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The effects of liquefying place, time, and organizational boundaries on employee behavior: Lessons of classical sociology

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Abstract

This paper explores how the liquefying of place, time, and organizational boundaries affects social control and self-regulation at the workplace. We address Norbert Elias's civilizing process theory (Elias 2000), and some of the criticism it has evoked, to explore the effects of both physical proximity and distance on control and behavior in work organizations. We hold that the theory still has relevance for contemporary organization and management theory with roots in the more classical traditions of the sociological discipline. Assuming that physical proximity at work is decreasing because of increased telework, the geographical spread of firms, and growing interorganizational collaboration, there is much to be gained by maintaining classical perspectives.

Keywords: physical proximity, distance, task interdependence, organizational boundaries, social control, self-regulation, Norbert Elias, civilizing process theory

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we seek to demonstrate how engagement with modern classical sociology can inform pertinent research questions facing researchers studying issues of organization and management. It is important that analysis of organizations maintains its intellectual taproot in sociology if only because without it there is little opportunity to develop either a historical or a sociological imagination (Mills 1959). In order to demonstrate the potential that still resides in this imagination we will deliberately address a seemingly mundane topic.

For the most part task interdependence in both traditional and modernist productive organizations requires the physical proximity of workers: 'the probability of people being in the same location during the same period of time' (Monge and Kirste 1980: 110). Organizational proximity, then, is defined as 'the extent to which people in an organization share the same physical locations at the same time providing an opportunity or psychological obligation to engage in face-to-face communication' (Monge et al. 1985: 1133)). When thus defined, it becomes apparent that opportunity and psychological obligation are outcomes of proximity. The reason why people in an organization share the same physical locations at the same time is mainly to be found in task interdependence: 'the extent to which the items or elements upon which work is performed or the work processes themselves are interrelated so that changes in the state of one element affect the state of the others' (Scott and Davis 2007: 126-127). This is particularly the case when interdependence is sequential or reciprocal (Thompson 2007: 54-55), since workers need to be physically proximate to perform their bodily embedded tasks. Yet times are changing: physical proximity is growing less crucial in task interdependence. With the advance of a globalizing economy, of outsourcing, and of alliances, as well as of information technologies, an increasing number of people can or must collaborate at a distance. But how will the structural change toward dispersed work affect employee behavior?

The effect of proximity/distance via social control on self-regulation has been largely overlooked to date. How will organizational members' behavior alter in reaction to the liquefying boundaries of place, time, and organizations proper? That is the question this paper seeks to address. The paper's secondary but related thread of inquiry regards the effects of diminishing centralization and specialization on self-regulation. We formulate propositions about proximity/ distance, control, and behavior based on a discussion of the civilizing process theory as developed by British-German sociologist Norbert Elias, and of the critique of his main dissenter, German ethnologist Hans Peter Duerr. We also consider the plea for contextualization of the study of civilizing processes made by Duerr and promoted by sociologist Nicos Mouzelis.

The civilizing process theory is chosen as a platform from which to further the development of theory regarding proximity/distance, control, and behavior for a variety of reasons. Firstly, because the central question that Elias' theory addresses is the effect of social structure on human behavior. Secondly, space, conceived of as physical expanse between two points (cf. Lefebvre 1991, who also makes a distinction between mental and social space; for a similar classification of organizational space, see Taylor and Spicer 2007), is an omnipresent factor in the civilizing process theory, albeit not always an explicit one. Thirdly, the civilizing process theory has been selected because

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it applies a historical perspective. A long-term approach may clarify whether or not seemingly unprecedented trends such as globally-dispersed work have a longer history and any staying power. As King and Frost (2002) write when referring to the activities of hunter-gatherers and herders: 'The management of distance is an ancient art' (p. 3). Knowledge of a certain phenomenon's pedigree can contribute to an understanding of its current profile and its potential future. Finally, as we have stated above, a compelling motive for directing attention to the work of Norbert Elias (1897-1990) is that current organizational theory can be enriched in general from a creative re-reading of the works of classical sociologists (Adler 2009; Alexander 1987; Stinchcombe 1982; for an overall assessment of Elias's potential impact on organization studies, see Newton 2001; Van Iterson et al. 2002; Van Iterson 2009).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

With the exception of collective undertakings such as the mobilization of armies and the construction of pyramids, which obviously required considerable organizational effort, it is only with the emergence of the factory system (e.g. Pollard 1965) in late eighteenth-century England that workers began to be systematically concentrated in space. In contrast to the putting-out system, in which subcontracted workers (for example carders, spinners, and weavers) produced goods in their own homes, work in the factory system was completely organized and controlled under one roof, with fixed working hours, performed by 'hired hands' assigned specialized tasks and narrow discretion. The early years of the factory system were typified by a novel scale and intensity of human interdependen¬cies (Newton 1999). A rapidly growing number of people worked together under conditions of increasing interconnectedness. They saw, heard, smelled, and touched each other. The problems of these ever-increasing interdependencies in the early decades of industrialization were dealt with by coercing the workers through orders, rules, and sanctions, as well as by stimulating their senses of discipline (Bendix 1956). On the factory floor and in the administrative offices, employees realized that they had to learn to live together in peace, virtuousness, and order (Kieser 1998), if only for their own benefit. Whereas coercing workers in line is exemplary of social control enacted by supervisors, both stimulating and convincing changes of behavior instead urge self-regulation on the part of the workers.

Factory rulebooks provide information about the mixture of social control and self-regulation present in the factory system. The Potters' Instructions and The Common Place Book, developed by the eighteenth-century English factory master Josiah Wedgwood, offer evocative examples of disciplinary rules that aimed to fight 'waste', 'inefficiency', 'arbitrariness', and 'idleness'. The following sanctions indicate severe external constraints: 'Any workman conveying Ale or Licquor into the manufactory in working hours forfits 2s.'; 'Any workman strikeing or otherwise abuseing an overlooker to lose his place' (McKendrick 1961: 45). At the same time, these documents instructed overseers on how to show 'marks of approbation' to the punctual and skilful. These instructions point to systematic efforts to enhance workers' self-control.

MODERN TIMES

Spatial and temporal concentration, subordination, and extensive labor division have been enduring features of modernist organizations, culminating perhaps in the 'bright satanic offices' of modern-day call centers (Baldry et al. 1998). But with the advent of 'post-modern' organizations, these four basic characteristics have begun to fade. Indicators of weakening spatial and temporal concentration, for instance, can be identified in recent phenomena such as working from home (e.g. Felstead and Jewson 2000) or from neighborhood work centers (e.g. Felstead et al. 2005), mobile working (e.g. Felstead et al. 2005), hoteling (using meeting rooms and workstations in nearby hotels), gatherings at clients' locations, distance learning, as well as (globally) distributed teams, and virtual teams (Cascio 2000) (for an overview of types of telework see also Kurland and Bailey 1999). With such distant individual or group arrangements people no longer need to—or are even able to—work together in one location, obeying strict time schedules. (Inter)organizational phenomena such as the geographical spread of units, outsourcing, and strategic alliances also lead to the loosening of spatial and temporal confines and of organizational boundaries. For instance, the very absence of spatial and temporal concentration is the defining characteristic of virtual organizations, where 'face time' is completely lacking. Examples of recent trends and concepts that reverse subordination and task specialization are empowerment, self-managed teams and work groups, job enrichment, and multitasking.

What effect does the likely corrosion of productive organizations based on spatial and temporal concentration, subordination, and labor division have on organizational members' behavior, particularly on their self-regulation? Much attention has been devoted to the effects of diminishing centralization and specialization on workers' behavior. For instance, Courpasson (2000) asks whether empowerment and other forms of decentralization actually reverse subordination. Although it seems that overt displays of authority have given way to a more negotiated order, which implies a greater place for give and take, some argue that this new order is actually one of 'soft domination': a subtle mechanism through which obedience is produced. This mechanism has the appearance of equality among peers, but in reality it is characterized by a pervasive system of controls (Courpasson 2000). Thus, the concentration of decision power may in essence not have diminished in postmodern organizations, and, consequently, organizational members are equally expected to maintain compliant behavior. Furthermore, the effects of 'dedifferentiation' (cf. Lash 1990) in postmodern organizations have been examined (e.g. Clegg 1990). Scholars point to the possible detrimental effects of job enrichment, job rotation, and other forms of de-specialization. Although de-specialization might provide the worker with a richer working life, which thus leads to higher job satisfaction, being a multi-skilled worker could also simply mean that one has to work harder to keep up with all the different tasks meant to be executed; also, it is time-cosuming to switch tasks. The latter theory is called the intensification hypothesis (for a discussion, see Thompson and McHugh 1990). Furthermore, increasing effort levels in decentralized work units may be accomplished by amplified monitoring in the form of peer surveillance (Sewell and Wilkinson 1992). Despite the research devoted to

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these related topics, the effects of diminishing centralization and specialization on employees' self-regulation have been given only sparse attention.

In so far as research has addressed the effects of reduced (need for) physical proximity in the workplace, attention has typically been devoted to communication (Nardi and Whittaker 2002), attribution (Cramton 2002; Cramton et al. 2007), and conflict (Hinds and Mortensen 2005; Hinds and Bailey 2003) in dispersed teams, such as software development teams (Carmel 1999). In addition, perceptions of proximity in virtual work have been addressed (Wilson et al. 2008), as well as individual and group performance in distributed work arrangements (Ahuja et al. 2003; Maznevski and Chudoba 2000; Shin 2004). Studies of trends such as the removal of physical barriers in organizations through the development of 'open plan'-style offices and hot-desking, have also considered the effects of distance/proximity on outcomes such as communication and interaction (e.g. Hatch 1987).

ELIAS'S CIVILIZING PROCESS THEORY AND ITS CRITICS

Elias's civilizing process theory addresses the effects of long-term changes in social structure on human behavior, granting a central position to both temporal and spatial considerations. We shall now consider the context and central tenets of this classical sociological approach. Norbert Elias (1897-1990) published his magnum opus Über den Prozess der Zivilisation in 1939. A work on the issue of civilization, published just before another war that seemed determined to obliterate civilization's foundations, it was largely ignored in the wake of World War II. It took thirty years before Elias' study was recognized as a modern sociological classic. The Civilizing Process (2000) identifies a long-term trend in Western European societies toward a restriction and refinement of social behavior (for discussions of Elias' work and approach, see e.g. Fletcher 1997; Mennell 1998; Van Krieken 1998; Smith 2001; Kilminster 2007). More precisely, Elias analyzes the formation of the French absolutist state, with its concomitant changes in social control and self-regulation. Elias selects this case, which he contrasts with the German and English paths to nation formation, because he considers the French court society the focal stage of the Western civilizing process (see also Elias 1983). From the twelfth century onwards, a number of princely courts in the fragmented region now called France succeeded in acquiring ever-larger territories. Their supremacy was built on a monopoly of the means of violence and of the levy of taxes. The ensuing absolutist state, ruled by the victorious house of Bourbon, exerted these two monopolies with unparalleled power. The defeated 'pacified' nobility was accommodated in the monarchic royal court. In this 'semi-ritualized setting' marked by ongoing political and status struggles, new standards of manners and morality were articulated, as Elias shows via an analysis of etiquette and manner books. Although the French courtiers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were compelled to give up the freedom to 'let themselves go' in order to maintain their high positions, which often led to feelings of artificiality and alienation, they nonetheless found their principal life fulfilment¬ in observed status differences and rules of

etiquette. Consequently, this semi-public life was a source of both happiness and unhappiness at the same time.

The behavioral codes originally essential for pacified interaction at the Versailles court were later imitated by bourgeois elites, including the early capitalistic entrepreneurs, and came to be subsequently diffused down the social ladder. This trickle-down extension of civilized behavior was central to the development of the mentality characteristic of the modern era: an ingrained disposition (cf. Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) to act, think, and feel in ways that are characterized by greater individuation and more empathy, and that are emotionally controlled, curbed, and refined, making the individual better capable of postponing immediate gratification.

Three levels of analysis can be distinguished in Elias' civilizing process theory. First, state formation, monopolization of violence and taxation, growing social differentiation, and lengthening interdependency networks that traverse time and physical space; second, changing standards of manners and morality, and third, self-regulation and formation of self-identity. In linking the three levels, the concepts of 'power inequalities', 'social differentiation', and 'social interdependencies' are the most crucial. Values, norms, and common understandings are disregarded as 'independent variables' by Elias. At best, these social determinants serve as 'mediating variables' to explain changes in self-regulation. Certainly power, differentiation, and interdependency webs take the lead, as it were, in the civilizing process.

Elias claims to find ample evidence of quite impulsive behavior among noblemen at the local courts in late medieval Western Europe. Outbursts of ferocity could occur at any moment. Elias seeks to demonstrate that this behavior was gradually tempered as authority became centralized in the victorious court, with the result that a growing number of people became mutually depen¬dent while simultaneously also more socially differentiated. Elias (2000) summarizes the psychological concomitants of power centralization and increasing interdependencies as follows: '[i]f in this or that region, the power of central authority grows, if over a larger or smaller area people are forced to live at peace with one another, the molding of affects and the standards of the economy of instincts are very gradually changed as well' (p. 169).

In the early modern era that followed, which was characterized by further concentration of power and increasing differentiation and interdependence, the pattern of controls over individual behavior changed dramatically. Whereas behavioral restraints of humans initially arose primarily from marked power imbalances (as we saw in the formation of absolutism), later on regulation was induced by the more impersonal, less visible coercions of larger and denser interdependency webs such as those typified by the later years of the Ancien Régime court. Concurrent with the progressive diminution of power disparities between groups (an outcome of further advancing human interdependence and differentiation), desired behavior was increasingly produced by individuals of their own accord. Elias labels this change as a shift from 'social constraint' to 'self-constraint'; for the second concept, however, we prefer the label 'self-regulation', because in addition to acknowledging the repressive side of behavior (cf. Muchembled 1988), this label also allows for the expressive side of behavior, which recognizes that civilized behavior is also a way to seek distinction (from others).

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The aforementioned shift has led to fundamental changes in the psychological make-up of humans. When social constraints were still dominant, one could witness what Elias calls the advance of the threshold of shame and repugnance. This advance meant that an increasing number of spheres of action became social danger zones in which one could lapse into gestures or expressions that were liable to give cause to shame. When self-regulation became more prominent, feelings of shame yielded to a more 'advanced' stage of self-consciousness: a quasi-automatic self-discipline and foresight regardless of whether one was observed or not. This self-discipline became also patently more universal, more stable, and more differentiated.

We would like to draw attention to Elias' use of the adjective 'advanced' here. His main intellectual contender, Michel Foucault (1975), saw the trend toward internalization of the disciplinary power of the observing eye of Panopticism in a far less favourable light (see also Burkitt, 1993, on Elias vs. Foucault). Indeed, although Elias' civilizing process theory may have the ring of a universal evolutionist theory in the tradition of Herbert Spencer, Elias objected fiercely when confronted with such allegations. His thesis was certainly not intended to be teleological since Elias did not believe in an overall purpose. Although Elias speculates on the final page of The Civilizing Process that the civilizing process may have an endpoint, for the time being, he writes, it is still in a state of becoming. Nevertheless, there is still debate about Elias' universalistic ambitions, which, arguably, he cherished to the extent that he seemed to regard the Western civilization process as a template that will be adopted in other parts of the world (e.g. Barraclough 1982; Duerr 1988, 1990, 1993, 1997, 2002; Goody 2006). Some 'Eliasians' deny this; others try to reassure critics that, admittedly, non-Western civilizing processes will follow suit or develop with different itineraries (for a summary of the disagreement, see Mennell 1998: 228–34). It is needless to add that Foucault's work is marked by a strong dissociation from any notion of humanistic progress or teleological history.

The Eliasian aspect of differentiation of self-regulation was expanded in later publications, in which the twentieth-century trend toward a 'loosening of manners and morals' is evaluated. Elias and some of his followers (e.g. Wouters 1986) argue that this development, which gained momentum in the 1920s, 1960s, and 1970s, has not been accompanied by a lapse in self-discipline. 'Informalization', as they label it, does not simply involve a linear loosening of morals marked by permissiveness; rather, it is a 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls' (Elias and Dunning 1986: 44; for a critical discussion, see Newton 1998). The controlled decontrolling implies an increased differentiation in manners that express control and distinction rather than sheer moral decline. Elias concludes that over the past centuries self-discipline and foresight, as well as becoming more universal, more stable, and more differentiated, have also grown more effective. He argues that the reason for this development is that urges and impulses came to be more effectively subordinated to the requirements of increasingly intricate and differentiated social relationships, which resulted from lengthening chains of social interdependence.

Elias gives much weight to the lengthening of chains of interdependence over time as a driver of increasingly regulated behavior. Mouzelis (1995) argues that the idea of interdependence chains increasing in length makes

or breaks the civilizing process theory. It is here that the topic of physical proximity becomes very relevant, since it may offer an alternative approach to the relationship between social control and self-regulation. Given that Elias empirically studied civilizing processes in such spatially confined contexts as the battlefield, the castle, and the court, one is tempted to give priority to the alternative notion of physical proximity. It is possible that if one has to take into account the preferences and sensitivities of an increasing number of humans, as is the case when interdependency networks extend, one may be inclined to higher self-regulation. Nevertheless, the effect of being visible—and audible and touchable, etc.—may well be a considerably stronger motive for greater self-regulation (cf. the Foucauldian gaze, which also stimulates self-regulation: Foucault 1975). Unseen and unknown fellow humans will always remain to some extent abstractions. Proximity, the immediate bodily presence of others within a certain time period, may drive civilizing processes much more rapidly and broadly than interdependency chains per se.

Elias' fiercest critic, ethnologist Hans Peter Duerr (1988, 1990, 1993, 1997, 2002; for a counter critique see e.g. Burkitt 1996; Mennell and Goudsblom 1997), maintains that humans who lived in the late Middle Ages were more restrained in their behavior than humans in the early modern and modern era only because they lived so close to each other, and everyone could see and hear what the other was doing. Not only were people in small, easily surveyed, traditional societies more closely interwoven with family relatives, Duerr argues (1988: 10), but there was also hardly any chance to escape the social control of the castle, village, or walled town. People were integrated in consanguine and affinitive kinship groups as well as in groups based on age, sex, occupation, and location of residence, in addition to warrior and secret societies (Duerr 1993: 26-7). The norms that can be applied to members of medieval villages are also relevantly applied to members of tribal societies: they are much more subject to an effective and exorable social control than citizens of the modern metropolis (Duerr 1993: 26). When one looks at the proximity claim from a social-psychological angle, one thinks of Festinger and colleagues (1948), who demonstrate that people tend to befriend their neighbours for the reason that they are physically so close (this is called the propinquity effect) (see also Kiesler and Cummings 2002, for an overview of social-psychological research on the effects of the near presence of others).

The alternative line of reasoning holds that lengthening interdependence chains characteristic of urbanizing and industrializing societies did not lead to a demand for greater self-regulation and foresight. In this model, on the contrary, to associate with many other people also implies a relational freedom or lack of social bonds (1988: 11). As Newton (2001) argues: '[...] many complex networks are currently disembedded in time and place, particularly those of a monetary or economic variety. Most individuals are engaged in highly complex economic interdependency webs, yet are blissfully unaware or unconcerned at their predicament. For instance, I will probably never meet the people who grew the cotton that I wear, or the bananas that I eat.' (p. 488). Here, Duerr and Newton seem to echo Durkheim (1947), who has forcefully demonstrated that social differentiation, along with the reduced human closeness that goes with it, may promote anomie: a far cry from refined civilized behavior. If one is connected to a large number of people, Duerr explains, it may well imply that deviant behavior is less consequential. If you trespass you don't lose your face

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but only one of your faces (1993). Thus, a certain degree of porosity, which gives agents more freedom, developed hand in hand with the newer forms of control that emerged in the early modern era.

Instead of regarding self-regulation as a function of expanding interdependence chains, Duerr believes that self-regulation will fit the specific social relations that occur in a given time and place. Such social relations may be marked by close physical proximity, or by its opposite, distance. In any case, contextualization theoretically yields a larger repertoire of interaction patterns. Therefore, one can concede that it is differing forms of self-regulation, rather than their greater effectiveness, which accompany structural changes such as urbanization, industrialization, and anonymity. Deviation from 'civilized behavior' is equally possible, and such an outcome is not just an episode, not just a temporary relapse in the ongoing civilizing process, as Elias sees it. The link between shifting forms of interdependency networks and changing self-regulation may still hold—although not in the optimistic strand that is so characteristic of nineteenth-century evolutionary theorizing exemplified by Elias.

According to Mouzelis (1995), the civilizing process approach is not a one-size-fits-all method, based on and leading to 'quasi-universal generalizations between growing social interdependence and self-discipline' (p. 150). But Mouzelis goes one step further. Eliasians, he argues, should construct more context-bound sub-theories that explore 'the complex conditions where social differentiation and interdependence are linked to civilizing processes, and the conditions where they are not' (Mouzelis 1995: 74; emphasis added). Thus, not all interdependence leads to a conversion in self-regulation and subjectivity. The hypothesized relation has to be tested everywhere, in various time periods, to assess whether a connection exists, and, if so, to assess its exact nature and form.

Giving primacy to proximity in the study of civilizing processes evidently also requires contextualization. To be near to one's fellow humans can have dissimilar effects in terms of self-regulation, dependent on the type of task-interdependence concerned. Under which spatial and interconnectivity conditions—in our case, of modern versus postmodern productive organizations—do agents enact more versus less 'civilized' behavior? In the next section we will suggest some effects of the probable liquefying of place, time, and organizational boundaries.

ELIAS AND MANAGEMENT

Reversing subordination and specialization necessitates more self-regulation. Decentralization and de-specialization imply more intraorganizational linkages, such as semi-autonomous work groups and cross-functional work teams. Postmodern organizations thus represent increasingly lengthy and complex webs of interdependency that require people to take each other into greater consideration. De-specialized workers have to be as proficient as 'network players' as were the courtiers at Versailles (cf. Kuzmics 1991). They have to juggle anxious, disciplined behavior and relaxed, informal behavior. Thus, complex and lengthy interdependence chains are likely to imply a further shift toward self-regulation, in line with the Eliasian view on the civilizing process.

Alternatively, decentralization and de-specialization of tasks will result in less self-regulation. Workers who participate in various cross-functional work teams will experience fragmentation of social relations. Instead of having a fixed set of near and familiar equals, de-specialized workers now have to deal with a large variety of organizational members. De-specialized workers cooperate with many co-workers but as a rule only on a part-time basis, usually for limited periods of time. Proximity is ephemeral: it happens less frequently and comes to an end altogether much sooner. Why be concerned with people whom you only see once a week or month? Why be concerned with people with whom collaboration will end in the very near future? Why bother with people who hardly understand what you can do or what you actually do? If you lose face vis-à-vis such a colleague, you will only lose one face. Since authority is waning as well (because of processes of decentralization), the consequences of inconsiderate behavior on the work floor or in office relations will become even less consequential, as Duerr's account of proximity claims.

With regard to trends such as the geographical spread of organizational units, outsourcing, and strategic alliances, which in part allow for a loosening of the confines of place and time, one can assume more self-regulation of those involved. An increase in interorganizational linkages in and between contemporary organizations also represents the enhanced scope and complexity of interdependence, and this, again, requires participants to take each other into consideration more and postpone immediate gratification. Again, complex and lengthy interdependence chains are likely to imply a further shift toward self-regulation, in line with the Eliasian view of the civilizing process.

Alternatively, fading spatial and temporal concentration (as a consequence of teleworking as well as the geographical spread of organizational units, outsourcing and strategic alliances) could lead to less self-regulation, to less 'civilized' behavior. Because many direct work contacts will disappear or occur only electronically, restraints will weaken. Why should you be concerned with people you will never see? Or rather: Why should you be concerned with a shakily moving face you know only from videoconferencing or via a webcam? Why would one curb oneself and/or take care to impress through the regulated expression of manners and of morals? In all these cases, people are likely to experience shame and repugnance less easily. Growing concerns about Internet use by employees and attempts to develop corporate rules for online etiquette may be early reactions to a trend toward the loosening of behavioral restraints and skilful expression, in line with Duerr's proximity claim.

TOWARDS A RESEARCH AGENDA

Self-regulation involves suppression and expression, levelling and distinction. One can find the germs of this twin behavioral norm in early modern etiquette books, such as the work composed by Italian courtier and diplomat Baldassare Castiglione, who advocates flexible and pleasant conduct (1991; originally 1528) or the work of the Spanish Jesuit Baltasar Gracián, who focuses on tactical refinement (1994; originally 1646). Although Castiglione has a high regard for discipline, he believes that the 'true courtier' behaves above all in an unaffected, flexible, and natural manner. His ideal manner must also contain elements of humor, irony, and verbal dexterity, all of which demand

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considerable flexibility. Initially intended for courtiers, the Renaissance manner books gained popularity among other elites; by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they had reached the bourgeois, who were active in trading, manufacturing, the civil services, and other similar professi¬ons. Thus, although Elias underscores behavioral curbing and inhibition, one can affirm that civilizing processes comprise the simultaneous development of both constraint and expression, an insight at which Elias himself also arrived (Elias and Dunning 1986). More research needs to be done to unravel the dynamics between the two faces of civilizing processes. Surely, in the practice of (organizational) life, it is a precarious exercise to balance constraint and expression in self-regulation. Increased levels of discipline inflame the individual's desire to 'unleash', to use a psychodynamic idiom. On the other hand, 'free and easy conduct' presupposes and cultivates adherence to the rules of law and custom or the discipline of mutual consent.

The potential of research on civilizing processes for management and organization theory and practice is particularly strong with respect to trends such as distance work, interorganizational cooperation, and 'dedifferentiation'. The blurring of the boundaries of place, time, and organizational domain may bestow organizational members with varying needs for self-regulation. How the tension between discipline and expression in postmodern organizations will affect organizational members' disposition is an intriguing issue for further study. Mastenbroek (2000) sees the possibility of an increasing tolerance for the tension between autonomy and interdependence.

In relation to the aspect of differentiation of behavior, Mouzelis (1995) points out that civilizing processes in one area (i.e. meeting manners) do not rule out de-civilizing processes in another (i.e. misconduct during department outings). De-civilizing trends in the corporate boardrooms may well concur with civilizing trends on the work floor and vice versa. Likewise, when employees are more isolated, literally 'distanced', from the workplace, they are less inclined to self-regulation and possibly more inclined to feelings of estrangement, compensation might be sought in the non-work sphere. Closer distance to family and community, a side effect of working from home or from a neighborhood work center, may produce 'civilizing' effects with indirect gains. The overall argument of the present discussion is that the effect of physical distance/proximity and interdependency of work activities on social control and self-regulation processes warrants inclusion in organization and management studies. As Elias has shown, the application of a long-term perspective may help researchers to understand that collocated or dispersed work forms are continuously changing interdependency networks that exist in and between organizations; these work forms and the behaviors associated with them are the outcome of a long process (King and Frost 2002) and will lead to new forms of organizing, which are difficult to forecast given the unintended consequences that characterize social interaction.

One fruitful method of charting the relations discussed in the present paper could be the study of the above-mentioned manuals, such as the workman rulebooks at the Wedgewood factories. It would be worthwhile to again take the kind of long-term perspective Elias advocates, and examine how these manner books have developed to the present day, especially in the light of liquefying place, time, and organizational boundaries (Clegg and Baumler 2010). Websites on employment and work-related matters hosted

by newspapers also provide a bounteous opportunity for such research (see, for example: http://www.smh.com.au/executive-style/management/50-rules-for-doing-business-in-australia-20131024-2w3v6.html). Apart from shop floor workers, one could also examine the present-day counterpart to the upper strata of the feudal and early-modern systems: the top executives of business companies. Corporate etiquette manuals, like those written for courtiers back in the days of Castiglione and Gracián, are targeted at those who wish to be powerful and crave to make their way in the world. The current proliferation of such etiquette manuals for managers, expatriates, professionals and experts of all stripes could provide an opportunity to study how the boundaries of acceptable and appreciated behavior in proximate or distant working conditions have shifted. Other more obvious sources to include in a study would be interviews, surveys, and analysis of secondary data sources on organizational and employee performance and (mis)behaviors.

Relevant research questions include the following: to what extent can dispersed work be successfully accomplished? Can distance effectively be managed? Or is the collocation of interdependent work activities, where possible, to be preferred because of the blessings bestowed by face-to-face work? Can virtual teams and organizations thrive when they institutionalize intense live personal communication scattered over periods of distant communication (cf. Maznevski and Chudoba 2000)? Answers to these questions will inform research on organizational flexibility, innovativeness and revenues, as well as the quality of work life (Hinds and Kiesler 2002: xi). Proficient self-regulation of workers, be it in proximate or in dispersed working arrangements, is crucial for both their own benefit and that of the employing organizations. There is a great deal of work to be done in the analysis of organizational behavior and management that draws on classical sociology. This paper suggests some initial ways in which such research might be conducted.

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