea that "our" knowledge and activities are distinct from others'.

In the case of administrative staff such as secretaries, who are facing changing work conditions and a normatively charged rhetoric of flexibility and learning, one may ask what the trend towards a "new type" of flexible corporations with temporary demands for what is sometimes called "just-in-time workforce" means in terms of professional identity. It has been said to offer new opportunities for secretaries in the wake of rationalizations. Computerization of routine tasks may entail that formerly sharp boundaries between professions are now being blurred. The duties of the secretary, the assistant, and the clerk are being divided among several individuals. Old tasks disappear, while new ones emerge. Herein lie the possibilities for secretaries or area associates (such as Kay in the above discussion) to work on more qualified tasks, supporting the manager, working on project administration, etc. Hence, the allround secretary - the spider in the web of work relations - is said to become more professional (Ebbeskog 1995). It seems justfied to maintain that it is an open question whether a development towards flexible working conditions actually brings about increasing professionalization, a "re-professionalization," or whether it implies instead a "de-professionalization," where boundaries of skill and competence get blurred.

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[6]The concept of symbolic domain here refers to the differing interpretative framework that characterize different work settings (Schultz 1991). The concept has been used within organizational theory, closely linked, for example, to concepts of organizational "arena" and "context" (Tainio et al 1983, Goffman 1959).

Perhaps even more interesting in this respect is the fact that other professional categories, such as economists and technicians are being employed under temporary conditions. In the case of contractors at Apple, who are generally highly skilled and well-educated professionals, such as computer scientists hired to work on a particular program, their positions often lead them to express themselves as having difficulties with upholding the professional boundary and the identification with the community of colleagues across organizational boundaries under the changing demands of the particular workplace in which they are contracted. Some of them talk about performing tasks they are overqualified for, because getting the job done requires everyone to team up in whatever needs to be done. Still, the high hourly payment compensates for the inconveniences of adapting.

On a more general level, the condition of contractors at Apple addresses what is generally described as a move towards a more generalized set of skills and professional competencies among a large number of white-collar service sector workers. Reich even contends that former business and professional categories and entities are becoming irrelevant. In the emerging global economy, he sees alongside "the ecumenical company" earlier professional categories giving way to new broad categories of work reflecting the competitive positions of individuals. He calls them *routine production services, in-person services*, and *symbolic-analytic services*. The latter category; symbolic-analytic services, is by Reich considered to be of particular importance. They include problem-solving, problem-identifying, and strategic brokering activities of researchers, management consultants, management information specialists, strategic planners, marketing strategists, journalists, to mention only a few professional categories. Their trade is the manipulations of symbols - data, words, oral and visual representations, and the like:

> "Symbolic analysts solve, identify, and broker problems by manipulating symbols. They simplify reality into abstract images that can be rearranged, juggled, experimented with, communicated to other specialists, and then, eventually, transformed back into reality. The manipulations are done with analytic tools, sharpened by experience. The tools may be mathematical algorithms, legal arguments, financial gimmicks, scientific principles, psychological insights about how to persuade or to amuse, systems of induction or deduction, or any other set of techniques for doing conceptual puzzles" (op.cit.:178).

In Reich's view, that a job category is officially classified "professional" or "managerial" has little bearing upon the functions it performs in the world economy. Not all professionals, that is, are symbolic analysts. Nor are all symbolic analysts professionals. Symbolic analysts, however, are said to draw on established bodies of knowledge with

the flick of a computer key. What is more valuable than professional credentials is the capacity to effectively and creatively use the knowledge.

Professions, Schwartz and Thompson (1990:123-124) tell us, have to be socially viable to be successful; the have in other words to be *mediating* institutions; they have to contain within themselves a variety of approach and definition sufficient to match that which they will encounter among their diverse clients. Such a view speaks of the precarious balancing act of temporary staff, where changing conditions may entail new opportunities for mediating functions, as well as a loss of professional identity and a sense of wholeness and integrity in work.

Somewhat tentatively, there seems to be a contradictory relationship between demands for flexibility on the one hand, in the shape of a smaller core troop of employees, and an outer circle of "loose horses" - and on the other hand a need for increased competence in many jobs. Production may demand levels of knowledge and qualifications that are not possible to fill at short notice. In case of a period of economic recovery, the shortage in qualified workforce may become a bottleneck, which makes companies unable to grasp the possibilities of the business upturn. At Apple, employment policies during the initial years of success were largely along the lines of personality-match, a passion for the product, and a readiness for organizational commitment and willingness to learn. Later on, as the organization grew and the demands for specialized skills and competencies became evident, policies shifted towards an explicit striving to hire highly skilled professionals. In the business at large, the massive advertising for skilled secretaries, economists, assistants, and technicians supports the idea of specialized and highly competent temporaries by glamorous and extravagant promises of "personnel power," while the emergence of new categories of work, as Reich pictures them, speaks of a development in another direction.

Adapting to new conditions may lead individuals to develop a certain kind of skill in dealing with changing contexts and situations. Such a capacity or readiness has come to be valued as a significant characteristic of individual competence in societies with a high degree of change readiness. Davidow and Malone (1992) even speak of "a new breed" of employees, whose characteristics will be contrary to those who have been encouraged during the industrial era. Organizations now look for "socially competent" people, who embrace the idea of change and continuous learning and are flexible enough to rapidly adjust themselves to new circumstances.[7] [8] Continuous change and restructuring may on

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[7] In fact, Giddens (op.cit.:144-149) argues, it is the conditions of late-modernity under which we live, characterized by a discontinuity between abstract knowledge systems and the everyday knowledge of the lay agent, that bring about the continuous need for

the other hand induce anxiety among individuals, who may sense a loss of control over their work situation and split of professional competence. Vulnerability in relation to change may be seen to relate to a narrow professional role and increasing specialization, under which individuals may only make use of limited parts of their capabilities.

The example of the Stellar Support Program at Apple points to a an emergent awareness on the part of management and Area Associates alike that their position is subject to tensions, and that they may benefit from collegial advice and support, sharing of experiences, and skill enhancement. For such a strategy to mature and gain momentum, however, a degree of continuity is needed. The continuous reorganizations, although they might provide new opportunities for some AAs and at times speed their careers up, also weaken the formation of stable groups that could deal with the issues that are relevant to the Stellar category, and undermine the planning of long-term professional development. In reorganizations, new lines of activity are introduced, involving a multitude of new kinds of intersections with other teams, new organizational forms and sometimes new policies too. So the possibilities for building a strong collegial network that would involve continuous awareness-building decrease.

The search for stable reference points within continuous change was mirrored in the July 1989 issue of the *Stellar Support Update:*

In Search of the Winning Team

We're interested in finding out how many of you have been supporting the same Apple manager or supervisor for longer than four years. Even if you have changed groups or been caught up in department reorganizations, the time still counts if you're still in the race together.

We will publish the list of winning team members in our September issue. Also, we will write a feature article with photos to highlight the "winning team" that has worked together the longest!

Come on! If you turned that four-year corner with the same Apple manager, we want to hear from you! Please link your name and manager's name, along with job titles, department/group/site location, phone numbers, and length of time to us at XX.

Are you half of a "long-term team"? We can't wait to find out who you are!

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reskilling. The need to learn and to reskill is, according to Giddens, an expression of a change of social conditions, and of the sensitive relation between abstract systems and the individual. It speaks of the interdependency of individuals and organizations; of macro and micro. The emphasis on learning speak of changes to which the individual has to react in some way, by adjusting, questioning, or otherwise responding.

[8] A temp agency manager I interviewed confirms the public image, saying that hired consultants should be "loner wolves with a social talent, confident in themselves."

In relation to career moves, the quest for continuity in the midst of change has a double edge to it. While continuity furthers the development of professionalization and cohesion of a category of employees as well as the establishment of functioning relationships, it may also hinder career advancement. Reorganizations are hazardous. They may leave one aside, or if one is lucky, they may provide a leap up the ladder or a push in a different direction. Career moves, for all the conscious planning they involve, may in Weick's words (1979:195) "...turn out to be a set of actions that are career-interpreted after the fact rather than career-planned before the fact."

The Stellar Support category of employees, then, faces a dilemma: there is a pull toward being recognized as a distinct group within the organization, but not so distinct as to be defined as different altogether (cf. Strauss 1984:129). Individuals are up against the challenge of trying to maintain a balance between flexibility and stability, which may at times be a hard act. An AA once commented on the effects of a hectic pace by saying that the most valuable thing to her is learning how to juggle different priorities and job assignments, since the priorities are constantly changing. Area Associates and their colleagues in similar positions are people who challenge, oppose, question and improvise. In Kay's words, they are "odds and ends persons." Their actions embody ambivalence as the optimal compromise to deal with the incompatible demands of flexibility and stability (cf. Weick op.cit.:229).

Apple is an organization in which the language of individual initiative and responsibility also allows people to develop intense relations to others in the context of teams, groups, departments, and other network constellations. Even in these relatively narrow contexts, however, reciprocal loyalty and understanding among professional categories are frequently precarious and hard to maintain. Frequent changes hamper the gradual buildup of loyalty over time. The complexity of the organization, the shifting alignments of work groups, the reluctance to outline the organizational structure on the part of managers, and the continuous change, make the structure appear elusive and abstruse. It is thus natural that the larger interdependencies in which people work are neither clearly understood nor easily encompassed by an effective loyalty. When people do express a concern or sense of sharing for colleagues with the same professional training in the wider organization, with whom they may not be immediately involved, it takes the form of momentary outbursts of community, inspired rather by a sense of sharing a general symbolic universe, more or less detached from the immediacies of everyday work. Rarely are problems or issues relating to professional identity jointly articulated, or only cautiously so as they are in the case of the Stellar Support Program.

Upholding professional identity and community in an environment where those very aspects are undermined by continuous change is a precarious match. Transitions engender uncertainty not only with regards to employees' careers and daily work but also in terms of their entire social life. Employees who are not close enough to top management nodes, where both continuity and change are being designed, but who are part of the loosely linked outer network, may feel professionally disempowered and personally hurt.

Just-in-time personnel, agencies, and workplaces: a planned study

According to Aronsson (1995), Sweden has a long tradition of research in worklife organization - competence - stress - health, but there are very few studies done around "the shadow of unemployment" as he calls it, and what job insecurity means. Here, I believe rests a field of research of significant power of attraction. Not least, in trying to locate the particular way in which the labor market is becoming more "flexible" to begin with; what is "unsecure" and what is relatively stable.

Moving out from an interest in the core of regulars in global organizations, the planned study will involve an empirical study of the interface between the individual, the agencies who "lease" personnel and the workplace where the individual is temporarily employed. On a general level it will involve exposing the assumptions and meaning-making activities in the interaction between the three parties: the leasing agency - the individual - and the workplace. On other words, it will deal with core - periphery relations in the labor market.

Firstly, an intriguing aspect of the problem is the construction and passing on of messages, aspirations, and normative rules of conduct - in short, of a symbolic package - from the leasing agencies to temporary personnel. What type of individuals and categories of professionals are especially wanted? We may assume that the conditions on the labor market in general and the trend towards loose contracts between employer and employees in particular may lead agencies to look for individuals with a particular set of skills, both professionally and individually. Especially conspicuous at present are the demands on power of initiative and readiness for change on the part of the individual employee. What kind of messages do the agencies give their employees surrounding the nature of their engagement and character of their tasks? What are the promises and prospects given and how do they match the actual working conditions? Current advertising and the general discourse on issues of "flexible workforce" emphasize the positive aspects of flexibility; a large amount of freedom, experience, and versatility, downplaying the negative aspects of a peripheral or marginal position on the labor market

and in workplaces. Equally important is to look into the way promises and prospects are dealt with by temporary staff. The nature of their reactions will probably vary a great deal, even though patterns of appropriation, negotiation, or dismissal of the legitimating principles may be found.

A related issue concerns the relation of professional identity to the identity of "the self." It may be that the preoccupation with individual skills, competencies and characteristics is also suggestive of distinctive new ways in which organizational subjectivity is apprehended and reproduced. The projects of defining and developing "the self" may be understood as disciplinary constructs, representing an extension of the arena of control, stripping professional groups of some of their power in articulating interests.

The second aspect, which will be particularly focused on, involves a question of the character of relation the temporary personnel develops with colleagues at the particular workplace where he or she is assigned to work. In what manner does the individual influence the organization? The temporary may upset local patterns of influence and authority. He or she may, on the other hand, strengthen the existing pattern of authority relations, for example by offering a reflexive view of the organization, its members, and its set of values as opposed to those of other organizations. Temporaries both highlight and blur organizational boundaries. This leads to the question of how issues of boundary-drawing, for example in terms of accessibility to organizational information channels, social events and locales, are dealt with. Does the presence of temporary staff lead to increased levels of cultural management activities on the part of the hosting organization, or are temporaries viewed as valuable links to the wider business community?

Thirdly, we may also ask who the employees of temporary services actually are and what their motives for applying or taking on a temporary assignment at an agency are. In addition to administrative staff, we also see a tendency for highly educated economists, technicians and other categories to be recruited to organizations by companies providing temporary services. Here, it would be interesting to learn about their motives and constraints. Is temporary work seen as a way to get professional training where other options are hard to find, or is it viewed as a valuable way of getting varied professional training? An interview with a manager at a temp agency suggests that, on the contrary, a great deal of professional experience is required from people who seek employment as "hired consultants." Consequently, they look not for young individuals with eager minds, but rather for middle-aged, self-confident professionals with long-term experience. A degree from a school of economics or technology is merely a necessary and basic entrance ticket, the manager told me. Moreover, how do temporary personnel

construct and maintain a sense of identity in professional terms and how do they manage to create a sense of belonging (if they do) in relation to their fellow co-workers under conditions of uncertainty and temporary assignments? An important aspect of the transformation is therefore how it affects professional roles and professional identity, and how these are managed in particular contexts.

Much of the discourse on structural change and professional identity still embraces the idea that it makes sense to talk in the singular about the professional culture of a particular professional category. But, increasingly, the complexity of conditions and solutions implies that different categories of individuals may have competing perceptions of the situation. The intense discourse on change on the labor market is also a reflection of the battle over whose socio-cognitive problem definition should prevail. Here, the situation urges a problematization of the enactment and legitimating methods of sense-making on the part of companies offering temporary services, on the one hand, and among the temporarily employed administrative staff themselves, on the other. Hence, my concern with cultures in the plural, and with both macro- and micro levels of interaction.

In undertaking this study, I will use as dominant research methodology a qualitative ethnographic approach, combining participant observation with interviews. I believe this approach to be suited to this type of study, in particular because it offers a sensitivity to meanings as well as an ability to interpret and represent practices, articulations, and forms of cultural management.

In the above, I have tried, by using old field material as a springboard and a tool for reflection, to outline the contours of a planned study. The set of issues raised embrace a broad set of questions, only cursorily discussed here. It seems, however, that a more thorough study of center - periphery issues in the labor market would well be worth while.

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