**“Shaking the blues away”: management control practices and social space in a top level amateur choir**

Our aim in this paper is to study specific practices related to rehearsing a top level amateur choir, and how these change over time. We suggest that a choir conductor’s verbal and non-verbal instructions are part of the management practices control of a choir, and that he/she thereby holds choir members accountable for what they are doing and how they sing. We assume that in this particular setting, management control is very much presented top-down, as in amateur choirs, a conductor is typically ‘in charge’ of how a choir is organized on a day-to-day basis. On top of this, choir members within a particular vocal range will hold each other accountable for their progress. This we will analyze as well.

We apply Nicolini’s ‘theory-method package’ to bring the aforementioned practices to the fore. In studying how management control in the choir is enacted, we have special interest in the role of the body and social (cognitive, moral, and aesthetic) space.

The rehearsal of a choir is viewed as a ‘play’, and as something that chiefly (but not solely) involves aesthetic space. Since practices typically have a bodily and discursive dimension, these dimensions are emphasized in the research We have special interest in the misunderstandings that occur during a rehearsal between the conductor and choir members, and among choir members. We trace the consequences of these misunderstandings, and the (relationships between the management control) practices associated with them, in terms of the associated social (aesthetic) spacing processes.

To structure the ‘zooming in’ aspect of Nicolini’s theory-method package, we focus on three elements that are often deemed very important in a rehearsal:

* Musical scores;
* The conductor’s verbal and non-verbal communications;
* Choir members’ verbal and non-verbal communications.

A musical score can be regarded as an accounting inscription that helps to exert control. It stipulates (across space and time) how a particular piece of music ought to (or could) sound, and/or be played. Singers can be evaluated using this score and strengthen their group membership (within a particular vocal range). Conductors typically evaluate singers via other means during rehearsals (and concerts) as well, based upon aesthetic and personal considerations in line with the score (e.g. by judging the way in which a certain voice ‘blends’ with other voices). This is naturally in line what management control tries to achieve. We attend several rehearsals and make notes of our observations. We also make audio recordings of these rehearsals. In addition, a photographer, who is also a conductor and choir member (of a different choir), provided pictures of what she perceived to be remarkable episodes/occurrences during the rehearsals. We will follow up on the (management control) practices related to the misunderstandings that can be distilled from these materials by talking to the choir members involved. To stimulate their openness, this is not be done right after the rehearsal, but at a later point in time. The latter aspect is part of Nicolini’s ‘zooming out’ part of his ‘theory- method’ package.

This research intends to contribute to the management control literature in two ways. Firstly, it contributes to studies on the relation between management control, accountability, and (social) space. Secondly, it tries to engage with some of Nicolini’s ideas for studying practices, and more particularly, his idea to study the role of bodily movements and the configuration of the body in the accomplishment and development of practices.