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The Art of Existence and the Regimes of IS-enabled Customer Service Rationalization: a Study of IT Service Management in the UK Higher Education

L'art de l'existence et les régimes de rationalisation des service client par le biais des SI : une étude du management d'un service informatique dans l'enseignement supérieur britannique

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Abstract

This paper adopted a critical perspective to examine IS-enabled IT customer services rationalization project in a UK University context. Informed by Foucaultian framework of rationality/power and ethics the paper seeks to demonstrate how individuals deploy their critical moral reflection to enact 'the care of the self' in living with the consequences of IS-enabled services process change. The study draws on two years of field work to argue for the multiplicity of individual's moral judgment under rationalization regimes of truth. Individuals deploy a self reflective rationality to judge the impact of the project on their work and life experience and act accordingly. This paper contributes to IS research by drawing attention to IT service management as an area for academic research as well as to Foucault's notion of 'ethics' which provides a fresh view for understanding the consequences of the development and implementation of IS solutions.

Keywords: Rationalization, power/knowledge, care of the self, IT service management, customer

Résumé

Nous examinons d'un œil critique un projet de rationalisation d'un service client informatique par le biais des SI, dans un contexte universitaire britannique. Le papier cherche à manifester comment les individus déploient leur réflexion morale critique pour statuer 'le soin du moi' sous les régimes de rationalisation de vérité. Les contributions portent sur le management d'un service informatique comme objet de recherche académique, ainsi que sur l'attention à la notion 'd'éthique' reprise des travaux de Foucault.

Introduction:

There is an ongoing pressure on higher education institutions (HEIs) for deployment of more information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their integration in teaching, learning and research. The result is often a wider base of information technology (IT) infrastructure ranging from electronic mailing, World Wide Web, virtual learning environments, to on/off campus end user computing networks.

The change in the UK higher education (HE) policy in the last three decades coupled with national and global socio-economic changes have driven many HEIs into competitive and market oriented environment (Allen *et al.*, 2002). Initiatives such as the information systems and technology value for money in the late 90s, the widening participation strategy and more recently the top-up in tuition fees had added to the pressure on the UK HEIs and presented two challenges: first, how can HEIs manage and support the expanding IT infrastructure deployed to meet the increase in number of students. Second, is how to align institutional diverse cultures to deliver the level of IT services demanded by new types of students/customers expecting value for their money? The result is, that

University IT services function is constantly working under pressure to support both an increased number of end-users and diverse applications, often without equivalent rise in resources (Warren and Adam, 1999).

IT service management (ITSM) was only recently brought to the forefront of academic discussion with a number of scholars in IS field (e.g. Galup *et al*, 2007; Rai and Sambamurth, 2006) pointing out the dearth of research in ITSM and stressing its rich context awaiting IS researchers to explore its insights. ITSM is concerned with the delivery and support of IT services and its apparent main focus is the improvement of the quality of IT services provided to the customers in a cost efficient and effective manner. It is a process and service-oriented approach to IT service provision from a customer perspective (Beachboard *et al*, 2007). ITSM is usually implemented through a collection of 'best practice' in IT service provision commonly known as IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) Framework. Software vendors are continuously developing service management software solutions which are ITIL compliant with stated aims to enable and support the service processes. IT professionals in industry and government are increasingly adopting ITSM 'best practice' and developing IT services standards such as BS 15000 and more recently ISO/IEC20000 in managing IT services provision. This orientation also includes global sourcing or off shoring of IT services. The area of IT global sourcing has witnessed a growing research attention in recent years where number of studies were conducted focusing on the issues of cost reduction and competitiveness in the IT services delivery and support as well as labour processes and job losses. (Goodman and Ramer, 2007; Cederlund *et al*, 2007).

Commentators in IT services global sourcing have also called for the need of more theoretical lenses to improve the academic understanding of the evolving business models of outsourced IT services (Cederlund *et al*, 2007; Beachboard *et al*, 2007). Therefore, the obvious one aim of ITSM whether outsourced or delivered in-house is to achieve cost efficiency by rationalising services delivery and support processes. Frontline employees are key to any customer service improvement initiative because they are at the customer encounters for the delivery and support of IT services. However, there is little known about ITSM and the consequences of IT services rationalisation on frontline employees who deliver and support the IT services and how they live with such consequences. More specifically the University IT service management context remains a neglected area of academic research.

This paper provides a critical perspective to the growing urge for rationalisation of IT enabled customer services by exploring the experiences of employees in a UK University Information Systems Division (the Division). The Division embarked on an information systems (IS) enabled customer service project to rationalise and streamline the 'front end' customer services such as incident reporting, service requests and other user queries and problems. The data presented in this paper was collected as part of a larger study investigating ITSM practices and policies in HEIs. It was based on approximately two years of an in-depth field study at the IS Division of a mid-size UK University (Riverbank University). The author observed and was involved with the project team and other users at different stages of the project implementation life cycle. This involved working with the project teams, observing, sharing ideas and casual discussion on different occasions, and interviews with key participants and users. Informed by Foucaultian critical perspective of rationality, power and ethics the paper raised the following question: how do individuals enact 'the care of the self' in living with the consequences of IS enabled services rationalisation and what are the practices of the 'care of the self' deployed by the various actors involved? The aim is to use Foucault's work on ethics and care of the self to offer an alternative view to the consequences of IS-enabled customer services rationalisation in University context and to contribute to the critical literature on IT service management.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: In the next section, the notion of rationality is introduced and discussed in relation to IS. This is followed by discussion of Foucault's framework of rationality/power, ethics and regimes of truth. The section that follows is a description of the research design, data generation process and context, followed by the analysis and finally discussion and conclusions are drawn.

Theoretical Background:

1. Rationality Concept in IS and its Critique

Weber (1947) in his 'theory of organisation' introduced the concept of rationality in modern social institutions when he distinguishes between formal and substantive rational social actions on the one hand, and emotional and habitual social actions on the other hand. The concept was further extended and elaborated by different critical social theorists notably from Frankfurt school, such as Horkheimer (1947); Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) and Habermas, (1984); it

carries double meanings; it refers to a measurable or countable thing as well as the state of reasoning (Townley, 2002).

Information systems as a domain of knowledge has been rooted in computing and other scientific disciplines, accordingly early IS solutions are largely driven by technical considerations such as the technical rationality which assumes an inner rational logic of IS solutions to demonstrate the expected benefits; added to this the rational capabilities of those involved in their specification, development and use (Avgerou and McGrath, 2007; Asaro, 2000). Accordingly a stream of IS research tends to focus on the rationalist and functionalist design methodologies of IS solutions and the lure of design and development effort (Asaro, 2000; Mathiassen, 1996; Weber, 1987). Klein and Hirschheim (1991) for example considered IS development methodologies as forms of rational practices and developed a rationality typology of various development methodologies. Such rationality perspective in IS practice assumed that the most effective way for systems analysts and developers to state the requirements and develop solutions is to decontextualise them (Townley, 2002).

However, the rationality potential of IS solutions has been challenged by a number of IS researchers who applied critical social theory to explain the social and political influences of the context of IS development, implementation and use (Avgerou and McGrath, 2005; Klecun, 2005; Cecez-Kecmanovic *et al*, 2002; Avgerou, 2000; Kumar *et al*, 1998; Hirschheim *et al*, 1996). Feenberg (1991) believes that technology is far from being neutral but loaded with power relations. The critique also extends to include perspectives from social shaping of technology theorists (Mackenzie and Wajcman, 1999); social constructionists (Winner, 1993, Pinch and Bijker, 1984); actor-network theory and sociology of translation (Latour, 1987; Law, 1986; Callon, 1986; Callon and Law, 1982) and postmodernist (Foucault, 1980); they all challenged the rational inertia logic and deterministic view of technological solutions. Politically informed IS researchers drew attention to the inherently political activities involved in IS development, implementation and use and that resistance and systems failures are common phenomena in practice (e.g. Myers and Young, 1997; Markus and Bjorn-Andersen, 1987; Markus and Pfeffer, 1983; Markus, 1983). However, in most of these works the relationship between rationality and power relations remain unclear and either treated as two separate domains or vaguely collapsed onto each other (Avgerou and McGrath, 2007).

Foucault's work on ethics and care of the self provides a distinctive view for understanding rationality/power dimensions of IS solutions. This part of Foucault's work has received little attention from researchers in IS field (Willcocks, 2004). In fact Avgerou and McGrath (2007) study of IKA is one of the rare examples, however this study was limited by its focus on the IS development. This paper intended to build on that work to explore the ways in which individuals enacted 'the care of the self' through out the IS solution project life cycle. In the next section we will introduce Foucault's framework.

2. Foucault's Framework

As pointed out by Cordoba and Robson (2003) one of the concerns of those utilizing Michel Foucault work is the challenging task of providing a summary of his work without missing or misinterpreting some of its important aspects. However, Foucault's intellectual journey can be mapped onto three stages: archaeology, genealogy and ethics (Willcocks, 2004). In the archaeology Foucault was concerned with the order of discourse and discursive practices that constitute a particular field of knowledge such as psychiatry. In the genealogy discourses and knowledge are played in games of power relations to determine those statements accepted as truth /knowledge and those disqualified. The ethics turn appeared towards the end of his life where Foucault turns his attention to subjects and began writing about the 'Self' and this was considered as a logical conclusion to the historical investigation into insanity, deviancy, and criminality (Martin *et al*, 1988). In ethics Foucault broadened the rationality/power dimension to accommodate ethical behaviours such as friendship and sexuality ethics (McGrath, 2006).

2.1. Rationality/Power and Regimes of Truth

Foucault's thesis rejects the neutrality and value free rationality/knowledge such as the one embedded in IS solutions, for him all forms of knowledge have political history in the practice of power (Foucault, 1977). Power in Foucault's terms is organised, exercised, and legitimised through different forms of rationality-whether scientific, technological, economic, etc.-(Feenberg, 1991). Foucault seeks to emphasise the co-constitutive nature of rationality/power relationship (Avgerou, 2000). Thereby, he rejects all forms of dualism and 'binary opposition' of modernist approaches to knowledge (Townley, 1998). His distinctive analysis of power resides in the emphasis on its

relational nature and that power is not only negative and repressive but also positive and productive. Foucault rejects the universality of truth claims and argued that truth does not reside outside power relations and that each society has its own regime of truth determined by the type of discourse that becomes legitimate and accepted as true (Foucault, 1980). For instance, discourses of enterprise create and seek to impose certain values, assumptions and aspirations upon subjects (Chan, 2000). However, overtime such discourse could be changed, modified or resisted by subjugated or emerging rationalities which in turn reconfigure the power relations (Avgerou and McGrath, 2007). In this way a new regime of truth will be established under different set of power relations.

2.2. Ethics-‘The Care of the Self’ Principle

Foucault’s ethics turn was manifested in the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* and his seminars on the *Technologies of the Self*. In this work Foucault shifts the lens from technologies of power to focus on technologies of the self and becomes more concerned with studying desires, self knowledge, and self discipline (Foucault, 1978; 1984; 1988; 2000a). Individuals practice the ‘care of the self’ by their own selves or with the help of others to act upon their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, for the sake of transforming or changing themselves to a state of happiness, wisdom, and mastery (Foucault, 1988). According to Avgerou and McGrath (2007) such self-discipline is not purely a cognitive faculty but a moral care of the self. Care of the self requires knowledge of the self through critical moral reflection on the principles of rational conduct where actors use their own reasoning to make use of their selves for an aesthetic way of existence in which individuals’ experiences of oneself were not presupposed, but constituted in the dynamics of power relations and games of truth (Huijter, 1999; Foucault, 1984). Such critical moral reflection requires individuals to engage in a problematization process.

Problematization is the work of thought that individuals engaged in when facing some difficulties and obstacles in a particular domain of practice. Central to this process, problematization develops what is taken as given into a problem/question and transform the difficulties and obstacles into problems to which a diverse set of possible solutions are proposed in an attempt to produce response (Foucault, 2000b). When engaged in problematization process individuals bring in certain rationalities in an attempt to change or transform their lives, such transformation depends on individuals life experiences and constrained by their capacity to act within their particular context. According to Foucault (1984) the process of acting upon the self intensifies the relationship to one self making the ‘cultivation of the self’ as an art of existence.

This *art or aesthetics of existence* is the constitution of individual’s “reasoned moral stances within the power dynamics of their social context” (Avgerou and McGrath, 2007: 300). Here individuals don’t attempt to escape from power relations however; through self reflection, knowledge and capacity to act they are able to identify the various possible ways of action in relation to it. Therefore, power relations are not limiting but setting responsibilities for individuals to exercise their freedom in a more conscious and reasoned way (Cordoba and Robson, 2003). In this way they can transform their life into state of happiness.

Research Methodology:

1. Research Design

This paper drew from an in-depth field study conducted in the IS Division of the Riverbank University. In-depth field studies whether in a form of ethnography, participant and non-participant observation or action research provide the researcher with deeper involvement with the research subjects in their social context. It has been widely used by IS researchers to gain insight and understanding of the implications of IS solutions on individual and organisational life (Lee and Myers, 2004; Beynon-Davis, 1997; Zuboff, 1988).

2. Data Generation

The site of this field study was mainly determined by an opportunity provided to the author to get involved with a project team initiating and working towards the implementation of an ITSM project. The involvement came as a result of a request from the Division to a group of academics to provide informed academic opinion on the vision and implementation process of the project. The field study started in March 2006 and extended to the end of December 2007. During this period the author was offered a desk and worked with the project team in the Division. This

position allowed the author to be in close proximity to the different IT support teams who were expected to use the new solution and processes delivered by the project.

Initially it was intended as an interpretive field study where the author conducted both participant and non-participant observations (Mohammed and Richardson, 2007). After spending a reasonable time in the field and achieved a sufficient level of understanding of the social context, the author became more concerned about the assumptions behind the project objectives and scope. The scope comprised the implementation of a new software solution and reengineering the processes to rationalise and improve the IT services delivery and support, this added a critical lens to the study which became more of a critical field study (Cecez-Kecmanovic *et al*, 2002). The critical dimension developed as the author observed teams meetings, workshops and other public participatory meetings (called Roadshows) intended to be democratic venues to sell the vision of the project to the staff. In these meetings the asymmetrical power relations were quite obvious, and conflicts of interests between different functional units within the Division were voiced. The project brought together individuals with different knowledge and expertise from different units within the division, the release of these individuals by the heads of their units to work on the project became a political game. Add to this the continuing emphasis by the management that the Division lacks accurate performance information, indicators, targets, and there was no individual responsibility and accountability; all these further invited a critical investigation into the possibilities of control by the intended rationalisation of the services.

Different data generation techniques were used including observation notes, in-depth interviews and documentation materials. Over 200 documentations (hard and soft copies) were collected (few were analysed for this study). Documents include minutes of meetings, project reports, training materials, software evaluation and selection documents, email communications, processes design and work flows, workshop presentations, performance statistics and service targets, etc. The author was granted access to the project document management system where all documents and communications related to the project are stored.

Overall Thirty Eight in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted; this paper drew upon part of these interviews accounts. Two rounds of interviews were conducted; the first round took place during (October-November 2006) included Six project team members, the leader of change champions team, Two external consultants, Two senior management level, and Two middle management level. The main focus was to get a deeper understanding of the project's scope, vision, objectives, obstacles, and expectations. The second round took place during (October-November 2007) after the project was rolled out and the new systems and processes went live. Interviews in this round included, One senior management, Four project team members, One change champion, Three customer service agents from the Enquiry Desk, Five agents from the Service Desk First line and Nine agents from the 2nd line, in addition to email discussions with Three Information Assistants (they were originally work in the Library Issue Desks and replaced by self service machines). Some interviewees were interviewed twice in order to monitor the process and changes in views and accounts. The author seeks to listen to various voices regarding their evaluation of the implementation efforts, the consequences and how they have been affected. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours; all interviews were tape recorded and transcribed shortly after with only few exceptions where participants refused the recording in which case full notes were taken during the interviews and reconstructed by the author afterwards. Following Cecez-Kecmanovic *et al* (2002) by setting critical agenda for the research and seeking to examine the consequences of IS enabled service rationalisation, the documents and interview accounts generated were analysed by adopting a historic perspective to events, actors and broader contextual considerations.

3. The Setting Background and Context:

The setting of this field study was the IS Division of Riverbank University, it is a medium-size UK University with some 20000 students and around 3000 academic staff. The Division employs approximately 230 staff, including academic information support staff, IT professionals, administrative and clerical staff organised into seven functional service units. Collectively, they manage the campus wide IT infrastructure and services and provide support to all academic staff, students and administration from a variety of helpdesks, enquiry desks, and other specialised help lines. The range of services include and not limited to library services, desktop hardware and software support, e-mail facilities, campus telephony network, business applications, virtual learning environments, etc. to support teaching and learning, research and administrative activities of the University.

The Division came into existence in 2002 when the merger between the academic information services (AIS) and management information systems (MIS) units was approved by the University governing body. It was formally established in early 2003 by the appointment of a new director for the Division who came with a new vision for the Division. Indeed, it was not a coincidence that the restructuring of the University support services took place at this time as the HE sector was witnessing a new period of reform following the government white paper '*The Future of Higher education*' in 2003. Historically, the most influential reform efforts to the UK HE sector were initiated in 1979 by Thatcher Conservative government and continued by successive conservative governments that followed. These reforms were based on introducing new managerialism and market liberalisation ideologies seeking to remove inefficiencies in public service provision and allegedly 'empowering' consumers. In 1997 a New Labour government won the alleged elections declaring 'education, education, education' as the government's top priority. The New Labour government showed strong emphasis on issues of efficiency, transparency and accountability in public spending; accordingly series of value for money studies were conducted among which is the ITSM value for money in HE which recommended the need for efficient and effective use, procurement and support of IT infrastructure in HE (HEFCE, 1998). In 2003 the government issued a white paper on its vision for the future of higher education emphasising the need for more market deregulation in HE sector so as to remain competitive while ensuring the need to achieve social justice through widening access to HE and life long learning. In 2004 a new HE Act was introduced which made provision for HEIs to top-up tuition fees. The government saw a great potential for IT services infrastructure in support of life long learning and widening participation by offering learners and researchers flexibility and choices (DfES, 2003). Consequently, the discourse of enterprise was pervading the sector accompanied by a change in vocabulary where terms such as consumer, customer, services and quality have seen widespread in HE (Tight, 1998).

In early 2004 the Division formed a Review Panel consisting of academics and experts from within and outside the University to evaluate its whole services provision and processes. The Panel recommendations required the Division to build performance measurements, pay attention to value for money, establish service level agreements, and to improve communication with customers. Against this backdrop the unfolding story of this project was analysed. The catalyst to change lay with the impression of the Division senior management that these multiple services and support channels were inefficient, inconsistent and did not provide the level of responsiveness which customers increasingly demanded. The management believed that the legacy call management system (SM) currently in use by helpdesks agents was getting outdated, unsupportable and provided poor functionality. There was also a wide belief that the current part-time and rota base staffing model used in enquiry desks was inefficient in terms of time wasted, costs of handling enquiries, and lacking in continuity. Consequently, the decision was made by the management to initiate a project that was hoped to streamline and rationalise the Division's customer facing services and to enable the Division to become customer focused with 'empowered' frontline staff.

In October 2004 an external consultant (the Consultant) was invited to review the overall customer service functions and to propose a holistic solution that will address the shortcomings of the current system and radically improve the quality of services delivered to the customers and users. After a series of presentations and workshops the Consultant succeeded to convince the senior management that to achieve a radical improvement in customer services they need to look beyond the replacement of the legacy call management system. The result was the initiation of a project called 'customer resolution and information services project' (CRISP) classified by senior management as the Division's top priority and the Consultant was appointed as the project manager.

The scope of CRISP in the project initiation document (PID) included the replacement of the legacy system with a new IT service management software solution, business processes redesign, the adoption of ITSM best practices such as British Standards (BS15000) and the ITIL framework. The ITIL framework includes six modules: incident management, problem management, change management, release management, configuration management, and knowledge management. The scope also included the acquisition and implementation of Internet Protocol Call Centre (IPCC) software for automatic call distribution, scripting, monitoring, and performance statistics. Moreover, it includes the relocation of 1st, 2nd and 3rd lines support staff to create one central customer support centre (renamed latter as the Service Desk) for mail and phone services as well as enquiry desks for face-to-face enquires.

The Consultant set a time plan for completing CRISP within 12 months however, 18 months latter the main components of CRISP scope were still not implemented. In April 2006 the Consultant left and a new internal project manager was appointed. The new project manager refocused the project by phasing it into key milestones and by July 2006 CRISP became a long term programme and Key Milestone1 (KM1) became the official project. The scope

of KM1 was the implementation of the new IT service management software solution and a minor redesign of the incident management process only. By June 2007 the implementation was completed and the solution was installed in users' machines. Principal users were offered initial training and encouraged to play with the system and by August 2007 the project was officially rolled out.

In the following section we will analyse the data collected using Foucault's concepts of rationality/power, regimes of truth, care of the self and the art of existence to explore how various actors enact the 'care for the self' in living with the consequences of such rationalisation programme.

Analysis:

To analyse of the enactment of the care of the self under CRISP, we started by explaining how the technical/rational knowledge is deployed to achieve customer services rationalisation at Riverbank University. The main thesis is to demonstrate how rationality is implicated in relations of power to give rise to certain regimes of truth. Under such regimes individuals engaged in a moral critical reflection to enact the care of the self and to achieve aesthetic existence in their living experience.

1. Deployment of Technical/Rational Knowledge

Economic and technical/rationalities were deployed to provide a case for various aspects of the project at various stages of CRISP lifecycle. The project initiation document focused on two major things: the legacy call management system and the staffing model of the customer contact points. The initial report presented to the senior management problematized the existing legacy system and established a case for the replacement of the system based on technical reasoning such as the lack of supplier support and the perceived risk of system failure, as well as its non compliance with best practice in ITSM, and cost savings and efficiency gains expected from CRISP. The tender for the supply of the new service management software solution is a highly technical document. The mandatory requirements from the new solution supplier required a high level of performance and functionality, value for money, scalability, cost ownership, and cost saving in staff training. To further support the case of CRISP, meticulous calculations showing the detailed statistics of front line activities and operations were produced (Townley, 1998 & 1996).

During the implementation stage the Consultant set up a business transformation unit (BTU) to look at the Division's business process reengineering, the unit was staffed with three business analysts including the author. This unit was disbanded a few months after the Consultant had left. The rationale was the staff were lacking the technical knowledge and expertise in business process modelling (BPM), and had not enough training on using the BPM software. As a result the implementation process focused on the software development and that was considered by the new project manager as a 'pragmatic rationality' as he explains:

"I think we need to become more pragmatic to realise that we are in HE sector working with limited budget and resources...implementing the whole ITIL framework and a full scale BPR is unreasonable...we realised that there is only small part which we can deliver in a reasonable time scale and cost"

As Avgerou and McGrath (2007) suggest, the important question in this case is why the Division didn't mobilise the necessary resources to its top priority project and why full scale BPR became unreasonable? Here comes the political game we pointed out earlier and by scrutinising the implementation context, it was obvious that the technical and economic justifications provided were not sufficient. The early examination of the Division's service requests, request for change and other service delivery processes undertaken by the BTU staff revealed some serious process duplications and it was expected that cross-functional process reengineering will result in sufficient cost savings for the Division. However, the conflict awakened over who 'would be' the process owner/s. Although the merger was planned to create a converged and integrated body of service provision from Library and IT however, there was a general impression that the cultural differences between the two professions were huge and mounts to 'cultural clashes' in some instances. The customer services unit which is responsible for all customer facing services and operations including library services, grounded and legitimised its claim for owning the processes on the prevailing discourse of enterprise and the new regime of customer focused service approach. On the other hand, the IT Infrastructure and Application Development unit viewed integrated customer services as underpinned by IT and requiring a process orientation they believed already existed within the unit. This conflict is expressed by the head of the IT unit when he argued:

“...yes ideally I wanted a service delivery that absolutely cuts across the whole division but you imagine within the University to say to librarians that their services are the same as IT thing...COME ON!! I know we have merged in a way but in ten years ahead we may be so”.

This political tension was further manifested in the issue of resources particularly in releasing the seconded staff from other units to work on the project. Under the new regime of customer centricity the head of the customer service unit became the business owner of CRISP and consequently the project was perceived by other units as something belong to that unit. Therefore, *“when it comes to devoting staff and financial resources...people [other heads] say something and do something else”* (Head of Customer Service). In this case from Foucault’s perspective as noted by Avgerou and McGrath (2007) we would argue that the subjugated regime of the silo based service delivery challenged the legitimacy of IS enabled and process integrated customer services, despite its economic and technical/rational potentials.

2. Discourses of Enterprise and Regimes of Truth

As explained in the story of CRISP, the interaction between technological rationalism and power relations was not a dialectic engagement (Asaro, 2000) but, a correlative constitution linked through discourse to form regimes of truth (Introna, 2003). In such regimes of truth, technological rationalism is not only a means or servant of political hegemony but also the goals pursued by CRISP sponsors (Avgerou and McGrath, 2007). The genealogy of CRISP truth regimes of IS enabled customer service rationalisation can be found in the history of successive reform and the management of publicly funded institutions in the UK. In the post-war era during the 1950s and 60s the UK and the rest of the world was dominated by the Leftist ideologies which promoted the idea of the welfare state in which governments spend generously on public services. By the 70s the welfare state has come under severe criticism and governments began to rationalise public spending focusing on performance efficiency and control; consequently, public sector management ideology shifted to the New Right as exemplified by the UK Thatcherism political philosophy (Chan and Mok, 2001).

The New Labour government of the UK’s late 90s showed a further enforcement of Thatcherism through its “Third Way” ideology which is basically neo-liberalism ideologies with a discourse of social justice (Mulderrig, 2003). In the Third Way IS solutions are part of the government’s political vision for enacting its programmes for ‘modernising government’ in order to achieve ‘transformational change’ in public service delivery (Cabinet Office, 1999 & 2005).

Under the regimes of modernising government, the main concern was the deployment of IS solutions to ensure quality, effectiveness, efficiency and value for money through performance measurement in service delivery and support as well as ‘empowering’ both frontline staff and customers. CRISP became a legitimate project in such discourse of enterprise which trench the logic of rationalisation and offers modernisation sponsors in the Division new ways for legitimating and justifying programmes of organisational change and work restructuring (du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Fournier and Grey, 1999). CRISP teams utilised the power of enterprise discourse to justify the need for change. In this regime the customer services IS enabled rationalisation practices of CRISP were not only considered as means for political interests but also goals pursued by modernisation sponsors who believed that:

“CRISP is not just about the implementation of a software solution, it is a radical transformation of how we deliver customer services” (Senior Manager).

The transformation was translated into a series of organisational changes through which the Division restructured into five functional units instead of seven. The new structure is based on establishing two larger units for IT infrastructure and customer services and operations, in addition to three supporting units. As part of the restructuring a new customer support centre (later on renamed as the Service Desk) was established to bring together all customer contact points under one central hub organised a long three lines of customer service and support. This restructuring was further justified on the basis of an emerging discourse of the need to manage the knowledge of the Division. The belief was that most of the technical knowledge and professional expertise were highly tacit in the heads of people and in many cases it was perceived as an indication of a high business risk from a ‘single point of failure’. Accordingly, the idea was to bring the three levels of IT services and support in one building with permanent staffing model instead of the old fixed plus rota model. These levels represent different levels of technical expertise

and knowledge. The 1st line service agents receive customer cases either through the phone or via email, if the case fall within their domain of knowledge it will be resolved and keyed into the system by either pressing a ‘hotkey’ if it is generic like ‘I forgot my password’; if it was not then both the case description and customer details will be recorded. If the case was beyond the 1st line technical knowledge it will be logged onto the system and escalated to specialised 2nd line support team. The 2nd line technician may call a 3rd level of IT professionals for support if needed; the 3rd level can be an external partner (the vendor of the application). The intention was to enable the 1st line agents to share knowledge with the 2nd line agents as they were located in close proximity to each other as evident in the experience of the following first line agent:

“I regard myself probably the weakest among the 1st line team in terms of IT and software knowledge and skills, but having the 2nd line guys around me, I just observed that I absorbed enormous amount of knowledge cos I can just turn round and ask Fred...these guys are not any sort of selfishness or protecting their knowledge” (First Line Agent1).

Moreover, the knowledge management discourse was inscribed in the IS solution by making a mandatory requirement for the supplier to include a knowledge management module in the solution to help create a central knowledge base of tested and tried case resolutions.

However, the power of the discourse of the new regime of IS enabled customer service rationalisation was challenged by subjugated discourses of old days routine. CRISP Roadshows as discursive practices, though organised by the modernisation sponsors to sell the political vision of CRISP and to legitimise actions, they also provide a discursive space for others to challenge the possibility of delivering quality customer services under the rationalisation regime. For instance, in these Roadshows the capability of self service machines which were installed as a replacement for desk agents was seriously challenged. Many believed that these machines were not going to improve the quality of customers experience as the case of face-to-face interaction with desk agents. The new solution and the underpinning business rules were also debated as forcing the front line staff to focus on speed and meeting targets at the expense of delivering quality customer services.

Under the new regime the call centre system and the service management solution enabled the collection of performance statistics and the escalation of cases in a timely-stamped fashion to measure the resolution progress against the target set for each case category. In the words of Townley (1998), such rational and calculable knowledge under the new regime was deemed essential for improving customer services:

“...the important thing is you have statistics on what you have done and that will help us to see where we need improvements” (Service Desk Manager).

The implementation of the new solution and the business process imposed new ways of working. First, it dictates individual rather than team responsibility. For example, when a 2nd line team received an escalated case from the 1st line, the team leader will assign that case to an agent who became accountable for its resolution. The new process required the agent to contact the customer within 15 minutes of taking case ownership. As the agent continues working on the resolution, the system automatically changes the screen colours to indicate the status of the case in relation to the resolution time target. Second, in a situation where a case has to be transferred from one team to another, the new system rules required team leaders to negotiate and agree in advance. In this way the new regime sponsors hoped to improve the communication between the teams. However, the subjugated discourses and regimes tend to surface and challenge the legitimacy of the new regime claims for enhancing the quality of customer service.

“To be honest the old system [regime] of work is allowing us to continue doing what we needed to do...lots of jobs not necessary getting logged on to the system because it takes longer than to resolve, so lots of jobs never appeared on the stats and I would assume this is one of the reasons why they [modernisation sponsors] wanted to move to something bigger...now the problem with the new system [regime] is that sticking to the rules and process has become more important than actually resolving our customers’ problems...actually it is getting in our way for helping customers and delivering good service” (Second Line Agent1, emphasis added).

Moreover, a few months after the implementation a new operational group was formed and was charged with the task of looking onto the implementation process to “put the things right”. Through this process a number of old routines and practices were enabled. For example, teams were allowed to push cases within and between teams, a practice which was seriously condemned initially by modernisation sponsors and described as leading to what they called “the Ping Pong of cases” creating “cracks” where lots of cases went missing as well as leading to the spread of

a blaming culture. Therefore, despite the capability of the new IS enabled customer service regime to streamline the resolution process and to provide performance measurement and targets for efficient service delivery, it was constantly challenged by old routines and practices. Thus regimes of truth can be subtle and very mobile but in some cases they can be very rigid and persist all change mechanisms (Introna, 2003). Changes to the regimes of truth can be effected either through external forces or through a continuous enactment of the care of the self (Foucault, 2002 cited in Avgerou and McGrath, 2007).

3. Care of the Self under CRISP

Understanding the care of the self requires analysing the type of problematization by participant actors and their self reflective judgement concerning the significance of the changes brought by CRISP on their work and life experiences. Individual employees within the Division whether actively or silently (Avgerou and McGrath, 2007) made their own judgement as what working life they should aspire for, accordingly they acted in a way that either strengthen or weaken the rationalisation processes and discourses of enterprise which formed the basis of CRISP. In the following section we will give an account of how project managers and CRISP teams engaged in problematization process and bring in their private life concerns into CRISP.

3.1. Problematization by CRISP Project Managers

The first project manager was a consultant managing his own consultancy firm which specialised in BPR and change management. Initially he was invited to advice the Division on how to replace the legacy call management software which was seen as inefficient and not providing good customer services. Being in the consultancy business for more than a decade the Consultant believed that HE is a promising sector; and the successful implementation of CRISP could turn CRISP into an exemplar project in the sector which will be reflected positively on his track records and business. The Consultant employed his technical knowledge in BPR through series of presentations to senior management and was able to influence the course and scope of the project from simple software replacement to a transformative IT-enable BPR change programme, this programme has been described elsewhere as an unprecedented and unmatched scale of BPR in the UK higher education (See Jeal, 2005 for BPR detailed account). When offered the position to project manage CRISP, the Consultant viewed the position as an opportunity to demonstrate and use his technical expertise in BPR and change management to deliver an exemplar project in the sector which can be classified by the Joint Information Systems Committee (HE advisory organisation) as one of the best practice. However, in the University context being an external consultant and project manager proved to be problematic for two main reasons. First, the bureaucracy of the University finance procedures does not allow externals to manage the resource allocation and budgets of the projects. Second, in the Division CRISP was basically viewed as an IT Consultant led project and there was a feeling among employees within the Division that they got the professional capability to do the job instead of bringing an outsider paying him that lot of money. So the internal culture started to work against rather than supporting the project manager. The CRISP vision which was based on rational calculations could not resolve the situation. Moreover, based on his private sector experience the Consultant estimated too optimistic timescale for the project completion in a University culture that tends to favour long consultation processes. For example, the recruitment of some project staff was delayed simply because of a conflict on whether the post should be a 'manager' or 'co-ordinator'. Moreover, after few months some members of the project core team were required to assist the Review Panel which was set up to prepare the Division's internal evaluation report. Another obstacle was also manifested in the continuous change in the process modelling and notation methodology that CRISP was expected to adopt which eventually settled by using 'Visio Application' for process modelling. These obstacles rendered the implementation of CRISP transformatory vision to be a risky and uncertain task for which the Consultant appeared to have no technically rational resolution. He tried to use a participative approach to engage and take staff on board. These participative practices became one of his reasoned ways of acting by the self and with the help of other participants. Moreover, he used friendship as another practice (Foucault, 2000d), and tried to make his friendly relationship with the Director more visible to the staff in an attempt to push things as explained by one of the project team members:

"The consultant led the project team at a point of time to believe he had a very intimate relation with the Director, almost he could ring the Director at home...he had a little coffee chat in office, he had these agreements under the table from the Director...for instance he would walk into the project team meeting and say I and the Director agreed so and so...on a personal level that was really hard on the project

team to hear some consultant who was a bit of pop himself telling you that he had some intimate relationship with the director and he said so and so, you really have to believe in that"

Further problematic issues involved the steering group decision to purchase new servers as well as the decision to appoint a Test Manager to run the user acceptance testing. These decisions had been delayed and deferred for months, and seriously challenged the Consultant time scale and vision for CRISP. Therefore, the issues that arose during his tenure couldn't be resolved by the technical rationality deployed to build the case for CRISP. These issues also challenged that initial vision and private concerns of the Consultant. Eventually, the Consultant was replaced by an internal project manager.

The new project manager who replaced the Consultant in April 2006 was an older man with a long IT career in industry. He had moved in various IT roles including programmer, system analyst and project manager. He also did some consultancy and freelance work in business process mapping before he joined the Division in 2003 as the head of Quality and Processes unit. He volunteered to take on the role in addition to his managerial responsibilities. He took the role of CRISP project manager amidst of growing political pressure from the University management that CRISP had yet to deliver any tangible results. He viewed the previous two years of his predecessor as a period of ad hoc implementation which adversely affected the credibility of the Division and put the funding of future projects at stake. Under the pressure of his political commitment to the University stakeholders to deliver quick results and his personal concerns about taking the responsibilities of the new position he took in the new structure as Associate Director, making it very clear that he was not going to support the massive transformational vision of CRISP. Instead he was convinced that CRISP should be viewed as a programme encompassing number of projects to be implemented on the basis of continuous improvement. In his meeting with us (the author and two business analysts) at the BTU in the mid of June 2006 he asked for an immediate plan for implementing just the incident management module at least to deliver the same level of functionality as it was with the legacy system with minimum business rules to be incorporated, and was most concerned with meeting his commitment to the University management. Together with the project core team he worked out the detailed technical and functional requirements of KM1 to be implemented in six months. However, the consultation on KM1 took longer and he found that the delivery of quick wins while maintaining the participatory approach to be problematic and contradictory. He made his own judgement that fixing quick wins would restore the trust of the Division and in terms of private life would enhance his professional identity as a project manager. He explained his position as he said:

"Clearly there are political pressures, as we got latter on, it was more important that we push for results and tangible benefits than to keep every body involved and I think we have suffered from that". (The New Project Manager).

He acted by withdrawing himself from routine public work appearances such as regular meetings and instead focused on private work (CRISP). Moreover, he found it ineffective to maintain the project teams, accordingly the BTU team was disbanded and the change champions team also almost disbanded and CRISP was left with the core project team with a technology focus.

3.2. Probelmatization by CRISP Teams

The initial transformational regime of CRISP was operationalised through the establishment of several project teams that were seen at the time as essential for the realisation of that vision. Individuals in these teams engaged in problematization processes to critically reflect upon the impact of CRISP upon their work and life experiences.

The BTU team was seen as a vocal point in the implementation process. The two business analysts comprised the team were selected from amongst a number of internal applicants and they were highly motivated about their newly created roles. The first analyst worked for the University for 14 years; previously he worked for the AIS unit before the Division was established in 2003. The second analyst had been an issue desk staff, a job with a low status in the Division. Both analysts were appointed on a secondment basis and promised to be appointed full time in what was expected to be a promising career in the new regime. They were sent on ITIL foundation and business process modelling training courses. The first analyst was also a member of the software tender committee and part of the team who visited five reference sites recommended by the software bidding vendors. However, as the steering committee continued to delay taking a decision on their full time appointment, the analysts started to become uncertain about the future of their positions. Added to this the continued change in CRISP process modelling

approach had further escalated their fears that the BPR element of CRISP will not be delivered. Though they worked actively to demonstrate the importance of the work they were doing to the steering committee and senior management through workshop presentations and reporting however, later on the decision was made to put the process element of CRISP on hold and to focus mainly on the software development. Therefore, their ITIL and business modelling training did not help in realising the working life and the job they strived for. Later on the team was disbanded and the first analyst was assigned the role of system developer and a year later he implemented the incident management module and went back to his former job as a desktop software administrator while, the second analyst was appointed to work in a different project. When interviewed by the author a few months after the implementation of the software both appeared to be satisfied with the incremental approach adopted by phasing CRISP into key milestones.

“...in the BTU we had this idea of transforming our services, we start looking at the processes but I don’t think there was a clear understanding of what actually we were going to do with these processes...in retrospective I think that element was quite pointless...the reason why that element being put on hold is because we didn’t appreciate that it is a huge and massive undertaking” (First Business Analyst).

Both analysts believed that the political pressure and resources problem made the continuous rather than transformative improvement of the services the rational and reasoned approach for the Division. They expressed their willingness to support CRISP future phases should the management needed their expertise. Indeed, the first analyst as a system developer provided threads from the first phase to ensure that CRISP move forward and developed into further phases.

First line customer support team in the service desk included agents who were selected from among the Division’s current staff working as Information Assistants in the libraries to populate the newly formed customer support centre established under the consultant CRISP regime of customer services rationalisation. Coming from a job which had no career progression path, these young agents-all were under 24 years except one- made a judgement that moving to an IT related job would impact positively on their quality of work life. They went through intensive IT support training and were promised that once approved they would be upgraded to the new IT staff pay scheme which was far more rewarding than their current pay. The initial plan was to recruit six first line agents and place them juxtaposed to the second line where they can interact and further improve their IT skills and knowledge. By the time the new project manager took over there were only four agents. Following the phased approach, the appointment of the remaining two agents was delayed. Moreover, the negotiations with the University regarding the new pay scheme were delayed, and as the volume of the IT service calls increased, the situation became more problematic and the agents saw a contradiction between moving to a highly demanding job while staying on the old pay scheme.

“...yes the new pay scheme, because we took on the role on the understanding that we will be upgraded in the new pay scheme, and that was about a year ago and we are still waiting while getting a lot extra things added on us...in the meantime it is hard to say we are enjoying that extra work” (First Line Agent2)

Therefore, they were more cynical that their new jobs would bring the impact they were looking for in their life experience. In one way, they started to adjust to the current situation at least accepting the old pay scheme. But again with their current IT skills training they knew of the possibility of getting better offers in industry. Indeed, one of them left to an IT company.

Prior to the new regime of CRISP, second line customer support teams were distributed in different locations and they hardly knew each other. Each team had its own established work norms and ways of interacting with customers. The main features of the established work routines in the majority of these teams involved a complete autonomy for the agent to select the cases to resolve. Also when they needed extra information they call a first line agent asking him/her to contact the customer to supply the required information. When a case required tasks to be performed by other teams they tended to email it without prior contact with the receiving team. Therefore, their judgement and problematisation of the new regime of CRISP rationalisation vision varied with the extent to which it touched their established routines and the way it impacted the quality of work life experience they strived to achieve. Under CRISP, the customer support centre became the hub which brings the distributed second line teams in one location; some of them met each other for the first time. The new building was an open space plan which brought new forms

of socialisation; the new business rule for cases escalation outlined earlier, the performance measurement and the target time for case resolution, all present a new regime of work.

For instance, agents in the Systems team, due to the large volume of customer cases they receive did not follow any business rules and their work routine in allocating tasks was based on *'who shouts louder'*.

These agents viewed the new regime which requires cases to be allocated on the basis of severity with a target response time attached to each case, viewed it as a challenge to their professional conduct:

"...their [systems team] interpretation for the accumulation of jobs in their stacks, is that they will be looked at as if they are not professional or lacking the know how to do their jobs...these people want to see no jobs in their stacks by the end of the day" (Systems Team Leader).

They challenged the new regime of IS enabled rationalisation as a strategy to improve customer resolution. The team produced a detailed report to show the weaknesses in the new regime, as well as questioning why the focus was not on the good things in the old system and to start from there. Indeed, some of the highly skilled and competent IT individuals were able to find some holes in the system which enabled them to push cases away from their stacks as they used to do in the old system. These practices were later on legitimised by the development team thereby changing some of the intended objectives of the IS enabled rationalisation. These legitimised subjugated practices inscribed in the old regime pointed to the fact that the old regime was still preferred by some employees.

In the Business Applications team which dealt with very few customers, the individuals had very close personal relationships with customers. After the relocation to the customer support centre under the new regime, all customer service calls were taken by first line agents and logged onto the system before being escalated to a designated second line. These individuals were very much concerned about the loss of personal relationships but, the new regime also seemed to challenge their own notion and understanding of customer relationship management. For them these personal relationships are essential to carry out their work because they constantly involve applications users in the planning and roll out of any release and they believed that these users always have 'special needs'. They judged their detachment from customers' first contact as problematic to their customer relationship management. These agents to care for the their customers they tended to take customers calls directly, working with them to resolve their problems then forwarding the documentation details to a first line agent to log them onto the system; sometimes after the resolution. This concern for customer relationships was also a moral care of the self enacted by attending to other people's concerns. The enactment of personal relationship with customers in this team almost reversed the course of the IS enabled rationalisation business rules.

These ethical problematisations of individuals' concerns about their personal and work life were initiated by the new regime of IS enabled customer services rationalisation and at the same time played a significant role in shaping its direction. We have seen how the project had been strengthened and challenged as individuals strived to attain the aesthetic life they were aspired to achieve.

3.3. The Art of Existence

As we have seen, the care of the self practices in CRISP promotes individuals' self reflection and questioning of the value of a particular regime of truth to bring an aesthetic existence in work and private life (Starkey and Hatchuel, 2002). The aesthetics of existence assumes that individual actors exercise a critical attitude towards their current mode of being rather than prescribing normative rules of conduct (Avgerou and McGrath, 2007). When the self becomes the object of knowledge (Foucault, 1984), individuals can free themselves of the internal limits and possibilities of actions they are capable of taking to achieve the transformation they are aspiring for (Chan, 2000).

The care of the self by individuals in CRISP rested in their freedom to question -as self-reflective agents-the value of the IS enabled rationalisation on their lives. Such reflection involved the use of reasoning to interrogate the truth regimes conveyed by the rationality/power circuits (Chan, 2000). According to Avgerou and McGrath (2007) it involves a rational way of acting and thinking that is not purely technical/rational but, comprises individuals' concerns and values about work and private life which justify the way they act.

The Consultant for instance, was concerned about his technical and professional credibility as well as his private business future potential. The ways he conducted himself were rational ways of acting in the context the Divisions'

power relationships. The same applies to the internal project manager who was concerned about restoring the Division's credibility and securing future funding and the actions he took have changed and challenged the initial transformational vision of CRISP. Individuals in CRISP teams had various concerns which were related not only to their future career and the quality of work life they strived to achieve but also extend to their private concerns. The positions taken by individuals in CRISP teams regarding CRISP objectives and promises indicated that in individual's art of living, the old routines were still desirable.

It was left to future external forces and internal continuous care of the self to create a new type of rationality/power regime to determine to which direction CRISP will change.

Discussion and Conclusion:

The challenge to CRISP objectives by the self-reflexive individuals as they judged its impact on their way of living suggests the changing nature of truth regimes. As long as individuals have freedom to interrogate the validity of truth regimes, this means there were options for change and transformation (Chan, 2000). This freedom is also a resistance in Foucaultian terms and the notions of freedom and resistance were tied through reflexivity and change of the internal constraints of individuals' to act or think in ways different from what conveyed by the rationalities of a particular regime of truth. Individuals in CRISP first line of support by knowing the possibilities and options they had, they freed their internal limits as to the actions they can take. For instance, the practice of learning from second line agents as well as self-improvement efforts provided them with new possibility to transform their lives. Reflexivity as a freedom to the internal limits is central to Foucault's local nature of power relations; since every relation is power relation individuals can't transcend these relations but through self critical reflections and freedom to question, they have the possibility to challenge the discourses that form their subjectivities in alignment with its rationality and truth regimes thereby changing and transforming their limitations (Chan, 2000). This is different from the emancipatory notion of Frankfurt school which view power as externally imposed (Chan and Garrick, 2002). Therefore, once individuals in CRISP could identify alternative ways of acting or thinking then the power/ethics relationship was not repressive or limiting. Rather their ethical care of the self is a rational and conscious practice of freedom within the power relations of their context (Foucault, 2000c).

IT service management is a service oriented architecture of IT customer service delivery and support, This area of practice is dominated by technical rationalism enabled by design and implementation of IS solutions to enhance business efficiency and achieve cost savings. Our Foucaultian analysis of CRISP case suggests that such technical rationalisation is not value free but mutually constitutive of relations of power to create certain regimes of truth. It was clear that CRISP has no inertia by itself and that its movement is not an unproblematic or faithful transmission but a continuous translation in its scope, vision, aims and objectives as it moves from one hand to another (Latour, 1986). The translation process implied the power implicated context, and individual employees working in such contexts use their own rationality or reasoning as ethical subjects to reflect upon how they act and behave.

Though discourses of enterprise and regimes of rationalisation in CRISP sought to bring individuals' aspirations into alignment with the rationality of the enterprise, these individuals opted to think and act differently. The different ways in which individuals employed their reflexive rationality to enact 'the care of the self' to achieve an aesthetic existence under the rationalisation regime, highlighted the role of ethical subjects as agents who neither deploy confrontation strategies nor remain docile.

Foucault's ethics of the 'care of the self' is a useful contribution to IS research as it suggests an alternative way for understanding the unfolding nature of the development and implementation of IS solutions. Both functionalist and politically informed IS research did not adequately address the reflexive rationality triggered by IS projects and their truth regimes. This reflexive rationality enabled us to understand how the impact of IS solution can transcend the individuals' immediate work context to accommodate the broader life concerns.

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