

Chrononormativity and the personalization of temporal control in a professional service firm

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Temporal control and chrononormativity

Temporal control traditionally functions through chrononormativity (e.g., Riach et al., 2014)

- Regulating work by dictating dominant temporal structures and rhythms
- e.g., 9-to-5 office hours, facetime, extreme work hours, etc.

Chronormativity is well-documented in traditional, hierarchical organizations

- A „**closed**“ socio-temporal order with little tolerance for deviation (a “clockwork” organization)
- Dominant temporal order is **safeguarded**, e.g., through hierarchy, technology, and social norms
- Engenders an „**autonomy paradox**“ in professional contexts (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Michel, 2011)

Chrononormativity has been “under attack” (criticism and change attempts)

- Less reliance on hierarchical authority to impose a dominant socio-temporal order
- Increasingly diverse temporal needs of employees → Fragmentation and particularization of temporal orders?

The empirical setting:

FlatConsult and the Danish consulting industry

33 semi-structured interviews in the Danish consulting industry

- 18 interviews with FlatConsult
- (7 interviews with MarketConsult)
- (8 interviews with industry experts)

– **500+ pages of documents**

- Annual reports
- Project management handbooks
- Culture handbooks
- etc.

5 days of non-participant observation (office visits)

Introduction to FlatConsult

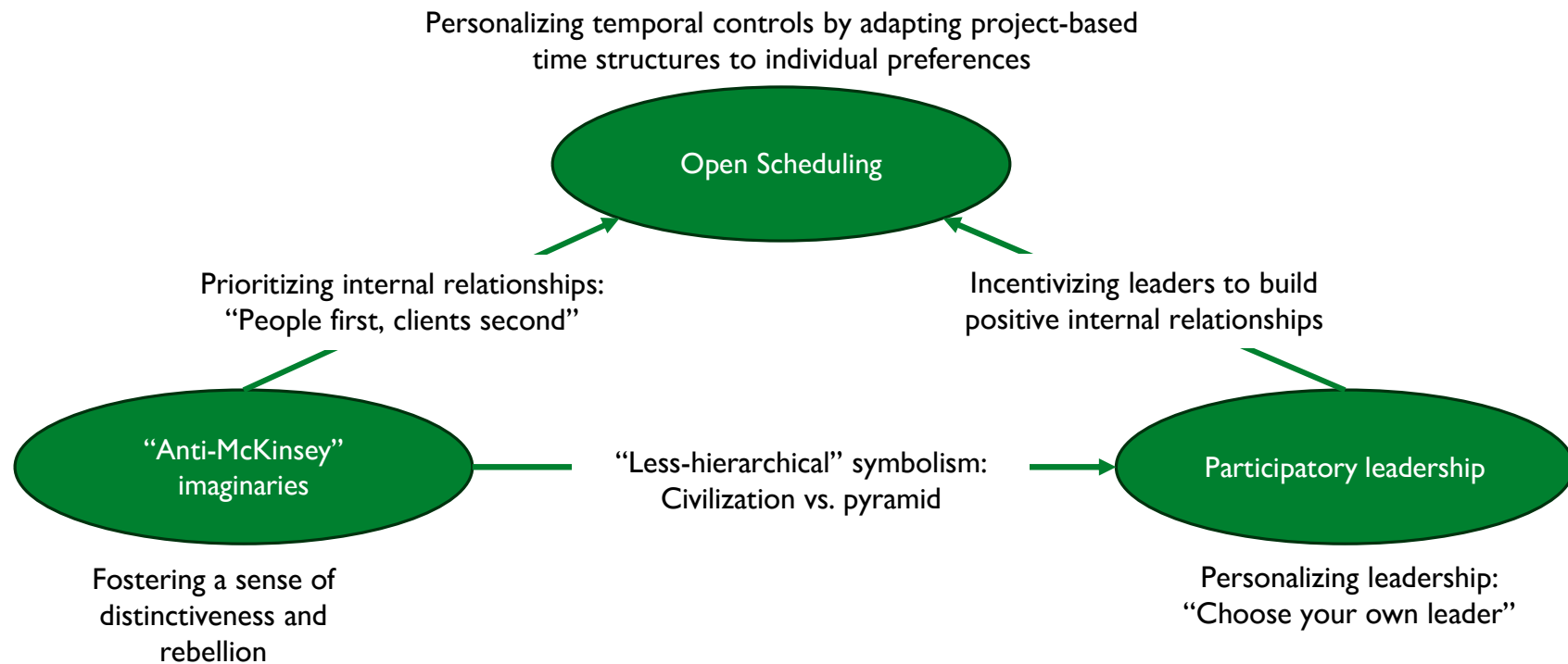
“I think the first time I went on a skiing holiday after being hired [at McKinsey], I think we were two days in, and they called me and told me that there was a plane leaving from Geneva at 10 o’clock that evening and I had to be on it and I could tell the people I was with that I wouldn’t be coming back. They didn’t ask me to, they told me to [...] So, the answer became to start a new consulting company” (Lasse, CEO)

“...creating a firm which is built on other norms than the American norms. [...] For me, and this is also a thing we try to do at FlatConsult, of course: Family first. Therefore, work second.” (Mitchell, CEO).

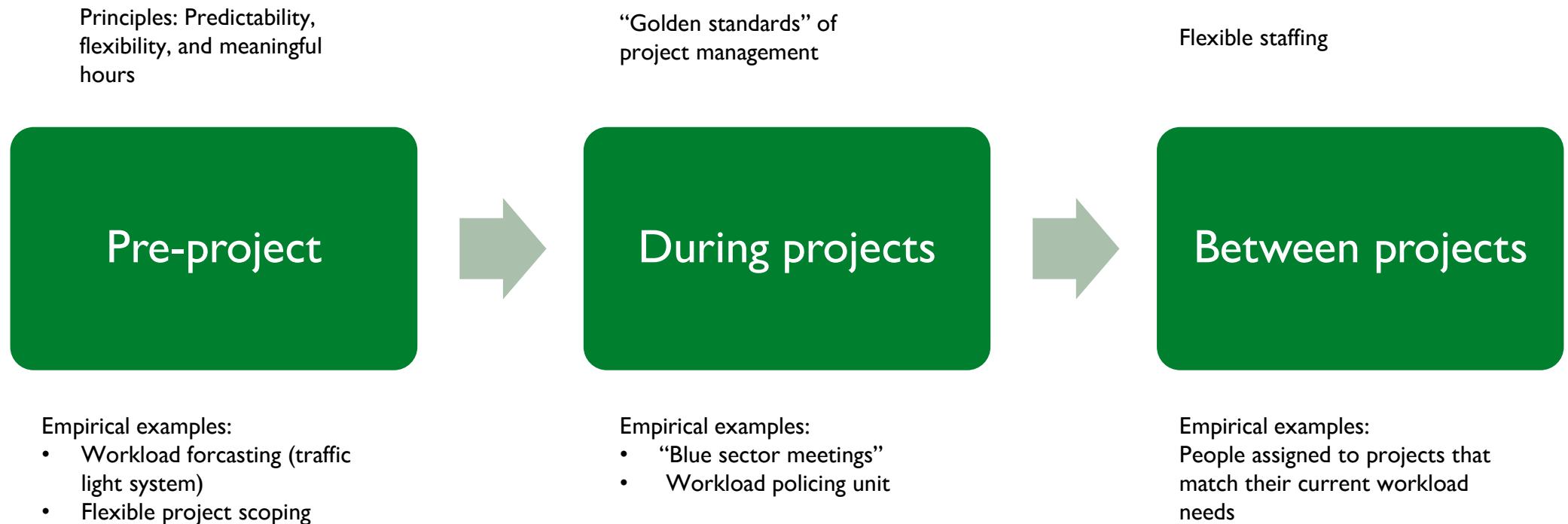
→ **Disillusionment with traditional chrononormativity regime triggers search for alternatives**

The personalization of temporal control at FlatConsult

“if you want to go and play football with your friends on a Wednesday afternoon, you should be able to do that. If you are a PM person, the kind of person that likes to sleep in, you should be able to do that. [...] we try to adapt to the individual.” (Martin, consultant)



Open scheduling: Principles and practices



“Anti-McKinsey” imaginaries: The othering of established elite consulting firms

“It’s exactly like: ‘People first, clients second,’ because, if you don’t have the people, you cannot serve the clients. [...] That is reversed compared to a lot of our competitors. [...] External relationships are important but they are coming in at second. The most important relationships are the internal relationships because they are the ones fostering energy, power and development opportunities.” (Mitchell, CEO)

“One of the problems in the consulting industry is that people burn out due to 80-hour workweeks. [...] Psychos, who cannot control ambitions or conduct themselves in a civilized manner, won’t get far in our system.”
(internal document)

Instead of the up-or-out principle, FlatConsult has an ambition of making people stay in the company for as a long as possible. We don’t fire people we’ve hired, unless there are completely exceptional circumstances.
(internal document)

Participatory leadership discourse

Lead and be led: “Everyone, even the most senior partner will sometimes lead people also sometimes be led by junior people. [...] If you don’t have the classical pyramid, then you need to find other ways of working. Junior people get a chance to step up earlier and senior people need to rely a little bit more on junior people.”
(Thomas, consultant)

Follower-ship: “So, the followership-logic is the notion that you do not become a leader in FlatConsult if you are just a good sales guy and you run your projects like hell and people go down with stress and nobody wants to work with you. You become leader at FlatConsult if people think that you are good enough to lead them.”
(James, partner)

“All managers junior partners and partners, get evaluated once or twice a year on their followership. Basically, they make a big survey and send it out to all the consultants. Then we rank them based on how much we like to work with them. Obviously, there could be many parameters of why you like to work with different specific persons, but for a lot of people “hours” is very important. I mean, of course we don't want to work little, but if this is a manager who just pushes his team to 80 hours a week, then he likely won't get a good followership score.” (Till, Consultant)

Conclusions

Temporal control in less-hierarchical organizations functions through personalization:

- From a dominant regime of chrononormativity to personalized and customized temporal controls
- Accommodating individual differences and fostering a sense of individual uniqueness while maintaining consent with heavy workload

Personalization of temporal control paradoxically enables individual to continue working long hours while no longer feeling bad about due to:

- Sense of control over personal schedule („We work a little bit more than everyone else, but I can still go to the gym.“)
- Fragmentation and singularization prevent opportunities for meaningful resistance
→ feeling unique by having a custom-made control regime

Thank you.

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