Project management and national culture: A Dutch–French case study

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Abstract

This case study explores the impact of national context in the integration of project management. It analyses the implementation of project management during a Dutch/French cooperation. Evaluation and monitoring are easily adopted by the Dutch whereas they are avoided by the French partners.

This qualitative and inductive research unravels the entanglement of the practice in two different contexts. It sheds light on the role of Dutch consensus as making the transfer of the practice easier. It reveals the difficulty encountered in making project management a part of French logic of "métier". The research underlines the fact that weak and limited articulations between the individual and the group and between the persons and their activities are key factors in the appropriation of project management.

This paper is also theoretically oriented. It proposes an analytical framework adapted to investigate managerial practices within their contexts of implementation.

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1. Introduction

Despite the belief that managerial tools and processes can be exported worldwide, a different reality is often experienced at the local workplace. Even within Europe, the transfer of managerial practices can take a long time. Implementation of a new management process can be subjected to avoidance, resistance or rejection. When this occurs, a manager may wonder why and seek the source of the problem.

A portrayal of managerial tools as objective and universal is mainly a matter of a dominant discourse. Yet, it is difficult to think of a practice as "suspended in the air", detached from actors and their contexts. Managerial practices are both designed and implemented within defined political, institutional and social contexts. They interact with cooperation and coordination processes. Whereas

the logic inherent to a practice is consistent with the context in which it has been elaborated, it may be at odds with the local contexts to which it is transferred. In which case, a manager will strive to reconcile the practice and the context. He/she will benefit from knowledge about the underlying logics that govern such a situation.

This research explores the influence of national context in the implementation of project management (PM). It takes advantage of a critical situation, a Dutch/French cooperation project in the field of R&D. The two partners adopt contrasting positions towards managerial aspects of the project and, more specifically, monitoring and evaluation. The research identifies the logics at stake and their interplay.

This paper describes the theoretical background for this research (Section 2) and the background for this case study (Section 3). Then, the text proceeds with the description of the case (Section 4). It analyzes the procedures and unfolding of the project and further interprets the perception of Dutch and French partners about the project, its

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evaluation and monitoring. The last section discusses the origin of the discrepancy between Dutch and French partners and proposes methodological developments (Section 5).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. National context and management

In this research, national culture is taken in a broad sense. It includes that is shared within a nation such as a common language, common political, legal and educational systems. We prefer the term national context because existing studies on national cultures either tend to evacuate the context or to minimize a part of the context which is important for management studies. The nation appears as a pertinent area among other relevant areas such as the organizational context. Although this work targets the national context, all contextual aspects contribute to and reinforce each other.

The literature about national culture and management can be summarized according to three main positions and the corresponding underlying assumptions. For the sake of clarity, I only refer to few representative scholars among them.

– A first stream of research considers that management has nothing to do with national culture: it is governed by objective practices and autonomous actors (Peters and Waterman, 1982). This "universalistic" current is criticized because it cannot make a distinction between a universal and a dominant form of management.

– A second current of research derives from psychology. Cross Cultural Studies (CCS) measure countries along few dimensions such as individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance or masculinity (Hofstede, 1991, 2001). CCS are based on the assumption that dimensions are common in nature and that national cultures are comparable. These dimensions reflect actors' attitudes rather than their contexts. CCS have been criticized for inherent theoretical and methodological biases (Berry et al., 2002; Kim et al., 1994; Chapman, 1996). They remain very popular among international managers even though they are badly equipped to provide relevant information on national contexts.

– A third stream of research is often referred to as an emic current (in opposition to an etic current which includes CCS). It postulates that a culture is characterized by its uniqueness and consequently, there are no common dimensions and no possible direct comparisons between cultures (Chapman, 1996). Deriving from symbolic anthropology (Geertz, 1973) this current mobilizes in-depth qualitative inductive studies in order to unravel indigenous (native) categories of interpretation of the reality. National culture is defined as a singular way to interpret the reality, a set of symbolic categories, a context of meaning (d'Iribarne, 1996). This stream has a high potential for management studies and has already accumulated substantial results. However, it is limited by two drawbacks:

– It has not developed tools or indicators to federate a collection of independent case studies.
– By focusing on culture as a context of meaning, it tends to underestimate culture as a context of action (Friedberg, 2005). Culture also influences practices, an aspect which is important in the field of management.

Until now, we have referred the permanent aspect of cultures but there is also a dynamic component. More than ever, culture is challenged by a world in rapid and constant evolution. The stability inherent in cultural studies hardly reconcile with today's rapid evolution. According to process theories (Weick, 1995, 2001) the meaning is permanently co-constructed, negotiated and renewed in association with action. Sense making integrates the diversity and complexity of organizational situations. Despite their attractive and fashionable character, these process theories have two drawbacks:

– They are seldom validated by concrete case studies (Autissier, 2006).
– Sense making is considered as context free. It does not integrate the political, institutional and social contexts in which the sense is built (Weber and Glynn, 2006).

These considerations lead to the conclusion that cultural evolution does not exclude the existence of structural components. Culture includes permanence and evolution and these two aspects are to be investigated by independent (and complementary) approaches.

2.2. Theoretical contribution to the field

2.2.1. Integrating context of action in cultural studies

As previously described, CCS are context free and inductive studies are almost exclusively oriented towards the context of interpretation. Considering that culture is not only a context of meaning but also a context of action, management processes deserve more attention than the starting point of inductive studies. I propose to centre the analysis at the articulation between the context of meaning and the context of action and to conduct a dialogue between actions and interpretation of these actions. This is important because:

– Management is turned on action rather than on interpretations. Implementation of a practice is essentially action driven.
– Actions and discourses about actions are not directly linked. Brunsson (2002) uses the word "hypocrisy" to reflect the relation between thoughts, decisions and actions.
– It is possible that the articulation between thoughts and actions is culturally dependent. This hypothesis is a wide open research question.

2.2.2. Analytical framework

My second contribution to the field is to sketch an analytical frame that can federate inductive studies. Any situation or practice always involves people and their actions. A situation is framed by a defined relation between the individual and the group and between actors and their actions. Hence, a situation or a practice can be read along two main federative dimensions:

– first dimension includes the individual (form of autonomy), the group (form of cooperation) and the nature of the articulation between the individual and the collectivity;
– second dimension includes actions, corresponding discourse and their articulation;
– Instead of considering these factors as independent, we take them as intertwined and examine them "en masse" as illustrated by the square in Fig. 1. In other words, we focus on the relations between the individual, the group, thoughts and actions in order to disentangle the mechanism of their articulations. Such a broad and flexible analytical frame allows the unravelling of indigenous categories without damaging their singularities.

2.2.3. Revisiting the notions of context and culture

In "*How Institutions Think*", Douglas (1986) describes the relations between a social group, its collectively acquired knowledge, its institutions, conventions and practices. Another current of research associates to each nation a specific articulation between educative system, professional relations and business organizations (Maurice et al., 1982; Maurice and Sorge, 2000). These streams emphasize the contexts and their impact on culture. However, the tricky question in all cultural studies is to clarify the very nature of what is shared in a culture. Culture is often defined as a "shared meaning" or a common interpretation of the reality within a group (Gullestrup, 2006). A shared meaning is hardly conceivable in pluralistic and complex societies. Even in a homogeneous group, individuals have their own perception of the reality.

Few scholars have proposed to define culture as the categories that frame the meaning rather than the meaning itself. In "*Patterns of Culture*", Benedict (1934) had already described how a culture partitions the reality by selecting a coherent system of categories.

"*Any society selects some segment of the arc of possible human behaviour, and in so far it achieves integration, its institutions tend to further the expression of its selected segment and to inhibit opposite expressions*".

We retain the definition of culture as a system of categories and arbitrages that frame the interpretation of the reality. This definition reconciles the existence of structural components (political system, institutions, socialization) and a dynamic vision of organisations and societies.

2.3. Research approach

In line with Douglas (1986), this approach focuses on the relation between a practice, its practising and the political and social context in which it is exercised. Departing from a critical situation which highlights the contrasts between a practice and its contexts of implementation, the research disentangles the logics at stake and their interplay. For example, in this case study (implementation of project management in a Dutch/French team), I discriminate the logic inherent to the practice, that of the Dutch contexts and that of the French contexts. This analysis is then extended at a macro level in order to control the consistency with political and societal corresponding contexts.

The work has been undertaken at the request of the Dutch institute after completion of the project. It is based on a detailed analysis of all provided documents and a search in literature about project management. It is complemented by a series of 16 open interviews (10 researchers, 6 at headquarters) of Dutch and French actors of the project and open ended discussions with several interviewees. It also benefits from the author's participation in four bilateral meetings of two subsequent bilateral projects.

The interpretive work is realized on available documents and transcriptions of open interviews. It follows an inductive pathway which mobilizes the previously described framework to disentangle pertinent symbolic categories and their arbitrations. Validation of the results is achieved by controlling internal consistency of results at various levels (micro and macro) in complementary fields (political, societal). It takes the benefits from previous research on the construction of Dutch consensus and its transmission at elementary school. This research is also facilitated by the author's situation as a French national integrated into Dutch society for more than a decade.

3. Background of this case study

3.1. Project management (PM): origin, features and reception in Europe

PM was originally meant to improve the structure of the work but, progressively, it has evolved as a concept. Today, a project can be considered as a current managerial practice, a way to work or a way to perceive the work. One even
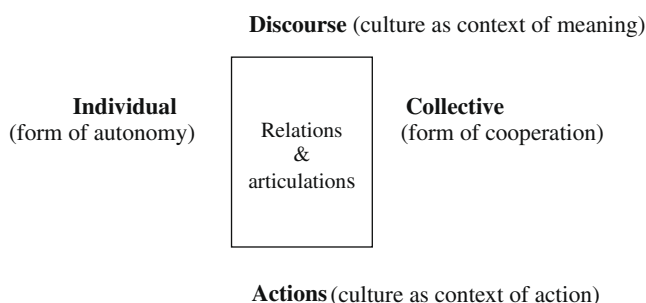

Discourse (culture as context of meaning)

Individual (form of autonomy) — Relations & articulations — **Collective** (form of cooperation)

Actions (culture as context of action)

Fig. 1. National context: theoretical framework.

talks about as a "projectified society" (Lundin and Söderholm, 1998).

A project is unique, it responds to a specific question and unfolds during a limited time period. It is characterized by a clear definition of the objectives to be reached, mediums to be used and results to be expected (Garel et al., 2004). It assembles a diversity of specialists in a team exclusively for the duration of the project. This team is placed directly under the authority of the direction that is in charge of monitoring and evaluation (Segrestin, 2004).

PM relies on a work organisation that transcends traditional professional segmentations (Messeghem and Schmitt, 2004). Specialists issued from various divisions and hierarchical levels are considered equally competent to implement the project. Another peculiarity of the project is its contractual character. However, instead of a share between employer and employee, this contract is centred on a realization (Bloch et al., 2001). Finally, a project proceeds in a matrix of financiers (government and private) and stakeholders (consumer, citizen, industry, local government). It is often linked with other projects or included in programs.

The dominant literature on PM describes how project management "should be" rather than what it really "is" at the workplace. As criticized by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999), it proposes a process assumed as rational with a prescriptive discourse. This combination of assumed objectivity and prescription contributes to universalizing the project. However, the literature also include researches based on a broader definition of project that includes situational and contextual aspects (Bredillet, 2008).

A number of studies addresses cultural aspects of project management (Rees, 2007). Some of them more specifically point out the difficulty of managing heterogeneity in project teams. These researches underline confrontations between different models of project management (Chevrier, 2003), challenges imposed by political and cultural factors (Shore and Cross, 2003), contrasting collaborative working relationships (Kendra and Tapin, 2004), country of origin effects Noorderhaven and Harzing, 2003), different approaches towards disputes and conflicts (Chan and Tse, 2003), different decision making processes (d'Iribarne, 1998), information flow barriers (Rosswurm and Bayerlein, 2005) or difficulties to integrate knowledge (Subramaniam, 2006). There is an increasing awareness of the role of embeddedness as an important dimension in analyzing projects (Blomquist and Packendorff, 1998). At stake is the integration project management within local professional logics. In this regard, a study by Campagnac and Winch (1997,1998) on construction projects allows to characterize and discriminate two different national model of PM in England and in France.

The transfer of PM varies from one country to another and the contrast between the Dutch and the French is particularly outstanding. In the Netherlands, the project is perceived as a common way of working. Dutch literature about project management is positive and enthusiastic to the point of ignoring its limitations (Bakker and Louweret, 2001; Bos and Harting, 1999; Wijnen et al., 1989). Significant for a successful integration, the project has even penetrated the educational sector as a learning approach. When entering active life, a young Dutch person is well acquainted with the project and its logic.

In France, the project has been more difficult to implement at the workplace. The specific work organisation that governs the project contradicts French professional logics (Bloch et al., 2001). Main stumbling blocks include the perception of time, perception of work and perception of hierarchy (Bréchet and Desreumaux, 2005; Garel et al., 2004). French scholars question a "projectified society" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) or the price to pay in order to adapt to project (Segrestin, 2004). They refer to an opposition between a logic of project and a logic of "métier" (Boussard, 2005; Maugeri, 2006) and a mismatch between managerial and professional logics which extends far beyond project management (Berrebi-Hoffmann and Boussard, 2005; Brunel, 2004; de Gaulejac, 2005; Le Goff, 2000).

The appropriation of evaluation follows in line with that of the project. In the Netherlands, the practice is widely and extensively used whereas the French still experience difficulties in implementing evaluation in various sectors (Salmon, 2005). It appears to them as a "catch all" notion that aggregates judgment, information and group cohesion (Perret, 2001). It encapsulates the individuals, their realizations and several "in-betweens" (competences, profile). Such a hybridization of concepts and registers hardly makes sense to them (Bouquet et al., 2007; Bureau and Marchal, 2005). The French also question the conception of work that is supported by this practice. Does working correspond to applying defined prescriptions or to fill the gap between reality and procedures? In this last situation, what is the substance to be evaluated (Dejours, 2003)?

3.2. Origin of the project

The story of this bilateral cooperation begins in 1998. In the economic sector of concern, the European Community has not initiated the funding of research. The Dutch research centre that we refer to as "Doel" (doel translates as objective) and the corresponding French research centre "Met" (for métier) decide to pool their efforts and assets in organizing a cooperation in the form of research projects as stepping stones to potential future European projects. A first project, described in this work, was undertaken between 2000 and 2004. Since then, two projects were completed (between 2003 and 2006) and others are still in progress.

The objective of this project is to develop an innovative product which satisfies the consumer, the citizen and ecological requirements as a whole. They agree on the employment of three to four full time researchers per country for a period of 4 years. The project is placed under the responsibility of a project coordinator (NL), assisted by a partner coordinator (F). Furthermore, the project is affiliated to the international department of both institutes that is accountable for its financing, monitoring and evaluation.

The cooperation is structured around two bilateral annual workshops, of a day and a half taking place alternatively in each country. These meetings are conceived as a platform where researchers (around 6 per country) can communicate, exchange and discuss the progress of their results. Since the main goal of this cooperation is to develop a future European research project, the meetings also aim at building cooperation and organizing co-publications.

3.3. Contextual aspects at Doel and Met during the last decades

Until 1990, Doel and Met were both traditional public organisations which benefited from a government funding and a stability of employment. During the nineties, both institutes witnessed the pressure of the market, an increasing concern about quality and sustainability of products and the new evolution of research funding at a European level. Yet, this evolution was not similarly reflected in the functioning of Doel and Met.

At the beginning of the nineties, the Dutch supervisory ministry made the decision to phase out the traditional funding of Doel. In the near future, it would only provide the funding of project and consequently, Doel had to become financially autonomous. The headquarters anticipated the future and initiated an internal reorganisation that integrated economical, ecological and social demands together with financial independence. Project management procedures were designed, the staff attended managerial training and the management of research by project was progressively implemented until completion at the end of the nineties.

Today, the supervisory ministry still remains the main financier of Doel. Acting as an intermediary between society and the research community, its knowledge department addresses the questions emerging from the market and the society in the form of projects. Research at Doel is reorganized in such a way that the funding unit is the project. A project covers expenses including research, salaries and office expenditures. Such an organisation is equipped for an equal treatment of private and public backers.

The evolution of Met has followed a radically different direction. In 1982, the so-called "regalian" law on research provided an institutional framework for public funding and a scientific autonomy to research centres (Théry and Barré, 2001). The status of researchers evolved from a long term contract to that of civil servants. Public pre competitive research was promoted to stimulate the market without depending on it. Hence, the pressure of the market, social demand and financial concerns was not manifest until the end of the nineties. Then, the government initiated a retrenchment phase, proposed to enhance cooperation between private and public research and started a reform of research organizations.

After several years of turmoil and attempts to reach agreements between ministries and research instances, a new Order in Council has been promulgated in April 2006. In the absence of concerted agreements, the conflicting issues of research funding and evaluation have been solved by creating government agencies in order to take over the lead. As far as Met is concerned, contractual research ranged only between 10 and 20% of the budget in 2005. Met researchers still benefit from a large degree of autonomy and staff turnover is particularly low.

3.4. Two radically different national contexts

This cooperation develops in the context of two contrasting political traditions. In a certain way, Dutch pluralistic and French republican democracies stand in opposition. French electoral system favours direct election and simple majority vote. In a Dutch perception, the concept of a majority simply outvoting a minority seems too selective. Voting divides and reinforces antagonistic positions instead of federating and unifying around a common issue (Van Lente, 1997). Accordingly, the Dutch political system is based on relative majorities and coalitions.

The construction of agreements follows in line with the political preferences in each country. Dutch decision is not a selection among potential solutions but a convergent process that constructs a federative solution (Van Vree, 1999). The Dutch use the word "besluitvorming" (literarily forming the conclusion of a decision) and in other countries, Dutch decision process is usually referred to as consensus or construction of consensus. At a symbolic level, the construction of consensus relies on equality between individuals and a primacy of collective interests (Van Lente, 1997). At an operational level, Dutch consensus is a time process framed around formal procedures and meetings. This process conciliates strong individual and collective characters (d'Iribarne, 1989). Each individual give his/her personal position over the matter at stake before drawing back in order to find a solution which is suitable for the group (Benders et al., 2000).

Dutch decision is an agreement over actions detached from their underlying principles (Huisman, 2001). It mobilizes a series of social devices (Lijphart, 1968) that are deeply embedded in Dutch culture (right to disagree, egalitarianism, objectivity, emotional control and pragmatism). These devices act in synergy in decoupling the expression of opinions from the decision, limiting the common ground between individual and collective expression and/or neutralizing the interaction between the individual and the group and between thoughts and actions. They are proposed to children at Dutch elementary school (de Bony, 2008). Hence, a Dutch individual is well equipped to take a distance from himself/herself as well as his/her activity.

In comparison with Dutch consensus, the nature of what is at stake in a French decision has more to do with the ideological than the practical. French decision is better described as a selection of principles or a selection of possible issues. Such a move from a pragmatic to an

ideological interpretation of the decision also induces a switch from a federation process to a differentiation process. In front of the same situation, this Dutch inclination to federate and French inclination to differentiate is a key factor of discrepancy between these two nations.

4. Description of the project

The project in question has produced results and publications of a high quality and a large variety of spill-over. In term of scientific achievements, it has been successfully implemented. However, cultural factors have been frequently evoked as limiting the extent of the cooperation. Embarrassed by the hesitations of Met towards monitoring and evaluating the project, Doel decided to look into cultural and managerial discrepancies and requested a study. It was agreed to analyze the entanglement of the project in Dutch and French contexts. In other words, this case study does not target the content of the project but its implementation and appropriation by Dutch and French actors.

4.1. The project, its procedures and unfolding

Two aspects of this cooperation have to be underlined. This project is co-financed by the two boards in absence of a third party imposing own rules of cooperation. Further, it has no antecedents. A first cooperation project is a unique situation in which indigenous attitudes spontaneously pop out. The absence of acquired knowledge from previous experiences boosts contextual discrepancies.

Doel proposes to manage this cooperation according to its procedure (duration of four years maximum, detailed work plan, annual progress reports, go/no go evaluation after one year, subsequent annual evaluation and monitoring) with a slight change due to the bi national character of the project. Annual report is independently evaluated by two scientific experts in each institute. Then, the evaluations are combined in one evaluation report which is agreed and co-signed by the two boards. It is immediately forwarded to the project coordinators so that the recommendations can be quickly implemented.

What happens in reality? Progress reports are always written by Doel coordinator. Met coordinator adds few lines at the bottom of the report together with his signature. Despite one exception (go/no go evaluation that was officially signed), Met headquarters do not implement the evaluation procedure proposed by the Doel. They experience difficulties in finding experts and evaluations do not develop until the end. After several reminder from Doel, Met headquarters give their agreement in a much freer way than was initially proposed.

4.2. Perception of the project

4.2.1. Dutch perception
At Doel headquarters, the project is considered as a contract: *"A project is temporary. It has a financier (giving input and asking) and a performer (giving output)"*. The object of the contract is the work plan which should be literally respected: *"If you do more than the contract, you get financial problems and if you do something else, you get problems with the financier"*. The project is perceived as an exchange of deliverables for money. A good researcher implements the research as described and delivers the products in due time. He/she satisfies the financer by being accountable for the work plan.

Talking about the project, Doel researchers frequently use words as *"cooperation, working together, common work"*. Individuals cooperate even when they do not get along together: *"We keep this (personal quarrels) under the table"*. This cooperation is mobilized for the sake of the project. As an interviewee says: *"The project counts: the individual is not so important"*. During the project, the individual put his or her position into perspective, distances himself or herself and contributes to the success of a common realization. The project corresponds to a collective action that fulfils at a collective interest. At a symbolic level, the project is in keeping with the register of the things.

The work plan cannot anticipate the results nor foresee the contingencies of research. This issue is not spontaneously addressed by Dutch interviewees. When asked about it, unpredictability is said to be compensated by cooperation: *"During the course of the project, a good contact between project leader and financier is important because research is never 100% predictable"*. It appears therefore that close cooperation is not only mobilized for the success of the project but also makes up for the contingency inherent in any research.

4.2.2. French perception
When they talk about the project, Met researcher refer to its managerial aspects in harsh terms such as "*idiot, ridiculous, caricature, irrational, counterproductive*". Time limitation is the first problem evoked: *"Our Dutch colleagues work only and totally on the basis of projects and they are limited in time. Consequently they count their time to the point that it becomes a caricature"*. They are stunned by Dutch submission to deadlines: *"And then, they (Dutch researchers) are not working anymore on the project and say: "Sorry, time is over" "It's a killing blade, it's an idiot and nasty killing blade"*. Such a temporal limitation is not possible for the French: *"It is not culturally conceivable for us to stop a project under the pretext that time has expired. It's unconceivable, unconceivable"*. In their opinion, the project stops when the production begins: *"We stop when we have made 90% efforts and obtained 10% results, this is a completely absurd situation"*.

Met researchers do not see the point of such a managerial infatuation: *"I had the feeling, that the Dutch coordinator had just followed a formation in management which he applied the following week to our project"*. Several interviewees refer to a recurrent activity that consists in listing the goals, output and stakeholders of the project and this does

not make any sense to them: *"The project has been running for two years: where are we going if we don't know these things already?"*

On the other hand, Met researchers are frustrated by the scientific aspects. They feel that the results could have been more extensively discussed and criticized: *"In fact results were required, but then, we did not really discuss, we could not use the scientific competences of our partners specialized in similar domains"*. One interviewee put into perspective a Dutch descriptive approach and a French analytic approach: *"They are much more ready to produce numbers without asking much theoretical questions whereas we are trying to ask relevant questions in order to predict possible answers"*.

At Met headquarters, management of research by project is not taken at face value. An interviewee says: *"French researchers have not appropriated the project"*. *Another person talks about the cost and time of "unwieldy procedures that still deserve to prove themselves"*. A director emphasizes the fact that *"Writing a project is neither research nor result"*. Another interviewee talks about a tradition *"that protects young researchers from administrative tasks in order to give them a best opportunity to develop their field of research"*. Yet another pinpoints a higher turnover associated with project organization and its consequences on the continuation of professional relations.

4.3. Evaluation and monitoring of the project

4.3.1. Dutch perception

At Doel, the financial director cannot conceive of an institute that provides financing without equipping itself with an evaluation and monitoring system. Soon, he notices that Met is not familiar with these practices. He says: *"It was difficult because they had no apparatus, they had no systems"*. He perceives the absence of evaluation by Met as reluctance to interfere with the researchers: *"They would not dare to judge or to review the work of the scientists, they would not put their hands on those topics at the headquarter side. They tell us: is it necessary? If you like to do those monitoring OK, go ahead, and if you have something we'll write: It's OK"*.

The Dutch coordinator also suffers from the lack of such evaluations by Met. He needs *"a mirror image of the project"*, some feedback from the French and he does not get it: *"I have no one to ask. Because an evaluation as we have within our Dutch group, is just to ask: "what's happening here"? That's not usual with the French.* And when he talks about his concern with his French partner, the answer does not meet his expectations: *"And my French partner says: We are doing well; we have a project of four years, we have our plan, let's go, don't worry. There is no expectation from the board at the moment. That's in the end"*.

4.3.2. French perception

At Met headquarters, project evaluation and monitoring arouses mixed feelings. It is talked about: *"cumbersome procedures, lack of relevant experts and lack of time to seriously evaluate these projects"*. An interviewee sneers while evoking a future situation in which *"half of the institute would spend its time to evaluate the other half"*. Above all, it is wondered whether these procedures promote the scientific quality. Indeed *"it is important to evaluate both pertinence and quality of the research"* says an interviewee, but the validity of the chosen procedures is questioned. As mentioned by a director: *"there are much simpler alternatives such as relying on recent performance of researchers"*.

When they talk about the project, Met researchers are not interested in evaluation. Asked about monitoring, one says: *"Why should we be told about what we have to do, it's our work!"* As mentioned at headquarters, researchers request to be left alone during the development of the project. For them, it is the result and not the process that counts. The comment: *"There is no expectation from the board for us at the moment. That's in the end"* reflects a logic shared by researchers and headquarters. This is also the reason why Met researchers strongly criticize deadlines while saying: *"the project stops when the production begins"*.

When they talk about their work, Met researchers emphasize the necessity of time. Time is associated with the unpredictable character of the results: *"One should know that it is extremely difficult to predict the time necessary to spend on a project"*. The interviewees refer to time as a right, as a privilege: *"Indeed, we (F) are even worse than them (NL) to predict because we don't care, we don't really care, we take our time"*. The French strongly defend the right to take their time because they consider it important to finish the work: *"In fact we stopped too early and this was very embarrassing for us because we felt that there were very interesting things to pursue"*. Or: *"Again and let me insist on this point, the work has to be finished"*.

5. Discussion

This case study shows that PM is differently interpreted and implemented by the Dutch and the French partners. PM does not covers the same realities in the two organizations. This section discusses the origin of this discrepancy by addressing two relevant contextual aspects. We argue that Dutch consensus makes the integration of the project easier whereas French logic of "métier" stumbles over PM. We also make the case that such discrepancies reflect two types of relation to the activity and two modes of insertion of the individual in the collective.

5.1. Two differently funded institutes

The observed divergence between Doel and Met can be interpreted at an institutional level. When the project develops, Doel is a market oriented institute whereas Met is nationally funded. Indeed, someone whose salary is paid by a project acts differently than a civil servant. This financial aspect has certainly influenced the implementation PM by the two teams. Yet, such interpretation does not explain

two contrasting evolutions of Doel and Met during the last decades. At Doel, PM has been rapidly accepted as a means of becoming financially independent and market oriented. It has been voluntarily undertaken and integrated without turmoil. In contrast, ten years later, French government experienced such a resistance and turmoil that it had to legislate in order to force the use of PM in public research. Today PM is still contested among French scientific community.

What catalyzed Dutch voluntary experience to shift towards a market orientated research? Why is it so difficult for the French to appropriate project management even in market orientated situations? Why can it be easily implemented in the Netherlands even in not market driven organizations? Central in this debate is the tension between the logic inherent to project management and the logic inherent to the local professional activity in which the project is implemented.

5.2. PM and Dutch consensus

Let us summarize the requirements of PM. The project corresponds to a contract for a realization. It is not an individual but a collective action. The project (and not its actors) is monitored and evaluated. At a symbolic level, the project is in keeping with the register of things and not that of the persons. According to this perception of the reality, the individual draws back for the benefit of the collective and keeps himself/herself at a distance from his/her activity. The articulation between the individual and his/her activity is loose. The insertion of the individual in the collective is dual with an intense individual autonomy of thoughts and a high cooperation capacity towards actions.

This description is in close agreement with that of consensus as summarized in Section 3.4. Project management and Dutch consensus are two of a kind at operational and symbolic levels. Both unfold according to a rigid time process, punctuated by formal steps and procedures. Both are based on an equality of participants and arbitrated by collective interest. They partition the reality according to similar symbolic categories and mobilize the same toolbox of social devices in order to separate thoughts and actions.

At this stage, it is useful to recall the scope of consensus in Dutch society (d'Iribarne, 1989). Consensus is widely retained as decision process in all sectors ranging from corporations to benevolent associations and in private situations. The first activity proposed at Dutch elementary school is a discussion in circle in which children practise consensus (de Bony, 2008). With such rooting of consensus, Dutch society is not only equipped for PM but already trained for it. Even in situations poorly adapted to PM, consensus assists in reconciling the situation and the practice by providing relevant social devices.

5.3. PM and French logic of "métier"

In most professional sectors, the French perpetuate a relation to work derived from old corporations and referred to as "métier" (d'Iribarne, 2006). Métier reflects a long term acquired work experience and deep expertise in a specific domain. The individual masters his/her job and is fully responsible for his/her actions. In this perception of work, job descriptions and task to accomplish do not need to be clearly defined nor written in details. This absence of clear cut rules and prescriptions provides space for individual initiative. Accordingly, the hierarchy keeps itself at a distance in order to respect such individual autonomy (Segal, 1987).

Within a French context, PM appears as restricting autonomy and creativity rather than as securing the parties. The contractual logic that inhabits PM telescopes French perception of freedom (d'Iribarne, 2006). Logic of "métier" is not reflected in working according to prescribed rules, deadlines and procedures but in delivering a good product. The focus is on the quality of the result and not on the process. This emphasis on result and its quality deserves a certain degree of individual autonomy which telescopes the logic of PM.

Implementation of PM in a context governed by logic of "métier" is far from neutral. It requires an exchange of arbitrations from individual responsibility to collective interest and a flip from the register of persons to that of things. It obliges to limit articulations between individual, collective and actions in absence of ad hoc social devices (de Bony, 2007).

5.4. Comparison with a related research on PM and national context

These observations confirm and reinforce a previous research by Campagnac and Winch (1997, 1998) on two construction projects (Channel tunnel and Severn bridge) involving a cooperation between British and French construction firms. By integrating PM analysis into relevant corresponding societal factors in The United Kingdom and in France, these authors disentangle a professional model in England and an industrial model in France. Interestingly, these two models are at discrepancy in term of key actors, tasks allocations and arbitrages.

According to Campagnac and Winch, in French industrial model, both technical and economic decisions are taken by ingenieers. These decision makers are co-ordinated through social networks such as "corps des ponts" (civil engineers). In other words, managerial and financial aspects are absorbed and integrates within technical sector under the responsibility of ingenieers. The British professional model of organization rather relies on financial measures and a contract with a client. Decisions are taken by managers who remain independent of technical aspects. In other words, the economic logic of the actors is separated from the technical logic and overcomes decisions.

In the construction sector, Campagnac and Winch talk about a confrontation between a professional British model arbitrated by managerial and financial aspects and an industrial French model arbitrated by technical aspects. In the

research sector, this case study pinpoints a dilemma between managerial and scientific aspects of PM. Within the French team, scientific aspects confront and dominate over managerial aspects whereas the Dutch team scientific and managerial aspects reconcile within the Dutch team. French logic of "metier" follows in line with the industrial model. Campagnac and Winch also underline cooperation and team working in the professional model and competitive individualism in the industrial model. This is also in agreement with two different mode of integration in the collective.

5.5. Research limitation and consequences for research and management

The scope of this research is restricted to the cultural aspects of project management. It does not cover the results of the project and does not aim at evaluating or comparing the performance of the teams. Consequently, the issue of project performance is not addressed in this work. This work does not allows to compare the performance of the teams in the perspective of acceptance/resistance of project management regulation. This should be underlined as a limitation of this research.

Studies that cross management and culture are more often turned on people's attitudes (CCS) or perception of the reality (ethnographic studies) than on management activity and results. Yet, culture is not restricted on behavioral and sense making aspects: it further extends towards actions and practices. Consequently, the impact of culture on managerial practices tends to remain a "forgotten child" of the field. In favorable situations, cultural singularities can be directly disentangled from management processes Bourguignon et al., 2004). This is also the case for PM which can be analyzed in term of inner logic. More generally, contextual studies on managerial practices deserve more attention and may open a breakthrough for both research and management.

The proposed conceptual framework is centered at the articulation between actions and corresponding meaning. It crosses two broad and flexible directions from individual to collective and from thoughts to actions. This framework can integrate and federate a large variety of research without denaturing their singularities. Departing from a defined managerial practice, its practicing and practizing, it disentangles the nature of the relation to the activity and to the collective. Further, by putting into perspective the logic of the practice with the logic of the context of implementation, one can elaborate concrete solutions that conciliate the practice and the context.

Managers should be aware of possible avoidance or resistance when they implement project management. Instead of forcing the practice, they can adapt it in a form consistent with the local interpretation of reality Henry, 2003; Hoppe, 2005). Adaptation of the practice deserve some attention when the societal context does not elicit a dual integration of the individual in the collective. However, tailoring the practice to the context requires a deep understanding of local cooperation and coordination norms and routines. Support from a local manager well acquainted to cultural singularities is necessary.

5.6. Conclusion and further research development

This research explores the impact of national culture on PM by means of a bi-national case study and thick description. It disentangles the logic of PM and that of Dutch and French contexts. It targets the mechanism by which PM interacts with local forms of cooperation, coordination and decision processes. It unravels the means by which Dutch consensus makes integration of PM easier. It indicates how French decision process can hinder the implementation of PM.

The work underlines the added value of contextualized case studies of PM and thick descriptions. It proposes a conceptual framework which targets the relations between individual, collective and actions and their role in cultural variability. In a period governed by intense internationalization and globalization, the field of management can benefit from research that focuses on the mechanisms of articulation between local and global.

Next step in this research is to reinforce the work with complementary case studies. On the one hand, we are turning our attention on implementation of PM in French profit organization. On the other hand, we are investigating PM in Dutch non profit organizations in that specialized on social integration. Both types of case studies may provide relevant information about the borders and limits of project management in The Netherlands and in France.

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