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The Workers the Work Environment Discourse Forgot

- a critical analysis of the
official psychosocial work environment discourse
in Sweden

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Abstract

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- Author:** Lisbeth Rydén
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- Key words:** Critical discourse analysis, psychosocial work environment, knowledge worker, discursive power, contemporary work life
- Purpose:** To explore how the changes in work life, here represented and depicted through the concepts of knowledge work and knowledge worker, have been incorporated in the official psychosocial work environment discourse in Sweden.
- Methodology:** Critical discourse analysis, contrasting the official psychosocial work environment discourse to literature on knowledge work and knowledge worker, to explore how employees, employers and their relations are constructed within these two discourses; focusing identity, autonomy and power. Using the constructions to make visible how they are articulated, used and dealt with in a real life case from the Work Environment Authority.
- Theoretical perspectives:** Our social world is socially constructed and language is the main tool for constructing it. Discourse analysis is thus not just a tool for deconstructing texts but also for enhanced understanding of our construction of the world and our ability to communicate about it.
- Empirical foundation:** The analysis is based on official and public texts on psychosocial work environment in Sweden and an inspection memo from the Work Environment Authority to exemplify and discuss the impact of the two discourses in an everyday work life case.
- Conclusions:** The nature of knowledge work and the subsequent conditions for a knowledge worker is not present in the official work environment discourse. The knowledge worker is thus actively, although maybe unintentionally, made invisible. This has two major consequences; the invisibility marginalizes the knowledge worker's work situation, i.e. it is both difficult to articulate and to be understood when talking about the work situation and secondly, being marginalized is a psychosocial work environment risk in itself. The non-existence of the knowledge worker in the work environment discourse is thus a double work environment hazard for a growing number of employees in Sweden.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Work life evolves and so does the work environment

The organizing of Swedish work life has two major directions; organizing based on Tayloristic principles, i.e. hierarchy, high degree of work distribution and limited possibilities for the individual worker to influence the work situation, and organizing based on more ‘modern’ principles, i.e. decentralization, participation on all levels and teamwork (Ds 2008:16 p. 62-63). In some organizations these two strategies are combined, i.e. you try to standardize routines but have more personal and unique solutions when dealing with customers’ requests and other internal and external agreements. Nevertheless, one is often more dominant or preferred than the other (Kärreman, Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2002; Löwendahl, 2005).

The Tayloristic strategy is well known and so are its pros and cons. As long as the workers accept and comply with the routines, procedures etc, the standardization is designed to create a flow in the production or, as in service industry, take care of most of the customers’ demands without forcing the employees to take any actual decisions but to follow the rules. When something is outside the rules, the customer is referred to another level of employees with other authorities. The vertical line takes care of the problems that are not solvable through rules and standards.

In more and more jobs deviation from standard is requested, by the customers, from the first line employees, i.e. the one facing the customer. In an instant you are supposed to make a decision that is satisfactory to the customer, possible to achieve for the organization and is good for the organization in the long run concerning profitability, reputation etc. This strategy demands other skills from the employees, it requires other ways of organizing and it has other pros and cons.

In more general terms the first strategy is often called standardization, hierarchy, bureaucracy, scientific management and the alternatives have been labelled to mark the difference from the more industrial way of organizing business life. As well as there are different labels on the ‘traditional’ work life there are also different labels for this more ‘contemporary’ work life. When talking about Knowledge Management these two lines of development are called codification and personalization (see for example Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough & Swan, 2002; Alvesson, 2004).

When the organizing principles change, the role and function of the worker subsequently also change. In Sweden the label ‘co-workership’ has been used (Backström, 2003) to mark the ‘equal’ position between the employee and the manager, i.e. being one’s own manager. Another way of labelling is ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’, where vertical emphasize the hierarchy and managerial control and the horizontal a more team based, cooperative and mutually adjusting way of control (Rennstam, 2007). What is in common for these different labels is that they all put a lot more emphasis on each employer. It is more of bottom-up than top-down concerning how to do things and sometimes even *what* to do. This enhanced ‘freedom/autonomy’ thus also means more personal responsibility and accountability.

The reasons for developing other strategies than standardization are several. One is that the customers demand it; they do not want to wait for answers and agreements while the employee is looking for the manager. It is a very impractical way of dealing with things. It takes time and the flexibility vanishes. Another reason for this strategy’s growth is that the employees are demanding it. In order to do a good job, they want to use their ability (knowledge and agency) to make a fair agreement with the customer, another colleague, the supplier etc. The strategy is therefore of mutual interest for two of the organization’s most important stakeholders. This strive for doing a good job is NOT connected to this strategy, most of us want to do a good job no matter within the type of organization we work. What a good job is, how it is measured and appreciated, the responsibility for the actual work and its consequences etc, is however different within the two strategies.

Nevertheless there are problems with this more autonomous way of organizing. Management still needs to have some control of the actions within, and in the name of, the organization. How this is implemented, argued for and conducted is of major interest for the employees. There is sometimes a thin line between perceived fair measures for management control and information systems and systems for surveillance based on mistrust that are not perceived as fair.

Another problem is that the conditions for health change. The focus on psychosocial¹ work health issues in a traditional organization (rules and standards) is on aspects depending on the relationship between the employee and the work process and/or the organizational design. The

¹ There is no definition of psychosocial work environment. In this study the focus is on health issues related to interaction and communication. Other ‘definitions’ are further introduced in this chapter as well as in Chapter 4.

health issues are connected to a healthy balance between demand and control (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), i.e. demands that are matched by your competence and ability and that you have influence on the work situation. Conflicts among employees are solved by the management and the employees are (supposed) to comply with the solutions. Potential consequences are then the management's responsibility and not a concern of the employees. The employees are thereby 'protected' from worrying about the conflicts and their consequences.

Co-workership is often considered as good as it makes the work more interesting and offers a better possibility for personal growth at work. For many though the work becomes more frustrating, demanding and exhausting (Backström, 2003 p. 268), especially if there are problems concerning the possibility to use one's enhanced autonomy in a productive and ethical way. Another often claimed effect is the so-called boundless work, where the work can be done everywhere and all the time. The individual in a more modern organisation must to a much higher degree construct its own work task and boundaries (time and space limits) (Ds 2008:16 p. 64).

Wennberg & Hane (2007) label this contemporary co-worker 'professional agent' (*professionell aktör*). By that they do not mean 'professional' as in educated, licensed or registered trades/professionals, but people who at work see themselves as making choices, exercising their autonomy, i.e. 'professional' in exercising their agency. Not being able to choose a 'good' way of conducting the work, i.e. keep your professional honour intact is threatening the identity at work and the health of the professional.

Both Backström (2003) and Wennberg & Hane (2007) takes departure in the organization as a social complex system, where the 'parts' interact with each other and create shared patterns of understanding and action. Illness is created when 'the parts', that is the persons, are not interacting in a way that makes it possible to create these shared meanings of understanding and action (Backström p. 276-277). What connects the system is communication. Communication is therefore essential both in creating and detecting psychosocial risks and when taking measures to prevent them (Wennberg & Hane, 2006).

Personally I think there is a more important line between people who see themselves as autonomous/exercising their autonomy and those who think they are not, than between a person

who is doing what is labelled knowledge work and someone who is not doing 'knowledge work'. However, I do think that knowledge work, knowledge worker and knowledge intensive organizations are interesting to study because they have some characteristics that are more outlined than in many other organizations and thus make them easier to study. For example, knowledge intensive organizations have work health issues related to more traditional work environment; noise, vibrations, air, machine safety, ergonomics etc, but compared to other organizations, psychosocial issues are probably a proportionate larger part of the work health and thus also more easy to discriminate. Another reason is that knowledge intensive organizations often are considered to be in the front line of work places, i.e. what concerns knowledge intensive organizations today concerns a wider range of organizations tomorrow (Kärreman, Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2002).

The labels knowledge worker, co-worker and professional agent are therefore in this study used interchangeably, although there are differences between them. The differences are however for this study not as important as the similarities, i.e. to differ one kind of organizational development from another, more traditional way of organizing work life and its consequences for the employee. The label 'knowledge worker' is used in general. The other labels are used when referring to reasoning/authors that use these specific labels.

1.2 Psychosocial work environment and knowledge worker

At a first glance you would say that knowledge worker and psychosocial work environment according to the demand/control model should be a perfect match, i.e. knowledge workers should have a quite good psychosocial work environment. The task control is high and the demands are followed by a high (equivalent) competence. Nevertheless some of the most sick absent professionals due to psychosocial related work environment has, at least the last decade, been just knowledge workers: e.g. doctors, occupational therapists, teachers. Despite a high degree of balance between demand and ability and a rather big span of control people get sick from psychosocial issues.

When investigating the work environment for occupational therapists Hane & Wennberg (Hane, Wennberg & FSA, 2002) found that work commitment/satisfaction was not a compensatory factor for poor work environment (as traditionally perceived) but the actual source of the perceived poor work environment. The fact that they took pride in their work made them

become frustrated when they did not manage to fulfil the potential of their efforts. The psychosocial risks are then embedded in the very core of making a good job when perceiving oneself as a competent and capable professional agent. That also widens the quite common perception that ‘if people are healthy they can do a good job’ to ‘to be able to do a good job is healthy’ (Rydén, 2004).

That psychosocial work environment is poor in some work places and/or some professions can have several origins. One is that it might be the result of a not sufficiently well spread knowledge. Another could be poor management of well spread knowledge. A third could be that the knowledge at hand is not sufficient for the problems at the work place. Depending on the emergence of these problems different interventions become relevant. For the first two it is probably a matter of information and education. It might be expensive or time consuming but not really difficult. If it is the third it is worse. Not only is it partly unknown and therefore difficult to spread, but the current knowledge, that is possible to spread, might be meaningless and even worse, destructive.

Everyone who perceives oneself as, or perceives others as, professional agents/knowledge workers should therefore have an interest in understanding the psychosocial work conditions this changed situation entail. Otherwise you risk ending up making things worse than they already are, all in good faith of what you – as an employee or a manager – are expected to do.

1.3 A peripheral issue – or just marginalized?

The psychosocial aspects arising from the emergence of knowledge work/ers are not especially attended in the literature. Alvesson (2004), for example, writes about the identity work of a knowledge worker but says little of the consequences of not being able to maintain an identity as a knowledge worker. Newell et al. (2002) write about community of practice and social capital but barely anything about the personal consequences of not being able to establish it within an organization.

Dawson (2003) and Alvesson & Sveningsson (2008) are focusing on organizational change but not really addressing the question of how ‘bad change management’ contributes to the psychosocial work environment. They focus on change fatigue, productivity and efficiency loss and loss of authority for the change agents. They say little about what all these change efforts do

to the possibility of doing a good job and the personal consequences for not being able to connect to and communicate around these ambitions and efforts. Nor is the questions addressed by Löwendahl (2005) when she is depicting the conditions of managing professional service firms. Backström (2003) however connects the co-workership and the 'burnout-syndrome', focusing two possible causes for burnout. The first is having freedom but a narrow solutional space and the other is that you have solutional space but without sufficient contact with the colleagues, thus developing patterns of action that is not shared. The organization and the work process become fragmented and less comprehensible.

Wennberg & Hane (2007) also connect the professional agents with health aspects. When you see yourself as a choosing agent in a social system of other choosing agents you perceive yourself as a co-creator of how things 'are' and thus also co-responsible for maintaining or changing the ways things 'will be'. When you are not able or allowed to talk about the situation and the consequences thereof with significant others in the system, risks arise.

Although there are researchers that focus on knowledge workers and their work related health situation, it is still quite peripheral. Maybe this is because health aspects are not really an issue for others than 'health care people' and not considered a natural part of, or in other ways related to, everyday work life and its organizing. The situation can thus also be an illustration of how psychosocial issues can arise. You say something that does not make sense for everyone (or no one). After having tried some time you get the feeling of being socially incompetent and/or misunderstood. You withdraw and risk being marginalized or you persist and risk being considered 'difficult'. Either way, you lose, even if that is not a personal shortcoming from the beginning (it is an effect of the social system!), the consequences are personal and can also be quite severe.

One way of coming to terms with difficulties at work is to use the work place communication and from that discuss what consequences the various reasoning have on our everyday work life (Wennberg & Hane, 2006). What is (re)produced when saying what we are saying? When becoming aware of what our talk constitutes we can choose to (re)produce what we perceive as 'good'. The process in itself also draws attention to the importance of language and language use and might therefore also function as a general reminder of how to view and approach our language use and/or communication at work. Hence, the intervention is not just about the actual

situation but also to introduce a way of being able to be more competent in general concerning the effects of our communication. This is also in line with a professional agent's need of enhanced awareness of the choices, the deliberations behind a decision and the consequences thereof.

The two discourses (systems of reasoning) mentioned above – the psychosocial discourse and the knowledge worker discourse – are two important discourses for knowledge intensive organizations. They are both at play at the work place although differently translated and transformed locally. One good thing about the multitude of discourses is that you can choose one that is relevant for the situation at hand (if you know about it). A not so good thing is if two discourses that are interrelated are inconsistent, contradictive and even incompatible. If that is the case and both are used for the same situation it might cause misunderstandings and circular talk where the communication becomes stagnate and infected causing inefficiency, productivity loss, marginalization, frustration and in the end loss of profit as well as wellbeing.

Whether there are any discrepancies, inconsistencies etc, between these two discourses or not, is not sufficiently explored. Enhanced understanding of how these two discourses cooperate/interact/counteract is one way of dealing with potential psychosocial risks at work, for understanding them as well as for preventing and dealing with them. If not understanding the concept of discourses in general and these two in specific and their impact on our ability to communicate we might end up just as described above with confusion, frustration, productivity loss and illness.

Not conducting an analysis is contributing to the silence in this area and that would be contributing to status quo, i.e. submission to the currently dominating discourse in each area. The challenge is to handle the two discourses in practice in a productive and constructive way, not to separate them as two different interests not really affecting each other. Not conducting an analysis would also contribute to a lesser possibility to attain a more autonomous position to the dominating discourse, thus also positioning oneself as a 'victim' of others influence on the discourse, making oneself free of responsibility for the state of affairs. That is not taking responsibility as a knowledge worker, nor as a citizen in general.

The exploration of the discourses can have several starting points and perspectives, to limit its range I will take departure in a few themes that are essential for the two discourses.

1.4 Research purpose / question

The purpose of this study is to explore how changes in the nature of work life, here represented by the concept of knowledge work and knowledge worker, have been incorporated in the official psychosocial work environment discourse and the consequences thereof. Hopefully this will entail enhanced understanding of how the nature of knowledge work and its consequences and the psychosocial work environment discourse interact and counteract. An enhanced understanding will make it (even more) possible to more deliberately choose a way to talk about psychosocial work environment that will be consistent to the work place each and everyone of us is involved in.

I will conduct my analysis through highlighting three interrelated themes contrasting the official psychosocial work environment discourse and the knowledge worker discourse. The three themes are identity, autonomy and power and the specific questions will be ‘How are the concept of the employee and the employer constructed?’ (identity), ‘What agentic space is ascribed to the employee and the employer?’ (autonomy) and ‘What relationships are constructed between the employer and the employee?’ (power).

1.5 Disposition

A master thesis follows a template, a pattern to make sure the reader and the academia recognize the text and to make it easier for the reader to approach and analyze it. When conducting a Discourse Analysis the template does not always fit. In this section I will therefore account for how and why the thesis is presented as it is.

Chapter 1: *Introduction*, is written to introduce the reader to the topic and to the research purpose/question.

Chapter 2: *Discourse and Discourse Analysis – Methodological and Theoretical Frame of Reference*, consists of two main parts. First there are four sections, 2.2-2.5, concerning the concept of discourse. Normally this would have been placed in the next chapter as part of the frame of reference, but if one has not been introduced to the concept of discourse, discourse analysis could be a little bit harder to understand. The order has thus been made to make it easier for the readers who are not so accustomed to the concept of discourse, but also to display how the author (that is me) sees the concept of discourse, as it can be seen and used in many different ways. The second part of Chapter 2, 2.6-2.12, is the more traditional part of a method chapter focusing on how to

approach the research questions, how to select and treat the empirical material and how to conduct the analysis.

Chapter 3: *Knowledge Work and Knowledge Workers*, are here placed as the frame of reference but it can also be seen as empirical material. However, the prime interest in this study is the official psychosocial work environment discourse and the knowledge worker discourse is not really what is primarily analyzed. The knowledge worker discourse is rather the reason for doing the analysis at all and is rather used as a tool to analyze the official psychosocial work environment discourse.

Chapter 4: *The Official Psychosocial Work Environment Discourse in Sweden*, is the first part of the empirical material. It is a survey over some of the official texts deriving from the most significant actors in the labour market concerning work environment. This is the empirical material, but it can also be seen as a frame of reference as it at the same time also depicts the emergence and development of the concept of psychosocial work environment in Sweden.

Chapter 5: *Analyzing the Discourse – Step 1: Constructions of Identity, Autonomy and Power*, is the first part of the analysis, connected to the empirical material in Chapter 4, focusing on the specific research questions concerning the constructions of identity, autonomy and power within the two discourses.

Chapter 6: *Malmö University – a Real Life Case*, is the second part of the empirical material and is based on a work environment inspection conducted at Malmö University by the Work Environment Authority.

Chapter 7: *Analyzing the Discourse – Step 2: Practical Consequences in Real Life*, is the second part of the analysis, consequently connected to the second part of the empirical material in Chapter 6. Here is the second part of the research purpose in focus, i.e. the consequences of different constructions emerging from the two discourses.

Chapter 8: *Concluding Discussions*, is what it is labelled. Here I put the different threads together to discuss the findings according to the overall research purpose; how changes in work life, represented by the knowledge worker, have been incorporated in the official psychosocial work environment discourse. I also discuss the importance and the impact of my findings, possible reasons for and consequences of them.

2 Discourse and Discourse Analysis

– Methodological and Theoretical Frame of Reference

2.1 Introduction

Before getting into the actual research question there are at least two questions that have to be more thoroughly addressed and that is 1) what is discourse and 2) why is it interesting to address and analyze? There are a wide range of definitions and ways of using the concept of 'discourse'. I will not make an extensive summary of the 'discourse on discourse' but highlight some of the more relevant aspects and characteristics concerning this study. By highlighting these aspects my hope is that I also have (partly, but sufficiently) answered the two questions above.

The wide range of definitions and ways of using 'discourse' consequently generates a wide range of conducting discourse analysis. Neither in the latter section will I do a thorough survey over various ways of approaching and analyzing discourses. I will focus on displaying the platform from where the analysis is made, i.e. where this thesis is positioned within the field of discourse analysis.

2.2 Discourse as social practice

Whatever you think of discourse (if you do at all), its importance, its power or its analytical usefulness, you would probably agree that it has to do with language and language use, i.e. talk and written texts. There are some who limit the concept of discourse to just texts (Fairclough, 2003) and some that have a broader approach and see everything as (the result of) discourse (Foucault, 1971/1993).

Discourse can be seen as 'a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitute a way of talking and writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue' (Watson, 1994 p. 113, in Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000:1131.) This study is in line with this way of viewing discourse. The focus will thus not be as much about the exact words and how they are combined but on what kind of reasoning (discourses) the texts are supporting or challenging.

2.3 Discourse as constituting our social world

Hardy & Phillips (2002, p. 2, in Heracleous 2004:177) say that discourses are ‘the things that make up the social world – including our very identities – appear out of discourse ... without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand social reality, our experiences, or ourselves’. Seen from this perspective social reality is mainly based on and (constantly) (re)constructed through discursive interaction. What we say is simultaneously a result of discursive power and an act of (re)producing a discourse.

To be a bit more clear: what we say is a result of our history, our knowledge and the context within it is said, thus it is a result of the discourses within which we have lived our lives. What we say is also part of maintaining or changing (supporting/challenging) our perception of our history, our knowledge and/or the context and thus we are all part in producing that discourse.

If we do not know more than one way of reasoning about an issue we cannot really reason differently than we do. It is not until we understand that there are other ways of reasoning that we can choose what we say and thereby choose what we reproduce. It does not mean that we ‘get out of discourse’ but that we draw on an alternative discourse or is ‘resisting’ within the same discourse. To *say* something is to *do* something (Austin, 1962, in Heracleous, 2004) and you do three things simultaneously: you say something (the actual words), you mean something (the intention) and your words have an actual effect (not necessarily what you have intended).

2.4 Discourse as constraining our social world

Discourses thus constitute our world by building boundaries of what is possible to pay attention to and/or to talk about. If we have no words for our experiences and feelings we have trouble communicating about them. And as we can only use the words we know we can end up enhancing a discourse even though our intention is to explain something rather ‘outside’ the discourse.

A discourse defends itself successfully (Foucault 1971/1993). ‘It’ defends itself because what we say is only what has already been said, if it is possible to say and to be understood it is already within the discourse. Whatever we say are just comments within existing discourse. Before your statements can be judged as true or false you must be ‘within the truth’. In order to take part in a discourse you have to submit to it. Consequently there is no ‘true truth’. What we know as ‘true’

is only true within a certain discourse. It also defends itself through exercising power on who are allowed to talk within a discipline. If you are not allowed to talk within a discourse you cannot affect it. It does not matter if you have something to contribute with but if you are allowed to speak.

An example: if you, as a student, say something about pedagogical matters you might not be 'heard' as this is something just teachers are allowed to have an opinion on (according to one specific discourse – there are many contesting discourses in pedagogical matters). It is not just that you do not have 'the right knowledge' to be understood (the first defence), but that you do not have 'the right' to speak (the latter defence) and thus are not listened to. You can compare this with the situation for how patients, women, elderly, children and other groups and individuals sometimes are treated by their social environment. These Catch 22-like-processes (Heller, 1961/1986) make the discourses resist change and thus survive or at least to change inertly.

2.5 Human agency and autonomy

Discourses are constructing our social world, and ourselves, but we can also construct them, they are not fixed. Discourses are constantly reproduced and/or contested. Some discourses have become more dominant than others but still there is some space left for alternative interpretations and/or the possibility to choose between contesting discourses to make sense of the world and its construction (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Hardy & Phillips, 2004). Following Foucault though, this is not an easy task as discourses are constituted and reproduced in a way that makes them resistant and self-enhancing.

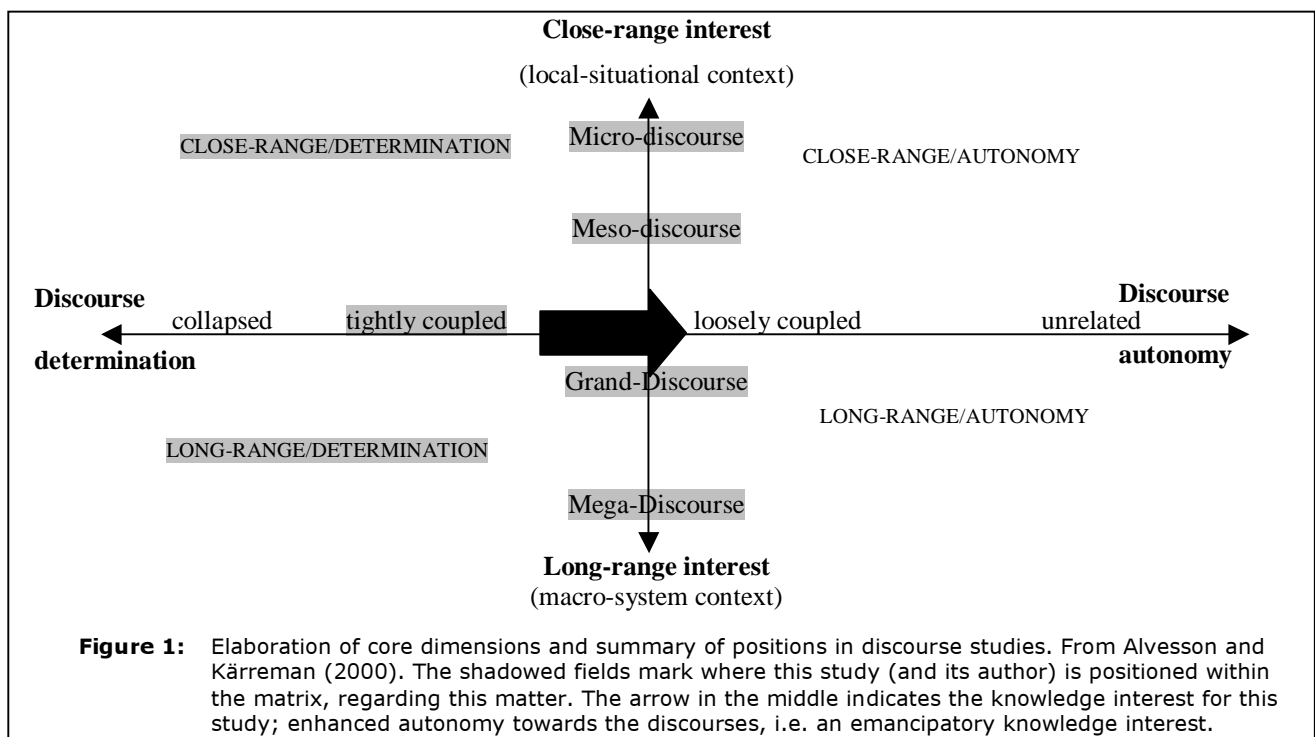
To be able to choose what reasoning to support or to challenge we need to be aware of how the discourses affect us and how we can affect them. The first step is to enhance awareness of the consequences of supporting the dominant discourse. The point here is awareness, not challenging or supporting. The important issue is to be more aware of what consequences your (speech) acts have. Then you can exercise your autonomy (the possibility to choose; not everything and not anything, but something) and then you can be accounted for, and account others for, the choices. If you do not know there could be a choice you cannot make deliberate choices and hence risk ending up as a 'product' or 'victim' of circumstances (discourses).

2.6 Positioning the thesis

Alvesson & Kärreman (2000) distinguish discourses (local, close-range) from Discourses (macro-system, long-range), see Figure 1. Depending on to which extent you believe the discourses or Discourses are determining social practice you will get different research interest.

I would say that this study attempts to approach both long-range/determination and close-range/determination (although both of a moderate kind). This is despite that Alvesson & Kärreman are stating that it is not easy to accurately account for both. I find it essential for the study also to display what kind of impact the discourse/Discourse could have on the micro/meso-discourses. In order to try and make account for both, the study has a narrow span of empirical material and a narrow analytical approach at the expense of depth and breadth. For example, I have narrowed the empirical material to official texts and have not included newspapers, journals, TV-shows, books etc. I have chosen three themes through which perspective I will analyze the empirical material, I could have chosen a much broader approach.

The empirical material used is both part of the Grand Discourse (legal texts, provisions etc) and the local through the inspection memos but also meso-discursive as the inspectors at the Work Environment Authority who write the memos is basing their judgement on broader patterns and experiences and not just on local context (micro-discourse). Mega-Discourses are addressed insofar as the Grand-Discourses often are connected to Mega-Discourses (e.g. managerialism).



2.7 Chosen approach

Another way of ordering different approaches to discourses is displayed by Heracleous (2004). Heracleous uses five theoretical approaches: hermeneutics, rhetoric, metaphor, symbolic interactionism and critical discourse analysis. According to his mapping the most relevant approach for this study is critical discourse analysis (CDA), as it focuses on links between power and discourses, relating discourses to social practices and powerful interests.

This choice is further enforced by the descriptions of CDA by Broadfoot, Deetz & Andersson (2004). As we often are unaware of the powers and functions of discourse a crucial interest for CDA is 'to make [the discourses] conscious to us' (p. 200) and to connect any given situated text to a broader societal problem. They refer to Fairclough (1992) when pointing out that there are three functions and levels of discourse: the discourse as text, the discursive practice and the social practice. Text and talk often have all three functions in one and the same utterance. The discourse as text focuses the linguistic and structural practices of texts. The discursive practice focuses production, distribution, circulation and consumption of texts. Discourse as social practice focuses on 'the ideological or hegemonic relationships that a text demonstrates and in which it participates.' (p. 200). This study is primarily focusing on what is (re)produced when saying/writing something, not how it is produced, distributed or consumed, neither how it is linguistically structured.

Yet another way of positioning this thesis is within Habermas' knowledge interest. He divides the knowledge interest in three: technical, practical and emancipatory. Technical is directed towards facts and finding general laws applicable whenever, once discovered. Practical interest is focused on language, communication and culture and is aiming for improved understanding between people. The third interest, emancipatory, is concerned with enhanced autonomy, i.e. a more free (aware) position towards powerful institutions, ideologies and interests. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; p. 124-125).

This thesis leans towards this third emancipatory approach albeit with a practical interest of enhanced understanding of both discourses and their power and psychosocial work environment in relation to knowledge workers. The objective of this enhanced understanding is though to be able to be more autonomous, independent and conscious in what we are (re)producing, thus an emancipatory knowledge interest.

CDA is not a specific method for analysis or research. The methods used can come from a variety of research areas. Choosing CDA is thus not helpful for knowing how to go about the analysis, but rather to be seen as a way of choosing approach and direction of the work. Even though CDA is not a method it stands on methodological grounds and in the process of displaying them the questions I am 'asking' the empirical material emerge. So even if it is not a method, CDA is of help delimiting, focusing and conducting the study by being a guide to analyze the empirical material.

2.8 Critical Theory

CDA is, as one can suspect by its name, related to Critical Theory (CT). The objectives of CT are autonomy and self-clarification (Alvesson, 2008). That means that the results of CT research is not to maximize control or predict human agency (instrumental knowledge), but instead to enhance the possibility to exert ones autonomy, i.e. to think more critically and reflective about oneself and the world.

It also means that the knowledge interest lies in enabling people to figure out what they want out of life. That includes to take a personal stand and subsequent actions based on thought-through deliberations on what is important in life and what the consequences of that is, instead of unreflexively follow 'mainstream' and/or imitate 'the others'.

According to Alvesson & Deetz (2000) there are two ways of accomplishing this emancipation. One is through focusing on communicative action aiming for mutual understanding (Habermasian approach) by asking questions and engaging in a critical and clarifying dialogue. The other is resistance (Foucauldian approach). The Foucauldian approach is primarily aiming for pointing out the consequences of certain social practices, but without introducing any new positions. All in order not to offer any new discourses/reasoning that constrains us or will 'imprison' our minds.

This study is in line with the two objectives of CT mentioned above and the way to achieve that in this study is closer to the Foucauldian approach than the Habermasian. Both are however included as the study is aiming for enhanced understanding (though not mutual understanding) but primarily doing it through pointing out inconsistencies, discrepancies and power relations.

The target for CT is ideologies (e.g. consumption, feminism, managerialism), institutions (e.g. schools, markets, prisons), interests (e.g. union, gender, conformity) and identities (e.g. self, group, organizational). CT research has a general sceptical approach to these phenomena and is often aiming for challenging and questioning them. When approaching the material you thus ask questions like: who gains (and who loses) on maintaining the dominating discourse/s? What ideologies are at play? What identities are being created when...? etc.

2.9 Discourse and power

In this section I will clarify the relationship between discourse and power that have been implied, more or less explicit, but still deserves some further explaining. Hardy & Phillips (2004) take departure in 'the observation that power and discourses are mutually constitutive...' (p. 299). Power in this respect is not power based on authority or specific actions, but 'represents a complex web of relations determined by systems of knowledge constituted in discourse.' (p. 303),

Discourse is constituting the power relations that in turn constrain what can be said, by whom and when. At any given moment discourse is determining the power relations. Over time though it is power that determines the discourse. While the discourse is determining who are allowed to speak (write, act etc), when and what in every instance; the ones who are allowed to speak thus are determining the discourse in the long run (i.e. mutually constitutive). This way of viewing discourses and power leaves some space to human agency to influence both the present and the future.

You can thus research power and discourses from different angles. For example you can look back on how and why a certain discourse have gained support. In this study the prime interest is the present/future and the focus is on what kind of identities and power relations are the texts (re)producing?

2.10 The selection and relevance of the empirical material

In this section I will describe and motivate my selections of the empirical material. As the analysis has two parts so has the empirical material. I will therefore begin with the empirical material concerning the official psychosocial work environment discourse and then discuss the selection of the empirical material concerning the real life case.

There is an almost infinite range of texts that could have been used for a discourse analysis, even when narrowing it down to 'Swedish official psychosocial work environment'. The empirical material has been deliberately selected for its relevance for this specific study. The material is taken from official texts. This limitation is quite natural, as I want to focus on the official discourse. Together the texts represent the legislative power (the Environment Act), the executive power (the Ministry of Employment and their 'Thoughtframe for the future work environment policy'), the enforcing/controlling power (the Work Environment Authority, their provisions and their website) and the actors in the Labour Market, through their mutual websites concerning work environment; one for the public sector (www.suntliv.nu) and one for the private sector (www.prevent.se).

How psychosocial issues are described and 'talked about' in these texts is *per se* dominating the texts and talks in society in general as well as in organizations. The chosen texts also have in common that they are preventive. If you follow the law, rules and recommendations in these texts health problems are (allegedly) less likely to occur. The texts are thus designed to have effect in present and future work life.

The next step in the selection of the empirical material presented in the thesis has been more delicate. The Act, the Provision and the 'Thoughtframe for the future work environment policy' are quite obvious. The Act and the Provision because they are the basis for how to approach work environment issues in Sweden and the 'Thoughtframe...' because it is a recent document aiming for laying the foundations for reviewing the current work environment policy.

Concerning the material from the websites, it has been selected a bit more subjectively. I have made a search on the websites and selected the texts that I would have selected if I had been a manager or a 'generally interested worker' looking for guidance and information. The selection is thus a mix of how the website is designed, the texts that appears when searching for psychosocial work environment and my own beliefs of what would be helpful to use as a practitioner. The selection is intentionally subjective. As I have been a practitioner in this area, I prefer to use my judgement concerning relevance rather than some 'objective' randomness.

As the real life example I have used an inspection memo from the Swedish Work Environment Authority. Their reports (memos) from inspections at work places are public acts. I wanted to

include an inspection because there the knowledge worker discourse and the official psychosocial work environment discourse meet. The selection was made by a civil servant at the Authority according to the following demands: focusing psychosocial issues and concerning a knowledge intensive organization. I got three memos but only one was conducted in a way that made it possible to see the inspectors' empirical material (focus groups reports) and not just the memo. Therefore I have chosen this specific case. The fact that it is an ongoing case was not important but it does make the case very contemporary.

I could have chosen to conduct a real life case on my own or use material that I have conducted before, as I have done focus inspections myself, although as a consultant and not as an inspector. My choice to use a formal inspection memo is primarily due to one reason: it is conducted, heard and written through persons knowledgeable in the official psychosocial work environment.

Sometimes a secondary source (as an interpreted text can be considered as) can be troublesome, here it is an asset. The inspection is the place for combining the two discourses and also for potential difficulties, discrepancies and contradictions to be highlighted/visible/dealt with. The text is not constructed to 'fit' my purposes and that is a strength. As it is the text in itself I am interested in the secondary source becomes a primary source.

2.11 Conducting the analysis

If Critical Discourse Analysis is not a method in itself, how am I going to conduct the actual analysis? A fair question for anyone, especially if you are used to strict procedures to secure the quality of the treatment of the empirical material. I cannot say that I am following a strict procedure or a certain technique to approach the material, but the analysis process is *not* the result of ad hoc decisions or pure whims. The analysis follows a logic and in the end I hope I have made an argument that is trustworthy and relevant although without a specific 'method' (or as method usually is defined). The following steps will be taken to secure an open and inspectable analysis process:

First, I choose a position; a way of looking at the material and an approach; what questions to ask and what to look for in the material. I do not analyze the exact words used, but what the reasoning are constructing, focusing on identity, autonomy and power relations. (Chapter 2)

Second, I analyze the official texts on psychosocial work environment to depict the constructions of the employer, the employee and their relation. The analysis is based on the explicit reasoning in the texts but also on what taken for granted assumptions the texts are based upon, i.e. the implicit and tacit part of the texts. (Chapter 5)

Third, I contrast the constructions with the concept of the knowledge worker, her employer and their relations to highlight differences, discrepancies and contradictions. (Chapter 5)

Fourth, I analyze what practical consequences these constructions entail in a real life case through an inspection memo from the Swedish Work Environment Authority based on an inspection at Malmö University. (Chapter 7)

Fifth, and finally, I have a concluding discussion on the findings from the analyses above, here too focusing on power. (Chapter 8)

2.12 The trustworthiness of the researcher

A research process has several ingredients, some of them are described and discussed above; the theoretical standpoints on discourses, the methodology and standpoints concerning the chosen method; critical discourse analysis and the selection and relevance of the empirical material. A fourth ‘ingredient’ is the researcher her self, that is me. Some say that this is the most important ingredient and I would agree.

I have accounted for my choices along the way and at the same time I have also presented myself as a person and as a researcher for the reader. Now I will add some to that picture that might be of interest when assessing the thesis and its claims.

I have been interested in the topic of contemporary work and work life for approximately 15 years. I have studied the subject both at university courses and as a professional during this time, as an employee and as a consultant. I have conducted focus groups for different reasons and in different ways; from very structured activities with quite clear questions (when to look for ‘answers’) to a lot more open and ‘free’ discussions (when interesting in ‘discourses’). The designs have differed according to the nature of the work, the questions, time limits etc.

The inspection method used by the Work Environment Authority in this thesis is called Focus inspection, a method I too have used, although not as an inspector, but as a consultant. This experience is not that frequent outside the Authority. The reason that I have conducted them is that I am associated to the consultant who helped the Authority to develop the method, Monica Hane, docent in Applied Psychology. Monica Hane is my former university teacher in Work Organization and Work Psychology (1994-95) and I have spent a significant amount of time with her and her consultant partner Bengt-Åke Wennberg in their knowledge intensive organization, Samarbetsdynamik AB, during the years since the university programme ended.

My interest in contemporary work life and its consequences for organizing, managing, efficiency and health and my knowledge concerning focus inspections and the methodological deliberations behind them have of course influenced my choices and my understanding of the empirical material.

The downside can be that I am too close to the topic and thus cannot create enough distance to actually elaborate and discuss the material in any interesting or challenging way. My basic assumptions and 'taken for granted' are blinding me for what might be of interest and what could be contradictive to my interpretations. The upside is that I actually have enough knowledge to recognize different discourses. If you are to conduct a discourse analysis you have to have some idea what to look for and to recognize it when you find it (and if you do not find anything understand that it is missing). Otherwise discourse analysis becomes like looking on a huge body of words without meaning.

My firm belief is that I would not have been able to make this study without a quite extensive pre-understanding of the topic. The closeness is almost a necessity and the challenge is to handle the risks with being close (knowledgeable) to a topic. I have handled it through being as open as the space in the thesis allows me to be. I have tried to the best of my ability to account for my interests, my standpoints as a researcher, how and why I have selected approach, methodology and empirical material. I have also tried to have an open mind for different interpretations of the material in the analyses and the discussions.

The most important thing is not if I have been objective or subjective in this process. I *have* been subjective and I could never be objective in this matter (no one can as it is an interpretation

process). The important thing is, as I see it, that I am open enough to make it possible for you, the reader, to make your own interpretations and assessments of the material and my discussions.

If this study manages to introduce one thought that makes you think of, or rethink, your own standpoint, I have succeeded. No matter how nice it is to be able to make a point someone else agrees on, it is a much greater satisfaction for me if the study is contributing to an exercise of your autonomy; taking your own stand and take responsibility for the consequences of that stand. When everyone see themselves as autonomous and accountable for their (speech) acts, I think we will have much more challenging, but also lot more rewarding discussions at work on work related issues. With this personal and revealing statement I will end this section in firm belief that for the attentive reader I will, consciously and subconsciously, continue to ‘reveal’ myself throughout the study.

2.13 Summary

Discourses are important for how we create our social world and ourselves. It is constraining our possibilities to communicate and is thereby closely connected to what here is labelled as psychosocial work environment, i.e. how we interact and communicate with each other. Discourse is thus not only interesting to explore in order to find out more of this specific discourse. A discourse analysis is also a way of demonstrating how discourses create psychosocial risks at work and how they can be addressed.

The primary interest in this study is to explore how the nature of knowledge work/er is incorporated in the official psychosocial work environment discourse. The analysis is based solely on textual sources and thus the empirical material is text and the chosen way to approach the texts are through critical discourse analysis, focusing on what identities are constructed through the discourse at hand and potential consequences thereof.

3 Knowledge Work and Knowledge Workers

3.1 Introduction

As I wrote in the introduction chapter there is no single way to define the changes in work life. In this study I have chosen to take departure in the research on knowledge intensive organizations and knowledge work/er, to try and capture the changes. As earlier mentioned I think there are problems with the label 'knowledge work', primarily because it unnecessarily excludes a lot of people at work who probably also are affected by the changes in work life described within this 'knowledge work' labelled research. It is, however, not my intention to problematize the labels or if there 'exist' such organizations or workers at all.

Instead of criticizing the labelling or the content I encourage the reader, in this specific study, to look at the labels as just a way to capture something that is essential for contemporary work life. No matter what you think of knowledge worker as a category or as a label I hope you can identify with the characteristics that is attributed to them. In short, even if you do not think there is a difference between 'knowledge worker' and 'other workers' (a view I am highly inclined to agree with), I hope you can see beyond the labelling and connect the discourse to 'people at work' who either define themselves as the following or is defined by others as such.

'Knowledge worker' is here used for two reasons. First, knowledge intensive organizations, knowledge work and knowledge worker have been the focus for a specific research interest and hence there is a literature about it. Secondly, even if the knowledge intensive organizations are not always special or different than other firms, some of the characteristics that are of interest are (alleged to be) more distinct within them and thus also easier to research and to discuss.

As it is the Swedish psychosocial work environment discourse that is the interest of this thesis there is an emphasis on Swedish/ Scandinavian literature, even though not exclusively. As psychosocial work issues are differently defined around the world (if at all a topic) I wanted authors that are 'brought up' in the same culture from where the Swedish psychosocial work environment discourse has emerged. I have used literature from authors connected to business schools in Lund, Stockholm, Oslo and Great Britain and authors connected to the (former) National Institute for Working Life in Sweden.

3.2 Knowledge intensive organizations

A knowledge worker often works in a knowledge intensive organization and it is the characteristics for the knowledge intensive organization that also form the demands and prerequisites for the 'knowledge worker'. Alvesson summarizes these characteristics in eleven points (Alvesson, 2004, p. 21 & 237-8). The first seven points are based, among others, on Alvesson (1995), Deetz (1997) and Löwendahl (1997) and are literally referred to. Points 8-11 are added by Alvesson (2004) and are here shortened. The points are:

- highly qualified individuals doing knowledge-based work, using intellectual and symbolic skills in their work;
- a fairly high degree of autonomy and the downplaying of organizational hierarchy;
- the use of adaptable, ad hoc organizational forms;
- the need for extensive communication for coordination and problem-solving;
- idiosyncratic client services;
- information and power asymmetry (often favouring the professional over the client);
- subjective and uncertain quality assessment
- knowledge work is characterized by a high level of ambiguity in input, process and output, i.e. knowledge intensive organizations are *ambiguity-intensive*.
- due to this ambiguity the management of image is essential, i.e. knowledge intensive organizations can be seen as *systems of persuasion*.
- knowledge work is often carried out between 'rhetoric' and 'everyday reality', which are not always aligned. Knowledge workers are thus often caught between *grandiose discourses at odds with social practice*.
- the ambiguity and uncertainty also highlight the importance of *identity work* for the knowledge workers. *Identity regulation* then can be seen as a managerial task.

I will explore some of these characteristics further below under five interrelated but somewhat different headings; autonomy, innovation and creativity, drive forces/motivation, identity and management.

3.3 Autonomy

A high degree of autonomy is the most salient attribute when talking about knowledge workers (Newell et al 2002; Alvesson 2004). The autonomy is due to different reasons; the nature of the work, the organizing of the work and the knowledge worker her self.

The work is often focused on problem solving and creativity in a complex and unique situation. The complexity and the nature of the work problems determine what kind of knowledge to draw on and one's actions can thus not be standardized or regulated by rules, policies etc. Autonomy, i.e. possibility to act according to one's own judgement and knowledge, becomes a prerequisite for doing a good job (Newell et al, 2002, p. 27; Rennstam, 2007, p. 204).

Knowledge work is often organized in a quite evolutionary, ad hoc way, i.e. as the situations arise the workers involved organize themselves to accommodate to it through mutual adjustment (Newell et al, 2002; Rennstam, 2007). A plan is a good thing but it is the possibility to deviate from plan that makes it work. Without it the flexibility, idiosyncrasy and speed required will be hard to achieve (Strannegård & Friberg, 2001; Backström, 2003).

The demand for autonomy is also often a result of the knowledge workers background. The education prepares the students for being able to exercise their autonomy; for the integrity of the profession, as being 'experts', for ethical reasons etc and not just to follow a rule or a routine. Through their education they have thus come to expect some autonomy in their work (Newell et al, 2002).

3.4 Innovation and creativity

Knowledge work is often claimed to be innovative and creative. To keep the knowledge worker 'happy and creative' you do not want to constrain her too much. There are several assumptions connected to this claim. One is that diversity (age, gender, education, personality, culture etc) is perceived good for innovation and creativity (Strannegård & Friberg, 2001; Newell et al, 2002). Without a quite substantial agentic space, the potential creativity is lost and so is one of the reasons to differ 'knowledge work' from work that is more based on following rules and routines and where creativity is more perceived as a problem than an asset.

Strannegård & Friberg (2001) put the light on play as a way to improve and use creativity and enhance innovation. Creativity is more likely to occur where control is absent, cf. 'play' in contrast to an organized 'game' (work). The boundaries between work and spare time become blurry and diffuse when the creativity is perceived as mostly present at play and when work is becoming 'play'. 'Having fun' and just doing 'what I feel like' (i.e. play) becomes something colleagues and management have to deal with.

3.5 Driving force and motivation

Knowledge workers are, as most people, interested in earning money. However, money is not always the most relevant issue as they are often already quite well paid. Additional pay can be nice but, without other benefits at work, they would probably change work places.

When the more instrumental (pecuniary) rewarding is good enough, and can be obtained elsewhere, other aspects such as status, reputation and recognition becomes more salient. Tampoe (1993) summarize the key motivational factors for knowledge workers besides money as: personal growth (interesting and challenging work tasks), operational autonomy (in performing the task, not necessarily choosing them) and task achievement (to do something meaningful and relevant) (Newell et al, 2002, p. 70).

The possibility to be involved in interesting and developing tasks and the ability to get recognition and gain (build) a reputation for it, is enhancing the 'asset' itself; the employability and the possibility to be involved in other interesting projects – a positive spiral for both the individual and the organization she belongs to (Löwendahl, 2005).

3.6 Identity

As the work is ambiguous and the outcome is uncertain and even hard to evaluate after delivery, identity issues become more in focus (Alvesson, 2004). Identity and identity work are essential for every person, so in that sense it is not more important for a knowledge worker than for others, but it becomes different.

This constantly ongoing process where identities are being constituted and reproduced are social in its character. In a knowledge intensive organization some of the more 'traditional' attributes for identity work such as hierarchical positions, a tangible and measurable outcome and the

possibility to comply with rules and policies, are less present and sometimes less important (p. 94). In a knowledge intensive organization hierarchy position, a predictable outcome and compliance with rules are sometimes even considered as not exercising one's knowledge and judgement, i.e. the opposite of the identity as a knowledge worker.

In order to create a somewhat stable and coherent self-image and not just being exposed to others' (unjustly/badly informed?) view of themselves and their work, identity work – self-identity as well as social identity – becomes strategically interesting for the organization and for the individual. As the identity work no longer is as naturally connected to the work process and the outcome of it, identity work (as well as image work) becomes of strategic interest in itself.

The identity work of a knowledge worker can roughly be divided into three lines; the innovative and creative worker; the professional and rational worker; the 'moral' worker with ethical standards and integrity where the two first lines are more common than the last one (Alvesson, 2004, p. 201).

3.7 Management

Traditionally management is about planning, coordinating, monitoring, i.e. knowing what to do, distribute the work, instruct and control. That is a strategy that will fail if exercised on knowledge workers (Löwendahl, 2005, p. 55). That would be like believing that the knowledge worker would behave like chess pieces and the manager is the chess player, i.e. the manager decides where the chess pieces are to be moved and that they will remain there until the next time the manager decides to move them. Opposite to this picture, the knowledge workers more often have a better grasp of what is going on and what would be a relevant intervention, than the manager. Subsequently she will take the actions she seems appropriate to take, without waiting for permission or instructions.

Löwendahl also uses the metaphor of managing knowledge worker as 'herding wild cats' (2005, p. 68) meaning that knowledge workers are not so keen on being managed at all. This is also emphasized by Newell et al (2002) stating that knowledge workers are even expected to 'resent any attempt to directly monitor or control their work' (p. 32). The nature of the work demands autonomy and the management is 'not really in a position to deny them' (p. 27). Management's role is to facilitate knowledge work or as articulated by Backström, Döös and Wilhelmsson in von

Otter (2006), the conditions for self-organizing, i.e. facilitating and supporting everyone's participation, not controlling it.

This different management approach is explained by the nature of the work, as earlier mentioned, but also because the asymmetry is changing when the management no longer is in control of the main resource (the knowledge, that is) within the organization, but is controlled by the worker herself (Newell et al, 2002; Löwendahl 2005).

This difficulty to control the workers in a more traditional way has developed new approaches to management focusing on normative and cultural control (Newell et al, 2002; Alvesson, 2004; Löwendahl, 2005), i.e. meanings, values, visions etc. The challenge is to create a work situation that the knowledge workers will work within and contribute to by their own choice. Then you will hopefully get the most out of the knowledge worker (creativity, time, knowledge sharing, commitment etc). This normative control is not just exercised in a vertical direction but is just as present in the more horizontal relationships (Rennstam, 2007).

Instead of focusing on control, management is focused on 'not disturbing' the workers, taking care of boring administration, dealing with demands from above etc. Keeping the workers 'happy' rather than in a controlled leash. Control constrains the agentic space needed for being able to do a good job (Strannegård & Friberg, 2001). Control can thus be seen as contradictory to knowledge work, but that does not mean that every knowledge intensive organization is minimizing control and maximizing the agentic space for the knowledge workers. Just as well as there are a wide range of knowledge work and knowledge workers there are different ways of managing a knowledge intensive organization. Some organizations, often labelled knowledge intensive organization, are building up extensive bureaucratic and managerial control systems (Kärreman, Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2002).

3.8 Summary

The nature of knowledge work is ambiguous. The product and the result are, sometimes even after delivery, uncertain and the quality can be due to subjective perceptions. This uncertainty entails a more intense use of symbols, image enhancing activities and other persuasive techniques. For the knowledge worker the nature of the work demands the exercise of autonomy in a complex situation with unique problems to be solved. The knowledge worker thus often has to

rely both on her own skill, expertise and judgement but also on being able to establish and withhold good relations with others; peers, customers, colleagues etc.

Managing the knowledge worker is more about offering and creating the right prerequisites for the knowledge worker than ordering or controlling her. One reason for that is that the organization's resources are within the mind and body of the worker. The knowledge worker thus have the power when and how to use the resource. If not content with the work conditions she might chose not to use her resources at the fullest.

4 The Official Psychosocial Work Environment Discourse in Sweden

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will summarize what the law, the governmental authorities and the official websites of the public as well as the private sector say about psychosocial work environment. For space reasons I cannot include all texts, but they are available for the public through the websites of each actor. I will however be quite extensive because of two reasons; first, most texts are in Swedish and thus hard to read for others as the one knowledgeable in the Swedish language and secondly to (roughly) depict what is perceived as ‘psychosocial work environment’ in Sweden. To put the subject matter in a context I will start with a short history.

4.2 The history of psychosocial work environment in Sweden

The psychosocial work environmental discussion in Sweden is not especially old. In 1967 the Union (LO) and the Swedish Employers Association (SAF) made an agreement that one also should take into account the psychological effects of work (SOU 1976:3). Before then work health had been focused on technical, medical and hygienic factors, i.e. preventing accidents and diseases and to adjust the machines to fit the human physiology and anatomy (Bankeryd, SOU 1976:3).

In 1977 the Swedish Parliament passed a new Work Environment Act. In the pre-works, one appendix, SOU 1976:3, is devoted to psychosocial issues. In the main report, SOU 1976:2, these issues have been granted the space of 3 out of 438 pages concerning work environment. That could be interpreted as a measure of the (lack of) importance these issues had, but is probably just as much (more?) a result of the difficulties of defining the problems and thus also to agree on what should be included by the law and how it should be formulated. Factors that are mentioned are stress, workers influence on the work situation, cooperation between people and employment security, but also the psychosocial consequences of having a bad technical and hygienic environment in general (SOU 1976:3).

Bertil Gardell (SOU 1976:3 p. 68-69) mentions three factors that are essential for people at work, above the more existential and personal safety factors and six conditions that the international

research at that time has been given reason to believe that are NOT consistent with healthy and dignified work conditions. The three conditions for health at work were:

- Influence in work life and self control over work pace and work methods
- A perceived general view and purpose (meaning) at work and
- Cooperation and community with other people.

The conditions that did NOT contribute to a healthy and dignified work situation were:

- Authoritarian and detail oriented leadership
- Work tasks that severely limit the possibilities for the individual to use her resources
- Work conditions that put little demand for the individual to contribute with her knowledge, responsibility and initiative
- Work conditions that offer little opportunity for influencing the planning and the work design
- Work tasks that hinders the individual self control over pace and methods, and
- Work tasks that give few or none contacts with other human beings during work.

The research results were quite coherent regardless if the target group had been selected by age, gender, education or income and regardless if the researches were conducted in the industrialized world (USA and Western Europe) or in the socialist countries (the Soviet Union and its allied; Eastern Europe).

Despite this there were difficulties and doubts about being able to draw up a psychosocial work protection (Levi in SOU 1976:3). Levi refers to the uncertainty and insufficient knowledge about:

- the factors affecting the situation
- the consequences of potential social political measures and its side effects and
- who are being affected and how (not everyone is affected the same way in the same situation)

The need for more research is also stated by Westlander (1978), but she also states that this need will never end as the technical development will change work conditions and thus also the psychosocial factors and because the human values/perspectives are not forever the same. In the same book she broadly defines/explains the psychosocial issues to where 'psychological perceptions are put in a social context' (p. 12). The attention can be on how the individual affects

the environment, how the environment affects the individual or how the individual and the environment are mutually affecting each other.

One effect of including the psychosocial factors into the work environment discussion was that 'white collar workers' came in focus. Beforehand the work environmental efforts had been primarily directed towards 'blue collar workers'. Accidents nor diseases did not as often affect white-collar workers. The psychosocial factors at work made it much more interesting to investigate how white-collar workers perceived their work situation (e.g. Gardell, 1979).

4.3 The Work Environment Act

The Work Environment Act (AML) that was passed in 1977 is still in force, although with additions and changes over the years. The psychosocial factors were not specifically mentioned in 1977, but were put forward in 1991. Still there is no specific paragraph about them as there are about the localities, hygienic factors (air, light, noise, vibrations), accidents (fall, collapses, fire, explosion, electricity), machinery and tools (built, placed and used in a healthy and secure way), substances (storage and usage), transportation and safety equipment. Working hours and building construction issues are also mentioned, although regulated by other laws.

The purpose of the Act is regulated in Chapter 1, 1§:

'The purpose of this Act is to prevent ill-health and accidents at work and generally to achieve a good working environment.'

The psychosocial aspects put forward in 1991, were inserted in the more general paragraph in Chapter 2, 1§:

'The working environment shall be satisfactory with regard to the nature of the work and social and technical progress in the community. In the case of work on board ship, the work environment shall also be satisfactory with regard to the requirements of maritime safety.'

Working conditions shall be adapted to people's differing physical and mental aptitudes.

The employee shall be given the opportunity of participating in the design of his own working situation and in processes of change and development affecting his own work.

Technology, work organisation and job content shall be designed in such a way that the employee is not subjected to physical or mental strains which can lead to ill-health or accidents. Forms of remuneration and the distribution of working hours shall also be taken into account in this connection. Closely controlled or restricted work shall be avoided or limited.

Efforts shall be made to ensure that work provides opportunities of variety, social contact and co-operation, as well as coherence between different tasks.

Furthermore, efforts shall be made to ensure that working conditions provide opportunities for personal and vocational development, as well as for self-determination and professional responsibility.’

In Chapter 3, the general obligations are stated:

1§ The stipulations of this Chapter shall be applied with due regard for the demands made in Chap. 2 concerning the nature of the working environment.

1a§ Employer and employee shall co-operate to establish a good working environment.

2§ The employer shall take all the precautions necessary to prevent the employee from being exposed to health hazards or accident risks. One basic principle in this connection shall be for everything capable of leading to ill-health or accidents to be altered or replaced in such a way that the risk of ill-health or accidents is eliminated.

The employer shall consider the special risk of ill-health and accidents which can be entailed by an employee working alone.

Facilities, as well as machinery, implements, safety equipment and other technical devices, shall be kept in a good state of repair.

2a§ The employer shall systematically plan, direct and control activities in a manner which leads to the working environment meeting the requirements for a good work environment. He shall investigate work injuries, continuously investigate the hazards of the activity and take the measures thus prompted. Measures which cannot be taken immediately shall be timetabled. [...]

2b§ The employer shall be responsible for the availability of the occupational health services which the working conditions require. [...]

3§ The employer shall ensure that the employee acquires a sound knowledge of the conditions in which work is conducted and that he is informed of the hazards which the work may entail. The employer shall make sure that the employee has received the training necessary and that he knows what measures shall be taken for the avoidance of risks in the work. The employer shall see to it that only employees who have received adequate instructions gain access to areas where there is a palpable risk of ill-health or accidents. The employer shall make allowance for the employee's special aptitudes for the work by modifying working conditions or taking other appropriate measures. In the planning and arrangement of work, due regard shall be paid to the fact that individual persons have differing aptitudes for the tasks involved.

4§ The employee shall assist in work relating to the working environment and shall take part in the implementation of the measures needed in order to achieve a good working environment. He shall comply with Provisions issued and use the safety devices and exercise such other precautions as are needed for the prevention of ill-health and accidents.

An employee finding that work entails an immediate and serious danger to life or health shall immediately notify the employer or a safety delegate. The employee cannot be held liable for any damage resulting from his non-performance of work pending instructions regarding its resumption.

*Excerpt from the Swedish Work Environment Act
All quotes are taken from Swedish Work Environment Authority website www.av.se, april 2008*

Even if the psychosocial factors are not especially mentioned they are included in the overall purpose with the Work Environment Act. The Work Environment Commission, Work and Health (SOU 1990:49) summarizes the purpose of the Act (AML) as:

‘One of the most important prerequisites for a better work life is a rich work content and the individual's own possibility to influence her work situation. If you constantly learn new things, are given opportunities to interact with other people, have an overview of the business you are part of, understand it and have the possibility to influence work – you can enjoy work life and grow as a person.’ (p. 54)

(own translation)

4.4 Provisions from the Swedish Work Environment Authority

A provision is where the Authority specify the consequences of the responsibilities in the law, i.e. what the legal texts mean for every day work life. The provisions are to be seen as advice and recommendations. Other ways to achieve the intentions behind the law than stated in the provisions are allowed. You can however not ignore them. In April 2008 there are 154 provisions in force concerning a variety of work environment factors; e.g. led, lifting, medical controls, ladders, cold storages etc etc (www.av.se/inenglish/lawandjustice/provisions/). The oldest provision concerns 'Psychic and Social Aspects of Work Environment' (AFS 1980:14) and is based on the pre-works (SOU 1976:2 & 3) of the Act.

The first paragraph states that psychosocial issues at work are vast and difficult to define:

'The psychosocial factors at work emerge when looking at the environment from a psychological and sociological perspective. This perspective includes physical as well as organizational and social environmental factors. The work environment design has consequences for the organizational and social conditions at the work place; e.g. task content, contact possibilities, cooperation, influence and personal development' (p. 3).

(own translation)

The basic outlook with the Act is that work shall not just be as free from risks as possible, but also give opportunity for commitment and work satisfaction.

The second paragraph focuses the connection between work, work experience and health:

'Conditions at work are of significance for the working individual's perception of herself. The image she forms of herself is partially based on the role she has at work and the experiences she thereby gets. Her self-esteem, the value she has, means in turn a lot for wellbeing and health. For the work to have a positive psychic effect on people it is important that they are allowed (it is made possible) to use their ability in various ways.

An employer has need for information and knowledge of issues concerning her self, the group and the work situation in common; the context of the role of oneself and the efforts of the group. Work should offer possibilities to responsibility and self-determination. The employee should also know that she is doing something important and that she is valued by others. The security that comes from trusting other people around you is of central significance for a positive working experience.'

(own translation)

The second paragraph also draws the attention to that psychosomatic diseases such as ulcer, high blood pressure, heart attacks etc; psychic diseases such as depression and anxiety neuroses; and social problems such as alcohol abuse also might be triggered by the work situation. Finally, the paragraph states that the diseases often have their origin in a combination of factors; hereditary aptitudes, work environment and other life conditions.

The third paragraph highlight conditions at work that are of special significance for the psychic and social situation: work organization, personal and professional development, social contacts, security awareness (risk and prevention awareness), physical and chemical factors, automatization and working hours (night, shift etc). The factors are described as:

Work organization: work content and design, technically and organization. It is in general advantageous if the individual employee can:

- Overview her own contribution to the final product and her own importance for the outcome of the organization as a whole
- Vary work methods and work pace
- Influence the order of the work
- Influence the quality of her work
- Control the result of her work

Everything cannot always be possible, but all parts are important to strive for. It is also important to avoid repetitive work patterns, long time psychic tension without possibility for recovery and reward systems that encourage a risky behaviour.

Personal and professional development: possible to use her skills and to continuously develop them. Many also need to get an outlet for emotions and fantasy at work. Thorough introduction and instructions are necessary both for safety and for work conditions to be perceived as satisfactory.

Social contacts: it is important to feel safe and secure at work, have the possibility to have a feeling of solidarity and receive appreciation. The possibility of contacts with others is important to take in consideration when designing work physically, technically and organizationally. Where relationships with customers, clients etc can be demanding it is important the individual employee are given such a support that the situation as far as possible is facilitated.

What kind of management that is applied is also important. Management's task is to point out the different efforts needed to achieve the goal of the organization, coordinate these efforts and distribute the tasks according to available resources. One important task is then to contribute to a good work environment by setting the foundation for good communication and contact between people and an open work climate. For the manager to accomplish this she has to be given authority to be enabled to live up to these role expectations.

Security awareness: it is essential to organize work in a way that makes it natural and positive to take security action. Instructions should contain a clear motivation for this. This also includes personal protection equipment. Another way of accomplishing security awareness is a development from bounded to more free work forms, i.e. more of independence and more of professional responsibility and knowledge.

Physical and chemical factors: furnishing, noise, light, air etc are factors that can enable or hinder social contact and communication and thus also the psychic and social experience of work. Chemical factors such as lead and chemical solvents can have psychic effects by direct influence on the nervous system and can also have an indirect effect through anxiety from the perception of being in a risky environment.

Automation: when tasks are automatized it is important to make sure that the remaining tasks are not leading to isolation, an increased degree of unqualified work content and/or increased boundedness.

Working hours: working hours are not just affecting the hours at work, they are also affecting the possibilities of social contact outside work and physical wellbeing. Special attention should therefore be given to shift work and night work and the consequences of that.

The provision ends with a paragraph on how to work with these issues. The responsibility for monitoring signals on poor work environment are primarily on the management and the 'work protection organization' (*skyddsorganisationen*), which includes the union and the employer and is based on systematic control of work environment and an organization for the union and the employer to have a joint arena for discussing these matters.

4.5 The Swedish Work Environment Authority's website

The web pages of the Swedish Work Environment Authority are more for information purposes than to be considered as legal texts. The texts are therefore also more updated on recent research. I will just mention the headlines and make a very short summary for the most significant issues in this study and how the Swedish Work Environment Authority recommends approaching them. The themes within these pages are:

- High workload – high work pace
- Monotone, repetitive work
- Unclear expectations for work achievements – unclear roles
- Constant changes – insecure employment
- Threat and violence
- Shift work- irregular working hours
- Conflicts – violations – harassments
- Relation intense work (customers)
- Working alone
- Physical environment
- Preventing and reducing stress

Workload, balance between demand and competence and resources are primarily a concern for the management. They have to distribute the work among the employees and be of support when prioritizing (or prioritize) them. Unclear work tasks and insufficiently defined work areas or conflicting demands are also a managerial task as that often is a result of unclear goals and unclear work distribution.

Clear (decisive?) control, constructive feedback, information and introduction are important to prevent illness. This is even more important as work changes, i.e. the employees' participation and possibility to influence/understand the change is included. Even if the work tasks or the work situation might be stressful it can still be stimulating and challenging, if there are good opportunities to influence the situation and the work task feel meaningful and fun.

A stressful work situation can cause conflicts and defence mechanisms leading to 'scapegoat behaviour'. The management is obliged to make the conflicts visible, investigate them and take

measures to take away the causes. Coaching and guidance through a conflict situation might be called for as well as a preventive measure in organizations with intense human contacts (health care, social workers etc.)

To visualize norms, to create a caring climate and a good introduction program for new employees are examples of measures preventing psychic strains due to working with people. Possibility to influence work hour distribution; to have/gain experience and knowledge to balance demands; emotional, instrumental and informative support and feedback; an agentic space to influence and accommodate the work situation; and opportunities for recovery is also preventive for /reducing stress reactions.

4.6 Prevent, www.prevent.se

Prevent.se is the joint website for the private sector's employers' and employees' associations (Svenskt Näringsliv, LO, PTK). They define psychosocial issues as concerning the 'softer' parts of work life as organization, leadership, social contacts, comfortable atmosphere, responsibility and developing opportunities.

Prevent.se offers a checklist for organizations when they want to investigate/discuss their psychosocial work environment. The checklist focuses expectations, information, workload, influence/participation, respect and fairness, work variation, work experience, social contacts, anxiety for changes at work, leadership and conflicts.

Prevent also focuses stress as a factor (consequence). They list eleven stress factors that might occur at work and example of actions that might be taken to prevent them from occurring. They are briefly listed below:

Factor	Preventive action
High workload	Clear boundaries for work content, clear goals, increased support and relief.
Insufficient solutional space	Participation, make sure the resources, authority and competence is sufficient, clarify expectations, set clear goals, correct and sufficient information
Low support	Guidance solving problem or help prioritize, feedback, enable a friendly atmosphere, forum for work talk, good administrative and technical support.
Inadequate leadership	Accessible manager who can see, hear and confirm employees, appraisal meetings, set clear and realistic goals, participation, show interest in employees' contribution
Vague work organization	Well defined work tasks, visualize work philosophy, value platforms, norms and policies
Recurrent changes	Prepare, give information, participation
Insufficient knowledge and competence	Introduction, appraisal meetings, education
Risky work	Clear and well known safety routines and instructions, security equipment, band aid, crisis support
Bad work climate (conflicts, mobbing, discrimination, injustice)	Regular meetings and information, make clear mobbing and discrimination is unacceptable, dialogue for preventing misunderstandings, clear distribution of work tasks and a 'fair' reward system, educate and coach managers in these matters
Deficiencies in the physical environment	Investigate the physical environment, make sure acquisition routines and services contributes to high equipment quality.
Insufficient recovery	Avoid weekends and overtime, flexible and individual working hours if possible, keep track of work culture – are pauses encouraged? Health care, exercise encouragement.

4.7 Sunt liv, www.suntliv.nu

This website is a joint website from actors in the public sector; Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL), Swedish Municipal Workers' Union (Kommunal), The Public Employees' Negotiation Council (OFR), The Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO) and AFA Försäkring (insurance company owned by actors in the labour market).

The content is very broad and here I will just very briefly refer to a guidance material concerning psychosocial issues at work. In the work material 'Healthsupporting leadership and co-workership' (Göteborgs Stad) the prerequisites for work health are referred to four areas: demand/control/social support, perceived balance and fairness between efforts and rewards, goal clarity and realistic/reasonable goal levels and balance between work life and private life.

As supportive and hindrance for developing a good health at work the material highlights:

- 1) The possibility to engage in a learning organization, to see result of the joint efforts and to avoid making paper products instead of practical results. ‘Much points in the direction that knowledge, learning and development has great significance for well-being, health and quality at work.’ (p. 22, own translation).
- 2) Participation and influence. At work places where the employees are committed, satisfied and responsible three factors are more often occurring; well-defined and clear goals; anchorage within the work force and activities that connects everything to each other and where it is clear how each activity is part of an ongoing development work. (p. 23)
- 3) Co-workership based on initiative, responsibility and cooperation. The work climate is characterized by trust, stability, appreciation among its members, focus on results and taking care of the resources in the group. Dialogue and cooperation is the way to get there, in contrast to an organization where the members construct ‘we and the others-mentality’, focusing on rights rather than responsibility. A ‘good co-workership’ is dependent on a ‘good leadership’ and vice versa.
- 4) Leadership: values and strategies. Leaders who see the employees as valuable resources (and not costs), and who have a long-term approach, focus on the surrounding world and have clear strategies of action both contribute to an efficient organization and enhanced work satisfaction.

4.8 Ministry of Employment – framing the future

The Ministry of Employment is responsible for preparing legislation within the labour market, including work environment. The ministry is currently monitoring this specific area. In February 2008 they published ‘Thought frame for future work environment policy’ (Ds 2008:16). The material is being used as a discussion platform when the ministry is meeting the labour market parties; the unions and the employers. If the texts were to be presented in the hierarchical order of the actors, the Ministry of Employment should have been second after the Act passed by the Parliament, but as their material were aiming for the future work environment I have decided to present it in the end.

The psychosocial issues are addressed although they state that the connections between work organization and health are not sufficiently illuminated by current research. For example there is

no research that can show how and to what extent changes in work conditions affect health and what is due to more societal level of changes in society in general and/or attitudes, demographic factors etc within the work force. Four areas are specifically mentioned: how change work is conducted, degree of personal influence and development, the exercise of leadership and the possibilities of combining work life and private life.

Some work organizational factors can be considered as significant for the work related health: demand and control, development and use of technique, production systems, leadership and influence (p. 62) or in other words; work pace, work control, social support and accurate competence (p. 65). They also refer to a national, biannual, Work Environment Investigation from 2005 (see: [www.av.se/Arbetsmiljöundersökningen 2005](http://www.av.se/Arbetsmiljöundersökningen_2005)). The questions from the investigation, included in the report concern workload, work pace control, help prioritizing and psychic demands.

Balance between work life and private life and equality at work (gender) are also mentioned as important for a healthy work life.

4.9 Summary

In this chapter I have made a brief survey over what the most important actors in the labour market concerning work environment say about psychosocial work environment. I started with the Act, followed by the provision from the Work Environment Authority and their website and the material from the employers' and the employees' associations' joint websites. Finally, I concluded with a recently published text from the Ministry of Employment, concerning the future work environment policy.

5 Analyzing the Discourse – Step 1: Constructions of Identity, Autonomy and Power

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will analyze and discuss the first part of the research question/purpose, which means that I will analyze the empirical material through the three specific research questions concerning identity, autonomy and power. I will do it by depicting how the employer, the employee and their relations are constructed within the official psychosocial work environment discourse, contrasting it with the literature (discourse) on knowledge workers.

The constructions emerge from the discourses and this section can therefore be seen as summaries thereof and as such they should have been written last in Chapter 3 & 4. However, I see them as *my* view of what emerges from the material and as such they are not to be seen as summaries but as interpretations, which can be challenged and reinterpreted and thus their place is in the analysis.

5.2 Identity, autonomy and power in the official psychosocial discourse

The official psychosocial work environment discourse constructs a very ‘traditional’ employer and employee and consequently also a traditional relationship between them. The employee is to be protected from dangers of all kinds at work and it is the employers responsibility to do so; no matter if it is concerning safe machines or conflicts between employees. The employees’ ‘only’ responsibilities are to participate in discussions and to draw the employer’s attention to unhealthy and risky phenomena and to comply with instructions and measures taken to secure a safe and healthy work environment.

The responsibility is aligned with the responsibility in a classic hierarchical and bureaucratic organization. Responsibility and possibility to act (agency) are vertically determined and is also the point of departure in the Act, in the formal provisions and even in the more ‘softer’ recommendations/advice.

Chapter 3 in the Work Environment Act, points out obligations and responsibilities for the work environment work. Within the 14 paragraphs stating the responsibilities two include the employee: 1 & 4§§. The rest states responsibilities for the employer.

1a§ Employer and employee shall co-operate to establish a good working environment.

4§ The employee shall assist in work relating to the working environment and shall take part in the implementation of the measures needed in order to achieve a good working environment. He shall comply with Provisions issued and use the safety devices and exercise such other precautions as are needed for the prevention of ill-health and accidents.

An employee finding that work entails an immediate and serious danger to life or health shall immediately notify the employer or a safety delegate. The employee cannot be held liable for any damage resulting from his non-performance of work pending instructions regarding its resumption.'

Work Environment Act, Chapter 3, 1 & 4§§

The demand/control model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) is very dominant, both explicitly and implicitly. The foundation for the model is that the employees are exposed to unhealthy elements in the environment and when detected it is the employer's responsibility to remove it. This 'exposure-thinking' is very much present in the other parts of work environment such as machine safety, chemistry and ergonomics, but also in the psychosocial reasoning. If something is 'bad' it has to go away and the problem is solved, once and for all. This removal might take time and sometimes be quite expensive but there is not really any debate about its danger nor that it would be good if (when) it can be removed.

'The employer shall take all the precautions necessary to prevent the employee from being exposed to health hazards or accident risks. One basic principle in this connection shall be for everything capable of leading to ill-health or accidents to be altered or replaced in such a way that the risk of ill-health or accidents is eliminated.'

Work Environment Act, Chapter 3, 2§

The employee is dependent of and relying on the employer and is thus constructed as being in a weak position. To be a 'good' employer means, in exchange for the employee's loyalty, to 'take care' of the employee. In short to be a 'good' father to one's 'children'. As a 'good child' you will obey the rules and orders and in general behave in a way that makes the work place a good place to be and not obstruct to the authorities at work. The agentic space is restricted to 'follow rules'.

This ‘father-child’ construction of the employer-employee relationship is present in most texts in the empirical material. The Provision (AFS 1980:14, see section 4.4) is based on a vocabulary that talks of the employee as someone who is in a weak position and have to be treated as ‘a child’, not really being an actor and co-creator of her own self-image, identity, work situation etc. The employee is depicted as passive and the recipient of the employer’s actions, e.g the employee:

- ‘has need of information and knowledge of issues concerning herself, the group and the work situation; the context of the role of oneself and the efforts of the group.’
- ‘should [...] know that she is doing something important and that she is valued by others.’
- for the work ‘to have a positive psychic effect [...] it is important that [she] is allowed (it is made possible) to use [her] ability in various ways.
- shall be offered ‘possibilities to responsibility and self-determination’

This is further enforced when reading the conditions specified in the Provision. It is quite obvious that they are deriving from the conditions for an industry worker (from before 1980, that is). If one goes through the conditions one by one, you could say that the knowledge workers are having a great time at work. They pretty much have achieved the conditions pointed out in the Provision. They:

- have influence of their work content, pace, methods etc
- have rich opportunities for ‘professional development’ and ‘social contacts’
- can be considered to have ‘more independence and [...] professional responsibility and knowledge’
- have small problems with physical and chemical factors and automatization at work.

The thing that might be of interest is working hours. Although the Provision focuses night work and shift work and not the possibility to work around the clock, this is probably the condition that is most applied for the knowledge worker.

When it comes to management it is depicted as the function responsible for ‘pointing out the efforts needed to achieve the goal of the organizations, coordinate these efforts and distribute the tasks according to available resources’. The manager is also responsible for laying the foundation for good communication and contact between people and an open working climate. The manager, in turn, must be ‘given authority to be enabled to live up to these role expectations.’

Concerning the websites of the Work Environment Authority, Prevent.se and Sunt liv, they too has this language of putting the employee in a passive role, where the manager is the one able to prevent psychosocial hazards. They are to distribute work according to the employees' capabilities, give introduction and feedback, visualize norms and create a caring climate so the employees will be able to perform. The management are obliged 'to make the conflicts visible, investigate them and take measures to take away the causes' (Work Environment Authority's website, see section 4.5).

Prevent.se (see section 4.6) displays measures for preventing psychosocial hazards. According to the eleven factors influencing the psychosocial work environment all preventive actions suggested are directed towards management. They are to set goals, be decisive, make sure demand and resources balance, provide information and support, see, hear and confirm employees etc. The verticality in the measures do not include the worker, it is the manager that has agentic space to act and the workers are to be protected through actions and/or information.

Sunt liv (www.suntliv.nu, see section 4.7) is not only focusing the management and it does not have this distinct paternalistic tone when referring to the employee-employer-relation. The 'knowledge worker discourse' could therefore be said to be present in the four points in the major material on the website. The explanatory factors are however mostly due to management. If the workers are committed, satisfied and responsible that is due to clear goals, anchorage and outspoken connections between single events and the overall development of the organization.

Sunt liv also points out the healthy aspects of doing something meaningful, useful and to achieve practical results. The material also focus trust, dialogue and cooperation, not necessarily though as a result of only managerial acts, at least opening up for a more horizontal and complex construction of the work situation.

5.3 Identity, autonomy and power in the knowledge worker discourse

The knowledge worker discourse, on the other hand, constructs a different employee, a slightly different employer and subsequently also other relations between them.

First of all, language is supposed to have a greater impact on the identity of the 'knowledge worker' than of a 'traditional' worker (Alvesson, 2004, see section 3.6). A traditional organization

offers, through its hierarchical structure and clear lines of command, one kind of identity base; position, function, authority, salary etc. A more ad hoc, network based organizing do not offer as clear grounds for identity so here the identity is very much (re)produced through language. How you are defined within a discourse and addressed by others are therefore often of greater importance for the knowledge workers than the workers that can rely more on their position to define themselves. To be addressed and referred to as weak and passive when not identifying one self as that can consequently be more severe for one's identity work/construction and thus also concern the psychosocial work environment situation in itself.

The discourse depicts the knowledge worker as autonomous, making decisions, taking actions and responsibility based on her own judgement and not due to rules, routines and instructions. (It does not mean that she does not follow rules, but that she chooses to follow rules, i.e. she takes an autonomous decision to comply with them.) The autonomy is also a way of creating diversity even within a quite homogene work place. Diversity is considered good for creativity and innovation (Strannegård & Friberg, 2001; Newell et al, 2002; see section 3.4) and is therefore worth aiming for by a knowledge intensive organization.

A knowledge worker has the organization's most valuable asset with her all the time (the 'knowledge') which makes the relation to the employer asymmetric in the employee's advantage. If not being treated as she thinks is fair, she can leave or choose not to use her resources to the best of her ability.

The relation employee – employer has two different constructions. One where the employer's role is depicted as a facilitator, making work life as easy and interesting as possible so the knowledge worker chooses to stay in the organization (Strannegård & Friberg, 2001; Newell et al, 2002; Löwendahl, 2005). The relation is still asymmetric, but the other way around. To use the family metaphor above (father-children) you could say that knowledge workers sometimes are described as 'spoiled teenagers'; doing what they feel like and leave the boring stuff to someone else. The construction of the employer as a 'facilitator' is not based on the assumption that this is 'good leadership/management' but more based on the fact that 'they are not really in the position to deny them' (Newell et al, 2002, p. 27), i.e. if the managers could give instructions and if they could expect obedience that would have been better, easier etc.

The other construction focuses a more equal position, where the employer–employee relation becomes almost irrelevant (Backström, 2003; Löwendahl, 2005; Wennberg & Hane, 2007). Instead the focus is on the work, what has to be done etc. The relation is based on partnership, i.e. based on the assumption that both the employer and the employee is autonomous partners making agreements and that each partner has the possibility (even realistically) to say no as well as yes. Referring to the family metaphor; two adults taking part in a discussion, making plans, agreements etc.

Control is no longer exclusively a managerial task, but something everyone is involved in (Rennstam, 2006). The construction of managing in the knowledge worker discourse is very much the opposite of the official psychosocial work environment discourse. In the latter managers are obliged to take managerial actions to ‘fix’ organizational and social problems or potential problems. In the knowledge worker discourse managing is almost considered contra productive to be able to understand the situation and the context and to be able to come up with a solution that will both work and be accepted.

The chess-metaphor by Löwendahl (2005, see section 3.7), where she warns the managers of professional service firms (knowledge intensive organizations) to believe they can ‘move’ employees as chess pieces and that the employees will comply with it, is very much aligned with the construction of the manager in the official psychosocial work environment discourse. There the managers are believed to have very powerful impact on, and also responsibility for, the work life of the employees and their actions. In a knowledge intensive organization the workers are expected to make their own judgements and decisions on what actions to take. Ignoring and or breaking the ‘rules and orders’ could even be considered as the normal way of doing things, as rules are for those who do not understand or have knowledge enough to assess the situation and take relevant actions. Not following rules and orders can also be a way of demonstrating one’s autonomy and independence.

However, in neither of these constructions are the knowledge worker a victim of circumstances; she is an active, capable actor and as such she can be accounted for her actions even if the teenager-metaphor can make challenging and accountability claims risky. The ‘teenager’ can feel unjustly accused, provoked, not trusted etc and take the accountability approach as a reason to leave the organization.

5.4 Do the differences matter?

Does it really matter if the two discourses construct different identities? You could say that one is connected to work itself and the other to safety at work. Is that not two different issues? Maybe you could say that when it concerns machines and chemical solvents. If, on the other hand, your work is done through interaction with the social system (customers, colleagues and other partners and stakeholders), the psychosocial factors become the same as work itself, it is not disconnected, it is not possible to divide and say – ‘I am responsible for the work and you are responsible for the psychosocial environment’. The work and the psychosocial situation are the same and you are as an employee unavoidably part of the situation.

Seen like this, there are probably a lot of organizations and work places where these two discourses are at play simultaneously and where they also might contribute to work environment risks if not dealt with in a productive way. As the discourses differ and also contradict each other there are reason to believe that difficulties might arise.

As this study is about the official psychosocial work environment discourse conducted in the light of the knowledge worker discourse, the most obvious place for this meeting between the discourses would be an inspection memo from the Work Environment Authority in a knowledge intensive organization. In such a memo you have to deal with both discourses. The inspection is based on the Act and Provisions and the situation for knowledge workers in a knowledge intensive organization. At an inspection the question of discourses is no longer just of theoretical interest but of a very practical one. In the inspection memo the two discourses and their consequences have to be dealt with in practice.

To analyze and discuss the second part of the research question, that is the consequences of the different constructions within the two discourses, I will thus use a real life case; an inspection memo focusing psychosocial work environment at a knowledge intensive organization: Malmö University.

6 Malmö University – a Real Life Case

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will describe a real life case, i.e. an inspection focusing psychosocial work environment in a knowledge intensive organization, Malmö University. I will start with a description of an inspection, then a section about the method used at the inspection; focus inspection and finally account for some of the content in the inspection memo, i.e. the areas covered in the focus groups and the stipulations resulting from the inspection.

6.2 Work environment inspection

An inspection memo is the formal and public result from an inspection made by the Swedish Work Environment Authority. The memo ends with stipulations from the authority to the employer on what kinds of measures that has to be taken. The memo is thus consisting of three parts; the empirical material, the discussion/comments and the stipulations. The memo is not juridical binding and can thus not be appealed.

If the employer does not comply with the stipulations, the Authority can issue an injunction or prohibition, i.e. prohibit a certain kind of handling or a certain operation, or order the employer to remedy the work environment deficiencies which have been described. An injunction or prohibition thus issued by the Authority may carry a contingent fine. An order of this kind can be appealed by both the employer and a safety delegate.

The inspection and the memo is thus something that has great impact on the inspected work places. It is therefore of utmost importance that the empirical material is trustworthy and that the stipulations made can be derived from the material. The procedures around inspections are therefore regulated to ensure quality and relevance in both the material and the stipulations.

The inspections can be conducted in different ways. The method applied in this case is called 'Focus inspection' and is further described below.

6.3 Focus inspection as method

A focus inspection is designed for investigating psychosocial work environment issues. The empirical material is generated by the inspectors through discussions with groups of people at the work place. The groups are determined by the unions and the employer and they also select the people invited to them.

Focus inspection as method has some basic foundations in order to generate empirical material that is of value for inspecting the psychosocial work environment (Hane & Yrkesinspektionen, 2000) and to make certified stipulations based on it. One is that the group members must want to explore and articulate the work situation together with the rest of the group (p. 48). Another is that the conversation should be as 'free' as possible, i.e. take departure in the group members' perspective and vocabulary and not from the inspectors' (p. 46). A third is that the empirical material generated is used and interpreted in a way that is not arbitrary and dependent on one inspector (p. 54).

The quality of the empirical material is thus depending on the employees abilities and will to contribute to a rich and authentic 'story' of the work place, the skills of the inspectors and the procedures surrounding the method.

When the empirical material is ready and everyone involved can agree that it is a (sufficiently) 'true story', the interpretation/transformation to an assessment of the psychosocial work environment begins. If the inspection has been somewhat successful the material should show what the employees see as problematic at work, how they think the problems arise and how they think they can be dealt with. The problems at work can thus be the ones described in the material or it can be related to *how the people at the work place manage to talk about them*.

An example: a work place can have a lot of problems and still not have work environment problems. Having problems is natural at every work place (otherwise you should probably be worried...). If you, on the other hand, define the problems in a way that make them unsolvable you have a risk. If every problem is defined as out of control for the work place, i.e. if you see yourself and the work place as 'victims of circumstances', you can probably never take actions that will make the situation better and thus risk ending up with frustration, irritation, helplessness and so forth. All early signs on psychosocial health issues.

It can also be the other way around. The empirical material depicts a work place where there are no or very few problems. But the material can all the same show that the communication skills at work is low and that can be a risk as soon as there are problems. If, for example, every problem is dealt with by handing it over to the manager, the collective problem solving skill will probably deteriorate and once called for, maybe not work at all. Communication needs to be exercised, for most of us it is not a skill that comes natural. The risk assessment is also dependent on what nature of work that is at hand. The risks are not the same in every work place, even if the empirical material can be very similar in its content. As an inspector you have to put the material in its context.

The empirical material can thus be treated in several ways (you can for example also use it for a discourse analysis), but if the interpretations and the stipulations made should have some relevance the material must be generated in a way that make the material interesting enough to analyze. The three basic foundations are interrelated and interdependent and all three must therefore be trustworthy – the material, the inspectors and the procedure.

6.4 The inspection at Malmö University

Malmö University is a work place with approximately 1400 employees and 21000 students, of which 10790 are full time students (October, 2007). Malmö University consists of five schools/faculties: Faculty of Culture and Society, Faculty of Health and Society, School of Teacher Education, School of Odontology and School of Technology. In October 2007, three of the schools/faculties were inspected through a focus inspection. A total of ten focus groups of managers, employees and students were conducted, distributed as following:

School of Odontology	School of Teacher Education	Faculty of Culture and Society
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ managers▪ teachers▪ nurses▪ students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ managers▪ teachers▪ administrators/ technical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ teachers▪ administrators▪ students

The inspection memo consists of 14 pages of notes from the focus groups and 15 pages of summary, comments and stipulations. The memo was sent to Malmö University in December 2007 and the employer has until September 2008 to report back what measures have been or will be, taken on account of the memo. (It is thus an ongoing act when writing this thesis in spring 2008).

The focus groups conducted were designed to discuss organizational and psychosocial work environment issues concentrated on the following areas:

- Goals and expectations
- Resources
- Feedback and support
- Agentic space and workload
- Influence and participation
- Routines for special issues (discrimination, harassments etc)
- Systematic work environment work
- Work related health

The empirical material and the following discussion in the memo have resulted in eight stipulations. It is the stipulations that the employer has to take measures to prevent/deal with and to account for in the answer to the Authority at the latest September 1st, 2008. The stipulations are:

1. Workload for the Technical and Administrative staff: investigate the psychosocial work environment and draw up an action plan. The investigation should at a minimum contain:
 - a. What work tasks there are
 - b. How the tasks are distributed among the employees
 - c. If the workload is reasonable considering the manpower
 - d. How substitutes are recruited
 - e. Possible priorities, if they are documented and known by the employees
 - f. How the communication with the managers works
 - g. What possibilities for influence there are
 - h. Demands for accessibility towards other employees and students, and
 - i. Possibilities for undisturbed time

2. Workload, Teachers at the School of Odontology: draw up an action plan to lessen the workload.
3. Establish mutual routines for Malmö University for how to detect health problems due to psychosocial work environment (early warning signals).
4. Managers who have work environment responsibility must have appropriate knowledge of warning signals concerning work load and/or other psychic illness; how people are affected and reactions that may arise, measures to prevent and feedback and support.
5. Declare in writing how to prevent negative effects of chosen work forms such as projects and research in combination with teaching etc.
6. Establish mutual routines for risk analyses before organizational changes. Includes educating the managers and the employees' representatives.
7. Make clear who is responsible for what concerning localities, make sure managers know the routines and control that the routines work.
8. Establish mutual routines for an annual follow-up of the systematic work environment routines.

7 Analyzing the Discourse – Step 2: Practical Consequences in Real Life

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the inspection memo from the Swedish Work Environment Authority to exemplify how the discourses (the psychosocial and the knowledge worker) appear, or rather do not appear, in a real life situation, potential reasons for it, but more importantly, potential consequences thereof.

7.2 Psychosocial work environment in a knowledge intensive organization

I have chosen to use an inspection memo from the Work Environment Authority in a knowledge intensive organization to exemplify and demonstrate the differences in the two discourses and consequences of them. My idea was to display how the knowledge worker and the official psychosocial work environment discourse appear in a discussion at a knowledge intensive work place and how the differences are dealt with. The result has been somewhat different than I expected. My assumption that there should have been two discourses present simultaneously in the inspection memo concerning Malmö University has been proven wrong.

When analyzing the inspection memo there is almost nothing that could be said to derive from a knowledge worker discourse, not in the focus groups documentations, nor in the summary, comments and/or stipulations. When following the process for the inspection you find that the questions asked in the focus groups are based on the official psychosocial work environment discourse:

- Goals and expectations
- Resources
- Feedback and support
- Agentic space and workload
- Influence and participation
- Routines for special issues (discrimination, harassments etc)
- Systematic work environment work
- Work related health

These questions are either connected to the official psychosocial discourse; control, demand, social support or to the societal demands on every employer to have routines for the work environment work.

The discussions in the focus groups are based on these questions and bear almost no signs of a knowledge worker discourse. This can have several possible explanations. One is that the employees at Malmö University do not consider themselves as knowledge workers, or rather they do not identify themselves as the knowledge worker discourse does. Another explanation is that as the questions are asked as they are the focus groups members have answered them as one could expect, seeing the ‘question – answer – situation’ as a script that you are to follow when talking to the inspectors. A third explanation might be that the ‘knowledge worker discourse’ has been present at the focus groups but that it is interpreted through the official psychosocial work environment discourse. A description of the work (from the employees) that might differ from the psychosocial discourse would not be understood or it would be transformed and translated into the language known by the inspector i.e. the official psychosocial work environment discourse.

One example of the latter is when there is a notion of ‘increased complexity’ (that could be deriving from the knowledge worker discourse) this is lumped together with ‘more work tasks’ and ‘more projects’ and summed up as ‘increased work load’ (Inspection memo, p. 4).

As the inspection follows the traditional way of talking and depicting the employer, employees and their relation, the stipulations the Authority makes are also aligned with the same reasoning. The stipulations focus routines and systematic work on work environment, workload and boundless work, knowledge enhancing interventions for the managers and clearer responsibility borders – all very vertical interventions and the responsibility and ability to act lies totally on the employer.

Let us for a while assume that there is no difference between knowledge work and more ‘traditional work’ and hence not on the psychosocial issues at work either. The knowledge worker discourse is rather a ‘hyper discourse’, i.e. a discourse aiming for identity and image work and not really addressing perceived ‘reality’ at all. The discourse is just used for different purposes, by researchers as well as for those who want to define themselves as ‘knowledge workers’.

For example, being a 'knowledge worker' is convenient when it comes to freedom, autonomy and agentic space at work as well as when establishing a relation to one's manager. Then you want to be perceived as competent, capable, knowledgeable, exercising your judgement with care based on knowledge and experience. But when it comes to work environment it might be more convenient to 'use' another discourse that makes you less responsible and involved in the situation at hand. Then you want to distance your self from the possibility that you might be a part of both the problem and a possible solution.

Employers might support the idea of knowledge work and knowledge worker to enhance their image of being an interesting place to work. Researchers want to discriminate themselves from others by finding 'new' organizations to research and thus also have an interest in supporting a knowledge worker discourse different from other 'worker discourses' etc.

If this is the case the situation at Malmö University might be well described, relevant conclusions are drawn and effective measures are stipulated. Pretty much everyone is happy (if we disregard from the fact that a lot of money is spent on useless research and empty image constructions). On the other hand, if the knowledge worker discourse does have some relevance to what is going on in work life there might be a problem.

So, let us for a while assume that there are jobs at Malmö University that are considered to have the nature of knowledge work and that there are people that are both identifying themselves as and are expected by others to act like, knowledge workers. Then you would expect some other work problems to arise than the ones mentioned in the inspection memo. If the inspector had conducted the inspection on the basis of the knowledge worker discourse, other questions had been asked, other answers had been 'delivered', the interpretation and the discussion of the answers had been different and finally the stipulations made had been different.

An example: Four stipulations in the inspection memo concern establishing new (or better) routines (claim 3, 6, 7 & 8). Two stipulations concern knowledge enhancing interventions for primarily managers but also for the employees' representatives (claim 4 & 6). Three stipulations concern the actual work situation and they all focus workload (claim 1, 2 & 5) and the recommended actions are to find ways of prioritizing among the work tasks and put up boundaries so the employees will not work too much.

These stipulations derive from the ‘take care’ mentality of a traditional work discourse and the perception that it is just a matter of too much work – not that the worker might have ethical dilemmas, professional ambitions, social relations and so on that also affect the work situation. It is the managers responsibility to take away work tasks or order the employer to go home to make sure she does not work too much. As if that would solve the problem of not being able to come to an agreement with important work relations (for example) or that the customer (patient/student etc) is not getting the care/service the knowledge worker think they could both expect and demand.

Of course the situation at Malmö University might be just about workload, but it can also be that as the official psychosocial work environment discourse is primarily based on demands, control and social support model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), most problem and situations are explained by this very model. If to put some relevance in the knowledge worker discourse, the problems that come with the nature of the work is not solved through better priorities (workload) and limitations on where and when to work (boundless work).

If you work in a complex organization with a high degree of interactions and interdependencies between yourself and your colleagues (inside and outside one’s organization), work life representatives, students etc, as a university is, you might expect that work problems, stress and frustration due to these circumstances would have come up in the focus groups.

This might call for a possibility that there are not just certain phenomena that are highlighted through the official psychosocial discourse but also phenomena that are (unintentionally) hidden. The notions of workload might be absolutely ‘true’ and relevant but if the knowledge work situation described above has anything to do with the work situation at Malmö University there would, consequently, also have been notions of problems connected to complexity.

Complexity becomes an issue when you as an employee have to make decisions, concerning also other actors within your social system/organization. To be able to make a fair agreement with the one facing you, you have to ‘control’ (understand) the whole system/organization. To make these decisions (autonomously and accountably) you need a lot more information about a lot more ingredients than if you only get your specifications/orders from someone or ‘just’ have to follow a rule or routine. When the organization as a system fails to provide this information to enable

the decision making process, it is not a matter of workload and/or work pace. It is due to a dysfunctional complex system, i.e. deficiencies in the organizing of the organization.

As there are almost no statements referring to this social side of work (but the relation to the manager and the demanding students) there might be reason to believe that the discourse this inspection is conducted within, has its limitations when it comes to investigate psychosocial work environment in knowledge intensive organizations.

7.3 Discourses and focus inspection as method

The official psychosocial discourse is also at play in the conduct of the inspection method. Focus inspections are designed to inspect psychosocial work environment, no matter if it is at a knowledge intensive organization or not. As the focus inspection is conducted in this case it would not be possible to find anything but that what you are asking for. The inspection becomes more or less a result of itself and not a result of what the employees at Malmö University could say about their work situation.

There are three basic foundations for conducting a focus inspection (Hane & Yrkesinspektionen, 2000): employees that are interested in exploring the conditions at the work place; a 'free' conversation based on the employees vocabulary and point of departure; a procedure to avoid arbitrary judgements and stipulations.

Based on the material in the inspection memo I cannot really say anything about the employees' ability or will to contribute to a fair description of the work conditions at Malmö University.

The second foundation is about taking departure in the interests and vocabulary of the employees. In this inspection the questions discussed in the focus group, derive from the official psychosocial work environment discourse. When the questions are posed like that there cannot really be any other answers than the one given according to the focus groups documentations. The glimpses of another 'discourse' are quickly and firmly categorized within the current official discourse (as the example with 'complexity' above mentioned).

The third foundation, the procedure, whose intention are to avoid arbitrariness and to secure legal and fair stipulations, might also contribute to the exclusion of an alternative discourse. It

probably takes a lot more effort to conduct a focus inspection based on a more open approach if the only reasoning and stipulations that are understood by the others in the quality assurance process/procedure are the 'traditional' ones. If that is the case it is easier to pose the questions that everyone anyway want to have answered in order to make an assessment on the risks and deficiencies at the work place.

Another reason to believe that that the current work environment discourse is very dominate at the Work Environment Authority is that the quality assurance procedure did not manage to discover that the focus groups reports are almost the same as the questions asked. If you go through the focus groups reports and refer every utterance to the questions asked in the focus groups there are no redundant information, i.e. there is no information that does not 'fit' the questions. When the answers fit 'too neatly,' especially when using a method that is designed to make it possible to 'hear' contesting discourses, the warning signals should be loud and clear.

No matter the reasons, I can only speculate about them, but if a focus inspection is conducted as described in the memo from Malmö University, you can just as well make a questionnaire and ask the group members to fill it out. The result would probably be the same: the inspectors have already determined the questions and there is already a 'fix' template to interpret the answers with.

You could say that this is due to poor implementation by the inspectors involved in this inspection, but I would rather be inclined to relate this 'misuse' of the focus inspection as a result of the official work environment discourse (not only the psychosocial one). In this specific case, Swedish work life, the discourse does not only control what can be said about psychosocial work environment and how the utterances can be interpreted but also constrains our ability to use methods that derives from a somewhat different discourse than the traditional one.

As long as the inspector (or a critical mass of them) are 'trapped' in the traditional discourse and thus believe that they know the 'truth' about psychosocial work environment issues there is no need to have a more open approach to the focus groups members. That would just entail fewer areas covered within the approximately two hours that are available for each group. Within the official work environment discourse this makes sense. Another way to approach the situation would be a waste of time. As good professionals and civil servants you do not want to contribute to that, hence this 'misuse' of focus inspection as an inspection method.

8 Concluding Discussion

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will conclude the analysis with a general discussion based on the findings in the previous chapters. My focus here too, is on power: from discursive powers to more aware and explicit exercise of power. I end the chapter by suggesting topics for further research and by a short summary of the most important findings and contributions in this thesis.

8.2 Discourses and their power

The case from Malmö University illustrates the power of discourses described in Chapter 2, Discourse and Discourse Analysis. The case illustrates how powerful a discourse is in the present (everyday life) and it illustrates how it is 'defending' itself through the reproduction of itself, i.e. the power of discourse over time. In this case the discourse limits and determines what questions that would be interesting to ask; it determines what can be answered; it determines what can be understood and it determines what can be said about the situation in an official inspection memo (that has to refer to the Act and Provisions). What is already said is what is possible to say again and the discourse thus endlessly repeats itself.

However, in each and every one of these phases the persons involved can choose to act differently; asking other questions (or not asking questions); describing the situation differently; critically scrutinize every utterance etc. There *is* room for challenging the discourse but that requires some kind of knowledge of other discourses or other reasoning within the discourse.

Still, to challenge is not enough, you also have to be understood by those who are 'in' the currently dominating discourse. This kind of study (which also is 'within' a certain discourse) aims at describing discourses and potential consequences so that it is possible to have a more autonomous, free position to the discourse/s. It does not mean that you will choose to support another discourse, but that you actually make a choice, i.e. exercise your autonomy.

8.3 Discourses' impact on psychosocial work environment

The case from Malmö University also illustrates how intertwined discourses are to psychosocial work environment. Psychosocial factors are very much connected to the possibility to interact

with the system around you. The main tool for interaction is language, which in turn is, determined by discourse. To be misunderstood, marginalized, not allowed to speak etc is thus possible to see as effects of discursive power.

Not to be able to communicate (articulate yourself/be understood) around, what you think are important organizational matters, is *per se* a psychosocial work environment hazard. This hazard is present in many ways: You might have problems articulating an alternative view of the situation. If you manage that, you might have problems being understood and thus the risk of *not* being able to take relevant and successful measures will increase and so will the frustration and the feelings of failure, abandonment, loneliness etc. All psychosocial work environment hazards/factors. Discourse and discursive power are thus also parts of the work environment, not just through defining what a psychosocial work environment hazard is, but also in themselves.

8.4 So what?

So, the claim in this study is that the knowledge worker's work conditions and situation is not included in the official psychosocial work environment discourse. So what? A knowledge worker is mostly well educated and well paid. If they are not content with their current situation they can leave, so why bother?

Now I will come back to the reservations I had in the beginning about the label 'knowledge worker'. First, if you take the most frequent notions of knowledge workers, they are not exclusively characteristics for 'educated employees'. Exercising one's autonomy, using one's experience and judgement in new, unknown and complex situations and having loyalty dilemmas between the customer and the employer due to professional demands of integrity and ethics and so on is not just the case for 'knowledge workers'. That is a situation that might arise in many work places and in many functions. The problem is thus much broader than the knowledge workers' situation; it probably concerns most of the Swedish work places.

Second, if we stick to knowledge worker for a while, even if they are well educated and sometimes well paid not everyone has the possibility to change work places just like that. The case from Malmö University is about university staff. If you want to teach at a School for Odontology, there are not so many to choose from and you might have research funding that ties you to the work place etc. If you have a family or other connections to the geographical place it

might be even harder. The love for a vocation and/or your skill and expertise can also make you ‘trapped’ in a work place and in a work situation.

Third, even if people are well educated and well paid, is that a reason for not being a concern of the Work Environment Authority? Is the knowledge worker not as important as other workers when it comes to the first paragraph in the Work Environment Act: ‘The purpose of this Act is to prevent ill-health and accidents at work and generally to achieve a good working environment.’? Do we think that it is better to be rich and ill than poor and ill? Or is illness just as bad, no matter the economic status of the person?

Another counterargument could be that the conclusions in this study is based on a too narrow empirical material. I can agree on that. It would be very interesting to investigate how other inspection memos from the Work Environment Authority are conducted and articulated. There is probably a difference between them and sometimes the knowledge workers’ situation is well described and taken into account. But the important thing here is, *it can happen!*

Despite the use of special methods and its procedures, that includes quite some people, it is possible to conduct an inspection that not with one word problematize the findings, or the lack of findings, and what that might tell us about the workplace and/or the inspection itself. The reasons for it do not matter. One is too many. For the ‘inspected’, the employees and employers at Malmö University, it really does not matter how others’ situations are like. For them the important thing is their work place. Illness due to work is not easier to bear just because there are others in the same situation. The consequences are personal and just as severe for the individual, and it is the individual the Act is aiming to protect.

8.5 Legal support for including the knowledge worker

‘The working environment shall be satisfactory with regard to the nature of the work and social and technical progress in the community.’

Work Environment Act, Chapter 2, 1§

Demands for an enhanced understanding and consideration of a persons work situation is supported by the Act itself. Despite that the Act is primarily constructed on a traditional employer-employee-relation, the legislators were insightful enough to understand that the Act

cannot foresee every change affecting work life and its effect on work environment. Not taking into account the knowledge worker and her situation is though an act of breaking, or at least not following, the law.

Another general paragraph, Chapter 3, 1§, states that the stipulations made concerning the obligations for employer and employees ‘...shall be applied with due regard for the demands made in Chapter 2 concerning the nature of the working environment.’ Even here have the legislators left some space for interpretation and contextual factors.

A third paragraph that I think is of special interest is Chapter 3, 3§, where the employer are obliged to ‘...ensure that the employee acquires a sound knowledge of the conditions in which work is conducted and that he is informed of the hazards which the work may entail.’ This is quite a heavy demand to stipulate, especially if the ‘knowledge’ available and offered through an inspection is at best (half) irrelevant and at worst, contributes to an aggravated situation.

How are the employers to fulfil their obligations if the inspection authority, research society and other institutions and interests cannot offer any useful material for understanding the changes in work environment due to changes in work life and its conditions? Even if the employer were taking actions to prevent work environment hazards for the knowledge workers, how would it be interpreted by the inspectors, researchers etc? As relevant and innovative? Or not good enough and not according to ‘evidence based research’?

8.6 Who gains on maintaining the current psychosocial work environment discourse?

Discourses defend themselves in different ways. One way is through the more or less unconscious actions where we (unintentionally) are reproducing what we have learnt without further ado; the discursive power in itself described above. Another way of ‘defending’ a discourse is through a more conscious and/or structural defence, i.e. there are people, institutions, ideologies and interests that actively reinforce one specific discourse.

In Chapter 7, I gave some examples of people and groups of people who could have an interest in inventing, establishing and maintaining a knowledge worker discourse. Of course the same goes for the official psychosocial work environment discourse. Just to mention some examples;

researchers and consultants, institutions such as Work Environment Authority, the Unions and the employer and the employees.

If a discourse has been dominating there are a lot of artefacts resulting from them. One such artefact is questionnaires, which are claimed to be relevant tools for investigating the work environment. To redo them (or stop using them) would be very costly. If your business is to sell and conduct such questionnaires you are not likely to question them.

Another reason for status quo connected to questionnaires is that if you have a strong faith in questionnaires as good and relevant indicators on work environment (something I do not have), you probably also believe that it is both possible and interesting to conduct comparative and longitudinal studies based on the questionnaires. Introducing new questions would then be seen as spoiling the opportunities to conduct such studies. If you have invested your career in this area you are not likely to challenge and question the foundations for the questionnaires, no matter if you are interested in work environment research or Human Resource activities.

Institutions such as the Work Environment Authority are populated with people educated and experienced in the dominating discourse and thus also have both an institutional and personal interest in maintaining it. To expand or challenge the discourse would be a great effort, especially if the legislation and/or the researchers are not supporting such 'expansion'.

The Unions can also have an interest in maintaining the current discourse, despite that it might make work life harder for their members. They have invested heavily in being a counterpart to an employer based on and constructed within the same ideological discourse as the current psychosocial work environment, i.e. an asymmetric relation in favour of the employer incl. subordination and obedience from the employees. In such a culture the Unions can both claim power on behalf of their members (as the weak ones) and point at the employer and say: It is your responsibility – fix it! If this no longer is a valid claim, what would the functions and roles of the Union be?

And finally, at the local work place, where employees and employers (managers) meet every day, there are both cultural and identity issues that are 'working' to keep the current order; 'we work for you – you take care of us'. The responsibility for actions in line with 'taking care' is ascribed

to the employer. It can be a pretty good feeling to let go of one's responsibility (not taking it on) as an employee, but just as comfortable to step up and take the responsibility ascribed to you as an employer. If you are 'trapped' in the traditional discourse on organizations, work distribution etc you know how to manage that. Lots of managers have tried not to 'do' the traditional managing. An educated guess is that there are fewer managers/employers that have managed to know what to do instead and still maintain their view of themselves (identity) as managers, leaders, in control or whatever our images of leadership and managing lead us to believe.

There are most likely a lot of other stakeholders that have reason to defend the current discourse, but to sum it up; there are many, diverse and divergent, but still interplaying and powerful interests, ideologies and institutions that make a discourse dominate and to very inertly change and develop. This is the nature of discourse and to be aware of these powers in action is a first step to critically approach and assess utterances, statements, 'truths' etc. Just as you as a reader critically have been approaching this study; my assumptions, my 'taken-for-granted's', my motives and (hopefully also) the trustworthiness and relevance of potential claims and reasoning made.

8.7 Why is the Demand-Control-model so dominant?

Another aspect that has surprised even me is how dominant the Demand-Control-Support-model by Karasek, Theorell, Johnson and Hall (Oxenstierna, Widmark, Finnholm & Elofsson, 2008) is. Why has this model gained such support/dominating position in Sweden?

One reason might be that the model is in line with our own traditional view of work life. That we as a society, Sweden, is dominated by a discourse that makes us see the employer, the employee and their relations in a certain way, and the model fits this way of constructing society.

Another reason might be that we are a quite small country with a history of cooperation between the employers' and the employees' associations and if they together support certain reasoning, intentionally or not, there is little space left for another point of departure.

A third reason might be that as the model comes with a questionnaire it is quite easy to use and because of its dominating position it has spread into most questionnaires concerning work environment and employee satisfaction. Whenever one is asked about one's work situation the

same questions keep coming back. The basic assumptions made are transferred to the users (employers and employees) in a quite sophisticated and tacit way.

A fourth reason might be that a Swedish researcher has been involved in developing and spreading the model. The researcher is Töres Theorell, professor emeritus, Karolinska Institutet (2007) and employed at the Institute of Psychosocial Medicine (IPM) between 1981-2006. IPM was founded in the mid-sixties by Lennart Levi, who was the manager until 1995, when Theorell was appointed manager. Until 1995 IPM was called 'The National Institute for Psychosocial Medicine'. In 1995 IPM became a research institute within the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. In 2007, IPM changed names and organizations and is now called Stress Research Institute and is a department at Stockholm University. Both Theorell and the institute thus have been significant stakeholders in the psychosocial work environment research under a long and, for these issues, important time. (*Facts from the Stress Research Institute's website: www.stressforskning.su.se*)

One example of the difficulties of introducing an alternative view/discourse is demonstrated by a recently published book from the Stress Research Institute (Oxenstierna et al, 2008) where the Demand-Control-Support-model has critically been analyzed together with another model: Effort-Reward-model by Sigriest.

The analysis started in 2003 and was aiming at understanding changes in work life so that the questions in the Demand-Control-Social support-questionnaire could be accommodated to a more contemporary work life. Their main question was if the Demand-Control-Support-questionnaire covered the new working conditions changes in work life had entailed (Oxenstierna et al, 2008 p. 13).

Their conclusion is that the model works for contemporary work life, at least if you add some categories and questions in the questionnaire and move some questions to another category within the questionnaire. There is no discussion in the report (Oxenstierna et al, 2008) about the taken-for granted-assumptions for the model or if there could be something problematic with measuring and questionnaires in general. There is not even a problematization about the cause-effect-idea the model is based on.

I do not say that the research presented in the report is useless or irrelevant for contemporary work life and I am convinced that the research has been conducted very scientifically, even if I have far too little knowledge of statistical variances and factor analysis and their significance or psychological measure methods in general for making such a judgement. What I would like to demonstrate, with this report as an example, is how difficult it is to get 'outside' the already known and familiar and start looking from another angle.

Not even researchers whose mission is to explore the 'modern work life' and its consequences for psychosocial health manage to take another start than in the current order, thus reproducing it, although ending up with an extended version. Discourses are powerful and as single individuals, or groups of individuals, within it we are far from powerful and the structures and discourses within in the research society do not make it easier. If they do not manage to challenge or highlight the consequences of different basic assumptions, reasoning and discourses, who then can?

8.8 Further research

The study gives material for further research. First and foremost, how to include the conditions of a 'knowledge worker' in the official work environment discourse so that they no longer will be marginalized and/or made invisible. Another issue would be to explore other 'types' of work/ers and/or organizations that also are being marginalized due to the current discourse.

A third topic would be to analyze the extended public work environment discourse, incl. newspapers, magazines, TV-shows, books, pop-management literature etc, in order to further understand how the discourse is (re)produced and/or challenged and how different discourses interact.

A fourth research area could be to make a genealogy of how the current discourse has evolved and why it has gained such a massive support. A fifth, but related issue, would be to investigate the psychosocial work environment discourses in other countries and if, how and why they differ and the consequences thereof. A sixth, and also related, research question would be to further analyze who gains on and what is gained by maintaining the current discourse.

8.9 Concluding summary: The workers the official work environment discourse forgot

This study is about the official psychosocial work environment discourse and its consequences for the psychosocial work environment for knowledge workers. The current psychosocial work environment discourse affects the knowledge workers situation in a complex, but compact way. Three aspects are highlighted.

First, the study shows how the current official psychosocial discourse does not manage to take into accounts a knowledge worker's perspectives and conditions. This is in itself a problem. Institutions of different kinds that are given the responsibility to prevent and inspect the work environment marginalize and even make invisible a growing number of employees and their work environment.

Secondly, as the official psychosocial work environment discourse is so dominating the knowledge worker is largely at risk of not being able to communicate her situation to others and thus the discursive power is worsening the situation 'not even the inspection, the union, the consultant etc understands my situation'. Being marginalized, misunderstood and not able to talk to others about it is indeed an unhealthy work environment. The nature of discourse itself is thus also part of the psychosocial work environment.

A third effect is that one of the methods used for inspecting the psychosocial work environment, is used in a way that only makes sense if one sees the approach and the material from the inspection through the official discourse. The method, focus inspection, is designed to make it possible to hear different discourses and their consequences. Used as a 'group questionnaire' it only confirms the current discourse. This is probably also an effect of the official psychosocial discourse. It is so dominating that it is almost impossible to approach the work place and to interpret the outcome of the inspection in an alternative way.

The need for further research within this area is crucial if not to keep excluding the knowledge workers from the work environment discourse and hence also contribute to maintaining unhealthy work places.

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