Liminality at Work

Mobile Project Workers In-Between

Elisabeth Borg

Linköping University
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Linköping Studies in Arts and Science No. 614
Linköping University, Department of Management and Engineering
Linköping 2014

Linköping Studies in Arts and Science • No. 614

At the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Linköping University, research and doctoral studies are carried out within broad problem areas. Research is organized in interdisciplinary research environments and doctoral studies mainly in graduate schools. Jointly, they publish the series Linköping Studies in arts and Science. This thesis comes from Business Administration at the Department of Management and Engineering.

Distributed by:
Department of Management and Engineering
Linköping University
581 83 Linköping

Elisabeth Borg
Liminality at Work
Mobile Project Workers In-Between

Cover and photo credits: Marie Bengtsson, 2014

Edition 1:1
ISBN 978-91-7519-364-9
ISSN 0282-9800

Printed by: LiU-Tryck, Linköping, 2014

ABSTRACT

Project-based work constitutes an increasing part of contemporary working life. For the individual worker, project-based work does not only entail performing specific tasks – it also entails equally important aspects of dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity, to create swift trust with new team members, recurrently enter new project, and leave old projects behind. Project-based work can arguably be described as a form of boundary work. This thesis adopts the conceptual lens of liminality in order to illustrate the challenges experienced by the individual project worker, the practices used to deal with these challenges, and the competence developed by the individual to handle project-based work. In particular, the studies reported here addresses how mobile project workers – more specifically, technical consultants performing their work in client projects – experience and deal with project-based work.

The thesis consists of a compilation of five papers and an extended summary. It draws upon on three qualitative studies based on interviews, diaries, and observations. In addition, the thesis offers a systematic review of literature on liminality at work.

The thesis identifies four different "liminality practices" that mobile project workers use to deal with ambiguities in their work situation. Moreover, the thesis develops the concept and framework of "liminality competence" to describe the different levels of competence mobile project workers show in relation to dealing with liminality at work. The thesis also provides insight into how high liminality competence is developed and, furthermore, how formal training programs affect mobile project workers' liminal positions and liminality competence.

Keywords: mobile project workers, liminality, project-based work, contingent workers, liminality practices, liminality competence

SAMMANFATTNING

Dagens arbetsliv består i allt större utsträckning av projektbaserat arbete. Arbete i ett sådant sammanhang handlar inte bara om att utföra sina arbetsuppgifter, utan minst lika mycket om att hantera den osäkerhet som arbetslivet i sig medför, att knyta nya kontakter med nya kollegor och att återkommande träda in i nya grupper, samt att avsluta tidigare grupptillhörigheter. Man skulle kunna säga att detta arbete i hög grad är ett gränslandsarbete. För att fånga de krav som ställs på individen, de praktiker denne använder och den kompetens som individen utvecklar i förhållande till den projektbaserade arbetssituationen används i föreliggande avhandling begreppet liminalitet. I denna avhandling studeras hur mobila projektarbetare, mer specifikt teknikkonsulter som utför arbete i kundprojekt, upplever och hanterar projektbaserat arbete.

Avhandlingen består av fem artiklar och en kappa. Den grundar sig i tre kvalitativa studier som bygger på intervjuer, dagboksanteckningar och deltagande observationer. Därutöver presenteras en systematisk genomgång av tidigare litteratur som behandlar arbetsrelaterad liminalitet.

Studiernas visar att det finns fyra typer av ”liminalitetspraktiker” som mobila projekt-arbetare använder för att hantera sin tvetydiga arbetssituation. Dessutom utvecklas begreppet ”liminalitetskompetens” för att beskriva olika nivåer av kompetenser som mobila projektmedarbetare visar i förhållande till att hantera liminalitet i sitt arbete. Avhandlingen visar också hur sådan kompetens utvecklas samt hur formella lärandeprogram påverkar liminalitetssituationen och liminalitetskompetensen hos mobila projektmedarbetare.

Nyckelord: mobila projektarbetare, liminalitet, projektbaserat arbete, konsulter, liminalitetspraktiker, liminalitetskompetens

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." – Samuel Beckett

I have always liked to challenge myself. That's why I became a PhD student, despite never thinking I was really suited for it – just imagine spending five years on one single project, all by yourself! But luckily, I haven't really been alone; I've had support from the wonderful people around me. I want to take this chance to show my gratitude to some of them in particular.

"Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary." – Winston Churchill

First, I wish to thank those who gave me the opportunity to do a PhD. To Jonas Söderlund, my main supervisor, you have given me much freedom and space. It has been especially instructive to co-author papers together with you and I greatly appreciate your help in the process' final stage. Karin Bredin, thank you for your support and for digging into the nitty-gritty details at the end of the process when I was too tired to see them for myself. You have both challenged me and I've grown as a result.

I would also like to show my gratitude to those who have funded this research: Swedish Research Council, Jan Wallander's and Tom Hedelius' Foundation, Linköping University, and VINNOVA. Their support is gratefully acknowledged.

Several people have read and commented on the thesis during this process, pushing me to develop it further. Johann Packendorff, thank you for all your comments at my final seminar, and for the friendly and constructive tone in which you gave them. I would also like to thank Lars Lindkvist for an excellent read-through at a later stage, giving me the energy and comments I needed to make this into a complete product. To Eskil Ekstedt and Cecilia Enberg, thank you for giving me many good comments at the licentiate state of the thesis. It has been a privilege to have had so many skillful people reading and giving constructive feedback on my work!

"Doing real world projects is, I think, the best way to learn and also to engage the world and find out what the world is all about". – Ray Kurzweil

To everyone at "Advanced Engineering," this thesis would not exist without you. You have been very generous with your time and experiences, and have been among my greatest sources of motivation. Per, I'm glad we continued our coaching project. You helped me plan my work and to stay on track when I wanted to surrender to procrastination.

"Time for reflection with colleagues is for me a lifesaver; it is not just a nice thing to do if you have the time. It is the only way you can survive." – Margaret Wheatley

I have an extroverted nature, which has sometimes made it difficult for me to stay put at the office to work on yet another revision. All chats, borrowed books and good cheers

from my colleagues have made it all easier. Special thanks to Marie Bengtsson – you're a rock. I have learned much from you and really enjoyed teaching and working together with you, you have been a source of inspiration in many ways. And, of course, to my fellow PhD students! It's been great to have some of you here from the beginning: Jenny, Lisa, Birgitta and Linnéa, you are gems! And Svjetlana – I am so glad you joined the research project. It has been both a lot of fun and motivating to work with you (as well as traveling and everything we have got up to). Also, to Susan, Vivi, David, Josefine, Christopher, Linus, Hugo and Victor – the fika breaks (and late night snacks) have been the highlight of many days.

"I'm not telling you it's going to be easy. I'm telling you it's going to be worth it." – Art Williams (& Björn)

To all my friends and family, when this hasn't been easy you have given me the energy I needed to continue and I am so glad to have you. Mum and dad, you've raised me to believe that anything is possible to achieve, as long as you start working on it and learn along the way. That, together with a healthy (?!) amount of stubbornness, constitutes a good basis for doing a PhD. To Anne, all hours of pep talk, sisterly advice, and cheering have been priceless.

I heard someone say that you are an average of all your friends. If that is true, I must be awesome, because you all are! To Anna, my dear friend, you are my rock, sometimes my conscience, and an endless a source of fun and laughter. From the lunches together in 2009 until now you've always known when to challenge me and when to just support me. Elin, thank you for making me dinners, for always being there, and for being you! To Cissi for taking me out into the world, and for being there although you lived somewhere else. Emma and Daniel, you've always been dear friends; let's see each other more often now! By the way, I guess all of you know that if I make it at the defense, you'll have to call me "Dr. Borg" for ages – hubris is a virtue!

To my dear Simon, I know that the last couple of months haven't been easy for you. There are so many things you do and you are that make me grateful. Thank you for your consideration, for all your support, for bringing me food to work when I had to work late, for lifting my spirits, for all your initiatives, for listening, and for all your patience and love.

"This is how you do it: you sit down at the keyboard and you put one word after another until it's done. It's that easy, and that hard." — Neil Gaiman

Linköping 2014-03-20

Elisabeth Borg

APPENDED PAPERS

Paper I

Borg, E. & Söderlund, J. (2014) "Moving in, moving on: Liminality practices in project-based work". *Employee Relations.* 36(2): 182 – 197.

Paper II

Borg, E. & Söderlund, J. (forthcoming) "Liminality competence: An interpretative study of mobile project workers' conception of liminality at work". *Management Learning.* Published online January 3, 2014.

Paper III

Borg, E. & Söderlund, J. "The nature and development of liminality competence: Narratives from mobile project workers". Revised version of paper presented at *EURAM European Academy of Management, Rotterdam, Holland, 2012.* Under review for journal publication.

Paper IV

Borg, E. & Pantic-Dragisic, S. "Enhancing liminality through formal training: Creating alterities through rites of passage". Revised version of paper presented at *IRNOP Project Research Conference, Oslo, Norway, 2013.* Revised version of the paper is accepted for presentation at *Academy of Management, Philadelphia, USA, 2014*. Under review for journal publication.

Paper V

Borg, E. "The concept of liminality in management and organizational studies: Past accomplishments and future challenges". Revised version of paper presented at *NFF, Nordic Academy of Management, Reykjavik, Iceland, 2013.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIGURES

TABLES

PAPERS

Paper I: Moving in, moving on: Liminality practices in project-based work
Paper II: Liminality competence: An interpretative study of mobile project workers' conception of liminality at work
Paper III: The nature and development of liminality competence: Narratives from mobile project workers
Paper IV: Enhancing liminality through formal training: Creating alterities through rites of passage
Paper V: The concept of liminality in management and organizational studies: Past accomplishments and future challenges

PART I

EXTENDED SUMMARY

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

MOBILE PROJECT WORKERS AND LIMINALITY AT WORK: INTRODUCING THE TOPIC AND AIM

"Observers in all industrial countries regularly emphasize the importance of human resource management practices that enable organizations to adapt quickly to rapid developments in technology, greater diversity in labour markets, growing international and price competition in product markets, and corporate financial restructuring in capital markets. A popular expression of this concern has been the idea of the 'flexible firm'" (Kalleberg, 2001: 479)

The quote above illustrates the critical need for contemporary organizations to organize their work in a way that allows for quick responses to a fast-changing environment. The trend of increased flexibility in firms is accompanied by that of today's knowledge economy; that is, firms' competitive advantage greatly relies on their ability to access, manage, and organize human capital (McIver et al., 2013).

These trends have important effects on work and workers (Grant & Parker, 2009). Work is becoming increasingly disaggregated and jobs and careers become more fragmented. Accordingly, Walsh et al. (2006: 661) argued that it has become a "central challenge for organizational scholars to track and understand the impact of this disaggregation on organizational members and employees." Therefore, this thesis focuses on individuals in contemporary organizations – people who work in knowledge-intensive flexible firms. More specifically, it focuses on mobile project workers. The thesis contributes to increased knowledge on how people experience and handle challenges and tensions that can arise as a consequence of this "modern" way of organizing.

In the following, I will introduce two strategies that firms increasingly rely on for flexible organizing; project-based work and external flexibility, and discuss how these strategies

imply consequences for individual workers. Furthermore, I will present the conceptual lens of liminality, which will be used in this thesis to study the work situation of mobile project workers. I will also provide arguments for how the study of mobile project workers more generally can contribute to theories of work and working today (Okhuysen et al., 2013).

TWO STRATEGIES FOR INCREASED FLEXIBILITY

One strategy of organizing for flexibility in the knowledge economy is that of organizing work through projects, a form of organizing that is increasingly used in mature, as well as growth industries (e.g., Ekstedt, 2009; Packendorff, 2002; Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm, 2002; Whitley, 2006; Whittington et al., 1999). Project-based work has even been called the "new logic of organizing" (Whitley, 2006: 77). Project-based organizing has been argued to increase firm performance as it allows for coordinating knowledge workers with technical expertise towards solving a specific goal (cf. Scarbrough, 1999). For workers, project-based organizing arguably gives rise to both challenges and opportunities. For instance, project workers' careers become based on temporariness; continuously moving from project to project and having to adapt to new working environments on a recurrent basis (Lindkvist, 2005). Moreover, the individual project worker must deal with blurred organizational boundaries since project teams often consist of a mix of core employees from different functional units as well as contingent workers from outside the parent organization (Bredin, 2008; Kamp et al., 2011). Consequently, multiple affiliations and ambiguous organizational belongings become a prevalent condition for project workers, who serve multiple masters from different organizational units (Packendorff, 2002).

However, while much focus in the project literature has been on issues such as; the management of projects (e.g., Allen et al., 1980; Meredith & Mantel Jr, 2011; Payne, 1995), the reasons why projects succeed or fail (e.g., Belassi & Tukel, 1996; Pinto & Prescott, 1988; Savolainen et al., 2012; Young & Poon, 2013), and the knowledge transfer and learning within and between projects (e.g., Bartsch et al., 2013; Becker, 2001; Bellini & Canonico, 2008; Fong, 2003; Lam, 1997; Lindkvist, 2005), the individual workers who spend most of their daily work in these project-based organizations have received relatively little scholarly attention (Stjernberg et al., 2008). This is in spite of the fact that researchers have claimed that "projects are now the normal form or work" for people in many industries (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006: 841). Some scholars have even argued that we have turned from a working life dominated by the organization man (Whyte, 1956) to a working life populated by project men and women (Grabher, 2002; Shih, 2004). But what challenges do project workers meet as a consequence of the continuous mobility across projects? How do they handle the challenge of moving in and out of projects? What requirements are posed on people who life their working life in a world of projects? And, are there better and worse ways of dealing competently with a project-based working life?

Another strategy to increase flexibility and access knowledge refers to the temporary leasing of external workers (Ashford et al., 2007; Cappelli, 1999b; Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Kalleberg, 2001; Kalleberg, 2009). This strategy has variously been denoted as "external flexibility", "numerical flexibility", "market flexibility", and "job-focused employment relations" (Kalleberg, 2001).

Indeed, the use of temporary workers is not new. In the early days of the industrialization many people worked as contractors or were "turned over so quickly that they were essentially 'temps'" (Cappelli, 1999b: 4). However, many of our organization theories are based in the experience of the "traditional 1950s workers" (Ashford et al., 2007: 66); full-time employees who can expect a long-term career within one firm – a type of work arrangement often denoted as traditional employment. Nevertheless, nonstandard work arrangements; that is, work arrangements that differ from the traditional employment relation, is arguably on the rise again. Today, not only blue-collar workers or creative workers work on contingent contracts, so do highly educated white-collar workers, such as engineers and managers (Kalleberg, 2009; Kunda et al., 2002).

Although there is a wide range of different nonstandard work arrangements, they have often been lumped together into categories like "nonstandard work" or "contingent work", often followed by the assumption that these are "bad" jobs in comparison with "good" traditional employment (Ashford et al., 2007; Cappelli & Keller, 2013). Cappelli and Keller (2013) challenged these broad previous categorizations and provided a distinction between different types of nonstandard work arrangements, differentiating between the four distinct categories: (1) direct part-time employment, (2) coemployment between agency, client and worker, (3) direct contracting between a self-employed worker and client, and (4) sub-contracting which involves vendor, client organization and self-employed worker. The authors argued that triangular employment relationships that involves worker, client and agency constitutes the "biggest deviation from traditional research topics associated with employment" (Cappelli & Keller, 2013: 591), and offers an important venue for further investigations. Ashford et al. (2007: 101) also argued that more research on nonstandard work arrangements is needed to "[overcome] the simplicity of the 'good versus bad' dichotomy" and to uncover "the conditions under which nonstandard work becomes either positive or negative." This thesis sets out to do just that. It aims to develop our understanding of people in a triangular, coemployed employment relationship by studying workers' experiences of working in client projects, their ways of handling challenges they meet, and how they develop competences to deal with their work situation.

The thesis addresses the work situation for individuals in the intersection of project-based organizing and nonstandard work arrangements. It focuses on mobile project workers, specifically on technical consultants who perform their everyday work in client projects. Previous research has shown that the use of external workers has gained importance in project-based work (Bredin, 2008; Ekstedt, 2002; Matusik & Hill, 1998;

Tempest & Starkey, 2004). Ekstedt (2002) discussed how the use of external workers actually increases as firms to greater extent rely on project-based organizing. Thus, "the PBO [project-based organization] is often characterised by *heterogeneity in employment relations"* (Bredin, 2008: 28, emphasis in original).

Common for both the abovementioned strategies they entail some important, and quite similar, consequences for individual workers. Working life becomes based on logics of temporariness; individual mobility in working life (Bakker, 2010) and boundarylessness that is often ambiguous (Kamp et al., 2011). With regard to mobile project workers, they perform most of their everyday work in client projects (cf. Cappelli & Keller, 2013) and their working life is arguably affected by the logic of temporariness, they not only move from project to project but also between different organizations. Moreover, mobile project workers must deal with ambiguous belongings and multiple affiliations that extend beyond the project-based organization (cf. Packendorff, 2002). To understand the work situation of mobile project workers, the thesis adopts the conceptual lens of *liminality*, a concept that comprises the mobility and structural ambiguity that is common in project-based work (Sturdy et al., 2009), as well as in nonstandard work arrangements (Garsten, 1999).

The chapter continues with a presentation of the nature of project-based work. It also reviews previous research on consequences for individual workers who engage in project-based-work Furthermore, the chapter presents how the concept of liminality can improve the understanding of mobile project workers' work situation. The chapter ends by introducing the aim and the research questions.

THE NATURE OF PROJECT-BASED WORK

Project-based work is typically contrasted to traditional bureaucratic work and scholars have highlighted a number of significant differences between the two (e.g., Ekstedt et al., 2003; Hovmark & Nordqvist, 1996; Packendorff, 2002). Although projects can differ greatly, previous research has identified the following three common denominators. A project is typically a *temporary* organization (Turner & Müller, 2003), that revolves around a *specific task* or purpose, and is carried out by a *team* (e.g. Bakker, 2010; Ekstedt, 2002). Therefore, project-based work could be viewed as implying three things in particular. First, project-based work relies on the principle of *temporariness* (Bakker, 2010); people are allocated into projects when their competence is needed, and will later move on to another project – either when the project comes to an end or their specific competences are better needed elsewhere (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009). Second, project-based work is *task focused* (Bakker, 2010). Lundin and Söderholm argued that "[a] task legitimizes a temporary organization" (p. 440) and the "creation of a temporary organization is motivated by a task that must be accomplished" (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995: 441). Third, project-based work is typically carried out in *cross-functional teams* (Bakker et al., 2011). This aspect relates to "the fact that temporary organizational forms … are systems that include interdependent sets of people working

together" (Bakker, 2010: 475). The three denominators are closely intertwined. Below, they will be discussed in some more detail.

TASK FOCUS

Knowledge intensity and task focus is often emphasized in relation to project-based organizing (Bakker, 2010; Bredin, 2008). Projects typically revolve around complex tasks with a set deadline (Lindkvist et al., 1998) and the task itself is often the main motivation for creating a project (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). Unlike traditional bureaucratic work, project-based organizing has been denoted as "intrinsically innovative" because it allows organizational structures to be recreated around specific demands for the project and the customers' needs (Hobday, 2000). Projects have been promoted for their flexibility and suitability for managing and solving complex tasks and problems that may not be clear or easily defined (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1998; Goodman & Goodman, 1976; Hobday, 2000; Söderlund, 2004).

TEMPORARINESS

It has also been suggested that time aspects in project-based work differ greatly from traditional bureaucratic forms of organizing, particularly in terms of time limits (Bakker, 2010; Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). Projects are carried out by temporary organizations, often within the boundaries of a stationary organization (Huemann et al., 2007; Modig, 2007; Turner & Müller, 2003) and are "temporary constellation[s] of people they entail" (Prencipe & Tell, 2001: 1374). Thus, people who work in projects build their careers on a trajectory on temporary engagement in different projects (Larsen, 2002; Packendorff, 2002); that is, for the individual worker, a project-based working life is based on mobility.

The temporary nature of project-based organizing has a set of important consequences for work and workers. For example, arguments presented in conceptual papers support that "temporary organizational forms would favour a task focus over a relationship focus" (Bakker, 2010: 473) since the time limitation of work arrangements do not encourage long-term efficiency (Goodman & Goodman, 1976). Temporariness also impacts on socialization and trust within the team. Meyerson et al. (1996: 170) argued that to "trust and be trustworthy, within the limits of temporary systems, means that people have to wade in on trust rather than wait while experience gradually shows who can be trusted and with what: Trust must be conferred presumptively." Therefore, the creation of coordination and swift trust in project teams rely on the strong task focus and of project teams sharing and striving towards a common goal (Lindkvist, 2005; Meyerson et al., 1996). As Goodman and Goodman stated, the temporary team members "must keep interrelating with one another in trying to arrive at viable solutions" (1976: 495). In line with this, Edmondson and Nembhard (2009) argued that the temporary nature of teams in project-based organizing can be problematic because teams generally need time to become familiar and work effectively. Therefore, the temporariness in project-based organizing can create tensions, stress, and conflicts.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS

In order to perform complex tasks within a limited amount of time, it is necessary to coordinate specialized resources (Meyerson et al., 1996; Sydow et al., 2004; Söderlund, 2004). Consequently, projects are often composed of cross-functional teams in which people from different functional backgrounds must co-operate in order to perform the set-out task (Bechky, 2006; Goodman & Goodman, 1976; Lindkvist, 2005). Lindkvist (2005) and Bechky (2006) argued that, due to the cross-functional and temporary nature of project-based work, project teams are usually less-developed groups, made up of individuals with various degrees of previous work relations. Lindkvist (2005) denoted this as a "knowledge collectivity," which he contrasted to the better known "community of practice." The cross-functional team constellation also emphasize the need for creating swift trust and for the individuals to quickly form a cohesive team (Meyerson et al., 1996), an aspect further stressed by the fact that project teams tend to change during the lifecycle of a project (Eskerod & Blichfeldt, 2005). As the project enters new phases, the expertise needed is also changing, and so does the composition of the team.

PROJECT-BASED WORK AND PROJECT WORKERS

The previous sections have outlined the characteristics of project-based work and showed that they lead to specific requirements, possibilities and challenges for project workers. In this section, I review the extant research about individuals in project-based work with particular focus on how temporariness and the nature of project teams affect project workers. I also discuss why individuals in project-based work need more scholarly attention.

Project-based work has been described as having both positive and negative consequences for the individual project worker. On the positive side, project work has been denoted as an exciting and interesting work environment that is empowering and engaging for project workers (Hovmark & Nordqvist, 1996; Smith, 1997). These positive aspects emerge from flatter organizations and more experimental ways of working. Moreover, clear goals (Gällstedt, 2003), interesting and challenging tasks, and rich communication in project-based work often increase workers' motivation (Dwivedula & Bredillet, 2010). On the other hand, projects have also been described as "complex, highly demanding and often stressful" work environments (Pinto et al., prepublished: 1). In line with this, several scholars have studied stress related to project-based work (Gällstedt, 2003; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006; Shih, 2004), which, in the worst case may lead to burnout for the individual project worker (Pinto et al., prepublished). The cause of negative stress can be associated with the perception of time pressure (Nordqvist et al., 2004), which could be explained by the fact that project workers are "not regulated by clock time, but by market time" (Shih, 2004: 241). There is a pressure to reach project deadlines, even though they might be optimistic or even unrealistic (Gevers et al., 2001). Thus, the temporary nature of projects and the individualization it entails seem to take its toll on the individual project workers.

As temporariness becomes the prevailing logic, individuals generally devote more energy and commitment toward projects and a mobile and project-based career that entails "meeting new people on a continual basis to pursue creative and innovative work" (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011: 5). Turner et al. (2008: 578) argued that: "[e]very time a new project or program starts or an old one finishes the human resource configuration of the parent organization changes." Thus, the working life of project workers can be compared to that of Barley and Kunda's (2006: 49) itinerant experts; "characterized by a distinct temporal rhythm, a repetitive cycle of moving." Thus, the temporary nature of working in projects implies a high degree of mobility for the project workers, and the continuous need to start over again (Packendorff, 2002). Furthermore, according to Bredin (2008), project-based work implies that people become more responsible for the making and shaping of their own careers. This individualization also holds true in more general terms in project-based work, as Packendorff (2002) argued; the individual must assume greater responsibility for personal success and failure in temporary organizations.

Working in cross-functional project teams also implies a set of challenges for the individual project worker. The main disadvantages with cross-functional teams, according to Ford and Randolph (1992), are increased ambiguity and risk of conflicts (see also Song et al., 1998). The risk of conflicts increases since each profession "has its own language, terminology, beliefs about relative importance of performance attributes, approaches to learning, mechanisms for information exchange, goals and reward structure" (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009: 128). Another implication of project-based work and cross-functional teams is that project workers struggle with multiple and ambiguous belongings (Packendorff, 2002). As Grabher (2004: 1509) argued: "individual project participants are faced with the challenge of aligning their conflicting loyalties to the core team, the firm, the client, and their personal networks." Packendorff described this challenge somewhat differently, saying "the individual serves two masters and has dual loyalties" (2002: 42), referring to the project and the functional department he or she is employed by. Moreover, managerial responsibilities are often divided between the functional units and the project manager, which can lead to conflicting and confusing expectations, as well as excessive demands for the individuals (Ford & Randolph, 1992). Since the project member is often employed in a functional department, while performing most part of his or her work in one or several projects, the individual is subject to structural ambiguity; it becomes difficult to know which organizational unit to be loyal to and where in the organization one belongs.

However, it is important to note that not all project workers are employed by the parent organization. As previously mentioned, project-based organizations increasingly rely on external resources (Ekstedt, 2002; Matusik & Hill, 1998; Reilly, 1998; Smith, 1997). Therefore, project teams are often constituted by a mix of "core" and "peripheral" workers (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1998). Although it has been argued that the peripheral workers are often used for lower-level jobs (Lepak & Snell, 1999), empirical studies have shown that many companies use contingent workers in areas that can be

considered core areas of the firm (Kalleberg, 2009; Matusik & Hill, 1998). Thus, the contingent workers constitute an important part of the project workforce.

The mobile project workers who are hired on contingent contracts are arguably dually affected by temporariness and structural ambiguity, compared to the core project workers who are hired by the parent organization. The temporary nature of work for mobile project workers not only implies mobility from project to project, but also mobility across different organizations (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). In terms of the belonging to several different organizational "masters" (to borrow Packendorff's, 2002, term), mobile project workers are affected by structural ambiguity more than regular project workers. Mobile project workers must comply with the requirements of the client firm that hired them, to the project in which they are working, and to the consulting firm that has employed them.

Although earlier studies have reported on some of the important effects that project-based work has on individual project workers, few comprehensive studies have so far explored how individuals experience project-based work, how they deal with its consequences, and whether there are individual differences in how well people navigate through a project-based working life. Like Walsh et al. (2006) argued, we need more empirical studies to understand how people deal with today's organizations and with contemporary organizing. The present thesis represents such an endeavor. It strives to increase the knowledge about the consequences of project-based organizing for individual workers, and more importantly about how project-workers deal with project-based organizing. This would be important in order to provide a basis for creating sustainable project-based organizations and for better working conditions in for project workers in general (Stjernberg et al., 2008).

As mentioned earlier, the empirical focus of the thesis is on mobile project workers. There are two main reasons for choosing this particular focus. First, mobile project workers constitute an increasingly important part of project-based work, despite having received scant scholarly attention (see, e.g., Barley & Kunda, 2004). The second reason is that the challenges of mobility and structural ambiguity in project-based work would be particularly evident for mobile project workers as they not only move from project team to project team, but across different organizations. Therefore, the results of such an empirical study could generate knowledge on both project-based work and contingent work.

Moreover, there is a need to better conceptualize the project-based work situation (cf. Walsh et al., 2006). In this thesis, the studies reported make use of the lens of liminality to address and improve our knowledge of people engaged in project-based work. Below, I present a brief overview to the concept of liminality and explain how liminality captures important aspects of project-based work.

MOBILE PROJECT WORKERS AS LIMINAL SUBJECTS

The concept of liminality has its origin in anthropology, where it was originally used to denote a transition phase from one social state to another; for example, the transition from being a boy to becoming a man. In the liminal phase, the individual is "betwixt and between" conventional positions in the social world (van Gennep, 1960). The concept of liminality has later been adopted into management and organization literature. Garsten (1999: 606) argued that "[l]iminality in the context of work may be seen as an alternative to work as organized and structured in bureaucratic, industrial organizations; an alternative to regular, full-time employment contracts." In the context of work liminality prevails when work is temporary to its nature and the person's organizational belonging is unclear (Wagner et al., 2012). Thus, in a work context, liminality can denote a position a worker is betwixt and between traditional organizational structures as a consequence of their mobility (Tempest & Starkey, 2004). The concept of liminality has been used to describe the work position for various types of mobile workers that continuously move in and out of different organizational contexts; such as, temporary workers (Garsten, 1999), consultants (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003), freelancers (Tempest & Starkey, 2004), and project workers (Sturdy et al., 2009).

Sturdy et al. (2009) claimed that the condition of liminality is present in project environments as people work together "outside of traditional and functional structures" (p. 636) on a temporary basis. The cross-functional character of project teams means that different logics of work (from various functional units) temporarily meet in the project, therefore creating a liminal situation for the individual project member. It is important to note that project-based work, as it is referred to in this thesis, implies a continuous trajectory of projects and project teams. This distinction is important since what is denoted as project-based work in some organizations might mean that project teams are more or less stable, and starting a new project implies that the team takes on a new task (Katz, 1982). The latter type of project work does not necessarily imply liminality, as norms and structures could remain more stable throughout the trajectory of projects. In this thesis, I focus on the type of project work that Sturdy et al. (2009) referred to, as described above. Therefore, "project workers" denotes individuals who move between different projects and different project teams.

In this thesis, I use the lens of liminality to study the work situation for mobile project workers. Mobile project workers are outside of traditional and functional structures as a consequence of the characteristics of project-based work. Moreover, these workers hold positions as "inside outsiders" in the client organization that hosts the project, because of their roles as consultants (cf. Sturdy et al., 2009), implying a positions of structural ambiguity that is common in project-based work. Hence, this thesis uses the concept of liminality to approach the study of mobile project workers in order to learn more about how these individuals "live in today's organizations" (Walsh et al., 2006: 661).

Liminality at work has been shown to have consequences for the individual worker. On the positive side liminality can enable creativity and a sense of freedom because it releases individuals from structures and obligations in fixed positions (Garsten, 1999), which can also increase self-reflection (Simpson et al., 2010). It can also lead to a broader scope of learning as the liminars continuously change environments and build on their previous experiences and knowledge repertoires (Tempest & Starkey, 2004). On the negative side, liminality can lead to a weakening of power and reduced access to organizational resources such as training or social events (Garsten, 1999; Tempest & Starkey, 2004).

Based on an empirical study, Tempest and Starkey (2004) suggested that some individuals might be better able to reap the advantages of liminality at work. Likewise, Garsten (1999), based on an extensive qualitative study, argued that liminality at work demands new skills and competences from individuals who hold liminal positions. However, these authors did not explore in further detail what people can do, or what additional competences they develop, in order to reap the advantages of liminality. If some people are better at drawing advantages from liminality at work than others – what constitutes those differences? Exploring these issues further can give important insights about how mobile project workers deal with the temporary and ambiguous features that prevail in project-based work. Liminality can also offer a fruitful conceptual lens with which to explore mobile project workers' experience of their work. For example, liminality makes it possible to investigate what dimensions of project-based work that is perceived as especially challenging and/or motivating by mobile project workers. This thesis provide important input to the literature on project-based work by studying how mobile project workers experience liminality at work, what practices they use to deal with this specific work situation, and what constitutes liminality competence and how such competence can be developed.

Several researchers have proposed that the particular nature and specific challenges of project-based work has a set of important effects on human resource management within project-based organizations (Bredin, 2008; Huemann et al., 2007; Turner et al., 2008). Adding to these claims, I argue that in order to learn more about how to organize purposeful HRM within project-based organizations, we must first know more about the human resources that work in them. This would include all human resources, not just core employees. Moreover, by using the conceptual lens of liminality, this study could expand not only on the knowledge of project-based work, but also on other contemporary, disaggregated, temporary work. Below, I present the aim and research questions that form the basis of this endeavor.

AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The general aim of this thesis is to investigate how mobile project workers experience and deal with liminality at work and what competences they develop in order to deal with this particular work situation. Hence, an important aspect of this study is to investigate and develop the conceptual lens of liminality in the context of work. More specifically, the thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. How do mobile project workers experience their liminal work situation?
2. What practices do mobile project workers make use of to deal with liminality at work?
3. What constitutes "liminality competence" and how can such competence be developed?
4. How does formal training affect mobile project workers' development of liminality competence?

THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis constitutes a compilation of five papers and an extended summary. The purpose of the extended summary is twofold. First, it aims to create a unified picture of the sub-studies and how, taken together, they meet the aim and research questions of thesis. Second, the extended summary provides a framing and elaborated discussion on the contributions of the studies that constitute the thesis. Here I will present the outline of the extended summary.

Chapter 2 presents an overview on the key concept in this thesis; the concept of liminality. The chapter presents the history and development of the concept of liminality, and discerns its different applications in management and organization literature. In doing so, this chapter investigates and offers the basis for developing the conceptual lens of liminality, which is part of the aim of this thesis.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of different approaches to study competence at work and also specifically presents the interpretative approach to competence that is applied in this thesis. An extended literature review on different approaches to study competence is presented in this chapter (compared to what can be found in the papers). This chapter aims to provide a framework for the study of liminality competence.

Chapter 4 describes the methodological approach of the thesis and describes the three phases of study that this thesis comprises. This chapter gives an extended description of what has been done in terms of the study's methods. Chapter 4 also shows how the different sub-studies are related and elaborates on how the use of different methods can strengthen the results of the thesis. Chapter 4 also provides an overview of what claims on generalizability are made in the thesis.

Chapter 5 summarizes the appended papers that constitute the basis for the thesis.

Chapter 6 presents a synthesized concluding discussion in which the research questions are addressed based on the findings and contributions in the appended papers.

Chapter 7 presents an elaborated discussion of the thesis' main contributions and implications for both research and practice. This chapter ends with some suggestions for future research.

The last part of the thesis includes complete versions of the five papers. The respective papers address different parts of the aim and research questions (for an overview, see Table 2 in Chapter 5). The papers are presented in chronological order, with respect to when they were initiated.

CHAPTER 2

LIMINALITY IN PROJECT-BASED WORK

This chapter deals with liminality, which is the main concept of this thesis. The chapter starts with a presentation of the background and history of the concept and its early development. It then elaborates on liminality in management and organization research and how it has been applied in this field. The chapter ends with presenting how liminality is applied in the present thesis.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONCEPT OF LIMINALITY

The concept of liminality originates from the Latin word "limen", which roughly means "threshold". The notion of liminality first appeared in Arthur van Gennep's "*Les rites de passage*" in 1909 (translated to English in 1960 as "The rites of passage"), which was based on research on rural societies. van Gennep studied rites of passage throughout the lives of individuals and groups, such as changes in a person's societal status (for example, rites of betrothal or initiation). van Gennep noted that these events have a common "underlying arrangement" (van Gennep, 1960: 191), in that they constitute three phases followed by subsequent rites. The first phase, *separation,* includes symbolic rites of detachment, in which the individual becomes separated from "the everyday flow of activities" (Turner, 1969: ix). The second phase in the rites of passage is the *liminal phase*, or transition phase. During the liminal phase, the ritual subject passes through a period of time and space in which he or she does not belong to the previous state, but has not yet been incorporated into the next. Therefore, this liminal phase bears little resemblance to the previous or subsequent state. In an anthropological context, the transition phase is often associated with a physical transition; travel from one place to another, stepping over an actual threshold, or similar. The liminal phase is typically ambiguous and, as Turner (1982: 24) argued, can be likened to "a sort of social limbo which has few (though sometimes these are most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent statuses or cultural states." The third and final phase is that of *incorporation,* or "reaggregation". During this phase, the ritual subject becomes incorporated into the new and relatively stable and well-defined state in society. This

new state is comprised of new obligations and norms compared to that from which the person was previously separated.

According to van Gennep (1960), some rites have a stronger emphasis on the liminal phase and liminal rituals than others, one such example is that of betrothal. As van Gennep (1960: 116) noted, marriage "constitutes the most important of the transitions from one social category to another, because for at least one of the spouses it involves a change of family, clan, village, or tribe." The importance of the change for the individuals involved means that the period of transition before the marriage – the betrothal – and the rites that demarcates it, is of great importance.

Rites of passage usually occur on several occasions in a person's life, often to determine a shift between hierarchical positions and the transition from a lower to a higher status. Figure 1 below illustrates the rites of passage and its three phases.

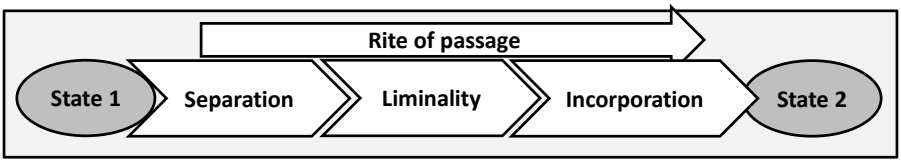

Figure 1 Illustration of the rites of passage.

Turner elaborated further on the concept of liminality. In his early work (1969; 1986), Turner studied African rituals and rites of passage. He elaborated on the liminal phase and considered some of its implications; importantly, he also elaborated on the individual liminars and how they experienced the liminal phase. Turner described these "liminal personae" as necessarily ambiguous, since they slip "through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (Turner, 1969: 95). Turner argued that being "betwixt and between" in this way has certain effects on the individuals' identities. For example, Turner argued that individuals are "temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure" (Turner, 1982: 27), which makes them weak and humbled. They may no longer affiliate with their previous position, and must be humbled in order to rise to a new societal status. According to Turner, anti-structure prevails in the liminal phase, in contrast to the more well-defined and structured positions between which an individual moves. During the liminal phase, the liminal personae can play with the familiar and at the same time de-familiarize it. Moreover, Turner (1969) noted that these liminal personae often develop a sort of comradeship with other liminars, which leads to so-called "communitas" being developed in the liminal phase. The communitas are not based on hierarchical structures, but on a kind of equality among those going through the liminal phase. Therefore, the communitas also end when the individuals are incorporated into the elevated state after the liminal phase – at the end of the rites of passage.

In later work, Turner introduced the concept of liminality into studies in Western industrialized society (Turner, 1982). In connection to the Western entertainment

industry, Turner introduced the notion of "liminoid". Liminoid became a spinoff of liminal, emphasizing that some people can freely choose to enter a phase or state of being betwixt and between two domains. The liminoid phenomena is based on options (whereas the liminal state is obligatory), it is individualized, and continuously entered and reentered, rather than being collective and cyclically entered. Moreover, while liminal phases are part of social processes in society, the liminoid state is developed apart from economic and political processes, often creating social critiques or even revolutions along its margins (Turner, 1982). Turner argued that liminoid positions are held by people such as artists who choose to position themselves outside of the norms of the surrounding community, in a state where they can play with existing repertoires. Thus, liminoid is connected to play and leisure, while liminality is connected to work and the movement in society. In brief, Turner described liminoid as the "successor of the liminal in complex large-scale societies, where individuality and potation in art have in theory supplanted collective and obligatory ritual performances" (Turner, 1986: 29).

The concept of liminality was later introduced into a number of different research areas, the most popular was perhaps the field of literature (e.g., Byatt, 2012; De Michelis, 2012; Zarate, 2011), sociology (e.g., Berkowitz, 2011; Lahad, 2012; Smith, 2013) and religion (e.g., Junker, 2013; Kaltner, 1997; Ludlow, 2012). During the 1990s, liminality was also introduced in management and organization studies (Zabusky & Barley, 1997), where it has been shown to constitute a fruitful theoretical construct for illuminating aspects regarding contemporary organizing. However, although the notion of liminoid would suggestively describe self-selected betwixt and between positions in working life, the term has not been successfully adopted in recent management and organization studies (for an exception see, Kelan & Jones, 2009). Czarniawska and Mazza (2003) made the following argument for the use of liminal over liminoid in their study of consultants:

> We do not make use of this new concept [liminoid] for two reasons. First, it is highly laudatory as it describes creative communities and, although the consultants might certainly be conceived as a creative community, we would like to abstain from delivering such judgments. Second, since Turner wrote these words, anthropology and the rest of the social sciences have agreed that there is no 'great divide' between so-called premodern and modern societies … We shall therefore continue to use the old concept of liminality. (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003: 271)

I will follow the bulk of previous work in management and organization studies by continuing to use the concept of liminality, over the concept of liminoid. The reasons for this are twofold. First, because although one could argue that the term liminoid might better describe the situation for mobile project workers who have chosen this type of work over another, we cannot know whether these people perceived this as much of a choice compared to other work options. Second, previous literature in this field (as will be presented below) has used the concept of liminality to address the work situations for different kinds of mobile and contingent workers. To move away from the concept of

liminality in in this present study could therefore add confusion to the debate, rather than clarifying it.

LIMINALITY AT WORK

The concept of liminality has been used variously in management and organization studies. However, there are three main approaches to how the concept has been applied, describing different organizational phenomena – "liminality as a process", "liminality as position", and "liminality as a space" – all of which are described below in this section. In addition, Paper V in this thesis provides a more detailed description of how these approaches have been derived.

Liminality as a process

One approach found in the literature is that of "liminality as a process", which refers to a change process for both individuals within organization and for organizations. This approach to liminality is similar to the original anthropological use, denoting the process of going through separation, a liminal phase, and then being incorporated into a new, more stable, state.

On the individual level, several authors have connected professional identity work and identity reconstruction with the undergoing of liminal phases (Beech, 2011; Ladge et al., 2012; Tansley & Tietze, 2013). In these studies the liminal phase thus represents a state of being in-between different professional identities. These studies have suggested different triggers of separation from a previous state, of a specific professional identity, such as: becoming pregnant (Ladge et al., 2012), repositioning within the organization (Beech, 2011) and taking part in an organizational development program (Tansley & Tietze, 2013). More generally, development programs have been denoted as liminal phases in several prior empirical studies (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2002; Simpson et al., 2010; Tansley & Tietze, 2013), since such programs constitute a transient period for the participants moving from one point and status to another as they go through the program. It has been argued that going through this type of liminal phase makes individuals reflect on themselves and their approach to their careers, and enables them to explore new work and management practices (Simpson et al., 2010).

Other studies have denoted that entire organizations can go through liminal phases during periods of change (Cunha et al., 2010; Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003; Howard-Grenville et al., 2011; Powley, 2009; Powley & Piderit, 2008; Wagner et al., 2012). These liminal phases can be triggered by external events. For example, a crisis can immediately cause the organization to enter a liminal phase in which traditional structures and relations are suspended (Powley, 2009; Powley & Piderit, 2008). Inviting management consultants to implement an organizational change (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003) could be viewed as another type of external trigger. Liminal phases can also be triggered by internal actions. Wagner et al. (2012) argued that an organizational liminal phase can be triggered through the creation of an internal project team assigned to develop and implement a specific change initiative (Wagner et al., 2012). Moreover, behavior that

threatens the prevailing ethical norms in an organization can also challenge and decompose organizational structures and cause a temporary liminal phase (Cunha et al., 2010). Furthermore, Howard-Grenville et al. (2011) found that an organization's employees can intentionally craft "experiences that bring forward new approaches and invite different interpretations that hold potential for altering the cultural order" in an organization (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011: 2). During this type of liminal phase, Howard-Grenville and colleagues argued that prevailing structures dissolve (at least partly) and are renegotiated before the organization again enters a new and more stable phase (reaggregates).

Liminality as a position

Another approach to liminality at work regards the idea of "liminality as position". This stream of literature focuses on the individual and argues that certain work positions are liminal. These positions causes the people that hold them to be betwixt and between at work, of at once belonging and being different (Ellis & Ybema, 2010). This approach to liminality implies a distinct difference from the concept's original use. Liminal positions are often viewed as continuous (Garsten, 1999); here, the application of liminality is removed from the original process character of liminality as a part of the rites of passage.

There are two main ways for defining the origin of liminal positions; in other words, why some work positions are liminal. The first takes its departure in individuals' sense and experience of professional belonging and identities. This research denotes work positions as liminal for people whose work situation puts them between different professional communities, which causes them to experience a lack of belonging to either community (Jeyaraj, 2004; Zabusky & Barley, 1997). According to Zabusky and Barley (1997), for example, this is the situation for industrial scientists who do not affiliate either with the scientific community or with the industrial organization in which they work. Holding liminal positions, and with that liminal professional identities, provides the individuals with freedom to move between different professional communities (Zabusky & Barley, 1997) and act as negotiators between the two communities (Jeyaraj, 2004).

The second way of defining the origin of liminal positions identified in this stream of literature is more commonly used. It posits that certain positions in working life can objectively be denoted as liminal (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003; Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Garsten, 1999; Guimarães-Costa & Cunha, 2009; Sturdy et al., 2009; Sturdy et al., 2006; Tansley & Tietze, 2013; Tempest & Starkey, 2004; Tempest et al., 2007). This literature most commonly argues that liminal positions are held by workers who temporarily perform work in an organization to which they have no formal belonging; that is, they are betwixt and between traditional structures at work. Differently said, due to the fact that these people temporarily work in an organization with which they have no formal belonging, their position holds structural ambiguity. The careers of these individuals are based on many temporary and structurally ambiguous assignments, which make the

liminal character of their work long-lasting. Examples of such positions include temporary workers (Garsten, 1999), freelancers (Tempest & Starkey, 2004), consultants (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003; Sturdy et al., 2009; Sturdy et al., 2006; Tansley & Tietze, 2013), and expatriates (Guimarães-Costa & Cunha, 2009). However, there are also a few examples of internal positions being described as liminal; for example, project workers (Sturdy et al., 2009; Tempest et al., 2007; Wagner et al., 2012). Project workers are also said to hold transient positions with elements of structural ambiguity. They hold their project position temporarily since projects are temporary organizations. Moreover, project workers work together with a mix of individuals from different professional groups which implies that norms and structures from the individual project worker's professional realm cannot be guaranteed to prevail in the project.

The two common features that mark a position as "objectively" liminal, apply to both these groups (external and internal mobile workers). The first feature noted in the literature is that of (1) *transience* – workers perform work on a temporary basis. This feature is referred to in terms of working on temporary assignments, which is common for people such as temporary workers (Garsten, 1999), consultants (e.g. Sturdy et al., 2009), and project workers (Wagner et al., 2012). The second feature is that of (2) *structural ambiguity*, which implies that workers do not have a formal belonging to the organization or organizational unit in which they perform work, which means they are not clearly addressed by the traditional norms, routines, and structures that prevail in firms (Garsten, 1999). For external workers, these criteria apply to temporary work in a client firm, and for the project workers it applies to working in projects outside their formal organizational belonging; that is, their functional line department. The experience of liminality in these objective positions does not necessarily imply that the liminars do not affiliate with any community or organizational entity. Ellis and Ybema (2010: 300) described the experience for the liminars who are "continually crossing the threshold (limen) of myriads of organizations while identifying with none in particular and/or many at the same time."

Studies that have suggested liminality as an objective position have offered several propositions on positive and negative implications for the liminars. On the positive side, studies have shown that people become more mobile and free from obligations (Garsten, 1999; Tempest & Starkey, 2004), which means they also have an opportunity to broaden their learning and to be open to outside impressions (Tempest & Starkey, 2004). They can trigger innovative thinking since they are not limited by traditional structures, which enables them to more easily access and assemble different disciplinary knowledge (Wagner et al., 2012). On a negative note, people holding liminal positions might also experience weakening of power and exclusion from organizational resources and privileges intended for regular employees; which, among other things, implies reduced access to organizational resources such as learning activities (Tempest & Starkey, 2004) or information (Garsten, 1999).

Liminality as a space

The final approach to liminality within management and organization studies has received less attention in research than the two described above. This stream of literature concentrates on "liminality as a space", emphasizing places created as liminal scenes in which traditional routines, norms, and activities are suspended and renegotiated. Liminal spaces differ from liminal positions. As mentioned above, liminal positions are specific work positions that an individual can hold. Liminal spaces, on the other hand, imply geographical places where different logics meet and create ambiguity (for example working from home, where the logics of working life and home life meet and sometimes clash).

Organizational liminal spaces can exist both within organizational boundaries (Bar-Lev & Vitner, 2012; Wagner et al., 2012) and outside them (Edwards, 2011; Johnson et al., 2010; Sturdy et al., 2006; Taminiau et al., 2011). For example, liminal spaces within organizational boundaries can occur when external decisions place the organization into a sort of chaos, when ambiguity and anti-structure prevails within the organization (Bar-Lev & Vitner, 2012). Liminal spaces outside the organization occur when work is performed in places outside the geographical boundaries of the organization where other traditions, norms, and structures regularly prevail; for example, during business meals during which leisure–work boundaries are often blurred (Sturdy et al., 2006; Taminiau et al., 2011), or when work is performed in places such as airports or during commutes (Edwards, 2011). Yet another example would be when people are removed from the organization to attend to workshops, in which people can "think and act in ways that are distinct from the everyday" (Johnson et al., 2010: 1591).

LIMINALITY AND MOBILE PROJECT WORKERS

This thesis argues that the conceptual lens of liminality could be helpful for improving our understanding of the work conditions for mobile project workers. In this thesis, I will lean on the approach of liminality as a position that can be objectively denoted. Below I explain the reason for denoting the work situation for mobile project workers as liminal and why the lens of liminality represents a good analytical ground to shed new light on how mobile project workers experience and deal with their work situation.

As described above, the first criteria for liminal work positions concerns the (1) transient nature or work that applies to mobile project workers. First, consultants are expected to move between different client assignment, a typical sign of which is the nature of their contracts, which often are negotiated for short-term durations (Barley & Kunda, 2006; Sturdy et al., 2009). Second, performing work in projects also adds to the temporary nature of their work, as such assignments are, by definition, time-limited (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Sturdy et al., 2009).

The second criteria is that of (2) structural ambiguity; that is, that workers are inside-outsiders and do not have a formal belonging to the organization in which they perform work. In other words, they are betwixt and between the traditional norms, routines and

structures in the firm, which means they cannot clearly be addressed by them (Garsten, 1999). This also applies both for consultants and for project workers in general. External resources, such as consultants who work in a client firm, bring knowledge, norms, and, structures from the consulting firm, to which they must adhere, while also temporarily adhering to those in the client firm. Nevertheless, this position also implies that some of the norms, structures, and knowledge can perhaps be overlooked by the individual and overstepped when necessary (Garsten, 1999). A similar pattern is apparent for internal mobile workers, such as project workers; they enter a project in which different knowledge bases and communities meet to work together towards a common goal (Lindkvist, 2005), and in which social orders and norms can be disrupted (Wagner et al., 2012).

Following the two criteria for what constitutes liminal positions, mobile project workers' work situation could arguably be defined as liminal. From the perspective of mobile project workers holding liminal positions, I have studied how mobile project workers experience liminality at work, what practices they use to deal with liminality, and what competences they develop to deal with their liminal positions at work.

CHAPTER 3

COMPETENCE IN LIMINAL WORK

Given that one of the objectives of this thesis is to study mobile project workers' liminality competence this chapter introduces the readers to the view on competence that has been adopted herein. The chapter starts with a general introduction to the notion of competence and presents the primary approaches to competence that have been prevalent in the literature and recent studies on competence (rationalistic approaches), including the critique against these approaches. Thereafter, the chapter introduces the interpretative approach, which is the approach relied upon in this thesis.

INTRODUCTION TO COMPETENCE AT WORK

Policy discourses around the world have emphasized the importance of competence (Winterton, 2009). Nevertheless, the concept of competence is still fuzzy, with many different definitions and implications (e.g. Bound & Lin, 2013; Ellström, 1997; Le Deist & Winterton, 2005). One reason for this apparent "fuzziness" is that the concept of competence has often been used interchangeably with other concepts, such as capability and performance (McMullan et al., 2003). Another reason is that research on competence has addressed several levels of analysis. For instance, in management and organization research the concept of competence has been used to describe both organizational as well as individual phenomena (Sandberg, 1994; Stokes & Oiry, 2012). On the organizational level Nadler and Tushman (1999) recognized the criticality and importance of "core competencies" for gaining competitive advantage; here core competencies refer to "the collective learning in the organization, especially how to coordinate diverse production skills and integrate multiple streams of technology" (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990: 82). Research has also addressed competence in project-based work on an organizational level. Söderlund (2005) for example, elaborated on project competence, which is defined as "the firm's ability to generate/select and implement/execute projects skillfully" (Söderlund, 2005: 455). The author proposed that project competence partly relies on project teamwork and on the project members' abilities to function well and take responsibility in the project teams. Söderlund (2005) also made the interesting observation that project-based organizing involves specific challenges that need to be met and handled competently. However, he did not delve into the specific demands on the individual project worker and how they can handle project-based work competently.

Another reason that makes competence unclear as a concept is the various uses of the terms "competence" and "competency". Some studies treat the two concepts as synonyms, while in others clearly distinguish between them (Fenwick, 2010). In the latter category of studies, competence usually implies "a description of action, behaviour or outcome that a person should demonstrate in their performance" (McMullan et al., 2003: 285). In this view, competence refers to individual "output", taking departure from what knowledge, skills and abilities a specific job demands from a worker (Winterton, 2009). Competency, on the other hand, refers on an individual's "underlying characteristics and qualities that lead to an effective and/or superior performance in a job" (McMullan et al., 2003: 285). This means that competency emphasizes the attributes an individual must have, in other words the "input", to perform work competently (Winterton, 2009). In this thesis, however, I will not distinguish between the concept of competence and competency, instead, like many others, I will use them interchangeably (Winterton et al., 2005).

The multitude of approaches to competence at work, which involves different epistemological assumptions (Pate et al., 2003) also partly explains the lack of an agreed definition of notion of competence (Ellström, 1997; Sandberg, 2000; Stoof et al., 2002; Winterton, 2009). The competence literature distinguishes primarily between (different) rationalistic and interpretative approaches to competence (Pate et al., 2003; Sandberg, 1994; Sandberg, 2000; Winterton et al., 2005). The rationalistic and the interpretative approaches hold different views on what constitute competence and also on how competence can be studied. In the sections below, I will first describe the rationalistic approaches to competence and later elaborate more on the interpretative approach.

RATIONALISTIC APPROACHES TO COMPETENCE

The traditional rationalistic view of competence stems from Taylor's "The principles of Scientific Management", in which he proclaimed the improvement of efficiency through developing employees to perform work in "the best way" (Taylor, 1911, in Garavan & McGuire, 2001). Rationalistic approaches are based on an objectivist epistemology and imply a clear distinction between the worker and the work (Pate et al., 2003: 169). These approaches assume that there is an objective reality, the workplace, that can be well described in terms of the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to fulfill it, and that these can be quantified and measured (Garavan & McGuire, 2001). The rationalistic approaches have a simplistic and linear logic that make them attractive (especially for practitioners) (Pate et al., 2003). Three main approaches to competence within the rationalistic logic can be found in the scholarly literature; these are described below.

Worker-oriented approach: Competence as attributes of the individual

This view on competence is input-based (Garavan & McGuire, 2001; McMullan et al., 2003). It emphasizes the worker's inherent attributes, including factors such as motives, traits, and social skills (Pate et al., 2003), as constituting competence (e.g., Ellström, 1997; Garavan & McGuire, 2001; Moore et al., 2002; Sandberg, 2000). This implies that

the worker-oriented view is linked to the concept of competency (see discussion in the previous section). Accordingly, his approach focuses on the person-related variables that the individual brings to work (Garavan & McGuire, 2001: 151), on the individual's human capital (Ellström, 1997). The worker-oriented approach is related to the generic approach to competence (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005; McMullan et al., 2003) which generally claims that competencies are universal and easily transferrable across different organizational settings. Thus, the worker-oriented view implies that a person can have a set of superior attributes leading to expert performance, regardless of the work context (McMullan et al., 2003). According to this view, formal education plays an important role, although the outcomes from traditional schooling have also been questioned (Ellström, 1997). Researchers holding this view on competence have sought to capture what is good competence by studying good performers, comparing their knowledge, skills, and other attributes to those of less successful performers (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005).

This approach has been criticized for not taking context into account and ignoring the fact that expertise can be context-specific (McMullan et al., 2003). Most notably, Sandberg (2000: 10) argued that empirical research following the worker-oriented view has produced descriptions of competences that are both too general and too abstract. Workers' input into their work is obviously important in studying competence at work. However, considering the importance of context in this present study, which focuses on mobile project work, a worker-oriented approach would not be sufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes liminality competence.

Work-oriented approach: Competence as job requirements

Similar to the worker-oriented view, the work-oriented approach also describes competence as a specific set of clearly defined attributes (Sandberg, 2000). The work-oriented approach is related to the behavioral or performance approach (McMullan et al., 2003). This view on competence, unlike the worker-oriented approach, is rooted in the qualifications of a specific work; that is, it is output-based (Garavan & McGuire, 2001). In order to determine what constitutes competent behavior, those who subscribe to the work-oriented approach take departure in a work role, decomposing it into measurable knowledge, skills, and attributes that a worker would need to hold in order to perform that specific work competently (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005). This means that the identified competences also constitute performance criteria that an employee can be measured against (Ellström, 1997).

The work-oriented approach to competence has also been criticized. Ellström (1997) argues that it has two main weaknesses. The first weakness is that official demands for competence, as derived from a work-oriented approach, will be affected by demand and supply of the workforce (for example, high access to a qualified workforce could trigger an excessive competence level for a specific position) and also by internal stakeholders who might wish to increase or decrease the status of a job. The second weakness is that the actual requirements for a work role might be more or less unknown, as it can be

difficult and expensive to capture them correctly through a job analysis. This latter critique is highly relevant in terms of mobile project workers who should be able to move between different types of projects, in which clear cut role definitions cannot be expected (Meyerson et al., 1996). Moreover, the position of liminality is, by nature, ambiguous (as shown in the previous chapter). Therefore, a work-oriented approach to studying what constitutes liminality competence would not be appropriate.

A hybrid approach

As an attempt to circumvent the criticism towards the worker-oriented and the work-oriented approaches, researchers have combined the two into a multimethod-oriented or hybrid approach (Cheng et al., 2005; Sandberg, 1994). Researchers who rely on this approach argue that by combining studies of both job-requirements and workers' behavior on the job, it is possible to discern what constitutes competent behavior for a specific type of work (Cheng et al., 2005; Garavan & McGuire, 2001). Thus, the hybrid approach relies on a combination of "input" and "output" to determine competence. Veres and colleagues' (1990) study of what constitutes the ideal competences for police lieutenants takes on a multimethod-oriented approach. The result of this study consists of a description of competence including 46 worker attributes and 23 corresponding police activities. As this example shows, studies using the hybrid approach often result in a list of knowledge, skills, and abilities needed in order to perform a specific type of work, which in turn is presented as a list of activities. This approach allows for a more comprehensive view on competence; regarding competent performance is a matter of the individual combining a set of attributes with accordance to the requirements of the job. However, this approach has been criticized for being positivistic (Garavan & McGuire, 2001), and also for rendering a static set of knowledge, skills, and attributes that are in themselves context-independent and thus, not comprising the tacit – that is the "know how"- aspect of competence (Dreyfus et al., 1986).

The main criticism towards the rationalistic approaches

Fenwick (2006) argued that rationalistic approaches fail to reflect the complexities of competence at work, which results in over-simplified and narrow descriptions of competence. Moreover, Brown and Duguid (1991: 40) concluded that the "way people actually work usually differ fundamentally from the ways organizations describe that work in manuals, training programs, organizational charts, and job descriptions." In line with this, Sandberg (2000) argued that all of the rationalistic approaches share one problematic basic assumption: that competence is described as being constituted solely of a specific set of attributes that people should use to accomplish their work. This implies disregarding the tacit aspects of competence, its "intuitive" parts (Fenwick, 2010), and also disregarding what and how knowledge, skills, and abilities are actually applied in performing work competently (Sandberg, 1994; Sandberg, 2000). Other research has revealed that workers' experience of work is imperative to the way they perform work (Schön, 1983). Accordingly, Sandberg (2000: 12) argued that "if attributes acquire their context-dependent nature through workers' experience of their work … then people's ways of experiencing work are more fundamental to their competence

than the attributes themselves." Therefore, in order to gain a comprehensive view of what constitutes competent behavior at work, we must study workers' perceptions of work and how those perceptions relate to actions at work. In order to do this, an interpretative approach is suggested.

AN INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH TO COMPETENCE

As mentioned above, the interpretative approach, also known as the constructivist (Pate et al., 2003) or situationalist approach (Capaldo et al., 2006), offers an alternative view on competence. This approach emphasizes that competence relies on a closely intertwined relationship between worker and work (Sandberg, 2000). By focusing on the interaction between the worker and the work, this approach emphasizes the context in which people perform their work (Sandberg & Pinnington, 2009; Winterton et al., 2005). This means that people can be considered competent within a specific tradition in which tacit dimensions of competence play an important role (Rolf, 1991). Consequently, the interpretative approach implies that an individual's competence cannot be captured in a predefined objective list of knowledge, skills, and abilities, nor a list of work activities (Chen & Partington, 2006). Instead, representatives of the interpretative approach have argued that what matters is the *enactment* of workers' attributes performed in relation to how the workers' perceive their work that matters (Partington et al., 2005).

In an important contribution to the work on competence from an interpretative approach, Sandberg (1994; 2000) studied how workers' knowledge, skills, and abilities were integrated into work performance. Sandberg found that the attributes people used to perform their work are preceded by and based upon the workers' conceptions of work. This means that the meaning work that takes on for people delimits, forms, and organizes their knowledge, skills, and other attributes "into distinctive competence in performing their work" (Sandberg, 2000: 20). Therefore, Sandberg continues, people's conception of work "defines [also mentioned as constitutes] what competence she or he develops and uses in performing that work" (Sandberg, 2000: 21).

Furthermore, since people's perceptions of work delimits how they perform their work, these different conceptions forms the basis for different levels of competence (Sandberg, 1994; Säljö, 1996). This has an important impact on how we think about competence, since it implies that levels of competence does not solely rely on holding a superior set of knowledge, skills, and abilities, but also on holding a different and more useful conception of work (Partington et al., 2005; Sandberg, 2000). In Sandberg's (2000) study of engine optimizers, he observed three different and hierarchically ordered levels of competence, constituted by the engineers' conception of work. Each conception, and subsequent competence level, entailed different key attributes that the engineers used when approaching their work. The different conceptions were, from the lowest to highest level of competence, (1) optimizing separate qualities, (2) optimizing interacting qualities, and (3) optimizing from the customer's perspective (Sandberg, 2000).

This view on competence implies some important aspects that are not reflected by the rationalistic approaches. The first is that the attributes acquired by the workers have no fixed meaning, but that such meaning is created in relation to how work is conceived (Partington et al., 2005; Sandberg, 2000). Instead, it is implied that the worker's conception of work directs which attributes the worker develops and maintains in order to perform his or her work (Blomberg, 2004; Chen & Partington, 2006; Dall'Alba, 2004; Partington et al., 2005; Sandberg, 2000). As Dall'Alba (2004: 680) puts it: "the particular knowledge and skills we develop and use in carrying out professional practice depend upon how we understand that practice." The interpretative approach therefore allows for the possibility to determine how people use their different knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform their work, based on their conceptions of work.

STUDYING MOBILE PROJECT WORKERS' LIMINALITY COMPETENCE

There has been few published studies on the competence of project workers (Zika-Viktorsson & Ritzén, 2005). Nevertheless, a great deal of research has addressed the topic of skills and competencies among engineers, often providing extensive lists of the various technical and social skills needed to perform engineering work successfully (e.g., Chatenier et al., 2010; Frank, 2006; Hecker, 1997; Nguyen, 1998). However, most of these studies have been based on a work-oriented approach, grounded in rationalistic approach to competence suggesting a repertoire of fixed knowledge, skills, and abilities that constitute competent performance. For example, Chatenier et al. (2010) identified 34 competencies, grouped into social and technical competences, that engineers need in order to act on challenges in open innovation teams. Hecker (1997) emphasized the importance of both technical and non-technical skills for engineers to successfully solve technical problems and simultaneously build a good relationship with colleagues and clients. The author stressed a number of soft skills, including the abilities to listen actively and speaking to be understood, as well as the ability to provide feedback and inspire and motivate others.

These studies indicate the complexity of engineering competence and generally underline the need for both social and technical skills for successful engineering work. However, they do not indicate whether engineers' actually use the listed knowledge, skills, and abilities when performing their work, which echoes the general critique against the rationalistic approaches to competence. Moreover, although Sandberg (1994; 2000) has made an important contribution to the literature on engineering competence through an interpretative approach, his study does not comprise the liminal character of engineering work that is becoming more common as more engineers find themselves engaged in both project and contingent work.

With regard to project-based work, some studies have applied an interpretative approach to study competence in this context. Partington et al.'s (2005) study of program managers concluded that there are 17 key attributes of program management, conceived at four different levels in a hierarchy of competence. Likewise, Chen and Partington (2006) studied project managers' competence and discovered a hierarchy of

competence in three levels; they concluded that prevalent development and assessment models for project management competence do not necessarily efficiently encourage competence development for project managers. Both of these studies take their departure in an interest of managerial competences and do not elaborate on what competencies are required of the project members, nor do they take the liminal character of work into account.

Zika-Viktorsson and Ritzén (2005) provided a starting point for the study of project competence on an individual level. The authors focused on the specific competences that project members must possess in order to work in projects. The authors concluded that project workers need to hold planning and technical skills, as well as inter-personal skills such as negotiation skills and self-confidence. Zika-Viktorsson and Ritzén (2005) made an important contribution by raising the question of what additional or specific competences are required of project workers. Their study focused on how to deal with solving the problem or task within a specific project, their study focused largely on managing the time restraints put forward by the nature of a project. In doing so, they do not examine the competences project workers hold or develop to deal with demands put on them by project-based organizing, or how these individuals deal with their overall work situation.

In their work on boundaryless careers, DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) touched upon the transient aspect of work (and project-based work) in relation to competence. DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) suggested that boundaryless careers – that is careers involving movement between different organizations rather than within one organization – require new forms of competences. They also posited that boundaryless careers would imply decoupling of professional identities towards a specific organization, a more rapid accumulation of skills and experiences, and would increase the importance of personal networks. What DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) did not investigate in greater depth, is how individuals' competences are enacted in performing boundaryless work, such as project-based work.

In this thesis, I study how mobile project workers deal with the liminal character of their work, which indeed is an important aspect in contemporary engineering and project-based work. This particular kind of competence is conceptualized herein as "liminality competence". In the study of liminality competence, presented in Paper II, I apply an interpretative approach for two main reasons. First, the interpretative approach allows for understanding how mobile project workers enact their knowledge, skills, and other abilities in their work. Thus, this approach enables the study of what mobile project workers "do in their job as a whole, what they find is included in their work and what they perceive as important" (Sandberg, 2000: 13); that is, what they perceive as important in dealing with liminality at work and how they act upon it. Second, the interpretative approach makes it possible to investigate whether different levels of liminality competence can be found among mobile project workers. By studying mobile project workers' perception of work in relation to how they act upon it, it is possible to

investigate whether some individuals are better at utilizing their liminal positions than others, and if so; what constitutes these differences.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter, I present and motivate the choices of methods used in the studies that constitute this thesis. The thesis is based on the three main empirical studies that I have conducted during my five years of time as a PhD candidate. This chapter starts with a description of the overall research approach. Then follows a short presentation of the focal firm for the different studies – Advanced Engineering. I then present the three separate study phases and the various methods used in each study. Thereafter follows a description of the division of labor in the thesis' five papers. I end the chapter by elaborating on how the triangulation of methods used in this thesis strengthens the trustworthiness of the study and discuss the generalizability of the findings presented in the thesis.

A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The objective of this thesis is to investigate how mobile project workers experience and deal with a work situation characterized as liminal. Based on this aim, this research has predominately been characterized by a qualitative explorative approach. Moreover, the focus of analysis is predominantly on an individual level, illuminating the work situation from the mobile project workers' perspective, within the context of project-based work. Bryman (1984) noted that qualitative research aims to explore the social world from the studied subjects' point of view; translated to my thesis, this implies understanding the world of work from mobile project workers' perspectives. Qualitative research also seems like particularly suitable for further research to understand the modern world of work (Walsh et al., 2006) as it comprises a contextual understanding and allows for new discoveries that have not been covered in previous literature (Flick, 2009; Tracy, 2013). Moreover, qualitative research allows the researcher to gain a detailed understanding of the phenomenon in focus (Creswell, 2007) which is important in this explorative study, where the experience of a specific work situation might vary over time and situations, as well as between different individuals.

REWARDS AND CHALLENGES WITH QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research also enables a researcher to join a field and, at the same time as conducting research, satisfy his or her own curiosity and interests (Tracy, 2013). However, this personal involvement in the research can be problematic. The researcher's involvement can lead to certain preconceptions (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Malterud, 2001). Moreover, taking on a specific perspective can result in empirical material being interpreted in a different way than it would have been interpreted by another researcher with a different perspective. As Malterud (2001) argued, such variations in the interpretation of data are not a sign of bad research, but alternative interpretations can be allowed and tested through a purposeful study design. One way of dealing with this problem, and thereby strengthening the quality of qualitative research, is by adopting "reflexivity"; challenging the interpretations of the empirical material and remaining sensitive to how one's own identity shapes the research (Alvesson, 2003; Malterud, 2001; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The research presented in this thesis has adopted three main strategies of reflexivity: cooperation, peer reviews, and feedback from the field. With regard to cooperation; my supervisors, a fellow PhD student colleague, and I have continuously discussed and questioned different aspects of the material, the analysis and conclusions, resulting in a more thorough reading and testing of the interpretations. Peer reviews have had similar effects. The work reported on in this thesis has been repeatedly subjected to scrutiny at conferences and seminars. Moreover, most of the papers in the thesis have undergone several rounds of reviews in different academic journals, which have provided reasons to revisit and reevaluate the analysis and conclusions of the papers, in search of alternative models of explanation and better ways of framing and conceptualizing the findings. Third, I have during several occasions held meetings and workshops together with representatives from my fieldwork during which we have discussed findings from the empirical studies as well as preliminary analysis. During these discussions, the findings were illuminated from different possible interpretative angles together with the field representatives, and, thus, the meetings lead to a deeper understanding of the empirical material.

ADVANCED ENGINEERING AS THE FOCAL FIRM

This thesis is based on three empirical studies within the boundaries of one single company, referred to here by the pseudonym "Advanced Engineering". Thus, the mobile project workers involved in this study share one organizational context; namely, the consulting firm in which they are employed.

MORE ABOUT ADVANCED ENGINEERING

Advanced Engineering (henceforth AE) is one of Scandinavia's leading technical consulting firms and has its head office located in Sweden. The firm currently employs approximately 1400 people. The original firm was founded in the early 1990s, but has undergone some mergers and acquisitions and has existed in its present form since the early 2010s. AE consists of three divisions, one of which employs the mobile project

workers who are the focus of inquiry for this study; therefore, references to AE, in this thesis refer to this specific division rather than the company in general. This division directs its work mainly toward the private sector and the client projects in which the consultants work often concern research and development within different engineering areas such as software engineering, mechanics, systems development, and information security.

The focal AE division has three hierarchical levels. The lowest-level managers are the consultant managers, who divide their work time between their managerial responsibilities and a consultant assignment. The middle-level managers each have responsibility for a different business unit, directed towards specific competence areas. The highest-level manager is responsible for the division. Overall, it is quite common for managers to work in client assignments for shorter periods. This is viewed as an important way to keep the managers close to the firm's operations.

The assignments

There are two types of assignment in AE. One is the more management-consulting type assignment, in which one or two consultants take on an assignment within an area such as change management. The more common type of assignment, which is also in focus for this thesis, is where the consultants work as "expert resources" in client assignments – hereafter I will only refer to this latter type of assignment.

AE consultants are typically located at client sites, involved in client projects in which they work together with client employees and other consultants. The decision to lease these individuals as consultants is usually made in a line department by a line manager, but the work is then preformed in one, or sometimes several, client projects. A few years ago AE also started working with outsourced client projects, which are managed at AE's site and usually only allocated to AE engineers. Examples of outsourcing projects can include developing projects for a specific product, or part of a product. These outsourcing projects have both similarities with and differences from traditional client projects. The similarities primarily concern project temporariness and cross-functional project team composition. The main difference, of course, is that the project is performed in AE premises, and together with the project members' "real colleagues".

AE culture

Much of the AE culture revolves around continuous learning and competence development. However, AE consultants and managers stated that the firm's growth in recent years has led to a weakening of the corporate culture. Many consultants spend most of their time at the client site, which makes it difficult to introduce them properly to an AE culture. To keep the culture strong, AE has made various attempts to strengthen the learning environment. The firm has invested in a range of internal learning opportunities, such as: an Introductory Development Program (IDP) directed towards newly graduated and recently hired employees, competence networks, a series of development seminars directed towards experienced consultants, and internal

courses. However, managers argue that on-the-job training is as important as any of these measures. Such training builds on the supply of "new and challenging assignments" and willingness from AE consultants to take on demanding new assignments.

WHY A STUDY IN ADVANCED ENGINEERING?

There were several reasons for limiting the study to mobile project workers employed by AE. One reason for limiting the study to this firm is the AE consultants' previous experience of reflecting on their work situation. During many of the internal development activities, AE employees' get to practice reflecting on their work situation and experiences, through writing about and discussing them together with colleagues. Thus, most AE workers have, at least on some occasions, put words to their work experiences. Such practice can be viewed as an advantage for studies such as this presented here. Since the aim is to learn about how mobile project workers experience, deal with and navigate through their liminal work situation, it seems beneficial to speak to people who have already reflected over these matters in various was previously to their participation in the study.

Another important reason is the interest for the present research shown by AE managers; their support and permission to access both employees and other important material encouraged an in-depth study at the company (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Moreover, AE provides a bounded unit and there are some advantages to using it as a focal firm for the study. It implies partially bounding the sample to the same context; the individuals are employed by the same consulting firm, although they often work at different client sites and in different projects. Hence, while the most important aspects in the sampling have been the individual participants' experience of working as consultants in different assignments, sampling people from the same consulting firm has offered an understanding of certain contextual factors such as the consulting firm's structure and policies. Those commonalities have made comparisons between the different consultants easier and, hopefully, more trustworthy.

ANONYMITY

Although revealing the firm name would have certain benefits in terms of transparency, I have opted not to do so, due to ethical issues. During the two first phases of study, the participants were promised confidentiality. The interviews and diaries revolved around the individuals' work situation, how they perceived the support and contact with the consulting firm and the client firms, as well as other issues that might have been sensitive to the individuals (perhaps also for the consulting and client firms). Therefore, I agreed with the participants that their names and the company name would not be disclosed. While this prevents me from presenting more detailed information about the firm, the experiences and perceptions of the participants towards their work have been presented comprehensively, and this was the most important factor in terms of the aim of this thesis. Therefore, it is important to note that the anonymity of the firm has not

had any negative consequences on the results published in this thesis, which are analyzed and presented in an inclusive, ethical, and representative way.

ONE STUDY IN THREE PHASES

As mentioned earlier, the empirical study was conducted in three phases over a period of almost five years (for an overview, see Figure 2 below). The three sub-studies were directed towards different research objectives and included different choices of method. The three phases of study evolved during the research process; new questions arose based on insights from the first phase of study, which laid the foundation for the second study and so forth. This section describes the three phases of the empirical study and the motivation for the different method choices (the first and second phases of study have also been reported on in my Licentiate thesis (Borg, 2012)).

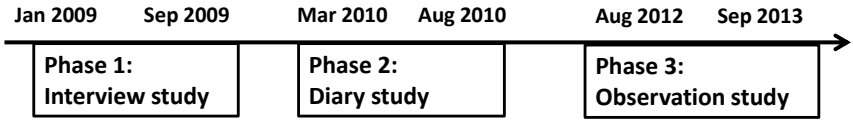

Figure 2 Overview of the research process

In order to obtain a more comprehensive view of the gathered material for the different study phases, Table 1 below compiles the data sources for the study overall. The first column of Table 1 shows the type of method used for collecting empirical material. The second column addresses the number of times that activity was conducted; for example the number of interviews. The numbers in brackets refer to how many individuals participated in these activities (when no such numbers are presented, the number of participants equals the number of activities). The third column shows how long each activity lasted. Also, since this thesis is partly based on joint collaboration with other researchers, the fourth column shows who participated in collecting the data. Given that the research presented in this thesis is, at least partly, based on joint collaboration, I have aimed to make it clear in the method section when other people were involved in gathering data. Later in this chapter, I describe the division of work for each paper, specifying my contribution.

Activity	Quantity	Duration	Participating researcher(s)
Phase 1 – Interviews with mobile project workers			
Interviews with consultants	20	1–2 h	E. Borg
Interviews with managers	4	1–2 h	E. Borg
Workshop with managers	1 (10 participants)	2 h	E. Borg, K. Bredin& J. Söderlund
Phase 2 – Studying liminality competence through diaries			
Diaries	13	3 months	E. Borg
Follow- up meetings and informal conversations	5	15 mins–1.5 h	E. Borg
Follow-up interviews	17	45 mins–2 h	E. Borg
Workshop with participants	1 (11 participants)	3 h	E. Borg & J. Söderlund
Phase 3 – Following a development program			
Interviews with key individuals	4	1–2 h	E. Borg & S. Pantic-Dragisic
Interviews with participants	11	45 mins–1.5 h	E. Borg & S. Pantic-Dragisic
Interviews with leaders of a formal training program	4 (5 leaders)	1–2 h	E. Borg & S. Pantic-Dragisic
Observations of a formal training program	11 (total of 36 participants and leaders)	5–8 hrs	E. Borg & S. Pantic-Dragisic
Observations of administrative activities concerning the program	3 (13 participants)	2–4 hrs	E. Borg & S. Pantic-Dragisic
Workshop with managers	1 (4 participants)	2 hrs	E. Borg & S. Pantic-Dragisic

Table 1 Overview of the data collection in the three phases

PHASE 1: INTERVIEWS WITH MOBILE PROJECT WORKERS

The objective of the first study was to investigate how mobile project workers experienced and dealt with mobile project work. The study was largely inspired by the work of Barley and Kunda (2004) and Fenwick (2007), who investigated similar subject matters. Therefore, the first study was approached through qualitative interviews. Interviewing has been said to be one of the most powerful tools to use in the attempt of understanding other people (Fontana & Frey, 2005) as well as for gathering detailed empirical material (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Furthermore, Peräkyle (2005) and Denscombe (2010) argued that interviews are a means of conveying information about phenomena, that would otherwise be inaccessible; such as people's experiences, feelings and/or thoughts. Darlington and Scott (2002: 48) also argued that one of the strengths of a qualitative interview is that it "takes seriously the notion that people are experts on their own experience and so best able to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon."

However, before conducting interviews, the study was initiated with a start-up meeting between three researchers in our research group (Karin Bredin, who initiated the

contact with AE, Jonas Söderlund, and myself) and four AE managers who represented each of the different management levels in the firm. This meeting had several purposes. One was to create a good collaborative atmosphere; that is, to ensure that the managers were interested in and appreciated the advantages of engaging in this research. The meeting also allowed us to elaborate on how the research could be conducted and what it would ideally focus on, in order for it to produce results that could also be beneficial for AE. Moreover, the meeting represented the first opportunity to probe the environment at the firm and obtain a preliminary understanding of how the company was run and what the work environment entailed for the consultants in AE.

Participants

After the initial meeting, we interviewed managers and mobile project workers. A purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) for the participants for this study implied different sampling strategies. Concerning the managers, one manager at each of the divisions' four hierarchical levels was interviewed. These were the four managers who participated at the start-up meeting, as they knew about and were engaged in the research project.

The sampling of the mobile project workers was based on three criteria. The first was work experience, which ranged from 1.5 years and up so that these workers would have formed an opinion of their work. The second criterion implied the inclusion of consultants who worked at different clients as well as for different units at the focal AE division. The final criterion was to include both male and female interviewees. Based on these criteria, the AE managers suggested the first interviewees. However, to reduce the risk of possible bias due to the managers choosing participants, the sampling later relied on the snowball effect, meaning that the consultants who were already participating suggested other AE consultants who might be suitable for the study (cf. Marshall, 1996).

In total, 21 AE consultants were interviewed in this phase, although it became clear during one interview that the interviewee did not work in projects, so only 20 were included in the final analysis. The question of sample size seems to be a difficult one, and recommendations on how to proceed in sampling vary. However, it is commonly recommended that sampling should continue until the researcher reaches a satisfactory saturation in the variation of concepts (Griffin & Hauser, 1993). Several studies have shown that concepts are usually reproduced after 12–15 interviews (Griffin & Hauser, 1993; Guest et al., 2006). As the analysis process progressed, the themes from the interviews were supported across the sample, which meant that no new interviews were made.

More about the interview study

The interviews were semi-structured, which implies that the interviews were organized around an interview guide with a set of open-ended questions divided into categories. This allowed me and the participants to dwell deeper into certain subjects and gain further understanding if something was unclear or especially interesting (DiCicco-Bloom

& Crabtree, 2006). The design of the interview guides (one for managers and one for consultants) was elaborated based on collaboration between me and my supervisors. The objective of the interviews with the managers was to acquire deeper knowledge about AE and gain insights into AE managers' views on consulting work. Accordingly, the discussions primarily circled around the following subjects: what the managers look for in a consultant, what defines a good consultant, what they expect from their consultants, consultant careers, consultant mobility, consultant assignments, and employee development. These interviews, together with documents written about the company, supplied knowledge regarding what it means to work at AE.

The interviews with mobile project workers included questions that aimed to capture the interviewees' experiences and ways to deal with mobility and structural ambiguity in their work. However, before asking more questions about the different aspects of the interviewees working life, the interviews started with questions concerning the interviewees' background. This, together with the fact that the interviews were conducted at a location outside the participants work environment, was a way of creating a trustful relationship with the interviewees (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interview guide included questions about how the interviewees' experienced their current assignment and project, previous assignments and projects, challenges they experienced in their work, their motivation to work, and their view on project-based work and consulting. The interviews included numerous follow-up questions, which had two specific intentions. The first was to clarify interviewees' statements in order to gain a more correctly interpreted interview material (see, e.g., Alvesson, 2002). Second, many follow-up questions focused on obtaining specific examples of how the interviewees dealt with the aspects, challenges, and motivators they raised as important in project-based and consulting work. Doing this helped provide information about the practices they used in facing liminal situations at work. These interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours and were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In an attempt to further our the insights about mobile project workers' work situation and their experience of work and liminality at work, the interviews were complemented with a workshop and meetings with managers at AE (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). During the workshop, Karin Bredin, Jonas Söderlund, and I presented the cursory analysis and discussed this together with 10 AE managers who worked or had previously worked in client assignments. Moreover, my two colleagues and I held a meeting with the managers involved in the start-up meeting, at which the results and analysis were discussed in detail. These meetings and discussions generated more input about what the managers felt were important challenges. Also, since the managers themselves worked or had worked as consultants, their recognition and acknowledgement of the presented results strengthened the analysis.

Analysis of the interview material

In a first step, the narratives from the interviewees were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis constitutes a method for "identifying, analyzing and

reporting patterns" within empirical material (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). The initial coding focused on two aspects. The first was to understand practicalities surrounding working in projects and assignments. Examples included how the interviewees were received in new assignments, how they got started in their projects, how the participants' assignments were negotiated, and how they ended their assignments. The second aspect of the coding dealt with the participants' experiences in their work, such as what they appreciated in their assignments and projects, the challenges they encountered and had to deal with, and how they described themselves. After this first step of the analysis the results showed that the interviewees experienced three aspects of their working life as especially challenging: entering a project, leaving a project and dealing with their trajectory of projects.

In the second phase of the analysis, the codes were ordered hierarchically using template analysis (King, 1998). The participants' descriptions of their experiences of liminality at work (challenges and ambiguities arising due to their work situation) were categorized into the different phases of an assignment. The focus here was on the early phase of new assignments, on the time at which the assignment was already started, and on the completion of an assignment. What were important here was how the interviewees talked about their intermediate position, how they coped with it, and what problems they encountered in their work. In this step, when the earlier codes were put into broader themes, essential similarities were found across the different interview transcripts (cf. Nag et al., 2007). We identified two types of liminality: social and technical (or task-related). Moreover, the themes also showed that the mobile project workers had different approaches to these ambiguous situations. These approaches were denoted as "active" and "passive" (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This second step of the analysis resulted in four dimensions that represents "ideal types" (e.g., Doty & Glick, 1994) of how the mobile project workers deal with their liminal positions: "reputation reliance," "role carving," "relaxation," and "redefinition." Ideal types represent "pure" types, which involve an exaggeration of certain attributes to gain a better and deeper understanding of the complexities of social reality. As Hagenaars and Halman (1989: 81) stated: "the 'overt' behavior of people is explained by, and is made intelligible from, their closeness to these pure, fundamental types." These four different ways of dealing with liminality have been denominated as four different liminality practices. To illustrate these practices, Paper I includes several quotes from the studied mobile project workers, as well as from their managers at AE.

New questions arising

This phase of the study showed that mobile project workers experience and deal with liminality at work differently. This led to a new set of questions regarding whether some individuals were *better* at dealing with liminality at work than others and, if so, what constitutes such differences. To investigate these questions, it was necessary to look closer into how different mobile project workers' approach their daily work. At this point, I encountered the work of Sandberg (2000) and his study of human competence at

work, which promoted an interpretative approach to competences. This paper inspired the second study phase; that is, investigating peoples' perceptions of work and how they deal with work. In turn, this led to an investigation of whether there are different "liminality competences" and, if so, how they are constituted. This second phase, and the logic behind it, is described below.

PHASE 2: STUDYING LIMINALITY COMPETENCE THROUGH DIARIES

The objective of this phase of the research was to understand individuals' lived experiences of the liminality in their work and to further investigate what competences the mobile project workers hold or develop in order to deal with liminality at work. Inspired by the work of Sandberg (2000), the study focuses on the interplay between perceptions, actions, and competences. Sandberg's perspective on competences implies that a person acts upon their work in accordance with their understanding of what that work implies (Sandberg, 2000). Therefore, investigating competences at work presupposes that the research captures both what the study subject perceive as their work, as well as how they act upon that work.

To study one phenomenon at several places simultaneously

The aim of understanding individuals' lived experiences of the liminality suggests that the researcher requires a thorough understanding of what is actually going on at the workplace, and how the individuals react to that. Studying how mobile project workers experience and deal with liminality when they are working at different client sites and in different projects raises an important question, similar to that asked by Czarniawska (2008: 6), which was "how to study the same object in different places at the same time?." In order to do this, this phase of the study was based on written diaries as well as follow-up interviews with the diary writers.

Perhaps the most appropriate method for studying mobile project workers' liminality competences is observations. However, it would be difficult to conduct an observation study in the present context, given that mobile project workers in AE, like many other contingent workers (see, e.g., Barley & Kunda, 2004), work in different projects at different client sites. This would require the researcher to be at several different places over a long period of time, which, although interesting, was deemed too inefficient for this study (cf. Czarniawska, 2008). Moreover, many of AE's mobile project workers work in classified projects, a fact which leaves limited access for shadowing or observations.

Furthermore, while interviews can offer detailed and valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of individuals' working life, interviews imply a retrospective account of happenings and experiences. Therefore, such narratives also entail some of the interviewees' own interpretations and retrospective sensemaking (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In an attempt to capture the individuals' understanding and acting on work more in the present, without actually doing the observations or shadowing, the second study phase was mainly based on written diaries. The intention was to lower the disadvantage of interviews and try to capture what the mobile project

workers encounter in their everyday work, as well as how they react to and experience that work. Therefore, this study follows the recommendation of Czarniawska (2008), who argued that a diary study enables the researcher to study work and the way work unravels at several places at the same time.

The diary method, a self-report tool, gives researchers the opportunity to investigate the experiences and social processes of the diary keepers, within a given context of interest (Bolger et al., 2003); in this case, liminality at work. A diary study allows for a comprehensive understanding of immediate and on-going work, as diaries allow individuals to note their thoughts and experiences in the context and at the moment they occur. This helps decrease the risk of retrospection compared to a research design that relies solely on interviews (Bolger et al 2002). It has also been argued that diaries are an effective method of collecting data from a number of participants over a period of time, which would be more time-consuming with other methods (Symon, 1998). Hence, this phase of the study lasted over a period of three months and the longitudinal aspiration made it possible to understand how the participants understood their work over time, instead of capturing a snapshot that might not be representative of their overall perception of work.

Another reason for choosing diaries as a method was that AE employees had already been encouraged to write diaries in their work, to state what they have done as part of their work, as well as any decisions that have been made regarding their work. The design of this AE diary, called a "project diary," is different from the data-generating diary used for the study. The project diary has no particular structure, but the employees may write where and how they deem it appropriate. Moreover, while writing in the project diary is not mandatory, it is highly encouraged by AE managers. Therefore, the decision was made not to use present diaries, as it could be too difficult to compare them. Thus, we developed a more elaborated and structured electronic diary (this will be described in more detail later on in this chapter). However, collecting material through diaries seemed suitable with regard to the AE employees, as it utilized their habit of writing. Moreover, AE also trains its employees to express their thoughts and to write reflections on their work at internal workshops and seminars. During these internal development activities, the consultants write reflection papers, based on their work situation. Therefore, an important reason for using diaries was that AE employees' experience and practice in writing reflections on their job would provide good conditions for elaborate diary entries, which would be useful for understanding how they perceived their work.

Participants

The participants for this study were chosen on the basis of a theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1996), on the premise of having a group of AE employees with diverse range of experiences, both regarding their amount of work experience as well as participants who had worked in different client firms. These criteria were chosen mainly to correspond to Sandberg's study (2000), focusing on a range of the participants'

experiences. The first aim was to involve 20–25 participants in the study. However, a majority of the approached consultants who met the criteria declined participation in the study, often due to a lack of time. Therefore, we started the study once 15 consultants had agreed to participate. Of these 15 participants, three had participated in the previous interview study and the other 12 were new participants in this study. However, two of the diary writers terminated their participation during the diary study, which meant the analysis on this material is based on 13 participants (two of whom had participated in the previous study phase).

The assignments of the 13 participants varied. All worked in time-limited projects, albeit under somewhat diverse organizational circumstances. Four of the participants worked in "regular assignments" that were assigned at a functional department at a client site and allocated to client projects. Three of the participants worked in projects at a client site; however, the arrangement of their assignment meant that they were to work with a defined part of a project and deliver a "work package," and therefore reported their time to AE rather than to the client. Four of the participants worked in outsourced projects, which were located at AE premises, in projects led by a client firm with which they also held continuous contact via telephone, e-mail, and personal meetings, although they worked together with other AE employees. The last two participants were working in different projects at AE during the period of the diary writing, as they were between regular assignments.

More about the diary study

The diaries took the form of narrative reports (Czarniawska, 2008) in which the participants were asked to write notes regarding different questions or categories, such as: what they did as part of their work, how they experienced the work, what had been motivating, what had been challenging, whether the work situation had changed and how, which decisions had been made and how those decisions affected the participants, and how the project team had collaborated. These questions were intended to capture different aspects of the participants' work situation, to investigate what they perceived of as their work, and how they acted upon it and experienced it. The diaries, which consisted of the open-ended questions and a field for other comments, were available online on AE's intranet. The participants were asked to write weekly reports as well as on occasions they considered important for their work situation; this implies that the diaries had both the character of both time-based and event-based design (Bolger et al., 2003). The choice of relying mainly on weekly diaries, rather than daily diaries, for example, avoided making the diary writing too much of a burden for the participants: it has been shown that it is difficult to sustain a high level of commitment from diary writers over a period of time (cf. Claessens et al., 2010). The decision concerning the interval was made during a two-week pilot study with two consultants who had participated in the first phase of the study. They had tested writing twice a week, as well as at certain events that they found interesting to report, but found it too time-consuming to provide elaborate answers to the questions in the diary. The pilot study also resulted in some minor changes to the form and content of the diary. As a result,

some questions were clarified and the design of the question sheet was altered to make it easier to deal with.

Plowman (2010) argued that participants in a diary study must feel comfortable and secure in sharing their experiences and thoughts, for the diaries to provide substantial material. She recommended that researchers provide a good introduction to the participants. Therefore, a start-up meeting was held with the original 15 participants; the meeting was designed and run by me and my main supervisor Jonas Söderlund. During that meeting, the objectives of the diary study were presented and the diary process was discussed, including when and how to answer it, together with an explanation of the questions. The matter of confidentiality was also discussed, and it was agreed that the participants would be de-identified in texts and at presentations at AE. Furthermore, during the three months of diary writing, I met the participants during informal meetings, such as lunches. At these meetings, we discussed the practicalities and experience of diary writing. These occasions provided opportunities to answer questions and further explain the objectives of the diary and to develop a shared understanding of the purpose of the study (see Sandberg, 2005). The meetings were important for building a trustful relationship between researchers and participants, and also to ensure that the participants continued to be engaged in their writing (cf. Bergendahl, 2009). Moreover, the participants also discussed their work at these meetings, which gave us the opportunity to better understand how they perceived their work.

Follow-up interviews and workshop

An important part of the empirical material for this study consisted of the follow-up interviews made on the diary material (cf. Czarniawska, 2008; Plowman, 2010). During the interviews, the 13 remaining participants were asked to elaborate on what they had written in their diary entries in order to further understand what their perceptions of work. Therefore, all the interviews were structured differently based on the participants' diary entries. Many interview questions started by asking the participant to elaborate on a specific activity or challenge described in the diary, with follow-up questions about what had led to that situation, if the participant had previous experience of similar situations, and so forth. The interviews also touched on the participants' previous work experiences, what they thought were the general important characteristics of their work, typical challenges and rewarding aspects of work, and what they felt were important ways to act upon their work and what they thought constituted competent behavior and good performance in their work. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and were later transcribed verbatim.

In additional, Jonas Söderlund and I held a workshop with the participants after the three-month diary writing period had finished. The aim of the workshop was to discuss the diary entries and a preliminary data analysis. This was also an opportunity for the two of us to listen to how the participants discussed their work together with their colleagues. During the workshop, the participants read their own diaries and discussed

them together in smaller groups, while the participating researchers listened and took notes, and asked some follow-up questions for clarification.

Finally, Jonas Söderlund and I also held a meeting with AE managers, during which the results of the complete diary study (including interviews and workshop) were presented. This meeting provided further input for interpretation of the empirical material, with regard to what the managers viewed as challenging in terms of to how the AE consultants experienced their working life.

Analysis: Characterizing liminality competence

Adopting an interpretative approach to competences has several implications related relation to data analysis. One is that understanding and interpreting the empirical material is a matter of understanding the meaning of the material, rather than solely interpreting statements as independent from the context (Dall'Alba, 1996: 8; Sandberg, 2000; Sandberg & Targama, 1998). Secondly, an interpretative approach to competence entails a holistic view, which is to say that analyzing competence is a search for what abilities the participants have and make use of (see Sandberg, 2000). Moreover, and maybe most importantly, this implies that unraveling liminality competence is about understanding how the mobile project workers perceive their work situation, as these conceptions constitute liminality competence. Understanding an individual's competence implies both a "what" and a "how" aspect. The "what" aspect refers to what people perceive of as their work assignment; that is, what they are supposed to do in their work. The "how" aspect indicates how meaning is created in that perception; that is, how people delimit and organize what they conceive of as their work (Larsson & Holmström, 2007).

To investigate how the mobile project workers perceive their work situation, we conducted the analysis in several steps. First, a cursory analysis was made, based solely on the diaries. This was used as input in the discussion at the final workshop with the diary participants, with the aim of potentially triggering a discussion about their work situation. Listening to the participants discussing their own diary entries provided an opportunity to 'tune in' to what they meant in their diary entries.

The second step in the analysis relied partly on the findings in the first study phase; specifically, on the distinction between social and technical liminality and active or passive approaches to dealing with that liminality. In order to see how the participants dealt with situations in their work over time, the material was analyzed according to whether their practices at work were socially active, technically active, socially passive, or technically passive. The aim was to get an overview of whether each participant tended to use one or more of the practices, and whether that changed over time and in different situations. The analysis captured whether the participants tended to focus on social or technical situations, and also whether they had an active or passive approach in their actions. This analysis revealed that some of the participants tended to shift continuously between different practices, while others relied more heavily on one of the

four approaches. While this step of the analysis did not fully discern liminality competence, it did help to create a distance from the material and look at it with fresh eyes. The next step in the analysis process, however, closely followed Sandberg's (2000) recommendations for understanding competence at work.

The third and most important step in the analysis focused on categorizing the diary entries and interviews according to how the mobile project workers perceived their work. This part of the analysis addressed what the participants perceived as their primary tasks and how they organized their work and responded to it. Clustering the coding enabled us to collate five different themes, according to which work tasks, or aspects of work, the participants described as the most important in mobile project work. These five themes constitute the work attributes that mobile project workers must respond to and act upon in their work. The five attributes were: (1) to analyze the needs in their work; (2) to initiate change; (3) to interpret contracts; (4) to create trust; and (5) to build, use, and transfer knowledge.

However, the participants had differing perceptions about what these work attributes entailed and how they should act upon them. In the continuing comparison across the participating mobile project workers, three main conceptions of work were discerned: the perception of work as "assignment handling," the perception of work as "a learning platform," and the perception of work as "knowledge transfer." There were also a number of other differences between the three groups of mobile project workers (one group for each perception of work). First, the individuals in each group had a distinct way of approaching their work and acting upon it, depending on the perception of work. Moreover, there was a difference between the groups in terms of how much the mobile project workers took advantage of the liminal nature of their work. The individuals who viewed work as knowledge transfer found that the mobility and structural ambiguity offered possibilities to broaden their knowledge and find new challenging work opportunities. On the other hand, those who viewed work as assignment handling found the mobility and structural ambiguity to be stressful elements and even as hindrances for them in performing their work. Therefore, the three groups also constitute the three categories of liminality competence, in accordance with the interpretative approach to competence described in Chapter 3 (Sandberg, 2000).

The conclusions, the different levels of liminality competence, and what constitutes them, were drawn from a sample of 13 mobile project workers. Previous literature has argued that 15–20 participants is the optimal number in order to gain richness in results and analytical strength (Sandberg, 2000). However, the 13 mobile project workers in our study provided rich and detailed material and the analysis showed coherence in the three generated perceptions of work. While additional participants could have provided more detail to the descriptions of each level of liminality competence, the main conceptualization would hopefully not have been affected.

New questions arising

This phase of the study resulted in three different levels of liminality competence being discernible among the mobile project workers. Interestingly, the number of years that each participant had spent as a mobile project worker did not clearly correspond to the level of liminality competence. That is to say, there was a broad diversity of years of work experience within each of the three categories of conceptions. This led to the question of how liminality competence is developed. To explore this question, two of the participants in the diary study that had been shown to hold a high level of liminality competence, with different levels of work experience. The diary entries and interviews with these individuals (presented as Harry and John in Paper III) indicated that they had developed a high level of liminality competence during different stages in their careers – Harry early on and John at a later stage. Below, I describe how the study of these two mobile project workers helped create an understanding of the development of liminality competence.

Creating narratives to understand the nature and development of liminality competence

The choice to focus on two individuals in order to explore the development of liminality competence was inspired by Beech's (2011) study on identity reconstruction. Focusing on two people with high liminality competence can also be viewed as selecting a specified population of cases, which "[c]onstrains extraneous variation and sharpens the external validity" (Eisenhardt, 1989: 533). There are several reasons for choosing two cases to focus more deeply on. One is that this type of research emphasizes the individual mobile project workers, which is what I wanted to do. By presenting in-depth studies of two mobile project workers' careers and views of work, the individuals' perspective of work could be raised in the scholarly debate in a more prominent way. Moreover, the use of a smaller sample that entails rich data can be used as an inspiration for new ideas. As Siggelkow (2007: 21) argued;

> If only limited theoretical knowledge exists concerning a particular phenomenon, an inductive research strategy that lets theory emerge from the data can be a valuable starting point. … I believe that cases can also help sharpen existing theory by pointing to gaps and beginning to fill them.

Several steps were taken to collect empirical material, with the aim of gathering rich information about the two mobile project workers' experience of their work and how they had developed their perceptions and actions towards work throughout their careers. After the diary study, we conducted follow-up interviews with Harry and John, primarily to ask more questions about their general career as mobile project workers and about how they had developed their perception of work, and work performance, over their careers. The ensuing analytical process consisted of writing elaborate linear case descriptions (Yin, 2009) for John and Harry, describing their respective career trajectory, their experiences with respect to their different assignments and projects, and their actions or reactions in different situations in their previous assignments.

These case descriptions were analyzed in a similar vein as the diary entries and interviews described above, except in relation to time and their different assignments and projects, with a focus on the point at which their descriptions of work and their actions towards it began to reflect a higher level of liminality competence.

In a second stage, these analytical ideas were discussed with Harry and John, in order to gain their perspective on the analysis and develop it further. We asked further questions about when they had encountered technical and social liminality, about what constituted the nature of liminality and liminality competence, and about when and why they had chosen a different pattern of action in their work. In analyzing this material further, we analyzed the participants' stories based on when they started showing signs of different patterns in perceiving and acting upon their work, focusing on how they experienced work and how they described their ways of thinking about their liminal work position. From the analysis of these narratives, three processes of developing liminality competence were discerned: (1) understanding the value of in-betweenness, (2) understanding the role of the liminar as different, and (3) translating the liminal experience through reflexivity. Moreover, the analysis indicated that, in developing a higher level of liminality, competence is dependent on the individual's ability to actively address both social and technical liminality, and that the development of the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to respond in a more competent way was sufficient; the participants needed to be faced with a triggering event that provoked a different way to perceive of work.

New questions arising

The study of liminality competence among mobile project workers raised the question of how the consulting firm in which they were employed dealt with the development of such competence among their employees. At this stage, our research group was told about an introductory development program at AE that aimed to develop better technical consultants during a two-year long program. This then became the focus of study for the coming research phase.

PHASE 3: FOLLOWING A DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The first version of the Introductory Development Program (hereafter IDP) was launched in 2007. The program is 24 months long and AE's policy is that all recently graduated employees at AE should go through IDP. In June 2013, 18 IDP classes had been started.

About the Introductory Development Program

The introductory development program was launched in its first version in 2007. It is a 24 month long program, and the AE policy is that all recently graduated employees at AE should go through IDP. In June 2013, 18 IDP classes in total had been started.

During the 24-month IDP, the participants meet for nine half-day long seminars, divided into three phases with different themes. The first general theme deals with the consultant assignments, the second theme concerns the client organization, and the

third revolves around the consulting business. Thus, the program consists of nine seminars and a final examination seminar (see Figure 3 below). Within each seminar phase, the general theme is divided into three specific and predefined subjects; such as, "the task", "processes", or "meeting", which are subsequently dealt with during one seminar. In addition to the seminars, the program entails formal courses, both business-focused and technical, which the participants should attend. Figure 3 below illustrates the process of the IDP.

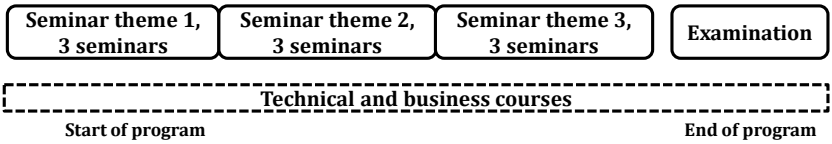

Figure 3 The structure of IDP

One IDP class usually consists of between 10 and12 participants who mainly attend the seminars together; they, sometimes also take one or two courses together, but this is rarer. Each class is usually led by two senior AE consultants who also work as consultant managers (on rare occasions only one). The focus of the program is on the "engineer's professionalism". One of the creators of the program, working as a senior consultant in AE, expressed the objective of the program as follows:

> All experience grows while you work. But why work for 10–15 years before you get the hang of the real important stuff, and what is really the core of the work? What we have done here is to create a program where we try to get our young colleagues to see all this. (IDP creator II)

For each seminar, the participants are expected to read a few texts and write down a reflection (approximately one page) based on their work experience, connected to the subject of that seminar. Each participant then reads his or her text aloud and the text is discussed during the seminar. During the discussions, the other participants are expected to relate the text to their own experiences and discuss what can be learned from the examples in the text and how to understand the experiences they have had.

For the final examination seminar, the participants are asked to read through their own text from the previous nine IDP seminars and write a paper reflecting on what they have learned through the program. In addition, one other participant is chosen by the leaders as a discussant for that text. During the seminar, the reviewer reads his or her review of the reflection paper, and the review then forms the basis for a general discussion among all participants.

Multiple methods in the IDP study

Several methods were used to learn more about how liminality at work was addressed during the IDP and how IDP participants were aided in relation to deal with their liminal positions. First, the two senior AE consultants who developed the IDP program were

interviewed. These interviews were semi-structured (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and the main objective was to create an understanding of the background and development of the program, how it was designed, and what the main aims of the program were. Then the five IDP leaders were interviewed; these interviews were semi-structured and covered subjects such as the leaders' first contact with IDP, the process and structure of an IDP, and what and how the participants are expected to learn in the program. Also, I observed administrative meetings regarding the IDP, listening to the challenges that AE considered important in running the program and how the program could be improved. Nevertheless, the major part of the empirical study in this phase was conducted through observations of the IDP seminars. Since these observations constitute the main part of this particular study phase, the next section describes the observations in greater detail.

Observations

As mentioned, the observations focused specifically on the half-day seminars that were part of the program. The rationale for this choice was that the seminars are considered the backbone of the program and that this is when the mobile project workers openly discuss what they experience and how they learn from it. Thus, studying the seminars made it possible to capture the mobile project workers' experiences of their work, as well as much of what the IDP leaders emphasized during the program. Through listening to discussions among the participants and leaders, it was possible to create an understanding of how the participants made sense of their work, how they perceived it, and how they acted upon different challenges they encountered in their work. As previously described, these challenges are important aspects of understanding people's competence at work (Sandberg, 2000).

To understand more about how the IDP addressed liminality at work, and how the participants would develop their understanding of their liminal work positions through the program, a doctoral colleague participating in the same research program (Svjetlana Pantic-Dragisic) and I conducted participant observations of IDP seminars in three separate classes, as well as at two final examination seminars. These observations were structured so that we followed one seminar theme for each class. Thus, we conducted participant observations in parallel in: seminar theme 1 (3 seminars) with class A, seminar theme 2 (three seminars) with class B, and seminar theme 3 (three seminars) with class C. The specific classes (A, B, and C) were chosen based on opportunistic sampling (Creswell, 2007), since they started on a new seminar theme at the time that this study started. Figure 4 below shows who participated in each observation (EB stands for Elisabeth Borg and SPD for Svjetlana Pantic Dragisic). This illustration follows the same logic with regard to the IDP structure as Figure 3.

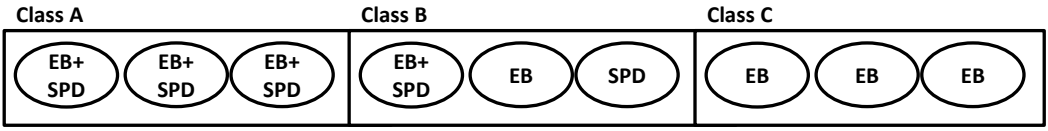

Figure 4 Observations during the IDP

Observations have been defined as "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989: 79). These specific observations could be described as partly participating, as the researchers did not completely participate and were not complete outsiders, but were somewhere in between (cf. Creswell, 2007). In practice, this implies that we wrote down our own reflection texts, which were read and discussed during the seminars together with the other participants' papers. We did participate fully during these discussions. However, when the other participants' texts were processed, the main focus for my colleague and I was on taking detailed field notes. These field notes concentrated on the seminar dialogue, trying to capture the participants' work experiences as thoroughly as possible.

One important criticism of observations is that the researcher's own interpretation and assumptions can limit and bias the recorded material (Cole, 2013). To minimize the effects of the critique, thorough notes were taken throughout the seminars of what was said and by whom. The researchers' own thoughts or cursory interpretations were added in the margins of the protocol in order to clearly separate what was descriptive and what was reflective notes (Creswell, 2007).

Analysis

We utilized open coding (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to analyze the empirical material, both with regard to the field notes and the interview transcripts. In the first part of the analysis, my research partner and I coded the empirical material independently. The dual coding aimed to increase the reflexivity (Alvesson et al., 2008) in the analysis, as my colleague and I have somewhat different research backgrounds.

Moreover, in accordance with the aim of this phase of study, the objective of the analysis was twofold. One part of the analysis concerned the IDP as a liminal process, and the second concentrated on how the participants' liminal positions were addressed during the program; that is, how the participants experienced their work and how they acted upon it.

The analysis started by focusing on the second aspect of the aim – how the participants' liminal positions were addressed during the program. For this part of the analysis, both researchers had a common structure for the analysis of the seminar observations. The field notes and transcriptions were coded according to the experiences, challenges, and actions towards work the participants discussed. After the individual coding, the respective codes and analysis were discussed and partly rearranged to a common agreed-upon coding. These codes were then clustered into various areas that reoccurred in the transcripts, such as the participants' social roles, ambiguous assignment

boundaries, the indistinct client, organizational belongingness, etc. This part of the analysis showed that the participants made use of distancing techniques during the program, in order to help untangle the ambiguous work situations they faced as mobile project workers. These distancing techniques made the participants more self-confident in their roles and broadened their scope of action in different work situation. Moreover, the program enhanced the experience of liminality for the mobile project workers, as it stressed their alterities (that is, the opposite to belonging, namely, who they are not) towards the client, at the same time as emphasizing the participants' abilities to continuously shifting organizational belongings.

The second part of the analysis, particularly addressing the seminar observations, illuminated the mobile project workers' passage through a formal development program, which we identified as the rites of passage. This is in line with Tansley and Tietze's (2013) study on rites of passage within a talent management program. The first stage of the rite of passage, the separation, occurs when the mobile project workers are detached from their status of being students. The comparison between being a student and an employee often recurred in the seminar discussions. The second stage was the liminal phase, during which the workers are no longer students, but are not yet experienced technical consultants. After finishing the two-year development program, the workers receive a diploma, which signifies an incorporation phase into the realm of experienced employees.

MY CONTRIBUTION TO THE PAPERS

As mentioned earlier, the research presented in this thesis is partly based on joint collaboration. This applies for some of the work with gathering and analyzing the empirical material, as noted above, as well as in co-authoring four of the five papers in the thesis. In this section I describe the collaboration for writing the papers and report on the conferences at which the papers have been presented. The descriptions of my contributions provide a picture of main responsibilities of different parts of the papers.

Paper I

Borg, E & Söderlund, J., (2014). Moving in, moving on: Liminality practices in project-based work. *Employee Relations.* 36(2): 182–197.

My contribution to this paper: For the first draft of this paper, I was mainly responsible for writing the empirical chapter. Jonas Söderlund, my co-author, took the lead on framing the paper and completing the first draft as a whole. In coming discussions, we jointly worked on specifying the analytical ideas and worked in iterations on revising the paper before submitting it to a journal (for which it was later rejected). We also worked in iterations on revising the paper after receiving comments from different reviewers and from conferences. Before submitting it to *Employee Relations,* I took the lead on revising the paper again and shortening it by approximately 30 percent, thus restructuring and editing many parts of the paper.

Before being published in *Employee Relations*, the paper was presented at two conferences. Jonas Söderlund and I both presented the paper at the IRNOP conference (The International Research Network on Organizing by Projects) in Berlin in 2009. In 2011, I presented a revised version of the paper at the NFF conference (Nordic Academy of Management) in Stockholm (Division: Nordic Practices of HRM).

Paper II

Borg, E & Söderlund, J., (forthcoming). Liminality competence: An interpretative study of mobile project workers' conception of liminality at work. *Management Learning.*

My contribution to this paper: The idea for this paper emerged in a discussion between Jonas Söderlund and myself, in which the field of competence arose as an interesting new venture for study. I wrote the first full draft of the paper and I also built the analytical model of liminality competence. Jonas and I then discussed the content of the paper and revised it through a number of iterations. After presenting the paper at conferences and receiving comments from different reviewers, we discussed improvements, which I took first lead on implementing.

Before being accepted for publication in *Management Learning,* this paper was also presented at conferences, such as the 2012 year's Academy of Management Conference in Boston (Division: Organizational Behavior).

Paper III

Borg, E & Söderlund, J. The nature and development of liminality competence: Narratives from mobile project workers. *Under review for publication.*

My contribution to this paper: An earlier, single-authored version of this paper was presented in my licentiate thesis. After discussing ways to move forward with this paper with my supervisors, I collected more empirical material and discussed new possible ways of framing the paper and findings with Jonas Söderlund. After I worked on integrating the empirical material and revising the paper, Jonas Söderlund was included as a co-author. It has since been a joint collaboration to develop the paper and particularly the analytical framing of the paper.

This paper is currently under review in a peer-reviewed journal, and has previously been presented at several conferences, such as EURAM 2012 in Rotterdam (Track: Project Organizing – General Track).

Paper IV
Borg, E & Pantic-Dragisic, S. Enhancing liminality through formal training: Creating alterities through rites of passage. *Under review for publication.*

My contribution to this paper: The idea for this paper emerged during a course collaboration between myself and Svjetlana Pantic-Dragisic, a newly recruited PhD student within the project team. We have jointly collected the empirical material in this study and collaborated in the data analysis. In creating a first draft of this paper, my co-author and I created a structure for the paper from which I wrote most parts of the first draft. We have had continuous discussions about the content of the paper and the analytical ideas, and I have had the main responsibility for writing and revising the text.

This paper is now under review for publication in a peer-reviewed journal and was previously presented at the IRNOP conference 2013 in Oslo (Track: People in Projects).

Paper V
Borg, E. The concept of liminality in management and organization studies: Past accomplishments and future challenges. *Under review for publication.*

My contribution to this paper: I am the exclusive contributor for the data analysis (systematic literature review) and writing of this paper, which was presented at the Nordic Academy of Management conference 2013 in Reykjavik (Track: Researching Temporary Organizations and Project Practices).

TRIANGULATION AND MULTIPLE QUALITATIVE METHODS

As shown in the descriptions of the three study phases (as well as in Table 1), the different study phases, as well as the study in its entirety is comprised of a multiple set of qualitative methods. In a traditional quantitative language, this type of triangulation – applying different methods to study an empirical material – strengthens the validity and reliability of a study. However, given that this research is a qualitative endeavor, such language could be considered inappropriate (Seale, 1999). Nevertheless, there are benefits to using multiple methods. As Mason (2006: 10) argued: "social experience and lived realities are multi-dimensional and … our understanding impoverished and may be inadequate if we view these phenomena only along a single dimension." This implies that methodological choices, which of course should be dependent on the research questions, should allow for several views on the phenomenon under study. Thus, using multiple methods could increase the scope and the depth of a study's results (Flick, 2009). I would like to emphasize that triangulation or multiple methods used in the present research do not refer to the mix between qualitative and quantitative methods, as is so often referred to in relation to these concepts (Jick, 1979).

I have approached the research objective of studying mobile project workers' experience and ways to deal with liminality at work from different angles, including various qualitative methods. I believe that this approach has rendered some important benefits to this study. First, although interviews are a well-recognized qualitative

method that enable researchers to gain an understanding of how people make sense of their world and experiences, they have the disadvantage of retrospection (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Therefore, the diaries made a good complementary method as they made it possible to study not only the study participants' way of making sense of their world in real-time, but also how they act upon it. Thus, dual understanding could challenge possible presumptions based only on the participants' descriptions of their experiences, somewhat enabling thinking "outside the box" (Mason, 2006). Moreover, the workshops that have been a recurring element in my study have had the same type of effect. Here, various steps in the analysis have been discussed with participants and managers at AE, who have been able to ask questions and make suggestions that have increased the reflexivity in relation to the analysis (Hardy & Clegg, 1997). The observations offer yet another perspective to the present study. They do so by adding the perspective of the mobile project workers' employer, AE, into the study; which provides a broader perspective on what influences the mobile project workers (Mason, 2006). The observations also enabled me to capture how mobile project together (in a group) gave voice to their experiences of work.

GENERALIZABILITY AND RIGOR

Generalizability is an important element of research, although it has traditionally been given more attention in quantitative than qualitative studies (Schofield, 2002). The aim of qualitative research is not to generalize universal laws for an entire population. However, as argued by Schofield (2002), important ideas concluded in qualitative research can be transferrable to other situations. Nevertheless, empirical transferability constitutes only one aspect of generalizability in qualitative research – another type is theoretical or analytical generalizability (Lee & Baskerville, 2012; Whetten, 1989; Yin, 2009). Analytical generalizability means deriving new concepts for understanding a social phenomenon (Becker, 1998; Corley & Gioia, 2011). Both types of generalizability rely on the quality and rigor of the study. Therefore, this section describes how I have worked to obtain rigor in the present research. The section also discusses the claims of generalizability from this thesis, both in terms of empirical transferability and theoretical generalizability.

RIGOR

As mentioned, the generalizability of a study partly depends on the rigor of the study, also referred to as internal validity (Schofield, 2002; Whittemore et al., 2001). Whittemore et al. (2001) discuss four primary criteria for a study to obtain rigor in qualitative research.

The first criterion refers to the "credibility" and fit between the study's results and the experience of the participants in the research. Two main techniques have been adopted in to reach credibility in this research. One has to do with the data collection. During all interviews I thoroughly asked follow-up questions and asked the participants to elaborate on their answers to ensure that I understood them correctly (Kvale, 1997). Also, several data sources have been used. The combination of multiple interviews,

workshops, meetings, diaries, and observations worked as a way to create a rich understanding of how the participants made sense of their situation. Moreover, during the analysis, the focus was to understand the meaning of what the participants had said, rather than putting emphasis on singular expressions or wordings (Sandberg, 2000). Since all the empirical material was collected in Swedish (interviews, diaries and observation records), the process of translating quotes into English presented a challenge in order preserve the meaning of the participants' statements. In order to preserve the meaning of the quotes, my co-authors and I have collaborated in translating many quotes, to make sure that the English version represented the original transcript.

The second criterion of "authenticity" implies the need for showing "awareness to the subtle differences in the voices of all participants" (Whittemore et al., 2001: 534). Authenticity is closely linked to the criterion of credibility. To achieve authenticity the researcher needs to be aware of the influence or she might have on the participant during the data collections, so that the participant's "true voice" is heard. Apart from asking for elaborations during the interviews I have also entered the conversations trying not to have preset assumptions of the participants work and experiences, to have an open mind to differences in the participants' stories. In the diaries, the participants could choose the time and place for writing down their reflections, which hopefully made them comfortable and open in their writing. The follow-up interviews in that study phase also focused on clarifying what the participants referred to in their diaries, to ensure the right interpretation of them. During the observations of the IDP, we as researchers tried to be subtle when taking notes, not to disturb the conversations in the rest of the group. I have also strived for reflexivity throughout the analysis processes, looking through the coding several times to look for competing interpretations. In the last study phase, the analysis process started with two independent analyses – which were later discussed and then merged into one congruent analysis. This analysis technique allows competing interpretations to appear early in the analysis process, and therefore constitutes one way to ensure the internal validity (Kvale, 1997).

The reflexivity in the analysis process, described above, also strengthens the research's "criticality" – which is the third criterion raised by Whittemore et al. (2001). The criterion of criticality refers to demonstrating critical appraisal in the research process. Criticality is tightly coupled with the fourth criterion, "integrity," which signifies the need for reflection and humility in the presentation of results. Generally, these two last criteria are linked to "the process to assure that the interpretation is valid and grounded in the data" (Whittemore et al., 2001: 531). In order to further strengthen the interpretative power in the study, triangulation of methods has been used (as discussed earlier in this chapter). One example of how criticality and integrity has been sought is the feedback of results and cursory analysis during workshops with representatives from Advanced Engineering.

THEORETICAL GENERALIZABILITY

One important aim of qualitative research is to provide with new conceptual insights (Siggelkow, 2007). Becker (1998) argued that concepts in themselves represent generalizations that can be used, tested, and refined in further empirical studies. This thesis provides a conceptual framework for understanding contemporary work, which is becoming increasingly based on logics of temporariness and flexibility – an effort which has been called for by several researchers (Ashford et al., 2007; Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Walsh et al., 2006).

Taking stance in previous literature the use of the concept of liminality as a lens to discern effects and consequences of more flexible organizing, this thesis provides distinction in how liminality can be operationalized in different types of management and organization studies. Moreover, it develops the framework of liminality by conceptualizing different types of liminality at work, as well as practices that can be used to handle that liminality. Also, the thesis suggests how competent behavior can be understood in relation to holding liminal positions at work, as well as how such competence can be developed. Thus, this thesis both *engenders new concepts* and *elaborates the existing concept* of liminality. Therefore, I argue, this thesis offers theoretical generalizability as it suggests a framework of liminality; that is, analytical concepts, that can be used and developed in other studies (Yin, 2009) for understanding work in-between.

EMPIRICAL TRANSFERABILITY

Qualitative research can also provide with empirical transferability. To generalize results from a qualitative study it is also important to clarify the underlying assumptions so that others following can determine the degree of "'fit' between the situation studied and others to which one might be interested in applying the concepts and conclusions of that study" (Schofield, 2002: 198). Therefore, I here discuss the underlying aspects of this study, and how the results could be transferred to other contexts.

This study focuses on a specific kind of mobile project workers, technical consultants working for a Swedish consulting firm. They hold liminal positions which imply the characteristics of mobility and structural ambiguity. This type of work situation; where individuals are expected to move from one ambiguous context to another, is not unique for technical consultants. We find evidence of this in previous studies (elaborated on in the second chapter in this thesis) where certain work roles have already been denoted as liminal; consultants, temps, contractors, to name a few. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this study could likely be transferrable to other contexts with the same preset conditions.

When discussing transferability, one needs to take into account that this study takes its departure in a knowledge intensive industry and that the study is based on a sample of individuals with a university degree in engineering. Occupational roles can for example affect people's sense of commitment towards their work (Irving et al., 1997). Thus, the

engineering mobile project workers' experience of, and ways of dealing with, liminality at work might therefore differ from other occupational groups. Further research would therefore be needed in order to establish the transferability of results from this study to other occupational groups.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF PAPERS

This chapter provides a starting point for the concluding discussion presented in Chapter 6 by briefly presenting of the five papers that constitute the basis of this thesis. The five papers are summarized and their main results are presented in this chapter. Finally, the papers' respective contributions to answering the aim and research questions in the thesis are compiled in a table.

PAPER I

"Moving in, moving on: Liminality practices in project-based work"
Borg, E & Söderlund, J., (2014)*. Employee Relations.* 36(2): 182–197.

This paper focuses on how mobile project workers experience liminality at work, what types of situations are experienced as liminal and how they deal with these situations. More specifically, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the practices that mobile project workers rely upon to deal with their liminal positions at work. The paper is based on 24 interviews with AE managers and consultants. The point of departure is two main streams of literature – "knowledge collectivities" and work-related "liminality" – which the paper tries to connect. The paper argues that project work in knowledge collectivities constitutes a situation of liminality at work, since the individual project workers hold temporary positions and work together outside of traditional functional boundaries. Moreover, structural ambiguity is amplified by the diversity of knowledge bases that should work together to reach the project goals.

The study shows that mobile project workers experience liminality most clearly when they consider their overall careers (continuously moving between assignments and projects), when they enter new assignments and projects, and when they leave them. Thus, to "move in" and "move on" are considered critical activities among mobile project workers. The paper also presents two types of liminality in project-based work, based on the mobile project workers' experience of their work. One type is primarily technical and technical/task-related, and the other primarily social and group-related. The paper also elaborates on how the mobile project workers deal with these two types of liminality. Two attitudes towards liminality are discerned: passive and active. The two types of liminality and the two attitudes towards it represent four ideal types of liminality practices; that is, practices the mobile project workers apply to deal with

liminality at work. These four practices are: "reputation reliance," "role carving," "relaxation," and "redefinition."

PAPER II

"Liminality competence: An interpretative study of mobile project workers' conception of liminality at work"

Borg, E & Söderlund, J., (forthcoming). Management Learning.

The aim of this paper is to understand the different ways that people can handle liminality at work. Related to this aim, the paper introduces the concept of "liminality competence". The paper is based on a sample of 13 mobile project workers who wrote diaries over a three-month period. Furthermore, the empirical material consists of follow-up interviews with the 13 mobile project workers as well as workshops and meetings with the diary participants.

The paper takes its departure in two streams of literature: that of work related liminality and that of competence from an interpretative approach. On this basis, the paper investigates the competences that mobile project workers use to navigate through a work situation characterized by liminality. The study shows three conceptions of work for mobile project workers: "work as assignment handling," "work as a learning platform," and "work as knowledge transfer." Furthermore, the paper identifies five main areas as the central for the mobile project workers' in their work: to analyze needs, to initiate change, to interpret contracts, to create trust, and to build, use, and transfer knowledge. Depending of their conception of work, the mobile project workers show different ways of approaching the five main attributes of work. Hence, the paper argues that the three conceptions of work respectively constitute three different levels of liminality competence.

The conception of work as knowledge transfer correlates to the highest level of liminality competence. The participants who hold this conception manage the liminality in a more constructive way than the others; they perceive liminality as positive and enabling, as a way to increase their scope of learning through simultaneous engagement in several organizations and through the promotion of role sliding. These individuals tend to promote liminality. However, mobile project workers who hold the conception of work as assignment handling show the lowest level of liminality competence. They experience negative stress due to mobility and structural ambiguity and try to minimize or even suppress liminality by focusing their efforts on solving their assigned technical problems in their present project. Holding the conception of work as a learning platform represents the second, or middle, level of liminality competence. Although these mobile project workers find positive aspects and possibilities with liminality at work, such as increased flexibility and access to a larger range of learning activities, the liminal character of their work is also coupled with negative stress and frustration over unclear work boundaries.

PAPER III

"The nature and development of liminality competence: Narratives from mobile project workers"

Borg, E & Söderlund, J. (under review)

This paper aims to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of (high) liminality competence and to investigate how a high level of liminality competence can be developed among mobile project workers. The paper is based on the narratives of the work experience and careers of two mobile project workers who hold a high level of liminality competence. The narratives are based on written diaries and multiple interviews with the two participants.

The paper's point of departure is an interpretative approach to competence. The paper aims to find how a higher level of liminality competence is developed throughout the two mobile project workers' careers. One of the participants developed a high level of liminality competence early on in his career, while the other developed it after several years as a mobile project worker. The analysis of the empirical material focuses on how the participants' perceptions of their work (and course of action towards it) change in the course of their careers, and what triggers an elevation in competence level.

The paper discusses three processes that were identified as important for developing a high level of liminality competence. The first process is "understanding the value of in-betweenness," which is related to the individuals' acceptance of their role as being separated from traditional norms about what employment is and what engineering work should be. An important aspect in this process is the perception that moving around in work is an important and preferable feature of work, as this implies the possibility of entering new exciting problem-solving contexts. The second process, "understanding the role of the liminar as different," involves emphasizing the relational character of work. During this process, the mobile project workers could, for example, take on more of an advisory role and engage more actively in networking. The third process is named "translating liminal experience through reflexivity." This process is tightly linked to reflexivity with respect to what happens in the mobile project workers' assignments, in their organizations and in the clients' organizations. The paper also demonstrates that the project context and critical events, such as the change of assignments, are important for the development of higher liminality competence, since critical events can trigger new ways of perceiving an individual's role as a mobile project worker.

PAPER IV

"Enhancing liminality through formal training: Creating alterities through rites of passage"

Borg, E & Pantic-Dragisic, S. (under review)

This study investigated how an introductory development program (IDP) for newly-hired technical consultants addresses the liminal positions of mobile project workers, and whether (and how) IDP can help participants deal with positions of liminality at work. The paper relies on participative observations from IDP seminars during which the participants write about and discuss their experiences of work and how they meet challenges in their work. The empirical material also consists of interviews with developers, leaders and participants of the IDP.

The findings show that, unlike traditional organizational introduction programs, this IDP does not emphasize socialization of the participants so that they identify with the company; instead, their alterity is emphasized – they are *not* client employees. Thereby, the IDP enhances the mobile project workers liminal positions by stressing their role as inside-outsiders in the projects in which they perform their work. Moreover, the study shows that the IDP participants learned to make use of "distancing techniques," metaphorically distancing themselves from the different organizational contexts that they encounter in their work (their projects, client line departments, client's clients, and the consulting firm) in order to deal with ambiguities in their work. These distancing techniques show the effect of broadening the mobile project workers' scopes of action.

PAPER V

"The concept of liminality in management and organization studies: Past accomplishments and future challenges"

Borg, E.

This paper presents a systematic review of papers within the field of management and organization studies that use the concept of liminality. The paper aims to shed light on different areas of application of liminality and accomplishments of previous research, thereby also laying a foundation for future studies of liminality within this field. After using explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria for the papers to include, 22 articles were sampled and included in the review.

The paper shows that the concept of liminality has three primary applications within the sampled articles*:* "liminality as a process," "liminality as a position," and "liminality as a space." Liminality as a process has been studied at an individual and an organizational level. At the individual level, the key question asked in the literature was: "How are people affected by going through liminal phases at work?" At the organizational level, the key question asked in the literature was: "How can organizational liminal processes (of change) be managed?" This approach to liminality is the one most similar to van Gennep's original construction of the concept. Research on liminality as a position

focused on positions in working life that are described as liminal. For this approach, the following two main questions were found in the literature: (1): "How does working in a position betwixt and between conventional positions in organizational structures affect the individuals holding them?" and (2) "How are firms affected by involving individuals holding liminal positions?" Regarding the third application, liminal a space were described as locations in which traditional routines, norms, and activities are suspended and renegotiated. Here, the key question asked in research was, "What constitutes liminal spaces in organizational contexts?"

At the time of the literature review, liminality as a process and liminality as a position had received more scholarly attention than liminal spaces.

SUMMARIZING TABLE

Table 2 below briefly summarizes the papers with regard to the research questions they address in this thesis, the methods used, and the papers' main contribution.

Paper	Research question addressed	Research methods and data	Contribution
Paper I	RQ1 and RQ2	Interviews with four consultant managers and 20 consultants. One workshop with managers.	Four ideal practices mobile project workers use to deal with liminality: (1) role carving, 2) redefinition, (3) relaxation, and (4) reputation reliance.
Paper II	RQ1 and RQ3	Weekly diary and follow-up interviews with 13 consultants. One workshop with consultants.	Three identified conceptions of work, and corresponding levels of liminality competence. The three conceptions were: (1) work as assignment handling, (2) work as a learning platform, and (3) work as knowledge transfer.
Paper III	RQ3	Weekly diary and follow-up interviews, focused on individual two consultants.	The nature of liminality competence comprises of the individual's ability to actively address both social and technical liminality. Also, three processes for developing liminality competence are identified: (1) understanding the value of in-betweenness, (2) understanding the role of the liminar as different and, (3) translating the liminal experience through reflexivity. The importance of triggering events to elevate liminality competence is highlighted.
Paper IV	RQ4	13 observations, 11 interviews with IDP participants, four interviews with IDP leaders and four interviews with key individuals in the IDP.	The studied program elevated the characteristics of liminality for the participating mobile project workers though emphasizing their alterity (rather than focus on socializing them into an AE-identity). The paper also introduces the idea of distancing techniques that provide the participants with a broader scope of action to deal with the ambiguous character of their liminality at work.
Paper V	General aim	Literature review of 22 articles.	Reviews the concept of liminality within management and organization literature, and proposes three distinct applications of liminality: *liminality as a process, liminality as a position* and *liminality as a space.*

Table 2 An overview of the thesis' five papers

CHAPTER 6

A SYNTHESIZED CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This chapter of the extended summary presents the synthesized findings and contributions of the appended papers. As a reminder to readers, the general aim of this thesis is to investigate how mobile project workers experience and deal with liminality at work and what competences they develop in order to deal with this particular work situation. The chapter is structured according to the empirical research questions presented in the introduction. The chapter begins by reporting on how mobile project workers experience their liminal work situation. The chapter then covers the practices that mobile project workers use to deal with liminality at work. Thereafter the chapter reports on what constitutes liminality competence and how such competence can be developed, before ending with a discussion on how formal training affect mobile project workers' development of liminality competence.

MOBILE PROJECT WORKERS' EXPERIENCE OF LIMINALITY AT WORK

This thesis has used the concept of liminality to address mobile project work. The literature review presented in Paper V, which discusses the concept of liminality within management and organization research identifies three main approaches to the study of liminality at work. The approach used for this study is that of liminality as position, rather than looking at liminality as a process or as a space. Therefore this thesis puts focus on work characteristics of mobility and structural ambiguity (Tempest & Starkey, 2004) as the basis for mobile project workers liminality at work. With this in mind, the topic addressed here – how mobile project workers experience their liminal work situation – aims to study which parts of mobile project work are especially challenging due to the liminal character of mobile project work, as well as how project workers perceive of liminality at work.

MOVING IN, MOVING OUT, MOVING ON

As reported in Paper I, three aspects emerged from the interviews as particularly challenging in terms of the work's liminal character. The first occasion on which the ambiguity linked to liminality becomes particularly clear is when the mobile project

worker is “moving in” and enters a new project or assignment. The second is when the project worker is “moving out” from the current project and assignment. The third aspect is related to “moving on,” which entails how the mobile project workers view their careers and their moving between different projects and assignments.

Concerning “moving in,” many of the mobile project workers, regardless of the extent of their work experience, mentioned “fuzzy” and unclear beginnings. Some mobile project workers experience this ambiguity primarily in social terms; for example, related to questions such as which contacts to make, and what kind of social interactions to have with other project members or people in the client organization. Other mobile project workers identified technical ambiguities when entering a project. Examples include problems associated with design features and technical specifications, or situations when necessary equipment is missing at the beginning of the assignment which becomes a hindrance for the performance of the work. The fuzziness and ambiguity in the *moving-in* stage is also related to unclear assignment specifications. Nevertheless, many of the interviewed consultants said that ambiguity is an inherent and salient characteristic in project-based work, since both assignments and projects change continuously. However, the technical and social ambiguities are most obvious, and sometimes even overwhelming, when entering projects. Therefore, the mobile project workers must somehow untangle their tasks as well as their social role in their projects and assignments. The approach that the individuals took to unravel these ambiguities differed. Some respondents expressed a need to rely on a passive approach; to relax and wait until things were sorted out, while others stressed the need to be active; that is, to establish a role and act as an advisor to the client.

The second aspect of the mobile project working life that emerges as both important and challenging is “moving out;” that is, leaving the current project. Several of the interviewed mobile project workers stated that they would like to change projects and assignments on a more regular basis than they currently do because they seek the challenge of changing environments and projects. However, other consultants expressed satisfaction with their present client and would like to remain with them, as long as they were able to keep working with the specific technology of their choice. AE managers also talked about the importance of promoting and facilitating mobility among the consultants, which they felt is a balancing act. The managers emphasized the need to allow the mobile project workers to remain in an assignment long enough to mature in their roles and learn essential technical skills, but also to allow them to move between different projects and firms so they can build a broad repertoire of skills. Hence, moving out is an aspect of work that many mobile project workers strive for, but is sometimes difficult to obtain; consequently, this aspect of project work emerges as a complex issue.

The “moving-on” aspect refers to creating a career as a mobile project worker. Most of the interviewees chose to work as mobile project workers because it offered the possibility to move across exciting projects and challenging problem-solving situations. Others describe consulting work as a type of safety net; when a project ends, they still

have the affiliation with AE to fall back on. Thus, although they express an awareness of negative elements and consequences of working as mobile project workers, such as negative stress and uncertainty, many still prefer this alternative to "regular engineering employment". Part of moving on involves continuously dealing with ambiguities, both with regard to dual affiliation between the client firm/project and the consulting firm, and with regard to fuzzy technical and social situations within the project. Many consultants actively search for this ambiguity, because it implies the freedom to choose to participate in technical and social aspects of work, both in the project and in the consulting firm, and the freedom *not* to participate in other aspects of work, for example specific decision making or even conflicts.

TECHNICAL AND SOCIAL LIMINALITY

Based on the interviews in the first phase of the study and on the interviewees' description of their work situation, a distinction can be seen between social and technical, or task-related, liminality in mobile project work. Due to the transient character of the mobile project work, the individuals continuously face ambiguities related to the social and task-related aspects of their work. The division between social and technical liminality can be linked to the research by Faulkner (2007), who concluded that engineering work primarily involves a technical and a social dimension. Moreover, as argued by Bloomfield and Danieli (1995), these dimensions are usually tightly nestled; however, distinguishing between the two aspects of liminality at work could increase our understanding of the challenges that mobile project workers must deal with. The two types of liminality in project-based work are described in greater detail below.

Social liminality appears in situations that are socially ambiguous and challenging. These ambiguities can be linked to issues concerning one's social role in the project, such as whether the mobile project worker should take on an advisory role or be more laid back and function more like a resource, as an "ordinary" project member. Social liminality could also regard questions of participation, such as whether the mobile project worker should go for breaks with colleagues, or whether he or she must participate in discussions that arise in the project team – or remain as an "outsider" and focus solely on the job. Thus, social liminality also concern belonging, as they are simultaneously inside-outsiders in the project and outside-insiders in the consulting firm. Mobile project workers must create spaces for themselves in their projects and gain trust from the other team members, which can sometimes be stressful. The following quote from an interviewee in Paper I illustrates a situation that resembles social liminality:

> Often as a consultant, you enter the station when the train has already left. So at first, you have to run to catch up. First, you must get to know the people and establish yourself.

The findings of social liminality could aid in further developing and conceptualizing the results reported by Barley and Kunda (2006). In their study of contractors they found

that "[a]lthough a contractor's position in a client's organization was usually defined well enough in terms of legal terms, how he or she actually fit into the social fabric of organizational life was problematic" (Barley & Kunda, 2006: 49). In this quote, the authors particularly address social liminality. Furthermore, the findings presented in the present thesis also show that mobile project workers find that social ambiguity and dual belonging is beneficial for them, partly because it provides freedom (cf. Garsten, 1999). The dual belonging also provides security. The feeling of enhanced security is based on the fact that the mobile project workers rely on their consultancy firm to offer them a new assignment when their current assignment ends.

Technical liminality, on the other hand, occurs in such situations as when the problem-solving context is new, or when the problem-solving situation is unclear. In line with this, Barley and Kunda (2006) report that the definition of technical skills are never clear cut for contractors, which leads to task-related ambiguities in assignments that the contractors somehow need to deal with. Mobile project workers must continuously untangle assignment specifications and solve technical problems that occur in the project. Some of the interviewees described how they deal with such situations by actively participating in creating new solutions. On other occasions, they take a more passive approach and leave the problem for client employees to sort out because it is "not their job". Technical liminality could also arise when the mobile project workers cannot get access to the necessary equipment because they are not formal employees at the client firm. One of the interviewees described one such aspect of his job as follows:

> In my opinion, you should have a good structure [in the programming]. But they [at the client company] are stuck in what they used to do. Outside [the firm] a lot of things have happened, there are new ways and new concepts, but they have a problem embracing it. Therefore, it is hard for me at times, because this is obvious; this is what I have been taught. But it's like; "we can do as we've always done" – and that is the problem; that is why it is the way it is now. … They are good, but they have an outmode way of thinking when it comes to technology. But they'll come around eventually.

Based on the interviewees' account of experiencing different types of liminality in their work in the first phase of this study, the second phase investigated in greater depth how liminality at work was perceived in more general terms. These results are presented in the next section.

THREE PERCEPTIONS OF LIMINALITY AT WORK

Paper II concluded that mobile project workers have different perceptions of what it implies to hold a liminal position, engaging in work that takes place in liminality. The results of that paper show that there are three principal ways for mobile project workers to perceive their work: "work as assignment handling," "work as a learning platform," and "work as knowledge transfer." In Paper II, these perceptions are coupled with different levels of liminality competence, which will be discussed further below.

Mobile project workers who perceive of "work as assignment handling" expressed that they are primarily motivated by technical challenges in their assignments, and they focus on problem solving in the near future. In the narratives of these mobile project workers, they usually do not differentiate themselves from the other employees in the project; instead, they wish to be part of the project team and search for a clear role and stability in their projects. In this way, these mobile project workers strive to minimize the liminality at work. In their diaries and interviews, these individuals did not spontaneously reflect on liminal characteristics of their work; that is, that they hold ambiguous roles or are affected by temporariness, more than in the case of direct questions concerning their consultant contracts. When responding to this type of question, they found the liminal characteristics stressful and an element of negative uncertainty. These mobile project workers explained their decision to pursue such an occupation by referring to the need to be a consultant in order to work with their preferred area of expertise. Thus, rather than choosing a liminal career, in conformity to Turner's liminoid artists (1982), liminality at work has been somewhat forced upon these workers. Paper II concludes that the mobile project workers who hold this conception experience negative effects of liminality at work, such as negative stress and a weakening of power to determine their own future (Garsten, 1999), rather than enjoying its freedom of avoiding commitment and the possibility to enhance their learning opportunities (Tempest & Starkey, 2004).

The mobile project workers who perceive of "work as a learning platform" spontaneously reflected on how liminality affects their work situation. These workers found that the liminal characteristics of their work imply a responsibility to re-interpret their roles and the problem-solving context, although they also found this work frustrating. Moreover, the workers who have this perception benefit from being in-between organizational structures by actively engaging in activities offered by the client firm as well as the consulting firm. These mobile project workers can be compared to the liminars described in Garsten's work (1999) in that they clearly experience both positive and negative consequences of work liminality. They express how they both have a broader learning opportunity because of the work liminality (cf. Tempest & Starkey, 2004), but also that they sometimes suffer from not clearly affiliating with any team or organization and from the ambiguities that arise from this type of work arrangement.

The third conception is that of "work as knowledge transfer." Mobile project workers who have this perception of work express a high awareness of liminality in their work. They perceive this as a work situation that offers many opportunities, so they often promote liminality in terms of increased mobility and views liminality as a chance to improve their work. These mobile project workers, similar to the inter-organizational managers in Ellis and Ybemas' study (2010), expressed a multiple organizational belonging and inclusion, and consciously try to use this to their advantage in order to expand the scope of learning and take on exciting tasks within their project, or new assignments.

FOUR LIMINALITY PRACTICES

As noted earlier, project-based work includes both social and technical liminality and also different ways to deal with these specific situations. This finding leads to the question of what practices mobile project workers use in order to deal with social and technical liminality in their everyday work. This second research question is addressed in this section, based on findings in Paper I.

As already mentioned, the identified liminality practices are based on the distinction between social and technical liminality. They emerge from a distinction between active and passive approaches towards dealing with those ambiguous situations. Thus, four practices were identified in the first study phase: "reputation reliance," "role carving," "relaxation," and "redefinition," as presented in Figure 5 below (Borg & Söderlund, 2014: 191). It should be noted though that these practices represent ideal types (Doty & Glick, 1994), social and technical liminality at work are often closely intertwined and there will not always be a clear distinction between them. Nonetheless, the practices emerge from the empirical material, and can make an important contribution to our knowledge of how mobile project workers deal with their work situation.

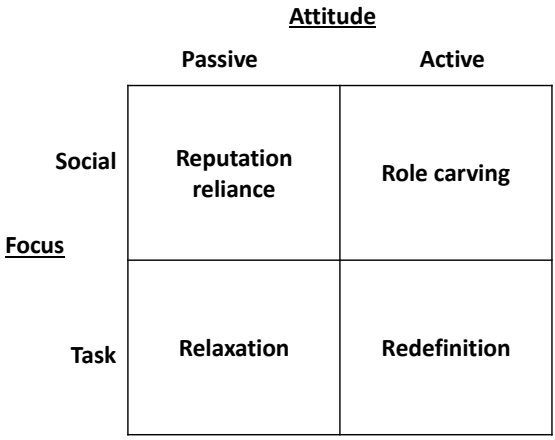

Figure 5 Four ideal types of liminality practices in project-based work

The practice of "reputation reliance" occurs when a mobile project worker adopts a passive attitude towards social liminality at work. This practice implies that the mobile project worker takes a somewhat laid-back position with regard to shaping and making relationships in the project. Instead of actively trying to carve out a specific role in the client project, the consultant waits to see what behavior and role the consultant's colleagues or managers expect him or her to adopt. Within this practice, the general reputation of AE consultants is important; individual mobile project workers can adopt a passive approach because AE consultants generally have good reputations at client sites. This good reputation lays the foundation for credibility and trust building in the temporary project groups (cf. Meyerson et al., 1996). Therefore, managers, both from

the consultant firm and from the line department in the client firm (that allocates the project workers into specific client project(s)) are important actors in creating this reputation for the liminars. Accordingly, reputation reliance is closely linked both to background ("being an engineer", "being well-educated") and belonging ("being a trustworthy consultant").

The liminality practice of "role carving" implies an active attitude towards social liminality. Role carving occurs when the mobile project worker works actively to establish a role in the project, often to enhance good personal reputation and employability. An example is shown in Paper I, where a mobile project worker described how he takes on an advisory role in the client project, which suggested that the project needed him for reasons other than those for which they originally hired him. The practice of role carving has previously been discussed in the literature, albeit not under that particular label. For example, Barley and Kunda (2006) stressed the importance of contractors carving out roles in order to be able to learn to live with their liminality. Moreover, Meyerson et al. (1996) highlighted the importance of rather fixed and clear-cut role definitions in order to enable swift trust; however, this seems difficult in a liminal context as the roles are seldom clear-cut. Therefore, mobile project workers instead refer to the need to create a role and to take part in constructing positions for themselves.

"Relaxation" is a liminality practice that involves adopting a passive attitude towards technical liminality. Several interviewed consultants referred to the importance of "waiting and seeing" until task-related ambiguities got sorted out by someone else. This passive approach was typically used when the mobile project workers felt that they were only moderately able to affect their situation and that it should be dealt with by the client or the rest of the project members. An example of such a situation was when a lack of proper equipment hindered the mobile project workers from working efficiently or even from working at all. Here, there was a discernable difference between junior and senior mobile project workers. Experienced consultants typically realized there was not much they could do about the situation, so they used their outsider identity to reduce the feeling of frustration and ambiguity; consequently, they did not find such situations particularly stressful. The senior mobile project workers were typically able to draw on previous experience from similar situations to ease the negative feelings of not being involved. This also centers on the importance of having experienced similar problem-solving situations (Sandberg, 2000). Junior mobile project workers, on the other hand, found these situations relatively troublesome and stressful.

The liminality practice of "redefinition" involves an active approach towards technical liminality. When adopting this practice, mobile project workers reinterpret and reformulate complex problems (cf. Hargadon & Bechky, 2006) more than they commonly would in their everyday work. This practice usually implies that people draw on knowledge and experiences from previous projects and assignments to improve on the quality of work in their current project. The interviewees said that this practice of

redefinition, involves striking a balance between suggesting improvements in the project without offending the client. In her study of independent contractors, Fenwick (2007) reported on similar observations. In that study, the contractors stated that they can often detect when a project is poorly handled, but that "they must proceed delicately to determine how to shift management's thinking without jeopardizing the contract or their reputation" (Fenwick, 2007: 518).

Table 3 summarizes some of the important features that constitute the four liminality practices (elaborated model, cf. Borg & Söderlund, 2014: 193). The table comprises what would be the main "intention" of relying on the specific practices and the "maxim" behind the liminality practice; that is, the main principal that the liminar expressed why he or she relies on that specific practice. Moreover, the table points to the personal "assets" the individual makes use of in the practice and what "mechanisms and activities" seem to be important in order to make use of each practice.

	Reputation Reliance	**Role Carving**	**Relaxation**	**Redefinition**
Intention	Relying on reputation to build trust, prepare for trust and observe social dynamics.	Clarifying expectations to reduce role overload, build role-based trust, make oneself irreplaceable.	Await signals and integration results from more central players, prepare for action and initiatives.	Reduce complexity and sort out assignments at the overall level to make local problem-solving possible.
Maxim	"Give me a role; let me be a member of the team."	"I will make myself a role, build a platform and build on a good résumé."	"Give me a task when you're ready, I am ready."	"I will change the problem-solving situation."
Assets	Reputational assets and individual, social capital.	Professional assets, role capital.	Occupational assets, knowledge from similar problem-solving situations.	Technical assets, human capital.
Mechanisms and activities	Relating, informal discussions, management support.	Role descriptions, negotiation, team member interactions, discussions with management.	Task specifications, observations, listening, reflecting.	Building a platform, networking, convincing, sensing, and communication.

Table 3 A comparison of the four liminality practices

THE CONSTITUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF LIMINALITY COMPETENCE

The previous sections have discerned some important elements of work for mobile project workers; one is that this work situation entails two types of liminality: social and technical/task-related. Moreover, these liminality types can be dealt with either passively or actively, giving rise to four distinct liminality practices. Nevertheless, when it comes to liminality at work in more general terms, three different perceptions emerge; work as assignment handling, work as a learning platform and work as knowledge transfer. Following the work of Sandberg (2000), a person's perception of work lays the foundation for his or her competence. In other words, a person's conception of work is a precondition for how his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities are organized "into a distinctive competence in performing the work" (Sandberg, 2005: 54). Based on the interpretative approach to competence, Paper II investigates mobile project workers' liminality competence – that is, how people deal with liminality at work competently. Therefore, the three different perceptions of work presented above correspond to three levels of liminality competence. This section starts by presenting these three levels of liminality competence, drawn from the findings in Paper II. With the additional findings from Paper III, the nature of the highest level of liminality competence is explored. I end the section by elaborating on how a high level of liminality competence can be developed, which also draws upon findings presented in Paper III.

WHAT CONSTITUTES LIMINALITY COMPETENCE?

As mentioned, this part of the thesis relates to the three conceptions of work presented above: "work as assignment handling," "work as a learning platform," and "work as knowledge transfer". The mobile project workers' found that liminality at work held different possibilities and challenges, depending on their perception of work. The mobile project workers' conceptions of work essentially affect what knowledge, skills, and abilities they adopted to meet the perceived work demands (cf. Sandberg, 2000). Consequently, the perception of project-based work forms the basis for how the individual act and solve problems at work (that is, what tasks the individual focus on and how the individual approach them) – thus constituting a person's level of liminality competence.

To understand the components of liminality competence, one must understand the main attributes of work and how the workers' ascribe meaning to the attributes and also act upon them (Sandberg, 2000). Based on diaries and interviews during the second phase of this study, the following five core attributes of mobile project work were distinguished: "analyzing needs," "dealing with change," "interpreting contracts," "creating trust," and "developing, using, and transferring knowledge." These five attributes signify important aspects that the individual must meet in order to deal with liminality at work. They are important as the mobile project workers enter a project context in which they are inside-outsiders. They need to establish themselves in a new context and contribute to value to the client. The must also deal with a particular duality in their work, as at the same time as they perform work in the client firm, they must also

somehow contribute to their employer, namely the consulting firm. Therefore, even if some of the work attributes could be viewed as core to project-based work in general, the mobile project workers' liminal position makes them more significant. The five abovementioned core attributes of work constitute what the mobile project workers describe as the main activities that they must deal with to perform their liminal work successfully.

The studied mobile project workers interpreted the meaning of the attributes differently and, accordingly, had different opinions on how these core areas should be performed (cf. Chen & Partington, 2006). Consequently, their actions towards solving the different attributes of work differed according to their general perception of work. Table 4 below (Borg & Söderlund, prepublished: 11) illustrates how mobile project workers holding each conception approached and performed their work in relation to the five attributes of work. The number in parentheses indicates how many of the study's mobile project workers hold that specific conception of work.

Attribute	Conception 1: Work as assignments handling (5)	Conception 2: Work as a learning platform (4)	Conception 3: Work as knowledge transfer (4)
Analyze needs	Analyzes the needs of the closest project team, what (s)he needs to do to contribute to and achieve the team's objectives.	Analyzes the needs of the overall project, to reach the project goal effectively.	Analyzes the needs of the client organization as a whole (views the sequence of projects – what needs to be done to improve in future projects), as well as the project in which (s)he is working. Simultaneously analyzes the need for AE, how AE needs to develop, and how (s)he can contribute.
Initiate change	Participates in changes that are initiated by others; can also contribute in change efforts if requested by management.	Can propose change initiatives within the project and can manage it if specifically requested by management.	Actively looks for aspects to develop in the project and for possible improvements in the client organization as a whole. Independently raises such concerns with the client and usually participates in managing the change.
Interpret contracts	Views contracts as job description and role specification.	Realizes that some tasks need to be 'outside' of the contract and that the job demands the flexibility necessary to adapt to changes.	Acts as an ambassador for AE. Views the assignment as fluid rather than static. Takes advantage of this to lead the role towards interesting tasks.
Create trust	Focuses on doing his/her assigned task as well as possible in order to create trust from project managers and, by extension, also from AE managers.	Focuses on performing tasks both within and outside of the role description that move the team forward to gain the team members trust and, secondarily, to gain trust from project management and AE managers.	Takes independent and active initiative to perform tasks that are outside the role description with the intention to swiftly increase trust from team members, project management, and AE managers – and also with the intention of improving their reputation and trust from colleagues.
Build, use, and transfer knowledge	Uses task-specific knowledge and focuses on building knowledge necessary for the current project.	Builds and uses knowledge primarily in the current assignment. Also uses AE activities such as technology development teams and networks to develop.	Considers one of the major missions in work to use knowledge from other firms and contexts in the current assignment. Seizes (or creates) new opportunities to acquire new knowledge to build on the existing repertoire.

Table 4 Liminality competencies and corresponding attributes

The study shows that the three different conceptions of work constitute three hierarchical levels of liminality competence. The mobile project workers who perceived work as assignment handling hold the lowest level of liminality competence, while those holding the view of work as knowledge transfer hold the highest level. This hierarchical level is based on the extent to which the mobile project workers utilize the liminal aspects of their work.

Accordingly, the mobile project workers who hold the first conception of "work liminality as assignment handling" try to reduce liminality in their work situation. They look for stability and clarity and seem to feel that their positions are weakened as a result of not truly belonging to a traditional structure (cf. Tempest & Starkey, 2004). These workers focus their efforts on their current project and would rather work in one of the client firms if possible. However, due to the nature of their technical expertise, they had not been able to find a "traditional" engineering job.

Mobile project workers who conceived of "work as a learning platform" used their liminal positions to extend their learning opportunities. However, these individuals holding also tend to miss the security stemming from belonging to traditional structures. This could therefore be considered a "middle level" of competence. Sandberg (2000) argued that an elevation from one conception of work to the next, entering a higher level of competence, is rarely a straightforward process. Thus, this middle conception of work could be an indication of individuals starting to develop their perception of work as assignment handling to perceiving work as knowledge transfer, without fully developing the attributes needed to reach a higher competence level.

On the other hand, the mobile project workers holding the third conception of liminality "work as knowledge transfer," are those who seem best suited to deal with liminality at work. To a large extent, they experience positive effects of liminality through increased freedom (Garsten, 1999) and broader possibilities of learning (Tempest & Starkey, 2004). Furthermore, like the inter-organizational managers studied by Ellis and Ybema (2010), they seem able to shift between belonging and not belonging to different organizational context, such as the project, the client firm as a whole, and the consulting firm. Similar to what Turner (1982) argued, these liminars find advantages in being free from structural obligations. Turner described the situation for novices as follows:

> The novices are, in fact, temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure. This weakens them, since they have no rights over others. But it also liberates them from structural obligations. (Turner, 1982: 27)

This study of liminality competence enhances our knowledge of how working in liminal positions can have different effects for different people. Barley and Kunda (2006), in their study on contractors in the US, observed that people carve out roles for themselves in order to deal with the liminality that is inherent in mobile and ambiguous positions. These roles, the authors argue, also represent different client needs and discourses when hiring contingent workers (Barley & Kunda, 2004). With respect to the contractors

ways of dealing with work conditions characterized by temporariness, ambiguity and unclear loyalties, the authors argue;

> For some [contractors], the sense of being a second-class citizen was a constant source of anxiety, dissatisfaction, and irritation. Others took it in stride, or even found the distance that it created comforting. But one way or another, all contractors had to learn how to live with their liminality. To do so, they carved out roles for themselves, ranging from 'gurus' and 'trusted confidants' to 'hired guns' and 'warm bodies' (Barley and Kunda, 2006: 49)

In this quote the authors indicate that individuals are variously well equipped to deal competently with their liminal positions at work. However, in their different reports on their study Barley and Kunda with colleagues (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Barley & Kunda, 2006; Evans et al., 2004) do not elaborate on what the different roles or ways to deal with liminality actually imply. Thus, the concept of liminality competence could aid our understanding of why some people are better at taking advantage of working in-between. Moreover, the results indicate that some workers in the context of project work are better at "knowledge cycling" (Pantic-Dragisic & Söderlund, 2013); that is, transferring knowledge between different projects and organizations, by increasing mobility and also drawing on their networks to increase their own learning.

In light of the above discussion, the following section delves deeper into the nature of high liminality competence, and how such levels of competence can be achieved.

THE NATURE OF HIGH LIMINALITY COMPETENCE AND HOW IT CAN BE DEVELOPED

Paper III of this thesis discusses the nature of high liminality competence and how it can be developed. That paper shows that mobile project workers who hold a high level of liminality competence are aware of both social and task-related liminality in their work. They also take active steps to approach technical aspects as well as social aspects. This compares to workers with lower levels of liminality competence, for who a focus on technical aspects of work is more prominent.

Paper III also offers some insights into how a higher liminality competence can be developed. Three processes in this development are suggested: "understanding the value of in-betweenness," "understanding the role of the liminar as different," and "translating liminal experience through reflexivity."

The first process – "understanding the value of in-betweenness" – relates to the active choice of becoming and remaining a mobile project worker (cf. Barley & Kunda, 2004). This stems from the realization that working as a mobile project worker differs from "traditional engineering work" and contains certain extra obligations as well as an increased freedom and mobility between different projects, assignments, and client firms.

In the second process – "understanding the role of the liminar as different" – mobile project workers reflect on the possibilities that their liminal positions entail within

current projects and assignments. Here, the liminars start to take more active approaches towards ambiguous situations in their work and emphasize how their roles as inside-outsiders in their projects contribute to additional possibilities.

The third process – "translating liminal experience through reflexivity" – relates to the mobile project workers reflexive abilities; that is, their abilities to change perspectives from the immediate project environment to the client organization as a whole and on the relation between the consulting firm and the client firm. This type of meta-analysis of one's role has previously been linked to liminality and liminal spaces (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011; Turner, 1982); being betwixt and between enables people to "explore and experiment, and through this … reflect on current conditions" (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011: 2). When engaging in such reflexivity, mobile project workers are able to use their roles as inside-outsiders to affect the projects and the client organizations by taking on the role as advisor. They are also able to affect their careers and positions in the client and consulting firms through more clearly navigating towards the roles and challenges they wish to obtain. In this process, mobile project workers show a change of perception of work; they become aware of the benefits of liminality and the opportunities to take advantage of it.

The movement through these three processes and the subsequent change of how work is perceived is not necessarily automatic or straight-forward. The study demonstrates the importance of so-called triggering events for the process to evolve, and for a change of perception of work to take place (cf. Mitki et al., 2008). An example of a triggering event could be moving to another type of project, where the individual's previous assumptions of work are challenged. This reiterates the findings of Mitki et al. (2008: 78) that external triggering "can be sources of dissonance that stimulate sense-making processes" and can therefore create change in people's perceptions. In addition to, for example, Sandberg (2000), Chen and Partington (2006), Partington et al. (2005), and Dall'Alba and Sandberg (2006), the present study suggests that the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities is not enough to perform more successfully at work. However, it is also important to note that changing a conception of work is not the only determining factor of developing a higher level of liminality competence. Developed experience, knowledge, and skills obtained from different projects are also necessary.

This study has implications for our research on how competence is developed, from an interpretative approach. In order to develop mobile project workers to achieve a higher liminality competence, their knowledge, skills, and abilities must be developed alongside their perceptions of work. As suggested in Paper II, this finding has implications on training and development activities. Sandberg made the following observation regarding training and competence development from an interpretative perspective on competence:

> The most fundamental guiding principle is to take workers' conceptions of their work as the point of departure. Doing this does not mean that

> development activities such as classroom teaching, apprenticeship, on-the-job training, and job rotation should be abandoned, but rather, that they need to be designed and conducted in a way that actively promotes changes in workers' conceptions of their work. (Sandberg, 2000: 22)

This concept raises the question of how development activities for mobile project workers address their liminal situation and whether they provoke a change of perception of work. This question was addressed in the final study phase of this thesis, and the results are discussed in further detail below.

FORMAL TRAINING AND LIMINALITY

Paper IV presents findings from an Introductory Development Program (IDP) for newly hired mobile project workers. This paper's point of departure is in two approaches to the study of liminality: liminality as a process – with regards to the development program as such (cf. Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2002; Simpson et al., 2010) – and liminality as a position that the mobile project workers hold in their work (c.f. Garsten, 1999; Tempest & Starkey, 2004). Therefore, the IDP constitutes a liminal phase in which the mobile project workers become separated from their previous careers or student lives, and move through the liminal phase to become incorporated in the community of experienced consultants and engineers.

During the liminal phase of the IDP, the participants use what is referred to as "distancing techniques" that consist of writing and discussing liminal dimensions of their work and challenges they meet. Thus, the IDP becomes a space in which "people are allowed to think about how they think, about the terms in which they conduct their thinking, or to feel about how they feel in daily lives" (Turner & Schechner, 1988: 413). By using distancing techniques, mobile project workers seem to both cognitively and emotionally distance themselves from the project and client firms that they are working in. In relation to the findings of Paper III, the participants engage in the processes of understanding the role of the liminar as different and translating liminal experience through reflexivity. Through discussions with their peers about how they as mobile project workers can take active approaches to solve both technical and social ambiguities in their assignments, they engage in the process of understanding the role of liminar as different. This typically occurs when an individual presents a problem in his or her assignment and peers who have solved similar problems talk about their experiences and different possible solutions to such problems. Distancing techniques can thereby be used to reflect on both social and technical liminality. Such techniques helped the individuals to broaden their scope of action in their work, as they became more aware of how they could choose to be either active or passive in ambiguous situations.

The process of translating liminal experience through reflexivity is also apparent during the program, especially during the final seminars. The mobile project workers vacillate on such aspects as what actually constitute their "client" and how to contribute to the

various organizations and organizational units (client organization, clients' clients, client project, and the consulting firm). Thus, they altered and assimilated new perspectives and reevaluated their previous assumptions (Hibbert, 2009; Hibbert et al., 2010) with help from discussions and text writing.

Interestingly, unlike traditional introduction programs, the IDP does not emphasize socialization into the consulting firm (cf. Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010; Cable & Parsons, 2001). Instead the IDP places strong emphasis on the mobile project workers' "alterity" (Czarniawska, 2008); that is, who they are *not* – they are not client employees. In doing so, the IDP can be said to creating a sense of comradeship, or communitas, with the other participating mobile project workers (Turner, 1969); that is, a sense of shared status as an inside-outsider. However, with regards to their positions in client projects, the IDP focused on the participants' insider-outsider status. By doing so, the IDP emphasized their liminal positions. Accordingly, one could even argue that the participants' liminality is enhanced through the program.

Thus, the IDP addresses the mobile project workers' liminal positions. Also, by engaging the participants in distancing techniques, the program seems to trigger the processes of understanding the role of the liminar as different and translating liminal experience through reflexivity. Therefore, the use of distancing techniques could be an effective tool to use when training liminars, in order to engage them in changing perceptions of their work and thereby elevate their level of liminality competence (cf. Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 2006).

CHAPTER 7

CONTRIBUTIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this final chapter I elaborate on the contributions and implications of the research presented in this thesis, based on the five papers and the synthesis of their findings presented in previous chapters. First, I address how this thesis contributes to research on flexible work by relating it to the literature on flexible work arrangements. Second, I elaborate on liminality competence and discuss its implications for competence research as well as for practice. Third, I discuss the need for taking individual workers and their differences into account in work and organization studies, providing some methodological implications for research. Fourth, I show how the thesis contributes to research on liminality, and how the findings presented here provide an elaborated language to address project-based work and its consequences. The chapter ends with suggestions for future studies.

ADDRESSING THE FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE

Recent literature has documented an increase in both the volume and importance of the contingent workforce, hired to increase firms' external flexibility (Ashford et al., 2007; Cappelli, 1999a; Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Kalleberg, 2009). Nevertheless, several authors have argued that the development of organization theory does not keep up with the changes in how contemporary work is performed and organized (Ashford et al., 2007; Kalleberg, 2001; Walsh et al., 2006). Ashford et al. (2007: 67) claimed that "nonstandard work is a topic worthy of study in and of itself and also an ideal context for testing and developing theory about organizations, work, and workers." Furthermore, Cappelli and Keller (2013: 851) noted that there are indeed many types of contingent work that need to be addressed separately in order to "develop, test, and extend management theory." Thus, an increased awareness of the specific challenges involved in different kinds of work has emerged. These challenges are not only important for organizational practice, but they are also for researchers to address and recognize.

The present thesis contributes to the understanding of nonstandard work arrangements by focusing on a specific type of worker, namely mobile project workers. These workers

are what Cappelli and Keller (2013) denoted as coemployed. Mobile project workers are employed by a consulting firm, but perform their work on temporary basis in client projects. This thesis presents both empirical descriptions of how mobile project workers experience and deal with their work situation, as well as some theoretical explanations to understand the *why*, the mechanism, behind their experience and ways of handling their work situation (cf. Ashford et al., 2007).

The present thesis provides a framework for understanding how individuals can adapt to "frequent moves from situation to situation" (Ashford et al., 2007: 100). The studies show that the work situation for mobile project workers entails both technical and social liminality. This means that workers experience ambiguities related to both technical and social arenas as a consequence of their mobile work situation. Examples of such challenges in the social dimension include finding a role in the project and assignment and finding a place in the client organization, while examples from the technical dimensions include reinterpreting and formulating the task at hand or getting access to necessary equipment and resources. The liminality practices presented in this thesis indicate that the workers can make use of their "triangular" contractual arrangement to draw upon resources from their own human capital, their formal employer (the consulting firm), and the client firm that leases them, in order to handle these types of liminality. Therefore, the liminality practices presented in this thesis offer a useful theoretical contribution that deciphers how individuals can gain and release control in relation to their triangular contractual arrangement and deal with the continuous movement between different projects, assignments and client sites. Moreover, the identified liminality passive practices indicate that, although a high level of individualization has been considered an important consequence of project-based work (Bredin, 2008; Packendorff, 2002), mobile project workers at times to great extent rely on several other stakeholders to shape their assignments and careers.

Moreover, the framework of liminality competence provides insights on how people who work in a triangular contractual arrangement have various levels of competence with regard to utilizing their work situation. The results presented in Paper II indicate that mobile project workers with a high level of liminality competence are able to utilize their in-between positions to shape their assignments, projects, and careers. Moreover, these individuals generally have a positive view on working in liminal positions. On the contrary, mobile project workers with the lowest level of liminality competence strive to minimize the effects of coemployment and would prefer a more stable work position. These individuals instead suffer more from holding a liminal position. Thus, the present research provides an understanding of how workers are variously suitable for flexible work arrangements. Moreover, these results can also provide a more nuanced view on the previous stated dichotomy between "good" regular jobs and "bad" nonstandard work arrangements (Ashford et al., 2007; Barley & Kunda, 2004; Cappelli & Keller, 2013). The results in this thesis suggests that the experience of nonstandard work as good or bad to large extent relies on peoples' perceptions of what work entails and their subsequent level of liminality competence.

UNCOVERING LIMINALITY COMPETENCE

The conceptualization of liminality competence constitutes an important theoretical explanation to why some people are more capable of managing and utilizing their liminal positions at work. The framework of liminality competence has several important implications, for research as well as for practice.

First, liminality competence indicate that there are not only differences to how people perform a specific type of work competently, which has been the primary focus for previous studies on competence (e.g., Sandberg, 2000; Zika-Viktorsson & Ritzén, 2005), it instead highlights that people can be differently apt for handling a particular *work situation* competently. Thus, this research suggests that although an individual could be competent at solving of a particular type problem, which people with the lower level of liminality competence could arguably be; the transient and ambiguous nature of working in a liminal position is a stressful element that they seek to avoid and thus fail to utilize. Accordingly, studies of competence at work would benefit from not only focusing on what constitutes competent performance in relation to a specific task or role, but also addressing how specific work situations could be handled more or less competently.

Moreover, the findings on liminality competence presented in Paper II and Paper III lead to some important questions and implications for our way of organizing, managing and training workers. First, since project-based and flexible work has been proposed as the new way of organizing, leaving the old large-scale, bureaucratic model obsolete (Cappelli, 1999a), we might ask ourselves; what happens with people holding a low level of liminality competence? Workers who feel pressured and experience negative stress from temporary work and fluid boundaries, do they still have a place in modern engineering work? Although this present thesis shows that it is possible to develop a higher level of liminality competence, thus becoming more able to utilize and thrive in liminal positions, it remains unclear whether all people are able to develop a high level of liminality competence. Therefore, an important question for practice is how people who show a low level of liminality competence should be managed and supported so that the negative effects of liminality are reduced or overcome.

Second, findings presented in Paper III suggest that the level of liminality competence could be developed through three cognitive processes, have implications for competence development activities for liminars. These results suggest that purposeful management of various types of projects and assignment can provide a trigger for a change of perceptions of work. Also, the use of distancing techniques such as writing texts, diaries and discuss work and its meaning, etc. could produce similar effects. Thus, competence development activities need to go beyond the one-sided focus on particular knowledge, skills and abilities used in performing work; they also need to target how liminars think about their work.

BRINGING WORKERS BACK IN

Another important contribution of the present thesis concerns its empirical focus and methodological implications. Previous research has emphasized a need to bring work back into work studies to fully understand contemporary organizational practice (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Walsh et al., 2006). Barley and Kunda (2001: 90) argued that there is a "dearth of data on what people actually do – the skills, knowledge, and practices that comprise their routine work – leaves us with increasingly anachronistic theories and outdated images of work and how it is organized." Several scholars of work have responded to this call and focused on people at work, discerning effects and consequences of modern organizing. However, there is one problem with these studies – although they take their departure in an individual level, the studies' results tend to bulk people into a homogenous mass. As a consequence, although these studies raise important questions on the effects of nonstandard and projectified organizing, they do not necessarily provide a nuanced picture that considers individual differences.

This thesis demonstrates that individual differences are important in the understanding of liminality at work and its effects on people, including the various effects connected to different perceptions of work. Similarly, some previous studies have shown that workers on nonstandard work arrangements can experience their work quite differently although they have a similar set of preconditions (Marler et al., 2002). Barley and Kunda (2004), for example, argued that independent contractors carve out different roles for themselves to navigate on the job market. Thus, the present research emphasizes the importance of not only bringing work back into studies on work and organizing, but to bring *workers* back in. Therefore, when studying work and different categories of nonstandard work arrangements (Cappelli & Keller, 2013), we must also take careful consideration to the potential individual differences in how people experience and handle that type of work.

MAKING SENSE OF CONTEMPORARY WORK

To develop language and offer new concepts to describe old as well as new phenomena can contribute to develop both researchers' and practitioners' understanding of work, and also to actually improve and change that world of work (Brunsson, 1982; Bryman & Bell, 2007; Corley & Gioia, 2011; Normann, 1976; Normann, 1993; Peshkin, 1993). Becker (1998: 128) writes that: "[i]n fact, concepts are empirical generalizations, which need to be tested and refined on the basis of empirical research results – that is, of knowledge of the world". What he implies is that through the development of new language and concepts, we are enabled to reach further understanding of a social phenomenon (Brunsson, 1982). Accordingly, developing the concept of liminality in the context of work has been an important aspect of this thesis.

In recent years, the concept of liminality has gained ground to create an improved understanding for contemporary working life (e.g., Garsten, 1999). The thesis provides a set of clarifications on what liminality entails and how it can be applied in work studies. I

argue that the studies reported here contribute with important distinctions for the future use of the concept of liminality. Previous studies have applied the concept of liminality in studying three different organizational phenomena: change processes, specific work positions, and organizational spaces. The aspects of ambiguity and temporariness are important in all the three approaches, albeit from different perspectives. As a consequence, when using the conceptual lens of liminality in future research it will be important for researchers to clarify the perspective used, so that comparisons, proposed contradictions to previous studies, and evolution of the concept will be cohesive and not an example of comparing apples and oranges.

Moreover, the present research offers an elaborated language for understanding transient positions in-between; such as mobile project work. As mentioned in the introduction, Lindkvist (2005) argued that the cross-functional character of project-based work is so specific that communities-of-practice is not a viable framework for understanding the constitution of project teams. Instead, Lindkvist suggested, cross-functional project groups are better conceptualized as knowledge collectivities. In a similar way, previous assumptions of what constitutes a traditional work position – the work position of the organizational man – is no longer viable; not for project workers, nor for workers in coemployed work arrangements. Instead a work position including mobility and structural ambiguity could better be conceptualized as liminal.

Furthermore, this thesis takes a first step towards understanding what kind of challenges liminal positions entail, as well as how individuals can and do handle those challenges. Thus, the conceptualization of the two types of liminality, the four liminality practices, the different levels of liminality competence, and the processes that forgo the development of higher level of liminality competence, help us to understand and talk about the work situation for mobile project workers and the working life in project-based work.

The conceptualizations presented in this thesis could also be of importance for practitioners. Through creating new language and concepts, researchers in the social sciences can describe and explain social phenomena in a way that can also make it understandable and offer new perspectives for practitioners (Brunsson, 1982). Hill and Levenhagen (1995) also argue that when people face an ambiguous situation, sensemaking (a mental model of the situation) and sensegiving (ways to communicate the mental model) are important in dealing with uncertainty. Accordingly, the various conceptualizations presented in the thesis can be used to make sense of some of the challenges project workers meet in their working life, as well as offer ideas and directions on how to can act upon them. I further argue that the different levels of liminality competence, as well as the processes leading to elevated liminality competence can be useful for human resource management, particularly for assessing and developing employees – both from the perspective of consulting firms, but also from the perspective of project-based organizations. Consequently, through developing this

"new language" to understand work in-between, both researchers and practitioners can develop their understanding of such work situations.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

An important part of qualitative studies is to derive new questions and identify problem areas for further research (Peshkin, 1993). This research on mobile project workers taps into the debates on nonstandard work arrangements and project-based work. As the present study provides some important conclusions about liminality at work, it also renders new questions and opens up new avenues for future research. In this final part of the thesis I will address three main suggestions for further investigations that could be particularly relevant.

One area that deserves more focus is that of liminality competence. This study takes the perspective of the individual mobile project workers and present three levels of liminality competence. The individuals holding the highest level of liminality competence are those who thrive in and make most use of liminality at work, whilst people holding the lower levels of liminality competence find liminality at work problematic and stressful. However, this study does not comprise of how the individual's liminality competence affects the consultancy firm or the client firms. One interesting avenue for future research is therefore to investigate the client and consultant firms' perspective on, and use of, liminality competence. What are the advantages in hiring mobile project workers with a particular level of liminality competence? How are mobile project workers with different levels of liminality competence perceived in the organization? What are the effects in terms of knowledge sharing from hiring individuals with different liminality competence? Focusing on the client perspective could generate knowledge that is of high practical use. For example on how individuals with different levels of liminality competence can be engaged and utilized in client projects, and how to improve the recruitment and development process in consulting firms.

The second issue for future research concerns the management of liminars. Cappelli and Keller (2013) argued that management of teams with heterogenic work arrangements is a topic that has been largely overlooked. The results from this study for example shows that people who have a low level of liminality competence seek to avoid liminality and its consequences, while those with a high level of liminality competence enjoy and take advantage of it. Consequently, people with different levels of liminality competence would arguably benefit from different types of management practices. Therefore, future studies could benefit from focusing both on the management of a blended workforce (with both standard and nonstandard work arrangements) as well as on how to manage liminars with different levels of liminality competence.

The third area for future research that I would like to emphasize is the consequences of liminality at work for individuals working under other conditions than those studied in this thesis. This study has been conducted in a knowledge intensive context, and takes its focus on technical consultants who have a permanent employment at a successful

consulting firm; that is, they have a coemployed work arrangement. However, as argued by Kalleberg (2009: 18): "[w]e need to understand the range of new workplace arrangements that have been adopted and their implications for both organizational performance and individuals' well-being" (cf. Cappelli & Keller, 2013). Accordingly, studies on how people deal with their liminal positions at work in other types of nonstandard work arrangements are needed to investigate similarities and differences in their experience, practices and competences with the findings presented in this thesis.

In sum, to close this thesis, I believe that what has been demonstrated through my studies offers new insights into what workers actually experience in a projectified and increasingly flexible world of work. At the same time, it opens up for new avenues for future research, research that might lead to even more sustainable and healthy organizations, projects, teams, and workforce.

REFERENCES

Allen TJ, Lee DMS and Tushman ML (1980) R & D performance as a function of internal communication, project management, and the nature of the work. *IEEE Transactions on engineering management* 27(1): 2-12.

Alvesson M (2002) *Postmodernism and Social Research.* London: Open University Press.

Alvesson M (2003) Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research. *The Academy of Management Review* 28(1): 13-33.

Alvesson M, Hardy C and Harley B (2008) Reflecting on reflexivity: Reflexive textual practices in organization and management theory. *Journal of Management Studies* 45(3): 480-501.

Alvesson M and Kärreman D (2011) *Qualitative Research and Theory Development: Mystery as Method.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Antonacopoulou EP and Güttel WH (2010) Staff induction practices and organizational socialization: A review and extension of the debate. *Society and business review* 5(1): 22-47.

Ashford SJ, George E and Blatt R (2007) Old assumptions, new work: The opportunities and challenges of research on nonstandard employment. *The Academy of Management Annals* 1(1): 65-117.

Bakker RM (2010) Taking Stock of Temporary Organizational Forms: A Systematic Review and Research Agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 12(4): 466-486.

Bakker RM, Cambré B, Korlaar L and Raab J (2011) Managing the project learning paradox: A set-theoretic approach toward project knowledge transfer. *International Journal of Project Management* 29(5): 494-503.

Bar-Lev S and Vitner G (2012) Performing a crisis: Institutional politics and the construction of (ir)responsibility. *Organization* 19(6): 667-684.

Barley SR and Kunda G (2001) Bringing work back in. *Organization Science* 12(1): 76-95.

Barley SR and Kunda G (2004) *Gurus, Hired Guns, and Warm Bodies: Itinerant Experts in a Knowlege Economy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Barley SR and Kunda G (2006) Contracting: A new form of professional practice. *Academy of Management Perspectives* 20(1): 45-66.

Bartsch V, Ebers M and Maurer I (2013) Learning in project-based organizations: The role of project teams' social capital for overcoming barriers to learning. *International Journal of Project Management* 31(2): 239-251.

Bechky BA (2006) Gaffers, gofers, and grips: Role-based coordination in temporary organizations. *Organization Science* 17(1): 3-21.

Becker HS (1998) *Tricks Of The Trade: How To Think About Your Research While You're Doing It.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Becker MC (2001) Managing dispersed knowledge: Organizational problems, managerial strategies, and their effectiveness. *Journal of Management Studies* 38(7): 1037-1051.

Beech N (2011) Liminality and the practices of identity reconstruction. *Human Relations* 64(2): 285-302.

Belassi W and Tukel OI (1996) A new framework for determining critical success/failure factors in projects. *International Journal of Project Management* 14(3): 141-151.
Bellini E and Canonico P (2008) Knowing communities in project driven organizations: Analysing the strategic impact of socially constructed HRM practices. *International Journal of Project Management* 26(1): 44-50.
Bergendahl J (2009) Entreprenörskapsresan genom beslutsprocesser i team: en elektronisk dagboksstudie i realtid. *Department of Business Administration.* Lund: Lunds University.
Berkowitz D (2011) Maternal instincts, biological clocks, and soccer moms: Gay men's parenting and family narratives. *Symbolic Interaction* 34(4): 514-535.
Blomberg J (2004) Appreciating stockbroking: Constructing conceptions to make sense of performance. *Journal of Management Studies* 41(1): 155-180.
Bloomfield BP and Danieli A (1995) The role of management consultants in the development of information technology: The indissoluble nature of socio political and technocal skills. *Journal of Management Studies* 32(1): 23-46.
Bolger N, Davis A and Rafaeli E (2003) Diary methods: Capturing life as it is lived. *Annual Review of Psychology* 54(1): 579.
Borg E (2012) Work liminality and liminality competence: A study of mobile project workers. *Department of Management and Engineering.* Linköping: Linköping University.
Borg E and Söderlund J (2014) Moving in, moving on: Liminality practices in project-based work. *Employee Relations* 36(2): 182-197.
Borg E and Söderlund J (prepublished) Liminality competence: An interpretative study of mobile project workers' conception of liminality at work. *Management Learning* January, 3, 2014.
Bound H and Lin M (2013) Developing competence at work. *Vocations and Learning* 6(3): 403-420.
Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77-101.
Bredin K (2008) Human resource management in project-based organisations: Challenges, changes and capabilities. *Department of Management and Engineering.* Linköping: Linköping University.
Bredin K and Söderlund J (2011) *Human Resource Management in Project-Based Organizations - The HR Quadriad Framework.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Brown JS and Duguid P (1991) Organizational learning and communities-of-practice: Toward a unified view of working, learning, and innovation. *Organization Science* 2(1): 40-57.
Brunsson N (1982) Företagsekonomi: Avbildning eller språkbildning. In: Brunsson N (ed) *Företagsekonomi - sanning eller moral? Om det normativa i företagsekonomis idéutveckling.* Lund: Studentlitteratur, pp. 100-112.
Bryman A (1984) The debate about quantitative and qualitative research: A question of method or epistemology? *British Journal of Sociology* 35(1): 75-92.
Bryman A and Bell E (2007) *Business Research Methods.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Byatt J (2012) Being dead? Trauma and the liminal narrative in J. G. Ballards crash and Tom McCarthys remainder. *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 48(3): 245-259.
Cable DM and Parsons CK (2001) Socialization tactics and person-organization fit. *Personnel Psychology* 54(1): 1-23.
Capaldo G, Iandoli L and Zollo G (2006) A situationalist perspective to competency management. *Human Resource Management* 45(3): 429-448.

Cappelli P (1999a) Career jobs are dead. *California management review* 42(1): 146-167.
Cappelli P (1999b) *The New Deal At Work: Managing The Market-Driven Workforce.* Boston: Harvard Business School.
Cappelli P and Keller J (2013) Classifying work in the new economy. *Academy of Management Review* 38(4): 575-596.
Chatenier E, Verstegen J, Biemans H, Mulder M and Omta O (2010) Identification of competencies for professionals in open innovation teams. *R&D Management* 40(3): 271-280.
Chen P and Partington D (2006) Three conceptual levels of construction project management work. *International Journal of Project Management* 24(5): 412-421.
Cheng M-I, Dainty AR and Moore DR (2005) Towards a multidimensional competency-based managerial performance framework: A hybrid approach. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 20(5): 380-396.
Claessens BJC, Van Eerde W, Rutte CG and Roe RA (2010) Things to do today . . . : A daily diary study on task completion at work. *Applied Psychology* 59(2): 273-295.
Cole CE (2013) Stories from the lived and living fieldwork process. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* 8(1): 50-69.
Corley KG and Gioia DA (2011) Building theory about theory building: What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review* 36(1): 12-32.
Creswell J (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
Cunha MP, Guimarães-Costa N, Rego A and Clegg SR (2010) Leading and following (un)ethically in limen. *Journal of Business Ethics* 97(2): 189-206.
Czarniawska B (2008) Organizing: How to study it and how to write about it. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management* 3(1): 4-20.
Czarniawska B and Mazza C (2003) Consulting as a liminal space. *Human Relations* 56(3): 267-290.
Dall'Alba G (1996) Reflections on phenomenography: An introduction. In: Dall'Alba G and Hasselgren B (eds) *Reflections on Phenomengraphy - Toward a Methodology?* Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, pp. 7-17.
Dall'Alba G (2004) Understanding professional practice: Investigations before and after an educational programme. *Studies in Higher Education* 29(6): 679-692.
Dall'Alba G and Sandberg J (2006) Unveiling professional development: A critical review of stage models. *Review of Educational Research* 76(3): 383-412.
Darlington Y and Scott D (2002) *Qualitative Research in Practice: Stories from the Field.* Buckingham: Open University Press.
De Michelis L (2012) Houses, memory and the nightmares of identity in Zoe Wicomb's playing in the night. *European Journal of English Studies* 16(1): 69-79.
DeFillippi R and Arthur M (1998) Paradox in project-based enterprise: The case of film making. *California management review* 40(2): 125-139.
DeFillippi RJ and Arthur MB (1994) The boundaryless career: A competency-based perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 15(4): 307-324.
Denscombe M (2010) *The Good Research Guide: For Small-Scale Social Research Projects.* Glasgow: Open University Press.
Denzin N and Lincoln Y (2005) Introduction: The dicipline and practice of qualitative research. In: Denzin N and Lincoln Y (eds) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Ltd., pp. 1-32.
DiCicco-Bloom B and Crabtree BF (2006) The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education* 40(4): 314-321.

Doty DH and Glick WH (1994) Typologies as a unique form of theory building: Toward improved understanding and modeling. *The Academy of Management Review* 19(2): 230-251.
Dreyfus H, Dreyfus S and Athanasiou T (1986) *Mind Over Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer.* New York: The Free Press.
Dwivedula R and Bredillet CN (2010) Profiling work motivation of project workers. *International Journal of Project Management* 28(2): 158-165.
Edmondson AC and Nembhard IM (2009) Product development and learning in project teams: The challenges are the benefits. *Journal of Product innovation management* 26(2): 123-138.
Edwards G (2011) Concepts of community: A framework for contextualizing distributed leadership. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 13(3): 301-312.
Eisenhardt KM (1989) Building theories from case study research. *The Academy of Management Review* 14(4): 532-550.
Eisenhardt KM and Graebner ME (2007) Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal* 50(1): 25-32.
Ekstedt E (2002) Contracts of work in a project-based economy. In: Sahlin-Andersson K and Söderholm A (eds) *Beyond project management: new perspectives on the temporary-permanent dilemma.* Malmö: Liber, pp. 59-80.
Ekstedt E (2009) A New Division of Labour the "Projectification" of Working and Industrial Life. In: Moreau M-A (ed) *Building Anticipation of Restructuring in Europe.* Bruxelles: Lang, pp. 31-54.
Ekstedt E, Lundin RA, Soderholm A and Wirdenius H (2003) *Neo-Industrial Organising: Renewal by Action and Knowledge Formation in a Project-Intensive Economy.* London: Routledge.
Ellis N and Ybema S (2010) Marketing identities: Shifting circles of identification in inter-organizational relationships. *Organization Studies* 31(3): 279-305.
Ellström P-E (1997) The many meanings of occupational competence and qualification. *Journal of European industrial training* 21(6/7): 266-273.
Eriksson-Zetterquist U (2002) Gender construction in corporations. In: Czarniawska B and Höpfl H (eds) *Casting the Other: Production and Maintenance of Inequality in Organizations.* London: Routledge, pp. 89-105.
Eskerod P and Blichfeldt BS (2005) Managing team entrees and withdrawals during the project life cycle. *International Journal of Project Management* 23(7): 495-503.
Evans JA, Kunda G and Barley SR (2004) Beach time, bridge time, and billable hours: The temporal structure of technical contracting. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 49(1): 1-38.
Faulkner W (2007) 'Nuts and bolts and people': Gender-troubled engineering identities. *Social Studies of Science* 37(3): 331-356.
Fenwick T (2006) Tidying the territory: Questioning terms and purposes in work-learning research. *Journal of Workplace Learning* 18(5): 265-278.
Fenwick T (2007) Knowledge workers in the in-between: Network identities. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 20(4): 509-524.
Fenwick T (2010) Re-thinking the “thing”: Sociomaterial approaches to understanding and researching learning in work. *Journal of Workplace Learning* 22(1/2): 104-116.
Flick U (2009) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research.* London: Sage Publications.

Fong PSW (2003) Knowledge creation in multidisciplinary project teams: An empirical study of the processes and their dynamic interrelationships. *International Journal of Project Management* 21(7): 479-486.

Fontana A and Frey J (2005) The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement. In: Denzin N and Lincoln Y (eds) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research.* pp. 695-727.

Ford RC and Randolph WA (1992) Cross-functional structures: A review and integration of matrix organization and project management. *Journal of Management* 18(2): 267-294.

Frank M (2006) Knowledge, abilities, cognitive characteristics and behavioral competences of engineers with high capacity for engineering systems thinking (CEST). *Systems Engineering* 9(2): 91-103.

Garavan TN and McGuire D (2001) Competencies and workplace learning: Some reflections on the rhetoric and the reality. *Journal of Workplace Learning* 13(4): 144-164.

Garsten C (1999) Betwixt and between: Temporary employees as liminal subjects in flexible organizations. *Organization Studies* 20(4): 601-617.

Gevers JM, van Eerde W and Rutte CG (2001) Time pressure, potency, and progress in project groups. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 10(2): 205-221.

Goodman RA and Goodman LP (1976) Some management issues in temporary systems: A study of professional development and manpower -The theater case. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21(3): 494-501.

Grabher G (2002) Cool projects, boring institutions: Temporary collaboration in social context. *Regional Studies* 36(3): 205-214.

Grabher G (2004) Temporary architectures of learning: Knowledge governance in project ecologies. *Organization Studies* 25(9): 1491-1514.

Grant AM and Parker SK (2009) Redesigning work design theories: The rise of relational and proactive perspectives. *The Academy of Management Annals* 3(1): 317-375.

Griffin A and Hauser JR (1993) The voice of the customer. *Marketing science* 12(1): 1-27.

Guest G, Bunce A and Johnson L (2006) How many interviews are enough?: An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods* 18(1): 59-82.

Guimarães-Costa N and Cunha M (2009) Foreign locals: A liminal perspective of international managers. *Organizational Dynamics* 38(2): 158-166.

Gällstedt M (2003) Working conditions in projects: Perceptions of stress and motivation among project team members and project managers. *International Journal of Project Management* 21(6): 449-455.

Hagenaars JA and Halman LC (1989) Searching for ideal types: The potentialities of latent class analysis. *European Sociological Review* 5(1): 81-96.

Hardy C and Clegg S (1997) Relativity without relativism: Reflexivity in post-paradigm organization studies. *British Journal of Management* 8(1): 5-17.

Hargadon AB and Bechky BA (2006) When collections of creatives become creative collectives: A field study of problem solving at work. *Organization Science* 17(4): 484-500.

Hecker P (1997) Successful consulting engineering: A lifetime of learning. *Journal of Management in Engineering* 13(6): 62-65.

Hibbert PC (2009) Reflexivity as a threshold concept: Troublesome understanding. *Sixty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management.* Chicago.

Hibbert PC, Cupland C and MacIntosh R (2010) Reflexivity: Recursion and relationality in organizational processess. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management* 5(1): 47-62.
Hill RC and Levenhagen M (1995) Metaphors and mental models: Sensemaking and sensegiving in innovative and entrepreneurial activities. *Journal of Management* 21(6): 1057-1074.
Hobday M (2000) The project-based organisation: An ideal form for managing complex products and systems? *Research policy* 29(7-8): 871-893.
Howard-Grenville J, Golden-Biddle K, Irwin J and Mao J (2011) Liminality as cultural process for cultural change. *Organization Science* 22(2): 522–539.
Hovmark S and Nordqvist S (1996) Project organization: Change in the work atmosphere for engineers. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics* 17(5): 389-398.
Huemann M, Keegan A and Turner JR (2007) Human resource management in the project-oriented company: A review. *International Journal of Project Management* 25(3): 315-323.
Irving PG, Coleman DF and Cooper CL (1997) Further assessments of a three-component model of occupational commitment: Generalizability and differences across occupations. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 82(3): 444-452.
Jeyaraj J (2004) Liminality and othering: The issue of rhetorical authority in technical discourse. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 18(1): 9-38.
Jick TD (1979) Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24(4): 602-611.
Johnson G, Prashantham S, Floyd SW and Bourque N (2010) The ritualization of strategy workshops. *Organization Studies* 31(12): 1589-1618.
Junker DBA (2013) Zone of proximal development, liminality, and communitas: Implications for religious education. *Religious Education* 108(2): 164-179.
Kalleberg A (2001) Organizing flexibility: The flexible firm in a new century. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 39(4): 479-504.
Kalleberg AL (2009) Precarious work, insecure workers: Employment relations in transition. *American Sociological Review* 74(1): 1-22.
Kaltner J (1997) Law and liminality in the Bible. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59(4): 752-753.
Kamp A, Lund HL and Hvid HS (2011) Negotiating time, meaning and identity in boundaryless work. *Journal of Workplace Learning* 23(4): 229-242.
Katz R (1982) The effects of group longevity on project communication and performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 27(1): 81-104.
Kelan E and Jones RD (2009) Reinventing the MBA as a rite of passage for a boundaryless era. *Career Development International* 14(6): 547-569.
King N (1998) Template analysis. In: Symon G and Cassell C (eds) *Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organizational Research: A Practical Guide.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, pp. 118-134.
Kunda G, Barley SR and Evans J (2002) Why do contractors contract? The experience of highly skilled technical professionals in a contingent labor market. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 55(2): 234-261.
Kvale S (1997) *Den Kvalitativa Forskningsintervjun.* Lund: Studentlitteratur.
Ladge JJ, Clair JA and Greenberg D (2012) Cross-domain identity transition during liminal periods: Constructing multiple selves as professional and mother during pregnancy. *Academy of Management Journal* 55(6): 1449-1471.

Lahad K (2012) Singlehood, waiting, and the sociology of time. *Sociological Forum* 27(1): 163-186.
Lam A (1997) Embedded firms, embedded knowledge: Problems of collaboration and knowledge transfer in global cooperative ventures. *Organization Studies* 18(6): 973-996.
Larsen HH (2002) Oticon: Unorthodox project-based management and careers in a "spaghetti organization". *Human Resource Planning* 25(4): 30-37.
Larsson J and Holmström I (2007) Phenomenographic or phenomenological analysis: Does it matter? Examples from a study on anaesthesiologists' work. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being* 2(1): 55-64.
Le Deist FD and Winterton J (2005) What is competence? *Human resource development international* 8(1): 27-46.
Lee AS and Baskerville RL (2012) Conzeptualizing generalizability: New contributions and a reply. *MIS quarterly* 36(3): 749-A747.
Lepak DP and Snell SA (1999) The human resource architecture: Toward a theory of human capital allocation and development. *Academy of Management Review* 24(1): 31-48.
Lindgren M and Packendorff J (2006) What's new in new forms of organizing? On the construction of gender in project-based work. *Journal of Management Studies* 43(4): 841-866.
Lindkvist L (2005) Knowledge communities and knowledge collectivities: A typology of knowledge work in groups. *Journal of Management Studies* 42(6): 1189-1210.
Lindkvist L, Söderlund J and Tell F (1998) Managing product development projects: On the significance of fountains and deadlines. *Organization Studies* 19(6): 931-951.
Ludlow M (2012) Demons, evil, and liminality in cappadocian theology. *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 20(2): 179-211.
Lundin RA and Söderholm A (1995) A theory of the temporary organization. *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 11(4): 437-455.
Malterud K (2001) Qualitative research: Standards, challenges, and guidelines. *The Lancet* 358(9280): 483-488.
Marler JH, Woodard Barringer M and Milkovich GT (2002) Boundaryless and traditional contingent employees: Worlds apart. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 23(4): 425-453.
Marshall C and Rossman G (2011) *Designing Qualitative Research.* Los Angele: Sage.
Marshall C and Rossman GB (1989) *Designing Qualitative Research.* Newbury Park: Sage.
Marshall M (1996) Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice* 13(6): 522-526.
Mason J (2006) Mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way. *Qualitative Research* 6(1): 9-25.
Matusik S, F. and Hill CWL (1998) The utilization of contingent work, knowledge creation, and competitive advantage. *The Academy of Management Review* 23(4): 680-697.
McIver D, Lengnick-Hall CA, Lengnick-Hall ML and Ramachandran I (2013) Understanding work and knowledge management from a knowledge in-practice perspective. *Academy of Management Review* 38(4): 597-620.
McMullan M, Endacott R, Gray MA, Jasper M, Miller CML, Scholes J and Webb C (2003) Portfolios and assessment of competence: A review of the literature. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 41(3): 283-294.
Meredith JR and Mantel Jr SJ (2011) *Project Management: A Managerial Approach.* Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Meyerson D, Weick KE and Kramer RM (1996) Swift trust and temporary groups. In: Kramer RM and Tyler TR (eds) *Trust in Organizations.* Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 166-195.

Mitki Y, Shani AR and Stjernberg T (2008) Leadership, development and learning mechanisms: System transformation as a balancing act. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 29(1): 68-84.

Modig N (2007) A continuum of organizations formed to carry out projects: Temporary and stationary organization forms. *International Journal of Project Management* 25(8): 807-814.

Moore DR, Cheng M-I and Dainty AR (2002) Competence, competency and competencies: Performance assessment in organisations. *Work Study* 51(6): 314-319.

Nadler DA and Tushman ML (1999) The organization of the future: Strategic imperatives and core competencies for the 21st century. *Organizational Dynamics* 28(1): 45-60.

Nag R, Corley KG and Gioia DA (2007) The intersection of organizational identity, knowledge, and practice: Attempting strategic change via knowledge grafting. *Academy of Management Journal* 50(4): 821-847.

Nguyen D (1998) The essential skills and attributes of an engineer: A comperative study of academics, industry personnel and engineering students. *Global Journal of Engineering Education* 2(1): 65-76.

Nordqvist S, Hovmark S and Zika-Viktorsson A (2004) Perceived time pressure and social processes in project teams. *International Journal of Project Management* 22(6): 463-468.

Normann R (1976) *På Spaning Efter En Metodologi.* Stockholm: Scandinavian institutes for administrative research.

Normann R (1993) *Skapande Företagsledning.* Stockholm: Bonnier Alba.

Okhuysen GA, Lepak D, Ashcraft KL, Labianca GJ, Smith V and Steensma HK (2013) Theories of work and working today. *Academy of Management Review* 38(4): 491-502.

Packendorff J (2002) The temporary society and its enemies: Projects from an individual perspective. In: Sahlin-Andersson K and Söderholm A (eds) *Beyond Project Management: New Perspectives on the Temporary - Permanent Dilemma.* 1 ed. Malmö: Liber ekonomi, pp. 39-58.

Pantic-Dragisic S and Söderlund J (2013) Swift transition and knowledge cycling: Dynamic capabilities in technical consultancies. *The International Research Network on Organizing by Projects Conference.* Norwegian Business School.

Partington D, Pellegrinelli S and Young M (2005) Attributes and levels of programme management competence: An interpretive study. *International Journal of Project Management* 23(2): 87-95.

Pate J, Martin G and Robertson M (2003) Accrediting competencies: A case of Scottish vocational qualifications. *Journal of European industrial training* 27(2/3/4): 169-176.

Patton MQ (2002) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods.* Thousand Oaks: Sage

Payne JH (1995) Management of multiple simultaneous projects: A state-of-the-art review. *International Journal of Project Management* 13(3): 163-168.

Peräkylä A (2005) Analyzing talk and text. In: Denzin N and Lincoln Y (eds) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publicatons, pp. 869-886.

Peshkin A (1993) The goodness of qualitative research. *Educational Researcher* 22(2): 23-29.
Pinto JK, Dawood S and Pinto MB (prepublished) Project management and burnout: Implications of the demand–control–support model on project-based work. *International Journal of Project Management* 22 October 2013.
Pinto JK and Prescott JE (1988) Variations in critical success factors over the stages in the project life cycle. *Journal of Management* 14(1): 5-18.
Plowman P (2010) The diary project: Revealing the gendered organisation. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management* 5(1): 28-46.
Powley EH (2009) Reclaiming resilience and safety: Resilience activation in the critical period of crisis. *Human Relations* 62(9): 1289-1326.
Powley EH and Piderit SK (2008) Tending wounds: Elements of the organizational healing process. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 44(1): 134-149.
Prahalad CK and Hamel G (1990) The core competence of the corporation. *Harvard Business Review* 68(3): 79-91.
Prencipe A and Tell F (2001) Inter-project learning: Processes and outcomes of knowledge codification in project-based firms. *Research policy* 30(9): 1373-1394.
Reilly PA (1998) Balancing flexibility: Meeting the interests of employer and employee. *European Journal of Work & Organizational Psychology* 7(1): 7-22.
Rolf B (1991) *Profession, Tradition och Tyst Kunskap: En Studie i Michael Polanyis Teori om den Professionella Kunskapens Tysta Dimension.* Lund: Nova Press.
Sahlin-Andersson K and Söderholm A (2002) The Scandinavian school of project studies. In: Sahlin-Andersson K and Söderholm A (eds) *Beyond project management: new perspectives on the temporary-permanent dilemma.* Stockholm: Liber, pp. 11-24.
Sandberg J (1994) *Human competence at work: An interpretative approach.* BAS: Göteborg.
Sandberg J (2000) Understanding human competence at work: An interpretative approach. *Academy of Management Journal* 43(1): 9-25.
Sandberg J (2005) How do we justify knowledge produced within interpretive approaches? *Organizational Research Methods* 8(1): 41-68.
Sandberg J and Pinnington AH (2009) Professional competence as ways of being: An existential ontological perspective. *Journal of Management Studies* 46(7): 7738-1170.
Sandberg J and Targama A (1998) *Ledning och Förståelse - Ett Kompetensperspektiv på Organisationer.* Lund: Studentlitteratur.
Savolainen P, Ahonen JJ and Richardson I (2012) Software development project success and failure from the supplier's perspective: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Project Management* 30(4): 458-469.
Scarbrough H (1999) Knowledge as work: Conflicts in the management of knowledge workers. *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management* 11(1): 5-16.
Schofield JW (2002) Increasing the generalizability of qualitative research. In: Huberman M and Miles M (eds) *The qualitative researcher's companion.* Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 171-203.
Schön DA (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action.* New York: Basic Books.
Seale C (1999) Quality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 5(4): 465-478.
Shih J (2004) Project time in Silicon Valley. *Qualitative Sociology* 27(2): 223-245.
Siggelkow N (2007) Persuasion with case studies. *Academy of Management Journal* 50(1): 20-24.

Simpson R, Sturges J and Weight P (2010) Transient, unsettling and creative space: Experiences of liminality through the accounts of Chinese students on a UK-based MBA. *Management Learning* 41(1): 53-70.

Smith LR (2013) Female refugee networks: Rebuilding post-conflict identity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 37(1): 11-27.

Smith V (1997) New forms of work organization. *Annual review of sociology* 23: 315-339.

Song XM, Thieme RJ and Xie J (1998) The impact of cross-functional joint involvement across product development stages: An exploratory study. *Journal of Product innovation management* 15(4): 289-303.

Stjernberg T, Söderlund J and Wikström E (2008) Projektlivets villkor: Några inledande betraktelser. In: Stjernberg T, Söderlund J and Wikström E (eds) *Projektliv: Villkor för Uthållig Projektverksamhet.* Poland: Pozkal, pp. 19-30.

Stokes P and Oiry E (2012) An evaluation of the use of competencies in human resource development: A historical and contemporary recontextualisation. *EuroMed Journal of Business* 7(1): 4-23.

Stoof A, Martens RL, van Merriënboer JJ and Bastiaens TJ (2002) The boundary approach of competence: A constructivist aid for understanding and using the concept of competence. *Human resource development review* 1(3): 345-365.

Strauss A and Corbin J (1996) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Strauss A and Corbin J (1998) Basics of Qualitative Research: Procedures and Techniques for Developing Grounded Theory. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Sturdy A, Clark T, Fincham R and Handley K (2009) Between innovation and legitimation-boundaries and knowledge flow in management consultancy. *Organization* 16(5): 627-653.

Sturdy A, Schwarz M and Spicer A (2006) Guess who's coming to dinner? Structures and uses of liminality in strategic management consultancy. *Human Relations* 59(7): 929-960.

Sydow J, Lindkvist L and DeFillippi R (2004) Project-based organizations, embeddedness and repositories of knowledge: Editorial. *Organization Studies* 25(9): 1475-1489.

Symon G (1998) Qualitative research diaries. In: Symon G and Cassell C (eds) *Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organisational Research: A Practical Guide.* London: Sage, pp. 94-117.

Säljö R (1996) Minding action: Conceiving of the world versus participating in cultural practices. In: Dall'Alba G and Hasselgren B (eds) *Reflections on Phenomenography - Toward a Methodology.* Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, pp. 19-33.

Söderlund J (2004) Building theories of project management: Past research, questions for the future. *International Journal of Project Management* 22(3): 183-191.

Söderlund J (2005) Developing project competence: Empirical regularities in competetive project operations. *International Journal of Innovation Management* 9(4): 451-480.

Taminiau Y, Das E, Berghman L and Fangman Y (2011) Not beyond the tipping point: Restrained emotions and the functionality of business meals in consultancy. *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion* 4(2): 158-177.

Tansley C and Tietze S (2013) Rites of passage through talent management progression stages: An identity work perspective. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 24(9): 1799-1815.

Tempest S and Starkey K (2004) The effects of liminality on individual and organizational learning. *Organization Studies* 25(4): 507-527.
Tempest S, Starkey K and Ennew C (2007) In the death zone: A study of limits in the 1996 Mount Everest disaster. *Human Relations* 60(7): 1039-1064.
Tracy SJ (2013) *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact.* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
Turner JR and Müller R (2003) On the nature of the project as a temporary organization. *International Journal of Project Management* 21(1): 1-8.
Turner R, Huemann M and Keegan A (2008) Human resource management in the project-oriented organization: Employee well-being and ethical treatment. *International Journal of Project Management* 26(5): 577-585.
Turner V (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
Turner VW (1982) *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness at Play.* New York: Performing Arts Journal.
Turner VW (1986) *The Anthropology of Performance.* New York: Performing Arts Journal.
Turner VW and Schechner R (1988) *The Anthropology of Performance.* New York: Performing Arts Journal.
Wagner EL, Newell S and Kay W (2012) Enterprise systems projects: The role of liminal space in enterprise systems implementation. *Journal of Information Technology* 27(4): 259-269.
Walsh J, Meyer A and Schoonhoven C (2006) A future for organization theory: Living in and living with changing organizations. *Organization Science* 17(5): 657.
van Gennep A (1960) *The Rites of Passage.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Veres J, Locklear T and Sims R (1990) Job analysis in practice: A brief review of the role of job analysis in human resource management. In: Ferris G, Rowland K and Buckley R (eds) *Human resource management: perspectives and issues.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 79-103.
Whetten DA (1989) What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review* 14(4): 490-495.
Whitley R (2006) Project-based firms: New organizational form or variations on a theme? *Industrial and Corporate Change* 15(1): 77-99.
Whittemore R, Chase SK and Mandle CL (2001) Validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research* 11(4): 522-537.
Whittington R, Pettigrew A, Peck S, Fenton E and Conyon M (1999) Change and complementarities in the new competitive landscape: A European panel study, 1992-1996. *Organization Science* 10(5): 583-600.
Whyte WH (1956) *The Organization Man.* New York: Simon & Schuster.
Winterton J (2009) Competence across Europe: Highest common factor or lowest common denominator? *Journal of European industrial training* 33(8): 681-700.
Winterton J, Delamare-Le Deist F and Stringfellow E (2005) Typology of knowledge, skills and competences: Clarification of the concept and prototype. *Cedefop.* Thessaloniki: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities Luxembourg.
Yin R (2009) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.
Young R and Poon S (2013) Top management support - almost always necessary and sometimes sufficient for success: Findings from a fuzzy set analysis. *International Journal of Project Management* 31(7): 943-957.

Zabusky SE and Barley SR (1997) 'You can't be a stone if you're cement': Reevaluating the emic identities of scientists in organizations. *Research in organizational behavior* 19: 361-404.
Zarate A (2011) Portals, agency and the negotiation of liminality in a tale of time city and Johnny and the bomb. *International Research in Childrens Literature* 4(1): 87-98.
Zika-Viktorsson A and Ritzén S (2005) Project competence in product development. *Research in Engineering Design* 15(4): 193-200.

PART II

PAPERS

Appended Papers

The articles associated with this thesis have been removed for copyright reasons. For more details about these see:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-105481