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Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Rodin, L. (2016)
'Developmental talk' as confession: The role of trade unions in workplace governance
Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization, 16(2): 53-75

Access to the published version may require subscription.

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Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:his:diva-22062

ephemera
theory & politics in organization

the author(s) 2016
ISSN 1473-2866 (Online)
ISSN 2052-1499 (Print)
www.ephemerajournal.org
volume 16(2): 53-75

'Developmental talk' as confession: The role of trade unions in workplace governance

Lika Rodin

abstract

With increasing market deregulation, workplace relationships, identities, and functions are gradually transforming. This study problematizes the role of trade union organizations, looking at the phenomenon of performance appraisal interviews or so-called 'developmental talks' in the Swedish context. The critical tradition in organizational research and Michel Foucault's notion of 'technologies of governance' (examination and confession) are utilized to scrutinize discourses produced by a trade union's training video on developmental talk. As I will demonstrate, the trade union appears in the educational materials as an expert-therapist, assisting the worker in the development of a specific identity type – a 'disciplined entrepreneurial self' – that fits neoliberal demands addressed to labour. The paper emphasizes the legitimation of normalizing power by means of the video narration and it's special concern for a particular category of employees, namely workers with non-Swedish background. The study ends with a discussion on a possibility of resistance to the regularity and normalizing effects of the video discourse.

Introduction

The process of economic de-regulation currently taking place across Europe entails a transformation of employment relationships and problematizes the traditional role and position of trade union organizations (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2004; Huzzard, 2004). Today's political rhetoric actively promotes 'employability' (Chertkovskaya et al., 2013), while straying from the notion of guaranteed employment (Jacobsson, 2004; Huzzard, 2004). Innovative policies, such as skill-enhancement for the unemployed, grounded in the idea of individualization of employment arrangements have been implemented over the

last decades in several EU countries (Huzzard 2004; Thedvall 2004). Correspondently, trade unions are reframing their programs to fit the new paradigm of self-promotion and continuous learning (Huzzard, 2004; Fogde, 2008). The case of Sweden is particularly interesting in this context. The 'Swedish model' that emerged during the early 20th century – based on the dominance of a social democratic doctrine, ideals of solidarity and institutionalized employee-employer negotiations with relative non-involvement of the state (Fogde, 2008) – is currently facing a challenge of neoliberalization regarding both social practices and ideology. In particular, trade unions were shown to be actively engaged in services for the unemployed (Edwards, 2008) and lifelong learning projects (Payne, 2001), shifting the locus of identity from the representation of workers' rights to coaching and 'management support' (Huzzard, 2004). Moreover, trade union organizations have been increasingly recognized as 'discursive agents' contributing to the currently promoted doctrine of a knowledge-driven, individualized society (ibid.: 108; Edwards, 2008).

Besides the proliferation of market relationships and logic, Sweden currently faces the issue of rising transnational migration (Swedish Migration Board, 2015). With the country's entrance into the European Union and the related increase in workforce mobility, maintaining fair employment and salary conditions for guest workers has become a challenge (Woolfson, Thörnqvist and Sommers, 2010). Several waves of forced migration to Sweden (Swedish Migration Board, 2016) have added complexity to the situation at the national labour market. General perspective of economic integration for newcomers has been declining since the mid-1990s (Bevelander and Lundh, 2007). Migrants' success in finding a relevant job appeared to be mediated by relatively high expectations of cultural fluency; the pattern reflecting both a subjective dimension of co-ethnic preferences in employment (ethnic-based discrimination) and objective change in the nature of labour towards communication and service provision that has elevated expectations towards workers' language skills and familiarity with the specific cultural codes (ibid.). In this context, a new task has been raised: groups increasingly joining the workforce need to be trained in line with culturally specific market demands.

In this study, I analyze ways in which the discourse of individualization is (re)produced in a white-collar trade union's educational video on performance appraisal interviews or so-called 'developmental talk', as well as how this discourse is employed to construct a new role for trade union organizations in the neoliberal context of workplace relationships. I utilize Michel Foucault's idea of different technologies of governance to explain the discursive organization of the didactic materials. The paper proceeds with a brief background on the concept and procedures of performance appraisal in the Scandinavian context,

followed by a theoretical framework of critical organizational studies used in the current research. Critical discourse analysis is utilized in the empirical conversation. The paper concludes that the trade union can be seen as re-establishing itself within the field of neoliberal power relations as an expert assisting an ethnic worker in the process of becoming a 'proper' subject that is willing and capable to meet new market expectations.

Performance appraisal interview or 'developmental talk' as a managerial technology

Performance appraisal interview is generally defined as 'a formal organizational mechanism for controlling the performance of work tasks on a rational, subjective, and continuous basis' (Coates, 2004: 566). Invented during the rise of scientific management in the USA (Mikkelsen, 1998), the procedure presents a complex phenomenon in which the appraiser assumes the role of a motivator and supervisor assisting employees in their self-development (Granberg, 2003).

Reflecting regional socio-political particularities, the performance appraisal in Scandinavia is frequently termed a 'co-workers talk' (medarbetarsamtal) or 'developmental talk' (utvecklingssamtal) to emphasize non-hierarchical and pedagogical aspects of the procedure (Mikkelsen, 1998; Lingren, 2001). The developmental talk is oriented towards a manager-employee exchange aimed at reviewing the employee's work performance and perspectives of development in relation to overall organizational goals (Mikkelsen, 1998). It nurtures in employees skills such as quick adjustment to continuously transforming work-related expectations and demands. The notion of 'organizational learning' that grounds the current approach to work and developmental talk is considered non-positivistic and pragmatic. Principles of effectiveness and 'learning by doing' are especially highlighted today (*ibid.*).

The procedure is typically carried out once or twice a year. It takes up to two hours for employees 'to discuss things that deal with the work and themselves' (Lindgren, 2001: 10). To structure the conversation, a set of topics is usually suggested, such as (self)appraisal of employees' competencies and work accomplishments, revision of current goals and desirable vocational training, as well as possible formats of monitoring further developments (Mikkelsen, 1998). The discussion is documented and consented to by both sides. Third-party access to the record is prohibited. The document is used at later similar or related events, including a wage-setting conversation (lönesamtal).

Scientific inquiry addressing the phenomenon of developmental talk is multidisciplinary and frequently critical. Dissociating itself from a classical 'neo-

human perspective' (Newton and Findlay 1996), international scholars increasingly apply the ideas of Michel Foucault to the field of Human Research Management (HRM) and general organizational studies (Barratt, 2002). Thus, Barbara Townley (1993), in her pioneer research on performance appraisal in the Western context, indicated two themes: the disciplining effect of the procedure on employees and the discursive construction of power. These themes were illustrated through the examination of institutional instructions for appraisal interviews obtained from a number of British universities, with an emphasis on the power/knowledge nexus as an explanatory framework for deeper understanding of surveillance and domination in work life. In one of her later projects, the scholar employed the notion of 'accountability' that is increasingly marked by a moral imperative, to scrutinize appraisal documentation and demonstrate the normalizing nature of appraisal interviewing (Townley, 1996).

In the Scandinavian context, critical and poststructuralist analysis of managerial technologies is an ongoing development. Until quite recently, the major body of literature on appraisal methodology predominantly represented a 'managerial perspective', though research addressing asymmetrical power relationships in the situation of appraisal interview has started to emerge during the last decades (see the related discussion in Lindgren, 2001 and Sandlund et al., 2011). Analyzing the micro-level details of a developmental talk, this research uncovered the mechanisms used to maintain domination through the conversational structure and communication routines (Lindgren, 2001; Forsström, 2000; Sandlund et al., 2011). A conversational analysis conducted by Lindgren (2001) illuminated a ritualized pattern in developmental talks that facilitates the manager in obtaining knowledge on the state of affairs of employers and in shaping their attitudes. Language was shown to be a tool in sustaining an order of the manager's supremacy and workers' compliance. This power asymmetry, however, may remain unseen by both sides. In another study on interactions, Sandlund et al. (2011) demonstrated how, in the course of developmental talks, workers' subjectivities are constituted in accordance with market logic. As shown in an examination of worker-manager exchanges, preferable standards of work attitude are conveyed by the manager in the course of the procedure and are maintained. Overall success of the performance appraisal interview was found to be secured by latently present standards of efficiently, self-management, and by the close proximity between performance appraisal and salary decisions.

A number of international and Scandinavia-based research projects (e.g., Townley, 1996; Triantaffilou, 2003) have approached performance appraisal/developmental talk as a power-laden procedure that builds on a certain model of governing and technologies of examination and confession, introduced by Foucault in *Discipline and punish* and elaborated upon in his later writings.

The current study uses this theoretical framework in in-depth analysis of the power-agency dynamics in performance appraisal interviews.

Technologies of governance

Foucault invented the notion of 'governance' to explain the current way that power is operating. Governing is said to champion oppression and direct command: 'governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarily and conflicts between technologies which ensure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself' (Foucault in Lemke, 2001: 204). It grounds in the knowledge/power nexus and is maintained by means of examination and confession (Foucault, 1995; Fairclaugh, 1992; Townley, 1996).

Examination rests on a 'disciplinary gaze' of surveillance and various types of assessment. It facilitates accumulation of knowledge on human subjects and enables the exercise of power over them (Foucault, 1995). Its disciplining effects are secured by techniques of 'hierarchical observation' and 'normalizing judgment' used separately or in tandem. Foucault is especially interested in architectural tricks that produce a space of inspection in different institutional domains: 'The old simple schema of confinement and enclosure – thick walls, a heavy gate that prevents entering or leaving – began to be replaced by the calculation of openings, of filled and empty spaces, passages and transparencies' (ibid.: 172). Examination is unimaginable without extensive documentation that turns an individual into 'a case' to be controlled and accommodated within the spectrum of established categories.

Distinctively, confession is not solely oppressive and objectifying; it works constitutive for the individual identities. Foucault (1980a) defines confession as a procedure embodying dialectic of personal agency and domination in establishing a mode of modern subjection. As a 'truth obligation', confession is an integral part of modern Western culture, driven to a large extent by the development of Christianity, a religion characterized by the affirmation of salvation and the related ethos of self-disclosure. Apart from loyalty to a certain doctrine, the confessant is expected to develop self-reflexivity and experience revelation, an ultimate condition for attaining the faith:

> Each person has a duty to know who he is, that is, to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognize temptations, to locate desires; and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community, and hence, to bear public or private witness against oneself. (Foucault, 1997: 242)

A 'ritual of discourse' and 'an obligatory act of speech' confession is perceived and assessed by the confessor and grants the confessant with a purification or cure. The discourse ought to emerge as a deliberate act of subordination, and has major consequences for the confessant. In contrast to pre-Christian practices of self-documentation, confession – as a new form of self-inquiry – reaches down to the microscopic details of the individual's mental life (Foucault, 1980a: 61ff; Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013).

The confessant does not necessary enjoy the truth from the start; truth needs to be uncovered in deep layers through engaging in individual self-reflection together with the confessor (Townley, 1995, 1996). As Fejes and Dahlstedt (2013: 6) specified, it is in 'the very act of disclosure that people come to know who they are'. The emerged knowledge is expected to be approved by the confessor in relation to a specific moral guideline: the ritual requests the individual as a 'certain type' of subjectivity characterized by particular features (ibid.), and it is therefore seen to be a productive one insofar as it produces subjectivity (Townley, 1996).

Thus, confession works in two ways; first, it exposes the individual to the external observation and makes attainable to control; second, it facilitates the formation of the individual as a subject of power relations.

> Through confessional practices and technologies of confession people's inner lives are brought into the domain of power. It is in the process of confessing that people are fashioned as active subjects, yet at the same time are enfolded in power as they become subject to confessional discourses and therefore sited for intervention. (Edwards, 2008: 31)

Confession is further positioned among other 'technologies of the self' or the individual's ways of fashioning his or her own affective, corporeal, and moral aspects and lifestyle, striving towards improved or valued states of feeling and being (Foucault, 1997: 225; see also Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013). Foucault (1997) differentiated two central affirmations grounding practices of self-disclosure in different historical periods – 'care of the self' and 'knowing yourself' – demonstrating a shift in locus and methods of self-examination and self-narration in early Christian times towards supremacy of truth production and profound subsumption of self-work under power operation. Two further discriminated types – 'exomologesis' and 'exagoreusis' – signify 'ontological' and 'epistemological' aspects of self-examination for the scholar. As explained by Fejes and Dahlstedt (2013: 16), '[w]hile the former positioned the ontological being of a person as a sinner, the later positioned her in a constant search for self-knowledge'. This, however, does not mean an entire escape from power.

Study methodology

The study utilizes critical discourse analysis (CDA) developed by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough 1992, 1993, 1995). CDA derives its major framework from Foucault's archaeological and genealogical trends in conceptualization of discourse and attempts to translate those into a methodology that would allow for the examination of concrete 'discursive events' as to be open for contestation and change of dominant discourses (Fairclough, 1992). Discourse is defined as 'a way of signifying experience from a particular perspective' and is assumed to be both a product of social relations and a tool for their reproduction or transformation (Fairclough, 1993: 138). Fairclough perceives social reality as material-symbolic and attempts to explain dialectical relationships between discourse and non-discursive domains in a three-dimensional model presupposing nested analysis of text, discursive practices, and social practices in interpretation of a give discursive event (Fairclaugh, 1993; Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Textual analysis looks at organization of the text and its particular features, including 'interactional control', 'identities', 'metaphors', 'wording' and 'grammar'. The discursive practice dimension presupposes scrutiny of interplay of different discourses and genres in the text, relations of the text with other cultural texts, and the text consumption. Analysis on the level of social practice situates the discursive event in a broader social context by employing a cross-theoretical perspective. This methodological scheme is assumed to be flexible and open, to adjust to the purpose of specific research (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 76ff).

In the current study, I apply an adapted version of the three-dimensional model to examine an educational video guide on a developmental talk produced by the trade union *Unionen*, in relations to the proliferation of ethos of individualization and employability in Sweden. Educational materials, as a major resource of socialization that translates moral and behaviour standards (Mustapha, 2012), has traditionally been used as objects of examination in studies on ideology, such as in gender analysis of textbooks (e.g., Evans and Davies, 2000; Frasher and Walker, 1972; Hellinger, 1980; Poulou, 1997; Talansky, 1986) and more recently in the analysis of training materials for security management and control (e.g. Hall, 2007). Unionen is 'the largest union in the private sector and the country's largest organization for white-collar workers' (Unionen, n.d.a). It is comprised of 600,000 members, including collective members, and claims for an ideological role as a part of its organizational mission. 'Together we are in the Union of the leading force that creates success, happiness and safety in the workplace; we need to form opinions on various issues' (ibid.: para 5).

Developmental talk: Examination and confession

The educational video guide presents different stages of a developmental talk. As well, it contains an introductory and concluding sequence that directs viewers to further materials available online. The video is of a didactic nature. It is divided into seven sequences (1-2 minutes long), accompanied by six integrated quizzes and closes with a short summary. In the analysis that follows, I will apply Fairclough's three-dimensional model to examine three video clips and the related quizzes that are most informative for the research question posed.

Developmental talk as a domain of individual agency

The first video sequence covered by voice-over provides an overview of the entire video guide. It opens with a challenging question: 'Do you what to have more influence over your development at work?' A male narrator refers directly to the viewer using an informal tone that immediately produces an atmosphere of egalitarianism and intimacy. The narrator indicates that the viewer is aware of the necessity to prepare for the developmental talk; a corresponding image shows a young man (apparently a worker) enthusiastically telling something to a female manager. The narrator questions if one recognizes the role of a goal setting in personal development; the worker and manager are now observed sitting at opposite sides of a long table and the entire interior is presented to the spectator (picture 1). The conversation takes place in a conference room outfitted with a blackboard and presentation equipment; some objects are placed on the distal part of the table, creating a busy atmosphere and evoking an idea of teamwork. The camera moves to gaze from the side of the manager and from behind a glass wall, creating a closed space where the conversation takes place. The worker is exposed to the observation (picture 2).

The gap in the social status of the participants is subtlety highlighted in aspects of clothing and poses. The manager – a white, middle-aged woman attired in a business suit – holds her body straight and confident; she occupies a significant space around her. The employee – a young man from an ethnic background – is casually dressed; his back is bent most of the time. The man frequently huddles up his body, keeping his hands in a protective position. The narrator continues to challenge the viewer by indicating that a developmental talk is one's 'own responsibility' (the camera focuses on the worker who communicates something to the manager). The sequence closes with the statement that one profits considerably (camera moves to zoom at the manager this moment) from actively pursuing one's own development, and that the union's expertise and materials will facilitate one's training in the successful techniques to be utilized during a developmental talk.

Picture 1

Picture 2

The scene introduces the viewer to the concept of developmental talk: causal, friendly, and orderly. It contains, however, an indirect reminder of organizational hierarchy, since the conversation is not between two equally positioned colleagues. The viewer is associated with the worker who sets up (and is encouraged to) goals for personal competence development and is responsible for individual achievements. This discourse of individualization (Huzzard, 2004) closely corresponds with Niklas Rose's (1996) notion of an 'entrepreneur of the self' (see also Berglund, 2013). According to Rose, in advanced modernity, entrepreneurial affirmations deeply inform individuals' existential perceptions as well as inter- and intra-subjective relationships. As never before, the self becomes a resource for valorization and a domain of continuous enhancement, potentially leading to pleasurable psychological states of self-accomplishment and satisfaction. As follows from the content of the video, the educational materials construct the worker in terms of 'entrepreneur of the self'. The trade union

(represented by a narrator) facilitates this managerial discourse of goal setting-achievements and undertakes the role of an educator.

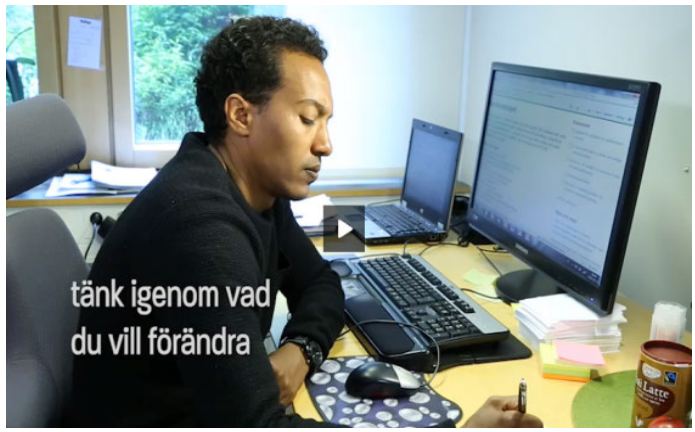
Critical studies have disclosed ways in which the individualizing ethos of self-activation makes individual workers vulnerable to sophisticated modes of (self)exploitation and eventually benefits the interests of capital (e.g., Ross, 2008; Nielson and Rossiter, 2008). Rose (1996) explained mechanisms behind this trend. In times of increasing de-regulation in the economic sphere, the content and outcomes of working activities and interactions are progressively framed in 'humanistic' terms and with respect to one's psychological needs, which will function as an engine for the organizational progress:

> Organizations are to get the most out of their employees, not by managing group relations to maximize contentment, or by rationalizing management to ensure efficiency, but by releasing the psychological striving of individuals for autonomy and creativity and channelling them into the search of the firm for excellence and success. It now appears that individuals will ally themselves with organizational objectives to the extent that they construe them as both dependent upon and enhancing their own skills of self-realization, self-presentation, self-direction, and self-management. (Rose, 1996: 160-161)

Discourse of entrepreneurship and individualized responsibility interweaves in the analyzed video with the semiotics of discipline: the viewer-employee is expected to know the procedure well and follow the prescribed rules (e.g., to prepare to for the conversation in advance). Technologies of subjectification (i.e., association of the viewer with the employee and the employee's active positioning) coexist with (self)objectification achieved by means of the visual experience of surveillance. The panopticon vision invites the spectator to join for a moment a privileged position in the system of hierarchical observation (Foucault, 1995). A feminist scholar, Laura Mulvey (1981), described this mechanism on the example of reproduction of gender ideology in Hollywood cinema. The scholar showed that Hollywood films are motivated by a male type of pleasure and framed by a particular perspective reflecting the structure of domination and control. A female viewer has literally no options except for to associate with the male's voyeurism; identification with the observed object would be 'the questionable pleasure of masochism — lack of power to the *n*th degree' (Nochlin, 1991: 40). In a similar manner, the audience of the educational guide is placed in a situation in which compliance to the managerial doctrine of control becomes the individual's (free) choice without a plausible alternative. Hierarchical observation is maintained with assistance of specific architecture, allowing the regime of visibility and soft pattering of the space.

'Go through what you would like to change'

The second sequence is devoted to the workers' preparation for developmental talk. The viewer observes an office environment; the young man – Mats – is sitting in front of a computer (picture 3). In fact, there are two computer screens on at once, providing an opportunity to accomplish several tasks simultaneously. The employee reveals his personal story in a voice-over, narrating in perfect Swedish. In parallel, written comments appear on the screen marking stages in the unfolding narrative and maintaining a certain structure of action. The first stage is termed 'making a flashback'. The man acknowledges having some changes in his work including an additional project which has resulted in overload and sleeping problems. Voice modulation and facial expressions display the employee's emotions.



Picture 3

A second note appears: 'go through what you would like to change'. The young man looks thoughtful now; he starts writing something on a piece of paper. The next note invites a viewer to acknowledge the value of the union's planning tools that have assisted Mats in managing his situation. The male narrator representing the trade union informs that the employee learned to sort out working tasks and make informed choices. He established the importance of a specific competence – project management – took an introductory course and started looking for advanced education that would lead him to a new professional specialization. The new specialization is promising, since a large project, as Mats has learned, is going to be launched soon at the company. The sequence closes with the man sitting wistfully in his room; the narrator's voice articulates his 'belief" and 'hope' to get support from his manager in this plan of self-promotion. A quiz that comes after the video points out the value of being proactive and attentive to managerial discourse (fig. A).

Figure A: Quiz 1

> Mats has found out what it costs to train to become a certified project manager. Preparing for the developmental conversation, he has selected a training company where he wants to go for education. He also has an eye on a new development project that will start in six months. Is it right to be this proactive?
>
> Yes [...] No [...]
>
> The correct answer:
>
> Well, no matter what your answer is, we believe that Mats has a clear advantage in being proactive and taking hold of the situation. It is advantageous to be knowledgeable and make suggestions. It is also important to listen to the manager's comments and suggestions, and try to find a solution that suits both you and the business. (Unionen, n.d.b: part 3)

The portrayed image of an employee once again exhibits a model of a self-activated and self-motivated personality. It is moreover constructed to present an 'ideal type' of worker possessing a non-Swedish background: the one who is not only fluent in market logic, but also acculturated (Swedish-sounding name and privileged form of dialect). Explorative and experimental studies have shown that language proficiency and cultural-specific human capital are among the major factors shaping chances of adequate employment for individuals of foreign origin (Duvander, 2001; le Grand and Szulkin, 2002; Delander et al., 2005; Jönsson and Rubinstein-Reich, 2006). Thus, a symbolic power of personal names was highlighted by the research on 'pragmatic assimilation' of immigrants from the Middle East; Swedish names were found purposefully used by the newcomers to reduce the effects of structural discrimination (Bursell, 2012).

Confession appears in this scene for the first time as both a technology and a discourse (Fairclough, 1992). Troubling somatic symptoms – manifesting sleeping problems – prompted the young man to confess about his working conditions. And indeed, the work environment is presented in the video sequence as potentially inducing psychological problems (e.g., effects of multitasking), which the worker is left to resolve on his own. Control over the employee's emotions is established with the help of an expert and by means of rationalization, resulting in a curative effect (Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013). The discourse of change and development is central in this sequence; it is closely associated with the means of sustaining one's own somatic and psychological wellbeing. As the viewer will further discover (in the omitted sequence 4), the work-related affective difficulties are not part of the conversation with the manager; these are personal matters that the worker must deal with individually. Along the same line, Sandlund et al. (2011), in a microanalysis of the developmental conversation, demonstrated that labourers' experiences with

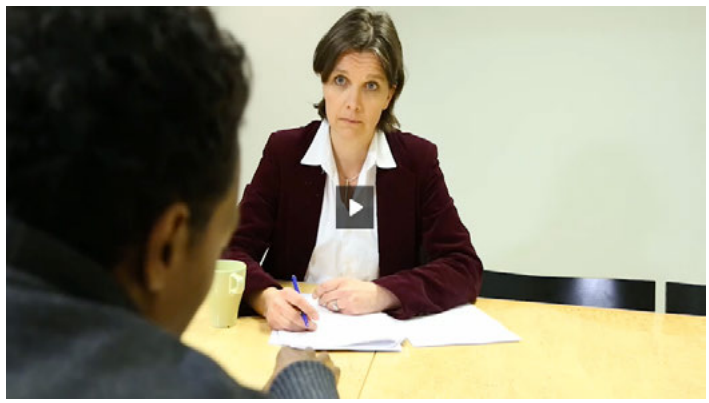
workplace stress are normalized and their related complaints are downplayed. Confession in the Unionen's video moreover manifests itself in as a discursive genre. It starts with the ontological modality of the confessional discourse – Mats exposes his psychological problems – and proceeds with an epistemological modality that is frequently thought of as enhancing and liberating, but it may become encapsulated within the logic of normalization (Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013).

The personal goals of the worker are awakened and articulated during the video in communication with organizational objectives (fig. A). The worker is free to follow his own aspirations on the condition that those coincide with the company's objectives. Thus, in a controversial manner, the organizational mission appears to frame the individual's needs and developmental trajectories. In a similar vein, Fejes and Dahlstedt (2013) described the ambiguity of a didactical approach frequently observed in the educational context; class discussions are said to be voluntary, although active engagement is promoted as a prerequisite for successful learning. According to this logic, students are responsible for self-motivation that essentially involves self-monitoring and regulation of one's own psychodynamics.

The developmental plan

The seventh and the final video sequence covers the individual developmental plan. The manager acknowledges that a developmental plan has been produced and that both sides have agreed on it. Mats evaluates the plan as being 'well-thought out' and 'all-embracing'. As introduced in sequence 2, he will on a later occasion inquire with the educational institution on the acceptance of a divided fee payment for the advanced course in project management. Visual space is organized to include an additional empty chair on the side of the employee (picture 4). The manager promises to make a note and investigate the company's ability to provide financial support. Mats would like to be given a timeframe for the final reply and would like to have the request documented as well. The camera gazes from behind the employee's shoulder while he points to the paper where the note is supposed to be made. The manager, however, does not confront this challenge alone; the spectator can observe a line of empty chairs on the manager's side (picture 5). She shakes her head and informs that the document will be available in the internal electronic system for Mats to give a formal confirmation. Mats exhibits a degree of satisfaction ('Great! So, we agreed'), though he keeps a 'closed' pose with his hands crossed in front of his body. The last quiz addresses the issue of a written developmental plan at work (fig. B).

Picture 4



Picture 5

As appeared during the interview, the manager is responsive to the initiative of the worker and demonstrates engagement with his idea of additional training. Skilful and disposed to relearn staff is a crucial resource for the contemporary organization (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2004). However, the company's contribution to competence development is framed as assistance or support. Overall, the company's responsibilities for staff training remain rather unclear. At some point, Mats attempts to get control over the uncertainty of the situation. His position is strengthened by an unseen presence of the trade union (an empty chair). Huzzard (2004) demonstrated that certain conventional elements remain among unions' priorities, though individualizing discourse of 'competence development' profoundly shapes unions' rhetoric and policies.

Figure B: Quiz 6

Do you have a written developmental plan at your job?

Yes: It's good! A written individual development plan will considerably facilitate the stability of the agreement. A lot can happen in a year and if your current boss disappears, there can be a risk that a verbal agreement does not persist when the time comes to implement and follow up the development plan.

No: It's not good. Make sure to get a written individual developmental plan. It considerably facilitates the stability of the agreement. A lot can happen in a year and if your current boss disappears, there can be a risk that a verbal agreement does not persist when the time comes to implement and follow up the development plan. (Unionen, n.d.b.: part 13)

Goal setting is of special importance: it helps to simultaneously maintain motivation and calculability of the subject. The company's guide fosters worker's recognition of the necessity of documentation that allows 'the case' to be monitored. The documentation imperative is presented as natural and intrinsic for successful workplace performance, without any reference to salary decisions that usually follow developmental talks and utilize the accumulated data (see also Sandlund et al., 2011).

The order of discourse in developmental talk

Three distinctive discourses interplay in the analysed visual text. First, a strong managerial discourse builds on the affirmation of rationality, procedures of goal setting, careful planning and documentation that enable evaluation, and on the direct surveillance. The employee's personal development is seen less as a spontaneous move than as a set of carefully calculated steps reassured in their relevance for organizational goals. Second, the discourse of entrepreneurship appears in the video. It is an individualizing discourse since responsibility is fully ascribed to the employee himself. In this context, self-motivation becomes a type of discipline that helps to sustain a neoliberal organization. Finally, the discourse of confession manifests itself in the video guide. It is frequently championed by managerial/evaluation discourse, a pattern that problematizes the leading role of pedagogical inspirations in performance appraisal procedures (Mikkelsen, 1998; Lingren, 2001). At the same time, confession allows for a deep engagement of individual psychodynamics into the neoliberal project. Trade union interventions into the flow of the conversation are closely associated with the episodes of confession.

Three types of identities are constructed in the analyzed educational video: the worker, the manager, and the trade union.

The worker

The video's emphasis is on the 'power of initiative' (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2004: 1) as a mode of self-governing guided by business priorities. Normalizing technologies interweave with the operation of productive effects of power to fashion a disciplined entrepreneurial self that relies on experts, conforms management, and struggles to acquire professional expertise. The normalized neoliberal worker is encouraged to invest personal resources into self and organizational promotion. The domain of the worker's private life and emotions is largely absent in the educational video or appears as a source of trouble for workplace relationships. Through the process of self-narration, the employee comes to know himself (Townley, 1996; Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013) and, with the assistance of an expert, to manage his own psychological welfare.

The educational materials address a specific social group, namely workers with a non-Swedish background, to be socialized in accordance with the neoliberal doctrine. It constructs a racialized figure of a desirable employee that satisfies both the requests from the de-regulated market and from the nationalistic political rhetoric. In the presented video, the developmental talk as governing technology is realized in full scale: the worker is both 'hailed' by neoliberal ideology (Althusser, 2008) and exposed to the controlling regime.

The manager/Management

A female manager in the educational video is personified but anonymous, which reduces possible accountability claims. She represents management at large as a stakeholder in the portrayed situation. Management appears predominantly concerned with the evaluation and control of the ethnic worker. The structural order of subordination is subtly constructed in the video, problematizing popular egalitarian inspirations of the developmental talk procedures (see Mikkelsen, 1996; Lingren, 2001). Management is further shown facilitating the worker's initiative in self-enhancement, even though the offer of help appeared as rather a precarious arrangement.

The trade union

Mats indirectly verbalizes to the manager his intimate desire for more balanced working conditions. The employee's work-induced health troubles and the related thoughts become even more open to the narrator representing the trade union organization. It is he who is a 'master' authorized to obtain all of the

details of individual psychodynamics for further validation and facilitation. 'Even if the master, in his role as a discriminating power, does not say anything, the fact that the thought has been expressed will have an effect of discrimination' (Foucault, 1997: 248; see also Fejes and Dahlstedt, 2013). The master remains invisible and capable of producing power/knowledge on the basis of hierarchical observation (Foucault, 1995). Overall, in the analyzed video materials, the leading role of the trade union in regulation of workplace relationships is maintained on its privileged access to the both public performance of the worker and his private needs and thoughts – micro-details of the individual mental life. It is the unique role of an expert-therapist helping the worker to adjust in the best way to the environmental demands by means of self-mastering. A relatively open genre, confession can in principle generate unanticipated ideas, though in the development talk video the framing effect of organizational objectives is profound.

As with previous research, trade unions' rhetoric increasingly echoes 'neoliberal rationality', emphasizing individualization and self-promotion at the expense of social guarantees and collective interests (Forge, 2008; Edwards, 2008). This study provides new evidence of a decline in a 'critical stance towards the employer' (Forge, 2008: 110) among some trade unions and their active involvement in workplace governance through education that legitimizes new modes of normalization and control. The described identity is associated with a white-collar trade union organization for workers in the private sector, which seems to be at the forefront of ideological innovations at times of de-regulation. Unionen is the sole organization out of 55 other trade unions that provides such an elaborate and interactive guide for developmental talk (Fackförbunden, n.d.).

As follows from the study, confession as an element of workplace interactions serves wide discourse of individualization. It is both oppressive and constitutive for an individual worker; it allows for the maintenance of a sophisticated power order in which deep psychological mechanisms are exploited. Why would a trade union associate itself with confession? The technology promises deeper involvement into the economy of truth via the institution of expertise that secures regulatory mechanisms. Foucault (2003) emphasized the role of experts as facilitators of discipline proliferation into the private domain of an individual's psychology. Rose and Miller elaborated further on a rather complex positioning and operation of experts in the matrix of governing relationships:

> On the one hand they would ally themselves with political authorities, focusing upon their problems and problematizing new issues, translating political concerns about economic productivity, innovation, industrial unrest, social stability, law and order, normality and pathology and so forth into the vocabulary of management, accounting, medicine, social science and psychology. On the other hand, they

> would seek to form alliances with individuals themselves, translating their daily worries and decisions over investment, child bearing, factory organization or diet into a language claiming the power of truth, and offering to teach them the techniques by which they might manage better, earn more, bring up healthier or happier children and much more besides. (1992: 188)

Creating domains of knowledge – 'enclosures' – where their specific proficiency would be privileged and exclusive, experts obtain an opportunity to maintain their own power. They also function as essential agents of the regulatory regime that rests on the intermingling of individual sovereignty and power effects (ibid.: 188-189). In the analyzed video, the trade union can be seen as re-establishing itself within the field of neoliberal power relations in a role of an expert assisting the worker in the process of becoming a 'proper' subject willing and capable of engaging with new market expectations.

Conclusion

According to Foucault, discourses are capable of shaping identities as well as individual and institutional practices. The question, however, remains: is it possible to escape 'truth effects', to resist or counter-act discourse-powers? Foucault's writings are frequently found to be rather confusingly unsatisfying on the issue of agency (Barrett, 1991; Resch, 1992; Smart, 1993). In Foucault's early writings, discourses are said to work on and through bodies. The analyzed educational video has a good chance of achieving certain effects by means of visual didactics, followed by materialization of the discourse in quiz choices. Training for Foucault is the basis of socialization; it allows to sustain disciplinary regime. The presented video provides a training tool for incorporation of a certain model of workplace relationships and related behaviour scripts.

In an attempt to overcome the image of an all-embracing power, Foucault (1980b: 81-82) invented the notion of 'subjugated knowledge' that describes (a) 'the immediate emergence of historical contents' or contradictions manifesting themselves despite dominant scientific paradigms and (b) a type of knowledge not directly satisfying functional ends of the system – 'popular', 'disqualified' knowledge – that is typically downplayed and oppressed. This line of thought, however, did not get a substantial development in Foucault's work beyond his lecture from 1976. Fairclough's later elaborations on discourse, communication theory that builds on Gramci's idea of hegemony and cultural studies' critique of structuralism seem to be more informative on the issue of counter-action to a dominant discourse and perspectives of its transformation. Thus, Stuart Hall's (1985) notion of 'articulation', employed by Fairclough (see Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002), highlights a complex

relationship and a possibility of competition between discourses constituting the communicative event, a situation reflecting heterogeneity and contradictive character of social institutions and social practice. Yet another concept of 'encoding/de-coding' (Hall, 2006) allows for exploring the readers' perceptions of cultural representations and thus helps to overcome the limitation of discourse analysis, namely its one-sided examination of the linguistic aspects of communication (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). In light of the ongoing discussion about counter-actions against normalizing and regulatory power regimes, further research is needed to address in depth the discursive practice dimension of the didactic interventions.

A number of studies argue for a certain space of resistance within the overall disciplinary regime of performance appraisal procedures (e.g., Towney, 1995; Triabtafiilou, 2003). Towney (1995) elaborated on Foucault's ethics of the self that can facilitate overcoming the dominant imperative of self-examination towards a creative fashioning of the self in non-individualistic and communitarian terms. Transgressing Foucault's framework, the scholar claims for reinstallation of the idea of citizenship into organizational rhetoric and organizational research; recognition of rights and mutual obligations should replace the currently salient discourse of needs. This would divert the process of individualization of social ills and return authority's lasting responsibility over organization as a social body at large as well as over situations of individual workers.

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the author

Lika Rodin, PhD, is a lecturer in social psychology at the University of Skövde (Sweden). Her engagement with a field of Organizational studies is associated with analysis of precarious employment as an effect of the ongoing shift towards immaterial production, and the discursive dimension of managerial technologies. Guided by the critical tradition, these projects zoomed at mechanisms of social exclusion and highlighted the issue of counter-action to innovative power forms.
Email: lika.rodin@his.se