Intimacy of Management: Codified Construction of Personalised Selves

Betina Wolfgang Rennison

'Individualisation' is a well-known societal phenomenon of late modernity. At the organisational level it shows up in different managerial forms and HRM technologies that focus more and more intensively on the employee as an individual person. In order to assess an employee's personal contribution and commitment emphasis is put on the characteristics of individuals: their talents, performance and personality. Reporting on research on an individualised pay system in Denmark, this paper illustrates the empirical complexity of this personalisation process. It shows how the employee is created and 'codified' as an individual person. It occurs in three different ways according to the codes of learning, love and the moral. It indicates that the postulated regime of individualisation follows a variety of trajectories to reach its target making for a quite subtle way of intimately managing human relations.

The individual has become a central figure in contemporary sociology. We can elaborate on this theme by noting that a regime of individuality bears down upon the individual person in virtually every organisational context imaginable. The management of everyone, from employees to the unemployed, from schoolchildren to the elderly, is marked by a fixation on the individual. Attention has shifted from 'common humanity' towards 'the concrete individual', rendering individuality itself a common characteristic because it devolves without exception upon everyone. As the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann expresses it:

The rumour of the human crowd seems increasingly to be fostered by an optical illusion because the demand to guide oneself towards the peculiarity of persons has expanded.

Every one of us is looked upon in terms of our particular individuality and evaluated in light of our entire personality. At work, we are no longer addressed solely as the possessors of given functions and members of specific professions. As members of organisations, we are construed as 'persons' and are expected to behave as personalities. In the words of the British sociologist Nicholas Rose:

In compelling, persuading and inciting subjects to disclose themselves, finer and more intimate regions of personal and interpersonal life come under surveillance and are opened up for expert judgment and normative evaluation, for classification and correction.

Personalisation has no limits in the intimacy of management.

This diagnosis of today's society is widely accepted but not often empirically demonstrated. This article will offer such a demonstration by showing how personalisation occurs in the implementation of a new individualised pay system in the Danish public sector; more importantly, it shows how personalisation changes form. While one might propose a single dominating regime (i.e. personalisation as such) it actually occurs in different forms from which the person emerges in quite diverse ways. This indicates a more sophisticated regime than might be apparent at first glance.

2 Niklas Luhmann Tillid – en mekanisme til reduktion af social kompleksitet p 92 Copenhagen, Hans Reitzels Forlag 1999
3 Niklas Rose Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self p 244 London, Routledge 1999
Fixing the Subject on the Loose

The paper adopts a constructivistic epistemological framework, which presumes that identity is socially and semantically constructed. The individual does not possess an essential personal identity, a self-evident unit of self, which is stable across time and space, as often stated in the HRM literature. Instead, identity is constructed and contingent. Human beings are always becoming. In this process individuals can relate themselves to available standards of identity. Following 'the linguistic turn' toward a discursive epistemology, we here can talk of the specific 'subject-positions' or 'person-fictions' offered by language. As Stewart Clegg states:

In the broadest terms, language defines the possibilities of meaningful existence at the same time as it limits them. Through language, our sense of ourselves as distinct subjectivities is constituted. Subjectivity is constituted through a myriad of discursive practices; practices of talk, text, writing, cognition, argumentation (...) Identity is never regarded as being given by nature, never seen as being fixed in its expression.5

Subjectivity can be construed in relation to dispositions, discourses and technologies following Michel Foucault4, or following Niklas Luhmann in relation to semantics and functionally differentiated media and codes of communication centred on the different functional systems that shape society e.g. the legal, economic, political and pedagogical. Either way, the different communicative forms and practices offer complete orders of meaning and given horizons of expectation to relate to. They represent a codified construction of selves. Their purpose is to relieve the pressure on social relations and personal identification by making (temporarily) fixed forms available. Thus forms have two functions: establishing the grounds for both socialisation and subjectification.

A given form of identity can be seen according to the scheme conformity/deviation. This means that the individual's creation of identity is judged by reference to compliance with the general norms and expectations. The employee, for example, is judged and rewarded according to the organisational norms of what an employee ought to be, and his or her ability to form him- or herself in that image. To win rewards and gain a certain salary the modern employee has to attain a certain identity; that of the individualised and personalised self. This article asks how this special form of identity is formed and differentiated. How is the social space concerning pay negotiations ordered as to make specific subjectivities emerge? Which strategies of personalisation are deployed at work?

Constructing the Self in a Pay System

In the late 1990s, a new pay system was introduced in the Danish public sector. The New Pay system (Ny løn) was designed to bring about significant changes, effecting a transition:8

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From detailed rules towards flexible frames, from centralism to decentralization, from solidarity to market-orientation, from standardization to differentiation, from externally given conditions to local solutions, from reactive to active careers.9

The New Pay system is a performance-related and skill-based pay system focusing on individual performance, employable skills and personal competences. It thus implies a greater role for individualisation in remuneration practices. It signals a shift from the traditional defence of collective interest and equality of pay, towards a defence of the specific individual and the individual differences among employees. The New Pay system also highlights individualisation with its focus on personalisation making salary depend on individual employee characteristics; their talents, performance and personality. As criteria of appraisal, personal competences such as ‘ability to cooperate’, ‘commitment’, ‘responsibility’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘flexibility’, are now identified as remunerable. Thus, the individual personality makes a difference.

Indeed, the New Pay system actualises and activates this individual personality. We therefore need to understand how the formation of the individual employee takes place and what kind of character traits or given subject-positions emerge in the observed communications. When decisions are made about pay, how do public organisations attach themselves to given codes of communication and which subject-positions are thereby made available? How are the organisation's members assigned an identity? How are they presented in discourse as individualised personalities and what kind of identity construction is offered?

Analytical Framework

I present the results of eight case studies, conducted in two counties and six municipalities in Denmark and covering different sectors of public service: health, elderly care, child care, the technical and environmental area, taxes, the social sector and central administration. The empirical material consists primarily of qualitative semi-structured interviews with managers at different levels, HR staff, employees and union representatives (149 interviews with 182 persons in total).10

The analysis is inspired by Niklas Luhmann and Michel Foucault. I see them as offering two complementary perspectives, both subscribing to discursive epistemology. They establish a suitable theoretical framework for analysing forms of communication and the constitutive consequences for subject-formation. This article does not seek to be dogmatic in its elaboration of the theories and is not an in-depth theoretical discussion of differences and similarities. Instead, the theories are used as horizons of meaning, establishing a frame of reference for the empirical observations, which in

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9 In Denmark the New Pay system is a result of a historic incremental process of change beginning with the first local pay system in 1987, accelerating ten years later with the New Pay system in 1997. The process is characterised by small steps towards a more local and individualised pay system. Before 1997 the different pay systems typically were experimental in nature and were based on central funds regulated and evaluated by central negotiations, in reality not leaving much room for the local level to decide. The systems were also dominated by seniority and solidarity based pay, not open for individual skills and performances. So in 1997, after ten years of experiments, the central negotiating parts in the public labour market agreed on a new system making a local and individualised system possible. (Dorthe Pedersen and Betina W. Rennison Kampen om Lønnen [The Struggle of Pay] p 12 Copenhagen, Kommuneinformation 2002). In spite of the New Pay system making the local public organisations and their managers more responsible for the decisions about salaries, it is important to note that this doesn't rely on an individual or one-to-one manager-employee relationship (resulting in a decline in union representation and collective bargaining). The pay-system in the public sector of Denmark still functions as a normal and not minimal system, still setting the collective central negotiations between employers' associations and unions as the essential part in our so-called corporative 'Danish model'. In this employment-relations-system decision about pay takes place under Union supervision, and Unions have to be consulted locally prior to implementation.

10 For further information about empirical data, theoretical considerations, and analytical results I refer to chapters 5 - 7 of my PhD dissertation - ‘Offentlig Ledelse i tekst, tal og tale’ [Public Management in texts, talks and numbers] Copenhagen, Samfundslitteratur 2003.
turn elucidates the theory. The methodological principle is neither deduction nor induction, but an analytical strategy of oscillation,\(^{11}\) where theoretical categories and empirical observations continually meet and challenge each other in the search for codified formations of subjectivity.

Three different ways of communicating about the ‘personalised subject’ can be discerned: the pedagogic, intimate and moral form of communication – summarised in the table below.\(^{12}\) In examining these three forms, the analysis is structured by the following categories.

- **Media:** The symbolically generalised media, which indicate the particular topic of communication around which the communication creates meaning.
- **Code:** The basic binary oppositions against which a distinction is made between a positive (preferable) and a negative (undesirable) value in relation to the actual media.
- **Theme:** Which gives substance to the different media and codes and actualises certain issues in the communication.
- **Technology:** Which indicates the operationalisation of the communication and the way the communication materialises itself.
- **Pay and person:** Two categories which are constructed differently according to the given code of communication and the related technology.

It is important to note that technology is not just instrumental. It does not simply mirror and represent a positivist model of reality. Following a Foucauldian perspective, technologies construct reality.\(^{13}\) Many of the HRM concepts and technologies, including New Pay, give the impression that managing personnel competences reveals the ‘natural’ abilities and talents of employees, rather than objectifies those competences through the gaze of an “already encoded eye”.\(^{14}\) But technologies are not unbiased techniques of administration; they are political constructors of management. Through the New Pay, the technologies have become micro-political arrangements that address personnel policy as ‘person policy’ and are understood as the criteria for being an ‘appropriate’ employee. The technologies frame identity and pre-select a given subject-position for the individual to choose if one wants to be rewarded.

I should also stress that ‘person’ refers to the organisational construction of the individual member and the expectations that this involves. The ‘person’ is a simplified, selected part of the individual human being, a ‘person- or actor-fiction’ selected for organisational purposes.\(^{15}\) Construction of ‘person’ is a way of ‘calculating humanity’, as Luhmann has put it.\(^{16}\) It is a semantic trick that makes it possible to communicate about expectations and indicate relevant aspects of the human being. In the observed communications, the person-fiction takes the form of the ‘personalised subject’ and is differentiated in terms of what I will call the ‘learning’, ‘loving’ and ‘ethical’ subjects. The following table summarises my results.

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\(^{11}\) Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen *Discursive analytical strategies – Understanding Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau, Luhmann* Bristol, Policy Press 2003

\(^{12}\) For the purpose of identifying the different codes concerning the communication of pay I have conditioned the transcribed interviews according to a simple model, involving three aspects: (i) the formation of objects (what are they taking about and how), (ii) the formation of subjects (who talks and in what way are they taking about whom), (iii) the formation of communication (which codes are in use in the way they talk and how they are unfolded). Through this empirical investigation I observe that the New Pay system is talked about and coded in different ways – all of which makes sense for the respondents and functions as a legitimate way of argumentation in decisions about setting pay – having different constitutive consequences for the formation of subjects.


\(^{15}\) Niklas Luhmann *Organisation und Entscheidung* p 92 Opladen/Wiesbaden, Westdeutscher Verlag 2000
Pedagogic Codification

In line with the general tendency in employment relations, communication about pay in Danish public organisations highlights the importance of education. In this educational or pedagogical codification the proposed person-fiction is created in relation to the medium learning and the code better/worse with respect to an individual’s performance and learning. The person-fiction that is articulated can be labelled the ‘learning subject’, articulated as a ‘pupil with room for improvement, someone with an immanent potential not yet realised or optimised. Pay is here objectified as a merited mark or grade: recognition for taking the developmental steps the clever ‘pupil’ has demonstrated.

Personal Performance

In the New Pay system, pay depends primarily on how the individual performs according to standards of professional qualifications and personal competences with emphasis on the latter, such as ‘commitment’, ‘ability to cooperate’, ‘independence’, ‘flexibility’, and so forth. As a union member explains:

   It isn’t so much the formal qualifications you can document that we focus upon – it’s most of all the personal ability to learn to learn and other relevant personal competences that pays off.

This focus on personal competences marks a shift in the observation of the employee from professional executors of a given function to subjects with a certain (and formable) personality. The employee is no longer only observed as one who has a given job, who lives up to (or fails to live up to) general professional norms, who takes care of specific functions and possesses certain professional qualifications in order to do so. The employee is also observed as a person who is expected to live up to specified personal criteria for getting noticed in pay negotiations.

These criteria are presented in a paradoxical manner; although they are directed toward the individual person, they are formulated as general criteria against which all ‘individuals’ are measured. The pedagogical gaze codes for individuality, but in a peculiar manner, i.e. on the basis of a pre-defined and applied profile. The pedagogical approach is not unconditional; it establishes conditions. Not just any and every sense of individuality is approved. Following Foucault, pedagogy can be seen as a part of a disciplinary regime setting up norms for ‘appropriate’ behaviour. In this way of communicating, a distinction is drawn on the basis of a common form, and it matters on which side of this distinction the ‘pupil’ is placed. It is a distinction that makes a difference.

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Perfection

Pedagogical communication is guided by a certain telos: one of individual progress towards perfection. What is important is whether individual employees are better or worse than their colleagues at continually correcting and developing themselves in the directions desired by the organisation. The meritorious employee is the one who continually strives for self-development. As an employee reported:

One ought not to stand still in this pay system! It's important that we innovate and qualify ourselves all the time – we have to make progress in order to move further up the salary class. (Employee in a kindergarten)

Employees do not merely have the right to develop themselves; it is their duty. Progress is valued over stability. Communicated as 'the pupil' or 'the child' this pedagogic form insists on the employees shaping and developing themselves in a constant process towards perfection and fulfilment. The employees never reach a final form; for as we know, learning is a life-long experience. As such, pedagogical communication is led by making a distinction between potential and perfection, between the unfinished and unformed and that which is in a state of completion. The individual employee must perceive of her/himself as being in an emergent 'becoming-movement' that actually never ends or is completed. Continuously accumulated progress must be displayed; an effort must constantly be made in the direction of self-movement, reaching ever-increasing levels of perfection.

Examination

To monitor the individual's qualifying 'grades', communication involves different technologies, e.g., job-profiles, pay-profiles and personal classification schemes, in order to make explicit the relevant competences and appraise them in terms of pay rankings. The test determines whether or not employees meet expectations and address themselves as individuals who are prepared to develop. It is the moment of truth and revelation. Where will the individual be ranked? Is he or she better or worse than his or her colleagues? By being appraised the employee is rendered as an object of inquiry whose individual components (skills, attitude and personality) are calculated, assessed and judged. As an object of measurement the individual is quantified and monitored, typically on a five-point scale, ranging from 'well above' to 'well below' average. As a manager puts it:

It's just like passing an exam – some get high grades, some low – it all depends on their qualifications, how good they are at their job and how willing they are to learn and develop further on. That's what makes the difference! (Vice-director of a welfare administration)

This pedagogical, quantitative, micro-economic code differentiates individuals around two poles, one negative and one positive. 'The distribution according to ranks or grades has a double role', notes Foucault; 'it marks the gaps, hierarchises qualities, skills and aptitudes but it also punishes and rewards'. Similarly, these pay schemes classify and rank the 'pupils' according to their individual level of professional and personal competence. And the assigned position in the hierarchy merits a given reward.

The double role of the technologies of classification can be seen as a paradox. On the one hand, the aim is to focus attention on separate individualities; on the other, it is to subject all of the different 'individualities' to the same form of disciplinary standardisation. As a head of a union critically points out:

The municipality has got this checklist system which we very much dislike. You can't mark people this way. You have to look at the individual persons and see them as one of a kind – you can't use general numbers to describe single persons.

With the 'checklist system' the different suddenly becomes similar. As Barbara Townley puts it, 'Classification schemes locate individuals in reference to the whole and in doing so they operate to

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reduce individual singularities’. This, of course, is precisely the function of technology. It must at one and the same time secure specialisation and generalisation. The technology renders it possible to constitute the employee as a describable and analyzable subject whom one can gain knowledge about, measure and thereafter compare with others. This ‘certified individuality’ enables a registration of the particularities of the individual who is simultaneously judged and compared with the individuality of others. Technologies of classification construe individuals as differentiated from one another on a comparative scalar measure. Technologies at the same time map out differences and similarities in the forming of the learning subject.

Intimate Codification

In late modernity, the intimate form of communication emerges alongside the pedagogical code but is quite different. It conflicts with the general way of characterising organisations and employment relations: ‘Intimacy is logic reserved for family life, not for work life, it relates to privacy; it is not a public way of expression’. Observations of employment relations in modern organisations, however, will leave quite another impression. In communication about pay, I noted an intimate articulation of the employee that coded her/him in line with the medium of love and allocated pay in relation to whether the employee was loved/not loved. In terms of such intimate coding, pay attains crucial symbolic value: it is allocated as a personal declaration of love, signalling who is loved and who is not. Those employees who identify themselves with the person-fiction of caring and committed partners – even without being asked to do so – are particularly loveable. They passionately devote themselves to the organisation, take responsibility for it, anticipate its needs and subsequently work to fulfill them. In this way employees can render themselves desirable and rewardable. A distinction can then be drawn between those who are loved and those who are not. Pay is not just about money; it is a symbol of who is acknowledged and who is rebuffed. As Luhmann puts it, ‘One does not love because one wants gifts, but because one wants the signification of them’.21

In intimate communication the focus is on the most personal aspects of the employee’s characteristics. The specific function of the code of love is precisely to enable, care for and encourage the communicative treatment of individuality – and by this means to assign meaning to the more individual, unique characteristics of the person.22

In this ‘loving’ relationship the employee’s entire personality is taken into account; all the individual characteristics are considered. A manager reports:

The employees feel that we are getting very close to their personalities when we want information about their personal qualifications – in this situation they sometimes feel we are getting a little bit too close. (HR manager)

Some managers actually prefer this kind of personal interest as a way of showing that the employee is ‘seen’ and taken seriously. As the Chief Executive of a local authority explains:

The employee thinks it’s nice that one’s boss relates to you. Before there was sometimes a feeling of ‘well, I am sitting at the office, but God only knows how visible I am in the mind of the boss’. No matter which relations you are engaged in – also in marriage, I would also hate to be like air for my husband back home! The only thing you must never do as a leader is to show an apathetic attitude. Give people praise or blame but never indifference. Luckily, the New Pay system makes it possible to relate to the employees.

20 For observations of this kind see also Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen and Asmund Born Kærlighed og omsilling, Italesættelse af den offentligt ansatte Copenhagen, Nyt fra samfundsvideneskaberne 2001.
21 Niklas Luhmann Tild – en mekanisme til reduktion af social kompleksitet p. 269 Copenhagen, Hans Reitzels Forlag 1999
And that is a special kind of relating. It is noteworthy that the relation to the employee as a person does not refer to the fulfilment of given objectives for development, as in the pedagogical code. Using the code of intimacy, employees are observed as they ‘are’ in their unique presence. The unique individuality is treated as such; no attempt is made to convert and correct it in relation to a certain telos. The important thing is that you see who I am; the code of love is founded on a vision of authenticity, not of changing people in certain directions, making them into ‘better persons’. Love is about seeing others as they are, and thereafter deciding whether to accept or reject them. Love is about pathos, not telos, sensibility, not sense. In terms of intimate communication, you can take me as I am, you can love me or not, express affection for me or hate me. And you can’t make it into a rational question to reflect upon; you just feel it. That is the relief of love.

Giving of Self

Intimate communication about pay is not only expressed in terms of noticing the employees’ personal characteristics, which the manager can admire, tolerate or despise. It has a much to do with the intensity of the partner’s commitment to the workplace. Intimate communication thus allows the pay and managerial relationship to be characterised as a relationship in which employees devote themselves to the organisation. On the face of it, this can look like coercion or control. The trick, however, is to provide the employee with the ‘freedom to give’. Through the delegation of responsibility and the demand for self-management – as is characteristic for all of the observed organisations – the employees receive a framework in which to demonstrate their caring. Theoretically speaking, the intimately coded communication is programmed according to the message of love about ‘providing the other with the opportunity to give’. Here, the intimate relationship is about how space is provided to partners to enable them to give – not just something specific, but first and foremost a part of themselves. Partners are invited to give something of themselves in the double sense of giving a part of oneself, the private self, to the organisation, and doing it on one’s own, i.e., without being asked to do so.

What matters here is the ability of employees to make themselves desirable, thereby constituting themselves as social identities that correspond to the surroundings. This will not be done in order to conform; as we know it’s better to diverge than to adapt, to carve out an identity of your own. Those who just adapt and act according to the norm don’t make characters of themselves and therefore do not make themselves desirable. In the code of love the acts of the individual must not be a result of obedience and compliance. No love can be satisfied by an ‘if you say so’. Love is not reactive, but proactive. The road leading to love is not made by doing the expected things – that is expressionless – but doing the unforeseeable, the unusual, the unexpected, those things that makes you into ‘a somebody’, one of a kind. That pays off in a pay system coded in the code of love.

Absorption

Whereas the pedagogical code operates with a conditioned differentiation of the employees typically based on certified qualifications, the code of love operates with an unconditional integration of the employer and the employee, based on an authentic and unsophisticated relationship. The code of love is preoccupied with creating an internalised relationship between manager and employee, where the partners are united as one another’s significant other. It is not the pupil versus the supervisor; it is the employee and the manager as one another’s better half – as a whole – that constitutes the relationship. The pay and managerial relationship is not thematised as an us/them relationship; rather, it is constituted on the basis of a conceptualisation of a ‘we’.

What makes the difference in the observed pay-setting is whether the employee is willing to go from a delimited work-life to an inclusive life together. Has the employee embraced the organisation? Is the employee empathic enough to put him- or herself in the place of the organisation; making it a place of her/his own? As an administrative manager puts it when asked about the way he communicates about pay:

23 Niklas Luhmann Love as Passion The codification of Intimacy California, Stanford University Press 1986
What I say to my employees? Well a course certificate doesn't count – it isn't enough. No, the important thing for me is the way they commit to the work and this workplace. Does it matter to them? Do they seem engaged and involved? Are they taking responsibility for this organization? Its things like this I notice.

The intention of the intimate relation is a kind of reunification of the employee and the employer. It aims at the absorption of the employees and not, as is the case in the pedagogical code, their reflection. Management is not about getting the employees to stop and reflect upon their practice; it is about getting them to fall in step, become absorbed, lured and tempted. In creating such absorption one could postulate that values are one of the best 'seductive tricks'. The Manager of a social care centre explains it in this way:

When we manage in relation to values instead of rules the employees are not only active from eight to four o’clock – they are committed all the time. This responsibility is an integrated way of being a human being. In the way we work today its very difficult to separate things – you aren't one person at work and another at home.

Such communication signals an ideal of employees as people who, with reference to the values, feel drawn in and involved as whole persons, committing themselves to keeping with the values and working in accord with them both at and after work.

Anticipation

As noted above in the code of love employees are expected to take the organisation into account, as 'the significant other'. They must care, they must act with the other in mind and act for the sake of the other. In this sense one can imagine an asymmetrical relation where employees are being observed according to their willingness to show the expressive signs of love: engagement, responsibility, empathy and so on. Moreover there is a way of getting ahead of this asymmetry: anticipation, the applied technology in the observed Danish public organisations. This technology highlights that employees can take initiatives no one has asked for, they can adapt to 'the other' even before any need to do so has been uttered. This is a form of tacit consent – one does not need to communicate, you know what the other thinks and feels. Love is silent. By relying on the pre-established understanding, manager and the employee live together in a system of confidence. The organisation has no need to make requests or issue orders. The management never has to control the employee, as that would constitute a breach of confidence. Employees are supposed to figure out on their own what the organisation requires. In a loving context there is a sense of failure if one actually has to make a request of the other. Orders and instructions are fatal for love. Anticipation and preemptive action, on the other hand, breathe life into it. This seems to be the ideal in the observed communications.

The 'love-relation' is not seen as an ordinary contract-relation with explicit rights and obligations. Instead it is founded on a silent and ritualised pact or 'marriage settlement', which need not be expressed. This is an immanent symbol beyond reach of explicit quid-pro-quo transactions. It is not a matter to explicate, guarantee and document. Love keeps its distance from a countable regime (shown in the pedagogical code) in which – as Baudrillard expresses it:

> everything has to be produced, everything has to be read, everything has to lead to what's real, to the visible and the figures of efficiency, everything has to be rewritten in accordance to performance, systems of concepts or in accountable energy, everything has to be said, accumulated, categorized and counted…

Love does not have to prove or argue for itself; it is just there (or not). It does not operate at a distance, but on the conditions of present intimacy, as an instrument for the fulfilment of unarticulated desires.

The ingenious aspect of this intimate relationship is that power appears to be absent while being present. It merely appears in a different and less conspicuous form. Power is constituted in the space

24 Jean Baudrillard *Forførelse* p. 41 Copenhagen, Sjakalen 1979
of uncertainty created by the anticipatory logic. It is established when the employee is told ‘something’ without being told precisely what it is. It is maintained by the employees’ uncertainty and their constant search for what ‘the other’, the manager, the organisation wants. Power is alive and well in the eternally insecure quest to do the right thing, the appropriate act in a given situation. Consider how this manager of a social care centre describes it:

Our system is based on value-based-management – we have very few rules. It certainly creates a lot of insecurity for the employees, but that’s the whole point! This insecurity forces the individual employee to be committed, to make contact with herself – and it demands a way of independently handling the situation.

So, power is actually everywhere, but in a quite inconspicuous manner. In that light, the power-exercising figure can always claim, ‘I do not exercise power – I just provide freedom’.

**Moral Codification**

As shown above, both the intimate and pedagogical codes render the individual employee as an individual person, who can be assessed in terms of better/worse or found to be loved/not loved. This personalisation renders communication uncertain and provides opportunity to change codification in the direction of a moral code. Faced with uncertainty in appraising an employee, it is tempting for a manager to get on his high horse and refer to that which is morally expected of each individual. Suppose the pedagogy is negatively codified e.g. in statements such as, ling. ‘she is a rights person’, ‘she is not development-minded and adaptable’, ‘she is bad at relating to herself’ – and suppose the love perspective questions the employee who is incapable of embracing the organisation and anticipating its needs. In such cases there is a subsequent demarcation of what is considered to be right and wrong, and a moral verdict is passed in terms of who is respected or disrespected. In this way, communication adopts a moralistic framework when all else fails.25

In the moral code the person is constituted in line with the medium moral and the code respected/disrespected. The subject-position offered can, with a theoretical reference, be called the ethical subject regulating itself according to a certain moral code, a particular ‘code of conduct’.26 Pay is allocated against the background of a moral verdict on the individual employee, depending on how the person appears and regulates him or herself in relation to the established traditions and norms for right/wrong behaviour.

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25 From a system theoretical point of view the moral code only gets activated under certain conditions. It only comes up when problems arise which are out of reach of being diagnosed or settled by the means of other codes. In that manner the moral code is not a code like the others – it has a kind of ‘pathological’ form. In communication in general it serves the role of being an ‘immune response’, with the function of alarming and warning if something gets out of hand; i.e. it can’t be rationally argued for. Only when something gets ambiguous one gets the chance – or risk the risk – of pronouncing those conditions under which you respect or disrespect others (or oneself). (Niklas Luhmann ‘The Code of the Moral’ Cardozo Law Review vol. 14, pp 995-1009, 1993). In line with this theoretical claim, the moral code is quite difficult empirically to unfold. From the empirical observations the moral seems to be the one thing no one will admit and explicitly turn to in relation to a pay system that ought to be founded on serious objective and transparent arguments. In addition to this, the moral conflicts are difficult to observe empirically; they are touchy issues and only reluctantly articulated. But no matter what knowledge the empirical findings have given, the mechanism in a moral way of communication [what does the preceding phrase relate to?], they show that this aspect, while hardly spoken of, is in fact a widespread and frequent way of communicating about the New Pay system. The moral code is, therefore, too important analytically to be left out.

**Personal Esteem**

A moralistic ‘infection’ of communication about pay involves interpreting and subsequently arranging of the employees along a right/wrong spectrum; respect or a lack of it is thus allocated accordingly. Respect is paid to those who are marked as sticking to what is ‘right’, and employees can thereby either fall or rise in esteem dependent on whether they live up to expectations. By respect or esteem Luhmann means a generalized recognition and respect, which honours that another is in accordance with the expectations that one find necessary to oblige in order to continue the given social relationships.27

Moral communication is founded on normative appeals and moral postulates to which the employees are obligated and on which they are judged. It charts the course of thinking and is a guideline which demands to be demanding. The employee has agreed on a kind of social contract when entering the organisation, which allows for normative expectations. If s/he breaks the contract s/he can be criticised, admonished and may be disregarded in terms of pay. Individual employees are morally obliged to regulate and refine themselves in relation to expectations if they are to make themselves worthy of respect and thereby of reward.

The moral code is total, and in two ways: it holds for everyone and it judges the individual person in total. As Luhmann puts it: ‘The more the organisations fine-tune their communication towards the individual person, the less they can observe individuals as simple variables’.28 Esteem is not given on the ground of specific qualifications or single performances – some ‘good deeds’ – but by observation of how entire persons are systematically controlled and control themselves in relation to the alternatives: being respected/disrespected, chosen/rejected. Moralistic communication is preoccupied with the personal standing of the employees. What kind of reputation do they have? Are they on the right side of the ordinary moral precepts? All things considered, what kind of persons are they? As in the case of the code of intimacy, we move in on the individual, but in this instance it is not merely about the ‘private’ intimate relationship between manager and employee. The moral code reaches further out into the public and social sphere. Morals are all-inclusive; everything and everyone is noticed. If the employee has a falling out, s/he is not only stigmatised by the manager, but by the entire collective. And conversely; if s/he does the correct thing, not only does s/he become the manager’s ‘darling’, attention is also called to him/her as ‘one of us’. As opposed to the pedagogical and intimate perspectives, there is not talk of a one-on-one relationship between the manager and the employee, here, we are dealing with a one-for-all and all-for-one relationship.

**Self-adjustment**

As in the pedagogical and intimate codification, self-management becomes important in the moral codification of pay communication. But now it shows up differently: it is not about developing ones competencies or taking a caring responsibility for one’s organisation. In the moral code, self-management emerges as an ethical relation to one’s ‘self’, to ones soul. In line with that, morality can be seen as ‘the attempt to make oneself accountable for one’s own actions, or as a practice in which human beings take their own conduct to be subject to self regulation’.29 In this kind of moral regulation it’s not only the manager who judges; individual employees must make themselves the object of their own judgment. The moral conviction is not external but internal – and it moves by comparing ‘the public conduct with private secrets, public statements with private desires, the outer person with their inner truth’, as Niklas Rose expresses it.30 And still citing Rose, individuals emerge as

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27 Niklas Luhmann *Sociale systemer* p 280 Copenhagen, Hans Reitzels Forlag 2000
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ethical beings who define and regulate themselves according to a moral code, establish precepts for conducting and judging their lives, and reject or accept certain moral goals for themselves.31

To manage oneself – to take ‘care of the self’ or to ‘take care of yourself’ – is the moral principle the ethical subject is committed to.

And how is it put into practice? The ethical subject is invited to form him or herself according to the ‘code of conduct’ embedded in social technologies of power; those prescriptions of norms and traditions which regulate the employees and constitutes them as subjects seeing themselves as objects of regulation. The technologies of power – one being the already mentioned examination via classification schemes – creates the subject as an object of knowledge and inquiry. But these technologies of power are not the whole story. In contrast to the pedagogical code, the person is not just created as an object of knowledge by sophisticated technological surveillance techniques, reducing the employee to a final score. When it comes to the construction of the ethical subject we must go further, talking about technologies of self constructing the person as a subject of self-knowledge and self-formation, as proclaimed by Foucault.32 In relation to the case observed, the moral communication stresses that an important thing to note, when judging an employee and his/her salary, is the way s/he connects to the technologies of power. How does s/he moderate him/herself in accordance to them? How do the formed forms become forming forms for the individual? The technologies of power do not function if the individual does not connect to them. Power is not a restricted phenomena but productive in its character and in the need of freedom to be exposed.33 An ethical subject is not ‘a slave of the invasion’, but takes up the fight by practising it on itself. As Foucault puts it, the technologies of the self are

proposed for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the deciphering of the self by oneself, for the transformation one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object.34

The final destination is victory over oneself, the ‘suicidal mortification’, where the employees, as ethical subjects, by their own hand finish themselves off in order to be reborn with a reformed identity. This mental killing of oneself is paradoxically the only way of surviving in this form of communication. To become rewardable the employee must question him/herself by a continuous reformation and improvement of the self. It is not about finding and caring for ‘the authentic self’, as in the code of love, but about constituting a new self; it involves a reconstituting of self through the creation of a new identity. As Foucault points out: ‘the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are…and to build up what we could be’.35

Confession

A technology used for that purpose is ‘the confession’, operationalised in the case of New Pay as pay-negotiations and appraisal interviews between the employer and the employee concerning financial and personal standing. Here employees are obliged to tell the truth about themselves, to confess their ‘sins’ and reveal their consciousness of guilt. An individualised appeal is directed at the individual’s ethical capacity, including the question as to how s/he wishes to appear and how s/he manages to maintain control over him/herself in relation to the collective expectations. So the confession is two-sided. On the one side, employees have to make a ‘confession of faith’, confirm the code of conduct; on the other side, they must confess how they are managing themselves in relation to this doctrine. What are their reflections about their strengths and weaknesses, what are their pleasures or regrets over the past year? And are they willing to do anything about it in the year to come?

31 Niklas Rose op cit 1999 p 245
35 Michel Foucault ‘Governmentality’ in: J D Faubion op cit 2000 p 336
The employee is invited to talk openly about anything, to break the bounds of discretion. Nothing must be left out; personal thoughts, feelings, moral values, concepts of good/evil, right/wrong, and so on – everything has to be revealed. In so doing the confession gives the manager an insight into the most intimate details to be managed, and it produces information for the manager to refer to in judging whether the employee can be deemed approvable or not, normal or deviant, as worthy or unworthy of reward. The confession at the same time becomes part of the employees’ self-understanding, giving them an opportunity to reflect on themselves, thereby transforming their present identity towards expectations that will determine their reward.

**Conclusion**

By presenting three different ways of communicating about the New Pay system – the pedagogical, intimate and moral codification – the above analysis contributes to studies of the way in which the contemporary apparatus of managerial discourses and technologies sets the frame for ‘being an employee’, i.e., for conceptualising individuality and personality at the workplace. In concluding the article, I want to emphasise four points.

First, the modern form of personnel management functions paradoxically; it focuses on the peculiarity of individuals in relation to generalised programmes for being individual. Even though there may be some truth in the post-modern diagnosis of the free and liberated individual, this individual is still governed in its forming of itself. Individuals are all looked upon with an encoded eye. The article has shown that the social space, here illustrated by pay negotiations, is ordered by certain subject positions or person-fictions making specific subjectivities emerge: the learning, loving and ethical subject.

Second, the regime of personalisation characterising modernity plays on different codes and subject positions signalling a rather sophisticated system. As we have seen, every one of the codifications construes the employee as an individual person, albeit in very different ways and with different consequences. By illustrating this empirical complexity the article shows that the postulated regime of individualisation follows a variety of trajectories to reach its target, indicating a quite subtle way of intimately managing human relations.

Third, the different strategies for subjectification operate within a single a priori: self-management. Even though the different codes communicate diverse identity-constructions, they highlight the autonomisation and responsibilisation of the self. Individuals are seen as autonomous subjects that are turned in on themselves and thereby individualised and made responsible for their own self-mastery, aiming at optimising personal competence (code of learning), commitment (code of love) and credibility (code of morality). In highlighting self-management the autonomous subjectivity of the modern self is not the antithesis of managerial power. Managerial power does not restrict individual freedom, but uses it as its primary means of operation – concerned with how free individuals manage their freedom appropriately. Power does not constrain, dominate and repress subjectivity, it creates, shapes and utilises human beings as subjects – power ‘works through, and not against, subjectivity’.

This reveals a peculiarity: on the one hand the codes I have presented produce different subject positions, i.e., certain forms of identity, but on the other hand the codified subject positions refer to an ideal of autonomous subjectivity, to forms of freedom and self-management that in principle produces a continuous lack of identity. This renders it necessary to make the identity-work a continuous reworking of identity.

Fourth, this ongoing reworking of identity refers to a structured but transformative space of subject formation – the subject positions are dispositions for the time being, not invariable determinations. We must resist the temptation to make the discursive regime of individualisation into ontology of subject and society, thereby reducing them to a sort of metaphysical, transcendent entity and, in so doing, postulating a given 1:1 causality between communicative forms and ‘real’ operations. This way of thinking leaves no room for reflection and voluntary selection. ‘Structural influence’ and ‘subject agency’ work dependently, not automatically. Language speaks the subject yet the subject

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speaks the language. The different codes call the subject into being, but if the subject does not call back to the code the codification remains merely symbolic, an empty rhetorical flourish. ‘If conditions of power are to persist, they must be reiterated; the subject is precisely the site of such reiteration’, as Judith Butler has emphasised.\(^{37}\) From a systems theoretical point of view, the individuals’ (psychic systems) are autopoietic; they produce themselves by themselves, making their own sense and selection of the offered structural schemes of meaning.\(^{38}\) Expressed in a Foucauldian way: ‘modern individuals are not merely ‘free to choose’ but ‘obliged to be free’, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice’.\(^{39}\) The individual person can, so to speak, comprehend the regime of individuality quite literally, using the demand for self-management and the ‘obligation of freedom’ to constitute oneself in one’s own way, questioning the contestability of the invented forms of being and beginning to invent oneself differently. This form of mature subjectivation sticks to the principle of contingency, enabling thinking and acting otherwise and thereby highlighting the point that ‘there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight’.\(^{40}\) This invites further research on the forms of resistance to the codified construction of personalised selves and the intimacy of management.

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\(^{39}\) Niklas Rose Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self p 87 London, Routledge 1999

\(^{40}\) Michel Foucault ‘The subject and power’ p 346 in: J D Faubion op cit 2000