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THEATRE OF CREATION: INDUSTRY ANALYSTS AS PROPAGATORS OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FRAMEWORKS

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Abstract

Industry analysts have received an increase in attention within information systems research during the past few years. Acknowledged as propagators in the diffusion of information technology (IT) innovations, they provide their clients and the neighboring industry-community with definitions, tools and frameworks intended to aid both managerial decision-making and operations. They have been described as “promissory organization”, building revenue through selling future-oriented promises and expectations. At the same time, they are producers of artefacts with a performative affect, changing the way in which decisions are made and operations are organized. This paper addresses the research question how industry analysts propagate IT frameworks. This is answered through an ethnographic study conducted at one of the largest annual gatherings of industry analysts and industry leaders in 2011. The story that unfolds highlights aspects of cocreation taking place in one studied session, introducing a new perspective on the propagation of IT frameworks, as well as the need for further studies of industry analyst gatherings.

Keywords: Industry analysts, promissory organizations, technology demonstrations, cocreation, IT Governance
1 Introduction

Industry analysts have recently been acknowledged as an important, yet within research largely overlooked set of actors in the creation and diffusion of innovations (Brown et al, 2000; Tutton, 2011). Defined as intermediate actors “specialized in the production, commodification and selling of future-oriented knowledge” (Pollock and Williams, 2010: 525), they have experienced an increase in importance throughout the last decade (Pollock and Williams, 2009).

According to Wang and Ramiller (2009), the industry analysts work with creating and classifying technological developments, often through branding a set of development into a concept with an accompanying definition. Previous examples of this can be seen with constructs such as that of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Total Cost of Ownership (TCO), both created and diffused by one of the leading industry analyst firms (Swanson, 2010). Hence, the industry analysts impact the market not solely through analyzing the market and supplying customers with future-oriented “knowledge”, but also through the use of performative definitions and classifications (Pollock and Williams, 2011; Tutton, 2011) aiming to force the customers to re-define their products and solutions.

The artefacts produced by the industry analysts’ range from reports to frameworks, toolkits and other practical decision-aids. These artefacts are available on a pay-per-view basis. In addition to the written material, the industry analysts organize congresses and workshops, focused on a general or specific topic. During these gatherings, customers are exposed to analysts presenting their latest findings. For this paper, we choose to regard these gatherings as instances of what Smith (2009) refers to as “Technological demonstrations”. Through doing so, we tap in to a rich plethora of research conducted within Science and Technology Studies (STS) on how these demonstrations can be understood.

Previous studies of industry analysts have largely focused on the impact that the classifications and definitions have on the organization of the technological field (see Pollock and Williams, 2011 for an excellent example of this). In this respect, only a limited amount of research has investigated the primary target for the industry analyst firms, namely the using organization i.e. customer (see Tutton, 2011 for an example). This paper wishes to add to this latter stream of industry analyst focused research through focusing on the customers’ role in the propagation of IT frameworks.

We define Frameworks as a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices constituting a way of viewing reality. Following this definition, we choose to regard the framework in focus for this paper as consisting of two parts: First, the formal definition and description of the “IT Governance Framework” available in the industry analyst reports. Second, the situated sense-making that takes place in the meeting between industry analysts and customers. The rationale for this dual view of the framework is based on Orlikowski (2010), Leonardi and Barley (2008) and Kallinikos (2011), and the sociomaterial call for reconceptualizing the demarcation of the technological and the social. In this respect, the “IT Governance Framework” is seen as a functional simplification (Kallinikos, 2011) infused with meaning and reference through the situated use (Leonardi and Barley, 2008; Orlikowski, 2010) in the studied session.

The research question that this paper adresses is:

*How are IT frameworks propagated through demonstrations by industry analysts?*

This question is answered through an ethnography of one of the largest gatherings of Chief Information Officers (CIOs) and Executive IT personnel in 2011, organized as a congress by one of the most dominant industry analysts within IT. The fieldwork was conducted by two researchers working in roles as CIOs and IT Executives, but with a background and current occupation as researchers. Due to the vastness of the acquired material, one particular session was chosen as an empirical delimitation for this paper.
The contribution is primarily directed towards two fields; For the first field, there is an intended contribution towards the growing field of literature on industry analysts as propagators of innovations and IT demonstrations. Here the contribution is two-fold. First, there is a content-related contribution through an ethnography conducted on one of the major industry analyst gatherings in the world. Secondly, there is a methodological contribution along the lines sought by Pollock and Williams (2010) and Simakova (2011) through the use of ethnographical methods for data collection.

For the second field, there is an intended contribution towards practice, through offering an example of how industry analysts work in propagating both their own image and legitimacy, as well as the definitions and frameworks that they make a business out of. This is perceived to be of interest to both the customer-side of industry analyst business, and the analysts themselves.

The paper is organized accordingly: After an introduction to the rationale for this piece of research, previous research of relevance to the study is presented. This is followed by a recollection of the method applied, and the ethnography itself. After this, a discussion is presented, including some notes on continued research.

2 Previous research on Industry analysts and Demonstrations

Directed studies of industry analysts has up until the last years been rather scarce, yet within Science and Technology Studies (STS), work such as that of Brown et al (2000), Brown and Michael (2003), Pollock and Williams (2010; 2011) and Tutton (2011) signal an increase in popularity. Within what is referred to as the “Sociology of Expectations” (Pollock and Williams, 2010), research is more and more using constructs such as performativity to understand the interplay between different actors in the innovation ecosystem (Brown and Michael, 2003). Following this school of thought, issues related to the sociomateriality of technology have also become increasingly popular (Kallinikos, 2011).

Industry analysts are seen as propagators (Fichman, 1991) of technologies, concepts and frameworks. They are in this view regarded as actors involved in the creation and diffusion (or rather marketing and sales) of innovations (Rogers, 2003), in line with previously studied actors such as academics and consultants (Ax and Bjørnenakk, 2005). Introducing the industry analysts in this set of actors, Pollock and Williams (2010) show how industry analysts act as intermediaries in influencing technological development and innovation. In other words, the industry analysts impact both the IT industry directly through signaling which direction is preferable in terms of development for IT vendors, and indirectly through impacting the expectations of the user-side (Brown et al, 2000). Through this setup, industry analysts are performative through not simply describing the current and future state of technology, but also impacting the development through prescriptions. Pollock and Williams use the notion of “promissory organizations” to capture the role that industry analysts play.

According to Burks (2006), industry analysts have shown an increase in importance and market size during the past decade. Industry analysts have gone from being highly specialized and narrow, towards having a more general acceptance and grasp of their offering. At present, we see no decrease in growth-rate for the industry analysts, and hence an increased understanding of their role as propagators is of interest to the scientific community.

A key distribution channel for industry analysts is congresses. At congresses, demonstrations of concepts, technologies and frameworks are made in front of an audience in a similar manner as that which has previously been studied under the heading of ”technological demonstrations” (Gooding et al. 1989; Smith, 2009; Simakova, 2010). The bulk of literature related to this comes from the school of STS, with a focus on public experiments, a popular occurrence during the 17th to 19th century. Smith (2009) expands this interest to the public display of IT through demonstrations of software and hardware in an interview study using Goffman’s (1974) methodology of frame analysis. Establishing that IT demonstrations encompass both inner and outer drama, while all the while creating what Smith
refers to as a “Theatre of use”, the demonstrator moves between roles of presenter and prospective user. This work was followed by Simakova (2010), with an ethnography of a product launch of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology. Simakova uses the concept of “Theatre of the Proof” to describe the role that demonstrations has for the organization that performs the demonstration. In relation to Smith’s (2009) external (audience) focus, this internal (presenter) focus sheds additional light on the importance of technology demonstrations as organizational practice.

For this paper we see industry analysts as promissory organizations, propagating innovations through market research in a performative manner. At the same time, we acknowledge that congress-based sessions have parallels with technology demonstrations as previously investigated within STS. Hence, we will use elements from both these two streams of research to analyze the ethnography presented in this paper.

3 Method

The method applied in this paper is that of ethnographic observation of an IT related industry analyst congress. Following Gold (1958), the research was conducted as "complete participant", with two researchers having dual roles throughout the fieldwork. Both researchers participated in the congress as regular participants, in relation to their main occupations as managers. An additional researcher in the group refrained from participating in the ethnographic observations, to counteract a tendency for the ethnographers to “go native” and have this impact the following research activities.

The congress was selected on the premise of it being the largest gathering of industry analysts and industry leaders in the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region in 2011. The industry analyst firm that organized the congress is the largest IT-related industry analyst firm in the world, and the congress annually brings together 3.000 to 4.000 participants, and around 100 analysts. The congress is held over four full days, with full days of scheduled sessions. The industry leaders participate as an audience, with industry analysts organizing and providing all content during the congress.

Before venturing into the field, inspiration from previous ethnographies was sought. The goal was to create an approach that would both be possible for the researchers to follow personally given their roles as complete participants, and that would create the most suitable ethnography. After inspiration from Schultze (2000) and her highly personal ethnography of knowledge work, Humphreys, Brown and Hatch’s (2003) notions of "ethnography as jazz" were found to be a suitable foundation for the fieldwork. The virtues presented in the latter of these publications accentuated the personal role of the ethnographer, which was something that both researchers felt necessary given the complicated aspects of working as complete participants. In addition to this, Rosen (1985) and Kunda (2006) were found to offer interesting examples of how a presentation of the final ethnography could be written, whereby these also were selected as references for the continued work.

Additional inspiration was sought through looking at theoretical temata that may be of interest as a backdrop to analysis of the findings. Here, we concentrated our focus on the two areas covered under “Previous research”, as well as recent developments within sociomateriality (Orlikowski, 2010; Kallinikos, 2011). The latter of these three areas brought with it implications for both the ethnography itself and the analysis, since it forced us to broaden our empirical base. Accordng to Orlikowski and Scott (2008), the separation of the social and the technological can be seen as counter-productive for an increased understanding of the situation at hand (see also Peckering, 1995). Hence, the technologies (i.e. tools, frameworks, definitions et cetera) referenced in the sessions were also necessary to take into consideration and include in the empirical foundation.

The empirical material that was used for the research encompassed fieldnotes taken on site (both during and between the formal sessions), reflective notes in daily after-congress reflection meetings between the two researchers, slideshows and formal minutes from the sessions, industry analyst reports referenced during the sessions, as well as video-recordings of the sessions (made available...
after the congress). The fieldnotes consisted of a mix of personal reflections, environmental observations and verbatim quotes.

In this paper, one session was selected as the empirical foundation. The session was one of the more central and marketed at the congress, with one of the most distinguished analysts speaking. The session covered issues related to IT Governance. One of the researchers participated as audience in the session, and after creating an outline for the ethnography this was sent to the other researchers. The idea of not participating with all researchers in the session was to have researchers relatively unaffected after the session before entering the analysis phase. Using additional material (as described above), the ethnography was then created through collaborative writing (Lowry, Crutis and Lowry, 2004) of a narrative in the first-person singular, followed by a narrative analysis guided by Fuller and Collier’s (2004) distinction between rhetoric and sociological epistemology.

4 Results: Theatre of Creation

As I enter the room, I am greeted by friendly support-staff with scanners, carefully registering all the 400 or so participants. They welcome each and every one personally with a smile, and another co-worker hands out review forms. As I sit down in the middle of the room, I hear people talking casually about the general event. They are surprised about the relatively low level of involvement from both the speakers and the crowd that they have seen so far, and they talk about the potential reasons for this.

The session is one of the top sessions, by a highly distinguished analyst within the field of IT Governance. The room is filled to the brim, and in the background there is up-beat pop music playing. Some of the attendants quietly hum along to the music, and all eyes are fixed on the large stage as the scheduled time approaches.

The speaker arrives three minutes late, a fact that is commented on by several in the audience. Despite having been in the room well 15 minutes in advance, they are surprised by this breach of protocol, since most of the sessions are precisely on time. As the speaker enters the stage, the music is cut, and the analyst introduces herself without much ado, simply greeting the crowd as a group of people where she knows most of them in person. This approach stands in sharp contrast with most of the other sessions during the event, where the presenter is careful to present him or herself in more detail. As a participant without a previous relationship with the speaker, I get the feeling that she sees no need to establish relevance for what she is about to say, and that I can trust her even more.

*Good morning, how are you all today. You are looking great, fantastic stamina! (short pause) How many of you are currently in the process of retuning your governance?*

After quickly making a gesture of counting the vast show of hands that she gets from the audience, she acknowledges the crowd and goes on to establish a sense of intimacy, a feeling that in this room, there is nothing to be ashamed of, and then she starts her presentation.

*I hear you! Usually, the first word that comes to mind is not fun. (the crowd laughs) When we speak to CIOs that have well functioning governance, they believe that they have a competitive advantage through this. To execute strategy and outpace competition. What I am gonna’ share with you today is a framework that will help you outperform the competitors.*

She speaks in a broad American accent, and constantly smiles at the audience while slowly and deliberately pacing the 50ft stage and motioning with her hands to accentuate particular aspects of what she says. An element of humor is always there, as a backdrop to the area that is covered.

*Now you’re thinking about bureaucracy! When you speak to the business, they are saying that you are slowing them down. Your answer to this is, ‘Yes!’ In order to avoid mistakes we need to design streamlined, non-bureaucratic governance.*

While putting up a slide on the single, large screen in the back of the stage showing the tradeoff between control and agility, her words both acknowledge and deter the crowd. On the one hand, we
feel good about having put into place the widespread bureaucracies of the past years, since this is clearly necessary given the information provided. On the other hand, we are made aware of the tradeoffs between agility and control, and hence we are left with wanting more information.

The speaker gets personal through an anecdote from her own life. This is accompanied by clear punchlines and loud laughs from the crowd. By now, everyone in the crowd is smiling and apparently enjoying the ride. The anecdote is boiled down to a lesson that is made explicit by the speaker.

*Where there is risk, we have to have rules. When we want to grow, we need to be agile and flexible. When do we need to avoid risk by control, and when do we want to grow? This to me is the key question in governance.*

After this conclusion and summary of the main relevance behind her talk, the speaker presents the agenda in three bullet points. Each of the three points are clearly formulated and raises the anticipation about the take-away’s from the session being both relevant and down-to-earth and easily applicable. The presentation of agenda is directly followed by a definition of what IT Governance is. This is presented through a schematic sketch of the comprising elements, in basic consisting of frameworks and processes, and a promise by the speaker to go into more detail on this. Before doing this, the speaker pauses, looks out across the room and smiles.

*It's hard to have a visual model for what good governance is. I work on the faculty for [reference to the industry analyst firm] CIO academy...*

The speaker shares an anecdote about giving the students in the CIO academy a blank piece of paper and asking them to visualize their governance. The audience laughs quietly and share looks among each other, clearly thinking about how they would react to this situation. The speaker acknowledges this and smiles nodding. In the continued anecdote, some of the students draw processes, others draw a picture of themselves with either a happy or a sad face, something that is greeted once again with laughs from the audience.

*The reality is that sometimes it is difficult for us to know what good governance looks like. I'll share with you some of the elements we believe are critical... The findings build on research... We spoke to organizations where corporate governance was strong, and IT Governance was strong. One of our findings was this: (directs attention to the screen). Governance had elements of both being a process and framework. The framework is where you wanna’ go.*

This clear indication of direction is greeted with a simultaneous scribbling of notes from the audience. As everyone looks up, the speaker continues, all along smiling.

*The governance process is intended to execute the framework. As the very wise Winnie the Pooh once said: if you don’t know where you’re going, it doesn’t matter how you get there! One of the findings was: the ones with the weak frameworks had the most bureaucratic governance.*

This is followed by more scribbling of notes and a long description of the basic elements of corporate and IT frameworks, all along with a focus on the necessity to identify the objectives and the destination of the strategic intent. The speaker weaves in examples of well-known firms that highlight the core principles being purveyed. For each of the companies mentioned, this is met with a response by the audience of nods and scribbles.

I can sense a feeling of ease among the audience and in myself, since I feel absolute trust in the speaker and what is communicated. It is easily presented, even though the details sometimes make me feel a spell of vertigo, and all the while I feel that I am moving between taking it all in and applying it as a test to my own organization. This sometimes makes me feel ashamed about my own organizations shortcomings, but at the same time I understand what I am supposed to do when I get back, and this eases the tension and leaves me with a feeling of content.

*Good governance is about control (message is simultaneously displayed on the screen). When we say control, is that something that makes you happy and makes you smile? (the audience laughs). I am*
very happy with control, as long as I am the one who has it. The reality is that control makes us nervous, nobody likes to be micro-managed. And we don’t like working in organizations when decisions are out of control. This is extremely uncomfortable…

The notion about control is illustrated by a reference to “a study published” in the Harvard Business Review about the level of strategy execution abilities as seen through the eyes of CIOs, with only 15% stating that they believed they could actually operationalize the decisions necessary from their strategies. This is accentuated by the speaker through asking the audience what this actually teaches us, and without waiting for a response she answers herself.

*When you can’t move those resources we are out of control, ladies and gentlemen! Do you know how you made a governance decision? You moved money. Everything after that is execution. So it’s critical that your financial processes are embedded. One of my favorite rules: When you make a governance decision, there should be a bean counter in the room. Make sure you work very closely with finance.*

Here another notion of governance is introduced into the session, that of funds control. This is directly followed by an anecdote from one of the speaker’s clients that met with his board only once a year. This is elaborated upon by the speaker as all to seldom, since these people (the board) meet with what they find interesting, and hence (implied) what they find interesting is that which they meet with. This is greeted with smiles, nods of approval and shared looks of guilt. During this time I find myself being bit perplexed, lingering on the notion of “governance decision”, which makes me think of the previously finely chiseled definition of IT Governance. After a brief moment of anxiety, I decide not to go into detail on this, but instead just enjoy the show.

*Taking calculated risk is an outcome of good governance. As part of this research we published a maturity model. We noticed an interesting thing, that the less mature governance, the more they spend on IT. (shows graph on slide)*

The graph presented is highly simplified with two distributions of spend and bureaucracy (green and red) in in interlocked bell- and U-shape. This graph is elaborated upon by the speaker, while all the time engaging the audience through talking at length about the CIOs role as no-sayer. Numerous examples are given, when the CIO standard response is “No” to any request coming from business. This is presented in a semi-mocking tone, with a clear response of smiles and acknowledging nods from the audience. We are all engaged now, highly sensitive to our roles as no-sayers, to the necessity yet foolishness and sub-optimization of saying No to everything. At this time, I feel a great sense of relief, I am at the same time patting myself on the back for all my previous issued No’s, yet relieved by the fact that I from now on may not have to be so adamant to new initiatives through a more fervent taking of calculated risks.

*As organizations become more mature in IT Governance, they start focusing on ROI. They treat IT as a portfolio of investments. We want this many… At level five they actively invest in innovation…*  

The presenter smiles constantly, walks slowly over the stage and points with hands. This establishes the need to move forward. First through a focus on bureaucracy in the early maturity stages of our IT Governance, and later through a relieving of bureaucratic control and a new era of highly focused innovation investments. The audience smiles and nods, scribbling incessantly.

*I suggest you make it an objective of yours as you move forward to eliminate committees that are not needed. I spoke to an organization recently that had 24 committees. They did an audit and it resulted in that they added one to coordinate committees! (laughs).*

*How many of you call it steering committee? I will be blunt: I don’t favor that word. I favor the IT investment team, since that is more poignant, steering is wrong. If you are steering the car, then you’re in control? Not if it is my car and I am in the passenger seat… My husband is going direct to heaven for dealing with me…*  

The tone in the room is now jovial and there are high, unrestrained laughs moving through the audience. I get the feeling that we are all friends, all in the same boat. With the same set of troubles,
and the same route ahead. Despite our organizations being different, I feel that we can all find comfort in the advice and information that we are receiving. The positive mood is enforced through the speaker turning our attention to what this successful state of IT Governance could bring.

At level 4 and 5, CEOs will say differently “We have 10 M€ in additional funds, what would that give us if we put it in IT?” Anybody had that discussion recently? Good for you!

Asking the audience and acknowledging those among the crowd that stated they had shared the experience described, the speaker continues on a positive note, in an almost playful manner.

How many of you killed a project last year? About half, good for you. For those of you that didn’t, you have homework. Go home and kill a project, I don’t care which one. It is in line with our creative destruction. That you killed it in progress, that is a sign of success! If you haven’t killed a project, it doesn’t mean you’ve done a bad job, but kill one just for fun!

Expecting the audience to frown at this blatant disregard of corporate convention, I am surprised at first to find the bulk of the people present laughing whole-heartedly at this. After a few moments, I join the laughter, feeling greatly released from tension. I find myself thinking that this is really the way to see things, why treat it so serious? The main thing is to get the overall effectiveness in place, what will one project mean if it can help us perform better in the long run? I start doing a quick inventory of the projects that I could consider to be targets for this type of learning.

After this brief breach of protocol, of suggesting a practical approach towards creative destruction that is one of the key thematic recommendations during the event, the speaker moves on to describing some toolkits and models that are designed to aid the audience in their coming work.

We have as reference, a toolkit that you can request...The only rule in the guide is that you have over 20 mechanisms in the guide, you are not allowed to use all. The goal is to use as few as possible to get your organization under control.

Through a swift recollection of some of the tools, in parallel shown on the screen, the speaker gives examples from well-known companies that have employed the advice to their own business. Here I find myself first becoming impressed by the spread of advice that the industry analysts have, the traction that their ideas get. After a while, I start thinking about whether or not these companies actually employ the models or are simply working in a similar manner. I sense a minor tone of ambivalence in the presentation, and, find myself wondering how I could actually use the examples at home.

An example of what it looks like when you combine it at Estee Lauder (case shown on screen). One of the reactions I get from this clients when I show this is: oh my god, they have seven gates! Ask the question: do you have gates when you ask should I kill this? In agile governance, what we would like to see is at least some of the projects moving in and out of the portfolio as the business changes. If you don’t have the ability to shift resources and move them, you may need to look at this. Make a little bit of an adjustment to your governance.

Numerous more toolkits, methods and mechanisms are presented, all along accompanied by examples, analogies, anecdotes and simple, rules of thumb.

Governance is a team sport. It is important to define roles and stay in position. Here’s a wonderful analogy: do anybody of you have children who played soccer as kids? When they’re small, do any of them play soccer? Nobody is gonna’ score, and if they score its gonna’ be an accident (laughs). They don’t really learn to play soccer until they learn a specific role, stay in position and play as a team. I would suggest that governance is the same. In governance, guess what the ball is that everybody chases? It is the money! It is really important that everybody plays their best role in the investment.

Here’s my Machiavellian shortcut: if they don’t have control over money then they are an advisory group... There is a very strong rule of thumb. People should only make decisions regarding that which they actually understand... Laughs... I know it’s really controversial... Laughs. I am a true
believer of this... Governance is what I call a garbage-in garbage-out process. Portfolio management!
If we can’t see the portfolio, we can’t manage it... Great landing, wrong airport... This is kind of a law of the jungle if you have money you can make decisions... The more mature you get, the more agile you will get.

These are some of the communication tools that make sure that we are effective... This is a simple tool that I encourage you to use at home... Don’t show this to anyone, this is a private tool (laughs)... These are some research references... some of the tools are contained... So if those are useful to you. Please feel free to access them.

As the session draws to an end, the speaker goes into some additional recommendations aimed at summarizing the talk. Having only five minutes before the stated end-time, the speaker concludes by apologizing for not being able to take questions from the audience, but invites anybody that feels inclined to approach her after the session. She thanks the audience for attending, and the audience responds with strong applause.

As we get up to leave, there is a strong feeling of positive energy in the audience, and people are involved in animated discussions about how good the session was. Some of the participants share ideas about how to apply elements of what the speaker presented in their own organizations when they get home, and others talk about what they are going to see next.

Personally, I feel rather spent and tired after concentrating hard for an hour, and I find myself thinking about how impressive the speaker was in her crowd-control and in her argumentation, and I am sure that I will have to go through the minutes from the session when the conference is over and I am back home, to make sure that I didn’t miss anything of importance.

5 Discussion

The ethnography portrays a situated propagation of the industry analysts IT Governance framework. This framework was first introduced 2005, and then re-designed on numerous occasions in light of new insight and changes in what the framework is to support. At the time of this particular session, the situation for the industry is one of a “perfect storm”, as the keynote speaker for the congress expressed. There is absolute turmoil, radical changes and enormous uncertainties looming (due to the economic crises of the EU and USA simultaneously), and this calls for decisive action and innovative thinking (according to the keynote).

With this as a backdrop, we will discuss the ethnography from two main perspectives following Fuller and Collier (2004), first, with a focus on the speaker and rhetoric used, and second with a focus on the audience and the sociological epistemology of the session. Together, these two perspectives will aid us in answering the research question of this paper.

Throughout the ethnography, the speaker gives the impression of being highly in control of the setting. She is well at ease, sees no need to establish her pathos and rests on the presumption that the audience is interested in what she has to say. This also impacts her building of legitimacy and relevance, where one of the most striking characteristics can be found in her use of references. References are not used in the traditional academic sense of the word as a means for securing both legitimacy and transparency. Instead, there are but a few direct references used, namely to “published” research from the industry analyst firm themselves and from Harvard Business Review (one paper). There is also an additional reference through a quote by Winnie the Pooh, but this rather falls into a category of truisms and anecdotes.

Instead of using references to establish legitimacy and transparency in her talk, the speaker depends on the audience. Through on numerous occasions polling the audience, she secures the figures that she is going to deliver before actually delivering them. Not once during the session were there a strong
discrepancy between the figures presented and the distribution of hands raised in the auditorium. This was enforced through small comments from the speaker to accentuate that the audience is representative, or rather, that the figures are valid.

Following Smith (2009), we see that the speaker is rather ambivalent in regards to whether or not she is an actual user of the framework delivered or not. Instead of embracing the role of CIO directly, and through this establishing the validity of what is propagated (as shown by Simakova, 2011), the speaker works with other mechanisms of identification. Through the use of examples from the field, of poignant observations about what it is like to be in the role of CIO or IT Executive, she employs humor and irony to express sympathy with the roles represented by the audience. In other words, she never directly embraces the roles of the audience, but keeps her independence. We see this as a key for the very idea of industry analyst firms as promissory organizations; that they must remain unbiased and hence cannot use the same type of mechanisms as those used by for instance technology vendors in order not to loose their trademark of objectivity.

Returning to the use of figures and facts, the ethnography showed signs of variance in terms of level of specificity throughout the entire session. The inter-weaving of “hard facts”, anecdotes, expressions of belief and recommendations highlight the dramaturgical aspects of the session, with the speaker as director rather than performer. Since the audience is at all times present and asked to participate, either through laughing or raising their hands or thinking for themselves, the level of interaction leads us to believe that a different metaphor than the “actor-on-stage” is warranted in this particular setting. The industry analyst frames her presence not through role embrace and identification with the audience and herself as a user, but rather as previously noted as an observer and director. The fact that she is actually on stage, warrants a thought about in which direction the stage at this session actually faced.

Related to previously studied technological demonstrations (Smith, 2009; Simakova, 2011), the Theatre metaphor has been used to highlight the actor-on-stage as the person involved in selling and/or establishing something through her demonstration. As an example of Theatre of the Proof (Simakova, 2011) or Theatre of Use (Smith, 2009), the ethnography in this paper rather shows the example of a Theatre of Creation, where the framework (in this setting shown for the first time in its present form) is cocreated (see Grover and Kohli, 2012). In one perspective the framework already exists, yet with the new framing (provided by the theme and keynote of the congress), it becomes something new. It becomes a viable means ahead for the audience, mainly through the cocreation of content conducted in the session. Here, the audience is as much part of its creation as the speaker-as-director.

With the speaker-as-director and the audience-as-actors, the theatre metaphor is laden with a different meaning. The speaker directs the creation of IT Governance framework’s in use, something that will become apparent once the audience returns to their regular activities of themselves “acting” as propagators of the frameworks. Since the framework in its rudimentary form is highly simplified and full of what may be referred to as interpretative viability (Benders and Van Veen, 2001), the actual script for interpretation is set during the session described in the ethnography. Here, the director acts to ensure that none of the actors stray too far from the script, yet she cannot exclude the actors themselves from the creative process. The actor must be an active part, and use his or her set of experiences and personal inclinations to interpret the role.

The implications of this re-interpretation of the propagation of IT frameworks by industry analysts are primarily of interest for future studies. With this being the first example we have found in the literature of industry analyst propagation studied in-situ, or rather in this particular situation, we believe that further studies will benefit from the perspective that we have employed. Combining recent findings from the fields of technological demonstrations (Smith, 2009) and the cocreation of value (Grover and Kohli, 2012; Sarker et al, 2012) with recent findings from the field covering industry analysts, the metaphor of Theatre of Construction could open up for interesting and important future findings. The central contribution of this new metaphor lies in the potential to open up the diffusion of IT
frameworks for new interpretations. In this manner, the role of both the industry analyst and the prospective user (audience) is sensitized through the concept of cocreation.

6 Concluding comments

As seen in the ethnography and subsequent analysis in this paper, the industry analysts can be seen to propagate IT frameworks through a process of situated cocreation. Following the Theatre metaphor, the setting for this cocreation is the session, with the speaker acting as director and the audience taking the role of actors. The mechanisms employed by the industry analysts include the use of internal referencing (among the participants) for establishing legitimacy, and, the balance of role distancing and role embracing (CIO versus industry analyst).

There are several limitations in the study that need to be further addressed. First, given the choice in method we have an issue of representability. With only one observation, we have limitations in the generalizability of our findings. Second, we need to accentuate the potential risks of introducing a new metaphor into the study of technology demonstrations. As argued by Pinder and Burgeous (1982), the use of tropes such as metaphors within management research should be handled with great care. Through bridging different domains, innate assumptions may lead to tarnish analytical reasoning. We have been aware of this limitation in our choice in analysis. As a ratification of both of these limitations, we argue that the opening up of new potential interpretations of the industry analyst propogation of IT frameworks warrant the employed method. These limitations will, however, be carefully contemplated in relation to future research that is currently in the planning process.

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