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Maintaining Legitimacy as a Criticized Institution

How Swedish TWAs discursively defend against criticism

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Maintaining legitimacy as a criticized institution
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Abstract

Organizations must maintain legitimacy in the eyes of wider society and clients to achieve longevity and success. However, how does a criticized institution, like the Swedish temporary work industry, maintain legitimacy when being continuously criticized? By interviewing consultant managers and TWA clients, this study examines how consultant managers discursively attempt to maintain legitimacy when responding to criticism, and illustrate how these discursive defense mechanisms become a repertoire for both consultant managers and clients that is reproduced in a fight for legitimacy, and how this effects TWAs and their clients. These discursive defense mechanisms subsequently result in discursive closure, the main theory of analysis for this study. This study secondarily also examines if discursive closure could be a form of institutional work. The study showed that consultant managers have a repertoire of discursive defense mechanisms for criticisms that they and their clients reuse, but that the power of the discursive closures is limited. Finally, the results indicate that discursive defense mechanisms and subsequent discursive closure could be a form of institutional work, not only because discursive defense mechanisms are speech acts, but also because they create accompanying physical actions as well, which facilitates maintaining legitimacy.

Keywords: *Legitimacy, criticism, discursive closure, temporary work agency, institutional work*

Introduction

For organizations to thrive and have longevity they must maintain legitimacy in the eyes of wider society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, Suchman, 1995) and firms that embed socially legitimate formal structures and processes in the organization have a better chance of longevity and receive more resources (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). A good definition of legitimacy can be concluded as actions that are proper, appropriate and desirable within a constructed, taken-for-granted system of shared beliefs, values and norms (de Jong et al. 2007, DeJordy & Jones, 2008). Legitimacy is therefore socially constructed, and in that sense perceived objectively, but it is nonetheless constructed subjectively (Suchman, 1995). As such, legitimation and institutionalization are in many ways synonymous. Legitimacy within

institutional theory research show how shared beliefs affect how people act within institutional structures, and therefore there is little difference between institutionalization and legitimation, as they both have similar affects on organizational and individual life (Suchman, 1995). Legitimacy is thus simply a way for firms to justify their practices and existence (Selznick, 1992).

However, if an institution is continuously criticized, and has been for many years, how does is discursively defend against criticism in order to maintain legitimacy? A criticized institution that is of interest for this study is the Swedish temporary work agency (henceforth abbreviated as TWAs). Swedish society and media has been very vocal in their discontent of TWAs, and openly criticize TWA operations (Bergström et al. 2007), requiring TWA actors to fight for legitimacy. Therefore, how TWA actors meet this outspoken criticism and discursively fight for legitimacy is of interest for this study.

Unfortunately, even though institutional perspectives like institutional work could facilitate an examination of individual actors' discursive defense mechanisms attempting to maintain legitimacy, the literature has been unclear of what actors do when they struggle with institutional structures to maintain legitimacy. The literature on how individuals conduct institutional maintenance has been scarce within institutional research, and studies on institutional work have been largely unarticulated and instead have developed as separate research streams with little cohesion among them (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). A narrative perspective on institutional maintenance allows for refocusing the emphasis from heroic entrepreneurial acts to a more inclusive understanding of institutional agency, as well as the acknowledgement that institutional maintenance conducted through narratives transfers between multiple societal and organizational levels. Therefore institutional work research can benefit from adopting narrative perspectives (Zilber, 2009). In addition, discursive mechanisms such as narratives can support and maintain institutions, as well as illustrate the processes of how actors use narratives to create, maintain and disrupt institutions. Furthermore, by systemically analyzing the narratives of individual actors the understanding of the nature of institutional work can be enhanced. Moreover, while some studies have acknowledged that dialogue can be a form of institutional work, discursive mechanisms like dialogue has generally not been greatly emphasized in institutional work research, even though it has the potential to be a powerful form of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Therefore, the role of discourse in institutional work and legitimacy maintenance could be one way to approach research of how a criticized institution discursively defend itself against criticism when its legitimacy is continuously questioned.

As such, this study has two principal aims. Firstly, it aims to examine how actors in a criticized institution discursively defend against criticism. This will be conducted by studying the Swedish TWA industry, and by analyzing the accounts of twelve consultant managers (henceforth referred to only as "managers") from four different TWAs and three TWA clients. This is accomplished by using Deetz's (1992) framework of discursive closure, which can possibly reveal how TWAs attempt to construct the conversation with critics in order to maintain legitimacy, and what consequences this has for TWAs and their clients. Secondly, this study argues that discursive defense mechanisms resulting in discursive closure is a form of institutional work, which provide insight into another way in which actors reproduce

institutional structures in their daily lives when they discursively defend against criticism, in the particular setting of a criticized industry.

The TWA industry is suitable for this study as its institutional environment is quite specific. Even though the TWA industry is well-established, the industry has been accused for hurting the labor market rather than helping it. Instead of catering and improving the labor market with flexible employment and competent labor, TWAs have been found to gravitate towards clients who are most likely to purchase their services, rather than towards firms who would better solve labor market issues. In addition, TWAs' sales tactics have been found to construct rather than satisfy their clients' needs (Bergström et al. 2007).

One purpose of purchasing services like TWAs is to receive help with issues and to reduce uncertainty. However, consulting services is both a cause and remedy for feelings of uncertainty for clients (Pemer & Werr, 2013). Service providers in general have historically faced much skepticism from clients (Furusten & Werr, 2005), and TWAs are no exception. As skepticism for service providers tend to be high, clients not only want to establish trust between entire organizations, but also personally with the service provider. This means that trust is built collectively on expertise, while trust is built personally on interpersonal relationships and face-to-face interaction (Furusten & Werr, 2005). This face-to-face personal interaction has also been found to be a tactic for TWAs when trying to establish rapport and business deals with prospective clients (Bergström et al. 2007).

Therefore, even though the main purpose behind the labor monopoly abolishment is to allow for more flexibility for firms, better matching between candidates and work opportunities, and an easier way for unemployed to enter the labor market, there are some skeptics who say that perhaps this leads to insecure employment conditions and temporary workers being stigmatized as second-class employees (Bergström et al. 2007). In addition, critics claim that TWAs are a way for clients to circumvent the law for labor security (LAS, making it more difficult to terminate employees, and provides a guideline for whom to let go) and instead of hiring employees instead renting personnel when needed. Clients, however, emphasize the great help temporary workers provide when supporting operations during e.g. peaks in production and during vacancies (SOU, 2014). As such, the Swedish TWA industry has been criticized by Swedish society since its inception, and is still considered to be one of the more controversial industries in Sweden (Bergström et al. 2007), making it a good industry in which to study discursive defense mechanisms and legitimation attempts.

Theoretical framework

Institutional work

An institution refers to a group or a social practice where distinctive features and vested interests of the group and their activities or social practice emerge (Selznick, 1992), and where social action patterns are reproduced continually (Bergström et al. 2007). The institution is maintained and reproduced over time because both individual and collective actors rely on its continued existence (Selznick, 1992).

The perspective of institutional work focuses on the everyday work of individual actors and emphasize that actors actively take part in institutional maintenance, disruption and creation. This means how actors create, maintain or destroy institutional structures in which

they work and live, and how this constructs their relationships, roles and habits. Therefore, seemingly mundane, small actions can affect institutional structures in unforeseen and unintended ways, and studies point to actors actively producing and transforming institutions (Lawrence et al. 2011). However, institutional work research has been empirically scattered and incoherent in how institutional work is practically conducted (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

As such, institutional theorists has historically not acknowledged the influence individual actors have on institutions, however, more and more have recognized that it is not only social norms that affect organizations' structures, but that individual actors can as well (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). In addition, when these individual actors interact and share common definitions of reality, language helps define these definitions as well as be vital in order to understand the reality of everyday life. Furthermore, it is the conversations between individual actors that help maintain the taken-for-granted reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), and therefore language is fundamental in institutionalization (Phillips et al. 2004). However, Phillips et al. (2004) argue that institutional theory research has not thoroughly acknowledged the role of language and discourse in institutional studies, even if it is slowly becoming increasingly frequent. However, the role of discourse in institutional maintenance has been even less emphasized (Zilber, 2009). Moreover, discourse is the basic vessel for action (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). Therefore, when making assertions, for example when defending oneself against criticism, those assertions are speech acts, and as we are responsible for those words, we can also be criticized for them (Gerken, 2012). Moreover, Phillips et al. (2004) see institutions as mainly constituted by the production of language rather than through actions, and emphasize that discourse is a large part of institutionalization.

There are studies that have acknowledged the role of discourse in legitimation maintenance attempts. Leary and Kowalski (1990) found in their extensive literature review of impression management that when there is a discrepancy between an external image and a preferred image, actors often verbally try to mitigate the situation in order to create a more legitimate image that is desired. Ergo, actors pose defensive arguments in order to maintain legitimacy (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). However, Phillips et al. (2004) explain that different scholars have discovered that organizations also use similar verbal tactics when attempting to maintain organizational legitimacy during times when their legitimacy is threatened. As such, language and discourse are produced in order to maintain legitimacy.

Furthermore, in a study of organizational communication in annual reports and to shareholders, Staw et al. (1983) found that firms can either enhance or defend themselves in order to maintain legitimacy. Organizations must defend their practices in order to be perceived as legitimate during times of a legitimacy crisis. One type of defense found in the study was emphasizing outside factors, like the industry itself, during potential legitimacy threats. Another study on police force websites in the UK (Sillince & Brown, 2009) highlights how organizations use rhetorical strategies to create organizational identities, in an attempt to maintain organizational claims of legitimacy. The study showed that the police forces used multiple identities in order to legitimize their claims. They simultaneously claimed to deserve support because they reduced some crime, treated most people equally, and were a part of the community, while simultaneously claiming that they needed more

support and resources because some crimes still increased, some people were treated unfairly because the police mirror the prejudices in their community, and because they have specialist knowledge they are also separate from the community (Sillince & Brown, 2009).

In study of how the Californian cattle industry verbally defended against critique to maintain legitimacy, Elsbach (1994) found that spokespeople used several different verbal defense strategies. For example, they used arguments of institutional content, saying that their practices were in line with governmental institutions. They used technical arguments that their practices were efficient, safe and fair for the animals. They used deniability and denied conducting certain practices or participating in illegitimate behavior. They also acknowledged certain illegitimate acts and aspects of the industry, although, this was only regarding minor discrepancies with few consequences (Elsbach, 1994). In another of Elsbach's studies she found that social organizations conducting illegitimate acts decoupled certain individuals' actions from the structures of the organization and used impression management in media outlets to verbally defend themselves and promote other, normative procedures that the organization conducted, which are far more legitimate in the eyes of wider society in order to shield themselves from the illegitimate acts of certain organization members (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). These studies therefore acknowledges the role of verbal defense mechanisms aimed at maintaining legitimacy, however as these studies focus on verbal defenses on the grand stage of the media, they do not coincide with the micro-perspective of individual actors in institutional work. Deetz's (1992) theoretical framework of distorted communication and discursive closure could therefore be one solution to bridge this gap and to facilitate an examination of what individual actors do to discursively defend against criticism when their legitimacy is questioned and how they by extension manage and struggle with institutional structures.

Systemically distorted communication

Whenever an ideal speech situation, meaning a conversation, is not accomplished, the interaction has been distorted, as if the conversation is not genuine. Distorted communication is very common, as well as pathological because it limits adaptation to changing environments; it hinders the creation of an ideal speech situation and as such infringes normative standards. Therefore, as the self is reproduced into structures deemed more appropriate, it hinders self-realization and the collective good. Systemic distortion means that organizations produce distortions through the institutionalized structures within the organization. This is called structural legitimation. In such cases structures, actions and decisions are based on taken-for-granted logics that are disguised as legitimate, while they remain indisputable. According to Deetz (1992) this can thereby lead to pathological, bad decisions that are not organizationally effective. Therefore, organizations actively use different types of *discursive closure* in order to maintain such internal structures.

Discursive closure

Discursive closures are mechanisms for suppressing potential conflicts. This means that whenever mutual understanding is distorted or hindered, particular realities or ideas are maintained while other, which can be equally plausible, is rejected and suppressed, which

usually is a result of someone exacting personal advantage from doing so. Such mechanisms aims at suppressing conflicting ideas and experiences and to obstruct the values embedded in these realities and ideas. Discursive closures are not necessarily overt in any way, but rather minimal in their enactment, while still managing to maintain prevailing social expectations. Deetz (1992) presents eight different discursive closures, however, only four of these are presented below, as these were the ones deemed relevant for this particular study. There were certainly indications that many of the discursive defense mechanisms of TWA managers could result in several the discursive closures, however, these four, meaning legitimation, pacification, disqualification and neutralization, were considerably more predominant.

When attempting *legitimation* actors tries to rationalize decisions and practices by referring to some superior logic or entity. Such logics or entities help make sense of processes and activities that are difficult to interpret, and by doing so also conceals conflicts within those processes and activities. By referring to the value of some superior logic or entity, personal values are displaced as they might lead to conflicting outcomes. In addition, decisions are often rationalized outward for one reason, while making such a decisions in reality was based on other, hidden factors (Deetz, 1992).

A conflicting conversation is *pacified* when actors feign to acknowledge conflicting ideas while simultaneously claiming that an issue is unsolvable. By doing this, the focus is diverted to aspects that cannot be changed from the issue at hand. This closes the conversation and displaces democracy As such, this calms the conversation like a pacifier calms a child. By discounting the importance of the issue and claiming that it is unsolvable, participants can subvert a conflicting conversation and avoid genuine conversation (Deetz, 1992).

Disqualification occurs when someone's input is rejected, e.g. due to their gender or stature, meaning that not all have a right to give genuine input in different conversations. Therefore, individuals that are deemed more qualified or who have more expertise, like a doctor consulting on medical issues rather than a lawyer, are included while those that are not are excluded from the conversation (Deetz, 1992).

Neutralization is the process where value-laden positions, activities and ideas is perceived as value-free, meaning that socially constructed objects and the production of these objects are seen as naturally occurring. As such, one possible rendition of ideas, values, and the world itself, is treated as the only in existence. This claim of objectivity thereby hides the values of different objects and its production. Neutralization therefore suppresses conflicting aspects of processes and ideas by hiding the underlying values used when producing them (Deetz, 1992). These four discursive closures can therefore help exemplify and explicate how actors in criticized institutions, like Swedish TWAs consultant managers, discursively defend against criticism, and illuminate what consequences this has for TWA managers, TWA clients, legitimacy and institutional work.

Method

Data collection
To be able to fulfill this study's purpose to examine the discursive defense mechanisms of TWA actors, access to the actors participating with these mechanisms in conversations with critics was required in order to receive their accounts of their behavior, interactions and

processes. As such a quantitative study was inappropriate as the findings are not easily quantifiable or measured, as they reflect actions, behavior, beliefs and norms of what is appropriate and legitimate (Silverman, 2013). Furthermore, by interviewing people I got the chance to get to know them, their interests, their thoughts and experiences (Kvale, 2007), which gave me the insight I needed to conduct this study. Therefore, as the experiences and actions of criticized institutions, and specifically TWAs, are what I aim to examine, interviews seems like an appropriate method.

Therefore, in this study, data was collected from twelve different consultant managers working within four different TWAs. In addition, three clients (store managers) from the same firm but working in different retail stores were interviewed in order to receive a complimentary view of the issue. The interviewees consisted of four male consultant managers, eight female consultant managers, and three male clients. The age span of the interviewees was between 25-60 years old, where most were in their early thirties. The experience of the interviewees ranged between 1-20 years. This wider range of interviewees thus allowed for a more inclusive and less homogenous data collection, and the inclusion of several different firms widens the scope of the study as well as facilitates drawing generalizable conclusions from the findings.

The 15 interviews lasted between 50-100 minutes, with an average length of approximately 60 minutes per interview. This was enough to deeply explore the interview themes (see below), and exhausted all the questions of the interview guide. In addition to the primary data collection (the interviews), secondary data such as peer-reviewed academic articles, newspaper articles as well as statistics were used to complement the primary data.

Interviewees

Consultant managers	Temporary work agencies
Manager 1A-F (6 interviewees)	TWA 1
Manager 2G-H (2 interviewees)	TWA 2
Manager 3I-J (2 interviewees)	TWA 3
Manager 4K-L (2 interviewees)	TWA 4
Clients	**Client Firm**
IC A-C (3 interviewees)	Client 1

The TWAs chosen for this study were chosen according to three parameters. Firstly, the firms needed to be included on the list of the top 25 TWAs in Sweden according to revenue in 2014, established by the industry organization Bemanningsföretagen. They also needed to be authorized TWAs, as to ensure that the firms had experience and was firmly established in the Swedish TWA market. This seemed like an appropriate parameter as Bemannings-företagen have approximately 440 authorized member firms (Bemanningsföretagen, 2015ab). As such, the chosen TWAs are all in the top 25 in Sweden according to revenue, except for TWA 4 that is smaller. However, as they are a subsidiary company working closely within the TWA 3 firm, they are included in this study.

Secondly, due to pragmatic reasons, the chosen firms were also based on access granted. Unfortunately, being allowed access to consultancies, and their clients especially, can be difficult (Sturdy et al. 2009, Nikolova et al. 2009), and proved to be true for this study as well. Therefore, granted access guided the choice of TWAs. This is in no way ideal, but the situation required relying on contacts in the industry. These contacts were possible as I during the study's duration worked in-house in TWA 1 and as a consultant for TWA 2, however I was only loosely acquainted with a few of the interviewees, while most I had never met before the interviews. Also, as a consultant I worked for the interviewed clients, however, our previous contact had generally been brief, and we were only loosely acquainted. For the interviewees I did not previously know, I used snowballing (Czarniawska, 2014) by asking the interviewees for contact information to other appropriate candidates.

Lastly, even though the study only focused on private sector firms, the study aimed to examine firms who differed slightly in their niche. This meant interviewing managers in TWAs that offers full-time, longer assignments, as well as firms who offers part-time, irregular and short-term assignments, and both blue- and white-collar positions. This was to receive a wider, more inclusive picture of the managers' work. In addition, the purpose for interviewing clients was to receive a more holistic view of managers' defense mechanisms, and was one way to triangulate the results (LeCompte, 2000) as the clients confirmed many of the managers' statements, thoughts, and experiences. The clients belonged to the same organization, a retail store chain, and all utilized TWA 2's services.

The qualitative interviews were conducted in a traditional manner, by using an interview guide where prepared semi-structured interview questions were divided accordingly to the main themes of the study (see below). Open-ended semi-structured questions allowed for variations and follow-up questions when deemed necessary, as well as allowing interviewees to freely give their accounts (Kvale, 2007). The choice to discontinue interviewing was mainly based on the saturation of interview answers, as well as in consideration of scope, time limitations, and limited access to primary sources. This technique ensured a sufficient data collection as a basis for analysis (Czarniawska, 2014).

Interview themes

For this study the interviews focused on three main themes in order to capture the behavior and processes of TWA actors as accurately as possible.

- Firstly, in order to have a solid foundation the first interview questions focused on understanding the interviewees' background and their daily work and interactions. This was necessary as it served as a platform for knowing how to best continue the interviews and how to tailor upcoming questions.
- Secondly, the interview questions focused on criticism TWAs face and how managers usually respond. By firstly asking what kind of criticism they receive, and then turning the question back to them, by e.g. asking, "when a client say you conduct slavery, how do you respond?" the interviewees were provoked into discursively defending themselves as they might have in reality, providing a more candid and honest account of their discursive defense mechanisms.

- Thirdly, the interview questions focused on common problems that can occur in TWAs' relationships with clients, and how the managers solve these common issues. This theme aimed to examine how TWA actors attempt to legitimize themselves both practically and discursively. By asking questions not directly related to criticism and discursive defense mechanisms, the interviewees could unconsciously explain their behavior more candidly.

Data analysis

The data from this study were quantitatively analyzed (Flick, 2014) in three steps. Firstly I recorded the interviews and carefully transcribed them. After transcribing the interviews I codified the data and sorted these taxonomies into the main themes of the study in order to receive an overview of the material (LeCompte, 2000). During this stage when about half of the interviews had been conducted, an unforeseen interesting pattern in the narrations was identified. It seemed as the interviewees, fairly unprovoked, were defensive of their work. This discovery felt more worth exploring further than the original focus of the study, which regarded the overall relationship between TWAs and their clients. The first interviews were neither obsolete nor irrelevant, as they provided a good basis for understanding the overall subject and a good introduction to the new, more narrowly defined focus of the study. However, this did mean that not all data would be suitable for the study's analysis. As such, the process of synthesis was adopted in order to carefully identify what data was relevant. This meant that in order to produce something from the collected material, the data was compared and assessed, and then finally arranged hierarchically according to relevance. Admittedly, this process is subjective, but none the less logically deduced (Kolko, 2010), and suitable considering the circumstances.

Secondly, after this discovery the interviews were refocused to more thoroughly examine how TWA managers and clients discursively defend against criticism. Therefore, in line with the theme of this study, discourse analysis was used to reanalyze the data by studying managers' and clients' use of language. More specifically, as this study aimed to identify and describe typical discursive defense mechanisms against common criticisms, the prioritized and new data were codified into categories where similar statements were grouped together in order to find commonalities. After these taxonomies were created, they were grouped into potential meaningful constellations. This enabled discerning patterns of discursive defense mechanisms, and facilitated an examination of how these mechanisms could result in discursive closure, and what consequences this has for TWAs, clients, legitimation and institutional work (LeCompte, 2000).

Lastly, previous studies of discursive legitimation attempts, as well as media reports on the criticism TWAs face, helped triangulate the narrations of the interviewees, and corroborated their accounts of the criticism they face and their discursive defense mechanisms (LeCompte, 2000).

Limitations

A limitation of this study specifically is that no observations were conducted, due to the lack of access. Even though this study focuses on discursive defense mechanisms, these are still discursive methods within a dialogue between two parties, which is why observations could

have been beneficial. Having said that, an observer could have impacted the genuineness of the dialogue. Luckily, interviewing clients on how they discursively defend their choice of using TWAs did provide some insight in how such conversations unfold and how they transfer among conversation participants. Therefore, the largest limitation of the study was the lack of access to clients, which was not unanticipated as previous studies suggest that this is a common issue (Sturdy et al., 2009, Nikolova et al. 2009).

Moreover, the fact that I am familiar with some of the interviewees could certainly have an impact on the study. However, I believe my affiliation with the TWA industry to be mostly positive, which many of the managers agreed with. I believe that the interviewees might have felt safer speaking with me as I, just like them, work in the industry and face the same criticism they do. As such, I believe the interviewees felt like I could understand their perspective better, and they had no need for concealing any thoughts they had, or being defensive against me for asking difficult questions. However, I tried to instill a sense of objectiveness and made sure to be critical to the answers I got, and was vigilant, especially towards the firms that I worked at, to be unbiased in my questions and interpretations. Using an interview guide facilitated this as it provided a similar structure to all interviews.

Setting

By building on the outline of the Swedish TWA industry in the introduction, a deeper understanding of TWA actors' discursive defense mechanisms will hopefully be achieved when having a better comprehension of the environment TWAs operate in, and the criticism they face. The market for TWAs has been growing steadily since the labor monopoly was abolished in 1993, and is still expanding in Sweden (Bemanningsföretagen, 2015c). In 2013 the TWA industry had a market penetration of 1.5 % and now provides 172 000 jobs yearly (Bemanningsföretagen, 2015a). Globally there are 260 000 TWAs that in 2013 provided over 60 million people access to the labor market through TWAs, whereof more than 40 million people work as consultants (Ciett, 2015). Today the Swedish TWA industry function as important employers, especially since many consultants decide to remain consultants rather than take employment directly with client firms (Bemanningsföretagen, 2015d).

However, even though TWAs are important for many people who rely on them for employment, the interviewees in this study described that it is not unusual to face skepticism and criticism, which they face both professionally and privately as consultant managers. This criticism has from time to time also flourished in the Swedish media. In fact, the positive aspects of TWAs are rarely, if ever, written about in the media. Instead the media has contributed to a wholly negative reputation of TWAs (Björkemarken, 2013). As such, below are some examples of critical reports on TWAs in different Swedish daily media outlets.

De Lima Fagerlind (2014) and Örnerborg (2014) describe how different unions are taking judicial repercussions against TWAs for not administering salaries properly and treating the consultants unfairly. Einerstam (2014) reports how unions are claiming that TWAs are frequently defrauding consultants on their collective agreements, and how union representatives claim that TWAs display opportunistic behavior and pay lower salaries to consultants and only offer the most difficult assignments. Einerstam (2014) reports how a consultant claimed that a TWA does not give him proper lunch breaks and works him like a

slave, while the president for Bemanningsföretagen denies all such allegations. Vangpreecha & Sjöqvist (2012) reports how managers are incentivized to defraud consultants on their salaries and consciously offer them bad employment contracts and assignments as they hope the consultants will decline the offer, lose their guarantee salary, and by extension save costs for the TWA, earning them bonuses. In addition, one of the major political parties in Sweden wants to abolish TWAs (Stiernstedt, 2013), while the party leader of the second largest political party in Sweden was criticized by members in her own party for not wanting to abolish LAS, and as such allowing the creation of an A-team of traditionally employed workers and a B-team of younger TWA consultants who have less job security (GP, 2015).

As such, there is a multitude of critical media reports that challenge TWAs' legitimacy, making the Swedish TWA industry an appropriate industry to study discursive defense mechanisms. However, in addition to and in corroboration with these media reports the managers in this study also expressed some common accusations they face. Many managers express that there is a general opinion among critics that the TWA industry is not serious. It does not work in a serious way, it does not employ serious personnel, it does not offer serious employment contracts and that it does not offer a serious service. The managers speak extensively about this general attitude, and explain that it shapes the general perception of the industry "There is a very negative attitude. People think it is not very serious" (manager 2G).

In addition, many managers explained that it is not uncommon that many of their clients see consultants as a cost that needs to be kept down rather than an actual person. Therefore, some managers explain how critics have explicitly described them as slave traders. Many managers explain how critics believe that TWAs do not value their consultants and that they especially use unemployed people for poor jobs no one else want. Also, many managers explain that one common accusation is that the TWA industry use their consultants like means to an end, as a tool that you buy and sell like a product. As such, many critics claim that consultants' employment contracts are sub-par and insecure. One manager even met a client who said, "Your consultants are like my prostitutes, that you buy and sell" (manager 3I).

Furthermore, many managers explain how critics believe there is a divide between clients' own employees and TWA consultants, and that consultants have less inclusive employment contracts. This critique is not always unfounded. Several managers explain that some clients do not include consultants in firm celebrations or activities, even though this is becoming increasingly rare. Moreover, one manager described how one client openly had told two consultants that at the end of the assignment, only the highest performing consultant would be able to stay with the client firm. Furthermore, not all TWAs follow the strict contract regulations. As such, TWAs create an A- and a B-team of workers "I have heard that (…) we set worker against worker (…) and that it creates an A-team and a B-team with the own (= the client's) employees on the A-team and us in the B-team" (manager 1A). Even though this outline of TWA criticism is not the focal point of this study, the acknowledgement of this criticism facilitates an understanding of TWA actors' discursive defense mechanisms, as this criticism is what triggers these mechanisms.

Findings

The analysis shows that even though the different TWAs vary in size, focus and origin, and the interviewees have diverse backgrounds, the managers and clients in this study use considerably similar discursive defense mechanisms when speaking about how they defend against criticism. These discursive defense mechanisms are produced and reproduced when managers and clients are criticized, and subsequently result in discursive closures. Like previously mentioned, the discursive defense mechanisms used by the interviewees had indications of all of the different discursive closures described by Deetz (1992), but there were nonetheless four main discourses that were more frequently used. Having said that, there were certainly some variations within these four main discourses. One manager expressed that responses might vary according to personality, and that some managers might prefer to use some discursive defense mechanisms to others. However, the overall consequences of the mechanisms are the same. Furthermore, to be noted here is that this section includes quite a bit of analysis regarding the defense mechanisms managers and clients use. When identifying patterns and seeing how different discursive defense mechanisms exemplify certain discursive closures, some analysis is certainly conducted. However, this lays the groundwork for the deeper discussion on what this means for TWAs, clients, legitimation and institutional work. As such, the findings below draw upon Deetz's (1992) framework of discursive closure.

Legitimation and pacification

When asked about TWAs' role in Sweden and its more established role abroad, many managers argue that as we live in a globalized world, organizations must be able to compete in a global arena where TWAs are considerable more established, accepted and utilized, as using TWAs reduces fixed costs and offers more flexibility.

> "First and foremost we must be able to compete with Europe, because we live in a globalized world no matter what we want, or how much reactionary people there are in society who claim that we should do it as we've always done it, and bla, bla bla. The world is globalizing. (…) We are competing globally." (Manager 1A)

Therefore, as the world is evolving and becoming increasingly competitive and firms and people are becoming more globalized, there is no use for reactionary efforts, even though many people and other institutions in Sweden try their best to ignore this fact, according to several managers.

> "We have to look further and see that we are global. Sweden is more global and we as people are more global. And you have to keep up, but unfortunately there are many authorities in Sweden that has not kept up with progress. And those authorities help provide a negative attitude towards TWAs. They're scared, scared for their jobs and that someone could do it better than them." (Manager 1F)

The defense mechanisms regarding globalization and state of the labor market relates to a global, forceful trend, which would be useless to fight. As such, these defense mechanisms go above criticism and relate to a superior power and claims that this is simply how things are. Therefore, these discursive defense mechanisms can close the conversation through legitimation as they refer to this irrefutable higher logic. Moreover, these defenses could be a complimentary, more business-minded response to other "softer" responses about e.g. values, due to its superior logic.

In addition, this discursive defense mechanism that refers to a higher logic was frequently accompanied with the argument that it is impossible for one TWA to change an entire labor market. Many managers emphasized how they could change neither the way the world is evolving, nor the labor market in Sweden.

> "There are absolutely people who think that we conduct slavery, that we use people for money. And I can on some level understand that they think that way. But the labor market is as it is, and it's the same thing with people who sell cigarettes. Yes, it might be morally dubious to go around and attempt to make people die in advance, but at the same time, if those people hadn't done it the next person would have instead. So you cannot change an entire labor market by not renting out people." (Manager 1C)

Therefore, when claiming that the labor market cannot be changed single handedly, and that TWAs are a global, unstoppable phenomenon, managers also use pacification when they claim that there is no use in acting upon the discussion, as they have no ability to solve an unsolvable issue. Managers can thereby subvert speaking about the real issue by pacifying the discussion and directing attention elsewhere from the issue at hand that cannot be solved. These two defense mechanisms therefore goes hand in hand for managers, as by referring to a higher power or global social structure, they legitimate the conversation as well as displaces it though pacification, as talking would have no effect on the perceived issue.

Furthermore, alongside these defense mechanisms appealing to logic, managers also attempt legitimation though a softer approach by speaking extensively about the importance of having a close relationship with their clients. When asked why the managers work hard to create a personal relationship, most managers emphasize that they create a close, personal relationship with their clients mainly due to strategic reasons.

> "It was because we wanted to stand out from the competition of course, what we sold was the personal firm that got all the answers, so it was absolutely so the clients would remember us all the time, because you would notice that there were unbelievably many TWAs who called the clients. (…) So first and foremost to make us competitive. It's strategic." (Manager 4L)

As such, a close personal relationship creates a more pleasant working relationship, as well as decreases the risk of being replaced. All managers explain that by establishing a close, personal relationship, clients might not want to replace you because they like you, and as long as the TWA delivers on their promises clients therefore have little reason to go to a competitor. The managers explained how sending personalized Christmas cards, by inviting

clients to social activities and having regular lunch dates, could help establish this personal relationship.

> "We were out and met the clients a lot, partly to see how the work environment was working out and to see what other needs they might have, and to show them that we exist, so we came with pastries and fika, so there was a lot of social upkeep." (Manager 4L)

However, all managers also explain that personal relationships help establish an open and honest dialogue, which will facilitate serving the client the best way possible. Although, when doing this they simultaneously engage in legitimation. This study revealed that many managers consciously create a personal relationship with their clients as a strategic advantage to make them less replaceable, this is however not explicated to the clients, instead a close relationship is framed as being for the clients' benefit, as they will be able to receive better suited consultants. Thus, by emphasizing the logic behind a close relationship, meaning a better working relationship and better service, managers avoid potential conflict by hiding the true value behind close relationships, meaning that it makes the managers less replaceable. Therefore, managers probably cannot admit the main reason behind creating such a relationship, as this would potentially seem like an illegitimate practice. As such they hide the real reasons behind their practices in order to legitimate themselves.

However, when asked if a close relationship secures the business relationship permanently, most managers and clients explain how managers cannot rest upon an existing relationship, but that it needs to be nurtured.

> "The legitimation of the TWA industry I don't think you have to contiguously work on. But you can never be satisfied with the fact that the relationship is good, because the relationship is always alive, and it must be nurtured." (Manager 1C)

As such, even though managers can let go of discursive legitimation attempts once a deal has been struck, they must instead ensure that they deliver on what they promised in order to maintain legitimacy. Therefore, TWAs are very strategic in their softer legitimation attempts as well, and hide the underlying, illegitimate values behind creating personal relationships.

Disqualification

When asked about the reliability of different discursive defense mechanisms, many managers explain how arguments concerning laws and contracts are more tangible than arguments concerning e.g. values that are more tacit. As such, it could be an easy way to legitimize TWAs in a more tangible, objective manner.

> "I refer to the TWA directive, that our consultants have exactly the same possibilities, the same conditions, salary policy in the work place, in the work environment, that the existing personnel have. So that criticism is bogus and taken out of nowhere…" (Manager 1A)

By referring to tangible contracts and documents, that can be physically displayed, managers disqualify critics who claim that TWA contracts are sub-par. In fact, all managers describe

how TWAs face considerable harsher regulations than traditional employers, and must adhere to stricter employment rules regarding wages, time of notice, working hours and other benefits. An example of this is the GFL salary, which means that consultants' salaries are based on the mean of the ordinary employees' salary, making it more difficult for TWAs to set lower wages than traditional firms. Therefore, many managers emphasize that there is little practical difference between employment in a TWA and employment in a traditional firm. However, some managers explain that even though TWAs face harsh regulations, critics can be uninformed of these regulations.

> "It's been problematic. I've been met with, especially from the unions, skepticism, but this was mostly due to ignorance from their side. No one ever asked how our employees were employed and what we did to take care of them. (…) They just assumed that they got no salary and that it wasn't fair." (Manager 1F)

As such, the managers disqualify their critics' experiences regarding employment contracts when they claim that their "arguments are bogus" (1A) and thus shut down any possible further discussion of the matter. Therefore, because the critics are uninformed they do not warrant an opinion, and as such there is no use in continuing the conversation, and it is thereby closed.

However, several mangers admit that some TWAs do not follow the regulations, and unfortunately such behavior affects all TWAs. Therefore, such disqualification is perhaps not a full-proof way to disprove criticism, which is perhaps why using "softer" arguments about values could work in complementary ways. Therefore, when admitting that some TWAs deserve criticism for not following rules and regulations, managers more or less acknowledge the criticism as true, and potentially reinforce the criticism for the critics. In addition, this study shows that all managers emphasize that there is a considerable power imbalance between TWAs and their clients, further constraining their discursive defense mechanisms.

> "Sometimes people just need to vent, so then they get to vent. And if they want to do that with me, he gets to scream a little bit, and that is fine. And that's what I mean with the supplier role. It's about knowing that they are the ones who pay our invoices, they pay for my rent and my salary, they are our clients. So of course, if he is pissed sometimes he can sit and scream at me a bit. And then I have to take that with me…" (Manager 1A)

All the managers explain that this power imbalance is mainly due to the fierce competition in the industry and because TWAs have a submissive supplier position in the relationship. However, the clients disagree that this power imbalance, which they deemphasize, affects the relationship in an adverse way. Even so, due to this power imbalance it might not be possible for managers to disqualify critics' opinions. Claiming that critical clients are uninformed and do not have the right to their opinion could be perceived as an illegitimate way to treat clients, especially as they have the power in the relationship. As such, managers might lose legitimacy unless they argue against criticism with other concrete, tangible, validated arguments that complement softer arguments concerning values. Therefore, arguments about how the consultants themselves feel could be another way to mitigate the criticism. The managers and clients explained that many critics believe that consultants are unhappy and

mistreated. However, one manager explained "We had about five consultants last year that said no to go over to the client because they are so satisfied with working for us" (manager 3I). In addition, besides enjoying the work as a consultant, several managers explain that there are many benefits to working as a consultant, like e.g. the extensive experience from working for many different firms. Therefore, when consultants claim that they are happy working as consultants, managers legitimate their work. By showing that the consultants are happy and say so on their own terms, this is a way for TWAs to provide tangible evidence against criticism, straight form the horse's mouth. By referring to the consultants themselves, managers disqualify criticism as the consultants are the experts on their own experience, and their honest account of their happiness reject any critic's accusations about their well-being, as the critics are not qualified or informed in this instance.

Neutralizing

When asked about the perception that TWAs are ethically questionable, all managers spoke extensively about the importance of healthy values, which truly seemed genuine and honest. However, many managers also explained that good values have a strategic purpose, as it is a way for them to stand out against the large number of TWAs in Sweden, to attract business and capable consultants, to inspire satisfied, high-performing consultants, and to defend against criticism. They also described that this also means to act according to the discursively communicated values. For example, it means not striking deals with unethical clients and not reducing the price at the expense of the consultants' well-being.

> "We say no to business deals, and we speak up to our clients, say we won't reduce the price. Because then we don't want the deal. We can't make this happen in a profitable and fair way. And then we tell the client that if you go to another supplier that can give you this at that price, then you know they are not acting fairly. But then the client have chosen that, and the client knows this, so then we don't want to work with that client." (Manager 1F)

When speaking extensively about their values, managers neutralize the conversation by acting like this is intrinsic to them and their TWA, rather than a conscious, calculated choice in how to treat their consultants. As such, by acting like their values are intrinsic to them, ergo naturally occurring, rather than socially and strategically created, managers hide the values behind creating those values and provide only certain facts that suit them. By having good values their consultants are more satisfied and perform better, the firm will gain a better reputation both in the labor market and in the business world, thus attracting both capable employees as well as more business. Therefore, by ignoring the underlying values for creating healthy values, managers neutralize the construction of their values, and instead presume they are naturally occurring, and as such closing the criticism that they are ethically questionable. Moreover, several managers, and clients, take this further by emphasizing the almost charitable role of TWAs in the labor market. Firstly,

> "If you look at scientific studies the TWA industry is the industry that hire the most young people, and the most immigrants. (…) They are (…) the groups with most unemployment in

society. It's them, people under 26 and immigrants. The TWA industry hires them." (Manager 1A)

As such, TWAs give inexperienced or minority candidates a way into the labor market. This is another way to underscore their seemingly intrinsically good values, thus neutralizing the criticism. Furthermore, one client who a year ago was unfamiliar with working with TWAs also experienced the benefits of using TWAs, which thereby neutralizes the criticism as there is a real benefit for clients and their business to rent minority and inexperienced consultants.

"I didn't really know about the consultants that came here, what their level were, what their knowledge were, what people they were. And I was sort of worried about that. But it has worked out amazingly well; I think it has been great, much better than I ever thought." (Client 1C)

Secondly, TWAs help clients with irregular staffing needs smooth out their staffing as well as contribute expertise that they might lack, which once again neutralizes the criticism as there are financial benefits to using TWAs as well.

"I think that when you look at a whole year it is very difficult for firms to have a smooth staffing level because there are ups and downs. It could be seasonal, it could be that they produce goods and that they get the orders from their clients late and that they have trouble foreseeing future needs, that can vary from week to week, or that their staff falls ill, they could use extra staffing. All firms have production increases sometime during the year. And then it could be difficult to staff under a short period of time, and easier to bring people in from the outside. (…) And then the client might not have the competency, might not have anyone that is good at recruiting, conducting interviews, and then it is easier to bring in outside help from someone who have it." (Manager 2G)

Thirdly, all managers expressed how they felt like they genuinely helped people, and one manager described how TWAs could help even more.

"We would be an asset to the traditional labor market. Many things I believe that we would do better than the employment office. If the government had given us some of that confidence we could do a considerably better job. However I think the employment office still needs to exist (…) but I think we together could put more people to work." (Manager 1F)

Therefore, when the managers speak about how they help minority and young unemployed workers find employment, help clients financially and to find good consultants, and that TWAs have even more to give to the Swedish labor market, managers can refocus the criticism into them doing something good, and by extension they neutralize the conversation. This means that TWAs help society by helping businesses at both ends. Therefore, by helping the market and businesses, and by extension helping the economy, TWAs are a reliable and serious industry. By acting that this is intrinsic, while in reality there are conscious strategic foundations for this charitable contribution to society, managers can neutralize the criticism and close the conversation for further discussion.

In addition, the firms renting temporary workers, like the clients in this study, might also want to push this agenda, as this is a way for them to legitimize their choice to use consultants rather than hiring directly, as well as to mitigate their own bad conscience for doing so. All clients emphasized two arguments for using TWAs. Firstly, it helps students earn extra money.

> "Well I think TWAs are both good and bad. That's my opinion. (…) TWAs exist because many firms earn money. I can think that it feels wrong sometimes, I really do. It doesn't feel right, like many firms uses TWAs… (…) I guess it's great for someone like you who is studying, so then I think it's okay, but I think it's working when firms uses it in a way where they don't hire people. Because if you get a permanent employment you have security, you can get a mortgage and buy a house. (…) No I would rather see that my children would get a real job if you know what I mean. But during a shorter period, then sure." (Client 1C)

Secondly, it is financially beneficial to be able to send consultant home if you no longer need them. However, the clients explain that they also struggle with the criticism TWAs face, but that much of the criticism is uncalled for, as TWAs and clients provide work opportunities for people who might not have gotten employment otherwise.

Therefore, when arguing for how TWAs are aiding society, managers are neutralizing the criticism and closing the conversation because they are emphasizing their will to do good, to hire minorities, younger people etc. as a part of their intrinsically good nature. They thereby reject any further discussion about the fact that their choice to hire young people and immigrants perhaps might be because these are the people who mostly apply to TWA work advertisements, that these are the right people for the job, or that it is cheaper to hire younger people etc. As such, managers hide how their practices are produced and the underlying values behind them, and thereby neutralize the criticism in their favor.

Discussion

After analyzing the data using Deetz's model of discursive closure some things become apparent. The discursive defense mechanisms of managers and clients can result in discursive closure. However, the lines of what constitutes one discursive closure and another are often blurred. However, even though the model and the different defense mechanisms and subsequent discursive closures did not always have clear borders, the framework still provided information on the criticized Swedish TWA industry. Furthermore, even though the interviewees provided a range of different criticisms and responses, some patterns could still be identified and analyzed, suggesting that there is some coherence among practitioners, as some responses are more frequently used, and constructed into a repertoire that can be used and reused whenever needed. This study makes no attempt at discussing the effectiveness of discursive defense mechanisms, as this would be difficult to do without supplementing the study with observations. However, even though no claims about effectiveness can be made, the repertoire of discursive defense mechanisms has some consequences. The discussion regarding these consequences is as such supported by Deetz's (1992) framework.

Consequences of discursive defense mechanisms for clients

Firstly, the discursive defense mechanism repertoire is translated and adopted by TWA clients. Like previously explained, even though the TWAs in this study vary in size, shape, origin and focus, there was much cohesion among managers' responses, suggesting a discursive repertoire that is reproduced over and over. This cohesion extends to the clients who use this repertoire as well. With little provocation the clients in this study plentifully expressed their arguments for why TWAs are good. This suggests that there is a need for TWA clients to legitimize their choice to use the service, rather than to hire the consultants directly. If this need stems from facing actual criticism or to only alleviate their own bad conscience about using TWAs is uncertain, but that there is a need for legitimation, at least from the clients' perspective, is clear. Furthermore, the clients all expressed an ambivalent view of TWAs. On the one hand they felt like it was wrong, while admitting that the financial benefit is undeniable. The consequences of this are that clients also need to have a repertoire of arguments to use when feeling criticized. The clients in this study repeated some of the discursive defense mechanisms the managers used. As such, the repertoire of managers is reproduced in the clients' environment as well. When clients reproduce managers' defense mechanisms, perhaps this could further legitimize the TWA industry. However, there are other products that have many clients and users, but are still seen as illegitimate, like e.g. cigarettes. As such, the reproduction of defense mechanisms most probably mainly serves to shield clients and not TWAs from criticism, or to simply alleviate their own personal conscience. In addition, clients focus mainly on two arguments, the financial benefit and how TWAs provides job opportunities for young people and immigrants. As such, clients use a less complimentary repertoire than managers, who prefer to also speak much about their values and the consultants' well-being. Therefore, this could mean that clients in a lesser extent are able to legitimize the use TWAs.

Secondly, the discursive defense mechanisms and subsequent discursive closure postpones criticism rather than eliminates it. These discursive defense mechanisms result in closing the conversation much like Deetz's (1992) discursive closure theory describes. However, as the clients are still skeptical towards the TWA industry, the discursive closures do not convince critics, but rather quiets the conversation and postpones the criticism. The critics might accept managers' discursive defenses as such, and feel like they might not have more to say against it at this point, however they are not convinced, much like the clients expressed. This postponing however gives managers a chance to show what they can do, and they might therefore be given the chance to sell their services to critical clients, and as such have the opportunity to pleasantly surprise them, at least on a financial level, much like with client 1C.

Thirdly, the discursive defense mechanisms and subsequent discursive closure is limited. Both clients and managers express that the managers can desist discursively defending themselves when a deal has been struck. Instead they must deliver on their promise to fully serve the clients' needs. As such, clients, and perhaps other categories of critics as well, seemingly think that talk is overrated, and that actions speak louder than words. By delivering a good service, managers can maintain legitimacy with clients who can acknowledge the financial benefit of TWAs. This supports the notion that discursive defense mechanisms results in discursive closures that closes a conversation and postpones further criticism while critics remain skeptical. When demanding good delivery, clients acknowledge

the managers arguments, while insisting on proving themselves in action in order to maintain legitimacy. Therefore, as actions are seemingly required in order to fully maintain legitimacy, the consequences of discursive closures appear limited.

Consequences of discursive defense mechanisms for legitimacy

Discursive closure approaches legitimacy from an alternative angle, as legitimacy is maintained through verbal means rather than actual change or adaptation. By using discursive defense mechanisms, discursive closure can be achieved. The outcome is that the TWA industry is (further) legitimized, but not by adapting or changing the industry to adhere to normative expectations, but through closing and subverting discussions. Therefore, managers struggle and cope (Lawrence et al. 2011) with normative forces as best they can, without changing. The exchange almost becomes one-sided as managers sacrifice very little when responding to criticism. By using a repertoire of responses that can be used to meet common criticisms, discursive closure contributes to legitimation by easily maintaining legitimacy. Even though it requires continuous work, managers are not required to conform to societal normative standards. By not conforming, managers have the ability to influence institutions, as they manage their legitimacy by disrupting conversation in their favor, thus corroborating Elsbach and Sutton's (1992) findings that individuals can influence institutional structures. By extension we see that language does have the power to influence institutions, like Phillips et al. (2004) explains. Therefore, TWAs want to be institutionalized and to be taken for granted, but without genuinely discussing their practices, goals and institutional work. As such, this study continuously refers to discursive defense mechanisms rather than discursive defense strategies. One could see the interviewees' responses as strategy; they certainly have strategy behind some of their practices. However, they do not discuss this proactively, and the repertoire is not used proactively. The repertoire exists and is ready to be used, but as managers want to maintain legitimacy without genuinely discussing their practices, the repertoire is a collection of defense mechanisms that result in discursive closure, which is then used when needed.

However, like briefly mentioned above, there are limitations to these defense mechanisms. Even though they can in some degree maintain legitimacy, this continuous attempt to maintain legitimacy takes place mostly outside the grand stage of media outlets. Even if representatives of the TWA industry are occasionally asked to contribute their view in articles presenting criticisms towards TWAs, the continuous repertoire of responses are mainly performed by managers in a more everyday manner, in interactions with clients, consultants or people they meet in their private life, not unlike Lawrence's et al. (2011) description of institutional work. Even though managers attempt, and sometimes succeed, to disrupt a conversation, there is still back-and-forth interaction with critics, and as such the discussions are far less grand, perhaps being more of an exchange, a dialogue or conversation, between two people. Therefore, even though some critics might change their opinion on TWAs, this is hardly enough to change an entire society's view of an entire industry, and might not eradicate skepticism but rather postpone it. Many managers explain that the attitude towards the industry has improved immensely over the years, from clients asking, "is this even legal?" (manager 1F) to todays more accepting attitude. However, even though there are attitude improvements, there is a way to go until total acceptance of the

industry, even though these discursive defense mechanisms seemingly help maintain legitimacy. As such, discursive defense mechanisms and discursive closure do not have the power to single handedly change society's skeptical opinion of TWAs, at least not in the short run.

Consequences of discursive defense mechanisms for institutional work

Firstly, TWAs have many indications of today being an institution in the Swedish labor market. Like Selznick (1992) explains, an institution refers to a group or a social practice where distinctive features and vested interests emerge, which is maintained and reproduced over time because actors rely on its continued existence. TWAs fit this description well, as they have distinctive features, vested interest, and because over 40 million people rely on them for employment. In addition, the analysis shows how managers discursively respond to criticism, and that this is conducted coherently as separate actors, as well as repeatedly as if the responses are part of a repertoire, or using Bergström's et al. (2007) expression, a social action pattern that is continually reproduced. However, discursive closure analysis also describe what managers do, not only because they conduct speech acts (Gerken, 2012) when responding to criticism and conducting discursive closure, but also because their discursive defense mechanisms and subsequent discursive closures are accompanied by actions and behavior, like walking out of meetings, walking away from business deals, accept being yelled at for no reason etc. Therefore, managers' discursive defense mechanisms are also a vessel for action (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). Therefore, not only could discursive closure be one form of institutional work because discursive closure are speech acts, but also because discursive closure have accompanying actions that can construct and reconstruct institutional processes and structures, much like in institutional work.

Secondly, even though it might be valid that all managers respond to criticism according to their personality, there still seem to be some systemic continuous strategic reproduction of meaning as suggested by Deetz (1992). A good example of this is when clients' recycle and adopt managers' defense mechanisms in order for them to legitimize their choice of using TWAs. In addition, as it is not uncommon to hide the true agenda or values behind certain defense mechanisms and actions, the genuine conversation is displaced, and instead responses attempting to fulfill normative standards are formed. Therefore, these systemic, continuous, defense mechanisms and discursive closures are reproduced within the institutional environment of the TWA industry in an attempt to maintain legitimacy. As such, discursive defense mechanisms and discursive closure can be seen as a form of institutional work attempting to legitimize a criticized industry. When the discursive defense mechanisms result in discursive closure, actors reproduce the normative standards within their institutional environment in an attempt to maintain legitimacy, which corresponds to the institutional work actors conduct when they reproduce, maintain and disrupt institutional structures in any institutional field in order to maintain legitimacy (Lawrence et al. 2011). Therefore, this study suggest that there is little practical difference between the acts conducted in institutional work and discursive defense mechanisms resulting in discursive closure. As such, this builds on the relationship between institutional theory and discourse analysis as suggested by Phillips et al. (2004), but on a micro-level.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this article, two main aims of the study were identified, which was later fulfilled. First and foremost, the study revealed different discursive defense mechanisms that resulted in discursive closure. By legitimating, pacifying, disqualifying and neutralizing criticism, managers attempt to maintain legitimacy. Furthermore, the managers' discursive defense mechanisms exemplify methods of discursive closures, even though the line between different closures might not be precise or completely separated. These discursive defense mechanisms have limited power, but they are translated into a repertoire for TWA consultant managers and also for TWA clients, to use and reuse when they attempt to legitimize their choice of using consultants, and to alleviate their own conscience.

Secondly, as these defense mechanisms and subsequent discursive closures become a repertoire, they are continuously reproduced by the actors within the TWA industry, and as such share many aspects with institutional work. The repeated verbal actions are speech acts in themselves, as well as inspire other physical actions. As such the discursive defense mechanisms can be seen as having effects on the maintenance and reproduction of institutions, i.e. they can be seen as a form of institutional work, where actors attempt to maintain legitimacy by struggling and working with normative standards. As such, this study suggests that discursive defense mechanisms and subsequent discursive closure is one form of institutional work. This is not a theory formulation, but rather, it is a suggestion for an alternative way to think about institutional work.

Contributions and implications of the study

This study contributes to previous studies by examining criticisms and discursive mechanisms for maintaining legitimacy in the Swedish TWA industry, which still attract negative attention. The study confirmed that managers, much like actors within other firms, use discursive defense mechanisms when their legitimacy is questioned. By applying Deetz's (1992) framework of discursive closure on Swedish TWA managers' discursive defense mechanisms, these mechanisms attempting to maintain legitimacy becomes more structured and synoptic. Also, this study thereby promotes and highlights the influence and importance of discourse. Phillips et al. (2004) explain how studies on organizational discourse has not connected strongly enough to issues of interests for management researchers. This study will hopefully mitigate this, but on a less aggregated level than Phillips' et al. (2004) study. This study also suggest that this type of discursive analysis could be one form of institutional work, thus building upon Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) and Zelber's (2009) call for emphasizing discourse in institutional work research.

Furthermore, the study supports the notion of legitimacy as a competitive advantage, and that legitimation and institutionalization are in many ways synonymous, much like Suchman (1995) suggests. Moreover, many scholars of discursive defense mechanisms highlight how criticized organizations discursively attempt to maintain legitimacy during a legitimacy crisis (see e.g. Staw et al. 1983, Leary and Kowalski, 1990, Elsbach & Sutton, 1992, Elsbach, 1994). In this case however, TWAs does not face a legitimacy crisis per se, but are rather operating in a constant situation of legitimacy insecurity. This study therefore has a different perspective and setting than some of the previous literature presented. Moreover, these

authors also study discursive legitimation on the grand stage of the media. This study however extends the scope to a micro perspective among individual actors in everyday conversations. In addition, this study builds on Zelber's (2009) notion of transference, as this study found that the repertoire of TWA managers also travels between organizations, in this case between TWA managers and TWA clients.

Furthermore, for practitioners this study can concretize and exemplify what managers verbally do in order to maintain legitimacy. The results could show how managers discursively defend against criticism, and in what way these mechanisms displace genuine conversation and self-realization in the fight for legitimacy. Therefore, this study can hopefully help managers and clients reflect on their discourse and evaluate how to best proceed in the future when encountering criticism.

Limitations and suggestions for future research
However, there are certainly limitations to these results. There is the limitation of only using four firms, and as such it may not be possible to generalize in relation to the whole TWA industry. As such, there may be variation among TWAs, dependent on e.g., size and ownership, even though this study suggests industry coherence in how managers defend against criticism. Therefore, generalizing about an entire industry is difficult. Moreover, the TWA industry is only one example of a criticized industry attempting to maintain legitimacy.

Therefore, besides increasing the scope and scale of this study, one suggestion for future studies is to use a different setting, for example in countries where TWAs are more accepted. The TWA industry is still young in Sweden, but is far more established abroad. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if and how foreign managers use discursive defense mechanisms and discursive closure to maintain legitimacy. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, this study suggests that TWA clients also feel a need to legitimate their choice of using TWAs instead of hiring personnel directly. Therefore, a study examining how TWA clients discursively defend themselves against criticism could be an interesting extension of this study, and provide a more comprehensive view of the issues pertaining to Swedish TWAs.

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