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English Summary

This research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the practice and meaning of transition rituals in the context of complex construction projects in the infrastructure sector. Complex construction projects are characterized by their high cost, immense scope, inherent complexity and uncertainty, high environmental and societal impact, and the laborious collaboration between public and private partners. The ever-changing, non-linear, and often unpredictable process that typifies the life cycle of such projects is a main concern in organization and project management studies. Moreover, projects are temporary organizational constructs continuously evolving over time, concerning various stakeholders, and embedded in multiple socio-political contexts. Within this complex context, this research takes the ritualization of transitions in the project life cycle as the main research focus. Specifically, I address rituals that mark important transitions and milestones in the life cycle of construction projects, such as signing contracts, (sub)project kick-offs, project phase launches, celebrating milestones, and (sub)project completions. Using a qualitative-interpretive and practice-based approach, I exhibit how, when, and why these transition rituals are practiced in the context of complex construction projects.

To carry out this research I conducted multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork during eight ritual events in four construction projects in the Netherlands: two project kick-offs for the Room for the River project in Deventer and Zwolle; two phase transitions during the sub-project of tunnel-boring in the North-South metro line of Amsterdam; two milestone celebrations in the Railzone Delft project, one for reaching the end of the tunnel and the other for reaching the highest point of the new municipality building; and two project deliveries in the Hanzeline railroad project, one internal delivery held for the project organization and another external delivery held for the public. Fieldwork was also carried out at various construction sites in the project cases via excursions, private visits and open days. Furthermore, to decipher the meaning of transition rituals, 58 in-depth interviews were carried out with project actors who organized, attended or participated in the ritual events. This sample included communication advisors, project directors, managers, employees, contractors, constructors, as well as state officials and political representatives. The findings, analyses and contributions of this research have been divided into four research papers presented in Chapters 3 through 6 of this dissertation.

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of ‘transition rituals’ in the field of project management and shows how they facilitate and mediate the lengthy and fragmented project process. Specifically, I provide an overview of *how*, *when* and *why* transition rituals are

practiced to enact transitions and embed a project in its environment. The wide diversity of transition rituals emerged at three distinct levels. Firstly, at a team level construction workers engage in transition rituals such as shoveling the first earth, laying the first brick, or celebrating milestones and realizing subproject scopes. These smaller-scale rituals have an integrative character and help to build solidarity and commitment within the project organization. Secondly, at an institutional level transition rituals, such as the Queen's opening of the Hanzelne railway or the contract signed by the minister of infrastructure and environment in the Room for the River project, provide a space for state officials as mediators between a project and its environment. Thirdly, at a societal level transition rituals, such as reaching the end of a tunnel or the top of a building in Railzone Delft, are held for residents to gain citizen support and embed a project in its environment.

In other words, transition rituals can involve different target groups (i.e. 'Builders', 'VIPs', and 'Citizens' in this dissertation) and may have an internal or external focus. The internal and external distinction of transition rituals reflects the dual focus of construction projects which are embedded in multiple contexts. Internal rituals are usually more small-scale and practiced at the back-stage of a project for those who do the 'real' work, while external transition rituals are more large-scale and performed on the front-stage for wider institutional and societal audiences. During external rituals, state officials and the media play important roles in exposing the project to citizens residing in the project area. Therefore, I claim transition rituals are closely intertwined with the social, cultural and political dynamics of a project, such as the need to enhance legitimacy, support, involvement, solidarity and commitment. Essentially, transition rituals embody and act upon these dynamics as they serve to inform and involve multiple stakeholders as well as guide the project life cycle in a structured, timely, and inclusive manner. This is vital in helping a project to progress while remaining sensitive to its multi-layered social context.

Chapter 4 conceptualizes rituals as strategic practices by showing how they are performed at a certain time and space, with predetermined actors and audiences, and symbolic words, gestures and materials to signal and express meaning. In this way, rituals are performed strategically to construct particular meaning(s), shape reality, and catalyze transitions in the project process. Subsequently, I provide three strategic practices that typify ritual performances. The first is 'the sanctification of time and space' which shows how the orchestration of ritual performances sanctifies ordinary time and space as extraordinary. For example, when the Queen opens a railway, a priest baptizes a machine, or a political representative signs his name on a contract before a public audience, these are not everyday,

ordinary actions. In this way, by privileging and distinguishing what is being done compared to everyday work practices, rituals are granted their episodic and transformative power.

The second is ‘the legitimization of symbolic performance’ where ritual actors play their roles on stage and attempt to persuade the audience as strategists of orchestrated communication. In this research, it was found that only authoritative figures – which I call ‘VIPs’ – such as mayors, aldermen, provincial representatives, ministers, the Queen, or even a Catholic priest are permitted to perform rituals, entitling them to make important decisions and enact transitions during the life cycle of construction projects. Besides authoritative figures, I observed that school children were given important roles to perform rituals, such as by reciting poetry in the projects Room for the River and the Hanzeline, by ceremonially welcoming the contractor consortium in Railzone Delft, or by choosing and revealing the name bestowed to each tunnel boring machine in the North-South line of Amsterdam. Children are identified by project actors as important symbols of the future. In this way, the symbolic performance of VIPs and children during ritual events is a strategic practice to legitimate a project and help bring a vision of the future into being.

The third strategic practice is the ‘catalysis of a point of no return.’ Namely, I found that rituals give the impression of irreversibility via a particular ‘point of no return’, manifested by certain gestures and materials such as signing a signature, releasing a banner, raising a flag, smashing a bottle, or pressing a button. This gives rituals a certain magical or self-fulfilling character, allowing them to transform the present and (re)construct reality. Thus, because a certain state of the present and vision of the future are performed during a ritual, this state and vision become a reality through their very performance. Overall, this chapter exhibits how ritual performances not only mark transitions in projects but also realize them, thereby constructing a new situation and reality.

Chapter 5 applies the theory of ‘sociomateriality’ which underlines how social and material entities should be seen as inherently interrelated, rather than as autonomous and separate from one another. In other words, it argues that all processes and practices are simultaneously social *and* material – i.e. sociomaterial – though what this means precisely remains unclear in organization studies. Therefore, this chapter aims to show *how* and *why* social and material entities are interrelated in a specific case study: the North-South Line metro project in Amsterdam. To show this, I devise a multilayered lens to analyze sociomateriality at the contextual, organizational and practice level.

At the contextual level, I ‘zoom out’ on the case and unfold the history and context of the project in the city of Amsterdam more broadly. In doing so, the difficult process of metro

construction since the 1960's is disclosed, such as metro riots in the 1970's and a resultant metro taboo which remained, yet to be broken. In this context, the North-South line had to be constructed since 2009 which turned out to be a highly sensitive and problematic endeavor, stirring much social and political unrest. Thus, it becomes evident that the materiality of metro construction became increasingly entangled with social and political spheres in the city over time. Then, at the organizational level, I show how engineers and constructors struggled to control or predict the material. Though they claimed to have "state of the art" technology, there were many technical mishaps and problems such as the subsoil leakage at the Vijzelgracht causing various buildings to sink into the ground. This indicates the power of the material which could not always be 'tamed' by human actors. Thirdly, at practice level, I analyze the baptism and name-giving ritual of the tunnel boring machine. Rather than relying on technological calculations for control and predictability, the project organization performed this ritual; to reconfigure the difficult interrelation between the construction process (i.e. the material) and the people of Amsterdam (i.e. the social). Though highly symbolic and seemingly irrational, the performance of this ritual in this project and context was essential to humanize the material. Specifically, by publicly baptizing and naming the machine, an inherent interrelation between social and material entities was performed in an amiable light so that people would empathize with the material rather than fear it. To conclude, I argue that the perception of the interrelation between social and material dimensions depends on the level of analysis.

Chapter 6 focuses on the disturbance caused by urban megaprojects and on how project organizations can mitigate or absorb their 'self-produced shocks'. Specifically, two similar urban megaprojects in the Netherlands have been studied and compared: the North-South Line of Amsterdam and Railzone Delft. From analyzing the findings, a new term is coined, 'shock-absorbing platform', being a practice-based platform used by project participants to rebalance the disturbance of a megaproject in urban settings. Specifically, when comparing these two cases, four shock-absorbing platforms are detected in both projects: (1) an informative platform, including the use of websites, letters, leaflets, posters, news articles, and the information center to inform the public; (2) the interactive platform, such as Facebook, Twitter, Apps, and blogs which enable citizens to interact with the project organization; (3) the participatory platform, referring to project tours and excursions, open days, project lookout points, and the annual 'Day of Construction' during which citizens are permitted to visit the project grounds; and (4) the transitional platform, comprising ritual

events which invite citizens to celebrate milestones, (sub)project kick-offs, and (sub)project completions together with the project organization.

In this chapter, I claim that urban megaprojects cause significant threats to local quality of city life during their construction. Therefore, to absorb their self-produced shocks and rebalance the disturbance they cause in urban settings, I suggest project organizations can make use of these four shock-absorbing platforms. In particular, these platforms are useful for enhancing project transparency and legitimacy, involving citizens and other stakeholders, and mediating socio-cultural dynamics in and around a project. Thus, the careful crafting of these platforms as a collaborative process that is deemed fair and open to affected stakeholders is an important means for managing the complexity of megaprojects. Accordingly, the findings in this chapter are especially valuable for project managers, communication advisors, and environment managers to help open up their projects to citizens and other stakeholders. Opening up customarily “gated” megaprojects might be the best way forward to gain citizen support and absorb their self-produced shocks in urban areas.

This research as a whole makes several important theoretical contributions to the field of project management. Firstly, as established in Chapter 3, this research provides the conceptualization of transition rituals as important symbolic and strategic practices in the life cycle of complex construction projects. Specifically, a focus on transition rituals offers an alternative to traditional perspectives on temporal structuring and organizing, such as an emphasis on instrumental models and pacing devices for planning and control. Conversely, an interpretive study of transition rituals addresses the social and symbolic facet of time and transition in projects which has been neglected by traditional approaches. Secondly, this study contributes the understanding of rituals as strategic practices that are significant for authorization, legitimization, external communication, and realizing transitions in the project process. Precisely, the strategic implementation of rituals is considered especially significant at the interface between a project organization and its environment. A focus on this interface is becoming increasingly relevant in the field of project management. This dissertation adds to this growing area of research by exploring how project actors cope with the complex context of construction projects and communicate with and include their environment in the project implementation process.

In the field of organization studies, this research extends ritual theory by addressing ritual practices beyond the organizational periphery, thereby offering not only an internal focus but also an external focus. Namely, this research has been particularly attentive to organizational rituals performed for wider institutional and societal audiences. In this way,

this research contributes to ritual studies integrating the micro, meso and macro levels of organization studies. Additionally, this research provides a critical perspective that accounts for the strategic and performative dimensions of rituals where issues of power and politics are addressed. Importantly, this goes beyond research that tends to focus solely on the integrative and unifying aspects of rituals such as enhancing solidarity and equality. Similarly, the interpretive approach used in this study challenges a purely instrumental perspective on rituals in organization studies. Rather, in this dissertation I argue that while rituals may be useful to meet certain ends, they also have unintended consequences, latent or hidden meanings, and different implications for different actors.