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## **Unpacking the complexities of managerial subjectivity: An analytic fixation on constitutive dynamics**

### **Abstract**

In this paper an analytic scope is elaborated in order to unpack the complexities of *constitutive dynamics* co-producing managerial subjects in discursive practices of public management work (my empirical field). Such framing is proposed in order to grasp the dynamic complexity of multi-modal, power-infused processes of subject formations, that is, the significant discursive practices through which different enacting forces constitute selves, actions, procedures and/or materials as managerial matters with specific *normative effects*. In this view managerial subjectivity becomes a question of analysing power-infused processes of active and passive performing subject formations that manage meanings of managerial matter, selves, affect conditions of actions and ways of organizing. Public management work is an interesting field to such; with the rapid changes seen in many OECD-countries, embedded managerial subjects and relating phenomena become in fluxes of binary tensions between shifting modernization discourses (e.g. in terms of ‘New Public Management’ or ‘New Public Governance’). With such the significance of formal managers are often stressed to changing ways of organizing (Bislev et al. 2002, Pedersen & Hartley 2008). But how do certain ‘selves’, ‘doings’, ‘things’ come to matter managerially in everyday management work, managing meanings and conditions of selves, others and actions? By analysing the socially embedded co-productions of managerial work, we can nuance research accounts on the performance of manageability in organizing processes. But grasping such complexity calls for discourse analytics sensitive to social-psychological aspects of constitutive dynamics, a need this paper contributes to.

Much management theory presupposes a human, intentional manageability working through representational knowledge of and operational intervention with organizational subjects and procedures, and so managers’ personality traits are often considered to have an enormous impact on organizing processes of e.g. personnel, changes, strategy etc. (Alvesson 2010, Harding 2003, Grey 2009). But approaching management work from a poststructuralist, social-psychological view point (Fairhurst 2007, Wetherell 2008) destabilizes the idea of formal managers necessarily ‘being on top’ of organizing processes (Fairhurst & Grant 2010). Following these, it’s argued that management actors are socially embedded in socio-material, discursive contexts, and managerial impact and significance are effects constituted in ongoing discursive practices and processes of subjectification, and so better understood if sensitive to the empirical making. Furthermore, it is proposed that social-psychological perspectives on discursive phenomena have much to offer the study of management

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(Fairhurst 2007), but even more so with some analytic retooling. By drawing on poststructuralist readings of 'subjectivity' and 'performativity' within social-psychology (Blackman et al 2008, Wetherell 2008), the paper combines different analytic concepts of 'subjectification' in order to explore the complex constitutive dynamics, that simultaneously co-produce *subjective existence and agency* of manageability in work relations (Harré et al. 2009, Wetherell 2008, Rose 1996). Hereby the focus is on the ways that managerial matters are constituted, get normative effects and condition actions through complex compositions of discursive practices in (sometimes contradictory) tensions between socio-material discursive resources of contextuality, normativity, rationalities and knowledge domains.

Hence, the aim of the paper is to contribute with analytic retooling to existing critical management studies and organizational discourse analyses, by elaborating an analytic scope sensitive to the micro-social complexities of multi-modal *constitutive dynamics*. With such ambitions the interests are twofold; firstly the paper outlines an analytic retooling of 'subjectification' with the concepts of 'positioning' and 'performing' including and excluding discursive practices of subjectivities that come to matter managerially (Wetherell 2008, Harré et al. 2009, Barad 2003, Fairhurst 2007). With these we can explore the complex compositions simultaneously co-producing subjective existence and agency, conditioning beings and actions of manageable and managing subjectivities. Secondly, the analytic possibilities of unpacking the constitutive dynamics of everyday managerial work embedded in changing political discourses are discussed. This is done by exemplifying with empirical cases from two local governments in Denmark. In following their change-initiatives concerning quality management in the day care sector, I have participated in cross-professional encounters between political, administrative and professional actors and citizens (parents and children) and interviewed administrative and professional public servants over a period of 1½ year. With regard to the analytic prospects, implications for further conceptualization and empirical research are outlined.

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