Emergent stakeholder management

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Abstract

This paper works with dynamic project stakeholder management. More specifically it works with the competence development related to stakeholder management. Based on an in-depth study of a highly complex technology project, it contributes with a fine-grained analysis of why and how the competences to handle stakeholders evolve in the project team. It shows how the team developed the ability for dynamic interaction with each stakeholder over time and describes how the team was able to differentiate action patterns across relations over time. Additionally, the paper illuminates how the project and its stakeholders co-create one another, and how the development of relational competences enables the project to orchestrate actors and relations in a manner that makes the project more powerful than it was designed to be.

Introduction

This paper illuminates dynamic, project stakeholder management. By the term 'project' we mean a temporary organization that consists of a team that acts to solve a task and the aim of this task solving is to create transition of some sort (Lundin & Söderholm 1995). Projects require resources in order to solve tasks. As stakeholders possess various sorts of resources, projects need stakeholders. This means that technical projects are not merely technical. Technical task solving implies dealing with social, economical and political matters as well as the technical aspects (Latour 1987).

This paper is based on an in-depth, longitudinal, single case study of a highly complex technology development project. The project team faced a number of significant stakeholders, and it carried out extensive activities on forming and maintaining good relations with the stakeholders. Further, they deliberately tried to orchestrate the stakeholders in order to make them contribute to the project in appropriate ways. The paper describes and analyzes various means by which the project team engaged in stakeholder activities and the characteristics of these activities.

The following two questions have guided the research:

1.0 What triggers project stakeholder interaction?
2.0 What are the characteristics of project stakeholder interaction?
3.0 What are the effects of project stakeholder interaction?

The analyses have been developed with the help of a theoretical framework combining stakeholder theory with theories on learning and competence development. The analyses are underpinned by a processual understanding of reality, as it has been described by for example Whithead (1929/1978), Tsoukas and Chia (2002) and various contributions by Weick, for example Weick (1979) and (1995). This means seeing reality as fluid, phenomena as socially constructed and entwined in numerous relations. It means that all things are always in their becoming (Whithead 1929/1978). In accordance with this processual approach, stakeholder management is in the becoming as the project acts to solve its task.

The paper is outlined in the following way. Firstly an overall theoretical framework is developed, by combining insights from stakeholder theory with a situated-learning approach. Secondly, it describes how the empirical material was collected during a longitudinal in-depth case study. Then the case is outlined. Finally, the empirical findings are discussed and contributions are sketched out.

Project stakeholder management

The management of stakeholders is essential for carrying out projects and creating project success (Miller and Olleros 2001, Olander and Landin 2005, Vaagaasar 2006). General stakeholder theory deals with identifying and classifying stakeholders. A stakeholder can be seen as anyone who may affect and/or may be affected by the project (Freeman 1984). Stakeholders may affect the project’s internal task solving and possibility of success by contributing in positive or negative manner to the project.
activities. In accordance with this the confidence in stakeholder management has grown strong. The idea of project stakeholder management is that the project team can influence the stakeholders and create and maintain legitimacy for the activities and deliveries of the project.

Stakeholder theory tends to place emphasis on prescribing how project managers may manage in turbulent environments. The idea that project managers may manage, and control the situation they find themselves in by limiting stakeholders influence (Mitchell et al. 1997) seem to underpin these prescriptions. Typically these theories go through various stages of project activities that can be undertaken to cope with stakeholders, emphasizing how to identify relevant stakeholders, their claims and developing strategies for dealing with these claims. Often projects can identify numerous stakeholders that may hold different and even divergent interest. Due to limited capacity the project can not attend to all stakeholders. A challenge lies in determining what stakeholders to attend to at various points in time, thus the salience of the stakeholders becomes an important issue. It can be suggested that attention should be given to the stakeholders that are perceived as most salient in terms of power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell et al. 1997). The exploration of what actually sets off interactions between projects and their stakeholders and what characterizes these interaction patterns seems to have reached limited attention.

**Situated project competence**

Over the last decades there has been an increasing focus on knowledge and competence development in the project setting. Our contemporary society is characterized by being knowledge based and that several industries and sectors are projectified (Castells, 1998). Therefore, it has become salient to capture, store and transfer the knowledge developed during project work. It also appears to be highly acknowledged that the project work involves learning. Several researchers (i.e., Brady & Davies, 2004; Davies & Brady, 2000; Davies & Hobday, 2006; and Prencipe & Tell, 2001) have explored the development of knowledge and skills within the project setting, how project work may function as arenas for learning (Lundin & Midler, 1998, Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001).

Here a competence approach will be applied to stakeholder management. This means investigating if and how projects develop their ability to manage stakeholders as they interact with the stakeholders of their context. Competence is constituted by three assets; namely knowledge, skills and aptitudes (Nordhaug 1993). Trying to understand this competence development, it might be suitable to apply a practice-based learning approach. Practice based approaches focus on two particular challenges within the field of knowledge management: the nature of knowledge and the situated nature of learning and knowledge creation. Learning and knowing are seen as ongoing processes: Knowledge is continuously comprehended and translated as a result of the interaction between individuals and between individuals and artifacts. Just as learning and knowing are ongoing processes, rather than products, researchers have argued that competencies emerge – in a given context – with respect to valued enterprises (Wenger, 1998; von Krogh & Roos, 1992). This means that learning should be considered as a mediator for competence development.

In this sense competence development becomes experience-based and evolving. The characteristics defining knowledge, skills, and aptitudes emerge contingently of the challenges that a project team faces and the interactions that the team members negotiate. Thus, these characteristics are situated in specific practices. Still, they are based on more generalized knowledge structures. As the project team enquires knowledge, skills, and aptitudes, their local translations of the more generalized structures evolve. These translations are emergent and differentiated versions of the generalized structures displayed in situated knowledge, skills, and aptitudes of the project. This means that a project team’s cultural and social aspects help create both the nature of its learning process and the content of knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Cook & Yanow, 1993; Gerhardi & Niccolini, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1990).

**The case of a development project**

The empirical basis for this paper is a longitudinal study of a large-scale technology development project in Norway. The project involved the development and installation of a full-coverage, rail-specific mobile communications network, based on the GSM-net. The aim was to facilitate safe and efficient communication for the railroad system. It involved reducing the number of communication systems, facilitating more efficient operation, and providing new functions, services, and digital technology. It meant altering the routines and equipment used by numerous actors.

The project, initiated in 2001, was completed in late 2007. The estimated budget was about 200 million Euros; this effort received funding from the national
The empirical study and analyses

Inspired by procedures used in ethnography, the study was carried out as a longitudinal and explorative study. In autumn 2003, pre-field work was conducted to learn to know the project. This involved document analyses and open interviews. The main field work was performed between January 2003 and December 2005, including systematic observation and interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1997; Kvale, 1996). More than twenty interviews were conducted with the central actors. These interviews were based on the open format (Yin, 1994), only being semi-structured (Kvale 1996). This style was considered appropriate as the aim was to construct and present the world of the participants (Kvale, 1996). The ethnographic method recommends observation as a tool to collect data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1997), and this method was applied extensively. It seemed to provide valuable insights to the project practices. For almost two years, the weekly three-hour project management team meetings, as well as meetings between the team, or the project manager representing the team, and other actors were followed. The following three interfaces were regularly observed; the project team and project owner interfaces, the project team and sub-contractors interfaces, and the project team and – users interfaces. The project management team’s meetings with various user groups, extraordinary meetings with sub-contractors, and open meetings were also followed.

It is hard to study emergent phenomena such as evolving competencies. The trick is to capture the changes without forcing these to conform to an idea of a stepwise development pattern. Two things were done to analytically handle this challenge. One was to compare some processes that emerged in the observers descriptions at different points in time so as to identify the changes in nature. To control the emerging assumptions of transformations, the action flows were bracketed into action-sequences to compare and identify the changes that transpired over months. Bracketing (Weick, 1979) might help the researcher focus and identify changes. The data was made sense of by applying principles from the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Different types of sensitizing questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used to gain oversight of the material. Such questions can take different forms: For example, who are the actors here? What are the various actors doing? Why does a given activity seem to occur? At what time and to whom are actions directed? Using these kinds of questions, the material was re-examined several times to identify both the central topics and the empirical patterns (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1997). The empirical patterns emerging were combined with literature studies.

The empirical material is presented in the form of a story, because stories can preserve plausibility and coherence and represent the past and present (Weick, 1995). As the paper assumes that the ability to handle stakeholders can be adequately understood as situated practices, this is important. Following the technology project, story-telling proved useful to capture the richness and the ambiguity of the material, trying to make sense of it without enforcing predefined categories (Weick, 1995).

A story on project stakeholder management

Next a case story is presented. It illuminates how a project interacted with its’ stakeholders and how the project stakeholder management competence increased through these interactions.

From Technical to Relational Focus

As the technology project started, the project team was highly embedded in a managerial discourse of functionality and rationality. At this point, the task specification was regarded as relatively clear and the involved parties operated from a belief in a shared understanding of what the task was all about: to build and implement the emergency communication system (quotation of the project manager, February 19.2004). At the bases of the technical specification, the base organization identified the work processes to be performed, as well as the competencies one presumed to be required to conduct these processes. Much of these competencies were not available in the base organization and therefore members to the team had to be recruited externally. The base organization seemed to succeed in doing so, as the project manager expressed that ‘these are very good people – the best around’ (quotation of the project manager, Mars 8, 2004). Still, the first year of the project was characterized by numerous indications of trial and error when it came to the operational task solving. ‘We just had to act and see

state budget. The most important premise providers for the development were the two departments in the project organization that manages technical regulations and traffic regulation. Other stakeholders of the project included local and regional politicians and the neutral control organ, operating under the Department of Traffic and Communication, that held the final authority to accept or reject the system. Additionally, there were two subcontractors involved, which are referred to in the case description as Alpha and Beta.
what happened’ (quotation of the project manager November 10, 2003).

According to the project manager, in its very early days the project management team did neither place much emphasis on relational activities nor was it very efficient in such. The members expressed uncertainty regarding how to act in the position they seemed to find themselves (meeting observation Mars 8, 2004). However, the project work quite soon evolved to be highly relational, in the sense that much of the project team’s effort became dedicated to the forming and maintenance of relations with other actors.

**Emerging Relational Activity**

The emerging focus on relational activity pointed to seemed to spring from different sources. One was the project team’s belief in the project’s destiny as fragile and contested. This came about in expressions of how the space for making mistakes was limited and how mistakes could endanger the project funding. Different reasons seemed to contribute to this feeling of being fragile and contested. One reason the team gave was limited time for completing the planned deliveries. This awareness made the team form and work with relations, trying to facilitate its own maintenance and also to buy itself time. One way of trying to buy time was attempting to rush through decision gates, requiring that project owners make faster decisions. Additionally, the team also attempted to influence the content of decisions, as some decisions would require less time consuming activities than others.

In keeping with this, the project team first identified the central project stakeholders and then approached them, intending to influence their decisions, both in regards to time and content. Observations were made where participants of the project team aggressively approached the project owners, the technical-premise providers, and the representatives of the Ministry of Transport and Communication. The project team requested to take part in various decision-making processes; it argued in favour of these requests of participation referring to strong arguments within this particular setting; competence, uniqueness, and time pressure. For example; ‘our competence is valuable in enhancing the decision quality’ or ‘as we have first hand information we can help speed up the decision process and save time’. Other indications of this team strategy were the numerous discussions in the project team where one of the team members reported on their situation. Following the report, the project manager would typically ask: “Is that a problem or will that be a problem regarding the planned delivery?” This question often referred to the time aspect of the delivery. Then, if the answer was affirmative, the project manager would then ask: “What do we do?” This question gave rise to other questions: “Who is responsible for this at the main office, at the technical division, or at the sub-contractors? Who can we talk with?” The project management team members discussed these questions and often identified those they needed to approach and the way they could compel them to make quicker decisions.

When asked about their role in various decisions making processes, the project manager indicated that the team had developed the ability to affect decision processes:

“Often, the case may be that we need a clarification or a decision, but that we cannot make the decision ourselves. Then the staff holding this mandates neither have the competence nor the resources to do so — or the head where it should be — and cannot make it either. But then, we can’t make the decision ourselves, so we have to make sure that we have the right persons involved in order to have them make this decision and that the decision they make is ours, in the sense that we can live with it. That’s what often happens; we have to make sure that those providing the premises make decisions at the right time and that they make the right decisions”.

The team’s perceptions of being contested were also based on their emerging acknowledgement of how the technical development process was not so straight forward and manageable as assumed, but appeared to require extensive innovation. As the task development took unexpected directions and contingently required extensive innovation, the team members seemed to lack the necessary knowledge and skills to complete the task. Facing this situation, they sought out sources where knowledge could be embedded, such as exploring numerous technical regulations and specifications that constituted the base organization’s quality system and approached the project owner’s representatives. As these efforts seemed to be of limited value in filling the competence gaps, the team extensively discussed where to seek appropriate knowledge and advices and trying out different alternatives. Its’ scope of interaction was broadened. It initiated workshops with similar emergency communication projects in other countries as well as with various sub-contractors and users. During winter and spring 2003/04, the project team sought out quite a number of sources that proved more or less helpful, but as spring arrived, the numbers of possibilities were reduced. There seemed to be a set of relations recurring in the project’s exploration of competence. The knowledge-relations that remained over time were mainly those who had evolved into so-called standing workgroups. Over time, the project team learned how it could get access to this knowledge and
how the knowledge could be efficiently utilized. In summary, the experience of how technical knowledge fell short, triggered behavior that led to development of relational competencies aimed at obtaining access to technical knowledge.

With regard to whom the project team related, the observations indicated that some project relations, such as those with the main user groups and others, were laid out early in the project, while others emerged over time. The relations seemed to emerge as the task developed and included more innovation and different task solving activities than those foreseen. The team needed to involve more parties than anticipated at the project outset. As the task solving work proceeded in different directions, there seemed to be new stakeholders emerging claiming to have a say in the project management team’s activities. When asked directly about how the project had become related to X and Y, the project manager summarized the situation saying:

“Their role became apparent over time. I guess that was both because we did not realize it and also because little by little they came on strongly and wanted to take part and exert influence. Of course we knew from the start that the X the Y had to be part of this, but obviously, as they came on stronger they affected the process in various ways”.

The project team engaged in analytical exercises to determine the aspects of a given situation and the parties that would probably be involved and had to be considered. Moreover, the project team worked to find out the most likely expectations these parties were holding and also reflected on what they could do to meet these. After these exercises, the various stakeholders were approached.

The Characteristics of Relational activities

Two gradually emerging features of the project competencies can be identified. One was that the project team, over time, acted variably in the relation with one actor over time. Another feature was that the project team differentiated its actions across relations depending on the interests, expectations, and characteristics of the actors with whom it related.

Competence to vary relational activities.
Observations were made on how the project team seemed to work to vary its activities in relating with another actor over time. An example of this relates itself to the relation between the project and its’ subcontractor. During spring 2003, the project management team selected its two sub-contractors (Alfa and Beta) and thus developed its relationships with them. These relations took the form of being procedural and formal, rather than informal, and the project team concentrated on drawing up contracts and getting basic routines established. The relations seemed friendly and polite, but communications were vague. In winter 2003/04, these communications increased in precision after they had started working together and obtained some experience with task solving. When starting up, the project team emphasized Alfa’s high level of competence, but as time went by their opinion about this seem to change. The project management team’s discussions increasingly focused on how to enable Alfa to do their work by, among other things, changing their own structure so as to compensate for Alfa’s weaknesses. When Alfa did not deliver as promised and in accordance with the expectations of the project team, the relations between the two parties became difficult. In winter 2004, the project management team took actions to increase Alfa’s production by helping them plan and prioritize their tasks. In spring 2004, the project management team held monthly shared planning sessions with Alfa. A person from the project management team was also transferred to Alfa to help out with the planning work. Additionally, the project team spent extensive time discussing Alfa’s plans, to determine the realism of these, and the lack of realism was pointed to a number of times. Moreover, the project team worked to help Alfa by providing incentives, as well as threatening with economic punishment. Gradually the relation stabilized as troublesome yet functioning. The interaction between Alfa and the project team illustrate how the team, acting on the same relation over time, acted differently.

Competence to differentiate relational activities.
Analyses of the empirical material indicate that the project team developed an ability to act in differentiated manners when relating with various stakeholders at the same time. For example, in a situation where the project was not able to make its deliveries and its funding and further existence was at stake, the project produced stories. Five co-existing stories could be identified. They seemed to be developed partly to make other actors act in certain manners that the project team assumed to facilitate task solving and partly for maintaining the stakeholders’ belief in the project. The content of the stories were differentiated depending on who the project team interacted with and what kind of actions it wanted the other actors to undertake. For example, it was important for the project team to enable system implementation by motivating the train operators to educate their people. The story it communicated to the train operator expresses belief in completed deliveries and the importance of efficient training, for facilitating safe system operation.
Speaking with the sub-contractor Alfa, the team wanted to facilitate a dedicated effort at the sub-contractors as no time could be spared. It was assumed that if Alfa got to know about the possible delay, they would prioritize their effort elsewhere, at the cost of the project. The project manager and others communicated that, if they all stood together and worked day and night, they would probably make it (February 15, 2004). In interacting with the head director of the base organization, the project produced yet another story. This one was aimed at maintaining the head directors’ trust in the project. In meeting the neutral control organ that was to verify the system, the project team expressed sensational stories about the unexpected situations they had encountered, tackled, and learned from and how the deliveries were almost completed and under control.

It has been described how the team over time became skilled in fine-tuning its’ communication of a situation, contingent of the presumed interests of various stakeholders. This skill was accompanied by knowledge of how the actors, with whom it related, were inter-related. In a project team meeting the following dialogue occurred between the project manager, PM, and his team members; A, E, and G.

**PM:** Yes, so I assume we are all clear about what we communicate to Alfa.

**A:** But what do we communicate to Gamma and the rest of JBV?

**E:** The trick is that Gamma can leak information to both Alfa and the Ministry, if they understand that we are uncertain whether we make it or not.

**PM:** But, we will have conflicts if Gamma starts preparing for implementation on 01.04.04. and the system is not ready. They are so negative already, and preparations for implementations will be most demanding for them and...we need to communicate uncertainties in a way that is balanced.

**G:** Yes, we need to communicate that only 10-15% is not working.

**PM:** No, we need to communicate to Gamma and the Ministry that 85% works.

**G:** What we said to the Inspectorate last week was that with the limited solution we have already described, we believe that we will be able to make it.

The team members’ ability to fine-tune their stories combined with their awareness of interrelatedness came about as differentiated, yet carefully balanced stories. The project team developed sensitivity regarding what to say and how to say things. Over time the team developed a feeling for the appropriate timing of messages. Having to align several actors in a process the team extensively discussed what would be the most strategic order of telling and including the various actors

arguing things like; ‘if Gamma accepts, the Z will also accept’ (quote from a project team meeting, February 21, 2004).

**Summarizing and discussing stakeholder management**

A story has been presented on how stakeholder management evolved in a technology project. Next, these indications will be summarized and placed in a broader understanding.

**What triggers interactions with stakeholders?**

The narratives presented indicated that the project teams’ focus shifted from a technical to a relational focus over time. Several triggers for this emerging focus of establishing and maintaining relations were identified.

One was triggered by the **will** to affect decisions. This determination led the team to approach various actors to affect timing and content of decisions.

Another path of relational competence development was set off by the team, as it acknowledged lack of knowledge and skills, when the task developed in unexpected directions. The team approach actors to get access to their knowledge and skills and thereby expanding its resource base. Therefore it is here proposed that lack of technical competence can trigger project teams to develop relational competencies.

The third development for increasing focus on stakeholders came about as the task changed in unforeseen manners that led ‘new’ stakeholders to develop an interest in the project. As they emerged on the scene, and claimed to have a saying, the project management team had to consider these actors, their interests, and the ways they could meet these interests.

**What is the development pattern of stakeholder management competence?**

The story shows how the project team in its early days did neither have the focus on nor the competence to manage stakeholders. Over time this competence developed. The story presented shows how the project team starts acting, in a fumbling manner, to form and maintain relations, and how their skills and knowledge in handling these relations gradually develop. This competence evolves as the team attempts, responding in ways particular to its environment, to solve the task it has been assigned. These fumbling activities, whereby stakeholder management ability materialize, resemble the learning by trial and error process that Dewey
(1938) coined as learning by doing. Moreover, this mediating learning process appears explorative in nature (March, 1991). It seems that, as the team acted and made sense of its actions (Weick, 1979), the members were able to develop shared patterns of beliefs and cognitions (Weick, 1979). As these shared patterns were tested in practice, over and over, they were refined in efficient ways of meeting and responding to stakeholders. This can be seen as the learning product; the relational competence.

The observations that have here been presented, indicate that the development of knowledge and competencies was an ongoing process that was highly related to the participation in activities and relations. Wenger (1998) has pointed out that knowledge is actually knowing and “knowing is a matter of participating (...) of active engagement in the world” (p. 4). This also seems to be the case for the ability to manage stakeholders adequately.

Feeling vulnerable the team acted to keep itself afloat, by establishing relations to affect the actions and decisions of stakeholders. It seems that the team enacted the task as relational (Weick, 1979) and thereby it constructed the project task solving as a relational activity. This means that the development that has been described cannot be understood as mere adaptation to situational contingencies. The team could have responded to the perception of being contested or the lacking competence in numerous other ways. The relational activities emerged as the effect of the team’s actions and its understanding the situation it faced. The idea of the project task being enacted as relational and therefore contributing to relational competence development is in accordance with Wenger’s (1998) proposition that learning reproduces and transforms the social structure. The development can be understood in terms of a self-reinforcing circle. As the team became competent in relational acting, it experienced that it could act with efficiency both to affect the decisions and actions of others and to exploit the knowledge of others. Experiencing success seemed to facilitate the team’s further actions to shape the decisions, offsetting more frequent interaction between the project management team and other interests. Through trial and error, the relational competencies took form.

Characteristics

The story points to two characteristics of stakeholder management. One was that the project did not apply one activity pattern in the interaction with a stakeholder over time. The pattern was changed contingently of developments in the perspectives, need and context of the other party. It was dynamic over time. This finding might be understood in light of Kreiner’s (1995) point that project tasks change over time when stakeholders alter their actual interests or their ideas about their interests. Thus, the project team might be expected to gradually act differently in order to meet the changing perceptions.

The second feature described was the project teams’ differentiation of its actions across relations depending on the interests, expectations, and characteristics of the actors with whom it related. These two features indicates a highly situated ability to handle the stakeholders. It was best shown in attention paid to and the knowledge developed on how each actor is unique. This awareness and knowledge was accompanied by the skill to present relevant messages to the various actors. It also came about as the ability to frame a message in a manner that it appeared relevant for the particular actor. The implication was a team learning to take on different roles and presenting itself and its activities in various ways depending on whom it interacted with. A multiplicity of presentations, that were differentiated, and to some extent also divergent, were observed living side by side.

Yet the emerging competence was also generic in the sense that the team, in order to stay attuned to the various actors and their needs, continuously worked with the following questions:

- Who are the actors that we have to consider?
- What do these actors expect from us?
- How do we act for them to develop the perception of getting what they expect from us?
- How do we act to affect these actors?

Based on the description of how the teams’ relational activities became more fine-tuned and fine grained, it can be suggested that it developed competencies that were both generic and situated. They were generic in the sense that as the team acted it discovered more general ways of meeting and treating stakeholders.

The effects of stakeholder management

Descriptions of how a project team tried to influence major decisions and major political and governmental actors have been provided. The team managed to position itself as an influential premise provider of the discourse in which it took part. This suggestion is not in accordance with mainstream project management theory (Engwall, 2003). However, process focus applied in this paper places more emphasis on process and change than mainstream project management research tends to presuppose. Taking a process focus, things are believed to continuously change. They become what they become contingent of temporal co-presence, rather than design (Weick, 1979, 1995). This also applies for the distribution of authority. It makes the idea of a designed
a-symmetrical power relation, where the project acts on the decisions of project owner, difficult (Kreiner, 1995). Decision authority cannot be determined by organizational design and structures. It is a product of uncertain and moving positions from which action choices can be justified (Kreiner 1995). The implication is that authority and responsibility for actions are to be negotiated, rather than being decided by hierarchy (Kreiner). “The non-hierarchical relations imply that none of the parties can dictate specific opinions and conclusions to the others” (Kreiner, 1995, p. 342).

As the interaction and communication between actors determine the outcome, strong identities can become fragile or reinforced through networking (Kreiner 1995). Kreiner’s proposal aligns with the observation made of the technology project, namely that neither the nature of projects, nor the power distribution of project settings, can be fixed in advance of the project work commencing. It is negotiated as the actors interact (Callon & Latour, 1981). Knowledge is linked with systems of powers, which produce and sustain it, and to the effects of power that it provokes and which extend it (Foucault, 1986).

This means that if the project maneuvers itself in a position where it can define what the valuable stories and discourses are, it can enact authority that was not intended for it. The project here studied seemed to develop the ability of translating the meaning and the systems of knowledge embedded in this social context, translating it into specific practices and structures. This helped increase the project management team’s ability to guide the actions and decisions of others.

Conclusions
The analyses of this paper indicate that stakeholder management is an emergent process. It contributes with showing how it is situated as it evolves as the project interacts with its stakeholders. It is a matter of active participation, it evolves through trial and error in a self-reinforcing circle and it holds the potential for transforming structures of social power. The paper adds to the request (Frooman 1999, Winch and Bonke 2002) of understanding projects and their stakeholders as dynamic entities in an evolving relation.

The empirical material indicates that the project team considered the project as coalition of stakeholders that needed to be kept satisfied in order to enable the project to stay afloat. Stakeholder literature tends to take the perspective of the project, or analyze dyadic relations from the perspective of the actor that has formally been granted decision making authority. As projects, and their stakeholders, take part in numerous relationships it appears paradoxical to assume that the relations between projects and their stakeholders are best understood when they are singled out and studied one by one. It also seems strange to presume that a locus of control can formally be designed (Kreiner 1995). The scope needs to be broadened.

Hellgren and Stjernberg (1995) have suggested that stakeholder management could be better understood by as nested relations of several actors, as “project networks” (Hellgren & Stjernberg, 1995). In the definition suggested by Hellgren & Stjernberg (1995:379) a project network is defined as:

“(1) a set of relations, where no single actor may act as legitimate authority for the network as a whole, (2) where the network is open in the sense that there are no definite criteria by which the boundary of the network may be identified and controlled, and (3) where the network is temporarily limited, dynamically changing and (partially) reconstructed from one project to the next”.

The technology project here studied further the understanding of project networks, the challenges of coping with the fluid boundaries of the network, the emerging rules of the game and the ability of reconstructing power relations.

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