

Identity work related to the use of Macintosh or PC in two research departments

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Track- Micro processes- examples of how we can study them

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Abstract

The idea of this paper is to investigate identity work of members in two academic research departments, and through this contribute to further understanding of organisational change processes in the specific departments. Furthermore identity work on micro level will be briefly related to construction of computer environment on a broader level. More specifically selected members' talk, and to some extent subjective meaning-constructions about Macintosh/PC advantages are explored, and the way this is seemingly related to historical social and discursive practices in a broader context is addressed.

In the first department (in the following referred to as the MAC-department), where I have worked for a longer period before entering the PhD. programme in Aarhus, the default computer platform given to new members were Macintosh. In the other department (referred to as the PC-department) PC is the default platform. In the Macintosh department some employees did explicate strong reservations against the computer policy and used seemingly rational arguments for PC to support their views. Others supported the use of Macintosh. After a tense period of arguments it was decided to give new members the choice between Macintosh and PC. A minority of the former MAC-users did switch from Macintosh to PC and Macintosh seemed to some extent to loose status in the department.

The assumption underlying this paper is that this can be approached as a process of changed social practices, which partly influences and is influenced by identity work, and thus is not only a result of rational decision making.

I visited the other department (the PC department) for three months during the PhD process, which gave me the idea to this paper. From the first day I experienced that my iMAC laptop gave much more positive reactions in this department. However, further investigation showed that the choice of computer platform has also been an explicit topic in this department. I guess most people would argue that they have primarily rational reasons for their choice of computer platform, which might also be the case. However, especially in the MAC department other aspects related to a broader context seem to have influenced the process.

The paper will be initiated with a brief introduction of theories on perfect and bounded rationality, respectively. Arguing that these theories give limited attention to social practices and interaction in social contexts, institutional theory is touched upon, which further leads to introduction of discourse analysis. The latter perspective highlights that what initially might appear as production and consumption of rational arguments seemingly is modified by dynamic identity work in the local contexts, which however at the same time draw on broader discursive practices in a constructed computer environment. The empirical section consists of interview statements and stories of selected members, which is used to illustrate how discursive text production on the micro level reproduces local social practices and/or broader discourses. Articles from computer magazines and newspapers are used as representatives of a broader constructed computer environment.

Introduction

Different models of rational decision making have been introduced in economics and organisational behaviour (Cyert, 1992; Simon, 1979). They most often include a model of different steps to take in the decision process, through which the problem can be defined, criteria be weighted, alternatives developed, evaluated and chosen between. Such models assume problem clarity, clear and constant preferences, no time or cost constraints, and that the decision maker will choose the alternative that yields the highest perceived value (March, 1994).

Arguing that this is not always the case, (Simon in Dequech, 2001) has introduced the concept of bounded rationality, in which it is argued that a single decision maker's limited mental capacity prevents him/her from considering all alternatives. The decision maker thus uses heuristic procedures or in other words "rules of thumbs" and a "satisfying rather than an optimizing strategy", searching for solutions that are "good enough" or satisfactory. This includes that "human behaviour is intendedly rational, but only limitedly so, and that an objective optimal solution exists" (ibid), which has been a point of later critique (Dequech, 2001).

According to Dequech (2001) a single individual might follow rules of thumb, but "*Simon's work has been criticized by both old and new institutionalists for not paying enough attention to the social context in which people act and interact*"¹.

Arguing that following social rules may be a simple, practical, satisfactory way of behaving in a complex social environment, the article encourages the development of revised theories of bounded rationality, which focus on institutions and on the social environment (Dequech, 2001). However, in this paper I will argue, that if theories on bounded rationality is developed further towards institutionalism the former would no longer be of significant value for intended rational decision making, but would rather contribute to a deeper understanding of human beings' partly irrational social practices, which is however also an aim of this paper.

With this argument institutional theory compared with theories on bounded rationality is evaluated as a more constructive movement according to investigation of discursive and social practices related to choice of computer platform in academic departments, and for investigation of other forms of partly irrational behaviour as well. Different contributions in institutional theory have adapted focus from *old institutionalism* departing from among others Weber and Schütz (DiMaggio, 1983) concentrating on society levels, towards *new institutionalism* primarily focused on inter-organisational elements (Czarniawska, 1996) and again towards *Scandinavian institutionalism* (Erlingsdottir, 1999) in which focus is extended to include the element that stability as well as change is approached as institutions. Still focus is relatively inter-organisational (ibid).

Especially Scandinavian institutional theory with its focus on social habits, norms and traditions as both restricting and encouraging behaviour, is in some way closely related to discourse analysis. However, some approaches to the latter are in addition partly focused on individual strategies for language use in relation to broader macro discursive and social (e.g. institutional) practices (Fairclough, 1992; Potter, 1987) and thus give more space to the active individual. Thus an advantage of using discourse analysis might be that it is more explicitly focused on language use as both constituting and constituted, which makes it closer related to everyday micro level practices. In the following sections I will present a broad introduction of discourse analysis and identity construction, which will lead to the empirical part of the paper in which discourse analysis is used as inspiration for analysis and discussion of interviews statements from members of the MAC and PC departments, respectively.

Aspects of discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is relatively new. It appeared in 1970^s and 1980^s. In this period there was a growing attention towards changes in the society, and the way these influenced and were influenced by the use of words and concepts. In other words, in the field of discourse, changed vocabularies are viewed as closely related to the way social life is

¹ This critique is however modified by (Dequech, 2001) who argues that (Simon in Dequech, 2001) came closer to the old, or original, institutionalist view of institutions as patterns of social behavior and that a neoclassical economist would correctly characterize his description of social behavior as "institutionalist."

organized (Dyrberg, 2000). Thus in relation to discourse analysis “the linguistic turn” that influenced humanities in the nineteen sixties and later social sciences is often addressed (Alvesson, 2000a; Jørgensen, 1999; Stormhøj, 2001).

Discourse analysis is a broad concept covering multidisciplinary approaches used in different kinds of investigations of social processes (Dyrberg, 2000; Jørgensen, 1999). A general assumption is that talk or text is not only a reflection of reality, but that discourse plays an active role in creation and understanding of surroundings, identity and social relations. A central argument in discourse analysis is that the only way subjects can relate to the world is through words and text. It thus becomes central to study the way discourses are negotiated, contrasted and changed, which is one reason why research in some parts of social science is to a larger and larger extent focused on process elements in specific contexts (Jørgensen, 1999; Stormhøj, 2001). In continuation of this discourse analysis is not focused on finding “right” or “wrong” statements in empirical material, but to identify patterns between these, and to further investigate the social consequences of different discursive meanings (Alvesson, 2000b; Jørgensen, 1999).

More concretely Jørgensen (1999) have defined a discourse as “*a certain way of talking about and understanding the world (or parts of the world)*”, Foucault (1972 p. 117) defined it as “*A group of expressions which originate from the same discursive formation* and Fairclough (1992 p. 64) has approached a discursive practice as “*a social practice that reproduces and changes knowledge, identities and social relations but which at the same time is formed by other social practices and structures*”. Examples of discourses are medical or political discourses, but discourses can also be searched for on much more local levels such as quality discourse or promotion discourse (Jørgensen, 1999). In the actual case a discourse order consisting of a Macintosh and a PC discourse is installed as analytical construct.

Discourse analysis is closely related to power and identity construction. Power is hardly mentioned without addressing Michel Foucault (Alvesson, 2000b; Danaher, 2000; Dyrberg, 2000; Elliott, 2003; Jørgensen, 1999; Stormhøj, 2001) and Foucault has in varying degrees influenced different approaches to discourse analysis. But it is hard to imagine discourse analysis that is not to some extent influenced by his work (Jørgensen, 1999).

Different approaches to discourse analysis

As mentioned above the field of discourse analysis is sometimes distinguished into *discourse theory* heavily influenced by Laclau (1985), *discourse psychology* often represented by Potter (1987) and *Critical discourse analysis* partly developed by Fairclough (1992). There are differences between those approaches, but they also have common aspects, and they are used separately as well as in combination.

Discourse theory is mostly founded on textual analysis of written language, which makes it a difficult approach in relation to micro studies, in which concrete changes of social practices related to the use of MAC-PC platforms are the primary object of study. In contrast discourse psychology has its main focus on strategies for spoken language and

the rhetoric related to that, which has been used as inspiration in this paper according to the way individuals talk about the choice of platforms. In critical discourse analysis discursive practices are approached as a combination of written language (textual analysis), spoken language (the consumption and production of spoken language), and attention is in addition given to related social practices (Fairclough, 1992; Jørgensen, 1999). In the actual study I have used inspiration from Norman Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis mostly because it is focused on discourses as both constituted and constitutive. It is central for Fairclough (1992) that analysis of non-discursive elements is included in the model, which makes it possible to use sociological theories without having to "translate" them into discourse theories (Jørgensen, 1999).

The central aim of a critical discourse analysis is to explicate the relation between the use of language and social practice. Focus is on the communicative event such as an interview, a magazine or a speech, and on the order of discourse. Fairclough (1992) defines the order of discourse as the sum of different discourses used in a social domain. An example of a discourse order can be found in universities or hospitals, where the order of discourse in parallel with the introduction of concepts such as "new public management" and "total quality management" (Lund, 1998) is often argued to consist of a market and a professional discourse (Jørgensen, 1999).

A text can be analysed in detail according to its vocabulary, grammaticism, and broader relations between sentences. Examples of elements that can be searched for in textual analysis are transivity (the use of active or passive language to create the agent), nominalization (use of noun instead of process), modality ("true"/vague statements) (Fairclough, 1992; Jørgensen, 1999), which has however not been an explicit focus in this paper. Primacy has been given to production and consumption of discursive practices and the way these are partly reproduce social practices, and at the same time seem to be drawing on discursive practices from a broader computer environment. It is illustrated how dynamic aspects of social practices are partly reproduced partly transformed through discursive "fights" between MAC and PC discourses. In other words the order of discourse seems to be challenged.

Fairclough (1992) uses the term inter-discursivity to refer to discourses that are transferred such as in the concrete study where a MAC discourse is from time to time confronted with a PC discourse. In some cases inter-discursivity influences and indicates future changes, in other situations changed social practices are reproduced in discursive practices. More concretely the empirical part of the paper illustrates how changed social practices is reproduced in discursive practices in the PC-department, while these are still negotiated inter-discursively in the MAC department.

As touched upon briefly above identity work is closely related to discourse. Identity as a construct will be introduced in the following section, and my specific use of it will be presented.

Identity, Identity work and Construction of Identity (self)

Contemporary research on identity, identity work and identity construction is characterized by different understandings and different constructs attempting to capture the “meaning” of this highly diffuse aspect. Different approaches vary in the extent to which identity is assumed to be personal, collective, cultural, social, organisational, or as a combination of the former.

More broadly there has been a widespread tradition in Western society to treat the individual (sometimes talked of as the self, the ego, the I or the subject) as the object of study (Shotter, 1989). A distinction has been made between social psychology developed within the sociological tradition and that emerging from the psychological tradition (Gecas, 1982). Sampson (1989) has described this Western understanding of the individual as:

“An entity who is the integrated centre of certain powers: One who is aware, who feels, who thinks, judges and acts. In concept, the individual is adopted as the primary reality, the ontological base from which issues the remainder, including society and social relations.”

(Sampson, 1989)

However, starting from a debate of the “I” and the “me”, which can be partly traced back to (Mead, 1934) some research areas and/or time periods are focused on identity as a social concept (Ashforth, 1999). Mead (cited in (Hatch, 2002) defined self as something that *“arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process”*.

At the same time, however, the interest in personal identity has had a renaissance partly influenced by the post-modern society where individuals are in some contributions argued to be able to more or less pick an identity that suits them, and partly related to a cognitive renaissance in psychology (Gecas, 1982), or what (Parker, 1989) addresses as the 1970’s new paradigm in psychology reflecting a movement away from behavioural experiments in social psychology towards primacy of human agency.

Sampson (1989) highlights that researchers in cross-cultural studies (Geertz, 1973 in Sampson, 1989) have addressed the existence of non-individualistic cultures, critical theorists inspired by the Frankfurt school have associated the North American concept of individual entities with a capitalist ideology (Adorno in Sampson, 1989) and system theory has addressed the primacy of relations rather than individual entities (Bateson in Sampson, 1989). Gergen (1985) further has developed Mead’s approach by raising the argument that selves, and individual traits are socially and historically constructed, and within post-structuralist tradition, de-constructionism has in the words of Sampson (1989) challenged all notions that involve the primacy of the subject (the author). Kärremann (2001) has argued that:

“Recent developments suggest that identities can be more productively viewed as social accomplishments rather than naturally occurring entities. Identity is a relational concept. It is a construction. There is no

such thing as a pure identity- no essence or substance that sums up what identity is about....It (identity) is seen as multiple, fragmented, processual and situational rather than coherent, fixed and stable”.

(Kärremann, 2001)

Following the latter definition of identity as a dynamic process of fragmentation, the empirical part of this paper does explore identity work as a process, which partly consist of subjection to discourses and related fragmentation. However, identity is at the same time assumed to be founded on a combination of identification with specific potentially more stable social groups, and as relatively stable states of being, which are challenged and thus unfolded in identity work during crises or transitions in a context relatively high on stability, a theme suggested and more closely discussed in (Sveningsson, 2003).

Through installation of a discourse order consisting of a MAC and a PC discourse, the following section presents events of identity work in an interview context. This is partly influenced by the author’s own constructions through the process of employment, and is additionally briefly related to a broader constructed computer environment.

Empirical study:

Analysis of discursive practices related to changed computer practices in two academic departments

The focus of the empirical study is to investigate identity work in the attempt to further understand and account for changed organisational practices. More concretely computer-platform talk and social practices in the specific micro contexts of two academic departments is investigated and further related to a broader constructed computer environment. Brief background information will be given on each department related to computer history and specific contextual elements. Interview with IT-supporters from both departments have been used as starting points, and have been complemented by an interview with a selected user in each of the two departments.

The Mac department

Background

The Mac department is physically located a few kilometres away from the Main building of the school, from which the rest of the school gets their (PC) support. The Mac story takes its departure approximately 17 years ago, where a new lecturer (Philip) arrived from another university. At that time the department was using a third old-fashioned platform, which a user describes as “the disaster platform” and which in combination with the physical distance to the school caused problems according to often delayed support. Phillip introduced Macintosh to the department, and after that took care of MAC-support at the department. However, in the long run it was difficult for Phillip to function as both lecturer and supporter and the present fulltime IT-supporter (Jack) was hired. Jack was enthusiastic Mac-supporter and immediately presents himself as a person investigating very carefully before buying an oven, a laundry mover or a computer (using rational decision making) Jack was originally educated in PC-support and development, but later ran into MAC (during his former occupation at the university). Jack explains

that he reached the conclusion that Mac technically was easier to work with; it made it more fun to work with computers.

However, a couple of years later, some of the new members arriving to the department did not want to switch from PC to Mac computers. One of the younger employees (Andy) even chose to buy his own PC and printer when he arrived to the department. Jack told him, that he should be aware that there was absolutely no support for PC in the department.

About a year after as a part of a larger strategy project, the IT department from the school presented the idea of working towards equal platforms for all members of the school (PC). A few persons in the Mac department reacted quite strongly against this, so it was decided to make it voluntary for the members of the department to choose which platform to use. At that time Jack seriously considered to find another job in case the strategy should be implemented "I was very pleased about my job" he explains, "but on the other hand relatively clarified about it, "I had used many years to build up the experience of Mac that I got now". However, today he adds: "but of course if to many members of the department choose to use PC, I then would probably have to start working with other things, I am no king, you know".

A MAC-supporter's identity work in an interview

About the right to choose- MAC users produced as dominated minorities, and as victims of the others' sense making of computer trouble

Jack is raising the argument that 60-70 percent of the computer work at the department could be fulfilled satisfyingly with PC and MAC platforms, respectively:

"If I had been Carl (PC-supporter at the school) and PC had been the brand used by everyone here, if you did get a proper support, I think people could be just as satisfied with PC. Out here it just happens to be the case that most users are used to Mac and they are satisfied with the support given out here, the way it functions"

In this way the staff at the Mac department is produced as (satisfied) users, and the use of MAC is addressed as a choice made by the users. A choice that they do not want to change. In addition Jack continuously through the interview touch upon people's right to make free choices. In this way Jack might be partly drawing on discursive practices at a broader societal level among other things related to Microsoft and Bill Gates as dominators of people's choice of software. He further addresses that:

Mac is produced by one single company, which knows about all the parts in it. PC is cheaper among other things because of many different producers...you always end up with something missing, it's a more blurred world, it's much more complicated to support. Mac is just simpler.

Jack highlights that one thing that really offends him is when people claim that all the problems would be solved if everyone did use PC:

And this is bullshit, because IT is rubbish, but it is the best rubbish we have got and that goes for both platforms. Then my belief is that there will be fewer problems when using Mac. This is simply my belief, that it is easier and better to work with especially if you don't know anything about it, that's what I try to convince people.

MAC and PC are here initially constructed as being equally problematic platforms, which is however followed by the statement that there will be fewer problems using MAC. Later in the interview MAC and PC users are constructed as being different.

MAC users constructed as non-technical work-oriented laymen:

Immediately, Jack is constructing the Mac-PC debate as a question of having voluntary choices between equal tools, but by closer investigation he takes the arguments a bit further:

...Then there are marginal areas, as an example related to research or tools. In this area there are things that people can work better with on Mac since they are convinced that this is the best tool.

You said within research, could you give an example?

Yeah, what could it be? For Mac tools exist used to, what the h.. is it called, investigation of text. It is something called NUDIST, which is extra ordinary

Text-analysis? (interviewer is curious according to this extra-ordinary programme)

Yes (but does not get further information). And within technology-based teaching more tools or larger degrees of freedom in relation to development of one or the other, its HTML or multi media or such things. There are larger degrees of freedom, things simply can go faster and easier because you as a layman can work with these things in a totally different way, and can focus much more on the product than on complications by using different programmes, it is simply (raises his voice, and knocks on the table) easier to use and results can be made quicker.

In this part of the interview Jack seem to be drawing on rational arguments to produce MAC as the best choice. Rationality is however not the only element introduced in his identity work.

Producing MAC-users as extraordinary people wanting fun- and PC users as experts:

In this part of the interview Jack quotes Steve Jobs to support his arguments:

Steve Jobs says that computers are for the brain what exercise bikes are to the body. What he means is that it is supposed to be fun to use it, and that you are supposed to get something out of it. If it is a daily fight to make things work, then you won't reach the point where it gets funny. It is supposed to be funny.

This can be related to the macro section below where Mac users are compared with sophisticated minorities preferring luxury cars or designer furniture. Jack more explicitly touches upon the differences between MAC and PC users:

The biggest difference I can see between MAC and PC users, but of course that is only pocket-philosophy, is that the PC users like to open the box, change things. We meet many PC-users that have opened their computers. For MAC users the hard disk is, well it is a box under the table, and it simply just has to work.

And its annoying if it doesn't work, because I have to make this paper or this presentation. They are focused on the task to finish.

While Mac users are here constructed as work-oriented non-experts, they are later produced as users, who are forced to relate to both Mac and PC:

It's a bit funny, I have heard people say, that if you want to know something about the differences it will not help you to ask a PC guy, he only knows about PC, whereas Mac people cannot avoid to reflect upon both platforms, they have a foundation for comparison, they know about difference. PC users do not see the other world.

In making such statements Jack seems to neglect that only a minority in the department actually have made an explicit choice between MAC and PC, whereas the rest might passively adapted to choices made by “enthusiasts” or to what was the norm or the social practice when they arrived to the department. The voluntary choice between PC and MAC does only partly exist. For people arriving at the department today a voluntary choice can to a larger extent be talked of, whereas a change of computer platform from MAC to PC might be a more controversial, politically and power-influenced step. However, today both MAC and PC discourses are inter-discursively drawn on in the MAC department, which might be signalling that social practices are changing. In the following section a user's identity work is presented. This user (Bob) was in the department when MAC was introduced.

A MAC users identity work in an interview context

The selected Mac user has been in the department for many years. Initially he says that he is not sure he is the right person to talk to, he suggest a few people that knows about technical stuff, and who are more enthusiastic about it. I do concretises that I am interested more broadly in the way decisions were made at the department:

The Local MAC users produced as not interested in computers

The fact, that we now have MAC is in many ways a non-decision, I guess. A few people knew something about it, they were interested in it, our support and the IT-system we had at that time sucked, and since we did not know anything, we just listened to the ones saying something and they then told us their opinions and since we did not want to confront it and fight for it, we just supported what was done, you can say that a few people made the decision or the decision made itself.

You can take me as the typical user, who does not really relate to it all. In principle I don't care, I did not pick up the phone when they tried to take Mac away from us. I guess this indifferent and babbling attitude is the most dominant here. And then the situation decides whether the one who feels strongly about it, or the others can get us to fight; I think its funny, and many organisation people say the same thing, decisions are made because they are not made. People who haven't got the formal competence get to make the decisions.

In this way Bob constructs the decision of using MAC platform as a historical non-decision practice. However through the interview he further raises rational arguments in favour of that non-decision.

The Choice of MAC platform produced as a rational choice and as the local rescuer of technical problems

Mac has been a product marketed at the university-market. That was where it began, and one of the explanations that has been given of missing success for MAC is that the university-niche did not expand as expected. I believe in what they said at that time, that MAC really was smarter. It is almost the same as in the market for video, you know Beta and VHS, VHS won but I have read that Beta technically was much better. I guess one of the advantages by MAC is, anyway it has been, I also think it still is, that when you speak of graphics and all that, modern homepages etc, then I think it is still better. They use it in advertising companies.

Bob is here drawing on the history of MAC and Beta to construct the choice of MAC platform as a rational choice. However, he further relates it to historical social practices in the department:

I think it's very important that our former system was very complicated, and did not function. It was extremely technical, you had to write syntaxes and so on, where the one Steve Jobs made, it was not technical, there was a picture of a document, then you clicked at the document, it was genius at that time.

Through this statement it is indicated that MAC historically has solved specific problems and influenced by that has been constructed as the genius system that solves technical problems. One thing that could really make Bob change the system is, he says, if things were not working for him. These statements can be related to Jack's talk of MAC users as non-experts primarily concentrating on daily routine-based functionality as the most important criteria for success. According to Jack PC users might require a more technical complicated functionality.

However this talk can be counterweighted with talk from another academic department, in which a seemingly more unequivocal official choice has been made according to the use of computer platform.

The PC-department

The PC department is physically located in one of two buildings at the school. IT-support is placed in the other building, which is however not far away. In relation to information systems the school is a smaller part of a huge local university, which means that approximately 40000 users have access to the same central server facilities among other things different licences, which are then centrally updated at the same time. From the middle of the eighties and until 1999 approximately 50% of the staff used MAC and 50% used PC. One of the IT-supporters Roger came to the institution in 1997 where he was hired for Mac support. However, four years ago it was decided that the institute should use PC as the official platform, which has had as its consequence that Roger is today PC-supporter. According to Roger, the need for a relatively big server was one important reason why it was decided in the board, that PC should be the future platform. It was simply not possible to connect so many users to a MAC server, or at least it caused unsolvable problems, and took up too much of the capacity.

Today, everyone employed at the department receives a standard PC from the school at their time of arrival. In principle it is still allowed to use MAC, but MAC Users must apply for money or use their own research funding to pay for it, and they do in principle not get any support from IT supporters.

The PC-supporters identity work in an interview context:

MAC constructed as simpler to work with

Roger today primarily uses PC. He though still has his MAC computer in the office. He explains:

Yes, I am sitting somewhere in between, Since I started at the institution as Mac supporter I still have much old Mac material on my Mac computer, and I never really have pulled myself together to move it to PC. I keep working with it on the Mac. In addition the finger-combinations on Mac are in some way internalised in me. On Mac it is still a little easier in word and Excel, there are more direct short commands. And many of the ones still working with Mac do agree.

But you must use both platforms?

Yes, and as a consequence of the fact that much computer-support is on PC, I cannot use the latest versions of Mac. As an example my old computer does not run Office 10.

Historically the university has chosen to investigate in MAC platforms partly because of Apple's low prices to the university market:

It had a great influence that Apple had very good prices for the universities in the 1980's. In addition it was much easier to work with than DOS. The first time MAC was presented was on a huge TV-trailer. At that time it was just a small box.

MAC and PC users produced as getting closer to each other

However, Roger further argues that the change from MAC to PC is definitely a rational choice. He says that as it is today there are not any big differences between PC and MAC, that you still can use syntaxes on PC, but that not many people does that. When asked if he had experienced any differences between MAC and PC users, Roger answers:

Within some areas it is standard that you use certain programmes such as SPSS. At some points in time these programmes are not available on MAC, which is a strong argument for using PC, but I guess it is so that those who uses MAC are strongly convinced about the excellence of MAC, and definitely would not want to make themselves acquainted with, and use a PC. When becoming used to a working tool you are not prepared to get used to another one. It takes focus too much away from writing or what it is you are doing.

He explicates examples of people who have recognized that it was not so hard to switch, especially not today where the two platforms work together quite well. When asked more directly about his own reactions upon changing from MAC support and being forced to switch to PC, he says:

The differences are so small today, which makes it logical to say that MAC must out. Apart from that MAC users require less support; there have been some problems with PC that gives PC users problems that MAC users do not have. It is very seldom that a MAC user enters into the more complicated things. If you don't get into more complicated things, there is less risk that things go wrong.

Roger's identity work points at adaptation to change of organisational and social practices in the department, which is also reflected in the way the organisational process

is discursively constructed. The same seems to be the case in identity work of a PC user in the same department, which will be illustrated briefly below.

Identity work of a user in the PC department

Howard is PC user who has been four years in the PC department. He explains that he started using MAC already as a student, but later has switched to PC since this was what he was offered by the organisations he later moved into:

When you get here, it is taken for granted that you get a PC. Earlier it was a problem that you had to send double documents because you never knew whether the receiver used PC or MAC. Today it is not a problem if you have PC. You can say that an advantage by using MAC is that you can always read what is sent from a PC; whereas you cannot be sure that you can read on a PC, what you have received from a MAC. But in a way, this is not my problem (laughing) it is not my problem if I can't read what people sends me.

Howard is here constructing MAC users as a minority, who must adapt to the majority, and talks of the differences between PC and MAC as something that used to be. Apart from that the MAC-PC debate does not seem to absorb much of his time. He has experiences with both platforms, and says that this has only given him temporary technical problems through the processes of switching. In identity work Howard seems to be reproducing transformed social practices, and does in addition draw on personal historical experiences.

Discursive practices in a broader computer environment

To give an impression of text production in a computer environment more broadly, presentation of statements from selected computer magazines newspapers are presented below. Producers, sellers, and users in the market for computers have from time to time touched upon the market war between Microsoft (Windows-platform) and Apple (Macintosh-platform). Immediately sales results seem to talk for themselves. Microsoft is the market leader, whereas Apple has a modest market share of approximately 5% (The Wall Street Journal New York June 2002). However, Apple has build its own niches in special industries such as the graphic industry, and the advertising industry might this be due to rational or non-rational arguments:

“There are rational arguments why there will always be an Apple. Apple excels in niche markets, much as do luxury cars and designer labels. Macs are superior for people in certain kinds of jobs, such as art and advertising. Apple represents Microsoft's loyal opposition, providing stimulating competition for the ruling party, with the consumer as the winner. There are even instances where Apple provides the only viable solution. It may not always be great to have Apple around, but the system would be worse off without it. Microsoft is trying to control and profit from anything that is or can be digitized; content, access to content, transactions, identities, and the tools used to work this all. Apple forces some positive basics, like how to get people turned on to and excited about using IT, how to inspire and get plain-old work done, how to think about an interface”

(Larry Levine Edcause Review Boulder jul/aug 2002)

A text is here produced that, although very superficially, to some extent address technical, rational arguments “for certain kinds of jobs, such as art and advertising”, but which to a larger extent produce political “represents Microsoft’s loyal opposition...” “Microsoft is trying to control, and profit...” and strategic arguments such as “competition for the ruling party, with the consumer as the winner”. The Mac customers are here constructed as a minority, the extraordinary customers associated with luxury cars and designer labels. At the same time, however, they are produced as weak consumers being controlled through market domination.

In the Strategic management Journal, Steve Jobs, formerly of Apple Computer, is presented as a child of the 1960’s, who travelled through India in search of truth, who meditated and was a rigid vegetarian. A story is told of once he lost his temper because he heard that a university to which he had donated computers was controlling access “ we want people to start fooling around, to let them get stolen, to let people use them at night” Forbes in

(Westley, 1989)

In favour of PC another Journal writes:

Anybody who uses niche software, specialized software, or software created by an employer knows that there is vastly more software for windows than Mac, and though the Mac has the main types covered, you won’t find much industry-specific software or specialized software for narrow tasks. Also, many companies write customized software for Windows.

(Walter S. Mossberg in Wall Street Journal June 2002)

This text produces PC users as the “knowers” the “experts” the ones needing specialized software. However, the author further elaborates upon pros and cons for using MAC and PC and produces arguments in favour of MAC according to software/hardware integration, software for photos, movies etc, and raises that MAC has dramatically fewer viruses, and a new stable operating system (OS 10). At the same time he concludes that Windows has industry standards, more models, lower prices, faster processors, more software, and a new stable operating system (XP). Altogether seemingly rational elements related to technical, functional elements. An Australian journalist specialised in IT makes a comparison between the PC-MAC debate and religion:

Although they’re both personal computers, the IBM PC is definitely the computer world’s version of the protestant work ethic- pragmatic and dowdy, while the stylish, imaginative Mac is catholic- and Italian Catholic at that.

(Charles Wright Techno-file February 2001 p. 57-58)

Again, a text is produced in which MAC is constructed as the stylish and imaginative product used by a minority, whereas PC is associated with work ethics, pragmatism and dowdy attitudes. By closer investigation of the article a few drawbacks related to Mac

and a host of drawbacks related to PC are produced. By first impression users of MAC in these magazines do show a need for defending their practices.

These texts do partly make themselves present through production and consumption of discursive practices in the micro level study presented above. However, such relatively stereotype texts are challenged by social practices in the local contexts, which are seemingly no longer that rigid.

Concluding remarks:

Rational decision models have been challenged years ago by other contributions such as models of bounded rationality and theories of institutionalism. However, according to understanding of changed social practices in specific academic departments the potential of discourse analysis seems clear. This was touched upon in this paper, in which it was illustrated how social practices are reproduced and/or transformed differently according to identity work of different contexts, organisation members, and stages in the interview context. In contrast rational decision-making would require that everyone independently of such elements would reach the same evaluation of changed social practices.

Common for both of the departments in the empirical study is that they recently have experienced a pressure from the Head departments of their schools in the direction of using PC as the universal computer platform. In the MAC department this was however not immediately accepted, which resulted in a compromise, in which the members of the department got the voluntary choice between MAC and PC. Bob, one of the MAC users, who has been in the department longer than MAC, produces the department's choice of using MAC as a historical non-decision, a decision that was made by a few pioneers. He thus implicitly constructs himself as indifferent, but at the same time produces rational arguments in favour of MAC. At the same time Jack, the MAC supporter in the department, produces the choice of using MAC (or PC) as a free choice, and constructs the MAC users in the department as satisfied users, who use MAC because they have chosen to. In this way Jack is drawing on a more recent social practice to account for what happened earlier when the social practice was "everyone is using MAC".

Howard, a PC user in the PC department did originally use MAC when he was a student and in his former job. But as is the normal procedure he received a PC when he arrived to the department. Today, he constructs PC users as the majority, that in principle do not need to adapt to MAC users. He further seems to reproduce the social practice in his talk of computer platform. Roger, the PC supporter in the same department, evaluates the choice of using PC platform as rational. At the same time he constructs MAC and PC users as becoming more equal. He explicates a feeling of belonging to MAC users, while at the same time reproducing the recent social practice of using PC.

In his model of discourse analysis Fairclough (1992) raises the importance of inter-discursivity as the articulation of different discourses within or across an order of discourse. A central element is to what extent the discursive practice is a reproduction of social practice, which contributes to status quo, or whether the social practice to a higher extent transforms the discursive practice and thus contributes to social change.

In the actual study social practices in both departments have recently changed. In the MAC department it has become an explicit social practice that members can choose between PC and MAC, whereas the social practice earlier was that a MAC computer was automatically given to new employees. This change arguably makes itself visible as discursive practice especially in the IT supporter Jack's identity work. However, while recognizing that social practice has changed, this is counterweighted by an attempt to reproduce the earlier social practice "In this department, we use MAC".

The social practice in the PC department has changed from being "You can choose between MAC and PC" to becoming "PC is what we use here, if you want to use something else, you must pay for it yourself, and do in principle not get support". This is making itself present in discursive practice through the way Roger, the former MAC but present PC-supporter, talks about MAC and PC users as becoming more equal. The changed social practice is here clearly reproduced in the discursive practice.

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