



CHALMERS
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY



'Millennials' as potential change agents for a different construction future: exploring visions and ambitions.

Master's Thesis in the Master's Programme Design and Construction Project Management

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ABSTRACT

Generation studies of workforces 'at work' are trying to establish the connection between work practices and age-group variables. Generation characteristics are often considered as being socially constructed, meaning that age cohorts share certain socio-historical mediated experiences. 'Millennials' is the generation born in the 1980s and 1990s, and is one of the most studied generations. The individuals were born in an era of internet and high-speed communication, and are therefore accustomed to rapid technology changes and a socially networked world. Besides being open towards technology, they are also characterized as often changing jobs and being reluctant to 'do time' in order to get promoted. The purpose of this thesis is to explore millennials as potential change agents for a different construction future. The perceptions of 13 university students who are either just about to start or have just started their careers in the construction industry (i.e. 0-3 years) have been examined through an interview study. The interviews focus on: 1) their impressions of work life in construction so far and 2) their expectations and visions regarding their future in construction. The findings include different views on how the industry is perceived, the experiences of others' expectations as well as stories from the construction sites. Furthermore, the dream projects of the interviewees are presented but also the projects that they reject. Lastly, some of their demands to stay at a company and how they make changes are presented. Drawing on the institutional theory, particularly institutional work and institutional entrepreneurs the individuals potential to create a different construction future is examined.

Key words: Construction industry, generations, generation Y, institutional work, institutional entrepreneurship, and millennials.

Contents

ABSTRACT	I
CONTENTS	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
1 INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 Research on generations & millennials	4
2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	6
2.1 From semi-structured to unstructured	6
2.2 The setting	6
2.3 Data analysis	7
2.4 Ethical issues and avoiding stereotypes	7
3 FINDINGS	9
3.1 A slow industry?	9
3.2 "Dog years"	11
3.3 The construction jargon	13
3.4 Yes please!	14
3.5 Thanks but no thanks	15
3.6 Thirsty for more	15
3.7 One way or another	16
4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	18
4.1 The construction industry	18
4.2 From 'Institutional theory' to 'Institutional work'	19
4.2.1 Individuals in institutions	19
4.3 Institutional entrepreneurs	20
4.3.1 Social position	20
4.3.2 Position in the organization	21
4.3.3 Position in the field	22
4.3.4 Things change over time	22
4.4 Institutional work	22
4.4.1 Create	23
4.4.2 Maintain	23
4.4.3 Disrupt	24
4.4.4 When power and resources are limited	24

5	DISCUSSION	26
5.1	Putting on institutional lenses	26
5.1.1	An innovative industry!	26
5.1.2	Cat years	27
5.1.3	‘Kom igen nu gubbar!’*	27
5.1.4	Yes please and No thanks	28
5.1.5	Hungry for more	28
5.1.6	My way or the high way	29
5.2	Being new in the industry	30
6	CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH	32
7	AUTHORS REFLECTIONS	34
8	REFERENCES	36

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Gothenburg, 2017

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Donia Aslanzadeh', with a stylized, flowing script.

Donia Aslanzadeh

1 Introduction

The term ‘Millennials’ – with all of its negative and positive connotations – has drawn much research attention lately. Millennials are the demographic cohort born around 1980 and 1990 (there are no precise dates for the start and end of this cohort) and have a reputation of being purpose-driven, tech-savvy (at best) and impatient, entitled and job-hopping (at worst). This is a study of those millennials who have started a career in the Swedish construction industry, an industry notoriously known for its inflexibility and inertia (see section 4.1).

This topic is interesting due to the extent of actions that could be related to the subject, the fact that the subject itself is so extensively researched and the timeliness of this work. As millennials have already started to enter their working life, if this type of work is supposed to be of any use the research needs to be done now.

By using the stories of 13 individuals who are in the early stages of their construction careers (i.e. students and employees with a maximum of 3 years experience) this thesis reveals some of this generation’s drives, its desires and expectations. Considering the industry as an institution and the millennials as its newest members, their experiences of the industry and their potential to influence it will be analysed. For this, a theoretical framework of institutional entrepreneurs and institutional work, which studies the relationship between institutions and the actors that populate them (Lawrence et al. 2011) has been used. The focus of the theoretical framework is to link the individuals back to the industry by examining their ability to create, maintain or disrupt institutions. A model of how the social position affects the likelihood to conduct changes by Battilana (2006) has been used in order to link the stories to the possibility for the individuals to challenge the status quo.

This research will, through the perspective of these individuals who are new in the industry, grasp encountered tendencies of the current state of the industry as well as their visions for the future. This leads to the research question for this thesis that is examining:

How do millennials work as change agents to create a different future in the construction industry?

The following section ‘Research on generations’ will provide relevant background information for discussing this topic. Next, in the section ‘Research methodology’ the method for examining the question is specified, followed by the ‘Findings’ section where the results from the interviews are provided. In the chapter ‘Discussion’ the findings are evaluated within the frames of the theory and lastly in the section ‘Conclusion’ it is all tied together in an attempt to answer the research question.

1.1 Research on generations & millennials

The socially constructed concept ”generation” has been studied for more than a century and one of the reasons is to identify the challenges and opportunities encountered within the workforce. The term ‘generation’ is by Johnson, M., Johnson, L. (2010) defined as 'A group of individuals born and living contemporaneously who

have common knowledge and experiences that affect their thoughts, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors”. Other literature describes the concept as a group of people that share “age location in history” shaped by historical events and social trends encountered as children and young adults. This means that even as people grow older, the generation they belong to, defined by the period in which they were born, will always remain the same. The three most common generations in workplaces today are Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials. Each generation has their own attitudes and perceptions about work life such as expected behaviours as employees or managerial relations and dynamics (Johnson, M., Johnson, L. 2010).

The generation that in this thesis will be referred to as ‘Millennials’ have different names in the literature, Echo-Boomers, Generation Y, Internet Generation or Nexters are some of the examples (Eisner, 2005). Millennials are born roughly during the 1980’s and the 1990’s and are currently the most researched cohort. They are ascribed various attributes related to the experiences they had while growing up. The geopolitical and economical situation, parenting and educational philosophies, not to mention climate change and technology development are all factors that contribute to the moulding of this generation. Millennials are according to some “experts” motivated by meaning, craving constant feedback and open toward changes. Confident, wanting instant gratification, work-life balance and flexibility are other traits that have been attributed this generation, not to mention changing jobs frequently (Abbot, 2013; Curwen, 2016).

The criticism towards studying generations and millennials in particular is that generational theory is “a simplistic way of thinking about the relationship between individuals, society, and history” (Onion, 2015). The author continues calling generational arguments “overly schematised and ridiculously reductive” and refers to a statement made by the cultural historian and media scholar Siva Vaidhyanathan who claimed that “Generational thinking is just a benign form of bigotry.” In the article ‘Generational Myth’ Vaidhyanathan (2008) claims that we tend to overestimate the digital skills of young people, as well as arguing that they are more complex than what an analysis of generations can reveal. He explains that this interest in generational studies is a result of people (more specifically in his study; Americans) avoiding examining uncomfortable subjects, such as ethnic, gender and class distinctions, too closely.

2 Research Methodology

This research is providing an understanding rather than an explanation and therefore a qualitative approach is being used with an abductive strategy. This has allowed the research topic and questions to “move” as the theory, empirical material and analysis are complementing rather than determining each other. The theoretical part has been done through a literature review and the empirical data is from 13 in-depth interviews. The interviewees consisted of 5 students enrolled in the Design and Construction Project Management program and 7 employees working at the same consultancy company as the researcher. All interviewees were millennials, born between 1988 and 1993 and their work experience in the construction industry varied between 0-3 years.

2.1 From semi-structured to unstructured

An interview study with 13 Millennials in which they shared their expectations in regard to the construction industry, resulted in a number of interesting findings. The first three interviews started as semi-structured with pre-written questions designed to cover the topics ‘innovation’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘diversity’ in regard to the construction industry. The questions did not follow any particular order and the method allowed the conversations to get side tracked in order to understand which subjects that were important for the interviewees. The interviewee was encouraged to speak freely as the focus of the interviews was on their experiences and perceptions rather than their knowledge about the industry.

By the fourth interview an unstructured method was used instead where the goal was to access the interviewees’ own beliefs and passions without steering the conversation too much. This method that is also referred to as an ‘In-depth interview’ (Bryman, 2012) is primarily used when seeking to capture peoples individual voices or stories and focuses of the context of the individuals (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). None of the conversations were like the other; each one took its own path and provided a deeper understanding to the research question. This method gave the researcher an insight into how the individuals see their own role in relation to both the construction industry and the rest of society. The conversations were held in Swedish, as it is the native language of both the interviewee and interviewer. In order to analyse the findings, the stories were recorded and repeatedly listened to, yet not transcribed.

2.2 The setting

The interviews were conducted at the interviewees’ workplaces, university facilities or at their kitchen tables (in cases where the interviewee and researcher were close friends). The aim was to create an open and informal atmosphere where the interviewee felt greater freedom to enter their own areas of interests within the subject. Many interviews were held in armchairs instead of traditional office furniture, which contributed to creating a relaxed situation, similar to a normal conversation rather than a formal interview. It turned out that the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee was of great significance for the dynamic and pulse of the interview. The closeness of age and academic background sometimes resulted in entering side-tracks and not always sticking to the subject matter, however this was a part of the strategy to keep the conversations as easy-going and as flowing as possible.

2.3 Data analysis

In cases where the research purpose is to test a hypothesis or examine differences and similarities between different subjects the analysis should be made systematically and be conducted in the same manner for each subject. On the other hand when the research is of exploratory nature, it is more suitable to follow up on different aspects of each interview and interpret each aspect thoroughly (Kvale, Brinkmann, & Torhell, 2009). As this research is exploratory and the interviews has been semi- or unstructured the advice from Kvale et al has been taken and the analysis has not followed any particular method but rather made by the combining of different techniques. This approach that is by Kvale et al (2009), described as an eclectic approach, is a tactic where the researcher approaches the material, that in the first reading do not seem to have any coherence, and finds connections and structures that are important to the research project.

Even though the analysis method has been rather iterative and not followed any particular order it has largely been achieved through the following steps.

1. Listening to the interviews and writing summaries of the most interesting parts.
2. Reading all the interview summaries and categorizing them in key terms such as; inertia, innovation, leadership, sustainability, et cetera.
3. Re-listening to some specific parts of the interview.
4. Determining a form in which the various stories would be told.
5. Organizing the stories and actively searching for similarities and contradictions.
6. Exploring parallels between the theory and the interviews.

The focus of both the interview and analysis method has been on the different stories. As mentioned, each interview took its own path and the conversations were more important than the results. A creative interplay between the interview material and different theories has been applied in order to understand the interviewees view on their own role in the construction industry and their aspirations for the future.

2.4 Ethical issues and avoiding stereotypes

Kvale, S. (2007) states that “The human interaction in the interview affects the interviewees and the knowledge produced by an interview inquiry affects our understanding of the human condition. Consequently, interview research is saturated with moral and ethical issues.” In this section different aspects concerning these issues will be addressed. Kvale (2007) also mentions that the ethical concern should take the whole process, from the beginning to the final report, in consideration. With that in mind this section starts with the topic of research, thereafter the research method and lastly the data processing.

One of the main concerns when writing this thesis about the generation millennials was how to avoid portraying a misleading and even prejudiced image of the generation, (one that in my own opinion already exists in various literature about the topic). For this, the research focuses on millennials being new in an industry, and by using their stories and perspectives the aim is to grasp tendencies in the industry rather than portraying the eccentricities of a generation. The findings are divided into the specific topics that came up during the interviews, and where the contradictions

and contrasts are giving a more nuanced picture. Additionally in order to avoid stereotypes, the theoretical part of this thesis does not explore already existing literature about the generations but rather focuses on institutional theory and institutional work.

The exploratory interview method that was used in order to delve into the generations' goals, visions and expectations on the future made it difficult to specify the topics in advance. The objective of each interview was to learn more about the interviewee's interests; therefore the questions were flexible and very much depended on the interviewees' answers, and following up unanticipated leads. The interviews started with a brief explanation about the overall purpose of the study and how the non-existence of structure is a method for finding out more about their interests. The interviewee was also informed that the conversation would be recorded and that the material would be shared with the supervisor and perhaps, in the future, transcribed by someone else. The interviewees were also informed that they will remain anonymous and that the responses would be bundled up rather than narrated separately.

Confidentiality, and the fact that private data identifying the subjects won't be reported, is an important aspect when doing interview research (Kvale, 2007). During some of the interviews where the interviewee was a colleague to the researcher some of the information shared were concerning clients and/or cases that the company where involved in. This information, concerning external issues/companies, has been anonymised. In one particular interview, where the interviewee asked not to be cited on a particular subject, the information was not included in the findings. As mentioned before, the interview setting was characterized as informal, and when opportunity was given the interviews were held in a room with armchairs instead of the traditional "office chair-table environment". This, in combination with the closeness of age and relationship between the interviewee and interviewer, was part of the method in order to create an open and relaxed atmosphere. This openness and intimacy might have led to situations where the interviewee revealed information that they might later have regretted which makes it important to handle the data with great sensitivity. For example by excluding the audio of one of the interviews where the interviewee revealed personal information that was an outcome of the friendship between the interviewee and interviewer rather than the subject of the research.

Due to having an unstructured method in the interviews, the findings have resulted in a broad range of topics covering different areas of the construction industry. Consequently some of the findings have been ignored whereas others emphasized in a selection process that was made by the researcher. Therefore the findings presented reflect her interests, which is an issue that can be discussed when considering the reliability of this thesis. It is important to emphasize that the purpose of this research is to provide a deeper understanding and insight about this generation's approach to working in the construction industry, rather than a comparative study.

3 Findings

The objective of this research is to examine millennials as potential change agents for a different construction future and explore their visions and ambitions. The findings include stories from 13 interviews with individuals in early stages of their careers in the construction industry, either students in the last years of the Design and Construction Project Management programme at Chalmers University, or employees working with project and construction management at a large consultancy firm. The results encapsulate their view on the industry as it is today and describe their preferences for the future of the construction industry.

The reason for doing the interviews without following pre-written questions were to find out more about each persons' own interests in regard to the construction industry. Before this research started, sustainability, diversity and innovation was expected to be the most important topics for this cohort. It was for some of interviewees, however not to the expected extent. The interviews ended up covering other topics, for example one interviewee was very passionate about information systems. Communication and human interactions were other topics of interest.

A typical assumption about millennials is that they are accustomed to technology in a way that differs from previous generations. This might be the case, however it didn't seem to be the favourite topic of any interviewee. Digitalisation and robotization that seem to be very trending subjects at this moment, didn't come up during the interviews. Social sustainability and the situation on the housing market are other subjects that received less attention than expected.

The findings starts with the different views on how the industry is perceived (A slow industry?), next the experiences of others' expectations are portrayed ("dog years"). This is followed by the perceived reality in the industry (The construction jargon), thereafter what the interviewees want and what they don't want (Yes please! and Thanks but no thanks). Lastly their demands (Thirsty for more) and how they go about to make changes (One way or another).

3.1 A slow industry?

It's very common to hear that the construction industry is slow and conservative, that processes take too long and innovations are limited. The following paragraph includes stories with different perspectives on the industry in regard to slowness. The general impression is that many interviewees consider there is inertia in the industry, things take time and contraction process is very costly.

"We aren't as special as we seem to think", says one of the interviewees who is still a student, she is referring to 'Us' as 'The construction industry', and continues "You know - how every project is unique and all of that talk". She is critical towards how the construction projects are both expensive and time consuming and believes that our generation will differentiate from the existing ones by being more inclined to changes. Our generation will enter the industry with the drive to improve and make it more effective, better for everyone.

We should be better in learning from previous projects in order to be more efficient, not only in the construction process but also in the planning and design phase.

In an interview with another student, we are talking about which issues that would be important to him in the hypothetical scenario where he is some kind of manager. He explains that he often hears that “things take time”, if that were the case, he would like to see changes. He describes himself as the kind of person who likes to see results rather quickly; it would feel meaningless if he cannot experience the results of his decisions. He continues saying that he wants to make processes more efficient, to make them cheaper, better and faster, to make things happen.

All regulations and having to remit to all authorities is the reason for the inertia according to an interviewee who has been working in the industry for three years. It is the reality we are in, and unfortunately this won't change during our working life.

(interviewee): I wouldn't be surprised if we have a fax machine somewhere here in the building, we are not leading the technical development in the construction industry unfortunately.

(researcher): Who is to blame for that?

(interviewee): It's our own fault.

(researcher): You think so? Who are “we”?

(interviewee): Not you and I, but those who have worked longer and have been outrun by the technical development. And also all the authorities, they're completely screwed in regard to the technical development, completely lost, they're about 10 years behind – all of them. And that is a limitation!

For example, in one project we have to use a certain type of lamp that doesn't exist anymore since LED-lamps have outcompeted those lamps in all possible aspects. This is an example of when the technical development is faster than the regulations, which creates an annoying process. It's probably the same with other authorities as well, for example in many cases you have to send paper copies instead of sending digitally, or with certain tenders, you have to deliver the copies personally. It's completely incompetent and they haven't joined the development. Some authorities have, but others are 100 years behind. And I believe that is holding us back.

(researcher): I agree, and I think it's quite alarming

(interviewee): We are too dependent, and we as an industry can't move forward unless the authorities and regulations around us does the same.

(researcher): In that case you're not just seeing the construction industry as all the different companies working in it, but also the laws and regulations of society that affect the industry.

(interviewee): Yes, and those are slower than the industry itself. If the construction industry is slow compared to other industries, it's because all the different authorities that set the rules limit us, this is because construction affects everything else.

He continues explaining that if you would be developing an IT-product you wouldn't have the same limitations, such as apply for a building permit, contact the county administrative board or land owners. As soon as you're doing anything in this industry you have about 100 stakeholders, as well as having to remit to all authorities.

(interviewee): That is the reality we work within, unfortunately.

(researcher): Is that also the reality that we will continue working within, for the rest of our working lives?

(Interviewee): Yes, I think so.

(researcher): And you're okay with that?

(interviewee): No, I think it's too slow. But at the same time I know which people who work in the different authorities.

(researcher): And who are those?

(interviewee): Those who have given up, not the most ambitious ones who want to make a career. They want government employment, extra holiday days and being able to blame everything on processing hours. They don't have any bonuses or incentives to work extra or do anything faster than necessary.

(researcher): So you think it's because of their personalities things go slow?

(interviewee): With authorities in general, everything is going extremely slowly, and everyone who works there agrees to the slowness. And the possibility to appeal against decisions is another thing that holds the industry back and makes it slow.

(researcher): Do you ever think about going into it instead, working with the authorities that are slow in order to be the one who steers up and pushes for change?

(interviewee): No, I think it's hopeless.

During another conversation, one of the interviewees point out innovation as her main interests and does not see the construction industry as conservative as others have pointed out. On the contrary she thinks that the industry constantly creates new methods to build, design and new materials as we become better all the time. Perhaps it is not 'THE most innovative industry' and it also depends on which role you have, for example, the production-phase might not be as innovative. She recalls on her first job as a contractor where new solutions were not particularly appreciated - you should do as you always have done. However as a consultant it is her job to always be one step ahead and if working with for example urban development, real estate development or finding new housing concepts, there are quite a lot of opportunities to be innovative.

3.2 "Dog years"

To do a dog year is in Swedish an expression for doing boring, backbreaking and drudgery jobs that require hard struggle. It is a common expression when referring to the first years within a career when doing unqualified and uninteresting work, before getting the "real" assignments. This is a common expression in regard to doing a career in construction and with this, it is suggested that one should start work life at the construction site, before advancing to site management or consultant jobs. In this section, different stories in regard to this "advice" are brought up, all individuals who defied this idea and started working as project managers directly after graduation.

(researcher): Is that why you chose the 'Design and Construction Project Management (DCPM) programme', because you wanted to work with project management?

(interviewee): Yes, exactly! I feel, why wouldn't you be able to start working as a construction and project manager, directly after school? It is very much about how to drive a project forward, decisions, contracts and those things that we studied.

However, I experience that the industry is never hiring a newly graduate as a construction and project manager, you have to do your 'dog years' with the contractor, you're not worth anything if you haven't been on site, and DCPM, what is that? [ironic tone].

She tells that that she looked for jobs on construction sites because she thought it was impossible to get a job within her interest. She thought that the industry is-as-it-is and that she had to accept the situation and do a couple of years on site. Although she never had to do her 'dog years', she was offered an internship as a project manager that later led to a job.

(interviewee): I remember when still being a student, at VARM (a work fair organized at campus), I had booked an interview with a consultancy firm, I remember how the woman representing the company just laughed in my face when I told her I wanted to work as a construction and project manager when graduating. "Oh, you probably need to rethink that idea, dear" she said condescendingly.

She continues telling, it is within the last 2-3 years that it has become more common to hire newly graduates, our company is the one that is in the forefront within this. When she started working at this company there were only 2 others like her who hadn't worked on site. In the beginning she experienced that other employees questioned their ability and some saw it as a chance to get a personal secretary and tried to exploit that. Even from managerial level she could sometimes hear about the benefits of having worked on site, that we should hire more site managers and that if you haven't worked on the construction site, you don't know anything. However, lately this attitude has been toned down and it's a different atmosphere than the one she started in, probably a result of hiring more newly graduates.

In a similar conversation, another interviewee says that during the education you often hear how you should start at the contracting firms.

(interviewee): Yes, I think it might be an advantage to have worked on site, to learn the details, maybe I should have taken that path, to get a better overview of the projects.

But at the same time, I feel, there isn't just one way that is the correct one, you learn in different ways and for me, if you work as a foreman, it's probably better if you want to work your way up to site manager and advance within the production. That is not what I want, even if I find production interesting, that's not where I picture myself in ten years. I choose to focus on other parts, especially management, since I want to work with property development, plan and develop housings. For me, a background as a foreman isn't the most important, even if it's probably a great experience.

I don't believe in listening too much to what everyone else thinks in regard to this, also, I experience that the ones who are saying that you should start on site, in most cases are those who themselves started as carpenters, became foremen, site managers, head of projects... It's not the ones that have 5-years of education that say this. You have to choose who you want to listen to. I don't know, how do you feel about this?

(researcher): I agree and have the same ideas. Many have expressed that you should do some 'dog years' when you start. That expression annoys me, it's rather condescending to those who work a whole career as foremen on site. To call it a 'dog year' is implying that it's work less worth. For whom should I do the 'dog years' unless I actually want to work there. I've heard classmates using that term, which

makes me wonder if it's their own idea or if they are just repeating what they've heard?

(interviewee): Probably just what they've heard. No one that said that to be has studied. I consider, we have done our 'dog years' in school, our five years in university are 'dog years' if anything! We have learned the same foundations but in school rather than on site and in that way speeded up the process, in my opinion.

A friend of mine who is working in a big construction company often says that you should do your 'dog years'. However, she loves working there, and if you had put me in the same position, I wouldn't enjoy it as much and therefore not done a particularly good job. You learn more when working with something you really enjoy!

For me, if you are able to learn something in a faster way, by asking more experienced, or participate or read about the subject, then you learn more. Instead of just doing your 'dog years' just to be able to say that you have. In my world, it's just stupid to do something that you don't enjoy.

(researcher): well.. time will tell. Maybe we'll change our minds later [jokingly]

(interviewee): Yeah, who knows... Maybe we'll go back and work on sites in ten years.

Another interviewee explains why he directly after graduation decided to apply for jobs that weren't related to the construction industry. He wanted to do something completely different for a while, but later he felt that he had judged the construction industry before even giving it a chance. However he explains he doesn't want a typical career by working on construction site. Even if he considers it being a good career choice, he tries to be strategic and reflects on why he is doing something. If it is only because it's easy and expected of you, he will avoid that path and choose one that will give him more in regard to his own interests.

3.3 The construction jargon

One subject that was often mentioned during the interviews is about the 'construction jargon'. It covers both ways of speaking, such as terminology and vocabulary but also the types of jokes and attitudes that are common in the industry. This jargon is particularly known for being used on the construction sites, which is where these following scenarios took place.

One of the interviewees recalls on his first weeks as a foreman, his first construction job after graduating from university. He remembers the transition from student to employee as mostly smooth due to his previous experience as an intern where he learned how to speak to the workers "in their language". For example, if you wanted something done, you shouldn't go about asking blandly about it, it does not work. Another of his examples was regarding how some things are named differently in the construction vocabulary than in every day life. It is very importance to use the "right" term when speaking to the workers. The reason for this, according to the interviewee, is that construction workers have little confidence in people that haven't been in the industry long, especially if they lack experience of the particular task just about to be done. The jargon did not appear to bother him too much, he explained that it requires some time but that one learns it rather fast, something that he had witnessed this among friends and co-workers.

Another interviewee stated that he enjoyed the ‘construction jargon’ pretty much. He described it as ‘raw but warm-hearted’ and ‘straightforward’. You speak up when something is wrong, solve the problem and afterwards there is nothing more to it. A big part of the jargon is the types of jokes that are common. He remembers his first job as a surveyor. The first thing that the site manager told him was; “There are two common mistakes on a building site, either surveying mistakes, or the surveyor himself”. Even though he did not mind this joke at all, he points out that there are down sides to this rough humour, at times someone simply needs a lousy day for a joke to fail and cause tension. In regard to this he explained that he sometimes would get tired of hearing too many jokes on the behalf of his family name that have a foreign origin. Another recollection of a perhaps inappropriate joke was from a time when he had a dark-skinned co-worker and some of the others were joking about his huge penis. In this occasion the interviewee brought up the subject with the management on site, although they did not seem to understand how that would be an issue.

3.4 Yes please!

This paragraph includes stories about dream projects in future. For some, making a change and contributing to the community are of most importance, while others have goals and aspirations for their respective working lives that involve more specific projects.

"It's almost as if we are shaped to think that the construction industry is not good at innovation, efficiency and all of those things" says one of the interviewees. He continues telling about the projects that he had been working in before, since ‘Time’ was the limiting resource, innovation and sustainability lagged behind. He is hoping that once he gets more experienced, he will be able to choose projects. He says that he would love to work with wind turbine projects, sewage treatments or as he called it ‘things that helps the society’.

The same interviewee goes on telling, "When you graduate, you have this feeling that we are the ones who will revolutionize the industry". He is sceptical about revolutionizing in terms of production, but in regard to sustainability he thinks we have a great chance. With that in mind, he feels a responsibility to choose projects that are better in terms of sustainability and good for the community. As we rounded up the topic he said that these issues are important and will continue to be and we might as well get used to that idea. "These are not questions that will be important for 20 years and later ignored, there is no stop - the time has turned".

During other interviews in a similar conversations about dream projects the interviewees states that they would love to work as a project manager for a shopping centre, apartment complex or hospital projects. Large infrastructure projects or projects well-known projects such as ‘Västlänken’ or ‘Karlastaden’ are also highly prioritised. The common factor being the size as of the projects, as the interviewees would like to have the overall responsibility in a big project and manage a project team. One of the interviewees state that he wants to be a part of some of the projects that forms the city, that is one of the reasons he chose this career and to study civil engineering.

3.5 Thanks but no thanks

During one of the interviews as we were speaking about the presumption about us Millennials (i.e. needing a purpose and striving to make an impact), the interviewee asks;

What's wrong with wanting a job that brings value? Having the ambition to work with projects that makes a difference, or doing things better?

She continues saying that she does not want to work for a client who only sits comfortably and does lousy work in order to make money. She recalls on an assignment she was handed about one year into her career, a job that she politely denied. The assignment involved building a fence for a prison and did not match her moral stands. She did not have an issue with someone else doing the assignment but she herself did not want to be a part of the project. At the time this brought her distress, she did not know how the management would perceive it and being new at the position she was used to always saying “Yes, of course” when offered new clients. Today, two years later she is proud about that decision, she says, ‘That’s how you make changes’.

In another interview, as we were speaking about hypothetical situations, the interviewee argues that he most certainly would deny projects that are not sustainable, for example working on oil refinery projects. If the job market would be the same as it is today, he would not mind losing his job due to his decision. On the other hand, if it were in a time of recession he probably would have taken the project, entering with the ambition to make the best (i.e. most sustainable) out of the situation.

There is little confidence for the corporations’ accountability for sustainable values. One of the interviewees says that “the corporations are not persons; they do not have feelings or moral obligations. The only goal is to make money for their shareholders which leaves the responsibility to the people working there.”

3.6 Thirsty for more

The interviewees take great responsibility in creating their own path, not expecting anyone else to plan their journey for them. The same responsibility applies when it comes to accepting the consequences of their actions, and with this, a moral accountability for the way they work. The previous it-is-as-it-is-mentality within the construction industry is questioned by the interviewees as a part of undermining existing assumptions and beliefs while creating their own. One of the typical assumptions made about millennials is that they change jobs more frequently than other generations. Millennials are often called disloyal to their employers, as if they would have one foot out the door as soon as they start. This is not the impression noticed from the interviews – perhaps not the type of information that the interviewee would share with the researcher. However in regard to loyalty, many interviewees mention that within their role as good employees, it is important to have profitable projects, in ways that will benefit the companies’ economy and in turn strengthen their own role.

When discussing previous jobs, it was not uncommon to hear stories about workplaces or employers that could not match the interviewees expectations in regard

to developing knowledge. One of the interviewees recalls on her first employment within the construction industry after graduating from university. She was a part of the client organization at the country council and after a few months she found herself bored and dissatisfied with the working environment. She thought the organization was slow and that she had more to offer. When encountering more experienced seniors in the industry, she could not set aside the feeling that they had knowledge, which she still lacked and was thirsty for. Rather soon she resigned from the job and found another employment elsewhere.

Another interviewee had a very similar story about why she changed job from one consultancy firm to another. Also in this case, it was her first job after graduation and due to the firms' organization of the different services, she was placed in a team without seniors in the same role as hers. This left her feeling lonely with the tasks without anyone to consult and learn from. As she still enjoyed the work, she switched to the same type of job but in a firm with a different organizational structure.

Being young and coming directly from the university was not an advantage, told an interviewee who experienced prejudice due to her age. She is referring to previous employment where her supervisor, an older man who started his career as a carpenter seemed to see a university degree as something negative. She recalls on not getting any own responsibilities and the supervisor double-checking all of her work, if ever he would ask her to do something it was tasks such as ordering coffee for meetings. She brought up the subject with her manager at two different occasions, telling about how her ambition-level was falling and the desire for more responsibility. She decided to give it six months but when nothing changed she quit her job.

In all cases the interviewees described how they wanted to do more and learn more, as much as possible and as soon as possible. They were constantly feeling stressed about starting their careers and could not bear being as patient as their employers seemed to expect from them. Many of the interviewees mention the importance of taking control of their own careers. They create their own journey as they go along, never depending on anyone else taking responsibility for their development. Words such as 'beginning' or 'start' were often used when the actors were speaking about their current state within their working life. It seemed specifically important to be open, yet strategic and explore as much as possible in this state, sometimes as if they were expecting to be slowed down further along the journey.

3.7 One way or another

"No one is going to drop something on your lap" says an interview who like previous mentioned, also seemed tired of the inertia within the industry. When asked if she usually has to struggle, she replied that it sometimes becomes tiresome to "constantly having to convince people about things that are good for them". She continued explaining that when her ideas are not taken in, she usually steppes back, analysed and learned from the situation in order to later try again in a slightly different way. This self-reflexive and analytical approach showed signs of great self-awareness, using an iterative process in order to understand the context and simultaneously creating her own role.

During another conversation the interviewee expresses his opinion about influencing a certain situation and the contrasts from previous conversations are clear. The conversation is about sustainability versus costs when he points out that, as he sees it,

it is only his responsibility to point out the different options - never to push for any of the different alternatives. As a consultant and project manager, if you have lifted the alternative solutions, it is up to the customer or the builder to evaluate. You have done what is expected of you and should not actively advocate that one solution is better than the other. Lastly he says: "You are hired to do a job, not to make the decisions".

4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework starts with a description of the construction industry, particularly in regard to the criticism of it being a conservative industry. Later two aspects of institutional theory are explained. The first, institutional entrepreneurs, is through Battilanas (2009) model of 'Individuals' social position exploring the relationship between agency and the likelihood to conduct changes. The second part is on institutional work, which explores the individual actors' roles in creating, maintaining and disruption institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). This chapter ends with an explanation on how institutional work is done when resources and power is limited.

4.1 The construction industry

Increased productivity, lowered costs, higher quality and consequently cheaper housing and facilities are demands on the construction industry that are often connected to the criticism of the industry for being conservative and not renewed enough (Ingemansson et al., 2012). Löwstedt (2017) states that this idea about the industry having low change tendencies is rooted in both self-criticism from the industry but also documented in various research and investigations from the past 20 years. The arguments about inefficiency, low innovation and lack of technical developments are often connected to how the construction industry has failed to adopt techniques which have improved performance in other industries, such as just-in-time, total quality management, supply chain management and 'industrialization' of manufacturing (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

One reason for this criticism might be how the concept of innovation is defined and usually connected to products rather than improvements of processes (Ingemansson, 2012). The common view that the industry should change in order to resemble other industries might be a mistake since construction follows a different logic than other industries (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The varieties of actors in the industry (e.g. architects, consultants, contractors and property-owners), as well as the varieties within each company (e.g. size, regional or international et cetera) make it difficult to discuss the industry as a whole (Ingemansson, 2012, Löwstedt, 2017). It is also important to question whether it is suitable to study change as it usually occurs over time and does not follow a particular logic (Löwstedt, 2017).

There are different kinds of change and driving forces, and Löwstedt (2017) points out two different types. The first one is characterized by improvements within areas such as productivity, quality, cost development, environmental impact and innovation et cetera and are usually initiatives from managerial levels. The second type is of rather reactive nature, mainly responses to different types of crises and is the kind of change that the employment usually experiences. This type is listed in a survey research made by Ingemansson (2012) as the third most common driving force for change, following 'ideas and opinions from employees' and 'ideas and demands from clients'.

The same survey shows that only 1 percent of the respondents consider university education as a form of knowledge development, a number which can be compared to the 89 percent who consider knowledge development through working (e.g. mentorship, coaching or instructions). Additionally only 9 percent view information

from research institutes as an important driving force for change – which is reassuring information when doing this research. Another interesting finding from the same research shows that 61 percent of the respondents (representing the whole industry) experience that they have, during the past 5 years, taken measures for renewal which in turn has given the customer a more affordable product. In companies with more than 300 employees the survey shows that as much as 91 percent share that opinion – yet the idea of a slow industry still persists.

For this research, the notion of change and whether the industry is conservative or not, is more interesting than the actuality of the question. Different initiatives have been introduced in the last decade and many companies portray themselves as enthusiastic about change and innovation (Löwstedt, 2017). Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the image of the construction industry as slow and conservative still exists.

4.2 From ‘Institutional theory’ to ‘Institutional work’

The long tradition of academic interest in organization studies could be traced back to the late 1940’s (Sarma, 2013). Institutional studies was during the 1970’s and 80’s regenerated as neo-institutionalism and has, through the work of pioneers such as Powell and DiMaggio (1991) and Greenwood et al. (2008), resulted in some interesting discoveries within this area of research (Sarma, 2013; Lawrence et al. 2013). The original focus on similarities in the organizational field was in the late 1990’s followed by a focus on ‘Institutional change’, which later resulted in an interest in ‘Institutional entrepreneurship’ (Sarma, 2013). Institutional entrepreneurship tries to resolve ‘the paradox of agency’ which is questioning how actors can change the very same institutions that they are a part of. (Gluch & Bosch-Sijtsema, 2016). Additionally the concept of institutional entrepreneurs is important as it focuses on ways and different strategies that actors use in order to influence their institutional contexts (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). Even though institutional entrepreneurs emphasize the role of actors in creating institutions, lately there has been an increased interest in how actors transform and maintain institutions. This has led to the research of Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) called ‘institutional work’ which discusses and aims to understand the role of actors in creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions (Sarma, 2013).

4.2.1 Individuals in institutions

Battilana (2006) emphasises the necessity to link the individual and the organizational level as she questions how organizations or individuals can innovate if their beliefs and actions are all determined by the same institutional environment they wish to change. Lawrence et al. (2011) use the research on institutional work to bring the individual back into institutional theory by re-examining the relationship between agency and institutions.

The shift back to individuals requires examining the institutional resistance and maintenance in which change is achieved. The research focuses on ‘practice’ and ‘process’ rather than ‘outcome’, observing the daily work of “individuals and groups who reproduce their roles, rites, and rituals at the same time thatf they challenge, modify, and disrupt them” (Lawrence et al., 2011).

4.3 Institutional entrepreneurs

By linking the individual level of analysis back to the organizational and societal level, the foundation of institutional entrepreneurship is established and this is, according to Battilana (2006), the way to overcome the paradox embedded in agency. DiMaggio (1988) states: “New institutions arise when organized actors with sufficient resources (institutional entrepreneurs) see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly”. Institutional entrepreneurs create new institutions or transform the existing ones; this can be organizations, groups of organizations, individuals or groups of individuals (Battilana, 2006 drawing on e.g. Greenwood et al., 2002)

Institutional logics are social directions that guide the behaviour of actors in fields, representing shared understandings of objectives and how to pursue them (Scott, 1994). Agents that are leading organizational change by breaking with the dominant institutional logic(s) are institutional entrepreneurs. However, Battilana (2006) states that not everyone that shows some degree of agency necessarily qualifies as institutional entrepreneur, as it also requires breaking with the rules and practices associated with the dominant institutional logic(s), and thus building alternative ones.

An actor is considered an institutional entrepreneur even though they might not even be aware that she or he is contributing to changing the institutional environment, as long as she or he actively takes part in implementing changes that break with the dominant logic(s) and thereby promotes alternative ones. Being successful or not in institutionalizing new practices does not determine whether that person qualifies as an institutional entrepreneur or not.

4.3.1 Social position

Battilana (2006) focuses on the role of individuals’ social position in the context of institutional entrepreneurship as it relates individuals to their structural context. She draws on the research of Bourdieu (1990) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) to describe the terms ‘Field’ and ‘Agent’. Fields are the structured systems of social positions where struggles take place over resources, stakes, and access. Agents are individuals in the field, acting under consideration by the fact that they acquire the necessary properties to be effective. Bourdieu (1988) states that agents’ ‘point of view’ about the field, as well as hers/his access to resources, is depending on hers/his social position in the field. This relates to whether individuals benefit from maintaining the status quo or not, thus an agent may be more or less willing to transform the field, as well as being more or less able to do so.

As mentioned, institutional entrepreneurs are individuals that break with the dominant institutional logic in the field. Battilana’s (2006) study tries to answer how the likelihood for institutional entrepreneurs to conduct organizational changes is affected by the individuals’ social position. In order to forecast the impact of the social position she has developed a model that includes different propositions in regard to organizational status, individual status, mobility et cetera. The following two sections ‘Position in the organization’ and ‘Position in the field’ are based on that model and contribute to the understanding of how individuals’ social position in a given organizational field affects the likelihood of them conducting changes and therefore acting as institutional entrepreneurs.

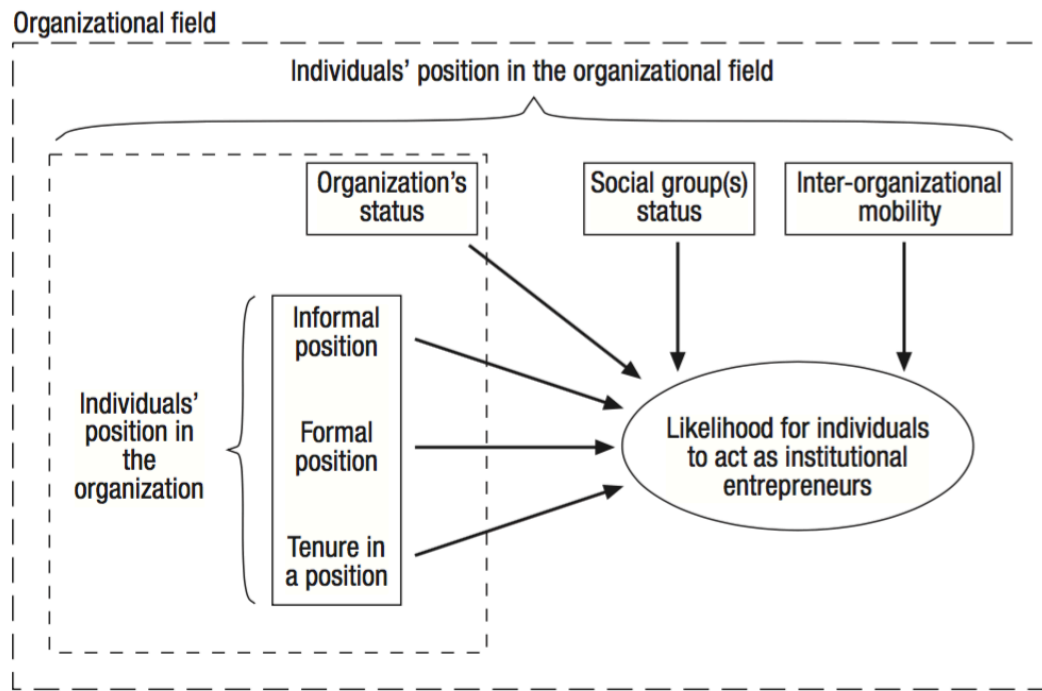


Figure 4.1 Impact of individuals' social position in a given organizational field on the likelihood for them to conduct changes (Battilana, 2006).

4.3.2 Position in the organization

The formal position an individual has within an organization is likely to contribute to the ability of making changes. Battilana (2006) suggest that individuals that are higher in their organizational hierarchy are more likely to make different organizational changes. This is due to some different factors; one is that individuals in lower organizational hierarchy often lack enough legitimacy and resources. They cannot rely on their authority to impose changes in the same way that the individuals with a higher organizational position can. Additionally, the ones in higher positions are responsible for making strategic decisions, and have therefore a lot of information about the organization, which in turn is very useful when identifying models to break with the dominant institutional logics. Their tenure in the formal organizational position is also affecting the likelihood to make changes; it is suggested that the probability for individuals to conduct organizational changes are highest at the midway duration.

Another factor that contributes to the likelihood of individual making changes is the informal position in organizational networks. In regard to this, it is suggested that the likelihood of an individual in a lower status social group increases if that person has strong ties with individuals in higher status social groups (Battilana, 2006). The reasons for this are similar to the ones regarding formal positions, which is basically the lack of resources and not controlling decision processes. The ties to individuals in higher positions are important to get access to resources, but also potential resistance from higher social groups might be undermined if strong ties exist.

4.3.3 Position in the field

This section is about the individuals' position within the field in which she/he works. Different organizations have different statuses within the field and the likelihood of their members steering changes is connected to the status of the organization. In short, individuals who are in lower status organizations are more likely to conduct changes than those in higher status organizations (Batillana, 2006). This is because individuals that belong to lower status organizations are in a challenger position, their organizations are less well-established and therefore less privileged by the existing institutional arrangements.

The same goes for the status of the social group in which the individuals belong. Here, it is proposed that individuals in lower status social groups are more likely to conduct organizational change than those in higher status social groups within the organizational field. Most often the ones in lower social groups are not benefitting from the existing institutional arrangements. However, as mentioned before, the fact that these individuals have less access to necessary resources, creates a hinder when trying to make organizational changes (Battilana, 2006)

People and organizations are not static and an important aspect in regards to institutional entrepreneurship and the likelihood to conduct changes are the persons' inter-organizational mobility. In regards to this, Battilana (2006) suggests that the more an individual has been mobile within different organizations, the more likely they are to question arrangements that are taken for granted and see opportunities beyond the current functions of their organization. This in turn leads to a greater likelihood for conducting organizational change.

4.3.4 Things change over time

With the passing of time it is most likely that these aspects of individuals in organizational fields and their social positions change accordingly. As mentioned, the mobility of individuals within different organizations contributes to them seeing things differently and conducting more changes. In addition individuals may change position within the organizational field and/or within their organization, which in turn affects the memberships to social groups. Thus the status changes and since that corresponds to access to resources and willingness to make changes it is safe to assume that individuals will be more or less likely to conduct changes over time. Similarly the formal positions might change which in turn affects the formal and informal networks, thus corresponding to the likelihood to conduct organizational changes (Battilana, 2006). In summary – nothing is static and everything is interrelated.

4.4 Institutional work

In this section, we introduce the concept of “institutional work” which is a theory that highlights the actions of individuals and collective actions of those who affect (or attempt to affect) institutional processes (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). This theory has gained popularity in research and is a great tool in the challenge of understanding change when it occurs due to the efforts of actors working within the institutions. The concept can be divided into two components, ‘institutions’ and ‘work’. The first component is by Lawrence et al. (2011) described as “Those (more or less) enduring

elements of social life that affect the behaviour and beliefs of individuals and collective actors by providing templates for action, cognition, and emotion, nonconformity with which is associated with some kind of costs” drawing on the accounts of many well-known researchers (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2001; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Jepperson, 1991). The second component, work, has over the past few decades received increased research attention and is connected to institutions by two critical concepts ‘effort’ and ‘intentionality’ (Lawrence et al., 2011).

Institutional work highlights the complex, reflexive and recursive relationship between “ordinary” persons and the institutions, and not the great accomplishments done by outstanding individuals (Lawrence et al. 2011). These aware, skilful and reflexive actors who creatively navigate within their organizational fields, aim at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

4.4.1 Create

There are many different ways of doing work that create institutions; such as reconstructing the rules or boundaries in order to access material resources, or activities that reconfigure actors’ belief systems. Some of the actions focus on the normative structures of the institutions, such as roles, values and norms. Lawrence & Suddaby (2006) mention three different types of interactions, actor-field, norm-field and actor-actor. Actor-field is for example by ‘Constructing identities’, which focuses on the relationship between an actor and the institutional field in which they work. Norm-field actions are those that are changing normative associations by altering the relationship between norms and the institutional field in which they are shaped. Actor-actor describes the relationship between actors in a field and that type of work aims at changing the normative assumptions between people in the same institutional field. There is also work that focuses on the cognitive parts of institutions such as beliefs, assumptions and frameworks, these methods involve developing concepts and beliefs and providing actors with the necessary knowledge to engage in new practices (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

One of the forms of creating institutional work is by changing normative associations; this is done by altering the connections between practices and the moral and cultural foundations of them. This creates new institutions that are complementary and question the existing institutions rather than replacing them (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Another form is called ‘Mimicry’ and is a form that creates new institutions by gaining leverage from existing practises. An example that Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) uses to explain mimicry is on how Edison, when introducing the electric light system, used the features of gas lamps in order to draw on pre-existing understanding of the value and use. By using the form Mimicry the actor can make new structures understandable and accessible whilst simultaneously pointing out problems with old structures.

4.4.2 Maintain

Maintaining institutions is work done in order to uphold the controls that are the foundations of an institution. This can be done for instance by ensuring loyalty to rule systems. Other efforts to maintain institutions focus on repeating existing norms and

belief systems. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) mention six different forms of doing institutional work in order to maintain institutions. Some of the forms have the purpose to ensure adherence to existing rule systems, while others focus on maintaining existing norms and belief systems. 'Valorizing/demonizing' is an example of the latter and is done by providing positive or negative examples of the normative foundations of an institution. The relationship between institutional maintenance and change is an interesting (and important) aspect as maintaining institutions is not equivalent to absence of change, but rather work that requires great effort (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

4.4.3 Disrupt

Disruption of institutions is the result of some actors whose interests are not corresponding with the existing institutional arrangements (Bourdieu, 1993; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; DiMaggio, 1991). Lawrence & Suddaby (2006) state "Actors appear to disrupt institutions primarily by re-defining, re-categorizing, re-configuring, abstracting, problematizing and, generally manipulating the social and symbolic boundaries that constitute institutions." Economic, physical and political locations are referred to as 'Social boundaries' whereas 'Symbolic boundaries' are moral, socioeconomic and cultural boundaries (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). 'Disassociating moral foundations' and 'Undermining assumptions and beliefs' are two of the methods suggested by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). The first one disrupts institutions when the moral foundations within a specific cultural context are undermined (rather than directly attacked). One of the reasons that institutions are kept in place are the costs of innovation. Undermining assumptions and beliefs is at its most effective when removing those costs.

Some common methods used to disrupt institutions such as, disconnecting rewards and sanctions, are directly associated with the state or elites that have the financial resources (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In regard to this, it is interesting to examine the institutional work done by those actors without mandate to make changes through traditional methods.

4.4.4 When power and resources are limited

Much of the research in institutional work has been conducted on the powerful actors who also control resources. Unfortunately, how the less powerful and influential actors - the ones without financial resources, contribute to institutional change has not been studied (Martí & Mair, 2009). Establishing rules and constructing rewards in order to make changes is mainly directly tied to the actors' position, and in most fields this is restricted to the state or agents of the state (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Martí & Mairs (2009) research focuses on actors who are usually labelled 'marginal' (i.e. poorly resourced, less powerful, and peripheral actors), and contributes to our understanding of institutional work. Assuming that only the powerful hold a great deal of agency, and that this is limited among the powerless, is a simplification according to Martí & Mairs (2009). Agency comes in different forms and in cases of the less powerful it is presented in a more subtle and hidden form of institutional work. The authors list the following six strategies as ways of doing institutional work when resources are limited;

1. Engaging in experimental projects.
2. Probing for weaknesses and exploiting small advantages in non-aggressive ways.
3. Working – often behind the scenes – for the enhancement of existing institutions.
4. Challenging existing myths, traditions, cultural beliefs, and structures of dominance that not only prevent them from having a more active role in their communities but also generate practices and rituals of denigration and insult.
5. Building provisional institutions.
6. Navigating across different institutional logics.

The third one, working for the enhancement of existing institutions, can be seen as complementing institutions that are created and maintained by other actors and does not fit entirely in any of the categories presented by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) (i.e. creating, maintaining, or disrupting of institutions) but can rather be included in all three. This study is interesting, considering that the agency of the powerless contributes to advancing institutional theory by rethinking different aspects of institutional work. Additionally, by exploring the relationship between ‘power and resistance’ and ‘how the powerless use different method for making changes’, we open up a new spectrum of studying millennials as potential change agents for a different construction future.

5 Discussion

Institutional work highlights the complex, reflexive and recursive relationship between “ordinary” persons and the institutions, not the great accomplishments done by outstanding individuals. This research focuses on the activities millennials engage in and their vision about the future, instead of the achievements during their short presence in the industry. The aim of this study is not to foretell the future but instead grasp encountered tendencies when interviewing this cohort. The overall response to the interviews is the high level of ambition and work ethics. However, the interviewees are not perceived as grand entrepreneurs or motivators, instead they are practical and mostly want to accomplish a good job.

It is important to recognize that all of the three categories (create, maintain and disrupt) require work and as mentioned before, the absence of change is not equivalent with maintaining institutions. Assuming it requires the same amount of work to drive change as to maintain the status quo, an important question becomes; what do millennials want for the future of the industry? And how do they use their efforts to reach that vision? When using institutional work terminology, one question could be: Will millennials disrupt the existing structures and create a different industry? Or were they drawn to this industry particularly because of its character and will therefore strive to maintain the industry the way it is?

5.1 Putting on institutional lenses

By using the frameworks of institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work, the findings are evaluated and analysed. The structure follows the same logic as before; from how the industry is perceived to how they go about to change it, and everything in between.

5.1.1 An innovative industry!

In this section ‘A slow industry?’ different opinions about whether the construction industry is conservative, slow and non-innovative are brought up. Some of the conversations were with persons that had not yet started working; therefore they spoke about impressions of the industry rather than own experiences. The stories show that that they would like the industry to change, and considering themselves and the generation as impatient and wanting things to happen faster, cheaper and better. Yet, there are few proposals on how to make this change possible.

In another conversation with an employee with a couple of years experience, the problems of the industry are directed towards state authorities; the people working there and bureaucratic processes. Yet the it-is-as-it-is mentality is quite striking – even though change is desired, the interviewee will not attempt to do something himself, thinking that it is hopeless.

In the last conversation, the interviewee does not consider the industry to be as conservative as previous conversations. She points out that it depends on different companies, roles and phases of construction. As mentioned in the introduction, the industry is rather complex and the varieties of actors and different companies make it impossible to discuss the industry as a whole; it becomes a matter of perspective.

5.1.2 Cat years

In the section “Dog years” the different stories represent expectations from others in the industry; the “advice” given are that one should start working on construction sites before advancing to other positions and types of jobs, and that things should be done in a particular order. Without trying to explain why these ideas about the “dog years” exist, the connection to the survey results presented in the introduction is interesting to examine. In the survey made by Ingemansson (2012) 89 percent of the respondents answered that learning from working is the primary form of knowledge development. Does the fact that only 1 percent of the respondents perceive education at university as knowledge development and 9 percent view information from research institutes as an important driving force for change, show that work experience is higher valued than education?

Cats go their own way and so did the interviewees when they chose to challenge the idea of a typically good career path and start working within their own areas of interest instead of ‘doing time’ in order to get accepted. Knowing what is expected, yet doing things differently can be seen as creating institutional work by constructing identities or changing the normative assumptions. Here, challenging the idea of what the typical construction career is and showing that there isn’t just one right or wrong way to go about things.

However, according to Battilana (2006), social positions affect likelihood to conduct changes and one aspect that is relevant for this part is the formal position. Even though they are challenging the existing norms of what a job in construction requires, the decision of hiring newly-graduates to construction and project management positions is not made by the millennials but rather from upper management within the company. The informal networks (also mentioned by Battilana) might have contributed to convince persons in higher positions to consider hire new workers without the traditional site background, however it is also most likely a matter of profitability.

5.1.3 ‘Kom igen nu gubbar!’*

In the conversations about the ‘Construction Jargon’, the interviewees did not give the impression of disliking the jargon. On the contrary, they seemed rather charmed by it and proud to be mastering the skill. This could be interpreted as a sign of the worker embracing the jargon as a procedure to maintain the institution the way it is. On the other hand, when one of the interviewees found a joke to be inappropriate, he brought up the subject with the management. Instead this suggests that the interviewee adapts to the situation and uses the existing rules in an attempt to create new institution. By associating the old with the new, the actor uses a method called ‘Mimicry’ by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). To adapt to the construction jargon by changing the way to speak and vocabulary the millennial gains trust and acceptance by the other construction workers and can therefore easier raise new ideas and challenge existing cultures. Yet, the question whether this can be considered as institutional work or not, depends on the intentionality of the worker. According to Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) it is not institutional work unless the aim is to create, maintain or disrupt an institution. Here, perhaps learning the ‘construction jargon’ is a natural process of absorbing terminology without even them realizing it.

The three first sections in the findings are in some ways related. The term doing dog years is about following a pre-written path and having the same construction career the precursors. This will in turn give the employee similar experiences. In addition, by learning the construction jargon, the construction worker learns terminology used on site and this contributes to creating the “right” identity. New employees are fostered in the same ways that previous employees. This will in turn lead to having similar ideas and perceptions about the industry that contributes to an it-is-as-it-is mentality and perhaps a slow industry. “Cat years” on the other hand is less appreciated as it question existing ideas and not allowing oneself to be moulded into the expected form.

The title is Swedish for the expression ‘Come on now guys!’

5.1.4 Yes please and No thanks

‘Yes please!’ is about the dream projects of the interviewees, and these projects vary from big infrastructure projects, prestigious housing projects to environmental projects such as wind turbine and sewage treatments, which emphasizes that the projects should help the society. This ambition is also recurring in the section ‘Thanks but no thanks’ where an interviewee states that he would reject projects that are not sustainable (e.g. oil refinery projects). Sustainability is an issue that has been on the agenda for more than a decade; one reason is that industry had and/or has a bad reputation of being very polluting and energy demanding. In regards to this, the institutional work for creating a better and more sustainable industry cannot be credited to the millennials entering the industry today, however some of their work is aiming at maintaining this agenda. Choosing environmental project over others, and purposefully working toward these types of projects can be seen as maintaining by using the form called Valorizing/Demonizing by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). Nevertheless, one of the interviewees denied taking on a prison project that didn’t match her moral stands and faced the consequences for that decision. This is an example of disrupting an institution. Even if it at the time was a rather difficult decision, she said during the interview “that’s how you make changes” which shows the purposefulness of the action.

To reject certain types of projects is a way of ‘probing for weaknesses and exploiting small advantages in non-aggressive ways which is one of the methods to do institutional work when power and resources are limited, provided by Martí & Mair (2009). Another relevant method by the same authors is “Working for the enhancement of existing institutions” which is accurate in situations when the actor, in a time of recession, probably would take projects that aren’t sustainable, yet entering with the ambition to make the best out of the situation.

5.1.5 Hungry for more

Millennials have a reputation of being impatient and changing jobs frequently. In the section ‘Thirsty for more’ different stories about why the interviewees left previous companies are represented. The common factor is that they wanted to have more responsibilities in order to develop and learn more. One way of seeing this as institutional work (perhaps a bit farfetched) is if the employees themselves are considered as a resource. Resigning from a job due to the lack of learning and responsibility given can be a way of disrupting an institution by disconnecting sanctions and rewards according to the model of Lawrence and Suddaby (2006).

However, just like in the section 5.1.3, the intentionality of the action determines whether the action is counted as institutional work or not.

One of the factors that, according to Batillana (2006), increase the likelihood to conduct changes is the mobility of an actor. It becomes easier to question current arrangements, and having worked in different organizations brings new perspectives that in turn help to see opportunities beyond current functions of their organization. Even though the action of resigning from a job might not count as institutional work, it increases the chances of these actors becoming potential change agents in the future. The millennials graduating today are entering the industry in a time when the industry is blooming and there is a shortage of employees. This is important to keep in mind as it affects the likelihood to change jobs.

5.1.6 My way or the high way

Lastly, in the section ‘One way or another’ two different opinions about making changes are brought up. In the first one, the interviewee talks about how she constantly worked in different ways to make changes and influence those in higher positions. The second interviewee has the opposite opinion, he thinks that one should stick to the assignment given and leave the decision making to the client or contractor, the role of the consultant is simply to advice and demonstrate different options. Here, it is the contrasts that are interesting. One could say that the first interviewee is a change agent while the other isn’t. However that would be a simplification and perhaps not true.

The unstructured interviews provided more information about each individual’s interests, which resulted in discussing many different topics. Sustainability, information systems, communication, innovation and people were some of the topics that the interviewees were very passionate about. This says that someone might be a change agent within one topic, but completely uninterested in changing, maintaining or disrupting something else. In addition, things change over time and this will most likely affect social positions, informal networks and interests.

As mentioned, when discussing change, generalizing the whole industry is rather wrong due to the diversity of the industry. The same applies for the generation millennials (and probably all generations). If the millennials entering the industry today will change the industry or not, depends on which perspective is taken and how change is defined. This will be further discussed in the last section of this thesis.

5.2 Being new in the industry

The common parameter between these individuals, except being millennials, is their short presence in the industry. With this, they have the ability to see the industry from a different perspective than those who have been working in the industry longer. The relation between the individuals and the institutional context, as well as two different tendencies noticed from the perspective of the interviewees, will be presented in this section.

Figure 6.1 shows different contexts that these individuals are a part of. The different circles representing the society, the construction industry and the construction company are all related and most often dependent on each other. The circles can be seen as institutions and as the figure shows, the individuals are members of the different institutional contexts at the same time.

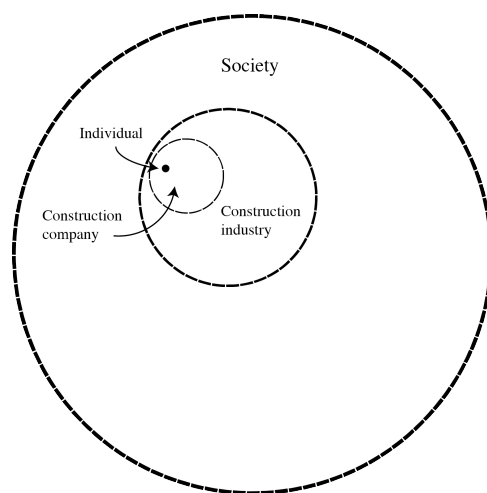


Figure 6.1 Different contexts affecting the individual (figure by author)

As the millennials have recently moved from one institutional context (i.e. university) to another, these tendencies and their resemblance to each other are clearer. The longer they stay in the context of the construction industry, the millennials will become more differentiated from each other and fit more to into the profession role taken. The theoretical framework of this thesis does not cover the transaction from one institutional context to another, or how the individuals are affected by the time working in an institution.

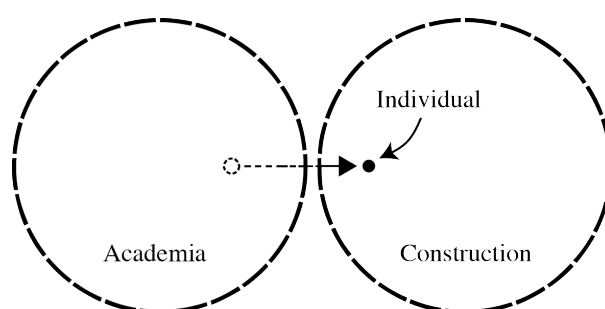


Figure 6.2 The transaction from one institutional context to another (figure by author)

The first tendency noticed through the perspective of the millennials is in regard to equality and diversity in the workplace. Even though construction jobs and the industry has come a long way, some of the findings show that the industry still has some work to be done in those fields. In the section 'Thirsty for more' one of the interviewees recalls that at her first job the only responsibility she was given was tasks such as ordering coffee for the meetings. Another similar story is told in the section 'Dog years' when the interviewee describes being new in the role as a consultant and that some of the employees saw it as a chance to get a personal secretary. These are both experiences from young female employees and probably not unique incidents. Some (men) from older generations are not used to having females in positions that are equal to their own and therefore treat the millennial as an assistant rather than a co-worker.

The second tendency noticed through the perspective of the millennials, is in regards to being a university graduate and lacking experience from work on construction sites. In the findings section, stories where the interviewee explains that a university degree isn't an advantage and that having worked in the industry (especially on site) is much higher valued, are presented. This shows a division in the construction industry in regard to education versus work experience. Even though most managerial positions often require academic background, not everyone appreciates the university degree. In fact, some see it as something rather negative. Some of those that are in managerial positions today have started their careers being skilled workers, and later "worked their way up". According to Battilana's (2006) model on social positions, the status of the social group affects the likelihood to conduct changes and consequently being a social entrepreneur. Since those in lower status social groups are often not benefitting from the existing institutional arrangements they are more likely to conduct organizational changes than those in higher status social groups within the organizational field. The different social positions that exist in construction are for example skilled workers (e.g. carpenter, plumber) and managerial positions (e.g. foremen, site managers, project managers). Having both worked on site for years and studied at university are two different career paths and can be difficult to combine, which might leave the millennial with a sense of being insufficient in their role. As long as they are considered being in a lower status social group, this will increase the likelihood of conducting organizational changes. However, this will probably change over time as the millennial acquires more experience.

6 Conclusion and further research

A short summary of the findings from the interviews are presented before answering the research question on how millennials work as change agents to create a different future in the construction industry.

The construction industry is mostly depicted as being slow and conservative from the interviews. Some individuals are challenging ideas about the typical construction career and what it should look like; they choose to follow their own interests instead of doing as is expected from them. Dream projects vary between different individuals, yet there are tendencies that show the interest for sustainability and how the millennials are taking responsibility for their actions and choices. Some of the interviewees left one job for another due to unfulfilled expectations and because they wanted more out of work life than they were offered. In some cases there are apparent expectations and demands on the industry, a strong desire to change the status quo, whereas in other cases a clear acceptance seems to influence the roles and the corresponding ability for making changes within given position.

As more and more millennials are entering the construction industry the recommendations for the employers is to focus on the individual interests of each person instead of generalizing the whole generation. This way the integration process will become smoother and the risk of losing talents to other companies or industries will be reduced. One of the main challenges when leading this generation is that many millennials are eager to learn a lot as fast as possible and therefore demand challenging tasks and a great deal of responsibility. If the industry recognizes the value of the university degree and not only work life experience, it will become easier to find appropriate and developing tasks.

The millennials work in different ways as change agents, some of the examples provided in the findings include more drastic actions in order to disrupt existing foundations, for example by refusing to take on a project. Other examples are subtler; such as using mimicry to associate more with existing cultures as new propositions are introduced. The millennials use different methods, sometimes purposefully and other times more passively. They work as individuals affected by personal goals, preferences and structural contexts.

It is impossible to answer the research question without considering the structural context, such as the relation between the industry and the rest of the society. Regulations, laws, social movements and technical developments are all things that affect the way we work, thus the industry and the individuals are all linked together. For example, the finding presented in the section ‘Construction jargon’ where one of the interviewees reacts on a joke that could be interpreted as both sexist and racist, is a result of increased knowledge about these topics. The industry recognizing the issues could be related to a larger movement in society that is happening simultaneously. Another example is presented in the section ‘Thirsty for more’, where different stories about when the individuals have demands on the employer and change jobs when the expectations are not fulfilled. This would not have been as easy if the job market in the construction industry wasn’t as flourishing as it is today, which in turn are results of the economic situation and different political decisions.

Each section presented in the findings could be further studied separately in more detail. For example the results from a longitudinal study on “dog years” and how that affects careers would be interesting to read. Reasons for rejecting certain projects, or

choosing others – how that affects the individuals but also construction companies and client organizations – is another example of a deeper study based on these findings that could be made.

7 Authors reflections

At this point, I'm reflecting on the expectations I had before starting this thesis and how that corresponds to the outcome. It was difficult to, ahead of time, distinguish what the study was about and where it was heading. I chose to use a semi-structured interview method, which quite early in the process changed to being completely unstructured. Doing unstructured interviews was very exciting; starting each conversation with little knowledge about how the discussion would flow and which topics would be covered created an interesting atmosphere. I enjoyed each interview as they felt honest and led me to think about the industry in ways I had not before.

However, the method also led to some distress and long nights trying to find meaning in the mountain of information received from the interviews. And later, figuring out how to tie the findings and theoretical framework together wasn't a piece of cake. Despite the distress and long nights, I'm glad I chose this method and think that it was a necessary approach to the subject and an important aspect for avoiding stereotypes. Not knowing exactly what I was looking for, allowed me to be more open-minded in the interviews and in the analysis.

I expected more radical findings before starting this thesis. I thought that I would be able to answer the research question in a way that portrayed a completely different construction industry. Perhaps not like in *The Jetsons* with flying vehicles and robots doing all the chores, but actually more robots than I encountered and hints of some incredible technology to come. But in seriousness I thought that I would be able to conclude "In the future, leadership is unnecessary since everyone manages themselves" or that "Not only will the industry be non-polluting, but buildings will generate enough electricity to save the planet" would be safe bet to make.

Since the findings weren't as overwhelming as I expected, I started to reflect on where my expectations came from; was it my method that wasn't sufficient to find the goodies, or is this all there is to it? I figure my expectations are a result of the hype on the millennial generation – all those thousands of articles and videos online of how the millennials are coming for every industry and transforming the way work and organizations are structured today. Generational research is rather tricky, it involves bundling up ideas and experiences of millions of individuals and stating something based merely on the years of birth. With this I'm not suggesting that generational research is completely irrelevant and shouldn't be made. However the reality is more complex than what a study based on only age can provide. Here, agreeing with Vaidhyathan (2008), by ignoring aspects such as ethnicity, gender and class distinctions, the risk of simplifying and providing stereotypes is big and therefore doing this type of research requires a great deal of cautiousness and consideration.

Onion (2015) expresses that "Distinctions between given age groups in a society can be an interesting lens for examination – but only if the person framing the questions is painfully cautious to qualify her terms, set careful parameters, and examine her assumptions." This is something I wish I had reflected on before starting this research since I missed to qualify the terms and set any parameters. Even though the study would not have been the same if the interviews were structured, it might have benefitted from setting the framework beforehand. For example by narrowing down the study to a specific part of the industry. During the interviews we discussed the industry as a whole, however the interviewees were either students in the DCPM programme or employees currently working at a large consultancy firm as assistant construction and project managers. I assume that the results would have differed if

interviewing students from other construction or architecture programmes and different professional roles within the industry.

Millennials are often assumed to differentiate from previous generations due to being born in an era of Internet and therefore accustomed to technology from a very young age. This is one of the subjects that were barely covered during the interviews. One reason might be that using Internet and computers is so common that it is taken for granted and not particularly interesting to discuss. Another reason might be that the interviewees studied or worked with management and therefore more interested in people than technology. The results would probably have been different in interviewing in other fields of the industry that benefit more from technical development such as architecture, or those working with estimations or calculations. Another aspect when discussing technology is that even though the technology has been available for a broader range, it is important to keep in mind that this does not apply for all millennials. Assuming that everyone had access to a computer while growing up would be to ignore those from lower income households that did not have the same access. This critique applies to much of the research made on millennials since it usually focuses on the privileged groups of society.

The findings reflect some of the topics that were covered during the 13 interviews. As the analysis shows some of the ways are considered to be institutional work according to the theoretical framework. Using the method called mimicry is one of the ways, and includes drawing on existing styles in order to ease into something new. Saying yes to certain projects and rejecting others is another way of doing institutional work, particularly in the case where the interviewee refused to take on a project that didn't match her moral stands. Even though this is consistent with one of the millennial-attributes often heard – that is, wanting a purpose or wanting to make a difference – it is (unfortunately) not enough to draw the conclusion that millennials will change the construction industry.

I believe that the construction industry will change in many ways (and remain the same in some). Millennials will play a big role in conducting this change, however not because they are millennials but simply because they are individuals who care about doing a good job and see opportunities where a change can provide better results. I think the identity of those working in the construction industry is becoming more diverse; from what used to be a man with long experience from working on construction sites, to both men and women, different ages and different educational backgrounds. In regards to what millennials want in their work life; they wish to have a sense of meaning and make an impact, they want work-life balance, opportunities, feedback and being appreciated for the job that they are doing – which is pretty much the same things as every generation in the workforce.

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