

# **Something is happening here, but you don't know what it is, do you, Mister Jones?<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Introduction**

Modern bureaucracies are under reconstruction. First, bureaucracy no longer being 'modern', those organizations formerly known as bureaucracies are seeking to become 'post' bureaucratic, and second, as the ecology of the dot.com boom indicates, newly founded organizations often strive not to be bureaucratic. What, precisely, constitutes the post bureaucratic is less clear. Often, the post bureaucratic is defined in terms of hybrid new organization forms.

In this paper I shall argue that bureaucracy, far from being superseded, is becoming embroiled in complex processes of hybridization (du Gay 2000; Courpasson and Reed 2004). To understand post bureaucracy today we need to see bureaucratic organizations through a dialectical lens, one that sees them as simultaneously decomposing and recomposing. Decomposition takes us to the world of supply chains and outsourcing, of which the phenomenon of call centres is probably the most pertinent example. Recomposition takes us into the world of new organizational forms. In the former, there are some very familiar politics of surveillance and control; in the latter there are more innovative developments that centre on the replacement of the central figure of the bureaucrat with that of the project leader, and the central life experience of the occupational career followed largely in one organization being replaced by that of individual's management of projects. The politics of the project are the testing ground for elite reproduction. But first, a little pre-history ...

## **Bureaucracy and empirical studies of organizations**

Bureaucracy is "the primary institutional characteristic of highly complex and differentiated societies" (Landau 1972: 167), epitomizing "the modern era" (Blau and Meyer 1971: 10). Its greatest theorist was Max Weber (1978), who foresaw that future states and organizations would be in step with the rhythms of bureaucracy irrespective of whether a capitalist or socialist drumbeat.

Weber's conception of bureaucracy was one aspect of his overall attempt to understand the features of Western civilization through the process of rationalization. For Weber, rationalization signifies increasing use of calculation to master phenomena and things through the domination of rules and instrumental systems. Weber's insight was that in a social context, such as an organization, the process of bureaucratization entailed by the rationalization process results in a diminution of freedom, initiative and individual power. People would be expected to become obedient objects, trapped in the "iron cage", enhancing the power of the machine as a tool. The cage is the

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<sup>1</sup> An explanation: the Mr. Jones referenced is D. Jones (2003), author of the *New Economy Handbook*, Academic Press, San Diego, CA; the words are Mr. Dylan's (1965), from the "Ballad of a Thin Man", on *Bringing it all Back Home*, New York: Columbia.

metaphorical instrument of dominant authority within which bureaucracy appears as a system of legitimate power “over” its members, neutralizing all potential sources of countervailing power.

In situations of bureaucratic rule, the domination of bureaucratic leaders is fundamentally based on knowledge. “Bureaucratic domination means fundamentally domination through ... technical knowledge ... [and] ... knowledge growing out of experience in the service” (Weber 1978: 225); thus, knowledge is directly related to power expressed in terms of length of service, disciplinary formation and progression through a career structure. It is, indeed, a situation of power/knowledge. One way of reading Weber’s account of bureaucracy is as a treatise on the formation of a particular type of moral character bounded by an emotionally strong sense of duty as a vocation. The type was captured in terms of a mastery of technical rationality.

Weber’s ideas about bureaucracy were transmitted through the methodology of ideal types. Weber’s account of bureaucracy was not a representation for all seasons, an essential and eternal characterisation of a functionally necessary social form. As Weber conceived them ideal types were hypothetical, not a reference to something normatively ideal, but to an ideational type serving as a mental model that can be widely shared and used because analysts agree that it captures some essential features of a phenomenon here and-now. The ideal type does not correspond to reality but seeks to condense essential features of it in the model so that one can better recognize its real characteristics when it is encountered. It is not an embodiment of one side or aspect but the synthetic ideational representation of complex phenomena from reality.

Later, Schutz (1967) was to take issue with one aspect of Weber's approach to ideal types: were they a construct by the analysts or were they the analysts' account of the constructs in use by the members of the research setting in question? For Schutz it was not clear whether Weber's ideal types, in their basis in social action, were a member's category or one that belonged to analysts. He thought that the construction of types out of the concepts of everyday life should be such that they were grounded in the member’s usage. Once they were refined by an analyst, the risk was that they became somewhat dissociated from everyday usage; they could become reifications that related unreflexively to the evolving grounds of their own existence.

The history of the concept of bureaucracy is an example of the slippage that Schutz feared could occur. Bureaucracy had been identified by Weber with constructions that were widely known in common and shared amongst elite German echelons; these, in turn, were subsequently taken to be the literal depiction of the bureaucratic phenomenon wherever and however it might subsequently have evolved. Thus, a historical conception of bureaucracy, identified with top managerial prerogative in German state organizations, initially defined what bureaucracy was taken to be. Increasingly, as the concept was translated into post Second World War empirical social science Weber’s concern with bureaucracy as a tool of technical rationality was replaced with the narrower conception of efficiency (Pugh 1966). The cultural, historical, political and economic analysis which Weber (1978) pioneered, the institutional context, within which his conception of bureaucracy was embedded, was overshadowed. What was lost was the institutional character of bureaucracy.

Weber regarded bureaucracy as both an institution and an organization form.

Institutionally, he focused on the ethos of bureaucracy, the specific character of the bureaucrat, and the experience of things being done according to rule rather than caprice. Recent writers such as Fligstein (1990; 2001) and above all, du Gay (2005), focus on these institutional aspects. Kallinikos (2006: 20) observes that the institution of bureaucracy is an 'outcome of complex cultural and social developments. These reflect, among other things, the institutional embeddedness of property rights and the employment contract and the legal and socio-political processes for assigning jurisdictions and laying out the rules of accountability in democratic societies.' Thus, all specific contexts in which bureaucracies flourish would be bureaucratic in their own way.

Because the ideal type was a construct from a highly specific place and time it would have been odd for later and different realities to correspond to it. Nonetheless, some sociologists made such comparisons. When writers such as Gouldner (1954) investigated organizations, they compared the realities they found with the type that they had inherited. However, since the type was always an imaginary and synthetic construct from a specific place and time this is not an immediately sensible activity. It ends up privileging the subjectivities of those members whose everyday usage first grounded the construct. The type becomes reified. It takes on a life of its own. The analysts' casting of the ideal type sets it in concrete long past its use-by date.

How current constructions necessarily relate to the different circumstances in which other member's constructs occurred might raise questions about the foundational limits of the initial conception, and why it should so frame and circumscribe debate. It might, but for a long time it rarely did. In the 1950s bureaucracy became the object of critical attack on a dehumanized world in which the bureaucratic machine was seen to be destroying emotions and individualities in pursuit of efficiency (Gouldner 1955). Such views were hardly novel; for instance, Marx (1867) had explored them in *Capital*, nor was the most important point that Weber had left out the unintended consequences of the internal working of a concrete bureaucracy (Merton 1940; Dubin 1949; Gouldner 1955; Crozier 1964).

Weber's famous ideal type of bureaucracy became widely used as the basis for case studies (Burns and Stalker 1961; Selznick 1949). Later bureaucracy was both heralded by, and then seen as superseded in, taxonomic approaches to organizations (Pugh and Hickson 1976). These saw the ideal type elements abstracted by Weber with respect to German nineteenth century bureaucracy become the definitive features of a functionalist conception of organization structure as an essential form, determined in its particular patterns by specific local contingencies, such as size or technology. Conceptualized as a set of stable structural arrangements emerging from a composite of variables that denote bureaucratization, such as standardization, formalization and so on, the essence of bureaucracy became frozen as organization structure, rather like a liquefied jelly that could be poured into different moulds to set, and thus produce different shapes as variations on the essential 'jellyness' of the essence. The contingencies – of size, technology, environment and even something imagined as 'national culture' – provided the moulds.

The focus on bureaucracy as an organization form, rather than as an institution, has been pervasive in organization theories. On these criteria, concrete organizations may be seen as more or less bureaucratic in their characteristics, depending on how they

are rated on the measures taken to denote the dimensions of bureaucracy. Martindale (1960: 383) suggested that we should "compare different empirical configurations, not empirical configurations and types" as any specific type is always historically bounded and "destined to be scrapped".

Martindale's (1960) advice was not widely heeded in organization theory. For several authors, analysing bureaucracy did not involve consideration of whether or not it actually existed but only examining the concrete conditions that might enable us to situate such and such organization somewhere along an abstract continuum (Gouldner 1956). For instance, Hall's study of the degree of bureaucratisation, following in the footsteps of Bendix (1956), tended to confirm that "bureaucracy in general may be viewed as a matter of degree, rather than of kind" (Hall 1963: 37). With the characterization of bureaucracy as a matter of dimensions, and the collection of data on them, the typology became taxonomy. The characteristics abstracted from Weber and other writers were taken to be constitutive categorically shared features that bestowed family resemblances on all organizations. If all efficient bureaucracies were alike, every inefficient bureaucracy would be inefficient in its own way, one might say. Epistemologically, subsequent analysis became caught in a historical cul-de-sac of ever-diminishing returns as contingency scholars sought to defend the essentially conceived ontological structure of the underlying configurationally moulded model against all comers. The work of Lex Donaldson (1996) is the exemplar of such tendencies, although he misses the essential institutional features of bureaucracy in his search for contingent universalisms.

By standardizing the requirements of role performance and formalizing the process of role taking, recruitment and appointment, the bureaucratic organization became the vehicle through which jobs became potentially available to anyone who fulfilled requirements of the job specification. It is through the very separation of the role from the person that such an availability can be rendered possible, and an employment contract signed that makes the term of the agreement legible and enforceable at law (Kallinikos 1006: 135-6).

What it is difficult to grasp from empiricist approaches to bureaucracy conceived as a bundle of formal organization characteristics captured as variables, is bureaucracy's role as a constitutive element of modernity. Bureaucracy provided a novel way of orchestrating the individual-organization relationship through an organization form premised on the ethical values of universalism and meritocracy, on that was necessarily concordant in its rational legal form with the emergence of universalism and meritocracy (Kallinikos (2006: 135).

### **Criticisms of bureaucracy**

To oppose bureaucracy is to oppose a particular conception of modernity as rational legal, meritocratic and universalistic. Such criticisms came increasingly into focus from the 1980s onwards. Much of this criticism was banal, criticising actually existing bureaucracies in terms of abstracted and utopian standards of efficiency. Utopias always have their own horrors to unfold – it is in the nature of the genre, one might say (ten Bos 2002). Actual bureaucracies rarely achieve the efficiency that might be attributed to them in any pure state; rather than setting up an ideal, abstracted type, as the standard measure of efficiency and then proclaiming, dolefully, on the ruination of things in the present, a less utopian way of proceeding might be found. Rather than

seek for the utopian perfection of a pure bureaucratic type, perhaps one should instead search for forms of hybridity that actual organizations adopt as their designers and social constructors seek to make sense of templates and times? In other words, rather than dismissing actual bureaucracy as inefficient when compared with its ideal type, wouldn't one be better employed in looking at the ways in which the actualities of bureaucracy are socially constructed in specific locales?

Bureaucracy, construed as an ideal type, has been seen as the source of much of what is wrong in the contemporary world. Recent history has been replete with rallying cries against fundamental errors said to emanate from the bacillus of bureaucracy. It is a culture that, seemingly, must be terminated with extreme prejudice. Critics of public sector management regard bureaucracy as something that must be "banished" (Osborne and Plastrik 1997); government must be "reinvented" (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). The reason is simple: bureaucracy is said to be inefficient. In the popular view, as du Gay (2000) or Pugh (1966) point out, bureaucracy is synonymous with inefficient business administration, pettifogging legalism, and red tape. For critics, demolition of bureaucratic systems will further efficiency: "Employee empowerment does not mean every decision in the organization must be made democratically or through consensus" (Osborne and Plastrik 1997: 227). Empowerment will foster effectiveness not egalitarian and universalistic values. These institutional attributes must be sacrificed in the name of efficiency.

Perversely, in the private sector, other critics are more enamoured of democracy than efficiency because the attributes of bureaucracy "are maladaptive when massive change, environmental dynamism and considerable uncertainty are the norm" and there is a "growing asymmetry of power between the managerial agents in charge of them [the mega global firms] and most other groups in the society, including consumers, employees, and members of the local communities in which the firms' operations are located" (Child and McGrath 2001: 1136; 1140). The hierarchical configuration of power and the multiplication of different stakeholders mean that power and representation must be seen from different perspectives. Power within the bureaucratic apparatus fails to reflect the representation of interests to which it should attend.

Heckscher and Donnellon (1994) and Ashcraft (2001) suggest that entrepreneurially oriented organizations must try to base their efficiency and legitimacy on a different model of commitment of members, supported by a strategy of decentralization of authority and the granting of empowerment. Empowerment and the question of morality are relevant to post bureaucratic trends. At the core of these trends is the idea that the person in role should be replaced with the enthusiastic participation of the whole person, wholly committed, to the courses of action chosen. The emergent notion of post bureaucratic organisation has very significant similarities to that of an empowered democracy. Its central concept has been suggested to be that "everyone takes responsibility for the success of the whole" (Heckscher 1994: 24). Therefore, such organizations must develop informed consensus amongst their members, rather than relying on authority and hierarchical supervision. Above all, they must try and involve the whole person, rather than merely those aspects of the person invested in role. The development of agreement, it is said, has to be situated in interactive settings where the gathering of information increases collective power. Organizational politics in post bureaucracies will be characterized by the use of influence and persuasion

rather than power exercised through command and control.

The most salient implications of post bureaucracy are conceived as political: they concern relationships between individual members, and between members and their organization, the nature of power and authority, the conception of equity instead of equality and, above all, the existence of flexible and permanent dialogues concerning the rules of action. In some respects there are echoes of earlier ideal types, such as Rothschild-Whitt and Whitt's (1986) and Rothschild-Whitt's (1979) collectivist organization, and Lazega's (2000) collegial organization, that were constructed in terms of mutually opposite criteria to bureaucracy.

At the core of the politics of these post bureaucracies, it is often argued, is a new conception of trust. Trust is a crucial resource in post bureaucratic settings because everyone must believe that the others are seeking mutual benefit rather than maximizing personal gain (Heckscher 1994: 25). Leadership is not exercised through complex systems of rules but via guidelines for action, which take the form of principles, "expressing the reasons behind the rules" (Heckscher 1994: 26). Hence, the rules are not simply taken-for-granted, with all the attendant economies of action, but have to be elaborated and on an ad hoc case by case basis. Internal social processes decide who decides, the decision-making power not being derived from official rank but from the nature of the problems at hand. A deliberative and interactive structure is supposed to come from the necessary fluidity of internal relationships. Post bureaucracies are "networks of relationships based on specific performances and abilities (...) people one can "work with" on particular projects rather than "live with" (Heckscher 1994: 55). What is sought is the "substitution of normative identification with the organization for the purely utilitarian traditional employment nexus" (Child and McGrath 2001: 1143). The traditional bureaucratic commitment "We will take care of you if you do what we have asked", once premised on the celebrated balance of inducements and contributions (March and Simon 1950), seems now to be a dead letter (Heckscher and Applegate 1994: 7), they suggest.

What is demanded today by bureaucracy's critics, especially the more extreme such as Peters (2003), is total commitment and complete trust by the member in their organization and the subsumption of their identity to that of being an organization member *in toto*. They want to overthrow bureaucracy both substantively and in principle. Bureaucracy should be replaced with a new kind of total institution in which energized team members commit themselves wholly to the goals of the organization. Tom Peters proselytizes constant revolutionary change in *Re-imagine! Scorecard and Revolution Planner* and treats such a revolutionary approach as a process for sudden intuitive leaps of understanding, or epiphany, to combat the hardening of metaphorically managerial arteries in bureaucratic structures.

Kallinikos (2006: 141) captures the thinking behind these revolutionary slogans very clearly. While bureaucracy may be seen as too inward looking, too concerned with its own procedures, with doing things according to rule, this critique 'understates the fact that extreme concern with external contingencies and adaptability in the long run hollows out social systems (as they hollow out individuals) from the inside.' These hollow men and women of the corporation would be driven wholly by events, by contingent demands and their commitment and involvement in responding to them, rather than by detached behaviour in role that enables the actor to achieve some

distance from the minutiae of everyday organizational necessity. Such detachment in role is one of the old fashioned verities that the new revolutionaries would smash in order to achieve post bureaucracy.

Peters' (2003) accentuates a 'Them and Us' mentality. The dualism is presented as an imperative to managers to unleash organizational change programs with which to pursue a witch hunt within their organizations. The whole emphasis stresses that managers should seek out and label what are the old and smash them – 'out with the old' and 'in with the new': new work context; new technology; new organization; new customers; new markets; new work; new people; new management.

A cult of personality is entailed in the Peters process. Peters is quite explicit about this; for him, the masses are confused and unable to find direction unless they have charismatic leaders able to project their egos in a cult of extraordinary personality. The confusion of the masses is a thesis that requires the antithesis of a great leader to lead them to the sunny uplands of a new synthesis:

I think the Iacocca thing, the Peters and Waterman thing, the Robbins thing, the [Ken] Blanchard thing, and the Hamel-Porter thing is a very specific reaction of a whole lot of people who are confused by all the shit that's going down. When people are confused, they want people on white horses to lead them. Obviously it didn't have to be me and Bob, and Blanchard and [John] Naisbitt and Porter and so on, any more than it had to be Iacocca and Ted Turner. But it had to be (Postrel, 1997).

What is being struggled against is also personified in a cult of personality. In order to give shape to the struggle against bureaucracy, Peters identifies it with a specific reactionary figure and ethos. The figure is Robert McNamara and the ethos is that of the Harvard Business School. Peters is on frequent record as saying that his whole life has been a struggle against the legacy of Robert McNamara, which he saw as having become the essential *de facto* wisdom of the Harvard Business School, setting the pace for large American enterprise in the post war era. 'Start with Taylorism, add a layer of Druckerism and a dose of McNamaraism, and by the late 1970's you had the great American corporation that was being run by bean counters.'<sup>2</sup> McNamara and Harvard merely represented the tip of an iceberg. Opposing them was not enough. Bureaucracy had to be smashed and new organization forms emerge from its ashes.

The valorization of the charismatic leader in a cult of personality, who leads, guides and governs not according to rule but according to convictions, is the most worrying aspect of the whole post bureaucracy package. Hollowed out men and women following the enthusiasms of the moment, as these are filtered through the convictions of their leaders and which they are supposed to enact with trust, as empowered and totally committed individuals, begin to look worryingly like the inmates of total institutions (see Clegg et al, 1006, chapter 6). Nonetheless, as Kalikoss (2006: 145-6) suggests, they increasingly people the scenarios of contemporary HRM (Human Resource Management), a vocational discourse that targets the individual as a 'psychological unity', seeking to minimize the friction between the character of the person and the needs of the roles that they fulfil organizationally, allowing the expansion of work and professional concerns into the lifeworld that was once held secure outside the role of the bureaucrat. At its core, the new post bureaucracy seeks a

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<sup>2</sup> Sourced from <http://www.businessballs.com/tompetersinsearchofexcellence.htm>

totalizing creep into and envelopment of an increasing part of the organizational members' lifeworld in a manner that would, from the perspective of bureaucracy As an institution, be seen as corrosive or destructive. New technologies, in particular, make this attempted takeover easier to accomplish. We turn now to a presentation of some of the characteristics of the new organizational forms that are seen to be replacing bureaucracy. We shall address these in terms of the dialectics of decomposition and recomposition.

### **Decomposing bureaucracy**

Behind the rhetoric of the need for revolutionary change there is often a technological determinism. The major external fact in speeding up organization change in recent times has been the Internet and associated information and communication technologies (ICT). The Internet enables speedier, more efficient and cost effective access to resources and customers and a different set of ownership, location and organizational capabilities than was possible just a decade before. Contrast Amazon with a traditional book retailer.

Kallinikos (2006) argues that digital technologies allow tasks that were previously embedded in the 'fixed space' of traditional organizations (for example accounting, inventory management, production operations or financial management) to be dissolved and recomposed as 'informatised' modules or services (Kallinikos 2006: 96). Computer screens have become the altars of the new secular religion of change. As secularized religions go, that of the digital devotees is fairly apocalyptic and a little messianic. There was a past, irrevocably broken with through the advances of digital technologies, and there is a bright sunlit future, a veritable New Jerusalem, just out of reach but visible through the miasma of the imperfect here-and-now. Only more devotion to newer and better digital technologies, an utter commitment requiring more dollars and tithes on the altar plate, can clear the present miasma. Digital technologies are implicated in an historic shift dissolving bureaucratic organizations. The New Jerusalem will be a robust, almost Quaker, Protestantism not a Catholicism, with its attendant hierarchy and bureaucracy. The post bureaucratic individual, lost in the lonely existence of their soul, digital virtuosi all, will communicate with their Organizational Master, or at least, the Master's disciples, in a wholly unmediated and direct way. No priests; no bureaucrats – just believers and their digital devices, the only artefacts the new religious virtuosi need.

We should, perhaps, pause – are not all utopia's, however beautifully glimpsed, false dawns? Digital technologies may be mapping paths to the future but they are no yellow brick road. Along the way lies not the wizardry of radically changed organizations made virtual (Kallinikos, 2006: 100) by the 'dematerialization' of work processes and more 'inclusive' organizational designs. What is mapped out is a deconstruction of the scalar and career elements of bureaucracy for all but the elites. New entrants must learn to compete and win if they are to pierce into the inner sanctum of the bureaucracy that remains. Not for them the golden chains, unless they can be seen to triumph in and make themselves a value proposition for the elites (Kallinkos, 2006: 109).

In the nineteenth century the typewriter was a profound mechanical invention. It speeded up clerical and recording systems that had been based on hand writing. In Weber's (1978) view the typewriter directly contributed to the creation of modern

managerial bureaucracies. The computer vastly extends the capabilities of the keyboard, even while retaining many of its apparent features, but its digital capabilities also transform the possible nature of organizational design.

Almost every organization today is awash with e-technology and software. Most of the tools that are bought are not revolutionary in their managerial impact; they merely enable managers to do what they would have done anyway but do it better and faster. The new tools are based on technological innovations that drastically change the hardware used to produce a good or service. For instance, e-mail replaces and speeds-up the postal system or search engines such as Google replace and speed-up the reference library; yet, as Beauvallet and Balle (2002) argue, revolutionary new technologies do not necessarily produce managerial revolutions. What digital technologies can do is to deliver business as usual much faster. Basic e-technologies, such as e-mail, websites, and search engines can be used effectively to obtain office productivity improvements. They make it possible to generate new channels for communicating with customers, suppliers and staff. The digital revolution not only enhances service productivity but can transform what were once broadcast models of distribution – from a few centres to many customers – into narrow-cast communication where there a great many points of distribution and reception – think of Limewire and downloads or favourite blogs. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, digital technologies make extended supply chain operations feasible and reliable.

The major advantage of digital technologies for business and organizations are their virtual possibilities for disaggregating existing designs. Increasingly, organizations segment and specialize activities that are critical to their competitive advantage and those that are not. The non-core functions, such as back office accounting, telemarketing, or programming are outsourced to parts of the world where the wage is one third to one tenth the cost in the home market, dramatically reducing operating costs and increasing competitiveness.

Outsourcing is not a new phenomenon: in major production industries such as automotives, the outsourcing of initially non-core and latterly core functions and services has been progressively used since the 1930s (Macaulay, 1966). However, services outsourcing, although common for some time in specialist areas such as advertising and legal services, increased dramatically from the mid-1990s. The outsourcing of sectors such as IT and Telecommunications and Business Processing occurred with the dawning of advanced digital telecommunications services that facilitated the availability of this option. The imperative to outsource – as distinct from the opportunity to do so – was a result of other dynamics that occurred in parallel with the digital age; primarily globalization and increased competition, leading to a continual need to improve efficiency from productivity and to increase service levels. Thus, vertically integrated services were no longer seen as the best organizational arrangements for gaining competitive advantage. The idea of extending the organization's capabilities, whether core or non-core, to a third party, is confirmed in recent research in the area by Gottfredson, Puryear and Phillips (2005). Gottfredson et al.'s (2005) framework suggests that competitive advantage can be gained by optimizing uniqueness of function versus the proprietary nature of the organizations' capabilities. Outsourcing combined with digitalization has proven to be a potent mix.

The result of digitalization has not really been the development of post bureaucratic organizations that was widely imagined in the new organizational forms literature. In fact, what has happened has been a decomposition of existing organization forms, especially bureaucracies, and the externalization of bureaucratic routines into either supply chain inputs or sub-contracted and out-sourced service providers.

There are now very many new niche-based business opportunities that were not previously evident. Perhaps the one that we will all be most familiar with is the call centre. When we have a problem with that new gadget or that bill we have just received the number that we call is not that of the organization that supplied it to us. It will be a call centre that handles that organization's account. Digital technology means that organizations can slake-off non-core elements of their business and contract other business, for which this is their core-technology, to handle that aspect of the business.

Call Centres are often the first point of contact that most customers have with virtual organization. Call Centres handle large volumes of telephone calls from and to internal and external customers. They emerged in the service sector in the late 1980s as an efficient way to conduct sales, marketing, and customer service functions. Usually they are unremarkable office buildings with many cubicles, within each of which is a computer monitor and telephony head-set. Usually the cubicles are about a meter deep, about 1.2 meters wide, and separated by a partition wall about 1.2 meters high. There might be many hundreds of these cubicles. With the development of VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), call centres can be located anywhere, in any country and still dial at local rates. Many are located in countries such as India where labor costs are far cheaper than in the more developed economies and where the skill basis is well developed, especially language capabilities in English. Call centres are organized in shifts of team workers, with employees answering or making calls. Team leaders monitor targets and manage performance.

The technology behind call centres is twofold: first the menu of FAQs and scripted responses, and second, automated call distribution (ACD) – the technological backbone of Call Centres. For the former, some Call Centres will be dedicated – dealing with one just one firm or organization's incoming calls while others will handle multiple accounts. Most scripts are prewritten and appear on the screen in front of the agent handling the call. The only real problems that can arise are when the agent is 'off script' – when the question doesn't conform to the problems for which they have answers. The ADC routes calls to the different operators on the next available basis, thus minimizing 'hold times', and maximizing the number of calls that any agent can handle, as well as ordering the queue of calls. Once the calls have been queued then each operator can expect to handle relatively the same number of calls per shift. Thus, each operator can be subject to surveillance of their performance. Winiecki (2006: 25) notes that data on more than 20 statistical records are recorded by the ADC on the performance of each operative, such as how long each call takes, how long the operative pauses between calls, how much time is spent on other related work, such as preparing data base records documenting the call, time logged on and off, break times and duration, and so on. It is, indeed, an electronic panopticon as Winiecki elaborates at length. Moreover, it is one that is capable of generating quite profound emotional dissonance, as Ball (2007) recognizes. The most common cause of emotional dissonance is frustrated and abusive customers, the necessity of sticking

to restrictive scripts, and the increased quantification of the performance management systems through the electronic panopticon.

Inbound call centres handle customer queries; employees have to be good listeners, good at keeping customers to questions that they are scripted to deal with, and being good listeners and empathetic when dealing with them. Length of time spent on each call is the major performance indicator. Efficiency is demonstrated by a greater volume of calls handled. Employees are also assessed according to the service quality levels they achieve. Outbound call centres try to sell goods and services to randomly chosen telephone customers and employees are assessed on the number of sales they make (Ball 2007).

Call centres combine elements of three different technology-based organization designs (Frenkel et al 1998). First, they are white collar bureaucracies, with extensive technical rules built in to the design of the work process: the scripts, the electronic measures of performance, and close supervision. Second, they are mass production flow-based labour processes. What flows through them on a 24/7 basis are telephone calls rather than oil or petro-chemicals. Third, each service encounter is a unique opportunity to either sell or service a customer satisfactorily. While each call will be different, the centres have high degrees of standardization in the available responses and sales pitches, although, because of the unpredictability of customer responses, operatives can display creativity and innovation in the way that they handle specific customers. Where more complex customer relationships exist, call centres can be innovative forms of work organization, suggest Wickham and Collins (2004).

Increasingly, call centres not only handle basic sales and customer services but are also locales for work to be outsourced to third-party providers, such as specialist HRM firms. These may either be entirely outsourced, or they could be co-sourced, where a call process is performed by both internal staff and external resources or in-sourced where a business sets up its own call processes in an overseas location, such as India. Outsourced firms rely on the premise that they are specialists in services that are only peripheral to the core business of their contract partners, and thus they are able to achieve efficiencies of scale, scope and quality in providing service, which are stipulated in the contract.

### **Recomposing bureaucracy through new organization forms**

If the call centre is the very model of the decomposed bureaucracy, what happens to the central heights of the bureau which are not outsourced? Concepts of new organizational forms all point the way to some version or other of a post bureaucratic future (Heckscher 1994), but no one term, other than the generic “new organizational forms” (Lewin, Long, and Carroll 2002) and “virtual organization” (Ahuja and Carley 1999; Black and Edwards 2000; Davidow and Malone 1992; De Sanctis and Monge 1999), has captured the imagination in the way that the term *bureaucracy* once did. Thus, new organizational forms are many but united by one thing – they are all conceived in opposition to the classic model of bureaucracy. For this reason they are sometimes termed post bureaucratic organizations, as Fairtlough (2007) suggests. At their core he suggests are two main features: reduction of hierarchy and of coercive elements in bureaucracy and a move towards less rigid and perhaps apparently less rationalistic ways of organizing.

For Fairtlough (2007), the alternatives to hierarchical bureaucracy are suggested as *heterarchy* and *responsible autonomy*. As he argues, heterarchy comprises dispersed leadership, dispersed power, and a balance of power, with mutual accountability. A good example of heterarchy would be the structure of professional service firms, such as law firms. Although these tend to become more hierarchical as they grow in size, the advantages of partnership continue to be recognized. The procedures in many successful law firms are quasi-democratic, with voting by all partners deciding key issues. A great deal of conversation between partners takes place before a vote. However, the nature of these conversations is strongly influenced by the prospect of the subsequent vote (Fairtlough 2007). Responsible autonomy depends on encapsulating relatively autonomous roles as responsible to rules, both explicit and tacit, which govern the interaction of autonomous actors or elements or divisions of an organization. Dunford et al (2007) provide a succinct account of the relationships between design and form.

Strong organizational relationships have been posited between design and form. Think of the image of a central business district and contrast a traditional village with a corporate cityscape, crowding out the small-scale domestic architecture in its surrounds. Could the corporate organizations be easily headquartered in the village? Could the villagers easily live in or adapt to the corporate-scape? The literature on new organizational forms suggests that modern corporations can become similar to high-tech cottage industries, as everyone is wired from anywhere. Working virtually, there may be no need to concentrate in a few blocks of central business district real estate. In its most virtual new form, organization will be composed of networks of interdependent but independent knowledge-based teams working in different continents and time zones. Such work can be organized on a rolling twenty-four-hour process and often involves multiple global collaborators (Clarke and Clegg 1998: 293). The work activities are often associated with digital data-based projects, such as film or copy editing, computer programming, or graphic designing.

Many new forms of organization are emerging these days: the network and cellular form (Miles, Snow, Matthews, and Coleman 1997), the federal organization (Handy 1993), the creative compartment (Fairtlough 1994), the postmodern and flexible firm (Clegg 1990; Volberda 2002), the virtual organization (Goldman, Nagel, and Preiss 1995), and the individualized corporation (Ghoshal and Bartlett 1997). Clarke and Clegg (1998) review the mainstreams in the literature of these “post” organizations—all of which have in common that they are conceived in terms that are opposed to and seen as superseding bureaucratic models of structure. Often, in a generic sense, these post organizations are referred to as “new organizational forms.” In Table 1 we indicate some of the terms and sources of new organizational forms.

**Table 1: Concepts of organization structure**

Concept	Characteristics	Author and Year
Adhocracy	This refers to organizations that have simply grown, without much explicit design. They are characterized by a lack of structure and formal rules. Often small, creative agencies are adhocracies, such as a design studio.	Mintzberg 1983
Technocracy	Organization structure enabled by technological innovations. Organizations that comprise people who work on a common data base from remote locations would be a good example. Research networks such as the Genome project would be a good example.	Burris 1993
Internal Market	Flexible markets and internal contracts within an organization structure characterize these forms of organization, often adopted by public sector organizations in search of greater flexibility and efficiency.	Malone, Yates and Benjamin 1987
Clans	A clan organization is based on shared culture rather than formal rules, much as the members of an extended anthropological clan might be in a traditional society. The culture is overwhelmingly oral rather than recorded in formal rule-like statements. For instance, hi-tech start ups in places such as Silicon Valley.	Ouchi 1980
Heterarchy	A form of organization resembling a network or fishnet. Rather than their being a single chain of authority – a hierarchy – there are plural connections between the individual members. Professional firms, such as Law Partnerships or Accounting Partnerships often correspond to this model.	Hedlund 1986
Virtual organization	An organization linked through virtual networks rather than formal rules, often involving several ostensibly separate organizations, often project-organized. <i>The crucial factor is that the network relations are virtually enabled.</i> Often data is moved with great rapidity around the virtual network and separate skill-sets work on it either in series or in parallel. This often is the preferred mode of design-oriented firms, such as architects studios, working on large projects with many other specialist partners, such as engineers, project management firms, designers, etc.	Davidow and Malone 1992
Network organization	An organization formed by intersecting and crosscutting linkages between several separate organizations, usually connected on a project basis, such as large scale civil engineering alliances between a public sector organization, such as a major utility, and other specialist construction, design and project management related firms. <i>The crucial factor here is that the partners have a more formal and enduring relationship than in the virtual organization, and are not restricted to work on digital data, such as movies, designs, etc.</i>	Biggart and Hamilton 1992 Powell 1990 Rockart and Short 1991
Postmodern organization	This is essentially a bureaucratic organization which has undergone a degree of de-differentiation of its structure; that is, it has become more integrated, less specialist, and more team-based. Japanese automobile companies – learning bureaucracies that are seeking to become less bureaucratic – would be a case in point.	Clegg 1990

According to Accenture (Harris, De Long, Donnellon 2001), the management

consultancy, there are key capabilities for managers to master in the new fast companies that are post bureaucratic. Making fast decisions is the first—and, arguably, the most important—capability for post bureaucratic managers, they suggest. Managers need to be able to do their own data analysis on the spot, and to make decisions with limited information—recognizing they may be wrong. If they do make a mistake, they have to cut their losses and quickly reverse directions, knowing that ultimately making that mistake will have been less costly than delaying any decision too long. They must continually balance the need for speed against the need to be right, keeping an eye out for decisions that, if made too quickly, could not be reversed before causing real harm to the organization.

One of the reasons for speed is that the Internet and the digital revolution make many partnerships, networks and collaborations possible. The ability to identify and evaluate potential partnerships, build key relationships and successfully negotiate the terms of a deal will be critical capabilities for managers in post bureaucratic organizations in the digital economy. Alliances will move such organizations toward strategic objectives, hence managers need to be able quickly to evaluate a potential ally's financial strength and whether or not they can deliver the value they are promising. Managers also need to build rapport quickly with potential partners because a lot of collaborations are really experiments, thus managers need to negotiate less formal, less structured relationships as a way of finding out which alliances really work for both parties. A strong creative bent is essential for negotiating web partnerships in order to involve collaborative conflicts.

Where these partnerships are put in place we are dealing with what Castells (2000) called, in *The Rise of the Network Society*, the fundamental form transforming post bureaucracies. Networks can be understood as a long-term relationship between organizations that share resources to achieve common goals through negotiated actions. Castells identified Cisco Systems as the world's leading and most typical network enterprise. Cisco follows a 'networked business model' demonstrating that networks are a means of production at the same time as being the end product of the business. Cisco uses the Internet and web-based technology to maintain a global network of customers, employees and suppliers. It is reasonable to assume that the Accenture consultants might have had Cisco as one of the companies in mind when producing its list of capabilities.

The Accenture report suggests that in the post bureaucratic organization technology will not be a support system but the very basis of the business model. Hence, post bureaucratic organizations will be technologically fetishistic: hence, the digital devotion of which I have spoken in religious terms, only half-jokingly. Managers will routinely invest time in keeping up with evolving technologies—reading, meeting with experts, and working with the technology first hand. They will develop a network of trusted technical experts – disciples – who can offer guidance and will have to "unlearn" old technologies, just as the religious convert must unlearn old faiths, which act as barriers to the new. Multiple partnerships, collaborations and networks means that successful managers in post bureaucratic organizations will have to learn to balance and devote time to the demands of multiple and diverse stakeholders—members of their own team, colleagues from other units in the company, external partners, customers, and shareholders in a new and complex community of other faithful who are digitally devolved.

Managing at the speed of the Internet, in fast organizations, means that virtually all of the core assumptions about a company's business, and market trends in general, will be up for grabs. Successful managers, the Accenture researchers suggest, will seek insight from a range of sources: they will read widely—not just business publications but books and articles on social trends, history—even science fiction. They will network extensively, not just with peers but with contacts in dissimilar fields, industries or business functions. And they will take an experimental approach, learning by doing, by surfing the net, looking for opportunities to structure experiments around new business concepts or Web applications, and to capture and spread the learning that results. There is little from the Accenture list that suggests any great specificity about e-management in networked based firms whose business model sits astride the Internet.

Additional research suggests that for new firms in the e-economy many aspects of the disaggregation of traditional organization designs that is under way are more social than technological. Barbara Adkins and her colleagues (2007: 922) have recently written that in the 'knowledge economy ... [t]he product is no longer tangible, the process is no longer straightforward, and the outcomes – “success” or “failure” – are no longer exclusively defined by the bottom line. The traditional firm that works independently no longer stands up in comparison with the organizational and professional networks that cross-cut and break down traditional organizational and disciplinary boundaries.'

Networking has become a core business competence for firms such as Cisco in a largely technical marketing and supply chain set of relations. However, there is one puzzling aspect of the knowledge economy: if digital disaggregation makes location anywhere possible how come so many firms cluster close to each other in locations such as Silicon Valley – where Cisco Systems has stayed resolutely headquartered? The answer resides in that concept of 'embeddedness': Certain places become magnets for particular fields of activity, like hi-tech in Silicon Valley, movie-making in Hollywood or Mumbai, or creative design in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley. Let's look at the last one in a little more detail, as Brisbane is a place I happen to know well.

Fortitude Valley, or the Valley, as locals refer to it, has long been a slightly seedy area of the city, close to the old wharves on the Brisbane River, separated from the city of Brisbane by a ridge and the undeveloped site of a Cathedral, in the past a place associated with prostitution and illegal gambling, as well as Chinatown. But, like many other edgy areas of major cities, the Valley has become cool. Cheap leases, warehouses ripe for conversion, street level access rather than anonymous high rises, and a traditional café and restaurant scene have seen many new design businesses locate there.

A specific ecology of business has developed in the Valley, where social and business networks overlay each other in a shared sense of identity and community, as well as dense networks of referrals and problem-solving. Much of the work that individual firms do is digitally based but often involves collaborative project-based work with other creative people in the same neighbourhood. So while much of the work is internet-mediated it occurs between people involved in projects that are very much

socially mediated. It is not so much the technology that creates new possibilities for organization design that is disaggregated and project based but a network of ties premised on social proximity, in both a spatial and cultural sense. Projects and project teams are the nodes that connect in a series of value-chain relationships that bind members and projects together. Connected by these nodes are team members, clients, suppliers, users, and other key stakeholders, who comprise a socio-professional community. Digital capabilities maintain and make possible the network but they are not its essence: that resides in the deep embeddedness of the creative teams in a specific place and set of related spaces that constitute the Valley as these creative people experience and use it as a resource, or what the French sociologist, Bourdieu (1998) called symbolic capital.

The ultimate contradiction of the Internet revolution is that although firms could be located anywhere in cyberspace, they still seem to cluster together in specific quarters of global cities such as New York, London, and Sydney. The digital world moves fundamentally towards concentration, standardization and control, as Castells acknowledge in both *The Rise of the Network society* (2000) and *The Internet Galaxy* (2001). An obvious reason is that on the average in the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) economies, about 36% to 40% of what is spent in the economy is spent by the national state, in terms of defence, health, education, and so on, and these sorts of expenditures tend to be well grounded in national capabilities and concentrated, indeed, clustered, in national space.

Castells' account of the digital utopia is premised on seeing extensive organizational subcontracting through inter-firm networks, the use of 'multidirectional' networks of technologically dynamic firms, and the development of a plurality of strategic alliances between small and large firms (Castells, 2000: 163-188). More innovative flexible responses demand both inter-organizational networking and the functional decentralization of managerial structures (Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994; Nohria and Berkley, 1994). 'Network enterprises' are characterized by decentralized loosely coupled, flexible, non-hierarchical and fluid forms, horizontally networking (Hill et al 2000: 563), finding their clearest expression in high-tech sectors such as IT, biotechnology and advanced manufacturing (Castells 2000).

The Internet enables space to supersede time because, in a world of trade in symbolic images such as software, currencies, and other forms of representation, time is no longer an issue. If you have trading facilities in the right time zones, for instance, you can trade twenty-four hours a day, moving money, or other "signs" of commerce, symbolically, across the globe, from London to New York to Tokyo to Sydney to London. There is an increasing separation of the "real" economy of production and its simulacra in the "symbol economy" of financial flows and transactions. A new international division of labour compresses and fragments both space and distance in such a way that not only production but also various business service industries become distributed in unlikely places. Global currencies facilitate trade across the world: MBAs become global warriors in the new world order. New divisions restructure geographic space. In principle, anywhere is virtually immediately accessible by information and communication technologies. In practice, most national capitals can be reached within twenty-four hours of air travel.

The most radical expression of network organization is that of Michael Hardt and

Antonio Negri (200X), who envisage a new form of global democratic potential in network organizations, which they term the “multitude.” They conceive a network in terms inspired by Deleuze and Guattari (1984) who conceived of a network as an open system with no underlying structure or hierarchy, which they termed “the rhizome.” The term is used metaphorically and is drawn from botanical usage, where it means a thick underground horizontal stem that produces roots and has shoots that develop into new plants. The rhizome can be expressed in terms of several principles, suggests Munro (2007: 273).

1. Any point in a rhizome can be connected to any other (like a distributed network), and objects of different kinds are connected within the rhizome. This is the principle of connection and heterogeneity.
2. The rhizome is defined by its lines of flight rather than by points internal to it. As the rhizome makes connections with the outside, it undergoes a metamorphosis; like a piece of music, it transforms itself with each new note. This is the principle multiplicity.
3. The rhizome can be broken at any spot, and it will either sprout a new line of growth or continue along an old line. Deleuze and Guattari described this kind of network as “the wisdom of plants,” by means of which they move, expand, and develop their territory. The rhizome moves by following a flow, of wind, of rain, of water. This is the principle of a signifying rupture.
4. The rhizome does not have an underlying generative structure; intensive states and thresholds replace the idea of an underlying topology, this is referred to as the principle of cartography.

Virtual spaces in which information can spread in an unregulated, nomadic fashion would be examples of rhizomatic networks, such as on-line communities for file sharing such as YouTube or Linux, which function by making novel connections and expanding and maintaining internal communal relations. Rhizomatic networks, such as Limewire, are challenging the dominance of older bureaucratically organized music companies, for instance.

In the new digital world IT reduces the transaction costs of information flows, increasing the efficiencies which allow an expanded field of operations. On the other hand, these technologies are associated with more flexible and decentralised management and organizational structures, since they allow for highly efficient communication between functionally and spatially separate units. IT networks thus allow quasi-autonomous, geographically dispersed production units to be embedded in ever more integrated corporate structures.

### **The politics of post bureaucracy**

In contemporary post bureaucracies the promotion of socio-economic cooperation is achieved through the manipulation of specific trust/control mechanisms, thanks, above all, to the form of networks, suggests Castells (1996). These hybrids evoke some types of technologies of trust, which make politically viable a fuzzy, but nevertheless active, system of concentrated power. The “organizational hybridisation” analysed by Ferlie et al (1996) in the British health-care sector, demonstrates the political aspect of the dynamics implied. Classical administrative [bureaucratic] power is maintained, because these post bureaucratic hybrids “have the technical and ideological capacity to combine and re-combine selected elements of managerialism with pre-existing structures of political, administrative and professional power” (Reed

2001: 220). As Reed has argued (1999), these hybrids often generate considerable mistrust, if not downright opposition, on the part of some groups of experts, who sense a decline in the conditions enabling the exercise of autonomous judgement.

Power in bureaucracy was largely determined through career opportunities. An inability to fit in, to comport in the appropriate way, or to simply blend into the *habitus*, was a sufficient reason, on many occasions, for a person's career opportunities to be questioned and perhaps restricted. Even when the person might appear singularly inappropriate as an organization member in many ways, if their was good fit in terms of *habitus* their future was usually relatively unquestioned (see Kim Philby's [1968] account of Guy Burgess' everyday life)

The question of power remains at the core of post bureaucracy, but it is less the dialectic of *habitus* and career that structures it. The post bureaucratic hybrid is a "loosened community" (Courpasson and Dany 2003), where relationships and groupings are temporarily maintained, where individuals' destinies are more and more separated, where the institutionalised dialogues and interactions are operated through sometimes uncertain and barely legible networks of control, of influence and of friendship. Consequentially, there is far less opportunity for the formation of stable views of the person in situ.

Adler (2001) analyses the general evolution of firms toward "trust and community systems". He suggests mapping institutions in a three-dimensional representation, making it possible to consider the variety of possible organizational models entailed by the hybridisation process (Adler 2001: 219). Hierarchy can be combined with trust mechanisms, producing first-degree bureaucratic hybrids, such as "dynamic bureaucracy" (Blau 1955) or "enabling bureaucracy" (Adler and Borys 1996). He points out the "refinements of hierarchy" existing within business firms: the introduction of more formal procedures (TQM, product and software development processes), the strengthening of planning techniques (in HRM, in project management), of control instruments to assess the projects and performances. Simultaneously, in a post bureaucratic manner, he argues that the necessary sharing of knowledge in business firms "depends equally critically on a sense of shared destiny ... a sense of mutual trust" to improve and reinforce employee commitment. Even the form of trust entailed by contemporary organizations is rational, according to Adler: "leadership seems to have shifted toward a form of trust consonant with the ethos of 'fact-based management', independent inquiry" (Adler 2001: 227). He sees this shift as constituting a bureaucratic hybrid removed from the traditional bureaucratic deference to established authority, but which, simultaneously, relies on a rational and formalized apparatus. The rhetoric of trust and dialogue that constitutes the post bureaucratic argument must not lead us simply to forget the existence of "façades of trust" (Hardy et al. 1998: 71), where trust is not necessarily undertaken "with reciprocity in mind and may, on the contrary, be intended to maintain or increase power differentials."

The person in post bureaucracy is not the *épitomé* of the trusting and trusted subject that is sometimes suggested. Lack of trust is the very reason why post bureaucracies' organizational arrangements are somewhat authoritarian. The pressure to perform is intense, and business leaders implement tough supervisory processes. These underlying authoritarian mechanisms are largely constituted by tight time-reporting

schedules for milestones and progress in specific projects. As a hybrid system of tensions between opposed goals, post bureaucracies build bridges between domination and self-determination (Romme 1999), in “the paradoxes and tensions that arise from enacting oppositional forms” (Ashcraft 2001: 131). Ackoff terms this relationship between domination and self-determination one of ‘democracy’, which he defines as a regime based on three major features:

“(1) The absence of an ultimate authority, the circularity of power ; (2) the ability of each member to participate directly or through representation in all decisions that affect him or her directly; and (3) the ability of members, individually or collectively, to make and implement decisions that affect no one other than the decision-maker or decision-makers” (1994: 117).

Democracy is founded on a circular form of power because “anyone who has authority over others is subject to the collective authority of these others; hence its circularity” (Ackoff 1994: 118). But Ackoff is also a “realist” thinker. He reminds us that “divided labour must be coordinated and multiple coordinators must be coordinated; therefore, where complex tasks are involved, hierarchy cannot be avoided ...hierarchies, contrary to what many assume, need not be autocratic” (Ackoff 1999: 181).

What is distinctive about the contemporary post bureaucracy is that the major mechanism of the career has undergone a substantial change. In the bureaucracy, the career was an enclosed phenomenon, classically contained within one organization. Post bureaucracy differs significantly on this dimension. The inherent political dynamics of post bureaucratic organizations are condensed and concentrated on the figure of the project manager, circulating from project to project, alliance to alliance and network to network, torn between the *habitus* of their professional background and the reporting needs of the situation in which they are currently located.

### **Project management as the core of politics in post bureaucracy**

Careers will be increasingly project-based in post bureaucratic organizations. Increasingly they will be liquid careers, flowing now like mercury and then reconsolidating in a new plane of activity. The project – whether innovation, R&D, engineering, marketing or whatever, becomes the major vehicle for organization networks and alliances and developmental tasks within specific organizations – although, increasingly these will involve team members from other organizations. In such hybrid and often unclear situations conflict and confrontation are inevitable, so managing emotions becomes a crucial skill. Managers need to create a learning environment—coaching, hands-on-teaching and mentoring—to stimulate and develop their employees – and to manage expectations about evolving roles in projects. Employees will be sensitive to shifting roles and the signals they send about a person's worth. Accenture likens the task of the post bureaucratic manager to that of a coach trying to build a team out of a group of highly paid free agent talents, networking like crazy.

Taking together the characteristics of networks, alliances, collaborations, virtual relations, multiple stakeholders, liquid careers, and work in projects, it is not surprising that the figure of the project manager should have emerged as the point at which all the contradictions of post bureaucracy are concentrated. The virtual organization, apart from its digital accoutrements, seems too hazy to grab a firm hold

of and it is by no means clear that some of those things attributed as its effects, are not, in fact, the working out of the near-total dominance of market values (Kallinkos, 2006:109).

Recent management writers have seen project management as a circuit breaker for bureaucracy, and have contrasted the bureaucratic past with the future of a project-based post modern world (Clegg 1990). Elements of empowerment, self-reliance, trust and peer-based teamwork controls (Barker 1999) are supposed to portray project-management as an explicit and concrete appeal to post modern/post bureaucratic organizations. Looked at from below, from the perspective of the subaltern recruit, these organizations seem shape-shifters, project-based, with teams composing and decomposing, locations shifting as projects are completed, KPIs changing with projects, and one's individual organizational future uncertain. From the perspective of the elites the story is quite different. They know that they are over the threshold where the golden chains are evident. The largest problem that they must deal with is using the project shape-shifting that goes on outside the threshold as the basis for competitions and tournaments that will decide who may cross the threshold.

The hybrid political structure of post bureaucracy needs both elite differentiation to ensure a credible competition among various centres of power (individuals and/or sub-groups), and elite unification to ensure a relative consensus on basic values and on the legitimate rules of the internal political arena. Elites are differentiated from sub-elite members and the former distinguished from the necessary minimal similarity of the latter population of knowledge workers, experts, and professionals, with regard to values, demographic characteristics and types of aspirations.

Project management is one of the technologies used to design hybrid political structures for post bureaucracies for at least two major reasons. Project management encompasses principles of selection and education. Selection mechanisms are used to enhance the circulation as well as rivalries among sub-elite members (namely would-be project managers and actual project managers), while facilitating the control by incumbent oligarchs over local orderings (through appointments of new project leaders, circulation of experts among projects, "go/no go" decisions at certain critical steps of the projects...). Education mechanisms are used to create what Mills terms the "fraternity of the chosen" (1957: 143). In other words, project management can be viewed as a technology of power helping to create and sustain diffuse networks of acquaintanceship between "professionals", that legitimates "educational nurseries" in which project managers learn both the basics of the official body of knowledge, as well as a feel for those underlying values whose meaning they have to decipher (such as those values pertaining to "what is important to succeed in this place").

Project managers in post bureaucratic organizations cultivate a culture of ambition and a method of circulation. As they cycle through projects they strive for visibility for their achievements in managing the projects as innovative, creative and exciting but also as timely, on budget and dependable. Like Weber's Protestants, they strive to show the state of leadership grace moves through them sufficiently to join the ranks of the elect, or at least those elites who are currently elect.

Corporate leaders have a direct interest in shaping, grooming and educating selected aspirants, constituting what might be called subjects with an appropriate

comportment, etiquette, and equipage to qualify as disciplined. The question is not to know whether being a project manager constitutes a guarantee that one will be tagged as a would-be leader. Such is obviously not the case. Being made a project manager merely hints, in a weak way, that one has been spotted as someone with potential which the elites wish to test out, to see if the project leader can display certain indispensable characteristics. Mostly, these characteristics pertain to an ability to accept and work creatively with an existing order and existing rules; thus, they go far beyond merely technical and professional expertise. They are the new way of re-invigortating *habitus* when organizational borders have become porous, careers liquid, and professional identities contingent.

Wilensky defines (1964: 138) a profession, using two criteria: “1) The job of the professional is *technical*-based on systematic knowledge or doctrine acquired only through long prescribed training; 2) The professional man adheres to a set of *professional norms*”. Project management combines “pure” professional features, such as the existence of external rules of expertise, of external associations, of official systems of accreditation, of an official body of knowledge, with organizational norms and values. Project management arenas serve as resources for business leaders to compare and judge future would-be leaders, a metric for gauging the level of ambition of pre-selected individuals. Project management thus constitutes a springboard for those who shrewdly avoid being pegged as “true professionals”, with the cosmopolitan and organizationally disinterested pose that this can imply.

One should not be viewed merely as an expert in project management if one aspires to be one of the chosen few, but should be seen as someone equipped to move between the interest of the project and the interests of the centre. While exogenous institutions stabilize the professional body, endogenous political dynamics enhance the circulation of values, the diffusion of ambitions and the creation of a culture of precariousness among sub-elite members as a mechanism that helps to generate stability in the political structure.

Project management directly influences elite power structures in contemporary post bureaucratic organizations for three major reasons. First, it differentiates between those likely to be able to aspire further and those who will not. The latter will end up either specializing in project management or going back to their initial working environment. Project management therefore helps differentiate between pre-selected individuals. Second, different kinds of top management decisions (such as resource allocation, project termination, team leaders demotion/promotion...) can shape the chances of those in the project roles. Third, project management both creates more complex elite strata to traverse and enables a route of social mobility within the organization. Project management is premised on a high degree of transparency of project performance. Creating a powerful network of shared values regarding career and ambition also facilitates the activation and embodiment of common reference points that structure the attention and commitment of project members. Such reference points include milestones, key performance indicators, profit-margins, annual performance, respect for deadlines, respect for budgets, deference to which is progressively internalised as incontrovertible business *and* moral values, essential for the healthy survival of the entire organization (Courpasson and Dany 2003). These reference points strengthen the regime through weaving the social fabric of allegiance for would-be leaders.

In the context of post bureaucratic organizations it is the circulation of people (especially potentially key people), which provides the elites with the resources to recruit, stabilize and perpetuate their ilk. From the moment the circulation of sub-elites is monitored from the centre of the organization, it becomes a means of producing knowledge through the diversity of individual experiences. .

### **The death of a theoretical object?**

Bureaucracy is both being superseded by post bureaucracy and not being superseded by post bureaucracy. While this may sound nonsensical it all depends on whether one focuses on recomposition or decomposition. If one follows the direction of decomposition it is clear that in the new electronic panopticons of the call centre, often globally located on the margins of modernity, bureaucracy is alive and well in a particularly centralized, standardized and routinized form. Here the bureaucratization of the shopfloor has proceeded into the heart of the white collar, pink blouse, and colourful indigenously attired digital factory. If, on the other hand, one follows the recomposition route into the upper echelons of leaner and more entrepreneurially oriented organizations then one might draw the conclusion that they were, indeed, post bureaucracies that had managed to turn the iron cage into golden chains.

It is in the land between that there lays the road less travelled. Here, above and outside the routines embedded in the digital factory are the innovation, construction, design, and research projects through which young Turks circulate. However, in the words of Matthew (22:14, King James Version of *The Bible*), “Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen.” The zone in-between, the arenas through which individual recruits cycle and circulate, managing their careers as they manage their projects, becomes a panoptical space for the elites to watch and for the project managers to be aware that they are under surveillance, never knowing whether this is the project that will lift them out of the in-between zone and get them over the threshold into the promised land.

There are some rather large implications to this recomposition and decomposition. What made bureaucracies bureaucratic, in part, was their unitary nature – the incorporation within them of many separate processes under one central control. What we are seeing with the emergence of the post digital economy is a dispersal of the elements that once were incorporated. In fact, in some respects we are seeing the end of organizations as theoretical objects.

The notion of theoretical object derives from the French philosopher Bachelard (1984) but has its popularity in English-usage almost wholly to the influence of Althusser (1968), at one time considerable. The term is rarely used these days but it has a particular relevancy for debates in dynamic fields such as the social sciences where the nature of reality is constantly in the process of *becoming* rather than merely *being* in a transcendent manner (Kornberger, Clegg and Rhodes 2005). Whereas, since the post Second World War era, the organization has been assumed to be an equivalent theoretical and empirical object, the dialectics of recomposition and decomposition have sundered the presumed unity. In order to understand the processes of organizing fully today, we need to realize that organizing capabilities of focal organizations are often vested in the chains, networks, alliances and collaborations that they are party to. These are traversed by a multiplicity of projects and panoptical devices, organized around creativity and innovation on the one hand

and strictly defined KPIs on the other. The organization is much less than the sum of its relations and the spaces they traverse. The centrality of relations of employment – the proxy for organization size in the old accounts – has been superseded by the centrality of relations of production, distribution, service provision and supply. Organization – conceived on the old model of bureaucracy – is decomposing.

Organizations, as a theoretical object, came into focus through the study of bureaucracy. Weber's ideal type was the anchor point for almost all of the initial post Second War development of the area, either as organization theory or the sociology of organizations. In the mid-1960s, when the Aston researchers were collecting data on organizations they did so with an implicit model that equated the theoretical object – the construct – of organizations with the empirical object of actual organizations. The two were assumed to correspond. It was in Birmingham that Aston's views crystallized, not more than a couple of kilometres from a much earlier harbinger of organization that was far more fluid. These were earlier models of Marshallian industrial districts, which emphasized what we might now think of as important post bureaucratic tendencies. An example was on the doorstep: it had characterized areas such as Birmingham's Jewellery District, not far from Aston University (Pollard 2004). Here, since at least the late eighteenth century, jewellery and medallions, shields, presentation cups, etc, had been produced in a dense web of networking and putting out, in which it was rare for any one craftsman to produce a whole item. Instead, the whole trade was based on parts manufacture. It was decomposed. The earlier model of the decomposed industrial district is in many ways a more useful guide to the social organization of spaces such as Brisbane's The Valley, than the models of bureaucracy.

## **Conclusion**

In many ways, given the tendencies to recomposition, in which the figure of the project leader has replaced that of the bureaucrat, and the centrality of the project has replaced the centrality of an occupational career pursued within an organization, together with the decomposition of routines and standardization and the growth of out-sourcing, the theoretical object has been transformed. Today it is less the organization and more the processes of organizing, the chains, links and networks, the politics of KPIs, milestones etc, which comprise the salient theoretical objects as specific practices rather than a specific thing.

Continuing analysis of organizations as stand-alone and complete entities increasingly misses that much of what organizations achieve – both in the past, as in The Jewellery Quarter, as well as today – will be done through virtual linkages. Thus, in the post bureaucratic era we may be witnessing not only the emergence of post bureaucracies but also the decline of the ontological basis for what has been a fairly fruitful line of enquiry these past 70 years or so. To excavate the future we may need not only new tools but also a renewed scepticism, and a different compass, than that which has brought us, analytically, to a position where we need 'to find out what price [we] have to pay to get out of going through all these things twice' (Dylan 1966). Otherwise, post bureaucracy will simply be a replay of the old ontology's, this time through the mirror darkly, in reverse, as the representations of organization theorists increasingly accord with a moment of intellectual reification, frozen in a language game of their own making, whilst, meanwhile, social reality changes in ways that cannot easily be represented within the contingent language game being played out, in a deathly,

Bergman-like endgame (Bergman 1957).

In the end, Mr. Dylan got it partly right: something is happening and it is not at all clear that this something is a 'new economy', as Mr. Jones suggests. The something is both more than a singular event and is not novel: it is, in fact, a complex set of processes of decomposition and recomposition, which have at their core an indeterminate and unpredictable set of political practises, that are in part foreshadowed in pre-modern forms such as the Jewellery Quarter. But there is something else happening; that is the marketization of many aspects of organizational practices. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the unanticipated events that are flowing from the continuing unravelling of the sub-prime mortgages problems in the US – in part generated by an entrepreneurial project-oriented selling mentality. We should recognize that the most significant aspect of the present conjecture is its unpredictability and undecidability: we do not know where the ramifications of past projects will lead us. The successful performance indicators of success in past projects, such as entrepreneurial selling of mortgages, can be the harbingers of tomorrow's doom. Political indetermination is the frontier of present practices. Something is happening as bureaucracies unravel into post bureaucracies through the dialectics of decomposition and recomposition and, while it is not possible to say exactly what this something is, or where it might lead, in this paper I have sought to bring some 'sociological imagination' to bear on the issue.

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