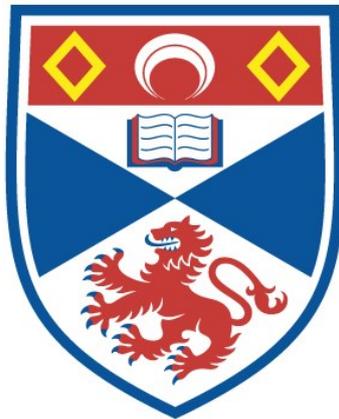


**ENFORCED CHANGE AT WORK, THE RECONSTRUCTION  
OF BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON  
ATTRIBUTION, SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND THE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT**

**Julian Randall**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
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Reconstruction Of Basic Assumptions And  
Its Influence On Attribution, Self-Sufficiency  
And The Psychological Contract

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# DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Hyacinth Irene Randall, my mother, who worked persistently to ensure that I had the best education possible and encouraged me even in the face of defeat and failure. Without that firm foundation much that I have achieved since would not have been possible.

My thanks are due to Drs Robin Fincham and Jerry Hallier who supervised my early efforts at the University of Stirling and initiated me in the adversarial nature of academic debate; to Professor Alan McKinlay who took over at the University of St Andrews and who had a marvellous knack of getting me to achieve with his non-directive and encouraging way; to Pauline, my wife, without whose technical expertise on the PC and patience at my many absences researching, this work would not have been possible; to Ray Griffiths, my father-in-law, who accompanied me to the University library and acted as my scribe and supporter; to Jiorgis Kritsotakis, who shared the MBA course with me, going on to St Andrews to pursue his own PhD yet still had time to read through the final draft of this work and suggest improvements in important and significant detail; to my colleagues and many students at Stirling and St Andrews whose ideas and discussions I have always enjoyed and frequently benefited from.

***Grammatici certant et adhuc sub iudice lis est***

*Horace – Ars Poetica 78*

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# ABSTRACT

The theoretical underpinning of Human Resource Management assumes the existence of individual motivation, which can be manipulated or managed in a way that enables organisational objectives to be achieved with the compliance and commitment of the individual worker.

However, the increasing incidence of mergers, takeovers and reengineering has imposed on the individuals caught up in it change and challenge, which leaves even those retaining their employment doubtful of the benefits of HRM proclaimed by employers.

Job insecurity has been well researched by those who wish to examine how enforced change affects the survivors both within the organisation and those who move on to alternative employment elsewhere. Charting the change undergone by individuals suffering such enforced change at work has traditionally involved attempts to measure the antecedents of change and correlating it to the consequences of the change. In this way the effects of imposed change on individuals can be linked to organisational consequences like intention to leave or job satisfaction.

The present research allows individuals to reflect on their own confirmed and disconfirmed expectancies following the experience of enforced change at work. It allows them to examine what assumptions they had about their employer's behaviour during enforced change and how far they have accepted or rejected the legitimacy of that behaviour. For each of them this has involved interpreting events occurring during enforced change. Such interpretation may reinforce the

meaning of work and its inherent value or threaten continued belief in the value of employers' promises of employment and career development.

Identifying expectancies enables the researcher to examine the different responses to questions of attribution, self-sufficiency and the traditional elements of loyalty and trust together with the individual's assessment of how he or she would respond to a repeat of such enforced change. The conclusions of the present research indicate that individuals who maintain traditional beliefs of loyalty and trust are more likely to experience alienation than those who evince an independence who seek to use working experience to gain more knowledge and skill and so increase their own employability.

The future dependence of employers on traditional promises of career development and life long learning would seem to have been circumscribed by the many individuals whose experience of enforced change has convinced them they need to take ownership of their own destiny in which different employers will play but a fleeting part.

# INTRODUCTION

## **THE BACKGROUND**

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The impact of industrialisation in its effect on individuals has exercised researchers for nearly two hundred years. Early attempts to force groups of individuals to submit themselves to the processes required for the production of economic goods brought enforced change on communities and individuals and stimulated comment and research from concerned individuals throughout the industrialised world. As Engels began to apply the emergent discipline of sociology to identify and measure these effects on individuals, his compatriot, Marx, began the task of analysing what these changes meant to the historical development of society in the trade off between Land, Capital and Labour. The question of control and how it is exercised was prominent in this analysis and, increasingly, the resistance that enforced discipline evoked from individuals on whom it was exercised. The identification of significant groups in this struggle to control that resistance reinforced the class categories of workers set against owners and their agents, the supervisors and, eventually, the managers of the bureaucracies that succeeded them. The concept of alienation of individuals and groups from the ownership of the tools of survival and the materials with which they worked influenced the debate on who held power, how power could be modified or resisted and whether the whole process of change at work could be imposed successfully at all by one party over another.

## **THE HOW OF LABOUR PROCESS**

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How individuals learn about the society they find themselves in, is a debate that has led to different versions of interpretation and assumptions among contributors. In early life, the individual must first assimilate language and understanding so that he or she can interpret experience according to required meanings and imposed values of others. The revolutionary doctrine that man is born free but everywhere is in chains starts from early experience of imposed environmental forces of nurture on nature. The human subject can be considered as an agent on whom various stimuli can be exercised (Skinner, 1974) and which will then respond in the required manner. He, or she, may be considered as an organism whose compliance can be better achieved by engaging inner commitment to internalise the rules, perhaps by offering expected benefits (Piaget, 1932; Vroom, 1964). Alternatively, he or she may be perceived as a series of roles played out in turn with no inner substratum like personality, so that each individual is just a vehicle for succeeding functions as required by environmentally imposed need (Allen & Van der Vliert, 1984).

This account of human relations suggests the compliance or passivity of the individual and the dominance of the environment or external agencies, or at least, there ensues a tussle to achieve the dominant position so that he who gains it initially will find it easy to control the other party. Resistance becomes more difficult for the individual the longer the imposed organisation controls the access to knowledge of meaning and value (Braverman, 1974). In some accounts the frames and schemas of the 'to do' in organising work contain assumed meanings of right and wrong for the individual (Schank & Abelson,

1971). But, more than that, there is a strong assertion that the very dialogue of relationships, which unfolds between its participants, reinforces a dominance of relationship that becomes an iron cage, forcing the compliance of the dominated partner (Foucault, 1977; 1979; 1980; 1982). The identification and measurement of work processes and required behaviours becomes a panopticon, as described by Jeremy Bentham, from which the individual subject can be monitored and if necessary corrected back into compliance. Knowledge imposed by process becomes the iron cage and enables the dominant partner to dispose power throughout the working relationship (Burowoy, 1985). If we accept this view of reality imposed from without then we can agree with Marx that 'men make their own history in conditions that they are not responsible for. They do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past' (Marx; 1934, 10).

## **THE WHY OF LABOUR PROCESS**

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The functionalism of work and working processes fits well with scientific managerialism as demonstrated by Taylor (1911). The 'hands' can be delivered to the process of a division of labour, which makes it impossible for any individual to gain access to the complete cycle of production or to its inner knowledges. In this way the managers can divide and rule and compliance will be the dominant mode in a command and control management style. However, the question why individuals work and whether this commitment of the individual can be depended on and if necessary manipulated became an increasing quest of motivational experts from the Hawthorne experiments

onwards (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). Individuals respond to incentives and emoluments and managers now needed to discover what would make individuals work better and secure the desired aim of achieving productivity through job satisfaction. (Herzberg; 1959; McGregor; 1960). Engaging minds and hearts of workers ensures that they will work willingly; they will not need supervision. Indeed, they will even manage themselves, thereby relieving supervisors of the irksome task of constant supervision. This is the Y type management style that proceeds through consensus and builds teams in which the task, individual and group are all subsumed into a willing and winning team (Adair, 1984; Stewart, 1985, 1992).

This new desire to manage with consensus suggests that organisations need to engender a climate in which managers will manage in this new way, thus gaining compliance from the workers without the resistance and alienation, which so often bedevilled industrial relations in their early years. This means that the organisation needs to ensure that managers and workers behave in a concerted way that will henceforth be a demonstrable performance delineating 'our' way of doing things. This would also mean that human relations would be approached as scientifically as the processes of work had themselves been managed in previous years.

## **THE RISE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

The co-ordination of hand and heart in managing workers became a unitary quest for complete coincidence of processes of production and its motivational rationale that would give managers the power to compel compliance in individuals. Bringing together organisational objectives and integrating them

with the key events that occur in the individual's working life would now be the desirable aim of all integrated organisations. Individuals would be managed in a way that reinforced the goals of the company. Each contribution to the common weal would be reinforced through the HRD tools of recruitment & selection, induction training, monitoring, review, reward and development. One seamless and co-ordinated management strategy would be imposed on all parts of the organisation. This could be reinforced with company songs, common uniforms and a single shared dining room (Wickens, 1987; 1991). It could even be developed into a philosophy associated with its progenitor, Jack Welch at General Electric, for example, under the guise of employee involvement (Pascale, 1990; 1995).

The company philosophy now becomes like a creedal formula, to be learned, rejoiced in and totally committed to (Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1984). Indeed, commitment, by which the proponents seem often to mean organisational commitment, goes hand-in-hand with other desirable outcomes like quality, flexibility and strategic integration, according to HRM theory (Guest, 1989; 1992).

The achievement of this co-ordination of hearts and minds can become the deliberate development of a strong company culture (Legge, 1995). It can mean concentrating on the management of the human resource or the human management of the resource. But whether it is hard or soft, once embarked upon it becomes a deliberately managed path of choosing the individuals most likely to respond to the strategy (Storey, 1989; 1995) and excluding those likely to resist. A Greenfield site allows this choice most easily and thereafter the culture will be set up and controlled by managers. Workers will be monitored

and assessed on attitudinal factors at the time of their recruitment and selection, as well as behavioural ones and those not exhibiting the required affective responses can be brought in and dealt with by corrective training and re-education or preferably excluded before they even start (Blyton & Turnbull, 1992; du Gay & Salaman, 1992).

## **THE SPECTRE OF CHANGE**

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Into this idealised paradise slips the serpent of change. No Garden of Eden is without one. It should be said that this is no new phenomenon and the signal work of Lewin (1947) alerts us to the flaw in the steady state approach to gaining motivation through job satisfaction and its connection with managed productivity. Different factors affect work organisation and either technological or business priorities may require change in work processes. But getting the workforce onside is the critical factor for managers. Workers themselves may modify their expectations and make allowances for change (Festinger, 1959; Becker, 1964). But overall the management of change needs to be addressed directly if the culture is to be reinforced.

There have been all sorts of change management proposed in the last ten years: gradualist, emergent, taking-people-with-us change (Nadler, 1977; Bullock & Batten, 1985) often associated with TQM initiatives, or there can be the radical changes espoused by the proponents of Business Process Reengineering (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; Champy, 1995; Hammer & Champy, 1995). The underlying assumption of either change seems to be that the organisation will dominate at any price and the individual worker will be newly compliant to the required change if he or she wants to continue with the organisation. Traditional

instrumental power is still predominant. Elephants will learn to dance and the dancers for whom the tunes are changed will adapt and adopt in a flexible and compliant way (Kanter, 1984; Kanter & Stein, 1979, 1980).

If culture is as key to Human Resource Management as the theory suggests, then the management of cultural change now becomes paramount as a set of skills that managers need to embrace to be successful. There are those for whom it is a question of gradual transition, rather like planing wood – you go with the grain rather than against it. It is a rational process (Hendry, 1999; Pettigrew, 1985; 1993; Hendry & Pettigrew, 1986; 1988 & 1990). It can be considered as moving an organisation from one state to another (Handy; 1985; 1989; Stace & Dunphy, 1991). It is just a question of managing the culture (Weick, 1987). This may be achieved by identifying and then working to secure the critical factor, like organisational commitment (Iverson, 1996). It all sounds so obvious, a logical process. So, managers follow the procedure and impose the traditional management cycle of plan, organise, monitor and review (Delbridge and Lowe, 1997) on the management of the change. But the challenge for all such management theory remains the same: it is the acceptable response of the individual workers.

## **THE REALITY OF CHANGE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL**

Increasing unemployment, sometimes deliberately embarked upon by Government economic intervention, has brought the experience of unemployment to increasing numbers of individuals at work and there has been an increasing focus on the research of its effects (Jahoda, 1982; Little, 1976; Smith, 1985; Swinburne, 1981). The job insecurity literature opens many

options for examining individual and group responses in detail. Early studies focused on the effect on individual health or self-belief factors (Fox, 1974; Louis, 1980a & b). As the phenomenon of change appeared to be becoming a constant in work experience in all sectors, the research began to suggest acceptance by individuals. Transition through change at work could be identified in the stages that individuals went through: there would be initial surprise, followed by a period of rationalisation then acceptance and assimilation of the new conditions of employment at work (Nicholson & West, 1988). Workers would see symbolic change or draw on previous experience of change to rationalise what they saw going on around them (Isabella, 1990).

The internal mechanism by which this acceptance occurred was often charted by an internal cognitive calculus in which the individual first embarked on a survival or coping strategy, followed by a secondary loop of learning (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rusbult & Farrell, 1983). Part of the calculus might include looking for alternative employment or altered patterns of employment (Roskies & Louis-Guerin, 1990; Ashford, 1988). Thus far there is still an emphasis in the research quest on accommodation by the individual worker.

It would take the emergence of the idea of some sort of psychological contract to uncover the frustration that individuals might experience during transition at work (Rousseau & Parks, 1993; Herriot & Pemberton, 1995; Manning, 1992). Here the emphasis lay in uncovering the elements of negotiation which underlie the assumptions held by the individuals about what he is she is responsible for and what the organisation expects in return. This gave rise to further distinctions between relational elements of the contract, like trust and loyalty

compared with transactional elements like money in exchange for labour (Mac Neil, 1985) and the comparison between contract violation and contract breach (Hallier & Lyon, 1993; Hallier & James, 1995).

The question of whether such a thing as a psychological contract can exist at all has been given a thorough review (Anderson & Schalk, 1998; Guest, 1998; Rousseau, 1998). However, allowing for the continued discussion about the validity of the original concept, we can accept that expectancies, whether acknowledged or recognised by two parties at work, can still affect the outcome of unwanted transitions at work imposed on individuals without consent. What is important to the present research is the internal change that may occur within the individual to such internal expectancies during the experience of such enforced change. Indeed, it could be argued that the period of enforced change is an ideal opportunity to examine how individuals are responding and whether their previous expectations or assumptions have remained intact or have changed significantly, and if so how change occurs and what explanation the individual gives to the change.

## **ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE REVISITED**

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The present research should attempt to identify how individual perceptions can or might coalesce to become a corporate or organisational culture. If it is correct that what everyone takes for granted in an organisation is part of its culture then we need to identify how these factors are assimilated, taught, absorbed by individuals and how they can be imputed as part of an organisational culture in any real sense at all. If we accept that at its simplest culture is 'the way we do things round here' then a simple functionalist approach is sufficient as the

ground of understanding a culture (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). If this is its definition, then we can accept that what is done is processual and probably involves behaviours reinforced early on in work experience and brought about as much by peer-group reinforcement in early working experience as it is a function of induction training (Van Maanen, 1978). Indeed, this definition of culture could include the practice of kaizen and quality circles in which participants commonly own the targets and aims of production and manage the achievement of the standards thereby monitoring their own standards or risk losing desired rewards.

But there is more to it than just co-ordinated, consistent practice. The question of a set of values underlying production and practice seems to be present in most definitions of culture. It is not just what you do, it is also what you believe about it, too. So, just as consumers are guided to desire certain outcomes in the products and services that they are offered, so too are workers internal consumers of the desirable benefits to be derived from belief in the required values. 'Fordism cultivated acquisitive consumers: the eager customers with regular wage packets that supported markets for standardised, mass-produced goods. As a key component of moves towards more flexible structures of accumulation, corporate culturism expects and requires employees to internalise the new values of 'quality', 'flexibility' and value-added – to adopt and cherish them as their own – so that, in principle, their uniquely human powers of judgement and discretion are directed unequivocally towards working methods that will deliver capital accumulation (Willmott, 1993, 519). Thus far we appear to be referring here to internalised values approved of by the organisation which may commend such HR strategies as performance related pay to bind effort and commitment to productive outcome and inherent reward (Fletcher, 1993).

At this point we are at a crossroads, well known to researchers and classically expressed as: culture is either something the organisation is or something the organisation has (Smircich, 1983). If it is like a trait – something individuals are thought to be in virtue of personality – then individuals who possess the required trait can be, in theory at least, identified, hired and retained whilst those who do not can be excluded. But if culture is a 'root metaphor' then we are embarking on a journey of interpretation. For symbol is itself an implied or imputed value, which signifies something which those 'in the know', will recognise instantly. To enter this world of symbol we are looking at the interpretation offered by, say, semiotics (Barley, 1983) in which a phenomenon like death can be disguised to look like sleep. Or an examination of personal parts of the body by a stranger can be interpreted as a right and proper procedure (Nahavandi, 1994). At this interpretational level, the meaning derived from the experience is dependent on the assumptions that were held by the individual undergoing the experience.

The question then arises, how do individuals acquire these assumptions? Schein suggests that these assumptions are acquired by the group learning over a period of time 'as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration' (1990. 111). This begs the question of how a group can learn some common lesson. For, the assumption would seem to be that everyone will learn the same thing from an external threat and thus the interpretation will be common to all. The possible variety or variance of individual response is not questioned in the article at all. He goes on to assert that such externally imposed events once experienced by the group enables the individual to 'decipher the taken-for-granted, underlying,

unconscious assumptions that determine thought processes feelings and behaviour' (ibid 112). It has to be said that Schein offers many different examples to illustrate his definition of basic assumptions from the simple, functional way things are done at work to the broad philosophical concepts like the nature of truth, nature of time, the nature of human nature, the nature of human relationships, homogeneity verses diversity (ibid p.114). As to the creation of this culture itself, he falls back on the popular notion of dominant founders or figures (Bennis & Shepherd, 1956; Bion, 1961; Schein, 1985). The question of managed change becomes for him a combination of careful selection of members 'who have the right set of assumptions and values' and continues with a careful 'socialisation process' – a question of guided evolution and managed change. His contribution to managed change, process consultation, is not too far distant from that of his mentor, Kurt Lewin. Schein worked in his team with sensitivity groups, unfreezing, moving and refreezing the correct attitudes for workers under the process of managed change. Our own methodology can be found in Appendix 1 on page I below.

## **WORKING WITH BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

If we accept a definition of culture that includes the function of interpretation of what is done at work then we need to examine just how this process of interpretation may take place within the individual. For, there is a taken-for granted element in much research on the management of change. It assumes that while existing organisational culture is derived from a past threat from forces external to the organisation, its strength now enables individuals to assimilate new members in the accepted interpretation of enforced change and

enables them to protect the required cultural beliefs through periods of further change (Schein, 1978; Isabella, 1990). But why should one interpretation of change be valid for all time? Further threats must allow that acceptance of change can occur or rejection. In this sense it is not the group which interprets the significance of enforced change, but the individual. There may be collusion with others but ultimately the individual decides how to interpret imposed change at work. That being so, we have to examine how exactly that process takes place. Adaptation is one possibility and, as we have seen, it is those who propose a rational and controllable process of change (Lewin, 1947; Festinger, 1959; Kanter, 1984) who often assume it. But what about those who interpret change differently due to the fact that they interpret the changes imposed differently? If individuals are likely to interpret events differently from the expected response then it begs the question what criteria the individual is using which might make his or her interpretation differ from a required outcome? We cannot accept the infinite regression of one individual seeing the glass half empty and another seeing the same glass as half full. Judgements about violation or breach of any internal assumption, whether it be contractual or relational presupposes that there is a principle which is held to be universally applicable to a particular situation by an individual and which will be applied in the same way each time a particular incident or experience is presented to that individual.

If we consider how cognitive categories are formed in individuals then we can accept that language itself is an imposition, which the individual must assimilate and repeat in order to be understood (Greene, 1986). In the same way, socialised behaviour patterns, whether described as schemas, references or

frames (Schank & Abelson 1977b), impose a socially acceptable series of responses for coping with situations successfully. This programme of learning imposes on individuals not just words, or preset actions, but also comparative measures, like constructs (Kelly, 1955). Thus there may be a spectrum of colours from, say, black to white, or in behavioural terms from good to bad, which enables the individual to make a judgement about experiences offered by experience. If such constructs exist in this way, then we can accept that they will offer consistent criteria, which enable individual to interpret the world. They may exist inherently in the individual (Bion, 1961) or may be both personal and corporate constructs in that several individual members of a team or group hold them (Balnaves & Caputi, 1993). In each case, though, they are the means by which individuals interpret what they experience around them.

This explanation of how individuals make sense of imposed reality may sometimes itself assume another level of evaluation, which individuals can make. Modern proponents of Kelly's construct theory put it thus: 'Although not all cognitive therapists are constructivists, they share with the latter the desire to look for common patterns underlying individual maladaptive thoughts and actions' (Blowers & O'Connor, 1995, 1). Now, to the researcher in enforced change at work the crucial word here is 'maladaptive'. Who says that an individual is maladaptive and what has the individual adapted badly to? A whole world of assumed or expected and weighted behaviours now emerges. Evidently, behaviours contain values, which can be imputed or implied by the observers or intended by actors themselves. The resistant worker can be seen as maladaptive to the processes of the organisation's preferred or required patterns. The resister refuses or fails to accept the imputed values and either adopts

alternative behaviours to register his or her resistance or has embarked on another behavioural strategy to satisfy or fulfil preferred values or principles.

The evaluation process seems to include what has sometimes been referred to as the conative aspect of individual evaluation (Georgopoulos & Tannenbaum, 1957). In this research the individuals were asked how they rated the authority that their supervisor had and how much authority that supervisor ought to have. The researchers were surprised to discover that individuals thought the supervisors ought to have more authority than they currently enjoyed. Another but similar conclusion is drawn in research into successful manager behaviour in early months of appointment. Failure most often occurs when the subject embarks on a behaviour, which he or she sees as vital and feels confident to implement. Those subjected to this change have very different perceptions of what the priorities for change actually were (Stewart, 1991). We are dealing here with the ought of behaviours and whether individuals on whom behaviour is imposed believe in the benefits espoused by the change agent or something significantly different. Here, too, we are at the frontiers of meaning and value, imputed or implied by the individual. For, it is the expected values and their translation into action that will evoke in the individual response acceptance of change or rejection. For some writers this is referred to as the management of meaning. For imposed change at work 'require the basic meanings of work and its organisation in society to change profoundly. Before offering pat agendas for managing tomorrow's organisations, we must create a more comprehensive forum for discussing the problems of tomorrow by articulating ways that in times of change, not only do new problems arise; old ways of looking at problems become problems themselves' (Jacques, 1996, 1).

Managing meaning at the level of this analysis can apply to those wishing to gain control during times of organisational change. Traditionally, that seems to have been the manager of change within the organisation, which imposes enforced change. The focus of the present research lies with what happens to the individual. How does he or she interpret change? For, those who experience enforced change receive a challenge, which may require that they reassert control over their own lives by interpreting the significance of the change in the light of their own expectations or assumptions. Whether they manage to restore the same categories or expectancies in the future is the area that now beckons us. For, if it is possible to come to terms or assimilate imposed change, as many seem to suggest (Isabella, 1990; Nicholson & West, 1988) then it must also be open to individuals not to accept and to interpret the change in another, perhaps less valued, way. For it is clear that enforced change 'forces the members of an organisation to examine the existential questions: who are we? What do we want? And where are we going? (Finstad, 1998, 1).

This process of reflection offers the researcher an opportunity to identify the basic beliefs or assumptions held by individuals exposed to enforced change at work. The way each interprets his or her experience then becomes both presentational and expressive of basic assumptions held in a way, perhaps, never before acknowledged. It may also be the opportunity for the individual to re-examine his or her basic beliefs to see whether they remain valid or perform deconstructed (Derrida, 1978, 1981). Indeed, it is the element of surprise and sense making that enables us to examine the process in detail (Louis 1980a & b; Weick, 1995). When beliefs are threatened, those who hold them realise how important and valuable they perceived such assumptions to be. Louis compares

and contrasts what she calls confirmed and disconfirmed beliefs: those that individuals expected to happen and did not, or not to happen and did. In either case the surprise expressed suggests that deeply held assumptions have been violated. Given that contradiction or confusion has now arisen in the individual we may be able to identify just how sense making takes place. If we accept the dissonance theory (Festinger, 1959) or role change theory (Allen & Van der Vliert, 1984) then acceptance would seem to be the expected outcome. If we find that the individual feels unable to accommodate in this way then resistance would seem the logical outcome and much evidence from the job insecurity literature would seem to confirm this (Hallier & Lyon, 1993; Hallier & James, 1995). But perhaps there is another option for the individual: to reconstruct the basic beliefs to take account of newly imposed realities at work and so be able to interpret them in a different way. If we return to the management of meaning then we might posit the idea of basic assumptions, the criteria used to evaluate the meaning of change, being modified or even abandoned to take account of a new reality and respond differently, perhaps, in the future. If beauty lies in the eye of the beholder, then likewise any value imputed in leadership, or organisation must similarly lie in the perception of the individual who suffers enforced change at work. It is this route of self-assessment and changing perception that we seek to identify. We can then follow the different individual responses, to discover what else may have changed which may affect interpretation, meaning and value of self and action in future.

The purpose of this quest is to compare and contrast subjects whose basic assumptions might influence a negative response in the face of enforced change with subjects whose basic assumptions might influence them to respond more

positively. But we have also attempted to identify individuals who have been able to reconstruct their basic assumptions about themselves at work in such a way that they have been enabled to draw revised conclusions about themselves, their work and their future career prospects. We acknowledge that there will be an organisational context to the responses of individual subjects and that background is outlined more fully in Appendix 2 on page xi below. However, our focus has been the change occurring at the micro level of each subject and the similarities that such responses may have between subjects in terms of their self-assessment of future career prospects and confidence in facing such enforced change should it occur in the future.

## **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES**

If different responses to enforced change at work enable identification of different and changing basic assumptions, then the way in which that change is linked to other perceptions may be significant. The choice of direction here was triggered in part by a subject who remarked that having been through the threat to her livelihood she now felt stronger in herself. The obvious question arises why she should respond in this positive way to an experience that ostensibly might have been expected to bring a negative response? If those who suffer enforced change at work sit and think about why they felt stronger or weaker how do they ascribe such a positive or negative response to the same experience? Is it connected to different or changing basic assumptions?

It is here that the literature on attribution offered an opportunity to examine elements that have been thought significant by individuals responding to challenge or change. When individuals are faced with a personal challenge, what

is it that causes some of them to feel confident or optimistic, compared with those who do not? An early distinction was made between personal factors and environmental conditions (Heider, 1958) and was followed by the definition of locus of control (Rotter, 1966) and finally the distinction between stable and unstable elements (Weiner, 1985). A full review of the literature can be found in Weiner (1985). The research supported belief that individuals respond more positively to internal and stable factors like perceived ability than external and unstable factors such as luck. Continued failure and belief in lack of control can lead to learned helplessness. The conditions under which these results were derived seemed somewhat theoretical in the context of the conducted research. For example, some subjects were asked about their response to being passengers in a car. Those who were drivers felt less in control than those who were non-drivers. Such experiments seem destined to reveal the self-evident. In our present research, however, subjects are exposed to enforced change which must by definition be both unexpected and not previously encountered. So the question of prior experience does not arise in most instances. Therefore we have a more immediate situation in which to examine how far basic assumptions about such change may affect the outcome of attribution of survival through such a period of enforced change at work and we lay out the findings of the present research in Chapter Three. We may expect to find that a subject's reflectiveness includes such elements as ability, effort, task difficulty and luck. But our present research seeks to uncover whether individuals vary in attributing significance according to the different expectancies, which they hold.

Further developments in the literature have included optimistic bias which would seem to link to the response of feeling stronger. Again, just as the feelings of

shame, anger or optimism are posited to different elements of the locus of control, we have an opportunity to compare and contrast different emotional responses with the basic assumptions held and their possible effect on retaining, rejecting or reconstructing the basic belief (Weiner, 1985; Anderson, 1995; Anderson & Slusher, 1986). In more recent research the aspect of attribution has been extended to include successful change and coping strategies in later life: 'the capability or readiness to disengage from blocked developmental options and to flexibly readjust one's developmental goals is an important factor that reduces the risk of dissatisfaction and depression in later life. Empirical findings indicate that this second, accommodative mode of coping becomes increasingly dominant in later adulthood' (Brandstaedter, 1992, 1). It may be that such accommodative coping coincides with subjects who find reconstruction of basic assumptions possible in the face of enforced change. In simple terms, 'if an event is perceived to be controllable, it signifies that people believe there are steps one can take to increase the likelihood of a desirable outcome' (Harris, 1996). 'Comparative optimists have higher perceptions of personal control over events than non-optimists' (Van der Velde & Feij, 1995). Perhaps, those who have reconstructed their basic assumptions may feel equally more in control of their career prospects than individuals who do not.

A closely related field of study concerning coping strategy is that of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986). 'Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's judgments of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances' (ibid, 1986, 391). The research develops this competence to include examination of the development of self-appraisal skills and a useful distinction is offered in two dimensions of

perceived self-efficacy: cognitive control and behavioural coping ability (McCarthy & Newcomb, 1992). If basic assumptions affect personal coping, and attribution of internal control, then perhaps they also affect a movement towards greater self-sufficiency either in what individuals believe about their ability to survive and whether they feel confident of survival should another, similar event occur (Brockner, 1992). We intend to examine whether changes in basic assumptions during enforced change at work enable individual subjects to assert greater self-sufficiency at the prospect of such a change occurring again and we lay out the evidence of different responses in Chapter Four. It may also be that the movement towards such increased self-reliance moves individuals closer to thoughts of or plans for self-employment. So, having lost a belief in the reliability of organisations to offer job security, the only option may be thought to be self-employment. There are those who believe that prospects for such a radical change have a certain entrepreneurial personality (Wright, Robbie & Ennew, 1997). In contrast others assert that the move into self-employment is largely pragmatic – no other option being available (Dennis, 1996). We intend to identify individuals who make that ultimate change to self-employed status and attempt to identify how far that link is reinforced by any change in basic assumptions at work.

Finally, the literature on psychological contract invites examination. The debate on this concept has ranged from questioning whether it can be called a contract at all (Guest, 1998; Rousseau, 1998) to attempting to gauge whether enforced change at work brings about a violation or breach of the contract (Hallier & Lyon, 1993; Hallier & James, 1995). We can accept the question mark over the definition of psychological contract while also examining how valid some of the

concepts within that larger definition are. For example, whether elements are correctly designated as relational, contractual or not (Mac Neil, 1985), we can still examine how far they relate to basic assumptions and enforced change in organisations. Individuals may seem to hold elements like loyalty and trust of the organisation intact. Alternatively, there may be no expectancy that they apply at all. Alternatively, the elements may be jettisoned during enforced change. What this may offer is an insight into whether psychological contracts exist in the way their proponents assert or that particular elements may be radically affected by the experience of enforced change at work whilst others remain intact. We present the evidence derived from our research in Chapter Five.

## **WIDER IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

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Some of the most radical change imposed on individuals has occurred under initiatives like Business Process Engineering (Knights & McCabe, 1998). Such ideologically driven change offers an opportunity to examine how individuals exposed to such enforced change at work, relate its impact and interpret what has happened to them. The authors admit that 'there are few accounts which explore the experiences of employees during the introduction and operation' of such change (ibid, p 762). The present research therefore offers an opportunity to examine in detail just how individuals adapt and alter their own perceptions during the experience of such change. If reconstruction of basic assumptions can be seen to have occurred then perhaps we have offered an opportunity to see emancipation at work in individuals (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Willmott, 1993). 'Emancipation describes the process through which individuals and groups

become freed from repressive social and ideological conditions in particular those that place socially unnecessary restrictions upon the development and articulation of human consciousness' (ibid 1992 p 432). If even a few subjects have managed to free themselves for the iron cage of organisational dominance, then we can allow that perceptions of the organisation in some of its workers has changed in a way that causes them to question their previous beliefs and assumptions and modify their expectancies at the prospect of similar change occurring again. This would mean that the significance of the organisation as a source of security and focus of loyalty is under significant threat (Rowlinson, 1999). 'At very least, a recognition of the socially constructed nature of social arrangements points to their contingency and the possibility of their reconstruction along different lines' (Fournier, 2000, 5).

The question of deconstruction is central to the post-modern analysis of knowledge between individuals and the unitary meanings imposed by organisation and societal structures of control and there are many contributions which focus on the implications of this world of uncertainty (Burrell, 1998; Hassard & Parker, 1993; Calas & Smircich, 1997a; Jackson & Carter 1998; Linstead, 1993; Schultz, 1992). A simple question arises: once you've deconstructed, then what? How can we reconstruct or get anything positive from this?' (Calas, 1999). If we look at the level of organisational culture and symbolism research it is difficult to see how fragmented and fissured perceptions can ever coalesce into a common interpretation and meaning of organisational symbols. 'There is no essence on which to ground meaning, there are only differences between meanings' (ibid p 5). We could add that even the interpretation of differences is yet another interpretation, so that we are back to

an infinite regression of perceived perceptions reflected in different individual analysis of what is occurring in the objective world of work. 'Rather than putting an end to interpretation about the meaning of original texts, recourse to the author produces more and newer meanings (ibid p.6).

What we assert here is that the individual is the focus of research and his or her interpretation is based on the basic assumptions held about what is of vital value to them during enforced change at work. These 'petit recits, small stories or modest narratives' (Lyotard, 1979) are the only valid basis for self-knowledge and representation in the face of enforced change. How alone lies the reconstruction of an inner world of self-valuation and continued revision of meaning in an arbitrary world of unprincipled change. If we wanted to ally ourselves with a movement within the field of research we could identify Actor-Network Theory as coming close to the objectives and methods of the present research. For, 'ANT has become as assemblage of modest stories whose narratives have changed from great stories with a chronological ordering to many small stories that form a pattern with no possible chronology' (Calas, 1999, 16). We can accept that definition while suggesting that chronology may be less important than the significance attributed by the actor. The benefit that the researcher has lies in the similarity that different small narratives may have and the implication, which that individual interpretation holds for the unitary approach propagated by Human Resource Management theory, the constant search for management hegemony typified by the upsurge of management gurus and theorists (Huczynski, 1993; Fincham, 2000) and the continued iron cage of Foucauldian discipline (McKinlay & Starkey, 1998).

'By decentring true knowledge post-modern analyses help us to accept the possibility of other knowledges' which in turn can provide a different language with which to address conventional issues (Gergen, 1992). As such, it is possible to see conventional theories in a different light and, further, to write knowledge in a different form' (Calas, 1999, 11). The evidence is already emerging that the significance of meaning and the achievement of individual release from the iron cage is already occurring for many individuals (Prichard, Hull, Chumer & Willmott, 2000; McKinlay, 2000). Even the newly hailed team working strategies reveal similar evidence of knower-as-known individuals (Barker, 1999; Proctor & Mueller, 2000). These are people who have seen through the promises of organisations during enforced change and are unlikely ever to believe in it again. But more importantly, as holders of the knowledge on which the organisation itself depends they are now at liberty to walk away and take with them the very essence of the organisation's future success. The pawn that has survived the enforced-change-at-work-game reaches the end of the board intact and is rewarded by becoming the most powerful piece in the game of organisational chess. It may be that his or her perception of future organisational promises is that of Alice in Wonderland – 'you're just a pack of cards'. The implications of this kind of change for those who manage organisations may be the demise of structuralism and the collapse of guaranteed dependence on modernistic management techniques to control individuals at work. We present the findings of our research on the implications of reconstruction in Chapter Six.

At very least the assurance that permeates Human Resource Management as a theory may cease to have any relevance for subjects who have experienced enforced change at work. Dependency on the organisation may be replaced by

self-reliance and a newly found independence for career development based on the knowledge that proven employability is now the gauge of success at work. If this is indeed the trend among those subject to enforced change then it begs the question how much longer can companies rely on the traditional loyalty among their workers to guarantee continued commitment to the work in hand and willingness to remain with the job. Perhaps the desired HRM outcome of flexibility has come in a way that the proponents of HRM could never have imagined. It certainly suggests that a worker secure in his or her own employability need not fear enforced change again. The same cannot be said for the companies who need the continued implicit knowledge of professional workers. For them the prospect of continuity of support from workers could begin to look bleak. This consideration should be kept in mind as the accounts of our subjects unfold below.

# CHAPTER ONE

## ENFORCED CHANGE AT WORK

### THE MANAGEMENT OF ENFORCED CHANGE AT WORK

Managing change at work has been an increasing focus for research and theory in recent times (Beckhard & Harris, 1987; Hunt & Downing, 1990; Starkey, 1990). Organisational Development has produced a profusion of stepped approaches to guide the manager through the thickets of individual and group uncertainty and helpful steps are identified which will enable the manager of change to assess whereabouts in the process individuals are and how they should be handled to achieve optimum adaptation to new conditions at work (Bullock & Batten, 1985; Garrahan & Stewart, 1992). For some there is the assumption of a steady state in work processes which individuals have become accustomed to, like an equilibrium, which may be temporarily disturbed by structural or procedural changes (Nadler, 1982). What is needed, it is suggested, is an accurate assessment of the required state, a comparative assessment of the current working state and a programme of transition management during which individuals are supported through the required change (Cappelli, 1998). Managing the transition successfully should bring a resumption of normal service from the individual as soon as possible (Buono, 1994).

If we accept that we are not here referring just to procedural changes or structural changes, it is clear that changes of perception by the individuals affected by enforced change may be necessary, too. The traditional approach of

unfreezing, moving and refreezing workers' beliefs about the change underwrite the assumptions which underlie most theories of managing change at work (Lewin, 1947) We may be dealing with norms or culture (Kilmann, 1984, 1985) but the requirement is the same: measure the gap between current operation and desired new state and then plan the stepped change to bring individuals to a state of competence and commitment to new ways of doing things at work.

However, resistance to change at work can be expected from individuals. The theorists and practitioners admit that there are grounds for fears about security, autonomy and power inherent in such changes at work (Nadler, 1993, 90). And there are different strategies that individuals may use to rationalise the impact of change on themselves: there is the rearrangement of expectancies in the face of change (Festinger, 1959), there are side-bets which may help individuals take account of different options (Becker, 1964), there are different cognitive assessments which will be used by individuals to work out coping strategies during the change (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). But all of these theoretical approaches to the change experience have one assumption in common: the individual will accommodate to the needs of the organisation.

Job insecurity literature offers an opportunity to examine how threats to employment can affect individuals at work and alter radically previously held beliefs. What individuals thought they had been promised in return for their commitment to the organization has been examined in detail (Rousseau & Parks, 1993; Herriot & Pemberton, 1995). The question of betrayal or violation of an assumed agreement has been highlighted (Hallier & Lyon, 1993; Hallier & James, 1996). More accurate measurement was attempted of

individual conditions before enforced change and comparison with conditions afterwards (Roskies & Louis Guerin, 1990; Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989) and such factors as job satisfaction, productivity and propensity to look for work elsewhere examined. Trends and tendencies were measured and correlations made but overall there was still little individual tracking of the individual's internal reassessment of previous expectancies in order to make sense of enforced change at work.

Some researchers assume that individuals involved in such change will go through a series of stages in which they come to terms with such change (Nicholson & West, 1988; Isabella, 1990), perhaps suggesting that there is a predictive path which will be followed by all subjects making it easier for them to modify their behaviour to fit into the new requirements at work. We refer more frequently to Isabella because she speaks of 'transactions' which subjects make during enforced change and 'frames' which she sees as assumptions about situations pertaining at work. The subjects of change come to see that new perceptions are required to make sense of new situations imposed by the company taking over. The subjects accept, sometimes with the help of others who have been through the same experience, that they must change they way of interpreting events occurring at work. Our own research will examine a similar change of mind or lack of it in the subjects we have examined. However, the outcomes that we identify will indicate significantly different results and draw different conclusions about the individual micro level of enforced change at work.

Another approach to examining the micro level of response in individuals is Jacobson. In his personalogical approach he asserts that such outcomes 'depend on the nature of the worker's phenomenological experience and are

dependent on contextual factors, personal attributes and emotional responses to threat' (1987 p.31). In other words, we are looking at the individual interpreting the events that have occurred in a way that will make different outcomes possible. The present research takes this micro level as its point of entry.

Differences of response alone, though interesting, beg the question of how and why different outcomes occur. 'The emotional importance of the situation makes it necessary for the individual to assess its meaning for him or her, but the ambiguity and differential impact of change are likely to highlight individual differences in perception and interpretation – some employees see themselves as winners, while others will see themselves as losers' (Roskies et al, 1988, p.124). So, there is a need to find out exactly how and why such differences occur. There is always a danger that an attempt is made to identify the factors, which were perceived as a benefit. 'Winners are persons who perceived themselves as currently experiencing more gains than losses from the changes or who anticipated doing so in the foreseeable future' (ibid, p.128). This brings us back to the idea of a cognitive calculus – that there are identifiable factors, which make one individual assess change positively while another interprets it negatively. A more open approach would suggest allowing the individual to explain it for him or herself. We believe with other researchers that, 'if the same circumstances and cues produce different responses we must explore other predictors that might explain feelings of job insecurity' (Hartley et al, 1991). We have, therefore, chosen to attempt to identify the basic beliefs or assumptions that may have influenced our subjects to interpret their experience of enforced change at work in the way that they have.

## **ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF ENFORCED CHANGE AT WORK**

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As soon as we mention basic assumptions, we may trigger references to the use of the term in another context altogether: culture in the organisation. Indeed, the many definitions of culture in organisations include specific reference to the term, 'the pattern of basic assumption that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaption and internal integration.' Here there is a reference to 'underlying basic assumptions that determine how group members perceive, think and feel' (Schein, 1985). The suggestion here seems to be that emerging corporate patterns of understanding have been brokered by a group of individuals at work and that idea goes back to similar assertions about how cultures are formed in organisations, 'an ordered system of meanings and of symbols in terms of which social interaction takes place and that structure can be seen as a pattern of social interaction' (Geertz, 1973). The context of this approach seems to be as rooted in the steady-state assumptions of employment provision as those which we mentioned above but which has since been undermined, we will argue, by enforced change at work. We believe that 'adaptability relies on people having different perceptions of environmental data' (Weick, 1986) and that this is the process through which individuals re-establish their understanding of what has happened to them to 'translate events and develop frameworks for understanding' (ibid, 1986). It is this interpretation that we seek to examine in detail. We seek to identify the criteria used by the individual to interpret enforced change at work and how it leads to different meanings and implied value of the events experienced during change. It may be that should several

individuals have held similar beliefs, the experience of change may find different interpretations and a new diversity of meaning.

So, if culture is deemed to be a set of basic assumptions held in common by a working group, the present research maintains that such common consensus may be fragmented by the different interpretations put upon events by individual participants. That means that enforced change at work would give us the opportunity to examine such a breakdown of consensus. We shall attempt to identify the different basic assumptions that may give rise to different personal interpretations and evaluation to establish which assumptions have been reinforced. We will also seek to identify subjects, whose experience of enforced change has caused them to reconstruct their basic assumptions, jettisoning what is no longer thought to be valid and refining new beliefs to measure future events at work should they recur.

## **THE INDIVIDUAL FOCUS OF ENFORCED CHANGE**

How individuals respond to enforced change at work will depend on the way in which that change is effected and the impact of that change on day-to-day working. We would expect job change to bring about such a fundamental reassessment and also have implications for long-term career prospects. Some writers suggest that 'managers will need increasingly to take ownership of their own career - they will need to be prepared for change and to seize it as an opportunity rather than view it as a threat' (Inkson & Coe, 1993). As far as career is concerned, then, 'even when employees are in identical organisational circumstances and refer to the same cues, they may arrive at different conclusions about their future prospects' (Hartley et al, 1991, p.69). How they

differ will depend on the background of their basic assumptions and we intend to attempt to uncover these in the present research.

One other factor will also be prominent: the role of the manager as agent of change. This is sometimes taken for granted as part of the way in which the organisation has dealt with enforced change at work. We believe that different managers will trigger different responses in individual subjects. Indeed, work on survivability in enforced change has identified two relevant elements in this respect: '1. Perceived unfairness of the process and 2. Survivor's identification with laid-off employees' (Brockner, 1986, 1992). We believe that the primary agent in both treatment of the individual and the peer group will be the individual manager rather than the organisation.

We can agree, therefore, that job insecurity can trigger 'a transformation of beliefs' in that it is 'appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being' (Jacobson, 1987, p.31). It is our intention to uncover exactly how this endangering of resources or well-being has affected personal beliefs about the significant factors in the life of the individual subjects.

## **LIFE BEFORE ENFORCED CHANGE**

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The context of enforced change is important to establish as part of the assumptions held by individuals. We have accepted that socialisation will have played a significant part in forming expectancies in individuals (Van Maanen, 1978). Getting individuals to reveal the context they consider significant is, however, more difficult. The opening of the semi-structured interview offers the opportunity of asking open questions about previous experience and it is

here that we invited individuals to begin their narrative. We have used the open interview to allow subjects to describe their own experience at work and then comment on what surprised them that happened during the change and what surprised them that did not happen (Louis, 1980a & b). We believe that this is an important means of identifying what individuals hold to be basic in their assumptions about work, their job, their career and their relationship with their manager long-term, providing us with a context of personal reference which may account for subsequent interpretation.

What individuals believe should or should not occur raises the ethical beliefs inherent in the individual about the work environment. Expectancy will probably have been laid early on in employment experience. The longer subjects have served with the organisation, the more strongly they may feel about their right to expect certain outcomes in return for their loyal service. So, allowing individuals to rehearse their early experience provides us with the context, which may offer the criteria used to judge subsequent enforced change. Surprise then becomes easier to link to previous expectancy and accommodation, rejection or reconstruction a question of the adaption of previously held basic assumptions or not (Townley, 1994, 166). Our own subjects range from those with 3 year's service to individuals with 37 year's experience so range of work experience varies widely. However, what subjects choose to tell us does not always correlate with length of service and some subjects divulge very little either by way of description or interpretation of their previous work experience.

Certainly, descriptions from long service subjects are more likely to include longer historical accounts of past organisational significance. Mr S, aged 57 with 37 year's service says, 'when I started with C & E it took me 14 years to

reach HEO grade. But when I did I had the equivalent of an MP's salary. There was then respect for the job equivalent to the Minister or Doctor in any community in Scotland. It was part of the Civil Service – the British Civil Service the greatest in the world. Northcote Trevelyan had made it the service that it was. We were riding high in the British Empire and the seeds of our greatness were sown then. I joined the officer grade – the OCX – during the depression, after the war and in those days there were a lot of over-qualified people in the service. There weren't the jobs around then, so they joined the Civil Service'. Several subjects in C & E make mention of the Minister and the Doctor, echoing the pride and belief in the Civil Service like a benchmark of respect and status accorded by fellow citizens. Within that context of organizational history lie the expectancies about what would be offered in terms of career opportunity. His colleague, Mr D, aged 52 with 30 year's service, says, 'I came into the OCX definitely interested in promotion. We were fiercely independent as a service but flexible enough to be able to respond to particular needs, as the service required'. The organization is identified using the metaphor of a family or a club. There were functional, hierarchically devolved tasks leading through the grades to improved and publicly acknowledged status. Mr S, aged 52 with 33 year's experience says, 'in those days C & E was a huge club. I joined the Waterguard and in those days the position was most jealously guarded. You had a uniformed position and there were values attached to the job. It was all command and control in those days. It was all about regulation and laws. Officers called us 'boatmen'. The OCX grade was equivalent to the HEO and you had Assistant Preventive Officers and Preventive Officers. 'Boatmen' were regarded as the lowest form of life'.

For females the service offered opportunity in what had previously been a male preserve. The organization offered similar benefits to all its officers and the same catalogue of praise could be found among females as among their male counterparts. Mrs R, aged 47 with 27 year's service, says, 'the culture of C & E was a good department to work for – better than the DSS. It was seen as doing a valuable job – you were someone in the village if you were the Exciseman – along with the Minister and the Doctor. Not only that but it was a lifetime's career. It had security, it was hierarchical, it was autonomous and everything had to be done straightaway. There were plenty of promotion prospects and women were just beginning to come in in greater numbers than before. This was due to the VAT business. Before that it was a very male-dominated department. Believe it or not, I was first female rummage officer. I was on trial and paid direct. In those days there were no females over the rank of HEO and those that were HEOs were spinsters past childbearing age. The OCX were all male. There weren't any females outdoors. VAT started taking in lots of staff – lots of them female. Jobs were available, there was training and that's where I started'.

However, not everything was as unchanging as early experience suggests. Officers were familiar with enforced change at work Mr S, again, aged 57, 'the two words were status and accountability. The key phrase was 'the officer should be satisfied' and no one, but no one, could tell the officer what should make him satisfied'. This autonomy was gradually modified by standardised responses and random checks rather than exhaustive searches: 'all that became eroded in the 1960s. The dinosaurs were left high and dry. More bulk cargo sealed at source meant less random checking, acting on hunches or information. Purchase tax had come in in the 40s and this led to bookkeeping and accountancy skills.

Assessments for VAT were based on these skills. Organizational restructuring was not new and amalgamation went on between 300 Waterguard and 5500 OCXs. Up till then we knew everybody by name. There was a bonding that went on after the two parts of the service were amalgamated'.

What the service meant to the individual was commented on, too. Career opportunities were available nationwide for those who wanted to make a move elsewhere. Mr D again, 'Geographical moves were possible then so you could have a career that took you round the country as opportunity arose. In those days it was a sort of caring club and Collectors were more paternal, relaxed and gentlemanly'. Job security and career opportunity were the hallmark of working in a good organization. As Miss G, aged 52 with 32 year's service, puts it, 'I began to work for a Government department because of security in the job and an opportunity to work my way to the top. It was a stable environment for me and everybody else was involved, too. The work was hard but if you got on and did your job then you could reach your potential'. Some mention the local culture, too. Mr F, aged 52 with 33 year's service, 'Glasgow was a different culture. There was a commitment to the team and all members of staff. It was comfortable and constructive. We had well developed work arrangements, which were successful and well regarded by everyone. We had career prospects then and movement around the organisation. Rewards were better and praise, thought difficult, was received more often than it is now'. His colleague, Mr K, aged 52 years with 33 year's service says, 'there were opportunities for growth, not money. The major motivators were praise and recognition and as far as the culture was concerned, it was a progressive organisation, involved in shaping events. There was a higher esprit de corps and C & E had a pivotal role - its

influence was valued'. The self-belief and pride in this value was evident in all long-serving officers.

Thus far, then, we could say that the historical appreciation of the organisation is dominant in the perception and interpretation of older managers in C & E. They recognise change in procedures as required by technological development and structural rationalisations but they see as enduring factors job security, professional development, promotion and career opportunity. Such historical references are not just confined to a public service organisation. In our second organisation, a pharmaceutical company, there are not quite the same lengthy descriptions of past history. Nonetheless, the impression is one of satisfaction and the same description of consistent projects and supporting procedures is to be found. Miss M, aged 52 with 18 year's service said, 'we always had the same goal in our work because each team was responsible for work on the same compound. It was a happy life with varied interests and a lot of autonomy and freedom to arrange our working lives, as we wanted. We really did our own thing unless a project need dictated that we work to interface with particular deadlines. It was a different culture, really. We were a bit spoiled, I think. We were not exposed to the real world. We couldn't have continued'. There is here a significant admission of an idyllic condition together with a pragmatic view of the need for change following the enforced change itself. Her colleague, Mrs H, aged 34 with 5 year's service said, 'It was a very hierarchical organisation and there was a very definite pecking order and career path. It was friendly, open and supportive. You felt you had ownership of drugs and what that meant was scientific interest'. Their colleague, Mrs W, aged 50 with 7 year's service is similarly reflective, 'the job I had was very rewarding. They always appreciated a

good piece of work. You always had the time to do the work and overtime was not expected. Managers were part of us. It was all team based. The senior management team was easy to speak to. They had a career system and your promotion had to be deserved'. In all of these comments there is a similar satisfaction with a predictable, autonomous working environment and acceptance of hierarchy, promotion and reward inherent within the structure of the company.

## **THE INVISIBLE ORGANISATION**

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Not all organisations seem to engender the same comments of familiarity and respect. Indeed, our third organisation, a local Authority, East Dumbarton District Council, there is no mention of it at all. Every member of the sports team refers to his or her previous career achievements in sports but not in terms of the organisations worked for. Mr G, the present manager of the team, aged 34 with 11 year's service is typical, 'I went to study at college and gained my ONC and HNC. I did teaching practice in conjunction with teaching in the evenings. I ran fitness clubs and a youth club in my spare time. I became a COMED coach and trainee recreation officer. I wanted to pick up on the admin side. Then I applied for the post of recreation officer in the field'. Even at the time of major restructuring he does not mention the organisation concerned, 'then came the time for Compulsory Competitive Tendering in 90/91. My remit was to write all the specs which went out to tender. I was doing that documentation for about two years. Apart from that I began to get the business overview in all respects'. His colleague, Mr H, aged 24 with 3 year's service emphasised his own personal career development, 'I went into the sports field. I

was interviewed in 1992 and appointed as a sports development officer. I was the first person to come in with a degree. I got on well with the job. It was a blank page to me so I could write on it more or less what I wanted. So the job was about managing, budgeting and programming over that period'. Autonomy and career opportunity are identified as significant factors in the individuals' perception throughout the early narratives.

For other subjects, mostly younger employees, there was little or no reference to the history of the organisation or its desirable cultural features. However, there was a similar focus on career and personal achievement. In these cases, the individual seems to have joined the organisation almost randomly and makes no mention of an organisational career path at all. Mrs P, aged 37 with 18 year's service relates her experience, 'after I had graduated I looked around for a job. I looked at the Civil Service, at the Foreign Office and another department. C & E was my third choice. It was most attractive as its network was nationwide and I was in Aberdeen. There was a generalist approach and you could find yourself in Customs, Excise or VAT'. Her interpretation of what this meant to her is direct, 'This suited me as I was in control of my career and I could develop myself. I never felt constrained by the organisation. I just got confidence working in the environment. It felt right to me. I am not a worrier. I have a feel for it. It's the track I take. I have no fear and I like people. I am very open: what you see is what you get. I can see an opportunity and take it. You have to promote yourself'. This is the first clear statement of a basic belief or assumption. Her colleague, Mrs R, aged 34 with 10 year's service, relates a similar narrative, 'I joined the Civil Service after the Army as a young direct. I went into Excise and I must admit I had an extremely good manager. He gave me lots of support and I

was responsible for my own work. I felt better about it than joining the army. I was ambitious. I wanted to develop myself. I wanted lots of experience and I wanted to develop myself quickly'. This response suggests that the organisation is a vehicle for personal career. She interprets its significance as providing career opportunity and a succession of jobs offering autonomy and interest. In the pharmaceuticals company Mrs McD, aged 32 with 6 year's service has a similar approach to her working life, 'my parents were on their own in business and so I grew up in that environment. I have always found the 9 to 5 working environment restricting. I want to be more flexible. So, I have always had this vision that it's better on your own - but not easier. Syntex was a good peer group. I was in the computing department just before Quintiles took over. I had taken on a management role and I was beginning to enjoy myself. I had a good manager, Percy H'. For younger subjects, embarking on a job in an organisation seems to have had a different significance from older, more traditional and long-serving managers. The basic assumptions that different subjects have about the organisation, their manager and their career seem here somewhat different. So, thus far we have different basic assumptions expressed by subjects some of whom expect job security and progression through the grades and others who look for career opportunity wherever it leads. Such a difference may enable us to identify different responses to enforced change at work. For during such change subjects are usually impelled to interpret the meaning they put on the events occurring at work. These taken-for-granted assumptions are easy to maintain until enforced change threatens them. It is then that decisions must be made to defend them, reject them, or reconstruct them.

## **ENFORCED CHANGE AND THE TRANSITION EVENT**

For some of our subjects the enforced change at work involved restructuring of the department and a required move to another post. The response of older members of staff was one of rejection, since it did not meet with their expected standards of management behaviour at all. For them there was a loss of status, no control and careless or thoughtless managers. Mrs R, aged 47 with 27 year's service in C & E relates, 'Investors in People brought involvement and an attempt to link business needs with training requirements. The efficiency reviews brought staff cuts particularly in the administration function. We were devalued. From being a Training Adviser, I became a supernumerary in VAT. I was chosen and I had no choice. It was during the August holiday and Fraud was rehoused on the second floor. I came back and Ian, my colleague, rang me at home. "Report to Jim," I was told. I found all my belongings had been put in a skip. "Go to VAT 2". The Surveyor there made no attempt to contact me for three weeks. Neither my previous boss nor the Head of Personnel spoke to me. Staff reports were made. I thought it was a bit off'. Mr R, her manager, aged 51 with 31 year's service had a similar experience, 'Once the merger of the two collections was announced it was clear that there would be only one T & D O job. Once my boss was in place as Head of Personnel it was clear that he wanted RK and that left me without a post'. The result of this shock was not just in terms of self-confidence at work but also his value to the organization and his contribution over the years of his service. 'Basically, I was mishandled. I lost all sense of value in myself not just in the job but as a husband and as a father. The new Deputy Collector was determined to do things his way and nothing would stand in his way. They were determined to get their way. They told me they didn't

know where to use me. A date was agreed and I was told I was going back to VAT'. Even subjects who seemed to succeed in getting a worthwhile job of their choice were sometimes shocked by what they heard. Mr K, aged 52 with 33 year's experience was disturbed by the implication of events, 'it came like a bolt out of the blue. I remember being called to the collector's office and told that the training departments were to be amalgamated and that there was to be a choice made between JR and me. I said jokingly, "I suppose this means I could be made redundant." And to my surprise I was told, "Yes, it does." So, now the total guarantee of security was gone'. The sacrosanct basic assumption of job security preserved through his whole working life was shattered and his disbelief is palpable. Discontent did not come just from the subjects who were directly affected by such forced change. Other colleagues were perturbed, too. The implication of Market Testing was viewed with considerable disquiet. Miss G, aged 52 with 32 year's service, says, 'we were always a very proud service. And now we were told that the work that we did could be up for grabs by outside contractors. I felt very bad about this, I can tell you. I felt utterly betrayed. We had always had a peer group. It was a job for life. But, now? I mean they don't really want you. We were being asked to bid for our own jobs completely in the dark'. The unfairness of this situation in which comparative competence is to be compared with outside providers is seen as another blow to previously held basic assumptions about what the organization can and cannot do. Not for the only time, a female subject uses graphic sexual imagery to describe her feelings of violation, 'It was so cold bloodied I couldn't believe it. We had no qualifications recognised by the outside world. We were completely naked'.

In the pharmaceutical company there was equal anger from some managers. Miss M, aged 52 with 18 year's service, said, 'in Pre-clinical there was no change of structure at all. I had a new boss put over me who knew nothing about the business and admitted that he needed me to make it work. He was very sensitive about it and treated me very fairly. I was made promises by the Operations Director'. Thus far she suspends disbelief pending further experience of this contradictory decision. 'Had I known how it would turn out I would have taken the parachute. I feel very bitter about that. It all came to a head with a meeting between my boss and the Managing Director. They explained that they needed me to be committed to the studies Roche wanted. The HR Director wouldn't tell me himself - I felt bitter about that. Then we moved to a new building, gave up manufacturing and QC. Pre-clinical was taken over by MB, who was imposed - a microbiologist who knew nothing about our business'. The implications are immediately apparent, 'for me it was a toss-up between taking another job and early retirement. Then I got a call from Scotia who I do respect. Several of our people have gone there'. Not all subjects responded in a negative way to enforced change. Some managers found that they were promoted and prospered under the change. But even these are somewhat tentative in their response. Mr A, aged 47 with 21 year's service said, 'it was a bit of a kick in the teeth. We were very concerned. The redundancy terms were very good and to be honest there were times in the last year or two when I had a twinge of regret I didn't take it. We're still not bigger but we've become massively more productive'. There is acceptance of the inevitable and an acknowledgement of some benefits, particularly greater autonomy in the work, 'I have a free hand to organise the workload. I have to demonstrate that if we don't get the finance we

can't complete the contract terms. It's champing from time to time, but it's exciting'.

## **TRANSITION AND THE MEDIATING ROLE OF THE MANAGER**

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For some subjects there was a personal and very public affront. Mr S, aged 52 with 33 year's service, said, 'I was told that my anti-smuggling job was going and I was going back to Aberdeen in charge of a VAT division. What did I know about VAT? It really hit me hard. I was going to leave the event straight away'. The manager would surely intervene to ameliorate the feeling of abandonment, 'I went home and no one contacted me for two weeks. And what about my leader? Did he do anything to alleviate the situation? Did he, hell! He let me down. I would take early retirement if I could. When I got home I was in tears – and that's only happened once in our married life. My wife was furious'. Mr S, aged 57 with 37 year's experience, says, 'when it came it was a major upheaval. One of my colleagues who was told to go told me it took him weeks before he could tell his wife. So, when the blow fell the Director Outfield phoned me at 3pm and told me I was to go but I should tell nobody. I was in the middle of a meeting with my key staff at the time. And yet the previous week he had chaired a collector's meeting in London and had given me a lift from Heathrow all the way in to London. I sat next to him in the back of the car and he dropped me off in the middle of London but not once did he share with me what he could have told me face to face. He had to wait and make a phone call. It was the coldest way to do it'. His interpretation of the meaning is immediate, 'I felt cheated. I had only just attended the collectors' forum and yet I was told to go on the phone and further not allowed to tell anyone. It was dreadful. It was

awful. I was bitter. I felt like fighting. He had an unfeeling attitude, but he was a good administrator'. The basic assumption of a caring manager is shattered but still retained intact. Sensitivity is still the prerequisite of a good manager.

Worse was to happen for the small team of sports managers. In this example an event unfolded that they could never have expected. Another basic assumption is disconfirmed. Mr G relates the story, 'in 1997 the Council was £9 million in the red. We were all at the Christmas lunch when the message came through that we were all out of a job. I was told to come in at 2pm the following day and sort out the options. At the very worst our case was to be: there's no point in sacking us, we're making you money. The compromise was to keep on some staff and get in what money we could'.

Miss J, his colleague, aged 29 with 10 year's service said, 'our manager, Colin, was told that the whole department had lost their jobs. It all took place during the Christmas lunch. That weekend was hectic. But Colin fought for us and secured half our jobs. But it was then a problem of who went and who stayed. We waited one and a half months until the news came through. I thought if it were going to happen to me I would pack up and go abroad for a while. In the end half stayed and half went. Colin discussed it with me in between trying to secure his own job'. Their colleague, Mrs S, aged 53 with 6 year's service said, 'Colin was good. He kept us informed all the time. In the end he was made to reapply for his own job and someone else got it. I watched him go. It was horrendous. Nobody came near us'. The interpretation of the meaning here is bleak and unrelenting, 'we were dumped, chucked aside. No one had any idea what was going on. From a department of 18 we were down to 8'. The shock of Colin's treatment affected everyone. Miss McK, aged 26 with 2 year's

service, said, 'Colin, having fought for us lost his own job in the end. They went from four heads of department down to one. He didn't get it. We were shocked. He fought for us and that was his reward in the end. Morale was low after that'.

## **ALTERNATIVE RESPONSES TO ENFORCED CHANGE**

Not every one responded negatively to enforced change, however. The subjects who had described their early expectancies as career opportunity responded quite differently to those whose expectancies were based on continued career advance and job security from one organisation. So, for them there is no mention of betrayal, or shock at events imposed by the organisation. For Mrs P, aged 37 with 18 year's service in C & E change has meant opportunity wherever she has ended up, 'overall the changes haven't taken me by surprise'. She is reflective about the reasons for this and ascribes it to her own disposition, 'I suppose you would call me naïve but adaptable. I would try anything, as long as I knew what I was doing and got a return on it'. And the basic assumption underlying this philosophy is, 'I can do anything I want to do and that's what I feel about myself'.

Her colleague, Mrs R, aged 34 with 10 year's experience, said, 'the Training Unit was sold down the river. In the end I was offered a job in the staff support unit. Then I didn't know really what to do. I didn't want fear of the unknown. The manager phoned. He said the job hadn't worked out for the other person, would I like it? This time they just appointed me. It's the best job I've ever done. I am very happy doing this job. Promotion? No, not out of this job'. Once her career is assured with the provision of an interesting and fulfilling job she accepts the change and her basic assumption about her career comprising of different but

interesting jobs is reinforced.

Again, for some the difference seems to have been a helpful manager, Mrs A, aged 33 with 5 year's service at Syntex said, 'I didn't hear any rumours. We were told we would be working for Roche. I thought that was fine. Then they mentioned redundancy. I hadn't considered redundancy at all. Shortly after that we were taken to Heriot Watt. One of the people from Roche told us that the site was to close. My manager was very good, very informative and very supportive. He encouraged us to get our CVs together. There were 121 of us and none of us wanted to look for another job. I was offered a job in a semi-conductor plant, but I didn't want to go. I could have taken redundancy. There was a lot of money for one year's work. Anyway, I didn't want to move. I much prefer it here because of the work'. The basic assumptions she holds confirm her own evaluation of the importance of the work and her manager in spite of other options offered her from outside the organization.

## **SURPRISE AND BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

We have already referred to surprise and sense making (Louis, 1980 a & b). The search to discover what subjects believe ought to be observed or ought not to be contravened by managers is central to the uncovering of basic assumptions. How managers construe key organisational events is a function of interpretation – and the meaning construed is a function of the criteria used to adjudge the event of, in this case, enforced change. Early attempts to examine this process have included events such as: mergers and acquisitions (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Mirvis & Marks, 1986), leadership succession (Sonnenfeld, 1988) and organisational deaths (Harris & Sutton, 1986; Sutton, 1987). Tracking how

change of perception occurs in individuals allows the researcher to examine criteria used by the individual to assess the significance of such change. Some refer to these criteria as 'frames of reference' (Isabella, 1990, p.12), and the derivation of the term stretches back to early behavioural learning and subsequent expectancy (Schank & Abelson, 1977a & b). The definition of such frames of reference is sometimes stated as 'the presumption of what will be is based on what has been' (Isabella, 1990, p.17) and these coincide with the confirmed assumptions in Louis' research (1980 a & b). As we have noted before, there is a prevalent assumption that individuals will always adapt to changes imposed by the organization and so change their frames of reference to accord with new demands or situations pertaining at work. Our own contention will be that while for some subjects that may be so, in others there could be a significant failure to abandon basic assumptions leading directly to either alienation from the organization or resentment with the perceived agents of enforced change at work like the immediate manager. At one point Isabella refers to frames of reference being amended (ibid. p.23). We will attempt to demonstrate that for some individuals such reconstruction may release subjects previously loyal and trusting in the organisation into a new freedom, which owes no dependence to the organisation to ensure that they survive enforced change and further the development of their career in the future independently.

## **DEPENDENTS, AFTER THE TRANSITION**

We will, hereafter, refer to subjects who hold basic assumptions requiring the organization to secure their job and progress their career as Dependents. For many such subjects the familiar values, which they assumed would govern their

working life, have changed never to return. Miss G, aged 52 with 32 year's service, says, 'they denigrated the old system. But we took the wrong way forward. We ought to look at it again. Look at the complex problems. The ethos was to plan our own careers. AO to EO was a big jump in those days. And then there was the internal trawl. That's just been made worse. You set the objectives then you either met them or exceeded them. You needed the ability to do a wide range of jobs and a flexible personality. Then you would be fitted for the next job up. We have lost the vetted list. We are losing good people because of it. Once upon a time you could choose the country you wanted to work in'. This loss of expected security and assured development opportunities leaves most dependents feeling aggrieved. Mr F, aged 52 with 33 year's service relates, 'there were a few people who were involved and whose jobs were increased. The rest were just denigrated and devalued, talked down, as I was myself. I found myself marginalized. In spite of being a Deputy Collector myself I was never kept in touch with what was going on. I felt I was swimming against the tide'. He interprets the meaning of this event and its value for him and is self reflective in his acknowledgment of what this has done to him personally. 'I have no desire to go further. I would happily take early retirement. I have reacted cynically. I have got to the stage of having a job for having a job's sake rather than for the organisation'. The cry of betrayal is universal among those who feel they have been deprived of the promised security of tenure and curtailment of their career. The energy once reserved for the job is often channelled elsewhere, 'as far as loyalty and trust are concerned, all my energies are put into my family and friends rather than push myself at work'.

For some subjects the loss of expected security and loyalty trigger a search for

the promised land elsewhere. Such subjects believe that their basic assumption about job security will be honoured somewhere else and the search is on to move to another organization which will provide the job security and assured promotion path again. The changes at Quintiles were typified by work profitability factors that now came to dominate everyone's working time. Gone are the days of respected dedication to compound development and the discretion to work at it as one pleases. Now the time accorded to each activity must be recorded and utilisation time must achieve a stated percentage of time committed to work. This new close scrutiny of minute-by-minute operations brings awareness of supervision and means that the status and autonomy once accorded the PhD chemist are being replaced by a monitoring system more suitable for a laboratory assistant. Mrs T, aged 37 with 8 year's service, who moved to Scotia Pharmaceuticals said, 'in a pharma you have freedom and you can make your own suggestions. You can make suggestions in Quintiles and they would be immediately resisted'. Again the search is on for an organisation that will offer acceptance and involvement both looked for and expected. Mrs T is not disappointed in her new post and reflects that her new job is much more like her time at Syntex. She reflects, 'here we are autonomous apart from a review every four weeks. There is development and we are lucky there is a good career structure. We should have had the same with Quintiles but it was the experienced against the novices and within five years there were stunted careers'. The interpretation of meaning and value are immediate, 'No end-result could be seen. We hadn't the same involvement with the development of the work. In a CRO (Quintiles) your time is taken up visiting clients. For us the number of hours began to mount up horrifically and it became increasingly difficult to find people to do the work. The rewards are nothing like those in

pharmaceuticals and nothing like working in a small company like Syntex. There you could find each other's company and involvement in the work interesting in itself. In Quintiles there was nothing like the same satisfaction'.

Some subjects tried the new way of life and were even promoted and given very public opportunities to excel in the new working environment. Mrs W, aged 50 with 7 year's service, welcomed her new chance to prove herself as a Business Development Manager. That excitement did not last long, 'I remember the Operations Director saying, "There are opportunities for all who want it." I thought, "I'll go for that." I thought I'd do an MBA. But the reality is they don't really care. You have to work excessive hours otherwise they think you can't do the job'. A basic assumption follows, 'People need listening to, otherwise they are just going to get jobs elsewhere. They're not a people-focused company. In Syntex we used to get a pension. In Quintiles there is no pension. I gave 110%. Now I have to give 300%. I want my life back. I'm looking for a job. - so are most Syntex people. There is no training - it's all about money. All they want is profit so everything is connected to the figures and if the budgeted results are not forthcoming then cuts to investment are put into effect immediately beginning with things like training'. Her basic assumptions about how an organization ought to behave are unmodified by experience of the enforced change at work and are stoutly defended.

Loss of expected working conditions and care from the management are not the only violated basic assumptions. For some subjects there is disgust at the behaviour of managers and the way they handled the enforced change. Mr K, aged 52 with 33year's service, 'I thought to myself, "If they can do this to me, they can do this to anyone." I had always thought that senior managers

were a sophisticated bunch. They would look after the needs of the peer group and apply themselves to avoid mismanagement'. Following this experience he finds another basic assumption disconfirmed. 'Well that didn't happen and I had to think again about the quality of our senior managers. I tried to rally round and reassure the others around me, but when it came to me there was no support. I involved everyone in the decisions and explained what would happen. I tried to make sure they were in a position of opportunity as they faced uncertainty. But no one did that for me'. His colleague, Mr R, aged 51 with 31 year's service said, 'They don't realise what they've got. I said to Bill (his boss) once, "Why is it we've got the best T & DO in the UK?" He answered, "Who said we had?" That was typical of him, you see. He never knew how good we were. I said, "Why don't you ask any of the T & DOs and they'll tell you." But he never appreciated what he had', and by implication, he should have done.

## **INDEPENDENTS, AFTER THE TRANSITION**

We have already identified subjects who do not express any dependence on the organisation to progress their career and who seem content to take control themselves. We will hereafter refer to such subjects as Independents. The interpretation that they make of the same enforced change is not described in the same way as Dependents. There is no mention of betrayal in their narratives and though they may criticise managers for not handling enforced change in the expected manner, they do so in an objective, almost impersonal way. Mrs P, aged 37 with 18 year's service makes her own assessment, 'My approach has not changed at all and you have to ask whether these changes have been as fundamental as they were made out to be or whether they were surface changes

only. OK so we reduced numbers, but what else have we achieved? It's still very hierarchical. It takes no risks and is a blame culture. We don't believe what we're saying. We've spent money on training but it's had very little impact on people at the grass-roots level'.

For some subjects the manager and Chief Executive played a positive role in their perception of enforced change and opportunity. Mrs A, aged 33 years with 5 year's experience said, 'Syntex had been a laid-back environment. We were invited to go to Murrayfield to hear Dennis Gillings (CEO). I remember him saying if you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen - the pace will get worse. It didn't concern me, but people who complain always remember that. We have a dynamic manager. He gets us involved in the future. So, we get that drive ourselves. Two other colleagues don't have the same drive as I do'. But for the meaning of what the CEO said is immediately applied as an opportunity to go out and control her own prospects and development, 'Quintiles had its own H & S and I thought, "Why shouldn't Edinburgh be the centre for H & S in the whole country?" That was the thing that Dennis said, "If you see something, go after it" and I took it with both hands. It's been hard work but different people have handled it differently'. Her basic assumption is reinforced, 'I like hard work. It's true you set your own standards. I hear people complain and I can't understand it. How can they get in such a mess?'

Successful performers are often appreciative of the opportunity given them. Mr B, aged 39 with 11 year's service straightaway revealed his own basic assumptions, 'It's a question of different pressures. The incentive of money does not drive day-to-day work. Compound development is an incentive in itself. But with a CRO it's all about deadlines to meet. There's a constant internal

conflict – as soon as figures go down so does investment in the future. At the time of the take-over I was asking myself whether I should stay or not. And I thought, "I am going to make this work". His own personal value will be enhanced if he succeeds, 'I will become more marketable'. This philosophy he attributes to a good manager in his early working life, 'I was lucky. I was at Pfizer for five years and I had a good boss. He was switched on and taught me the value of hard work. He taught me to realise that the company is not going to lead you along'. The value of hard work has its own incentive: marketability. His basic assumption is reinforced, 'If you want it, you do it'.

For some subjects, family experience has affected perception and given a similar objectivity to the experience of enforced change at work. Miss McK, aged 26 with 2 year's service said, 'my family is very optimistic for me. My Dad has his own business. He is very optimistic and very helpful. He tried to help me put it at the back of my mind. It pushed me to work harder. My Mum and Dad work together. They are very positive and they push me onward. My brother has an HND and my sister is a nurse with an HNC. I am ambitious and I have to push at any hurdle. I look back and think, "I've done that now", but I haven't been to College. I know I could get another job, so I don't let it get me down. I sorted it out quickly in my mind'. She reflects on her own approach self-reflectively and interprets the significance and value inherent in her decision, 'my personality is basically optimistic. I think I would go back to College. I need that bit of paper. I think I would do a mixed degree – business management and anatomy, definitely a college course'.

## **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS RECONSTRUCTED**

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As we have noted, for some writers the reconstruction of frames of reference seems to assume alteration of personal expectation to accept new and imposed demands at work (Isabella, 1990, p.23). The difference here, however, is that Isabella's research assumes that the frames of reference will change to accommodate the new reality imposed by the organisation. Among our own subjects there is evidence that enforced change may well bring about a change of basic assumptions from those typical of dependence to a state of non-dependence on the organisation and self-directed career opportunity. Sometimes this is because alternative career options are presented and always because the option reinforces a self-perception that had not been recognised before.

For two subjects the trigger for this reconstruction had been an unexpected and unlooked for offer of employment from outside providers. Mr McP, aged 46 with 23 year's service, worked in VAT and then moved into the IT department. He took charge there only to be confronted by the challenge of the Government's Private Finance Initiative in which his department was earmarked to be assessed and then bid for by outside providers. He worked closely with the main contractors and then received offers which he had never expected, 'the other month the Personnel Manager of the main contractor said to me, "You've got to come over to us." He is really enthusiastic every time I see him. I know it's a gamble, but when you see what I'm being offered now, to say I'll go, it's something really stimulating. Then Scottish Power approached me and I had an in-depth talk with them and the Personnel Manager said, "I hope you're still thinking of coming across to us." Then I had a performance review with my boss

and he said, "Mike can do this job and the next one as well." You've got to take it all in your stride'. Buoyed up by this multiple vote of confidence and two job offers he is enthusiastic, 'the forward view is that PFI which started as a threat is now seen as an opportunity. I can stay, I can perform well and I've got luck'. He interprets the meaning and value of these events immediately, 'I've been given the choice: I can stay where I am or I can go with a contractor'. But his view now is different about career and waiting for the organisation to provide opportunity. A basic assumption deferred previously is now adopted vigorously, 'I should have moved eight years ago. I should have been more self-sufficient. I should have managed my career'. These latter statements suggest revised basic assumptions, which will be acted on in future.

His colleague, Mr McD, aged 37 with 19 year's service reflects on work experience after the transition at work, 'Life in the Training Department became a shit-hole. We were working from a blank sheet of paper. The manager was under pressure and wanted results right away'. His interpretation measured by traditional basic assumptions is, 'I felt hard-done-by and definitely not valued. Our position became untenable and it began to affect my home life'. However, an opportunity was to offer itself in an unexpected way, 'I had been using the software for the ISO 9000 package and I wanted the scope of it extended. So, I approached the MD of the supplying company and started to talk to him about it. He discovered that I knew a lot about it so he offered me a job'. He takes time to assimilate the implications of this new prospect, 'I mean, I was frightened. What did I know about sales? He helped me through the dilemmas'. Looking back he assesses the change in his thinking since his time with C & E, 'I feel empowerment. I feel cosy working alone. I've enjoyed it. I get busy. I impress

others. I make presentations to clients'. This new success convinces him of his aptitude and ability to cope, 'I have no problem with that. I seem to have grown in confidence'. And he reflects on C & E itself, 'I believe C & E have a lot to learn about managing people'. The basic assumptions now reinforced for him are summarised thus, 'It's all to do with leadership style, communication and honesty. People are hurting with low self-esteem and still there are no leaders'.

Not every subject finds a new way of thinking as a result of external job offers. Indeed, for one subject the reassessment came as both enforced change came at work and personal disaster at home. Mrs S, aged 33 with 15 year's service relates what happened to her, 'I was told I would have to drop back from HEO to EO position. At this time the drop in money was very important, as I had split up with my husband and had a seven-year-old son to support. So every little help that I could get was important for my security'. Her conclusion about her situation was pragmatic 'My house, job and marriage were all moving under me so I had to find security for myself'. The trigger for change in her thinking came in the form of a special course, designed to give females assertive skills and greater confidence, 'the Springboard course came along and I got a lot out of that. I had to ask myself what I wanted to attain, what my goals were'. She reflects on her own personality, 'I am very practical and logical. I am always thinking about things and I thought, "For twenty-four years my mother had a miserable marriage'. Her interpretation of the meaning and value is immediate, 'She would have been better off without my Dad.'" The awareness of this is obvious in her current situation; 'I had to plan the change in my marriage and in my job at the same time'. She transformed her job in Fraud by undertaking voluntary training of staff members and then was able to apply successfully for a

move to a job with better prospects. When she looks back she analyses what she has learned and how seeing things for herself and making appropriate decisions is a new basic assumption whose implication she recognises immediately, 'I decided what was the right thing to do. I had control of my own destiny. But I still feel angry at the way things were done. I proved I could do it. I feel happier now. I know I can survive. I had some doubts. I had to be strong'.

Several subjects could be identified as winners in terms of what the new organisation has been able to offer. It might be expected that these would be committed employees, satisfied with what had been done for them and settling back to enjoy reaffirmed job security. For most such subjects there are readjustments of their assumptions about different factors, which might previously have been taken for, granted. Mr B, aged 39 with 11 year's service explains, 'I took over four people and I now have a staff of twenty-one. I am in the managerial ranks. So, I have done well for myself and overall I feel very satisfied. At a personal level I feel I have done very well, having gone through all that I have. It's up to you from there on in'. He develops his thoughts on the learning involved for him in this enforced change at work and reformulates in terms of a basic assumption, 'you have to have an attitude towards your career – one of stability. People are less willing to wait for things to happen. They are more proactive now'. The implications for traditional organizational life and individual worker commitment are obvious to him, 'Loyalty? I don't think it can exist to the same extent now. Companies don't matter anymore. You can have this loyalty but it takes a blow and then you never trust again. But, for the individual the result is you will have clearer goals about what you want to achieve'. A basic assumption of dependence is replaced with something more

durable to ensure survival in the event of further enforced change at work'

His colleague, Mr R, aged 42 with 12 year's service reflects on enforced change and its effect on individual workers, 'I am cynical about Quintiles. I wasn't. I used to want success. This is a human endeavour – it needs to engage the energy and enthusiasm of its people. But where's the reward and motivation for the staff? They're (Quintiles) raking in the profit. There are management stock options, but what about the poor bloody infantry?' And for himself, 'move on at the right time. I'm better off than I was three years ago. I'm dedicated to pharmacology'. The focus of his commitment becomes his own self-discipline, he rationalises staying with the organization and reflects on the ultimate benefit to himself, 'I'm battle hardened. My own self-esteem has risen. I've become just another work-horse'.

For some subjects there is new focus provided by their own perception of the scope of the job. Some of these have been many years in the service and the change to self-sufficiency from organisational dependency is significant in changing basic assumptions about employment. Mr R, aged 51 with 31 year's service said, 'I will develop the job. I believe in the learning organisation and quality, efficiency and value added. Key players are interested and once we get a new Collector in place we will by-pass obstacles at Collector level'. But as for his view of the organisation, it is not restored in any way, 'C & E are just a wage-payer for me. It came over me slowly. Now the passion is gone. They don't realise what they've got'. His colleague, Mr D, aged 52 with 30 year's service makes a similar distinction between organisation and commitment to more worthwhile causes in his continuing job. He reassesses his priorities between the assumptions that he previously accepted without question,

'I had to start thinking what things in my life were important to me. They want you to put them first the whole time. But there's no future in this department. I don't even know whether I want to go on until I'm sixty. It's a battle just to come in here each day'. So the important basic assumption is now apparent to him, 'what I do feel is more passionately about things going on around me – look after the interests of the staff. I have the opportunity to do this. They come first'.

For these subjects there has been a reassessment of their own priorities and some new basic beliefs or reconstruction of previously held beliefs. The loser in all these narratives is the organisation. Gone are the assumed pledges of loyalty and trust. Even managers successful under the new regime harbour feelings of doubt that there is any long-term prospect of restoring the once assumed tenets underwriting loyalty and trust in the organization. The assumptions of the modernistic world of stable and all-providing organizations are now superseded by a post-modernist world. Nothing is certain except that nothing is certain. The interpretation of the post-structuralist world is found in the interpretation of meaning and value for the individual and a set of basic assumptions that by-pass the rhetoric of dependency and life-long care. The implications for organizational integrity are formidable.

## **SUMMARY**

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There are many assumptions contained in the research on managers' transitions at work. Some have remained unquestioned in the research surrounding job and work transition. 'Older managers have higher levels of loyalty, commitment and job involvement... managers develop increasingly favourable attitudes to the

organisation with age... older manager have grown up in a time of unquestioning loyalty' (Nicholson & West, 1988, p.37). Such generalisations are tempting conclusions to draw from quantified analysis of questionnaires and the interpretation of subjects undergoing transition at work. Leaving aside whether it is possible to measure loyalty, commitment and job involvement, it would be difficult to assess accurately whether favourable attitudes to the organisation do indeed increase with age. Older managers may well have grown up in a time of unquestioning loyalty, but any subject may also hold similar basic assumptions about what the organisation ought to do to discharge such an inferred trust. Our own research would suggest that there is no automatic correlation between age and a belief that the organisation should show unquestioned loyalty to the individual worker. We would say that many older subjects seem to hold the basic assumption that they have a right to expect secure employment and a career path undisturbed by political initiatives that threaten the integrity of their employment contract. We have observed that such managers may well respond to enforced change with moral affront and a belief that senior managers have betrayed their life-long trust and working commitment to the organisation. It may be that 'life gets better as you get nearer the top of organisations and as you get older' (ibid, p.43). However, what is more significant is whether such subjects believe that this is what ought to happen, for, if they do, they are alienated by events that suggest to them that their rightful expectancies have been frustrated by politically motivated or socially inept senior managers.

The danger of enforced change at work is, 'it would seem that for many managers the satisfactions they are able to extract from work are by virtue of their autonomous efforts and not through the supportive agency of well-

designed human resource systems' (ibid, p.43). However, when we examine the basic assumptions that such managers hold, it becomes easier to identify subjects who are more likely to survive without feeling alienation at the deeds imposed by ill-judged or unwanted changes at work. Such subjects already have within them the beliefs that they are responsible for their own career and are willing to use any opportunity to rescue for themselves new experience that can make them more employable elsewhere either within or outside the organisation. Certainly, there is no expression of betrayal or disloyalty in such subjects as their loyalty is to their own career and there is no expectation that the organisation should be responsible for their next positive career move. In this respect we can draw the conclusion that 'mobile managers can be stronger if they remain open-minded but sceptical and prepared but flexible in the face of change' (ibid. p.94) because their basic assumptions of independence cause them to interpret the meaning of change and the value of its effects differently than those who hold assumptions of organizational dependency. We have identified the basic beliefs that underwrite this equanimity: independence within the organisation and self-dependence for career development within or outside the current organisation. This does not mean that such subjects will be uncritical of the behaviour of the organisation and its managers. It does mean that independent subjects will be more likely to rebuild their career prospects using opportunity within and that their relationship with their manager is more likely to be positive and accepting, rather than condemnatory and dismissive.

## **FEMALES AND GENDER DISTINCTIONS**

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We can find similar generalisations about female managers and their perception in the literature on change at work. There is, apparently, 'a widespread feeling among women that they are subject to discriminatory career opportunities... though this does not seem to dull their determined optimism about their future' (ibid. p.204). Perhaps it is established that in day-to-day converse at work, females compare and contrast their career prospects with males and perceive inequitable outcomes according to gender. Indeed, Nicholson & West list 8 factors which, they assert, summarise the current difference between female managers in transition and their male colleagues. Three of these conclusions relate to the current research:

- Women are more self-directed and intrinsically motivated in career choices.
- Women are not only finding their way to slots of equal status to men, but they are getting there earlier.
- In particular they see themselves discriminated against by organisational career policies.

These conclusions may be valid in the context of voluntary job change. However, they are rather different in the context of enforced change at work. In the first place, we found it impossible to distinguish between male and female responses. Indeed, removing gender references in the transcripts of interviews conducted made it impossible to identify which responses were female or male by content alone. The exception would be two females who used the language of violation

and the marriage metaphor to describe how they felt about enforced change. That apart, the more likely difference can be identified as the basic assumptions that different subjects express and the consequences that these beliefs may have on their response to enforced change.

It is, therefore, apparent from our present research that subjects who expect protection from the organisation and fulfilment of job security and career development all felt betrayed and devalued whether they are male or female. It is true that such subjects were more likely to be older and to have achieved long service in the organisation but that was not always the case. Older subjects who have experienced many changes of organisation may still harbour expectancies, which suggest dependency on the organization and will, perhaps, seek an alternative organisation to restore the looked for restoration of expected conditions at work of personal job security and guaranteed career path. Based on this evidence we could not support the assertion that 'women may develop distinctive orientations to survive and prosper in the face of inequitable circumstantial obstacles and the prevailing values of male-dominated sub-cultures' (ibid. p.44). Indeed, it is as likely that females will be as aggrieved as men or that they will be as independent of organisational dependency. In both cases male and female subjects will believe that their career destiny is in their own hands and will sometimes have been reinforced in this belief by a manager who has encouraged them to be independent of and sceptical about the claims of companies to offer security and development.

## **RECONSTRUCTION AND BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

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The process of internalising change at work has emphasised how the individual adapts to the organisation. Symbolism is sometimes cited as an indication that change has occurred and been accepted by individuals at work. 'There was overt acknowledgment of symbols and an attempt to understand what they meant' (Isabella, 1990, p.24). In this tradition of interpretation, events are cited and their meaning discussed and commented on so that individuals can 'derive new meaning or reconfirm old understandings' (ibid. p.25). The assumptions here are redolent of semiotics, reinterpreting an event say, from death to sleeping makes us feel better about uncongenial enforced change (Barley, 1983) Our own research suggests that significant re-evaluation of events is dependent on a deeper assessment and change of ethical criteria, which enables some subjects to reconstruct what they had previously believed, was right or important. In this respect we have demonstrated that external agents can be significant in mediating, wittingly or unwittingly, that change in self-belief and that events in the personal life, like personal tragedy or family break down can be as salient in enabling subjects to survive and reconstruct their basic beliefs as agents at work. Here again, there was no difference between the instances of male and female subjects who demonstrated such fundamental change during enforced change at work.

It is evident, then, that the identification of basic assumptions is a significant factor that can allow the researcher to examine how response to enforced change at work differs according to the assumptions held. Such beliefs may be sustained through enforced change or they may be reconstructed to abandon

previously held assumptions in order to accept new beliefs about the self and the organisation.

We have established that basic assumptions do affect the way individuals interpret the meaning of events and the way the outcome of these events is valued. Indeed, holding fast to basic assumptions of dependency can mean almost certain moral disbelief that violation of expectancies had taken place. Basic assumptions of independence may mean a very different evaluation. And for others, the change of basic assumptions triggered by enforced change at work can mean a very different way of evaluating the prospect of such change in the future.

In the following chapters we will attempt to continue to track subjects holding different basic assumptions about the expected organizational behaviour during enforced change at work to ascertain how this affects personal attribution, self-sufficiency and the psychological contract of the individual at work. 'The crises that post-industrialism is presenting in work and social meaning production are accordingly affecting the patterns of self-formation and of social solidarity. (Casey; 1995, 25). We believe that the present research offers an opportunity to examine this process in detail.

# CHAPTER TWO

## RECONSTRUCTION

### WHAT IS RECONSTRUCTION?

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A chapter on reconstruction requires an introduction on what is meant by construct and how it can be identified in individuals. Early work on constructs (Piaget, 1932; Kelly, 1955; Fransella, 1978) suggests that how individuals form their judgements on the world about them is an internal process in which criteria are drawn up and used to measure phenomena in the external world. There are others who would maintain that the process is more an external function in which the use of language imposes constructs on the individual (Berger & Luckman, 1976; Schutz, 1964). An alternative view would suggest that how individuals derive their ideas about the world is an interaction between the societal mediation of concepts about reality and a psychological process of developing and devolving categories that will interpret the external world and give it perceived value (Balnaves & Caputi, 1993).

To confine constructs to the subjective field of apprehension would seem to deny that the environment could have a positive effect on the formation of the construct. The subject makes evaluative judgements according to the constructs raised by experience and this in itself reinforces the belief that constructs are a personal process. Once formed, they become a decisive factor in the individual's evaluation of the world about him or herself and subsequent decisions made about an appropriate response to external stimuli. The present research focuses on enforced change at work so it is less concerned with how constructs come to

be formed in the first place. We want to examine how they come to be retained or modified under conditions of such change.

## **RECONSTRUCTION AND ENFORCED CHANGE AT WORK**

If we set this discussion in the context of the individual working in an organisation then we can locate the debate more specifically: an individual evaluates what happens in the organisation in which he or she works. But that evaluation may not be just a momentary response. It will depend on the expectancies or assumptions that the individual held about how the organisation ought to have behaved towards him or her. Clearly the organisation will have influenced the expectancies and assumptions of the individual in what was to be expected in a particular situation. This is the starting point for those wishing to examine the corporate values required in the individual by the organisation (Balnaves & Caputi, 1993, 121). Such would be the starting point for researchers seeking to identify cultural elements between an individual and the organisation (Schein, 1990). In his contributions to this debate Schein has offered different examples of what he defines as 'basic assumptions' and they vary from philosophical statements 'about the nature of reality and truth' to day-to-day company advice on how to survive like 'every person must think for himself' (op cit. p.114). When change is imposed by an organisation, we will suggest, these basic assumptions may be questioned and then reassessed by the individual to take account of the new reality or to reject the new reality and hold fast to the original basic assumption.

As we said above, the current research is concerned with defining how such basic beliefs or assumptions change during a significant threat to the

employment of the individual. In his original examples of cultural formation Schein lays emphasis on the traumatic external threats that may have formed such basic assumptions in the first place. Our interest will be whether trauma brought about by enforced change at work will bring about a change in basic assumptions on matters the individual considers significant. An example of this might be the belief that 'if I work hard and am loyal, there will always be a job open to me'. If the organisation reneges on that basic assumption, the individual may continue to believe that an organisation should remain loyal and start looking, perhaps, for a new company that will fulfil this expectation. Alternatively, the individual may reconstruct his or her basic assumption about employment security to be, say, 'no one owes me a living'. This would be a significant shift in a previously held basic assumption.

## **TRANSITION AND RECONSTRUCTION**

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Transitions have been the subject of much research on how individuals react and respond to change (Van der Velde & Feij, 1995; Gollwitzer, 1990). When individuals choose to change jobs they undergo, according to some researchers, a process comprising stages of assimilation during which they anticipate, encounter, adjust and then stabilise (Nicolson & West, 1989; Isabella, 1990). The assumption behind the research seems to be that individuals subjected to change will come to terms with organisational demands – almost like the unfreezing – refreezing process which is popular in management-of-change literature (Lewin, 1947). Indeed the assumption of much managed change literature seems to be that the individual will modify his or her own assumptions to suit the new requirements of the organization. Even literature that accepts

resistance by individual workers proposes that there will be internal strategies for coping with contradiction between what was expected to occur at work and different outcomes (Festinger, 1959). According to that tradition of adaption, the individual will then face the challenge of coming to terms with this change and explaining it in terms of acceptance. Some researchers assume an internal calculus, like side bets (Becker, 1964) or a cognitive calculus which enables individuals to off-set imposed change by finding other benefits and so coming to terms sufficiently to adapt and accept imposed change (Farrell & Rusbult, 1981; Rusbult & Farrell, 1983, 429; Oliver, 1991, 29).

This coming to terms with imposed change touches on the subject's cultural context and how it responds to changes within the working group. It is sometimes seen as a coming to terms with a new reality and learning about the new environment around the group (Schein, 1978; Hofstede, 1991).

A process of reconstruction is sometimes described as involving similar steps to those required in a normal transition: anticipation, confirmation, culmination and aftermath (Isabella, 1990). Managers 'need to undergo an alteration in their cognitive structure (ibid. p.8) in which their 'frame of reference shifts'. This citing of frames suggests the literature dedicated to explaining how scripts are learnt to make it easier to encounter and cope with social experiences (Greene 1986, 38). But for Isabella these frames of reference exist 'within a collectivity' (ibid p 9). The presumption is that what has occurred may become 'the standardised view managers will carry over to the next similar event they experience' (Isabella, 1990, 26). Significant events are labelled 'symbols' and they convey to individuals what the new reality in the organisation will be like (ibid p 25). The whole process is built on the assumption that 'managers

collectively construe organisational events' (ibid p 34). But in the examples she uses to illustrate such frames it becomes evident that she is referring to complete accounts of previous experience which managers who have undergone an event previously use to predict what is likely to happen again, 'When I found out we were acquired, I thought of another financial services company here that was recently purchased. I wondered if that was the road we were headed down' (ibid. p. 19). This could be described as a coming to terms and adjusting to an externally imposed reality by drawing on past experience.

## **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND RECONSTRUCTION**

The present research starts from a different premise: we would suggest that basic assumptions are themselves interpretive tools available to the individual to assess the value of what is being imposed by outside agencies. If basic assumptions are deeply held beliefs of what ought to happen, then it is more than just an account drawn from previous folk memory. Indeed all of Isabella's examples have about them a narrative style of present tense experience. None of them contains the subjunctive or optative sense of individuals expressing beliefs about what ought to happen or what ought not to have happened in any working situation affected by enforced change. It is, we will argue, that element of ethical or moral suasion that is likely to trigger acceptance or rejection and therefore what decision will be made about future action by the individuals thus affected. There is therefore no guarantee that one individual will interpret external change in exactly the same way as another. A working group may indeed give every appearance of acquiescing in what the organization now prescribes as the new reality. But whether there is genuine acceptance, still less

change of expectancy in the future, is something that this research examines more closely.

Some researchers refer to frames of reference, or schemas, (Schank & Abelson, 1977a, 1977b) which are alike in introducing individuals to acceptable behaviours or organisationally prescribed performances (Isabella, 1990, p 9). Our own assertion is that how such imposed changes to familiar scripts are evaluated touches more on what the individual thought ought to have happened compared with what actually happened and whether he or she can live with it or adapt to it. This moral dimension of actions has sometimes been referred to as the connative element in the individual and has been employed by researchers seeking to identify gaps between individual perception and change. An early example of this is the examination of how individuals workers perceived the authority they thought their supervisors had compared with what they thought supervisors ought to have (Georgopoulos & Tannenbaum, 1957). The research showed a significant and surprising variance within the body of subjects interviewed and suggests that we are here examining moral principles against which the individuals affected measure the experience of enforced change.

## **IDENTIFYING BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

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Discovering what basic assumptions individuals hold is always a difficult task for the researcher. What is required, ideally, is a probe that triggers a basic assumption, which in turn allows the researcher to investigate the basis of the belief by further questioning. In this respect the incident of enforced change is like an episode, which becomes an ideal vehicle for examining the impact of change on the individual (Giddens, 1987, xxxix). The situation of imposed

change at work then provides an opportunity of identifying the elements of such change from individuals. The method used here is derived from the literature on sense and sense making by Louis (1980a; 1980b). Subjects are asked what surprised them about the way the change was enforced at work and what did not surprise them. Louis refers to this as 'confirmed and disconfirmed' beliefs, as we mentioned above. Once individuals disclose what they believe ought or ought not to have happened we can track a basic belief or assumption about their relationships with the organisation and people significant to them in their working life. Beliefs that are confirmed should provide the opportunity to examine assumptions that are reinforced by the imposed work change; whereas, beliefs that are disconfirmed may indicate that a basic belief or assumption has been retained. In either case the opportunity then arises for the researcher to examine how far reconstruction has taken place within the individual in that he or she may have accepted that a new principle now governs successful survival during enforced change at work.

We would, therefore, define a basic assumption as a criterion, which enables an individual to interpret enforced change at work and define its meaning and value. This research works from the premise that individuals respond in very different ways to interpreting imposed change at work largely because the basic assumptions they hold differ significantly from one another. However, there is also the possibility that during enforced change at work the individual affected may change a particular basic assumption so that the new construct will replace a previously held belief and so bring about a change of perception about enforced change at work. Such a change might trigger a move of employment or at very least a lack of fear in the face of similar threat were it presented in the

future. We would therefore describe reconstruction as: the revision or abandonment of a basic assumption to allow the individual to avail him or herself of a perceived benefit during enforced change at work.

## **HOW INDIVIDUALS DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCE IN THE ORGANISATION**

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As we saw in the previous chapter, our first question invited subjects to describe their existence before the imposed change came about. The nature of the probe left it open to individuals to describe the working situation significant to him or her. But even this opening response evinced different descriptions and starting points among the subjects. We noted a traditional response of individuals who held a basic assumption that the organisation would offer job security, career progression and incremental rewards linked to length of service, which we described as dependence on the organisation. We contrasted such subjects with others who described themselves as self-sufficient and who felt that they needed to have control of their own careers at work. These we described as independent of the organisation.

Dependent subjects referred to the history of the organisation and saw it as significant in defining their own status and position within and outside the organisation. Mr S is aged 57 and has served 37 years with Customs & Excise: 'when I started with C & E as an EO it took me 14 years to reach HEO grade. But when I did, I had the equivalent of an MP's salary. There was, then, respect for the job equivalent to the Minister or Doctor in any village in Scotland. It was part of the British Civil Service – the greatest in the world. We were riding high in the British Empire, then, and the seeds of our greatness were sown then. The key

phrase then was 'the officer should be satisfied' and no one, but no one, could tell the officer what should make him satisfied. The two key words were status and accountability'.

Mr D of similar rank and service relates a similar story: 'Geographical moves were possible then, so you could have a career that took you round the country as opportunity arose. The overriding impression I have is of fairness. The individual put their own pressure on themselves at that time. Our values then were that we did things with a minimum of fuss and few problems. We were of the people. We involved them. We let them know what was going on and we listened.'

This Garden of Eden description is not confined to subjects in the Civil Service. Eighteen years as a research chemist in a traditional pharmaceutical company offers a similar view. Miss M has been 18 years with Syntex in this role: 'we always had the same goal in our work because each team was responsible for work on the same compound. It was a happy life with varied interests and a lot of autonomy and freedom to arrange our working lives, as we wanted. We really did our own thing unless a project need dictated that we work to interface with particular deadlines. It was a different culture, really. We were a bit spoiled, I think. We were not exposed to the real world. Personally, I liked my manager and his manager, too. I worked very hard, did extra hours and always made a valued contribution to the work. I was on the site committee. The site was small enough so that you could know everyone and in those days staff turnover was minimal. We worked together, that was my lasting impression of Syntex'. Thus far we could assert, like Isabella, that there are collective viewpoints on particular organisational occurrences, which 'create a material and symbolic

record on which they predict future action' (1990, 9). In this case the future expected action would seem to be that this situation would continue indefinitely.

Two other impressions also emerge: the opportunity to achieve significant results is one. Mr D again, 'after the merger of the collections I was put in charge of Excise for the whole of Scotland. This involved liaising with Brussels and London on the uniform rates of taxation that Europe must embrace. It was a very high level job in that regard. During that time we broke every target we were given for revenue and I was in control of the whole of the Excise brief'. The other is the culture that is believed to have existed in the pre-change organisation. This time Mr F, 52 years old and 33 years in C & E says, 'Glasgow was a different culture. There was a commitment to the team and all members of staff. It was comfortable and constructive. We had well-developed work arrangements that were successful and well regarded by everybody. We were trying to get away from the command and control management style. Indeed, Headquarters used the Glasgow Strategy documents as an example of a go-ahead collection, proactive and in the vanguard of both customs and excise initiatives. We were the first collection to get Investors in People. We were very well disposed towards our people and we wished to do the job well and professionally'.

This group of traditional, long serving managers represents about 30% of all respondents in all three organisations researched. And the effect of imposed change is most uncongenial for this group of dependents. For Mr K, 52 years old and 33 years with the organisation the defining event mirrors accounts given by others in this group, 'It came like a bolt out of the blue. I had been poised to take the next step. I remember being called into the collector's office and

told that there was to be a choice made between JR and me. I said jokingly, 'I suppose this means that I could be made redundant.' And to my surprise was told, 'Yes, it does.' So now that total guarantee of security was gone. That had a marked effect on me. My assumptions about the job I had with the organisation had gone completely. As far as my job was concerned I felt it could be done by anyone. In career terms my only prospects were outside.'

Miss M at Syntex is more philosophical: 'in retrospect we should have expected it. We had to cut the time we took to get drugs to the market. It was an expensive exercise: there were appraisals, team awards and a percentage bonus. It was a horrible period. No one thought beyond tomorrow. Promises were made, but we had to take them all with a pinch of salt. There was no security anymore. But it's the same everywhere. Sometimes I think the pharma sector is a huge money laundering business. It certainly doesn't help people to develop drugs. They are all mega companies. They are all as cynical as each other'.

Thus far there seems no evidence that traditional, long-serving managers are in any way accepting or adapting to the new situation (Isabella, 1990, p 8). Nor are any of these changes interpreted as symbolic – typical of organisations in a cynical way, but not symbolic. Indeed, the claim that 'interpretation is based on past, similar events' (ibid p 22) is not apparent either. And yet all of these subjects have met 'past, similar events' so that, in theory at least, they should be used to adjusting, assimilating and accepting new situations at work, even if they do not accept them. But for these subjects the sense of injustice and injured feelings is palpable and is based on the basic assumption that an organization should not have behaved in the way that it did. The

interpretation of such betrayal is expressed in most extreme terms and the meaning imputed, both for the self and others, suggests an experience devalued by such disloyalty. Mr D, again, 'I felt loss, worthlessness, hurt and disappointment. The day it happened we went to that final lunch and nobody mentioned anything at all. It was all as if nothing had happened. I had given the collector a paper on the future of the collection. I took satisfaction in that. But they refused to discuss it. It was arranged beforehand. You could see by the silent looks of satisfaction round the table'.

Miss G, aged 52, with 32 year's service in C & E said, 'we were always a very proud service. And now we were told that the work that we did could be up for grabs by outside contractors. I felt very bad about this, I can tell you. I felt utterly betrayed. So now we were being asked to bid for our own jobs totally in the dark. It was so cold blooded I could hardly believe it. We had no qualifications recognised by the outside world. We were completely naked'. Her colleague, Mrs R, aged 47, with 27 years' service, reflects similarly, 'we were devalued, I was a supernumerary at VAT - I had no choice. I found all my belongings had been put in a skip. I felt there was no rescue. There was no training, just VAT. No money for training and no release. It was a bad time. I felt I made no difference to the organisation. I wanted to be loved and cherished. There was no one else to share with and I had to work it out for myself'. Both women use sexual imagery of violation and a marriage in which they were like a faithful partner put aside by an unfeeling and callous spouse.

Some researchers detect that 'older managers have a higher loyalty and commitment and increasingly favourable attitudes to the organisation with age' (Nicolson & West, 1988, p 37). Certainly that would be apparent in our

research so far. However, the assertion that 'their greater number of adjustments gives them greater equanimity' (ibid p 47) does not seem to be born out in the case of enforced change at work which denies a basic assumption which they had always taken for granted would be unassailable – job security. Claims made for female managers 'having a style and pattern of response more in keeping with the climate of current times than men' (ibid p 207) does not seem to be reflected in the responses of the females quoted holding traditional views about the obligations of the organization to the individual, either. There is absolutely no sign of any accommodation, no frame of reference shift at all, if by that is meant a new way of explaining what goes on at work based on a different interpretation of events occurring during the change. Our subjects resist such imposed change and hold the agents of change guilty of violating basic assumptions previously accepted by all parties. There is no 'model of evolving managerial interpretation of change' (Isabella, 1990, p 21) nor are there 'distinct similarities across level and function in the manner in which managers construe their world' (ibid).

Perhaps this is because the subjects so far see no way out except retirement or early redundancy. Indeed, for some, that seems to be a welcome prospect as a means of escaping the uncongenial conditions of work now imposed on them. But for others there is a different response. Some have been given opportunities to develop and get on. Mr R, a research chemist, is 42 and has been 12 years with Syntex. When Quintiles took over he said, 'we had been an R & D team and we had to reinvent ourselves and to be honest there was no management team experience. We had nine month's experience followed by a liberating experience and suddenly I felt creative energy start anew. I was recharged. We worked

every night till 8pm and Fridays till 10pm. There were reports and protocols to get out, targets to meet, burnout. Staff turnover went up and we went from 42 to 20 and then we weren't allowed to recruit. Then we took on new graduates but we let them down and they were not grown properly and that led to low morale. Are we moving forward? Put up with it and survive'. Here, heightened expectancy and enthusiastic response initially gives way to grudging acceptance based on pragmatic survival.

His colleague, Mrs W, aged 50, a new MBA and 7 years' service had a similar experience, 'Phil (her manager) started talking about business development. So I thought 'I'm going for it. I gave 110%. Now I have to give 300%. I got the QC lab manager appointment. It was a done deal before I went in. But that wasn't fine for the 40 staff. I was cold-shouldered and excluded by the peer group. Not a good way of doing business but at least I got my chance. Now, I just want my life back. All they want is profit so everything is connected to the figures and if the budget results are not forthcoming then cuts in investment are put into effect immediately beginning with things like training'. The revised view of the company's strategy means that there is now a desire to move on to find acceptable employment conditions elsewhere.

Isabella refers to the 'assumptions of interpretive studies' (ibid p 9): and her main point is that interpretations are made a posteriori. It is certainly true that these managers have initially welcomed opportunity and also true that they have interpreted it according to their own expectancy. When that was not realised in the new opportunity, each subject expresses disappointment but does not change his or her basic assumption of what such change should have yielded. So there is no sign of any cognitive shifts. The a posteriori interpretation is not

changed, indeed the original expectation of what ought to have happened is reinforced in the mind of both subjects. For those who do not reconstruct their basic assumptions about the organisation and its duties towards them there may be only two options: leave and seek the Garden of Eden elsewhere or stay on and get the best personal outcome either by getting whatever is available or redundancy if it is offered.

There are two examples of the first strategy. Typical would be Mrs T, aged 37 with 8 year's service with Syntex. She relates, 'in pharma you have freedom and you can make your own suggestions. You can make suggestions in Quintiles but they would be immediately resisted. Here we are autonomous apart from the review every four weeks. There is development and we are lucky there is a good career structure'. The a posteriori view is clearly stated, 'we should have had the same at Quintiles but it was the experienced versus the novices and within 5 years there were stunted careers. No end result could be seen. We hadn't the same involvement for the development of the work. In a CRO your time is taken up visiting clients. For us the number of hours began to accumulate horrifically and it became an increasing struggle to find people to do the work'. The interpretation, meaning and value of the changes are commented on immediately, 'The rewards are nothing like those in pharmaceuticals and nothing like working for a small company like Syntex. There you could find each other's company and involvement in the work interesting in itself. In Quintiles there was nothing like the same satisfaction'.

Others followed the other option of disengagement. Mr F in C & E was invited to go forward for promotion to collector. He refused, 'Money and status were never motivators to me. It was always the job itself, whatever it was. I had to try

to make it as successful as I could. My values haven't changed in all that time. All my energies are put into my family and friends now rather than push myself at work. Where before I would put in any amount of time for the department, now I just work core hours'. Here basic assumptions about commitment are not abandoned or reframed, they are merely refocused on personal relationships and further opportunity for career progress deliberately passed up.

### **ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF ENFORCED CHANGE AT WORK**

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As we saw in the last previous chapter, during the research it became apparent that some subjects did not share the basic assumptions of what the organisation should be doing for them at all. Their presuppositions are accounted differently from the previous group who seemed to regard the organization as a Garden of Eden. We described them as being subjects independent of the organisation for control of their career and its development. Typical is Mrs P aged 37 with 18 years service in C & E and the youngest, most senior female officer in the country, 'I left school early by default. I went up to University and after I had graduated I looked around for a job. I looked at the Civil Service, at the Foreign Office and another department. C & E was my third choice. It was most attractive as its network was nationwide and I was in Aberdeen. It had a generalist approach and you could find yourself in customs, excise or VAT'. Her interpretation of the meaning of these conditions of work are defined clearly, 'This suited me as I was in control of my own career and I could develop myself. I never felt constrained by the organisation. I just felt confident working in the environment. It felt right to me. I am not a worrier. I have a feel for it. It's the track I take. I have no fear and I like people. I am very open: what you see is

what you get. I can see an opportunity and take it. You have to promote yourself. It is a question of knowing the right people. Peer group? I don't think I had one. I just had no worries. I got on and did the job. Women were beginning to break through in the organization and I was able to proceed quickly through the ranks.' Mrs R, 34 years old with 10 year's service in C & E gives a similar account. Having joined the Army she bought herself out and then looked for an opening with the Civil Service. She arrived at C & E. 'I felt better about it than joining the army and in any case I thought I had better get on with it. I went to the Collector's office on a management development programme. I was ambitious. I wanted to develop myself. I wanted lots of experience and I wanted to develop myself quickly. After three years I had had enough and even thought of taking time out and going to University. So they sent me to Investigation Division. It was dreadful. It was just too confrontational and I hated it. Eventually, I went to Training as a training advisor. I looked for another job and was offered two but I was offered the job here in the staff support unit. It's the best job I've ever done. I am very happy doing this job'. Both subjects reflect on good experience comparing it with what was not so successful and the criterion they use to gauge success is job interest and career direction opportunity.

What becomes apparent with such independent subjects is that their basic assumption about work starts from their own career and its opportunities within the organization they are in. So enforced change is yet another opportunity to restart elsewhere and find another opportunity to progress their career. They choose varied job roles as they go along and adapt well to chance change. Variety and opportunity go hand in hand and long-term commitment to an organization is never mentioned in their narratives. Mr McD is typical in his

opening account, 'I joined C & E 19 years ago straight from school. I was happy in a small office in the Western Isles. I had a uniform and was involved in shipping. It was like a dream come true and embraced all the things that I had always wanted to do. I then went to Aberdeen for six months as part of a mobile team looking for drugs. Then I was moved to Glasgow and promoted to EO within 4 years of joining the service. I set myself the target of becoming HEO before I was thirty. I always got good reports in all the jobs I had and the organization was multi-disciplined and multi functional'.

Such independent views are not always confined to younger subjects in our research. Mr G is 46 with 19 year's service in Syntex, now Quintiles expresses the different assumption held about career, 'Change is part of experience. I would have looked for change if it hadn't happened. I'm not an academic in that sense of science. But I am interested in application and problem solving, statistical project management, different perspectives, lateral thinking, coming up with something original'. However, acceptance does not mean that such individuals are uncritical of enforced change, 'It's OK as long as things are going well. But when performance dips then the trust and commitment dip with it and your good people go as well. I interviewed two people from British Oxygen Company and one was bemoaning his fate; "How could they do this to me?" but the other said, "Business is business". One subject's view was based on his own domestic experience, 'my father ran his own company and he had to liquidate six months before he wanted to. In other circumstances we would have gone through bereavement but once it was decided we got on with it and in some respects we came off better than anyone else'.

This experience of self-employment and catastrophe from personal experience is mentioned by several independents. They treat both organizations and change as capricious and accept vulnerability and threat to employment much more philosophically: 'Business is business' is typical of the basic assumption and differs from 'the organization owes me a living'. Those who possess it seem to have come to their working life better prepared to survive and less affronted by loss of prospects in their job.

There is another factor, which seems to have a similar modifying function in individual's lives: personal tragedy coped with alone. Mrs McD, aged 32, was 6 years with Syntex. Her father was self-employed and she shares a similar basic assumption about that experience, 'my father went bankrupt once but he always looked after his people. Perhaps he looked after them too well. My mother wouldn't have gone bankrupt. She was a bit harder-headed. As for me I am a bit of both'. What happened during the months that led up to the take over was her mother dying in hospital. She went down to be with her. 'She died in the August and we were told in the November we were being made redundant. I thought, so what. Nothing could have been worse than losing my Mum'. She reflects on the meaning by interpreting what this event illustrates about her, 'I was always a person on my own. I had to get closer to what I wanted. I made a bad decision with my Mum. I was still grieving. I wish I had not wasted time. I could have spent it all with her. I had to come to terms with grief and guilt. If you screw up you have to face it. But if you are true to your own values then you can live with it'. The final evaluation is then given, 'Being true to them was difficult. It took a sledgehammer to break through and find myself again'.

Independents interpret their experiences in an organization with different basic assumptions. This accounts for the different meaning they give to enforced change at work. They don't just have a different frame of reference like a story or account, which is more accurate at predicting the outcome of enforced change at work. It is the basic assumption by which they interpret this experience of change that differs from those who are dependent on the organisation. Neither group changes its basic assumptions significantly during the transition. If we accept that 'frames of reference exist within a collectivity' (Isabella, 1990, p 9) we would suggest that the collectivity referred to is expectancy prior to employment. Independents inhabit their own collectivity and have about them similar basic beliefs based, perhaps, on similar experiences. But the experiences are made available to others and the comment 'I had no peer group' suggests a self-sufficiency that will be examined later in this paper.

## **THE ROLE OF THE MANAGER AND BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

Managers are often cited at the heart of organizational change for those examining how individuals come to terms with change at work (Isabella, 1990, p 9). Indeed, they 'collectively construe events' How they do this requires 'identification and description of frames of reference managers share during specific changes' (ibid. p 31). One aspect in the current research reinforces this assertion very clearly: the behaviour of the immediate manager during the transition. However, it may not illustrate the point that Isabella is making, that 'if key people accept and support the change, novelty turns to confirmation and eventually innovation is routinised' (ibid, p.8).

The question of how the immediate manager behaved is evident with all subjects

but particularly strongly felt by senior managers. The way in which news of enforced change was delivered seems to be the most enduring memory in their experience. One very senior manager, Mr S of 57 years-old, was told one afternoon on the phone that he was to go but not to tell anyone – his manager had just dropped him off by car having spent two days with him on a conference. His focus remains the messenger (his manager) and his bitterness at this personal betrayal has not been alleviated over time. His expectations of management behaviour and trust and loyalty were totally destroyed in a moment and have never been restored since. Listening to him reinforces the belief that the basic assumption of loyalty and trust in the immediate manager remains firmly rooted in his mind. It is behaviour that, according to his own testimony, he would never have visited on any of his subordinates.

There is a telling quote from recent research which reinforces this feeling of deep grievance, 'I've known Keith for 10 years. He didn't have to talk to me like that' (Hallier & Lyon, 1993, 11). Our own results confirm this high expectancy of managers during enforced change at work. For all assistant collectors except one, the focus of their comment is forcefully their manager. As Mr S stated, 'I went home and nobody rung me for 2 weeks. And what about my leader? Did he do anything to alleviate the situation? Did he hell! He let me down.' Ironically, the leader awarded him a Box 1 (the highest marking) at his appraisal three month's afterwards. His response was immediate and bitter: 'Don't give me a Box 1 to save your own conscience.' Another subject speaks in similar terms. Mr F at 52 years-of-age has served 33 years with the Service. He speaks of being 'denigrated and devalued' particularly in the way that he was shouted at in front of other staff in the office. What surprised him is what he sees as unprofessional

behaviour on the part of new senior colleagues and their assumption that he would explain away unpleasant decisions with staff after messages of closure and job loss had been delivered to them by these senior agents of change.

None of the dependent subjects speaks with any affection or appreciation of his or her manager. The following comments are typical, 'I had always thought that senior managers were a sophisticated bunch. They would look at the needs of the organisation and apply themselves to avoid mismanagement. Well, that didn't happen and I had to think again about the quality of our senior managers.' Mr K, 52 with 33 year service answered the question what didn't happen that you did expect 'Openness. When the chips were down people will rally round and it will be OK. I tried to reassure others around me but when it came to me there was no support. I involved everyone in the decisions and explained what would happen. I tried to make sure that they were in a position of opportunity as they faced uncertainty. But no one did that for me.' Managers who had been treated badly themselves continued to do all they could to help others. 'It helps you to help other people', was a frequent refrain repeated by these managers. As one survivor, Mr D, aged 53 said, 'I'm only interested day-to-day in these staff. The youngsters deserve support and I'm going to make sure I give it to them.' Certainly there is no evidence of this basic assumption of a manager's responsibility to his or her staff being modified in any way at all in spite of senior managers having abandoned it themselves.

There is a deeply held belief by managers of all ages that there is an obligation to look after those who are dependent on the manager. The managers who fail to live up to that deserve nothing but contempt. Only one subject, Mrs R, has any positive comment about her previous manager in the training

department, 'Looking at the organisation there were some good managers. JR was one (her previous manager)'. More typical is the comment of her colleague, Miss G, 'they violated the trust put in them by their staff. It was a job for life. But now, I mean, they don't really want you.' Rejection is the final feeling and a resultant disregard for anything managers now say, 'the boss made no attempt to fight for us. There was lack of support. There was no one at senior level that fought for us.' And as for the final evaluation of the senior management team, 'The collectorate now are numpties'.

### **THE EFFECT OF SHARED ENFORCED CHANGE**

In East Dumbarton District Council a still more horrific story was related: the team had gone off for their Christmas Lunch together when they received the phone call that everyone was to get the sack. Over subsequent weeks, their team leader, Colin, fought for them and managed to secure the revised decision that only two staff were made redundant. Shortly after this he found himself without a job. The thoughts of the remaining team members are consistent and definite. Mr H is 28-years-old and has been with the authority for 6 years. What aggrieved him was the treatment of Colin and a reorganisation that left him in a team with no team meetings anymore. In spite of this let down he is positive about what he has achieved for himself. He is surprised that there was little communication but happy to have survived. Indeed, that was one of the learning points for him of the whole experience, 'I would demand more information next time. I would insist on information as soon as possible. I would make financial plans for losing my job'. Interestingly, he would not see himself as replacing Colin for other staff. Indeed, his concern was, 'who will fight for us next time'.

Miss J is 29-years-old and has served 7 years with the organisation. She was horrified at what happened to Colin. But not surprised at the way he behaved – which was professional, 'he kept everyone informed' and if he didn't know he would say 'I'm working on it'

No one differs about the treatment of Colin who is quite clearly treated as a canonised saint and hero of the story, sacrificing himself so that others may keep their jobs. The hatred of the remaining staff is directed at the politicians and officers who engineered this change. There is no possibility of the team members reconstructing their beliefs about how a manager ought to behave; indeed, Colin represents all that a good manager should do. So, in Isabella's sense, there is no change in the frame of reference. Their basic assumption remains that a manager should never be treated as Colin was treated. What is more interesting is that no one appears ready to assume his mantle. Indeed, each has his or her preferred escape route mapped out and filling Colin's role is not included.

## **THE ROLE OF THE CEO IN RECONSTRUCTING BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

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However, not all management behaviour brings condemnation from individual workers. There are notable exceptions when a CEO, for example, gets involved in addressing the employees on the newly acquired site and gives the good news of opportunity and prospects in the new organization.

Mr A, aged 47 with 21 year's experience in Syntex, 'I feel more committed to the organization than in Syntex days. It's a different attitude. I think that your personal commitment is far more valued or appears to be. DG's (the CEO)

company seems to be different in that from the top down there seems to be a commitment to individual performance. It's a product, what we're doing and there's encouragement to do that all the time, which perhaps wasn't there in Syntex. DG's very different. If he could bottle what he's got. I mean it's the profit motive. Five minutes talking to him and you're bumped up for a month'.

Mrs A, aged 33 with 5 year's experience in Syntex was similarly impressed, 'we were invited to go to Murrayfield to hear DG. I remember him saying if you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen - the pace will get worse. It didn't concern me, but people who complain always remember that. DG said, "If you see something, go after it" and I thought why shouldn't Edinburgh be the centre of Health and Safety'. He had enabled her to see opportunity and a way ahead for developing herself at work. 'There's far more job satisfaction now than there used to be in the days of Syntex'. But for her there was also the support of a good manager, 'my manager was very good and very informative. We have a dynamic manager. Gets involved in the future. So we get that drive ourselves. You have to trust your manager. I know there are some managers who are not liked by the staff. I had a manager who kept monitoring. But now I get the support. My boss pushed me for a long time. I'm not interested in learned papers. My boss says I should be. He sees it as a way of developing my career. He is very positive and motivating'. This subject is one of only two who have received positive reinforcement from both her immediate manager and inspiration from the CEO.

Of all the subjects that we have examined here the question of the role of the manager remains unreconstructed in any of our organisations. No subject reconstructs to, say, a belief that managers do not need to care so much

or that it is up to each individual to care for his or her own career. Perhaps this basic assumption about the manager's behaviour is taken for granted and we will examine that more closely in the next section. But as far as any person having the designation and function of immediate manager, the responsibility to be supportive, kind and helpful is overwhelmingly expected by individuals and universal in its expression. Research of managers subjected to enforced change has on occasion come up with different conclusions: 'betrayal is only rarely directed at particular individuals' (Hallier & Lyon, 1993, 12). However, in our organisations the reverse would appear to be true: immediate managers were held personally responsible and the memory of their inadequate performance commented on bitterly thereafter.

## **MANAGERS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT**

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Only two managers expressed different beliefs about the values that prevail during enforced change at work. Mr G is aged 46 with 19 years' service. He expresses no surprise at what happened at the time of the take-over. In fact his comments are matter of fact throughout, 'My father had his own company and he had to liquidate six months before he wanted to'. So, there's no sentiment in business.' Another manager, Mrs McD, aged 32 with 6 years' service has parents who were both self-employed had similarly philosophical views about managers and what can be expected from them under pressure, 'People put in long hours. But their contract is not basically with the organisation, it is people in the organization. An organization is inhuman. I don't care whose name is above the door. I just work for these people'. She is forgiving of those whom others roundly condemned, 'everyone is doing his or her best. It's all a question of

communication. Top people are doing their best. People thought of it as a family and RD and JH (directors) did their best. They were both very astute businessmen. They had to balance their future with the future of everyone on the site. They had to devise a survival system for them. They only wanted the best for everybody'.

## **RECONSTRUCTION FOR DEPENDENT MANAGERS**

Individuals who reconstruct their basic beliefs come from both a dependent view of the organization as provider of career security and those who feel that they can succeed independently of the organization or peer group. Indeed, it appears that some of those who suffered the harshest treatment may recover very well. Mr S who was sacked over the phone after 37 years' service, 'everyone should go through a counselling course starting with the Board. At Next Steps we were given autonomy but we were never given the opportunity to show what we could do. Empowerment should have meant that people on the ground have the chance to make a choice and find out the limits of what they could achieve. All we needed was team and leadership training. Develop the people - communication. It always comes down to the same thing in the public sector: resources. We are just as good at management. All we needed was freedom to fund the resources we needed to succeed'. He now acts as a consultant to Quality Scotland. 'We need self-managed teams. We've seen it at Quality Scotland, Caledonian Engines and Paper Mills, Ayr. They are all well ahead of their time. They are world class: flexible, rapidly adapting to new markets, faster at making decisions, using e-mail, reducing layers of management. They are competent and know their limits'. Having emerged from his own organisation he

can evaluate the factors he believes need to govern a successful organization and identify and support them in his new role. His basic assumptions of what is best practice have been reinforced.

For Mr D after 30 years' service there are similar comments, 'in basic training terms we have missed out and yet we were supposed to be a world class Investor in People organisation. Competent staff are fewer and fewer. One by one they are giving up. I had to start thinking about what things in life were important to me. And, to be honest, my thoughts had been turning that way already. The previous year my eldest son had been involved in a serious crime that led to a trial. All this was very traumatic and I was beside myself with worry. Throughout that whole time C (his boss) had only asked after the situation once. He never picked up the phone for two months'. His interpretation of what this meant is immediate, 'I was disgusted. Before that I would have put the Department before myself. Now I am only interested in early retirement. They want you to put them first the whole time. But there's no future in this department. It's a battle now just to come here. In three year's time I'll be 55. I would like to promote Scotland. I think independence is likely and if that comes who knows what that will mean with regard to our relations with Europe. On the other hand I might go on my own. I had always wanted to be a solicitor. I think I might do that. I certainly wouldn't join this organisation again'. His basic assumptions of how a manager should behave remain unchanged. However, his assumptions about his own future career prospects have altered positively.

His colleague with the same service says the same, 'I would take early retirement if I could. The change gave me a great downer. I am more outspoken than I've ever been. I tell you I am unsafe to let loose on the IIP assessor!

Our training budget's just been cut by 60%. The pretence of senior management is crumbling. I would say the management view is much closer to the staff view than it has ever been in the past. We are beginning to think like the staff'. Isabella suggests that further research needs to be done to discover whether the views of managers are held by non-managers (ibid, p.35). This last remark suggests that they are coincident. 'The foundations are shaky. There is nothing positive. It was as if everything died on me. I have given up on the service. Do you know I have signed up for a law degree? I should have gone to University after school but I messed around with a band for a few years instead. So, now is a good time to do what I want to do. And at my age who knows where it will lead?' The basic assumption of remaining in the service has evidently been abandoned.

Not all reconstructions feature life beyond the service. But should the individual decide to stay then it will be with a different set of basic assumptions about role and function. Mr R was the Training Officer forcibly moved to VAT, he states, 'I had sold my soul to Customs & Excise. I furthered the business in any way that I could. Now the passion has gone and I was doing nothing. C & E are just a wage-payer'. He has now taken the job of quality manager. 'I will develop this job. I believe in the learning organisation and efficiency and quality management. For me it is learning - continuous professional development. I've probably gone as far as I can go. I'm too outspoken. I am a visionary. I love ideas and concepts. I need that. My time back in VAT has made me more pragmatic. What's achievable - that's my motto'. His personal vision now becomes a mission and it combines with enhanced self-belief, which came about in spite of the organization, not because of it.

## **RECONSTRUCTION AND SURVIVAL FOR INDEPENDENT MANAGERS**

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A personal threat can be a stimulus for rethinking personal commitment and refocusing roles within the organisation. Mrs S, aged 37 with 19 years' service states, 'For 24 years my mother had a miserable marriage. She would have been better off apart from my Dad. The Springboard course came along (designed to develop assertiveness in female staff) and I got a lot out of that. I had to ask myself what I wanted to attain, what were my goals. Then I had to plan the change in my marriage and my job at the same time. I decided what was right to do. I had control of my own destiny'. However, she still retains her basic assumption about the correct way to do things, 'I still feel angry at the way things were done'. She has been successful in the new job against the odds and is moving down the country to a new job in the organization. This new opportunity mollifies her previous doubt about the organisation, 'But now I'm happy. I have applied for a compassionate transfer and I think C & E is a worthy employer'.

Her colleague, Mr McP, aged 46 with 23 years' service has survived running the IT department under the Private Finance Initiative and been offered a job by each of two outside contractors. 'I assumed that I could manage my way through PFI and I looked forward to it. What I didn't expect - I didn't expect the manager I got. I didn't even get any support. The forward view is that PFI which started as a threat is now seen as an opportunity. After that ICI approached me and said, "Come across." Scottish Power approached me and the Personnel Manager said, "I hope you're still thinking of coming across to us." Then I had a performance review with my boss and he said, "Mike can do this job and the

next one as well." His response to these personal affirmation about his ability are interpreted and evaluated immediately, 'I have exposed my own weaknesses. I know what my talents are. I don't need a Godfather. I've done it for myself. I can perform well and I've got luck. I've been given a choice: I can stay where I am or I can go with a contractor'.

## **SUCCESSFUL SURVIVORS AND RECONSTRUCTION**

Success in surviving enforced change at work does not always mean faith restored in the organization. For two managers the initial transition that brought reward has also brought an opportunity to reassess the reality of the new working conditions. Mr B, aged 39 has served 11 years as a research chemist and was given a new department of 23 people under the new management. He reflects, 'the interesting thing is that the work is very similar. But with a CRO everything is cost. It's all about billable hours and revenue generation. Irrespective of function you are only valuable if you're making it. You have to keep a good relationship with the clients. It's all about deadlines'. The basic assumption which governs a successful outcome at work is still intact, 'what I feel is there has to be a feel-good factor on any project. You have to have efficiencies but what's in it for the individual? They are making so much money for the company but then they say, "We're going to cut back on training" or travel's cancelled this week.' At the lower levels people feel totally stressed'.

His colleague, Mr M, aged 44 with 11 years' service his department rose from 20 to 60 people and he is their director. He said, 'the focus was entirely on external customers. Once you are committed to a deadline there is no going back. I didn't have a clear idea how things would go. Trust and loyalty – takeovers never meet

all concerns. What I had to do was present myself and gain control of the situation'. But this apparent success does not imbue him with more confidence. Indeed, his response to the future is tentative, 'I don't feel particularly more in control. You're only as secure as your next business. Quintiles talks about 'culture is a caring company'. But it focuses on meeting targets. CRO is a war of attrition no matter how they present themselves'.

For both managers the future looks successful but each harbours reservations about the way the organization is disregarding the motivation of people in the team. The frame of reference concerning profitability metrics is accepted as ruling conditions in the new organization but their own basic assumptions of how to manage people remain intact. Neither subject interprets his experience as symbolic of a new working world that can now do without soft social skills. Both retain intact the basic assumption that individuals work better if managers at work address more carefully workers' motivational needs. There is no hint here of frames of reference being adjusted to take into account the new working realities promulgated by the organization.

## **DISCUSSION**

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How individuals respond to enforced change by organisations has been researched now in many different ways. The concept of job insecurity encouraged research attempts to assess individual responses or predict likely outcomes in terms of individual behaviours. The theoretical assumption of such work has been that there is a 'cognitive calculus' or 'cognitive appraisal' going on within the individual as he or she attempted to assess the severity of the threat and the perceived powerlessness of resisting the threat (Greenhalgh &

Rosenblatt, 1984) or the assessment of danger from the threat itself or anything done about the threat (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Once this focus of research was established there were individual projects to establish instruments indicating just how insecure individuals might be feeling (Johnson, Messe & Ganon, 1984) and what sort of antecedents might be significant in differences between individual responses (Roskies & Louis Guerin, 1990), such items as role conflict and ambiguity (Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970) locus of control (Levenson & Miller, 1976) were examined. Perhaps of more importance to the application of such findings to organizational management were the feared consequences of personal insecurity at work: intention to quit (Walsh, Ashford and Hill, 1985), organizational commitment (Mowday, Steer & Porter, 1974), job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) and even somatic complaints (Caplan et al, 1980). Findings here tended to be general, such as, that job insecurity correlated positively with job satisfaction but negatively with job performance. (Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989).

More recent research has focused on individual outcomes and the effect on reconstructing organizational commitment (Hallier & Lyon, 1993). Here the authors identify four different types of outcome for individuals within a company: the dispossessed (still unemployed after 12 months); the reprieved (alternative management posts found within existing company within 3 months); the reborn (demotion to technical post); the converted (external labour market managerial jobs gained in 4 - 11 months) (ibid, pp 32 - 35). This approach at least acknowledges the individual outcomes that may be triggered by different organizational inputs but it has about it a generalised feel, e.g. of the reprieved, 'reassertion of commitment to employer/demotion only a short-term sacrifice; of

the reborn, 'rejection of commitment towards employers in general/establishment of commitment to new technical skills and their development/emergence of aspirations for personal control over job moves on external labour market' (ibid pp 33 & 34). Our own research suggests that it is not so much the outcome itself that is significant to the individual's response to enforced change as the individual's basic assumptions which are used to interpret the significance of the change and in certain circumstances bring about a process of reconstruction. In other words, demotion may indeed set individuals on a different career path from those restored to their management jobs. However, it is likely that there will be more subtle differences of internal perception that will account for different internalised evaluation by the individual. This, then, brings us back to the internal focus of the present research, 'how individuals derive their ideas about the world is an interaction between the societal mediation of concepts about reality and a psychological process of developing and devolving categories that will interpret the external world and give it perceived value' (Balnaves & Caputi, 1993, p 1). We believe that this internal process is to be identified in the reasons for retention or rejection of the basic assumptions challenged by enforced change at work.

As we look at that perception we can revisit the processes which it is alleged will account for individual acceptance of enforced change (Nicolson & West, 1988; Isabella, 1990). Examining the detail of the steps brings up the statement 'Managers' need to undergo an alteration in their cognitive structure' in order to assimilate change at work (Isabella, 1990, p 9). This will mean, according to the theory, a change to the frame of reference that the manager uses to make sense of events. A glance at the format of such a frame reveals the steps of a narrative

that is learned and then expected to remain consistent and dependable by the individual (Greene, 1986, p 38). This preset schema of events is then challenged by a change to the stages and this new stage is referred to as symbolic of the way things will be in the future (Isabella, 1990, p 25). Several examples are given in the research, among them the following: 'When the parent company came in and didn't change anything about how the business was run, I knew they had confidence in R' (ibid p 20); When R came in the first thing he did was to go out into the field and meet with the agents. Notice that I didn't say regional VPs who were the old guard of power. I think he intentionally did not call on the RVPs to signal their loss of favoured status' (ibid p 21). The examples given in this example assume that there will be a significant event which individuals will notice, recognise is significant and then adopt as the reality in the new regime. We have cited similar observations in each of our organizations. And yet, that is not quite the final outcome when the individual is confronted with contradictory or confusing messages. Some individuals may accept, but others could have alternative evaluations leading to very different evaluations.

In our own research we have identified individuals whose basic assumptions do not include dependence on the organization. These independent subjects demonstrate more resilient behaviours and attitudes in the face of enforced change. For some, experience of parents who were self-employed has been significant, for others it has been survival of a personal challenge, which enabled them to see their priorities and values enhanced to a point where they can survive whatever the organization imposes on them. For those holding the assumption that there should always be a job in the organization the impact of change is more likely to give rise to recrimination. But we have also identified

from both groups individuals who have changed their basic assumptions and reconstructed them to interpret their experience in a different, perhaps more confident way. Even those who have come out of change as ostensible winners may have a modified view of just how valid this newfound success really is as an interpretation of future value in work experience.

The common factor in all these changes is, of course, changed perceptions but also reconstructed basic assumptions. What individuals believe ought to happen in any situation is unlikely to be modified, as our example of management behaviours demonstrated. Few individuals will tolerate change that devalues the expected professional standards held by the manager. The difficulty for those wishing to assert that previous external threat and internal resistance to it bring about basic assumptions, is that interpretation of what happens in any situation of enforced change cannot be guaranteed as a corporate response (Schein, 1980). Therefore, it would be more accurate to assert that interpretation based on prior basic assumptions dictates how individuals respond to enforced change at work.

For some researchers interpretation represents 'reconstructed views/frames of reference that are being amended' (Isabella, 1990, p 23). Our own view is that such interpretation as described suggests an automatic acceptance of a new reality after the change – it assumes that the individual will assimilate or come to terms with the new reality of imposed or enforced change. What is more likely is an interpretation based on what is thought to be necessary, honest or right – the ought reinforcing behaviour at work. Where such basic beliefs are violated, wittingly or unwittingly, it is likely that a serious and long-lasting evaluation will take place. The individual may adapt in a way that the organization

expects. Or he or she may fail to accept and experience serious disaffection from the organisation. Alternatively, he or she may reconstruct to a more self-sufficient perception that dispenses with organizational dependence altogether. Even those who choose to stay may have a different set of basic assumptions following the enforced change. As Mr R revealed, 'the only person who helped me was Ann, my wife. She said, "You have to see your value in yourself as a person. You're better than they think you are." It's like McGregor (management guru) "What's stopping you doing the job you want to do now?" That's how I manage now. I got my team together and I said, 'I want you to manage yourselves. You give me the results and I will give you the support'. The process of reconstruction means that the prospect of enforced change will never be viewed in the same way again. The cost to organizations of this new found self-reliance could well be significant and as yet unnoticed by them.

With 30% of subjects finding this newly found reconstruction of non-dependent self-assurance, the prospect of managing according to the prescriptions of Strategic Human Resource management could be much more limited in the future. A virus-free strain of genetically modified individuals is being released into the workforce. The prescriptions of dependency and command and control look increasingly unlikely to be sustainable in the future. The irony of this situation is that the carelessness and cynicism of much managed change in pursuit of increasing efficiency and effectiveness has itself alienated individuals and released a significant number of subjects from dominance and duty to organisations into a new freedom based on self-sufficiency and opportunism.

# CHAPTER THREE

## ATTRIBUTION AND BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Why do people ask 'why'? Are we just naturally nosy or is it a desire to explain the causal connections we think we experience as human beings? 'I opened the window and it started to rain,' begs the question, always, sometimes or just a one-off? Understanding how things work has driven the cognitive world of science and discovery. If we learn what works we can replicate outcomes. We feel more in control. In our present research we have attempted to examine the basic assumptions that individuals use to judge what is going on around them. We have seen that they interpret enforced change in a way that gives meaning to events and attributes a relative value to the outcomes of change. However, the value is not just about the external world, but also embraces the internal world of the self. How individuals feel about themselves then may affect how they respond to future similar events. The study of this kind of attribution of cause examines the path taken by subjects in their attempt to make sense of their world. And not just to make sense. 'The attributor is not just an attributor, a seeker after knowledge; his or her latent goal in attaining knowledge is that of effective management of himself or herself and the environment' (Kelley, 1967).

The source of attribution literature goes back to the logical analysis of causal structure (Weiner, 1985, p. 551). It was an attempt to adduce the principal factors, which individuals use to assess control and predictability in their lives in the face of change. Heider (1958) identified ability and effort as two internal factors that the individual most frequently refers to. Perceived causes of success

and failure continued to occupy researchers using different groups to examine the elements believed to be salient by individuals. Task, ability, stable effort and mood (Elig & Frieze, 1979), ability, immediate effort, stable effort and attention (Burger, Cooper & Good, 1982), effort, luck/chance, task characteristics and interest (Willson and Palmer, 1983) are just a few of the factors identified by the research. The general or summary question is clearly: what do individuals attribute success or failure to? (Anderson & Deuser 1992).

The attribution of failure can trigger affective responses in individuals. These are sometimes listed as, anger, pity, guilt, shame, gratitude, helplessness (Weiner, 1985, p. 549). Each feeling is linked to how far the individual feels in control and whether that control lies within the individual or his or her environment. Some research takes this one step further and tries to identify more positive feelings about the future such as, hopeful, calm, confident, and venturesome and suggests that a factor of 'perceived control over development' (Brandtstaedter, 1992) is the critical factor. In the case of each subject the researcher will need to probe for more information about the basis for his or her feelings of confidence or pessimism and the mechanism by which they were derived. In this way it may be possible to identify how some individuals survive and prosper while others perceive failure and rejection from the same experience of enforced change at work.

The theory emerging so far from the literature suggests that we are looking at internal/external factors and stable/unstable elements in any situation of threat. Stated simply these are sometimes listed as, ability, effort, task difficulty and luck (Weiner, 1985, p. 559). So, for example, ability is internal/stable; effort is internal/unstable; task difficulty is external/stable and luck is

external/unstable. It would be surprising if such factors were as predictable as the categorisation suggests. The examples given in much of the research offer immediate situations of personal assessment in often-functional tasks. So, student groups are offered anagrams (McMahon, 1973), puzzles (Inagi, 1977), test performance (Kovenklioglu & Greenhaus, 1978) and the attribution measure is 'causes given in description' against an expectancy measure of 'expected score' (Rosenbaum, 1972; Neale & Friend, 1972; Pancer & Eiser, 1977). The present research seeks a somewhat deeper personal assessment from its subjects requiring them to analyse how enforced change has impacted on the personal and situational threat at work. In this assessment we will examine the factors, which each of them believes to have changed for better or worse and why each interprets events in the way he or she does. Ability is not a static element in this assessment. Aptitude can be developed in circumstances of enforced change. No one wants to land a plane in an emergency without prior training. But if one's life depended on it, a successful performance might demonstrate to the novice pilot a natural aptitude hitherto unrealised. Similarly, an event described as lucky can by practice be given a more assured and predictable basis when the same event is encountered again. In the present context of enforced change at work, we will examine three questions with our subjects: what is the perceived nature of the control that the individual now feels he or she has? How confident is he or she that he or she will meet the challenge should it be presented in the same way again? How differently would the subject behave next time?

One other factor will also be considered: how far subjects designate things within or outside them, as 'ought' factors. Moral suasion can play an important

part particularly in the apportionment of blame or acceptance of reality. The 'that shouldn't have happened' factor may lead to a reinforcement of basic assumptions as was seen in the last chapter. On the other hand reconstruction may take place in terms of newly held beliefs about the self or the environment. Often it comes to the researcher when subjects are asked what advice they would give to others facing a similar challenge at work. In fact a useful question which does not alert the subject to the researcher's intention has frequently been found to be: 'What advice would you give to a colleague who was about to undergo the same experience'. Ultimately, evaluation of the self in the experience of enforced change is a long-cycle experience. It can be cognitive and encompass defined factors of competence and performance. It can be affective and include commitment and motivational levels. It often includes basic assumptions or beliefs about future expectancy and may govern the response of the individual to future challenges to career and survivability. It involves an interpretive process in which basic assumptions are used to interpret events, impute meaning and derive value from the experience while drawing conclusions about the self and its ability to withstand future enforced change events confidently or not.

## **DEPENDENTS**

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In the last chapter we identified individuals whose basic beliefs about their job and career prospects seemed to make them dependent on the organisation for job security and career progression. Frequently such subjects had served for most of their adult life in the same organisation and saw that as the gauge of their right to continue in the same protected way. We begin this chapter by

revisiting those subjects. The initial impression throughout the interviews remains predominantly one of anger. Mr K, aged 52 with 32 year's service in Customs and Excise makes his own feelings plain, 'Anger, certainly, depression at certain stages, lost condition, certainly, a desire to recreate the cultural type of Glasgow Collection and a feeling of what's the point. There was a ready contact, being in touch, concrete proposals. But where is the motivation now?' He has a feeling of being let down by his manager when he has done everything he can to help others, 'I involved everyone in the decisions and explained what would happen but when it came to me there was no support'. But as far as drawing conclusions about his experience in crisis or identifying opportunities for learning and increased confidence, there was no evidence of this at all. Interestingly, he had had the opportunity of a job lecturing at the Civil Service College but that had come to nothing. But even that hint of a different career opening is not reflected on, only the downside of his situation, 'If I were younger I would be prepared to venture outside. But at age 50-plus I don't think I could get an introduction to anything else. Self-employment, perhaps, but that depends on networking and I don't find that easy. But the potential is there'. The phrase 'couldn't get an introduction to anything else' is the significant one: it suggests a basic assumption that career advancement and opportunity is dependent on reference rather than competence through his previous experience. As far as controllability is concerned his own words express it, 'I couldn't have done much else. It was a question of speed. Perhaps I could have got a degree - more latitude in the decisions? I don't think so. I am totally demoralised now. There isn't the same drive other than self-generated goals. Perhaps it's easier to manage now'. Future control is not expressed and his

prospects seem uncertain to him.

A similar response comes from his colleague, Mr F aged 52 with 33 year's service, 'Anger and guilt, yes, loss, yes – but only temporary. But for family and friends the whole experience would have been overwhelming. They restored my self-esteem. I knew that people in the organisation needed me'. The anger suggesting lack of control is off-set by the opportunity to help others, which is apparent in the interview. The focus of his life will now shift away from the job and organisation to a more worthwhile and responsive group: his family and friends. He has a new mission to others at work and they will receive his support just as if they were members of his family. There is a feeling that he might have done more to alleviate the lot of others lower down in the organisation, 'The question of whether one would have worked harder against what was going on is one that exercises me occasionally. It would have been a high-risk strategy and might have ended up causing more damage and marginalizing people even more than they already were. At the time people counselled me against it'. But this lurking doubt is brushed aside by more pragmatic considerations that such an intervention would not have been successful, 'it wouldn't have changed anything significantly. We would still have had to suffer all those things. Looking back perhaps I would have tried harder to change things and make things right'. What would he advise someone else going through the same experience? 'Be clear about what you want. Be realistic about your ability. Use the organisation to achieve your potential – and I wouldn't have said that 20 years ago!' And his final comment seems almost to be a basic assumption which is far from the career Civil Servant that he has always been, 'I do feel stronger and I do feel more self sufficient. But my view now is, "you use them as they used you". I am

quite prepared to put myself outside the service now'. Interestingly, he was asked to stand as a candidate for Collector, the most senior position and he declined. He leaves the office in Edinburgh at 3pm so that he gets back to Glasgow at 5pm – the time he would have finished in his home town had he been allowed to stay there after the enforced change.

Miss G, aged 52 with 32 year's service responds in a similar way, 'Alarm, yes. I was horrified. But searching for a lost condition? No, I knew there was no going back. They just lacked any sensitivity for the suffering they caused. Loss, yes. Peer group, yes. I think it affected my health. I was getting up in the middle of the night. Organisations don't always cotton on'. There is here no assessment of her responsibility in such circumstances of change. No mention, for example, of her staff in the Personnel Department at all. It is as if she is totally passive and has no responsibility for herself. Her advice to others is an avoidance strategy, 'I wouldn't want to come into C & E. I don't know what the future holds. But as rationalisation goes on, less opportunity. Those who ought to be standing up for us will stab us in the back'.

Her colleague, Mrs R, aged 47 with 27 year's experience makes similar points, 'Angry? Yes! I felt I made no difference to the organisation. There was no one else to share with and I had to work it out for myself'. Asked if she would do anything differently, she said, 'I would be more critical. I would not just float along. I would not make myself available in the same way. I think that the same opportunities are not available anyway. Once there was variety and change. But now there is not the same opportunity for the variety of work. I wouldn't want to get stuck in a rut. I think I would take different steps now'. What these might be she did not divulge. Both females rail against the perceived injustice based

on their interpretation that such treatment should not have happened. Their basic assumption is that the organisation owed them job security and career development.

Thus far, then, we can identify a pattern for dependents, which includes the feelings of anger and guilt, mainly, and a belief that others are responsible for their career prospects. There is no assessment of their responsibility for their own career. Their only response is that they will get their own back mainly by staying where they are thereby requiring the organisation to make them redundant and so releasing to them a large and, as they see it, well-deserved reward.

But dependents do not all respond in quite such a negative way. Two subjects in Quintiles had a similar response initially, but demonstrated a different strategy for dealing with their quandary. Miss Mitchell, aged 52 has served 18 year's with Syntex, she reports, 'Feelings of loss, certainly. Syntex was a great company to work for. I would certainly go immediately if it happened again. If you stay you won't be happy. I could have got a good pay-off. I gave a lot to stay. But it was a con trick'. She does not reflect on her own abilities or efforts or anything that initially enabled her to enhance her career at Quintiles. She has now secured a job at another pharmaceutical firm at the invitation of a colleague who went there before her. 'Trust and loyalty meant a lot to me. I gave extra hours and they couldn't have cared less. This new firm will be more like it was at Syntex. I like to be highly valued and I like to work for someone I know. I'm not going to stay and be miserable. I'm more myself than I was before. I like to have respect from the people I work with'. Her final advice to others was, 'Get out and start again somewhere fresh. I would have got a job easily if I had gone straight

away. In the end head hunters phoned me. There are lots of things going on out there. There are always stories about people on the dole. But to me it's all about commitment and working in a conducive culture'. Her advice for those starting out on a career in pharmaceuticals was, 'if you start here only stay for two or three years. It's a good exposure to the job market. Clients come around. It's a good experience but not a place you want to stay over long'.

Her colleague, who made the same move, Mrs T, aged 37 years with 8 year's service explained her own response as, 'a grieving process, a search for acceptance. Even a year afterwards we had still not accepted it. Many people decided to move on. It was a shock'. But she reflects on her own profile of competence and commitment, 'Ability and effort, certainly. Being in the right place at the right time. I feel more in control. I know what I want to do. I would certainly move on and do something else. As you get older you get more confident in your own abilities'. And advice for those just starting, 'Hang on in there and influence things; make yourself heard. At the end of the day some organisations will suit you and others will not. It's not as bad as you think. It's all in perception really. It might be a good place to start. But don't stay longer than two years. You might get a better grounding in a smaller company. We had a guy who has just gone. He had good career prospects but he was lost among so many others. I was fortunate because my manager moved me into management'. There was opportunity to prove her ability. But in the end she finds more value in a new environment similar to Syntex, which provided her with a more congenial base to continue her career progression.

This subject, while refinding herself in an organisation similar to Syntex, has learned about her own abilities and recognises both management

experience and opportunity to move on. Her basic assumption about her career and its prospects is that she can develop herself at work in any environment providing her with opportunity but that some environments are more satisfactory than others. And looking back would she have done anything differently? 'Tried harder to change, perhaps. I would certainly have gone straight to the Operations Director and put my cards on the table'. For both females future enforced change at work would find them moving sooner than they had on the previous occasion.

So, we have observed that subjects who want to retain the basic assumption of security of employment that they have always known are less likely to identify personal factors contributing to their situation, like effort or ability. They are more likely to seek the same kind of employment elsewhere and retain a belief in a protected and replicated environment with the new employer in which they can exercise the competences that made them successful performers in the past. The control that they have is marked by being able to move on to similar employment in the old regime found elsewhere. Once there, they can exercise their working strengths in a familiar way and guarantee the rewards they want.

## **INDEPENDENTS**

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In the last chapter we identified individuals who seemed less dependent on the organisation for their self-worth and who were more self-reliant in their career decisions and described them as independents. Their responses to the questions were very different from those we have cited above in subjects who are more dependent on the organization for job security and career prospects. In the first place, for these independent subjects, there was little if any feeling of loss or the

negative feelings associated with anger, guilt and hopelessness. But then again, there is not too much analysis of factors affecting success at the personal competency level. Typical is Mrs P, aged 37 and 19 year's with the organisation, 'I just got confidence working in the environment. It felt right to me. I am not a worrier. I have a feel for it. It's the track I take. I have no fear and I like people. I can see an opportunity and take it. You have to promote yourself'. Such obiter dicta come easily when she is asked what advice she would give to others starting out in a career, 'Earn respect from other people and don't depend on your status to achieve what you want. You must have knowledge of the job in whatever section you are working in. It's all about achievement and effort. You have got to deliver. Confront change, don't shy away from it. Ability may determine how far you can get but attitude is far more important. You must be positive and enthusiastic'. Interestingly, she is not so optimistic about her career prospects elsewhere, 'it is very limited. There is a perception of public service in the wider labour market that our work has no relevance to work as it is conducted in the private sector. So, whatever I have achieved is not rated highly by outside organisations. Then I have a lack of management qualifications, which again makes it difficult to prove to another employer that I have something important to offer'. Interestingly the focus of the comments here are achievement, but achievement within the organisation and using the opportunities arising to work her way up in the organisation. She is adamant that these skills of hers are not transferable outside and makes no commitment to gaining qualifications to make her transfer possible. Her control lies inside the organization. Using her contacts and political abilities there are the sole gauge of her future success, apparently.

Mr H is 24 and has been 3 years with East Dumbarton District Council. He admits to feeling alarm on the news of lay-offs. But his response is personal and pragmatic, 'the car will have to go. Realisation, yes, I realised the severity of the threat. It was terrible not knowing and then frantically searching. Turning the clock back? No! Eventually, there was relief'. His own strengths are apparent to him, 'I got on well with the job. It was a blank page to me so I could write on it whatever I wanted to'. A similar response comes from Mrs R, aged 34 with 10 year's service. She has been through several different functions and departments, 'I was always ambitious and competitive. I thought it would be difficult to get used to this job. But no, I got used to it quickly'. She reflects on the meaning of this for her own self-value, 'I think I'm flexible enough to change. It's no longer enough just to want to climb ladders. If I couldn't do the job, I'd get out. I've never felt like that before. I've always been very business focused, but now I feel very differently about myself'. But what is her advice to others? 'Take every opportunity. Don't look at it just as a career. I go along taking what I need and I would do that anywhere. I wouldn't advise anyone to join C & E. But then I wouldn't advise them to join the Civil Service anyway. My husband was in the Civil Service, too. Now he's been left for 5 years. He works incredibly long hours, but his enthusiasm is transformed. He really enjoys what he does. I am jealous of him. They recognise his efforts and he's got more opportunity, too'. There is a feeling in both subjects that self-sufficiency is vital and survival is based on pragmatic adaptability.

Miss McK, aged 26 years with 2 year's service with EDDC said, 'Alarm after the announcement, certainly. Bitter about the way things were done. Surprised at how selfish people can be. I felt bad about feeling good when others had to go

and I was safe. It wasn't fair and I felt angry on their behalf. But you've got to get on and make the best of it. There was panic at first, then shock. It pushed me to work harder. Looking back I would say it is all about control and the amount of effort you put in. The job is what you make it and the more you put in, the more you get out'. And her advice to others was, 'be enthusiastic. Make every effort to do the job well and be prepared to work across disciplines. Don't let things worry you. Put it in the back of your mind. Give yourself a good talking to. My Mum and Dad did that. That's where living at home can help you'.

Her boss, Mr G, aged 34 and 11 years with EDDC is equally positive, 'I am more street-wise. I would now see them coming and be better able to cope. I am better able to justify myself and the services I am responsible for. But I've come through it now. I have a broader range of things that I can do. I got a lot out of that. More self-sufficient and that makes me more marketable'. I asked him if he would have done anything differently. 'I don't think so. We were working flat out. What more could we have done?' And advice to others, 'don't take it personally. It's not your fault. The staff don't see it as politics. They see it as you. Be hardened. People look after their own backs. Be wary of that. Show no justifications. Prepare the case yourself and streamline all the time'. Here is another example of pragmatic adaptability.

Some independents have done well out of the enforced change and could congratulate themselves for achieving both high status and good rewards. Their views, however, can be equally objective about events as the other independents we have seen. Mr R, aged 42 with 12 year's service with Syntex expresses no feelings about the manner of the buy-out, 'We had nine month's anxiety followed by a liberating experience and suddenly I felt

creative energy start anew. I was recharged. I felt personally endorsed'. However, the first fresh dawn of hopefulness palled under the daily demands of time-lines and negotiating costs with clients. His view of mergers is objective, 'Mergers again, last in, first out, mergers and collisions? I wouldn't do anything different at the hand-over stage. They always want enthusiasm, success and excellence. Give it a year. We should have done it properly and not wasted time'. And as for the future, 'I am cynical about Quintiles. I wasn't. I used to want success. We got an American focus. We're devolved. We're more sensitive to different cultures but we're just an outpost'. And his advice to others is, 'Do your best. If you get no recognition, look elsewhere. It's all just mediocre people, just saying the right thing to the right people'. His colleague Mr M, aged 44 with 11 year's service says, 'I don't particularly feel more in control. You're only as secure as your next business. I didn't have a clear idea how things would go. Trust and loyalty, takeovers never meet all concerns. What I had to do was present myself and gain control of the situation. I had to get information and find out what was involved in running this new business'. At the end of the first year he felt, more entrepreneurial, more confident and more battle-hardened. 'I'm an overall manager. There're not that many opportunities'. And his advice to others was, 'wait and see what will happen. It's all about what you want to achieve for yourself. You should look for opportunities - a new job. But don't look back and don't harp on about the past'. For each subject there is more self-reflection on his or her own abilities whilst remaining sceptical about the organization and its care of its individual workers.

Their colleague, Mr B is aged 39 with 11 year's service. He says, 'I have done well for myself and overall I feel very positive. At a personal level I feel I have

done very well. Having gone through all that I have, I feel that I am cosseted. It's up to you from there in on. I asked myself whether I should stay or not and I thought, "I am going to make this work, I will become more marketable".'

Asked whether he would do anything differently if it were all to happen again he said, 'Yes, In three years I have experienced such a lot. I should have been harder and pushed myself more. I always enjoyed my job. If you get to end of your life and find yourself saying, "I never had the time", then is the time to regret'. Advice to others, 'It's the self-sufficient against the whiners. The secret is to know your own key elements. Once you know that you get organised. Then, you must be able to think for others – think what they need. The whiners, work organises them and they're always fire-fighting. There are good opportunities here. But, take control. They won't tell you your career here. Look to a big pharma company. Take the initiative'. Certainly, the message of control comes through, but it is tempered by a tentative endorsement for the organization. Interpretation takes place in terms of opportunity at a personal level but the value in terms of the organization is not reinforced.

The pattern of response from independents is similar: firstly, no recrimination and little or none of the grieving responses. That suggests, according to the theory of attribution, that there is little that they didn't feel in control of. They acknowledge learning and being forced to respond without a clear idea of how they might get through the work successfully. And that experience itself reinforces self-sufficiency even more. They appear to recognise ability and aptitude in themselves as it has developed under enforced change at work. They speak of control frequently and it is three-fold: internal control, control of others and control of company politics. Finally, most of them speak about more

confidence in their own marketability and that now becomes the focus of their efforts. They offer this consistently as advice to others: be aware of opportunity, don't wait for the company to tell you what your career move should be. As for future prospects, it would be difficult to identify the perceived control over development outcomes cited by Brandtstaedter (1993). Perhaps the hopeful, calm, confident and venturesome responses are implied rather than expressed and in one case tempered by doubt that the subject is quite as marketable as she would want to be in the eyes of prospective outside employers. Overall, the independence expected at the outset of their career is not modified by the experience of enforced change. They are just as confident in their own abilities both to perform well and survive. They are doubtful that the organisation will not repeat the experience of enforced change but more confident than dependent subjects that they would see it coming and still survive. There is no desire to move on as a result of their brush with insecurity at work, though when commenting on their own prospects outside they do not always view them as optimistically as the prospects of surviving within.

## **RECONSTRUCTION AT WORK**

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We identified in the previous chapter subjects whose basic assumptions had been significantly altered from organisational dependency to independence and self-sufficiency. We will now examine how far their attributional responses differ from the other subjects we have cited thus far.

Mr R, aged 51 with 31 year's service with C & E run the Training Department, lost the job under amalgamation of two Collections and was then shunted into a VAT office to head up a collection team. His initial response was as much

grievance as his colleagues, 'Basically, I was mishandled. I became embittered. There was no care. I was just a number.' After some months off sick in which his wife reinforced the message that he should recognise his own value he said, 'for me it was learning - continuous professional development. I believed in the Training and Development Officer's job. We had the best unit in the country. But now C & E are just a wage payer'. However, he has since been offered the position of quality control manager and sees it as a new lease of life. Looking back he sees his survival as dependent on, 'ability and control. The ability to know the essentials of the job I was doing, being able to produce ideas that could motivate others with a vision of the training department'. His new basic assumption is formulated in advice to others as, 'Constantly revalue yourselves. At the end of the day, if they don't value you, you can always find people to put value in you. I'm bloody good at what I do'. As for the future, 'I will develop the job. I believe in the learning organisation and efficiency and quality management. Key players are interested. Some are not. But once we get a new collector in place we will bypass obstacles at the collectorate level'. Control is restored in a personal manifesto, which will overcome any personal obstacles form within the organization.

His colleague, Mr D, aged 52 with 30 year's service spoke of his own attribution to success during enforced change. He interprets it as follows, 'I can take a problem, analyse it, implement the solution and take people with me. You don't just want to be a postman for everyone else, you want to be able to add value to what you do'. When discussing his own feeling of self-sufficiency he mentioned a serious crime for which his son was charged and tried and the fact that having survived that with his wife there was nothing worse that they felt could happen

to them. 'We had to find our own way out of that. What I do feel is more passionate about things going on around me. His basic assumption about priorities at work are different now, 'Look after the interests of the staff. I have the opportunity to do this. They come first'. As to his own priorities, 'before this I would have put the department before myself. Now I am only interested in early retirement'. But that does not mean that he is intending a life of inactivity. 'I want to work for Scottish Enterprise. I think independence is likely and if that comes who knows what that might mean with our relations with Europe. We could be ahead of the game in the UK'. As for alternatives, 'I don't know. I might go on my own. I had always wanted to be a solicitor. Perhaps I might do that'. And his advice to others summarises his now expressed assumptions about value in life, 'be true to yourself and stick to your values. Don't swerve. Be prepared to go so far and no farther'. Both subjects are aware of their own competence and can now exercise it objectively within the organisation or outside. It is almost as if the organisation is irrelevant and that any other organisation would be just a vehicle for their self-belief and reforming zeal. They sound like missionaries, intent on converting others to a new way of life and prepared to look anywhere to find that kind of opportunity.

Two colleagues had a slightly different experience. Both were offered jobs by outside organisations. In each case the subject had been working with a contractor and had then been offered a job with the organisation - in one case two contractors made an offer.

Mr McP, aged 46, with 23 year's service with C & E, relates the offers made, 'Bull approached me. I had an open mind about it myself. I didn't mind being rejected. The Personnel Manager said, "Come across". But May sealed my

fate. Scottish Power approached me and I had an in-depth talk with them and the Personnel Manager said, "I hope you're still thinking of coming across to us." Then I had a performance review with my boss and he said, "Mike can do this job and the next one as well". As to his own attribution of this success he says, 'Effort, ability and political ability. It's all about how you use people above you'. He reflects on what this means for him, 'I think in the past I suffered from naivety. You have to plan what you do. It's like the 'One minute Manager' – use staff and delegate'. I asked whether he had any regrets about the way things had gone in his career and he expresses it in terms of 'ought', 'I should have moved eight years ago. I should have been more self-reliant. I should have managed my career'. But the learning he has now acquired about himself becomes the basis of his affirmation about the future, 'I have exposed my own weaknesses. I know what my talents are. I don't need a godfather; I have done it for myself. This opportunity has turned up for me. Now I have to give it 100%. I think I am more realistic. I know what is possible and I know what is feasible. I could face unemployment. I could be a risk taker. The forward view is that Private Finance Initiative which started as a threat is now seen as an opportunity. I can stay, I can perform well and I've got luck. I've been given a choice. I can stay where I am or I can go with a contractor'. This is one of the few references to luck, a term which features significantly in the attribution literature (Weiner, 1985, p.552). But it seems to be coterminous with opportunity rather than a chance happening. The subject knows that he would not have been offered the job opportunity if he had not been recognised as capable and committed to IT in his own right. This demonstration of competence was the cause of his being noticed by another outside employer and receiving

this offer of a new job.

The second subject to be offered a job arrived at it through IT also. Mr McD, aged 37 with 19 year's service with the organisation had done many different jobs in C & E through training, audit, internal consultancy and finally software need assessment. It was in this latter capacity that he had to talk to a contractor who wrote such software and his grasp of the subject impressed them sufficiently to offer him a job. Asked how he felt about this experience he replied, 'Utterly confident. I am in a sales environment. Here there is leadership and management initiative'. The implications for his previous employer are immediately apparent, 'In C & E the wrong people were in the wrong jobs. I felt hard done by and I was definitely not valued. However, I was headhunted. I had been using the software for an ISO 9000 package and I wanted to get the scope of it extended. So I approached the MD of the company and he discovered that I knew a lot about it so he offered me a job. I had an offer and it gave me prospects'. I asked whether he felt stronger as a result of his experience, 'Stronger in self-esteem, yes. I haven't experienced any shock and I thought that I would do. I feel empowerment. I feel cosy working here. I've enjoyed it. I get busy. I impress others. I make presentations to clients. I have no problem with that. I seem to have built in self-confidence'. Such a description of self-worth is as close as any subject gets to the perceived control of future personal development cited by Brandtstaedter (1993). Again competence and ability are at the heart of this description together with the opportunity to demonstrate it in front of a prospective employer. Both subjects have transcended the personal constraints of a routine job in a predictive environment and been able to demonstrate to a prospective employer the ability of flourishing in a totally

different working environment. It is almost as if the attribution has been achieved through the agency of the third party who identifies and then draws attention to this newfound competence, which can be applied in a totally new sector. It surprises both subjects but they are not slow to respond and then analyse their own potential and recognise that it demonstrates transferability – almost as if they had fallen over it by chance.

One female colleague seems to have arrived at the same self-sufficiency, perhaps by a slightly different route. Mrs S, aged 33, with 15 year's service said, 'I decided what was the right thing to do. I had control of my own destiny. I proved I could do it. I feel happier now. I know I can survive. I had some doubts. I had to be strong. I didn't expect it to work out and it did. I never thought it would get so good so quickly'. But the rise of her self-esteem was not just a work-based competency proven at work; it was a home-based experience of marital break-up. 'For 24 years my Mum had a miserable marriage. She would have been better off apart from my Dad. Then the Springboard course (an assertiveness course for female managers) came along and I got a lot out of that. I had to ask myself what I wanted to attain, what were my goals. Then I had to plan the change in my marriage and my job at the same time'. Finally, she offered advice to others in a similar situation stating the practical lessons learned, 'Think it through. If you're uncertain, don't do it. Have control over change. Take extra time and remember the other people involved. Don't be scared. Most people could do what you're doing. Make sure you have a support mechanism – it could be someone in the family or a friend. It makes it easier if you have a sounding board – in my case it was my mother'. Her view of herself as a survivor is transformed and she reflects on what this means in terms of the

value to her that has been derived from this experience. But having found it in the personal side of her life she has successfully applied it to her professional career.

Some subjects who demonstrate such reconstruction in their basic assumptions have done well in the organisation and from being dependent are now independent within the organisation. Mrs A is 33 years old with 5 year's service with Syntex. She is in charge of Quality and Health and Safety on the site. She relates her initial response, 'Loss, certainly. It was a year of not knowing. It was just a bit uncertain; what were we doing and could we make a profit at it? She replied to the question of what she attributed her success to, 'control and ambition. I have always studied in my free time. Sometimes you want something and you go out and get it'. I asked her whether she felt stronger as a result of the transition. She said, 'Yes, I do. But that's not the transition. That's the opportunity I've had as a result of the change. The rate at which we do things'. I asked whether she was more aware of her market value. She said, 'Yes. It's the experience I've had and the reassurances I've found. Sometimes I lack confidence in myself. When I came I was encouraged to get on with it. Hopefully I merit that trust. I had a manager who kept monitoring me. But now I get the support'. As for the future, 'I'm not interested in learned papers. My boss says I should be. He sees it as a way of getting on. But I don't want to be headhunted. If it happened to me again I am safe in the knowledge that I could get a job quickly. It has done one thing: I was always careful with money. Now I am very careful with money'. For her, too, the experience and opportunity have caused her to reassess her own potential and competence. She now sees this clearly and recognises it as strength. She feels employable elsewhere and

therefore stronger in herself as she goes about her job with the present employer. We observe that both female subjects refer to a supporter or sounding board. It is almost as if the role that the mentor or guide played enabled the subject to clarify for herself what her career status and future prospects could be now in the light of new-found self-reliance.

## **SUMMARY**

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Summarising what we have seen so far we may draw some conclusions. The first, drawing on the responses of dependents, seems to be that those who suffer from a feeling of anger and betrayal, particularly older and long-serving subjects, are unable to focus on their own learning and its application to a wider world of employment. In every case cited, the emotional blame of the organisation was paramount and the sit-tight and get as much as you can out of them approach predominated. There is no assessment of ability or effort and no analysis of how things might have been different if they had done something else or intervened in another way. Even Mr F who thought about intervening, concluded that even if he had had the courage to speak out, it would probably not have made a lot of difference. This latter response suggests a classic self-fulfilment prophecy. Asked about alternative employment, at best something in the same sector is often cited, though the subject proposes nothing proactive him or herself. There is no suggestion that previous status and service could be transferable to another Department and there is certainly no sense of starting at the bottom anywhere else. Low self-awareness and inability or disinclination to assess ability and aptitude seem to characterise this unwillingness to consider other prospects in a different sector. This group may have made some decisions,

but these are usually to do with how to survive better or get their own back on the organisation. Certainly their perceived control over their own career development is not reinforced at all. Even the one subject, Mr K, whose father was self-employed was disinclined to consider this route – ‘that would mean networking and I’m not very good at that.’ At least this admission may indicate self-knowledge. But it might suggest lack of effort, too.

In our second group, not all independents are free of annoyance. Initial responses to perceived management manipulation during enforced change can find these subjects equally alarmed, ‘We had not been well represented by our masters,’ said Mr G, aged 46 with 19 year’s service with Syntex and now a Director at Quintiles, ‘We were sold down the river. Our senior management betrayed us. I wouldn’t bother talking to the old CEO if I ever met him again’. But this assessment was tempered by the assertion, ‘Anger doesn’t do you any good. Don’t get hung up on the politics of the past. Change is part of existence. We were given an opportunity of making a go of it ourselves, growing a business and having the freedom to act’. Opportunity here is not attributed to luck, the alleged external and unstable factor of Attribution theory. It is identified much more objectively and assessed dispassionately with opportunity grasped and fulfilled. There is a clear sense of the pragmatic in all the advice offered by independents. The basic assumption seems to be one of performance and becoming successful in terms of results in the new working environment as quickly as possible. Asked if he had any regrets, Mr G is quite emphatic, ‘Certainly not. Life is much more interesting, much more challenging. The balance of competence has shifted towards the CRO. Definitely I am much more experienced. The emergence of small and virtual bio companies has meant they

need more pre-clinical work done. It's more of a partnership'. Competence, as in knowledge and skill, are the critical factors for independents. They never doubt or question their own commitment to total effort – provided they know what outcome is required in the new working environment. On the other hand, they do not necessarily see the prospects for development as being open-ended. Sometimes the prospects are still confined to the same sector, or the assumption is made that different sectors will not value their experience or expertise. Lack of qualification is often seen as a drawback to future employability elsewhere by some subjects. So adaptation can be within the existing organisation or a narrow sector like, say, the Civil Service or Pharmaceutical industry. Only subjects offered a job completely outside the sector, in both cases almost fallen over by chance contact with subcontractors, reassess both their abilities and the opportunities for employability elsewhere. One subject moved on immediately. The other is still to decide to make the final jump outside the Civil Service altogether. Twenty-three year's experience and the chance of the next senior grade seem to remain a strong personal challenge that is not easy to pass over. So even here we might conclude that though hopeful, calm and confident, the subject is still not risking a move outside the organization yet (Brandtstaedter, 1993).

Our final group of subjects shares the initial emotions of betrayal and depression but emerges with different basic assumptions about themselves and their prospects. Thinking the unthinkable has meant, perhaps, a reassessment that includes questioning all that they had held most dear about their previous knowledge, skill and experience. But, instead of seeking to survive within or having someone offer something outside the organisation, they reinvent

themselves by seeing for the first time their true value and then looking dispassionately at where they might apply that skills-set in any other working context. For some subjects this process seems to be triggered by a reassessment of basic assumptions about themselves, their value as employees and the relationship they have with their current employer or any other employing organisation in the future.

## **ATTRIBUTION THEORY REVISITED**

The question why people ask 'why' and what their answers indicate in terms of self-awareness and appropriate action continue to challenge researchers who wish to track linkage between Attribution thinking and goal expectancy (Weiner, 1985, p. 555). There are those who have posited causal variables on predictive goal expectancies in achievement-related areas as determined by perceived ability and planned effort expenditure (Heider, 1958). An alternative method would be to examine the relationship between attributions and changes in expectancy. Here we return to what individuals think is going to occur and how they interpret results after the change has occurred. Some proponents illustrate the attribution process itself as a staged linkage of cognition and emotion (Weiner, op cit p.560) and others as 'an event characterisation-problem formulation-problem resolution process' (Anderson and Deuser, 1993). It is the contention of the present research that either process is preceded by basic assumptions which are sometimes acknowledged and sometimes taken for granted but always challenged by enforced change, particularly when unexpected events give rise to cognitive or affective dissonance. In this regard, then, it has been less important to identify the causal variables of change than

to allow individuals to express their own explanations and then probe to discover why events are interpreted in the way that they are and, more importantly, whether basic assumptions have been reinforced by enforced change or reconstructed in a way that would cause the individual to respond very differently to the change event if repeated.

We have already referred to the assumed factors of ability/effort/task difficulty and luck. Some researchers have asserted that these factors are either internal/external or stable/unstable and that the assessment of where exactly an event fits with reference these two axes will determine whether the subject feels in control or not and more, whether he or she experiences anger, guilt, pity, shame or helplessness. Each emotion, it is suggested, depends on how far there was perceived to be an element of controllability or blame (Anderson & Deuser, 1993, p. 97). So, according to the theory, in the case of an individual perceiving that he or she had not put in enough effort and then failing, a feeling of shame would overcome him or her. But where no personal blame could be imputed then no guilt would be experienced. On the other hand, where no intervention would have made any difference and the situation is perceived to be completely arbitrary or unstable, learned helplessness might result (Weiner, *ibid* p.561 ff).

## **ANGER**

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The present research has allowed us to examine the response of anger in more detail. Previous research offers subjects an incident and then invites them to explain why they might feel anger. Three different reasons are evinced: either the act is considered voluntary and unjustified; or it is thought to be avoidable with more care, or there is an attribution of blame (Averill, 1985, p.1150). It is

certainly cited as an emotion by several of the subjects in the present research. But it is not quite so clear-cut in its significance or its endurance.

In the first place, anger can be a response to shock at the unexpected and in that sense most subjects will admit to it in cases of enforced change at work, particularly where there is no hint of its impending impact before the enforced change. As a group, the independents seem to experience it less than other respondents. But even they can be caught unawares, 'Anger at the stupid one-liner "You're all out of a job".' 'Anger at how easily they could get rid of us'. The comments here are an immediate response and focus on the ineptitude of those who made the announcement in the first place. For independents there are basic assumptions about organisations and their behaviour and the way in which an individual can survive occasional managerial ineptitude. Mr G, aged 46 with 19 year's experience says, 'don't get hung up on the politics of the past. Get on and look forward. Anger doesn't do you any good'. This initial anger rarely endures once opportunity is identified and responded to.

To discover whether anger goes deeper requires further probing: what is it that is thought to be unjustified, avoidable or arbitrary in the situation as it presents itself to the individual. If it could have been avoided, then how could it have been avoided? Could coping strategies have been devised that would have given the individual survival options? In the context of the present research it has to be said that there is always the possibility of devising a way out given that an individual must currently be working with some knowledge, skill and experience – all of which should be transferable to another working context. An assessment of marketability should then follow. Significantly, even some of the independents are not so optimistic when thinking about transferability of their skills and

knowledge outside their present organisation. The most senior, youngest female in Scotland, whose testimony had until that point been very positive expresses it clearly, 'Very limited. Whatever I have achieved is not rated highly by outside organisations. Then I have a lack of management qualifications, which again makes it difficult to prove to another employer that I have something important to offer'. If she made an effort, could she do it? Has she got the ability? Is it too difficult? Why would she not be as lucky outside her present organization? All these questions remain unanswered by her. The arena of her endeavour continues to be firmly inside the organisation working with her political expertise to succeed. Perhaps the assumed prospect of failure precludes further action until there is no other option left to her except to leave.

But anger at a deeper level seems to preclude assessment of potential or aptitude or alternative secondary appraisals. And it is this anger, which is found to coexist with a basic assumption that 'the organization' owes the individual a job. We have seen that responsibility for failure induces guilt and lack of ability induces shame. But in the case of dependents the anger is directed at those who should have discharged their responsibility to ensure that the subject continued to have the job of their desire and the continued career development for which they believed they had signed up, 'I couldn't have done much else. It was a question of speed. Perhaps I could have got a degree, more latitude in the decisions? I don't think so'. There is even a horror that they should be subjected to efficiency scrutinies at all, 'we had no qualifications recognised by the outside world. A lot of us felt, "quality/right first time, we know all this." Why should we have to prove it when we knew it was going on?' There is certainly no attempt to assess ability or effort - these are assumed. And the attempt of outsiders to

assess such factors will be strongly resisted also. Our contention here is that possessing a basic assumption that the subject has a right to a continued career from the organisation precludes any attempt to assess ability or effort and look for its transfer to another organization. Indeed, even the attempt by an outside agency to make this assessment for subjects will be resisted by them. The organization has no right to do this. So, it is not the anger as such that prevents individuals from assessing their employability but the basic belief that the organisation owes them a continued career and that no one has a right to question their ability or the efforts they make at their work. The prospect of alternatives outside interventions is greeted with disbelief, 'we had personnel systems, we had appraisal systems, we had the blue form. We knew about competencies, personal qualities, outstanding/average and all that sort of thing. And you could comment because there was a narrative: fitted for promotion - there was always the box-mark. These were credentials for the team to examine'. There is here deep-seated anger at the perceived violation of a basic assumption of a protected employment contract and continued career prospects, which seems to make it difficult for the subject to assess ability and effort objectively and consider alternative employment options. Now, according to Attribution theory these are the internal factors, which open up control. By definition, therefore, controllability cannot be accessed by those subjects whose anger and blame focus on the organisation and who accept no part in the need to evaluate their own ability and effort for themselves.

In contrast, independents have a set of basic assumptions, which focus on competence and achievement. As we saw, they are not dependent on the organisation for a career and they take a pride in proving to themselves and

others that they can achieve whatever challenge is presented to them. Many of them have benefited from and welcomed change within the organisation. Mrs R, aged 34 with 10 year's service, is typical, 'I was ambitious. I wanted to develop myself. I wanted lots of experience and I wanted to develop myself quickly. I worked on various projects and when the merger of the two collections came about, I was in a good position to get involved in some of the preparatory work'. Her colleague, Mrs P, aged 37, is of a similar opinion, 'I have learned that the reward must come from me. I have to provide the ambition and drive for my own career. I would try anything. As long as I knew what I was doing and got a return on it. I can do anything I want to do and that's what I believe about myself'. As we saw above, the basic assumptions of independents change little during enforced change at work. The organisation offers an opportunity to continue promoting their career. Achievement is paramount to them and opportunity to operate as an independent career agent is all for them.

## **LUCK**

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This aspect of Attribution theory seems to distinguish those who reconstruct their basic assumptions from dependence to independence. Two subjects typify the response accurately and each of them has been offered, and in one case accepted, a job outside the organisation. For both, too, the element of surprise is evident and triggers the response without prompting from the researcher. In the case of Mr McP, his job had been put out to a Private Finance Initiative scheme with a view to the contractor taking over his department at the end of the period of co-operation. Two contractors offered him a job having seen him at work with the current computer software. Now he can rest assured, 'the forward

view is that PFI which started as a threat is now seen as an opportunity. I can stay, I can perform well and I've got luck'. He further defines how he attributes this opportunity, 'effort, ability and political ability'. But looking back he sees the need to define the guidelines for managing success and identifies what he believes to have been a flawed strategy in the past, 'I should have moved eight years ago. I should have been more self-sufficient. I should have managed my career'. His analysis of himself suggests that he will in the future. So, although it could be said that luck, the unstable factor according to attribution theory, has operated in the form of a job offer, it is in fact now opportunity that would better express what has occurred. The subject recognises that that opportunity has been offered because of a coincidence of his expertise and another employer's need. But now he will manage those coincidences more deliberately. His colleague, Mr McD says, 'I miss the people and I miss the work. But I was running out of time. I had an offer and it gave me prospects. I have personal satisfaction. I believe C & E have a lot to learn about managing people. It's all to do with leadership style, communication and honesty'.

But not all subjects who have reconstructed their basic assumptions have moved outside the organisation. Two have done well inside the newly changed existing organisation. They are both perceived as very successful and capable young managers. Mr B, aged 39 with 11 years in the pharmaceutical industry when asked to what he attributed his success said, 'Luck. I was at Pfizer for five years and had a good boss. He was switched on and taught me the value of hard work'. But the effort factor is paralleled by conclusions about the future way to think about working in an organisation, 'Companies don't matter anymore. This happened quite recently when a friend working for a local company was told

"You're no longer required." And I said to him, "Don't take it personally it's not you." You have to have an attitude towards your career – one of stability. People are less willing today to wait for things to happen. They are more proactive now'. A similar reply came from Mrs S aged 33 with 15 year's service. She was moved into another department in which she had no previous experience, 'I proved I could do it. I feel happier now. I had some doubts but I had to be strong. I decided what was the right thing to do. I had control of my own destiny'. She is now moving to a job in another area of the country, 'I am leaving happiness, to find happiness'.

## **AUTONOMY AND CONTROL**

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For older managers who are trapped by approaching retirement the fact that jobs elsewhere may be unlikely does not mean that they cannot find a similar reconstruction of basic assumptions from organisational dependency to self-sufficiency. Mr R, aged 51 with 31 year's service said, 'I can recognise the danger signals in other people and myself. It has taught me about value and self-value'. His advice to others reinforces that message, 'Constantly revalue yourself. At the end of the day if they don't value you, you can always find people to put value in you. I'm bloody good at what I do'. His colleague, Mr D, aged 51 with 31 year's service says, 'you want to be able to add value to what you do. Be true to yourself. Stick up for your values. Don't swerve. Be prepared to go so far and no farther'. This optimism is a testimony to a newfound self-confidence and in both cases takes place in subjects who have spent a significant amount of time in one organisation and have risen to senior rank. Enforced change at work has enabled them to assert independence and give

themselves new career prospects either inside or outside the organization.

## **SUMMARY**

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We have discussed how basic assumptions about job security and career prospects at work find subjects divided between those who believe that the organization bears responsibility to provide these and those who are more independent and self-sufficient in their beliefs. For dependents there is little reflection on their ability or effort, perhaps because these are either taken for granted in virtue of long service or assumed to be irrelevant as they have a right to expect the rewards regardless of other factors. The anger that they experience is not so much because they could not control events or felt powerless but rather because the events should not have happened at all, in their opinion. Indeed, the one subject who was senior enough to intervene did not do so, not because he thought he ought or ought not to but because he didn't think it would make any difference. At best these subjects will seek another job in an organization that offers previously valued security and career prospects. Independents, on the other hand respond less angrily at the enforced change because they accept that the outcome is in their own power. Through ability and effort they will negotiate or use influence to bring about the best outcome for their career development, though often this is seen solely as an internal survival rather than an outside move. Those who have reconstructed previous dependency assumptions into independence are triggered by external recognition of their abilities and effort, often by a job offer. The trigger does not have to be employment related, it can be challenge at home which has required reassessment of previously held beliefs. These subjects combine the

acknowledgement of ability and effort with the alleged unstable factor of luck. But they use the term coterminously with opportunity. In other words they can now see that their opportunity arose because they had demonstrated ability and effort, which was recognised by outsiders. From this experience they draw up the assertion of their own value, transferable to other work.

Predictive processes of tracking Attribution require an assumption that certain outcomes will trigger a particular evaluation which in turn will give rise to both positive/negative emotions and causal attributions and dimensions (Weiner, 1985, p.560). Our own research suggests that predictive categories of effort, ability, task difficulty, luck may yield more representative and significant results if they are related to the basic assumptions which individuals bring to their own experience of enforced change. As we have seen, not all subjects relate their experience to ability or effort, particularly if they believe that someone else is responsible for guaranteeing their future career. Similarly, although luck will sometimes accompany response to outside job offers or internal career promotion, that may still be accompanied by a careful assessment of why the luck occurred in the first place.

We can accept that controllability lies at the heart of all human attempts to make sense of why certain events have occurred. But using categories of preset outcomes in the context of career can be restrictive in distinguishing between subtle differences of response individual subjects make in the face of enforced change at work. For some researchers the attempt is made to categorise their subjects by career outcome (Hallier & Lyon, 1993). Individuals are categorised and labelled: dispossessed (still unemployed after twelve months); reprieved (alternative management posts found with existing companies within three

months); reborn (demotion to technical post); converted (external labour market managerial jobs gained in 4 – 11 months) (ibid pp 32 – 35). A summary of outcomes is attributed to each category of subject, which is alleged to summarise the joint responses. Our own research suggests that individuals within each of those categories could well have responded quite differently from each other and that if we identify their basic assumptions about job security and career dependence then the internal factors like ability, effort and external factors like luck and opportunity are assessed quite differently.

Questions will always be asked about personal attribution particularly where individuals have been subjected to enforced change at work; 'Precisely how are knowledge structures and belief systems recruited for use by an attributor? How does motivation influence this recruitment? What effect does the specificity of generality of the belief system that is used have upon the type and certainty of the attributions made? What is the role of the attributor goals in these processes? (Anderson & Slusher, 1986). It is the belief of the present research that an examination of basic assumptions allows us to identify an individual's self-assessment, his or her interpretation of events and the meaning and value he or she attributes to events occurring during enforced change at work. Sometimes the attribution indicates a reconstruction of basic assumptions in a way that will enable an individual to cope with further enforced change very differently should it occur again. Reassessing the elements of attribution can give rise to an individual's changing his or her basic assumptions about self and work. However, more significantly, the reconstruction of basic assumptions about job security and career progression always give rise to reassessment of the elements of attribution, control and optimistic bias in future enforced change

at work (Forster & Schwartz, 1994; Skinner, 1995).

# CHAPTER FOUR

## SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

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In the last Chapter we examined how far individuals feel in control during enforced change at work in terms of his or her assessment of the internal factors of ability and effort and such unstable factors as luck. We attempted to compare and contrast any change in attribution with basic assumption change about job security and career prospects. In this chapter we want to extend our research into the field of self-sufficiency to see whether there is a similar connection between subjects whose basic assumptions change and how they view their prospects of survival during enforced change at work. Finally, we will seek to identify any commonalities between such internal changes and their possible influence on a move to seek self-employment.

The link between perception of control and affective responses has been referred to as 'perceived controllability and optimistic bias'. There are those who see it as a 'robust psychological variable that predicts behaviour, emotion, motivation and performance' (Harris, 1996). 'If an event is perceived to be controllable it signifies that people believe there are steps one can take to increase the likelihood of a desirable outcome' (Weinstein, 1980) and such risks 'are usually associated with substantial optimistic biases' (Weinstein, 1983, p.14). The correlation between controllability and optimistic bias ought to be self-evident, as it suggests that what an individual has experienced in the past affects

whether he or she approaches the next similar threat as an opportunity or not. There is a significant reservation about the supporting research, which has often focused on routine, functional tasks or assessments of likely occurrences in individuals' perceptions (Harris, 1996, p.34 ff for a full review of the literature). In our present research we would have to say that the threat to future employment adds a different factor to the assessment of the individuals concerned.

Routine occurrences have either been experienced before and therefore there is some knowledge already held about likely outcomes, or common sense might suggest that one option would be safer than another. An example would be the assessment of risk in a car accident of being the driver compared with being a passenger (McKenna; 1993). Not surprisingly, most subjects feel they would be better off being the driver – at least controllability might seem to be more likely, even if the control is only illusory and the optimism, perhaps, not based on a realistic assessment. Again, the context of our present research asks subjects to reflect on their experience after the event rather than make an assessment beforehand. Our own approach is to ask how far subjects feel stronger or weaker as a result of the enforced change to which they have been subjected. It allows us to probe further into the basis of any optimism expressed to establish how realistic or detailed are the objective factors of survival that make them believe they would now be more successful if they had to face the same circumstances again. We link this change of perceptions to pre-existing basic assumptions that may have been acknowledged before the changes began, to discover whether changes here might account for a different assessment of self-sufficiency. This is not entirely novel as a hypothesis. How individuals change as they leave

university and enter into the world of work has been the context for similar research (Fournier, 1996, 1997). Constructs are used instead of basic assumptions. But the purpose of the overall research is similar. 'One would therefore expect some significant differences in the nature of the constructs used by 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' graduates at entry (Fournier, 1996, p.369). The results suggest that 'those graduates whose career became more successful were initially equipped with a more useful set of constructs to make sense of organisational reality' (ibid, p.381). We can accept that the focus of this kind of research is, indeed, about adaptability to a new situation. In our research the context for the individual is more complex: the organisation appears to be repudiating the individual and although some subjects may survive more readily than others, how each feels about the experience is always worth examining in detail (Doherty & Horsted, 1995; Grove, 1997). So, we will be looking at survival and self-sufficiency under perceived threat from the organisation and its relation to basic assumptions about job security and career prospects.

Our original quest to examine this had been the assertion by some subjects that they felt stronger as a result of their experience of enforced change at work. This seemed to be a statement about perceived self-sufficiency. In some research the same idea is described as self-efficacy, that is, 'a generative capability in which component cognitive, social and behavioural skills must be organised into integrated action to serve innumerable purposes' (Bandura, 1977, p.122). In his later work, Bandura clarifies more specifically his definition as, 'people's judgement of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. It is concerned not with the skills one has but the judgement about what one can do with whatever

skills one possesses' (ibid, 1983, p.393). This coincides exactly with the focus of our own research: we want to ascertain how subjects perceive the application of their skills to survival and success in circumstances of enforced change at work. We have added in one other distinction from the literature: subjects may well have survived and even be proud of their ability to find a way out of threatening change effectively. However, they may also have distinct feelings about that experience which can play a part in their optimistic bias about the future. Subjects may have survived but still not feel self-sufficient (Brockner, 1992). To examine this more clearly we have employed a further distinction within the larger context of self-efficacy, that between cognitive control and behavioural coping ability (McCarthy & Newcomb, 1992). In the case of cognitive strategies the authors describe change as a 'reframing' and we will examine how far that change of self belief is related to a reconstruction of basic assumptions. In this part of our research we have compared our subjects against two axes: how they felt about themselves as a result of the experience of the enforced change they had just experienced and what they did, if anything, about changing the outcome of the events for themselves.

We believe that this distinction between cognitive and perceived behavioural coping allows us to examine whether 'global beliefs about one's capacity to control the event in question may be independent of beliefs about specific control relevant behaviour' (Harris, op. cit. p.30). The difference may be between a general expression of belief 'I feel confident' and an attributed statement like 'I feel confident because...'. The scope of the subjects' confidence may offer further information on the basis of their optimistic bias and how far it applies to perceived job security and career prospects.

## DEPENDENTS

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We have already identified subjects who exhibit a basic belief that the organisation owes them security of tenure in their job and a putative career until such time as they choose to relinquish it. We have examined the evidence to indicate that such dependency leads initially to anger and recrimination. We might expect such subjects to respond negatively and to feel powerless in the face of future threat. It is true that some of them do. Miss G, aged 52 with 32 year's service with C & E would be typical, 'No, not stronger. If it happened again? I don't think so? Self-employed? I would need financial security before I considered that option'. Her colleague Mr S, aged 52 with 33 year's service is equally emphatic, 'It gave me a big downer. When I got home I was in tears – and that's only ever happened once in our married life'. We saw that their strategy for survival is to sit tight and just be difficult, 'I am now more outspoken than I have ever been. I tell you I am unsafe to let loose on the Investors in People assessor'.

At first sight it would appear that dependent subjects feel weaker and do nothing to get out of the organisation. So, not only is there no evidence of cognitive coping but no positive strategy either. They sit tight, are obstructive and wait for early retirement or redundancy. But drawing that conclusion would not reflect other responses from those whom we can justifiably describe as dependent. Mr K, aged 52 with 33 year's service responds slightly differently to the question of whether he feels stronger, 'In terms of toughness of mind, yes. That always stands you in better stead. If I were younger I would be more prepared to venture outside. But at age 50-plus I don't think I could get an introduction to anything else. Self-employment, perhaps. But that depends on networking and I

don't find that easy. But the potential is there'. In the case of this subject's response we might say that there is a perceived cognitive coping ability at the personal level of survival but the perceived behavioural coping ability is focused on a sit-tight and if necessary wait for an appropriate introduction to something more desirable. The implication of his response is that he does not perceive his experience as offering many prospects elsewhere and is disinclined to adopt a strategy of proactive searching for alternative employment. Any reframing or reconstruction lies in the area of ceasing to believe that C & E will offer anything like his expected career development. Similar in response is his colleague, Mr F, aged 52 with 33 year's experience, 'I do feel stronger and I do feel more self-sufficient. I am quite prepared to put myself outside the service. As for leaving, we'll accept it if it comes. As for me my expectancies are different now. My family has all left home. I was determined to see it through till the end, even though the world was changing around me. I thought, "I'll stay and see it out".' His coping strategy is to refocus his energies on family and friends, seen as a worthy recipient of his efforts rather than the organisation, which has repudiated him and failed to discharge its expected responsibility of career development and job security. Shortly after this interview, Mr F was invited to apply for the next grade up - the post of Collector, or which there are only 14 in the UK and would give him total control in Scotland. He declined and remained in post as a deputy. Again, in terms of cognitive beliefs both subjects allege that they feel stronger but neither is prepared to accept onward moves within the organisation. Only an invitation from outside the organisation would, apparently, be welcomed, though proactive seeking of such a position does not seem to be actively considered.

## **INDEPENDENTS**

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In contrast to subjects who feel dependent on the organization for job security and career progression, we identified subjects who did not feel dependent in the same way. They seemed to take responsibility for their own career and job security and offer basic assumptions that suggested they accepted this duty without question. They value their own independence and are openly proud of their ability to survive on their own. However, even among these subjects there are interesting contrasts between cognitive and behavioural coping abilities. Not all independent subjects respond in exactly the same way to enforced change at work. Mr H, aged 24 with three year's experience is a graduate sports trainer. In answer to the question of feeling stronger as a result of the experience he is emphatic, 'No, weaker'. The source of this loss of confidence, however, lies not in his impotence to change events. It is focused clearly on management, 'because if it happens again who's going to be fighting our corner? Will there be a public outcry? Will the boss fight? No!' So, generalised expectancy of protection by management and therefore control has gone and he now feels exposed to future threat. But this does not change his capacity beliefs. His coping strategy was to go out and seek training to become more transferable to similar work opportunities elsewhere. He was happy to take any offered help to develop this employability and with another member of the team went on external courses, 'Well, we got some training - special development conferences. We networked and shared information. I went on an Industrial Society course with Katie. We agreed it was a complete waste of time. Otherwise I think I had to get on with it on my own'. He can devise development strategies while remaining cognitively unconvinced because his basic assumption remains that he

needs a protector to fight for him inside the organization.

His colleague, Mrs S, aged 53 with 6 year's service has had several jobs including ten years as a self-employed owner of a hairdressing business and therefore might have been expected to be more resilient. However the same basic assumption is expressed, 'I hadn't been here long enough to be well protected. I have to support myself. We were a close-knit bunch. People lost their jobs; there was no togetherness anymore. I just lost heart. Someone was fighting our corner and then he lost his job. There was no meeting, nothing. All the in fighting - words and no action and then no words'. The basic assumption is stated simply, someone should have pulled it together. It is clear that her depression is focused on general expectancies of the organisation and its managers to provide her with protection. Her own capacity beliefs are not in doubt, 'I am a strong person. I am determined. I have a pride in what I do. You have to do the best. That was my father for you. He was a teacher and very strict. He taught his three daughters to do their duty to the best of their abilities. He accepted me as the numbskull of the family. I never did anything after I left school'. Her coping strategies were demonstrated in her subsequent explanation of her career, 'I had two boys and then I went hairdressing as a receptionist. Within a year the business was up for sale and I was asked if I would like to take it up. I did and I did it for 10 years. Would I do it again? I would like to open a B & B in the north'. Her strategy and capacity beliefs are intact, but not within the present organization where her cognitive beliefs still require a protector.

Some independent subjects express the total optimistic bias referred to in the literature. They are definite about the strategy for success within the organisation and will continue to take their chance inside the organisation by

using political means of furthering their career prospects. Mrs P, aged 37 with 18 years service and the most senior female in the service states her basic assumptions very clearly, 'ability may determine how far you get but attitude is far more important. You must be positive and enthusiastic. You have to be stable in yourself - emotional intelligence is vital. You have to know when to push and when not to push'. She interprets her own experience and derives the meaning and value it has reinforced in her mind, 'I think I have grown with experience now more than ever and that gives me the ability to look at people doing the job'. Now, this response may well suggest both optimistic bias and coping strategy together. But her response changes somewhat when she was asked about her perception of her value in the marketplace, 'very limited. Whatever I have achieved is not rated that highly by outside organisations. Then I have a lack of management qualifications, which makes it difficult to prove to another employer that I have something important to offer'. Her strategy beliefs when focused outside do not find her with the same optimistic bias. When asked about outside prospects she is as negative as subjects who express dependent basic assumptions. Her only coping strategy is to succeed inside and her cognitive belief only relates to her present employer.

Not all subjects are as definite about their basic assumptions. Miss J, aged 29 with ten year's service replied to the question about feeling stronger, 'I don't know. Possibly. It wouldn't bother me. It didn't bother me. I am fatalistic. Colin (her manager) had control. We had no control. I was out coaching. I was bringing in the money. I just feel the same'. Nonetheless she has applied for jobs in Australia and as an Air stewardess with several airlines. 'I'm laid back. How much can you do? Not much. It's out with our control. Just make sure

you're bringing in the money and then they've no reason to sack you'. As to her future development, she has a plan, 'When I left school I had an HNC at college on day-release. I wouldn't get any further without qualifications. Colin used to say that I was capable of something better. It'll take me a few years but I'll go for it'. Hers was an interesting reply overall: she distinguishes between her own indifference about the organisation and attests lack of control. However, she is proactive and reflective about her own future and positive about her prospects. She seems to exemplify the earlier definition of self-efficacious, 'it is concerned not with skills one has but with judgments about what one can do with whatever skills one possesses' (Bandura, 1985, p.393).

Thus far, then, we can identify quite different cognitive and behavioural coping abilities. Perceived control may or may not bring with it optimistic bias. And optimistic bias extends to areas of proven ability but not necessarily to unproven prospects outside the organization. Therefore, not all dependents lack optimistic bias - they may have another focus for their energies. But, neither are independents entirely optimistic and if they are, their optimism may be confined to a competence reflecting their previous internal experience. Few subjects seem to consider a journey into new and uncharted employment. Judgement about what one can do with the skills one possesses seems most likely to focus on past experience or present job - hence, perhaps, the need of an introduction from someone outside the organisation.

## **ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES OFFERED AND RECONSTRUCTION**

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One obvious bridge into new employment and career prospects is the offer of employment elsewhere. Subjects who accept, offer the researcher an opportunity to examine change that may occur in basic assumptions about the role of an employing organization. There is an interesting contrast between those dependents that have had a job offer and accepted. Mrs T, aged 37 with 8 year's service says, 'I definitely feel stronger. Quintiles helped me. I got the experience I needed and then I was headhunted by Scotia where we are much more of a team. I can work well in a team I trust. I didn't think about it before I moved. But I feel I can do more if I have to'. In contrast, her colleague, Miss M, aged 52 with 18 year's service, has likewise been invited to join Scotia and has accepted. Her response to the question of feeling stronger for the experience of enforced change is somewhat different, however, 'I don't feel stronger. There were a lot of values that I lost. Trust and loyalty meant a lot to me. I gave extra hours and they couldn't have cared less. I'm not going to stay and be miserable. I am more myself than I was before. I like to have respect for the people I work with'. Both subjects have had and accepted an offer from the same company and their capacity beliefs and strategy beliefs are similar. But their cognitive coping ability differs: one accepts change and welcomes opportunity to restore normal service. It may take time for the other to find her basic assumption of trust and loyalty restored at the new organisation. The difference in optimistic bias can be accounted for in this difference of expectancy about the new organization in spite of their both having proof that they can survive outside in a new job.

Independents who receive a job offer do not necessarily respond with the optimism that might be expected. Mrs R, aged 34 with 10 year's service at C & E definitely felt stronger at the end of the experience of enforced job change and it projected her into a job search, 'I was offered two in retail as HR manager of the House of Fraser but I thought I did not have enough experience for this. In the end I was offered a job here in the Staff Support Unit. It's hands on – just as the training administrator's job was. After that papers, papers, papers. Applied but didn't get it. The decision went to someone else. Then I didn't really know what to do. I had seen Shirley (colleague) move and other people were selected for things. I didn't want fear of the unknown. The manager phoned. He said the job hadn't worked out for the person appointed, would I like it now? This time they appointed me. It's the best job I've ever done. I am very happy with this job. Promotion? No, not out of this job.'

Her capacity beliefs are intact and transferable, but at this stage within the organisation only. She has developed a strategy capacity in another job offer inside C & E and her general expectancies are still firmly invested in her own confidence to succeed. But there is an interesting post-script in this interview. She speaks of her husband's experience first, 'my husband was in the Civil Service, too. Now he's been left for 5 years. He works incredibly long hours but his enthusiasm is transformed. He really enjoys what he does. I am very jealous of him. They recognise his efforts and he's got more opportunity, too. I asked her whether she thought she would still be with the organisation in 10 year's time, 'Probably not. I might get an HR position eventually. But I think I'll chuck it in and go back to University. OU? I thought about that. But with two young children you don't get the space. Probably Caledonian University will be my

option'. If we compare this independent to her colleague, Mrs P, the youngest, most senior female officer in the service, Mrs R has had a job offer from outside and does realise her potential to apply her skills, so her own self-efficacy has been demonstrated to her. But she also realises that further qualification will be necessary to achieve this more desirable employment condition which her husband now enjoys. She begins to plan a strategy that will enable her to develop her capacities and this reinforces both her control and her optimistic bias. But whereas Mrs P avoids outside contact and believes her own prospects outside are minimal, her younger colleague, encouraged by a job offer she didn't in the end accept, is now able to plan for a time when she will have increased her qualifications and be able to accept outside employment confident in her enhanced capability.

## **INTERNAL JOB CHALLENGE AND RECONSTRUCTION**

Of the subjects we have researched thus far some have either been offered a job and refused or believed that there was no chance of getting employment elsewhere. Others have accepted employment having applied to a similar organisation and look forward to restoring the attractive and protected working conditions they once experienced before the enforced change at work. For others, however, there was no job application or even a thought about employment elsewhere outside the organisation. For two subjects there were similar events, which brought about a totally unexpected prospect of employment. Both were placed in an exposed position by the organisation in jobs that were considered to put them at risk and did not appear to offer much future.

Since 1992, C & E had accepted the Government's requirement for Market Testing in which parts of the service are put out for competitive tender. The in-house team won 80% of these bids and so no progress in reducing the Treasury's pay bill was achieved. So, four years later another idea was conceived called Private Finance Initiative in which departments were designated first of all to work with an outside provider and then be subsumed within the control and ownership of the outside company. One of the departments designated for this treatment was Information Technology, headed by Mr McP, aged 46 with 23 year's experience. Starting as a VAT inspector he quickly achieved promotion and pioneered team collection techniques in London before returning to his own Scottish Collection as a successful career officer. He was called to Head Office to sort out the fledgling IT department in 1996 and became conversant with the technology and adept at sorting out the planning problems to integrate the different systems then developing independently in different offices. He then found himself working with two outside providers who were given a 12 month integration period before buying into the IT department completely. During the months of working with them Mr McP has been offered a job by each of them and been put forward for promotion to Assistant Collector within C & E. His answer to the question of how he felt after this enforced change was unequivocal, 'I feel stronger. Ask me in 18 month's time and I will feel stronger still. I have exposed my own weaknesses. I know what my talents are. I don't need a Godfather. I have done it for myself. This opportunity has just turned up for me. Now I have to give it 100%'. He moves on to interpret the meaning of this event and its value to him, 'I think I am more realistic. I know what is possible and I know what is feasible. I could face unemployment. I could be a risk-taker'. There can scarcely be a clearer attestation of newfound self-

sufficiency in an individual than this statement. His demonstrated behavioural coping ability triggered two offers unsought by him from outside organisations with which he worked. This revealed to him just how valuable he is in objective terms so his perceived cognitive coping ability is expressed in a reconstruction of his basic assumption about the organization he has worked for in his career so far, 'C & E is just a collection of individuals. There's no such thing as fairness or unfairness. You have to make your own luck. It's just as the Personnel Manager (who offered the job) said'. What started as a threat is now perceived as an opportunity, 'I can stay, I can perform well and I've got luck. I've been given a choice: I can stay where I am or I can go with the contractor'. So, this reinforcement of his ability by an outside contractor develops into strategy beliefs with options to stay or go and reinforces his reconstructed basic assumptions about his job and career prospects and combine with control beliefs and optimistic bias.

His colleague, Mr McD, aged 37 with 19 year's service in C & E, found himself in similar circumstances: having been a successful training administrator he was given a post in the central office and told to research a project on IT compatibility with audit software systems. With no previous experience he threw himself into the project and set about interviewing the software providers about specifications and application of their software programmes. This brought him face to face in negotiation with the managing director of the company who became impressed by his knowledge of the software requirements at C & E, his ability to ask detailed questions and interpret and apply the answers he received. He was eventually offered a job at the end of the project as sales representative and manager of their office in Scotland. He accepted and joined

them immediately. Asked how he now felt about the experience of enforced change he said, 'I am stronger in self-esteem, yes. I haven't experienced any shock and I thought that I would do'. His interpretation of the meaning of this and its value is expressed in terms of a tentative coping strategy, 'I feel empowerment. Do I feel more marketable? No, not yet. I need to look at quality and the IPD (Institute of Personnel and Development) and the American gurus and how all this applies to my product. I feel cosy here working alone. I've enjoyed it. I get busy. I impress others. I make presentations to clients. I have no problem with that. I seem to have built in confidence. When I think how I started off in BT in 1979, that and all the things I learned in C & E have stood me in good stead'. Again, the subject is triggered into reassessing his abilities by the recognition and job offer from an outside provider with whom he worked in C & E. His strategy beliefs are clarified by acceptance of that offer. But his control beliefs are more tentative as he seeks to improve his understanding of his new environment and consolidate his knowledge and skill through this new experience. As he does so he reflects on his past experience not with recrimination but with objectivity, 'I miss the people and I miss the work. But I was running out of time. I had an offer and it gave me prospects. I have personal satisfaction and I have pounds (£s). I have always dreamed of having my own business. But with Ethos I am more committed than I have ever had to be. I believe C & E have a lot to learn about managing people. It's all to do with leadership style, communication and honesty. People are hurting with low self-esteem and still there are no leaders'. For these subjects there is clear evidence that acknowledgement of their abilities by an outside agent reinforces their cognitive and coping ability and in turn reinforces optimistic bias.

## **INTERNAL SUCCESS, SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND RECONSTRUCTION**

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Along with subjects who have had a job offer from an external source, there are those who have achieved well within the new organisation. It might be expected that such subjects would exemplify a similar perception of control and optimistic bias. Mr A, aged 47 with 21 year's service in Syntex remained in his post as Head of the Animal House. This facility received significant up rating under the new company and his profile rose as he both became responsible for quality standards submission to the regulatory bodies and conducted clients around the facility. His answer to the question about feeling stronger was emphatic, 'Absolutely, undoubtedly. I am comfortable about what I'm doing and it's changing all the time. There's a huge change in the volume of work. It also makes you look more critically at your staff. If you ask them to do it then you need to be sure they can do it. It means being more focused. It makes you structure your day. It's not just a question of 'if you don't do this today you won't get your bonus' – you want to do it. There's urgency to get on and target what you need to achieve. If you have a meeting you feel something gets done'. His experience of a successful working environment has been enhanced, 'Here is a venture capital company and I am able to go back and say I got my figures wrong. He (Dennis Gillings, the founder) is committed to expanding. We have to be ready to receive visitors at any time. We're used to talking to customers. More responsibility. People feel there's a purpose to their lives and that they are listened to – and not only listened to but valued – and that's a real shot in the arm'. So his capacity beliefs have been enhanced and acknowledged and his control beliefs are intact within the organisation. This feeling of being valued enables him to feel optimistic about the future. His expectancies about his career

are changing too, 'branching out on my own would not worry me. I wouldn't be looking for redundancy. But if it came I would not be worried'. I asked him whether this new confidence stemmed from the experience he had had of enforced change, 'absolutely, yes. Redundancy gives you confidence. I once had a friend who was a salesman and wanted to become a photographer. He opened a small shop. It's just the fact that you've got to take a risk. I'm not a risk-taker, but if push came to shove I could do it now. It's personal development - but that's encouraged'. Mr A is almost a textbook example of enhanced capacity, strategy and control beliefs. He has demonstrated behavioural coping ability and this has reinforced his cognitive coping ability and left him feeling positive about his prospects either within or outside the company. His basic assumptions about a future occurrence of similar enforced change at work are an optimistic assertion of survival and optimism.

Not all subjects who have done well under the new regime are quite as optimistic in their self-assessment as Mr A. Mr G, aged 34 with 11 year's service with a local authority observed his sports department decimated in numbers of employees sacked, then witnessed his boss pushed out before receiving his boss's job and the rump of 8 people rescued at the end of the Council's quest for 'savings'. His response to the question of his feeling stronger was more constrained, 'More street-wise, yes. I would now see them coming and be better able to cope, better able to justify myself and the services I am responsible for'. His interpretation of the meaning is reflective about himself, 'I took it all personally. But I've come out of it now. I have a broader range of things that I can do. I got a lot out of that. More self-sufficient and that makes me more marketable'. So, again, his capacity beliefs have been extended in range and he

accepts that his strategy beliefs have meant greater career options for him. He now draws conclusions, which he lists, 'don't take it personally. It's not your fault. The staff don't see it as politics, they see it as you. Be hardened. People look after their own backs. Be wary of that. Prepare the case yourself and streamline all the time'. The sense of being less in control is more evident here. He may feel more self-sufficient and more marketable, but as yet he has not done anything to probe the acceptance of that market and there is still uncertainty about future career prospects to be resolved in his own mind before confidence and control beliefs can be fully restored. He accepts that he is more employable but optimism awaits a concrete offer of a new job.

Mr M, aged 44 with 11 year's experience with Syntex, came into his own with the reorganisation. He became a director and his staff went from 20 to 60 people. From the start of the enforced change he had made an objective assessment of the company's continuing need of his services, 'I felt very positive about the future because they needed experienced people'. He interpreted the meaning of this in terms of a coping strategy, 'what I had to do was present myself and gain control of the situation. I had to get information and find out what was involved in running this new business'. So having done that very successfully he could be expected to feel more in control. However, his response is negative and his basic assumption definite, 'I don't feel more in control. You're only as secure as your next business. There was a business build-up and the staff I had went from 20 to 60 people. It came at the right time for my age and I felt more entrepreneurial and more confident - more battle-hardened. There were staff issues to cope with all the time. I'm an overall manager'. His concern is based on doubt about alternative career prospects, 'There are not that many

opportunities. I'm not sure whether I would want to go it alone, though'. So, here there is clear expression of capacity beliefs and strategy beliefs surrounding the experience of taking on a big department and being successful at it. But overall, success in the job does not appear to extend to a feeling of self-sufficiency or a generalised expectancy of control beliefs. His behavioural coping ability has been amply demonstrated but his cognitive coping ability is more tentative and uncertain. He has control of the organisation and management of the present work but no clear optimistic bias about his future career prospects.

His colleague, Mr B, aged 39 with 11 year's experience, sounds more positive. Like Mr M, he found a significant increase in staff and has successfully organised his department into successful production, so his answer to the question of feeling stronger could be anticipated, 'Yes, I feel stronger. I took over 4 people and now I have staff of 21. I am in the managerial ranks so overall I feel very positive. At a personal level I feel I have done very well. Having gone through all that I have - you are cosseted. It's up to you from there on in'. To the question whether this awareness had been gradual or sudden he replied, 'I think it was just at the takeover by Quintiles and I was asking myself whether I should stay or not. And I thought, "I'm going to make this work. I will become more marketable".' This proactive assertion expresses the reason for his optimism. He has clearly demonstrated an increase in capacity beliefs and his strategy of working inside the organisation has proven successful, too. He expresses control of his own prospects, so is definitely more self-sufficient, although his self-efficacy has not been put to the test outside nor has he yet investigated how marketable he may now be. However, his basic assumptions focus clearly on career management, which companies are perceived to have opted out of and

responsibility now rests with the individual, 'You have to have an attitude towards your career – one of stability. People are less willing today to wait for things to happen. They are more proactive now. Loyalty cannot exist to the same extent. Companies don't matter anymore. This happened quite recently when a friend of mine working for a local firm said, "You're no longer required" and I said to him, "Don't take it personally, it's not you". You can have this loyalty but it takes a blow and then you never trust again. But for the individual the result is you will have clearer goals about what you want to achieve'. His reconstruction is complete and that, perhaps, is the final cognitive coping ability. It indicates that the subject has moved from organisational dependency to taking responsibility for his own career development.

Other subjects, whose performance within the organization has been exemplary and ostensibly successful, express similar doubts about traditional dependency on the organisation for career development. Mr R, aged 42 with 12 year's experience in the organisation has done well with new investment in his department and the opportunity to develop 20 new graduates within the department. But within a year nearly all of them had gone and he was barred from taking on any more as financial targets company-wide had been missed and therefore budgets frozen. His own comment on the company was similarly critical, 'I am cynical about Quintiles. I wasn't. I used to want success. I'm better off than I was three years ago. I'm battle-hardened. I'm sharper and I'm working for the same boss. The last six months have been frustrating. The site is badly run. I have become just another workhorse'. However, his assumptions about himself have changed, ' my self-esteem has risen'. Here, again, there is optimistic bias and belief in his abilities. For, having met with frustration within

the organisation his control is now focused on self-management and his career. He is philosophical about his future, 'Move on at the right time. I'm dedicated to academia, pharmacology and spotting winners. I've got two compounds in development and four in pre-development. Avoid the second-rate, see and follow up things worth proposing, serendipity and flexibility.' He is another ostensibly successful manager who harbours reservations about the significance of the present organisation in his future career development.

### **JOB SUCCESS, SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND RECONSTRUCTION**

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For some subjects the achievement of self-sufficiency comes during enforced change at work but is triggered by factors of personal experience. Each is forthright in his or her acknowledgement of the criticality of the event. Mrs A, aged 33 with 5 year's experience at Syntex answers the question about feeling stronger directly, 'Yes, I do. But that's not the transition. It's the opportunity I've had as a result of the change, the rate at which we do things'. She is site safety officer and so, in a sense, is like a consultant to all the departments. In the aftermath of the change her role was acknowledged and she took to heart Dennis Gilling's words about grabbing opportunity to develop your job. She has since offered her services to all the sites in the UK with official support from the company. I asked her whether she felt more aware of her market value. She interprets the meaning of the experience for her, 'Yes, it's the experience I've had and the reassurance I've found. Sometimes I lack confidence in myself. When I came I was encouraged to get on with it. Hopefully I merit that trust'. She never doubted her ability to cope but she admits that she doubted her cognitive coping ability at the time. And yet her strategy beliefs included

applying for jobs during the transition and even being offered another job elsewhere. 'There were 121 of us and we didn't want to look for new jobs. I was offered a job in a semi-conductor plant but I didn't want to go. I could have taken redundancy. That would have been a lot of money for one year's work. Anyway, I was glad not to have to move. I much prefer it here because I love the work'.

Her colleague, Mrs W, aged 50 with 7 year's service, did well under the new company, too. She was offered a job in business development and accepted it, leaving the working peer group and venturing out to do outside visits to clients in order to tender for work. She, too, answers the question about being stronger emphatically, 'I do feel stronger. This is the real world. I've never been redundant. I could have lost my job. Now I've survived another change. I don't listen to rumours anymore. They didn't talk us through it'. But and regrets are subordinate to her overall conclusion, 'my own marketability has gone up times twenty. I have a career now in business development, which I can take anywhere I want to'. Her capacity beliefs are well developed and her opportunity to succeed has been seized and reinforced her control beliefs. Her coping ability has been extended beyond the confines of the scientific work and into exposure before clients from a wider field in the business. This demonstrated coping ability gives her confidence and enables her to look at both her career prospects and the company in a new light. She defines her new basic assumptions, 'Decide what you want, a career or a job. This lot couldn't spot talent if it rose up and hit them in the face. Get with talent spotters. Avoid the whiz kids, for them it's just a stepping-stone. As for Quintiles, look for a smaller organisation not a global one. Here there is lack of training, lack of direction and no respect for senior

management. I'm looking for a job – so are most Syntex people'. For her, the capacity beliefs are reinforced by recent experience but control beliefs within the organisation are uncertain. Her strategy beliefs now focus on the marketability that she has achieved and she looks forward to establishing herself successfully elsewhere. Her self-sufficiency is based on perceived behavioural coping ability and perceived cognitive coping ability, which combine and exclude the current employer who is not considered a reliable vehicle for new career aspirations.

### **PERSONAL CHALLENGE, SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND RECONSTRUCTION**

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For some subjects the trigger for change and reconstruction is domestic. Mrs S, aged 33 with 15 year's service at C & E. was transferred out of training and sent to fraud division to collect debts. Within three weeks she identified that training was needed for a group of staff with low morale. She set about doing this voluntarily and became very successful. She looked around for a job but decided to seek a transfer instead and is about to move from Glasgow to Manchester. For her there was a doubly difficult situation: the break-up of her marriage and single parenthood with a son aged 6. In answer to the question of feeling stronger her response was adamant, 'I do. I proved I could do it. I feel happier now. I had some doubt. I had to be strong. I didn't expect it to work out and it did. I never thought it would get so good so quickly. I am very practical and logical. I am always thinking about things and I thought, "For 24 years my mother had a miserable marriage. She would have better off apart from my Dad". Then the Springboard course came along and I got a lot out of that. I had to ask myself what I wanted to attain, what were my goals'. This identification of her basic assumptions was followed by a reassessment of priorities and an action

plan, 'I had to plan the change in my marriage and my job at the same time'. Her newfound self-sufficiency includes both cognitive and behavioural coping ability and enables her to be optimistic about her own career. But the organisation itself is more critical, 'you have to be on the trail. You have to be on target. You have to be able to prove that when you invest in surveillance there's going to be a result. There is lip service to Investors in People but the caring side is not there anymore. People are interested in their families, problems at home and pressure. But here it's all about management, stress, retirements and more stress. There's been an attitude shift'. The present conditions are devalued compared with her past experience, 'Thirty years ago young people were helped through change. But, now there is only bitterness, spitefulness and moaning. Trainees come into that atmosphere from day one and they soon adapt to the situation by directing their frustration at management. No one's aware of what management's being asked to do and they are not involving the staff anymore. There's no education now, whereas that was all there for you - family and friends supporting you'. For her, self-sufficiency brings capacity, strategy and control beliefs and even optimistic bias for the future. That future, though, need not now be with her present employer.

## **SURVIVAL, SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND RECONSTRUCTION**

One final group of subjects express a slightly different view of their prospects as individuals and their assessment of self-efficaciousness. Both are senior officers in C & E and both experienced a fundamental re-evaluation of their personal lives and professional prospects. Mr D, aged 52 with 32 year's service with C & E responds to the question of feeling stronger as a result of his experience of

enforced change at work, 'No, weaker. Before, I would have put the department before myself. Now, I am only interested in early retirement. They want you to put them first the whole time. But there's no future in this department. I don't even know whether I want to carry on until I'm sixty. It's a battle now just to come in here. But I won't let them alter things. In three years I'll be 55'. He experienced the situation of a son who was charged with a serious crime and he felt he received very little support throughout his ordeal from his boss and the organisation, 'All this was very traumatic and I was beside myself with worry. Throughout that whole time my boss only asked after the situation once. For two months he never picked up the phone. I was disgusted. I could not believe how they could treat an AC who had brought in more revenue than the rest of the bunch of them put together'. His focus now is on his future career and on that subject he was more optimistic, 'I would like to promote Scotland. I think independence is likely and if that comes who knows what that may mean with regard to our relations with Europe. I don't know. I might go on my own. I had always wanted to be a solicitor. Perhaps I might do that'. His colleague, Mr R, aged 51 with 31 year's experience, had a similar experience of total desolation this time as a result of a mental breakdown, which caused him to be off sick for 6 months. The same disillusion about the lack of support in the organisation was apparent in his responses, 'I don't feel stronger. I can recognise danger signals in myself and other people. The organisation used me as a yardstick. We always had the best practice in Edinburgh'. His conclusion about the organisation is negative, 'this is a gradist organisation and doesn't know how to recognise talent. People out with the organisation recognise that talent'. As to support in the organisation, 'counsellors? They were useless. No one came near me. I was left completely on my own. The first time I saw anyone from the

department was when the six months was about to run out and they had to come round to tell me that I was going onto half-pay'. However, his final summary includes reconstruction of his basic assumptions, 'It taught me about value and that self-value will develop in the job. I believe in the learning organisation and efficiency and quality management. I was proud but now I'm anxious, anxious to satisfy myself, to find a niche. At the end of the day, if they don't value you, you can always find people to put value in you. I'm bloody good at what I do'. His self-assertion goes hand in hand with his disgust with the organization.

The last remark reinforces the self-belief that now characterises his assessment of his own abilities. As to his coping strategy, he has been offered the Quality Manager's position and is determined to make it a success, 'Just lateral promotion. I've probably gone as far as far as I could. I'm too outspoken. I've achieved upward but not outward, not in my mind. If there was a job, I did it. I am a visionary. I love ideas and concepts. I need that. My time back in VAT has made me more pragmatic. What's achievable, that's my motto'. So as far as his strategy beliefs are concerned, he is still dependent on the organisation for a job and sees opportunity only from within. However, control beliefs lie in his freedom of thought and originality of approach to undertake a mission and his lack of optimism lies in his failure to define any prospects outside the organisation. So, he has greater control cognitively in terms of self-awareness and confidence in his own abilities. But his behavioural coping ability still remains within the confines of the present organisation and that does not fill him with any optimism.

## **SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND RECONSTRUCTION**

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For some researchers, there is the belief that subjects who respond differently to enforced change at work are somehow mentally programmed differently from the start. One example is graduates who have been followed through significant changes in their careers such that at the end of the research 'successful' subjects are compared and contrasted with perceived 'unsuccessful' ones. 'Those graduates whose career became more successful were initially equipped with a more useful set of constructs to make sense of organisational reality' (Fournier, 1997, p.381). We can ask the question, are such constructs the perceived cognitive coping abilities mentioned by McCarthy & Newcomb or are they the perceived behavioural coping abilities, which are described as what, 'people undertake and perform assuredly - activities they judge themselves capable of handling' (Bandura, 1985, p.393)? As we have already observed, much of the fieldwork focuses on simple acts of competence or assessment of likely risk in familiar situations, like risk of accident while driving or being a passenger in a car. In our own research the context has been different: the subjects have had to survive something that they could neither have foreseen nor have practised for. So, for them the experience enables review and assessment of what they have learned about themselves, the organisation and their prospects of successfully facing a similar situation again. It is at this point in the individual's explanation that we can try and identify whether perceived behaviour coping strategy triggers cognitive coping ability or the reverse. Only then can we identify where the link is with optimistic bias.

## SUMMARY

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As we review the subjects whose results we have researched, we can identify the links between the theory of self-sufficiency, and optimistic bias, looking at whether cognitive factors and coping strategies combine to reinforce each other or not. Firstly, it is clear that the complexity of the experience of enforced change at work makes it difficult for the researcher to rely on simple causal connections between the factors. We have found that subdividing coping abilities allows us to focus on different factors at work during the sense-making period: beliefs about self-capacity; beliefs about strategy or a plan of action; beliefs of general control if a similar enforced change were to recur (Skinner, 1995, p.26). We observe that those subjects who have identified self-capacities are not necessarily inclined to be optimistic about their prospects in any future, similar event. Individuals may lack the courage to venture outside the organisation, or already have persuaded themselves that career prospects do not exist outside for them. They may embark on a survival strategy and therefore feel more in control. But that is as likely to bring cynicism about their future prospects as it does optimism. Subjects whose basic assumptions include dependency on the organisation are more likely to respond more negatively than subjects who are non-dependent. As we have seen, even those who are then offered promotion may decline, feeling demoralised by the whole experience and clearly they have not recovered any belief that they can expect the organisation to provide job security or career development again. Of these dependent subjects only one has settled in another organisation and has rediscovered her optimism as her career is restored in a similar familiar setting she has come to expect.

Independent subjects, as we have defined them, have no basic assumptions expecting the organisation to be secure or to offer on-going prospects. They are usually secure in their capacity beliefs already and the change merely reinforces them in that belief of self-sufficiency. Their strategy beliefs relate to their ability to work the internal promotion system and still come out ahead of others. In this way they typify the assertion that 'global beliefs about one's capacity to control the event in question may be independent of beliefs about specific control-relevant behaviours' (Harris, 1996, p.30). Further, we can say that the barrier most independents encounter is the perception they believe outsiders have about the relevance of their experience and aptitude. In other words, 'they undertake and perform assuredly those things that they judge themselves capable of managing' (Bandura, 1985, p.123) but do not consider their skills are accorded transferability by employers outside the organization. So, returning to the distinction between cognitive and behavioural coping ability, we can confirm that behavioural ability precedes cognitive ability because the confidence only extends to the boundaries set by the subject – in this case, organisational boundaries secure both career and job. We can identify optimistic bias as being bounded by and confined to the behavioural, capacity beliefs that are often confined to the current job. None of these subjects considers the question of transferability – that they could be doing very similar tasks and even the same job in a different context or environment outside the current organization.

The exceptions are those subjects who have experienced a reconstruction of their basic assumptions or reframing, as McCarthy & Newcomb refer to it (ibid. p.4). The most obvious examples are those who have been made a job offer outside the organisation, the ultimate validation of outside employability. For

them came a totally unexpected offer sometimes from a sub-contractor working within the organisation itself. In this case, the traditional definition of controllable as an 'event people believe there are steps one can take to increase the likelihood of desirable outcomes' (Weinstein, 1989, p.12) does not quite apply, as they have not yet proved their capacity to do the actual job. What it does illustrate, however, is that subjects given the option perceive that someone else outside the organization, whose judgment they trust, believes they have the capacity and this gives them both a generalised control belief and a strategy belief. This allows them to suspend judgement about their ability to do the job and triggers an optimistic bias unqualified by self-doubt. These subjects demonstrate the classic definition of self-sufficiency most clearly as 'concerned not with the skills one has but with judgements about what one can do with whatever skills one possesses' (Bandura, 1985, p.393). We observe that the judgement concerned is that of the outside observer who works with them and confirms their ability before they do so themselves. So, we can see that in this instance perceived cognitive coping ability precedes perceived behavioural coping ability and that this is the reverse of the subjects we have previously noted in either dependent or independent conditions. In answer to Harris' question, 'how do such global ratings relate to less abstract beliefs about relevant skills and attributes and how do they relate in turn to expectancies concerning actual behaviour' (ibid. p.27) we can assert that the intervention of a trusted outside agent who has observed the capacities at work in the subject leads to a job offer which, even if not immediately accepted, triggers optimistic bias and cognitive coping ability. Not all who receive the offer take it. But it does have a significant effect on optimistic bias.

By contrast we can compare subjects who have done well within the new organisation both in significant promotion and extended responsibilities. Here we observe capacity beliefs extended and enhanced and even strategy belief about the way ahead. But such perceived behavioural coping ability does not necessarily bring with it perceived cognitive coping ability. The total confidence exhibited by those offered a job outside is tempered in these subjects by reservations about the future moves within the company, such as 'you're only as good as your last business'. There is a cynicism about continued success based on a belief that the promises made of a bright new future may not be justified later on in the company's behaviour. For these subjects there is much less optimistic bias apparent and, indeed, we sometimes recognise latent fear and risk about their general expectancies or control beliefs. Observers and colleagues within the organisation might be forgiven for assuming that subjects' evident behavioural coping ability is complemented by a similar cognitive coping ability. However, such confidence would be misplaced.

Our final group of subjects who had both survived enforced change and identified their own capacities and outside options exhibit no optimistic bias at all. The definition of self-sufficiency would be satisfied in their responses, but clearly they express no optimistic bias and still feel aggrieved. We could identify the basic assumptions that remain as a lingering legacy of past trust - since obviously considered misplaced. They exhibit cognitive coping ability and even identify the openings they would like to have outside the organisation. But there is no evidence of optimistic bias about their future prospects whatsoever.

We have observed, then, different factors of controllability, including capacity, strategy and general beliefs in different subjects. Optimistic bias only

extends to belief demonstrated to the satisfaction of the individual subject concerned. But an outside agent is often responsible for triggering that process of confirming behavioural coping ability leading to control of career prospects and optimistic bias. What is more ominous for organisations embarking on enforced change at work is the effect on subjects who have clearly exhibited such behavioural ability and might be expected to exhibit similar confidence in terms of their cognitive coping ability. For subjects who have progressed inside the new organisation there is remarkable lack of such confidence and therefore no sense of optimistic bias at all in future employability outside. For Bandura, self-efficacious people remain 'unshaken in their perceived efficaciousness' (ibid, p.420). Our findings in this research suggest that for some subjects who have otherwise proved their success in being promoted to a new job this is clearly not the case. They will assert that they feel weaker and they interpret the meaning of that experience as a devalued one. Only evidence of reconstructed basic assumptions about career prospects independent of the organization would indicate likely perceived self-sufficiency and optimistic bias.

There is 'a pressing challenge facing researchers to devise ways of testing distinctive theoretical formulations of the mechanisms by which perceived controllability and optimistic bias are related and, in the process, to eliminate hypotheses from the large array of potentially viable mechanisms' (Harris, 1996, p.33). We would maintain that optimistic bias is dependent on the specificity of behavioural coping ability identified by the subject or evinced within the subject by a trusted outside agent. Neither perceived cognitive coping ability, nor perceived behavioural coping ability guarantee optimistic bias, which will be withheld wherever the subject believes there is an outside constraint for fulfilling

the expectations they have for continued career progression in an organisation. We return to our assertion that the reconstructed basic assumption is as the only likely guarantor of optimistic bias expressing self-sufficiency in career control.

## **SELF-SUFFICIENCY, RECONSTRUCTION AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT**

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How individuals come to embark on self-employment has been the focus of much research both here and in the United States. Just as success in transition is sometimes predicated on predetermined set of beliefs (Fournier, 1996) it made sense to see whether there was any similarity in basic beliefs among those who had made such a move into self-employment. There are those who assert that a different personality profile exists between employed and self-employed people (Kolvereid, 1997, p.24) and those who believe that entrepreneurial behaviours can in some way be ascribed to certain personality types (Dyer, 1994). Alternatively it might be thought that self-employment is sought because there is nothing else available - apparently confirmed by the fact that there is a higher percentage of unemployed than employed people embarking on self-employment (Dennis, 1996, p.645). Finally, there is always the hope that identifying a self-employed profile of attitudinal beliefs could enable successful entrepreneurs and innovative people to be more readily identified (Kirchhoff, 1996, p.629).

The present research included three subjects who had moved into self-employment during the research. This provided us with an opportunity to examine whether these subjects have a similar set of responses to the questions we have asked in this chapter and whether a particular reconstruction of basic

assumptions might be common to those who move into the self-employed state.

Mrs E, aged 40 with 6 year's service, spent her time as a trainer with team of four staff under her. When the company was taken over they were all sacked except Mrs S who was asked to work on. She stayed for a few months before setting up in business on her own. Did she feel stronger as a result of what she had been through during enforced change at work, 'Yes. It has made me look at the skills I have. You look at your CV again and interview technique. You need to think where you can be of benefit. The last six months have chipped away at my confidence. I need to get back in control. I know it's up to me. I need to feel empowered and in control of myself'. At first we seem to be hearing the same capacity beliefs typical of a successful professional. Indeed, when she was asked about her commitment to the job she said, 'I need to be committed. People throw up so many issues in training. You have to be secure in yourself to be able to answer the questions put to you by sceptical trainees'. So, doubt at the way the organisation was undermining her confidence in front of staff on her training courses and at the treatment of her team, made her review her commitment to continued leadership of company training events. Clearly, capacity beliefs are joined to control beliefs as a company that delivers uncertainty to its trainers exposes them to hostile staff audiences and puts their credibility at risk. Lack of control brings uncertainty in front of quizzical or hostile audiences. For Mrs E the option of working elsewhere included working as an associate trainer on a self-employed basis. I asked her how she felt about it now, 'I just look on it as part of my career development. I look on it in a positive way. It's not just an event in itself. It can build your confidence. I don't look at it as a personal slight. There was just a loss of focus, a loss of structure. What did the organisation want?

What were its priorities? They had become fuzzy'. Optimistic bias returns when the subject can account for her own strategy beliefs. She knows she is a good trainer and that the market needs confident performers like her. 'Risks that are perceived to be controllable are usually associated with substantial optimistic bias' (Weinstein, 1989, p.14). It would be exaggerating to claim substantial optimistic bias. However, we could claim that the subject identified the freelance trainer role as being free from dependence on the company whose lack of clarity had eroded her confidence in front of classes in her previous role as an in-house trainer.

Mrs McD, aged 32 with 6 year's service, entered self-employment via training, too. She expressed from the outset an independent set of basic assumptions and had two parents who had been self employed. The death of her mother reinforced in her mind her need to take control of her life and she is a strong proponent of this basic assumption to others. 'I was offered another six month contract and people could not understand why I was not taking it. I had good relations with the staff on site and it came as something of a shock to them. It was not comfortable for a lot of people to know that I was leaving voluntarily'. Her own beliefs are stated clearly as she interprets the meaning of her experience, 'Ask what you want. Keep your expectations of organisations down. Look at why you are still there. Be honest with yourself. If you are not getting anything out of it then move on. Don't look back, the past is irrelevant. Look at what you want. Make conscious choices'. She expresses all three self-sufficiency factors: perceived behavioural coping, perceived cognitive coping ability and optimistic bias. In this, perhaps, she is an ideal subject for self-employment.

Kolereid's final belief is that encouraging more individuals into self-employment depends on decreasing the security of organisational employment and/or increasing the security of self-employment (ibid p.30). We would argue that organisations have achieved the first part all on their own by the way they have conducted enforced change at work. The second part of the equation is being achieved by subjects who have had to re-examine their capacity beliefs, have found that their behavioural coping ability is enhanced and, with the confidence of their cognitive coping ability reinforced, can embark on a career either employed or self-employed unencumbered by dependence on organizational promises of job security and career development. However, it would be difficult to identify reconstructed basic assumptions as a prerequisite for self-employment. The only similar factor the three self employed subjects had in common was previous experience of someone self-employed in the immediate family.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT & BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

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In previous chapters the response of subjects to enforced change at work has focused on separate factors of the effect of such change on individuals. How people experience transition and how they interpret it plays an important part in their ultimate assessment of its value and meaning as an experience and the perception they have of themselves and their prospects in future employment (Brown, 1998, p.245). However, attempting to measure the effects of a single emotional upheaval against an arbitrary selection of criteria begs the question of how the factors in question were chosen by the researcher.

One current debate that seems to depend on a preset list of elements around which the individual assesses of his or her employment prospects is that contained in the psychological contract. The theory suggests that there is an internalised list of expectancies that every individual has which includes all the factors considered to be essential and unassailable and which cannot be threatened without putting the commitment of the individual to the organisation severely at risk (Hallier & James, 1995).

The idea of the psychological contract has emerged over a twenty-year period and owes its origin in part to the literature on climate in organisations. Indeed, an early definition describes the contract as 'a set of unwritten reciprocal

expectations between an individual employee and the organisation' (Schein, 1978). Immediately, the researcher is presented with a problem of how to access something which is as implicit or implied, not just within an individual but with whoever is thought to be mediating the contract. For some researchers there has been an attempt to clarify the terms a little more closely: 'an implicit contract between an individual and his organisation which specifies what each expect to give and receive from each other in their relationship' (Kotter, 1973). There is still an internal element in this definition. Is everything expected by either party expressed from the outset, or is it implied and is only expressed when threatened by enforced change at work? It comes close to equating with a standard employment contract of rights and responsibilities in that some elements are implied rather than expressed – as a formal contract would be. This makes the question of subjective insights and individual assumptions a continuing concern to a researcher looking for consistency of definition. More recently, the psychological contract has been examined in the light of violation or breach – that when one side, particularly the organisation, does not fulfil the expectations of the individual there is a feeling of outrage and belief that the good will and trust previously characterising the employment relationship has somehow been destroyed (Jahoda, 1982; Burchell, 1992; Fryer, 1992; Hallier & Lyon, 1993). A more recent definition of the psychological contract has attempted to redefine the psychological contract as: 'the perceptions of both parties to the employment relationship, organisation and individual, of the obligations implied in the relationship. Psychological contracting is the process whereby these perceptions are arrived at' (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995). Here, more emphasis is laid on 'obligations' and suggests an 'ought' factor of moral constraint or duty which is paralleled in our own definition of basic

assumptions. Interestingly, too, the concept is here referred to as a process, presumably meaning that it is not an instant perception but one that grows over the period of employment and can vary according to the way in which events are interpreted for meaning and value.

The problem with using the term 'contract' is that its use may seem to derive from the legal context in which a contract is a closely defined set of conditions to which two identified parties gives binding consent, as in a bank loan or a mortgage. The problem with the organizational partner of such a legal contract is the identity of the party contracting with the employee. Is it the company, the manager, HR department – each may have had a part in the formation of the contract? But which is ultimately responsible for supporting the contract during the period of employment? As one objector to the concept of psychological contract says, 'since the psychological contract is largely 'in the eye of the beholder' the embedded subjectivity seems likely to undermine the central concept of an agreement. Where the implicit encounters the implicit, the result may be two strangers passing blindfold and in the dark, disappointed at their failure to meet. Or, to put it another way, both may have drawn up contracts in the hope that the other has drawn up exactly the same contract. But since both contracts are locked away – in the mind rather than in the safe – there is no way of checking' (Guest, 1998, p.652).

In answer to this proponents of the psychological contract offer an amended definition of the psychological contract as 'an individual's belief regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party. A psychological contract emerges when one party believes that a promise of future returns has been made, a contribution

has been given and thus, an obligation has been created to provide future benefits' (Rousseau, 1990). Again, this is open to the charge of subjectivism but at least it focuses on the individual employee's perception of what employment obligations he or she assumes the psychological contract contains.

Before we leave these definitions we can examine the different wording used in each. For the question arises whether an expectation is the same as a perception or a belief and how far these differ from a promise or an obligation. Are these different ways of describing what may lie in the individual's psychological contract or are they, in fact, different concepts denoting a priority in the mind of the subject or a subtle distinction that might, say, suggest that a threat to one element may be accepted while another would be resisted? The disputants do not clarify this point.

The present research may offer a way of clarifying some of the conflicting factors in this debate. The purpose of the questions asked of subjects has been to uncover their basic assumptions. Such statements express expectancies and from our previous discussion we have accepted that assumptions and beliefs are not distinguished in the mind of an individual subject. What we need to establish is how strongly the individual views a particular factor and whether, in the event of its being broken by the other party, an obligation or promise is thought to be violated or breached (Rousseau & Parks, 1993, 33). As in previous chapters, we have accepted that an immediate and direct probe invites the accusation of leading the subject. So, using the questions of surprise and sense making we believe we have uncovered individual beliefs of confirmed or disconfirmed basic assumptions more accurately (Louis, 1980). In particular, we can also examine how far the subject views the failure to meet the objectives set to uphold

an expectation or belief as a matter of simple violation of promise which can be assimilated or the breach of a solemn obligation to be resisted, or requiring a reconstruction of the previously held basic assumptions. For this purpose we have accepted the definition of a psychological contract as 'an individual's belief of the obligations implied in the employment relationship'. What we can also do is examine how far the individual seeks to re-establish the framework of obligations in a way that restores them to their original format, or whether there is reconstruction of the original beliefs about employment and the elements of the psychological contracts in general and a replacement by different basic assumptions more resilient to enforced change at work.

### **THE CONTENT OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT'**

The question of what comprises the content of the psychological contract has focused on elements that would be found in a normal contract of employment: pay, time, and conditions of service. These could be described as the tangibles of a contract. But, some researchers assert that behind these lie other more intangible factors like loyalty, trust and the expectation of career development. These two classes are sometimes referred to as transactional and relational respectively (Mac Neil, 1985). What has interested researchers has been the effect of these different factors under the threat of breach or violation (Hallier & James, 1996; Rousseau & Parks, 1993). 'Research has begun to highlight some of the outcomes of employer violations on the employment relationship - the class of perceptions reflecting the individual's sense of grievance over the impairment of the relationship' (Hallier & James, 1996, p.2). For some researchers the desire to identify antecedent elements and then assess their

correlation with other elements has given rise to some significant results about unmet expectations in individuals and how these interact with such consequences as labour turnover and job satisfaction (Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994; Wanous et al, 1992). The present research takes a more eclectic approach to the elements that subjects believe are threatened in their basic beliefs about their employment relationship and its prospects during enforced change at work. For, we believe that the traditional assumption that there is a preset selection of expectancies may have diverted researchers from identifying subjects who do not have a psychological contract in the conventional understanding of the term.

## **CAREER PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTANCY**

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Some work done on the content of psychological contracts suggests that while such elements as pay, work, fairness and job security feature among the items cited, that 'career issues did not figure prominently except indirectly through aspects of fairness' (Herriot et al, 1996). Others go so far as to suggest 'that we should be cautious in assuming that career concerns are particularly salient' (Guest, 1998, p.654). It may be true that those who feel they have no career prospects outside their present organization will consider career as a prominent expectancy and that younger managers 'have rather more modest expectations of the rewards that are likely to accrue from employment' (Goffee & Scase, 1992). But overall we would expect some readjustment in assessment of work opportunities either within or outside the organisation (ibid p.383). At very least the impact of the threat to continued employment should trigger the examination of alternatives, available strategies and opportunities for moving on

elsewhere (Anderson & Schalk, 1998, p.645). So, the present research accepts that career will be a factor of useful comparison between subjects in the assessment of their future employment prospects. We have already identified subjects who express basic assumptions, which include dependence on the organisation and those whose basic beliefs are independent of the organisation. We have contrasted the responses subjects made with their attribution and self-sufficiency. We have also identified subjects who appear to have started off as traditionally dependent on their organisation but who have since reconstructed their basic beliefs to be independent of the organisation even if they have chosen to stay inside it for the time being. We would, therefore, expect to find similar distinctions reflected in the present chapter and in this respect we agree with Guest that career may be more or less relevant in individual cases. What we shall be looking for is the perception of career and its relation to basic beliefs about the organisation and its influence on the contents of the psychological contract.

## **AGENCY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONTRACT**

The problem of who holds the psychological contract with the individual employee is important to clarify here. It should be the case that just as there will be many parties involved in setting up the contract over an extended period at work initially, there may be several contestants who are thought to be responsible for any breach or perceived violation. It may be that identifying different perceptions of who is thought to be the key agent in modifying the psychological contract may coincide with basic assumptions about who was thought to be responsible for safeguarding them during enforced change at work

In this regard we can refer to a similar discussion relating to organisational commitment. Early attempts to assess this alleged important factor in the organisational commitment have sometimes drawn up lists of behaviours that assume the individual demonstrates such commitment at work by certain behaviours. Such questionnaires range from statements of assent to organisational values to continued commitment to the present job and staying in the organisation (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1984). It may be true that 'commitment can develop either through affect or through behaviour and each may reinforce the other (Allan & Meyer, 1990). We are interested less in identifying such correlated behaviours than in observing how basic assumptions affect the individual interpretation and meaning of enforced change at work. In this respect we can accept that there may be multiple agents and this is reinforced by findings that as a concept, organisational commitment is itself diffuse and focuses on different individuals, be they the immediate manager, senior management or the organisation as a general concept (Coopey & Hartley, 1991). We believe that the perception of different significant agents may correlate to particular basic assumptions about who should be responsible for intervening to repair breach or violation of expectancies, promises and obligations that comprise the perceived psychological contract. 'Commitments will appear to differ depending upon how persons evaluate them' (Brown, 1998). It is the purpose of this chapter to explore such differing evaluations and the influence that basic assumptions have had on the interpretation and meaning of enforced change at work in detail.

It has been alleged that 'there is a dearth of investigations examining the process by which workers alter their conception of the psychological contract'

(Hallier & James, 1996). This chapter intends to contribute to this investigation. It will examine in greater detail the links that are suggested exist between the perception of the individual and the behaviour of other significant parties in the formation and transmittal of the psychological contract. In the present research, therefore, we have restricted the number of subjects to those who have demonstrated significant surprise at what did or did not occur and then relate this to their evaluation of events that they considered significant in the effects on the psychological contract.

## **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS & DEPENDENCE ON THE ORGANIZATION**

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We have already identified subjects whose basic assumptions include dependency on the organisation for career aspirations and job security. We will revisit some of these individuals again, but this time seek to relate their beliefs to responses in detail on self-belief and the implications for both career and the organisation. As we do this it will become apparent that there are similarities in response within each of the three organisations from which our subjects are drawn. There are also similarities based on background, personal experience and particular working experiences that we will seek to identify and comment on.

There is a common set of responses that exemplify individuals who are dependent on the organisation. For them, the history of the service and their part in it dominated the first part of the interview. Mr K, aged 52, with 33 year's service in Customs & Excise is such a subject, 'I see myself very much as a C & E person. I have always been in C & E. I am an organisational animal. I was brought up in it, not just by my own managers but also in the Civil Service Union

whose foremost representative in Scotland I became. I always had the overview of the senior management team. I was proud to be trusted by the Collectorate in Glasgow Collection. Peer group? I didn't have a peer group beyond my immediate manager. My work was about flexibility and freedom. It was worthwhile and it had value – value in the eyes of others. I felt totally committed. One was waiting for selection to senior management. I had access to the Deputy Collector. At the end of the corridor was the Collectorate. All three of them were a team and I was part of that team'

Then follows the narrative of the surprising event that signalled a change in the organisation's approach to amalgamating the two Scottish Collections of Edinburgh and Glasgow, 'It came like a bolt out of the blue. I had been all poised to take the next step. I had been down to the Civil Service College and had had my interview for the post of Lecturer, which would have given me the rank of Assistant Collector attached to it. I remember being called to the Collector's Office and told that the training departments were to be amalgamated and that there was a choice to be made between JR and myself. I said jokingly, "I suppose this means I could be made redundant?" and to my surprise I was told, "Yes, it does." So now that total guarantee of security had gone. That had a marked effect on me. My assumptions about the job I had with the organisation had gone completely'. Here, the basic assumption of permanent employment is the violated belief, followed by the assumption about his on-going career prospects. It was likely that his basic assumption of trust in senior management to further his career would be violated, too. Over and above these pragmatic considerations emerges the evaluation of the significance of these events: a feeling of being devalued completely.

His response is one of feeling betrayed, 'I was angry, certainly. I was depressed at certain stages. I felt that I had lost something, too. There was a desire to recreate the culture of the Glasgow Collection together with a feeling of what's the point? I missed the tearoom where two or three of the Collectorate gathered in the morning. It was the Collector's collection point and we were able to mingle informally and know what was going on'. This reference to senior managers is contrasted with the situation as it came to exist for him with his new senior manager from the other collection, 'my line manager was useless. It was a culture of powerlessness. It was so arbitrary. And all the time we had to pretend it was OK. I had always thought that senior managers were a sophisticated bunch. They would look after the needs of the peer group and apply themselves to avoid mismanagement. Well, that didn't happen and I had to think again about the quality of our senior managers'. So, this is another basic assumption violated and reconstructed by Mr K. He continues in detail, 'I had always believed that when the chips are down people will rally round and it will be OK. I tried to reassure the others around me, but when it came to me there was no support. I involved everyone in the decisions and explained what would happen. I tried to make sure that they were in a position of opportunity as they faced uncertainty. But no one did that for me'. Here again is an expression of violation of trust by the individual manager to whom he now reported and depended on for his future prospects. There was now no basis for his trust.

At this point we begin to emerge into the broader issues of both the organisational implications and the individual responses to the relational factors of the psychological contract, like career. Mr K is a trainer and well acquainted with the terminology of this discussion. So he responded directly to the question

of the contract:

'It changed from an organisation that took care of you, that had a career ladder that would help significantly. I would never recommend it to anyone else. Change is just a political whim. I would advise anyone to get a skill or a profession. Jobs for life? A career? If I had to contemplate another job, it would be on an interim contract'.

So, from absolute trust he moves to little or no trust in the organisation, due to the poor behaviour of a new manager. In any career it might be said that at some stage an individual will experience a poor manager. Indeed, this was a critical, enforced change at work in which he had ostensibly won a new position within the organization at the expense of a colleague. And yet the betrayal is seen as irrevocable, only an interim contract would be considered in future. Trust and loyalty are on hold and to be parcelled out on a interim contract basis. It might seem unlikely that one perceived uncaring manager should trigger such a total loss of trust in the organisation. Perhaps it is the possible loss of his job that has brought a sense of grievance at the violation of an essential and valued basic assumption.

This brings us to the consideration of other options for a change in his employment and career. I asked him about his prospects in the outside market. 'I don't think they have been enhanced. There are mistakes in my profile. Like most in this organisation I am a general manager with specialist interests. I am not an on-feet trainer'. This is significant coming from a man who had applied for the Lecturer's post in the Civil Service College. But perhaps his reservations arise from the perception that he would be faced with a more demanding

audience as an outside trainer, 'I would need to adapt. You have got to perform well. You have got to have impact. If I were younger I would be prepared to venture outside. But at age 50-plus I don't think I could get an introduction to anything else. Self-employment, perhaps, but that depends on networking and I don't find that easy. But the potential is there'. And long-term he may need to reassess his position, 'I ask myself what I want to do now. Assess my other options. Explore. Do what I want to do now. Be my own man. Practically speaking, perhaps I need to acquire qualifications recognised by the outside world. Build a CV. Identify my market niche. But it came unstuck at the Civil Service College. I would have had a three-year contract as a senior lecturer living away from home during the week with no return but in-house consultancy. But I didn't get the final offer. But then I ask myself if I would really have wanted to go south and let everything go here'. There is here an underlying uncertainty about his future career direction. His father was self-employed so he speaks with experience of his own inadequacy at networking but the impetus needed to get him applying to outside organizations is constrained by his own perception that his profile is not strong enough. There is no suggestion that he will embark on the necessary qualification that he refers to. The traditional elements of trust and loyalty have been violated; he cannot see a way of taking outside work unless someone else offered it to him. He is doubtful about initiating such contacts himself. He is not proactive in embarking on a programme that would lead to the qualifications to make him more employable elsewhere. He remains with the organisation, blaming it for the ineptitude of his manager and his perceived loss of career prospects. He will stay until made redundant, 'I am totally demoralised now. There isn't the same drive other than self-regulated goals. Perhaps that's easier to manage now'. He is a classic

example of a traditional psychological contract breached as his basic assumptions are disconfirmed one by one.

Looking at the majority of subjects in the same age group and with a similar length of service we would find initial responses much the same: horror at the lack of consideration and betrayal following all the years of faithful service that they have put in. Much like spouses who have been deserted, there is no thought that they themselves have in any way been either disloyal by, say, looking for another job, or untrustworthy in not fulfilling their employment contract as conscientiously as they should have done. Only the outrage of the innocent characterise the responses. Miss G, aged 52, with 32 year's service, states, 'I began working in a Government department because of security in the job and an opportunity to work my way to the top. It was a stable environment for me and for everybody else involved too'. After the enforced change the same outrage is apparent but it doesn't focus on a particular manager, 'It was a job for life, but now, they don't really want you. It was so cold-blooded I couldn't believe it. We had no qualifications recognised by the outside world. We were completely naked'. Certainly the images of violation are evident here. Yet the focus is not the organisation, it is the Government, 'don't be bitter with the organisation. It's a question of politics. Privatisation and value for money will always be with us and we are not emotive subjects like teachers or nurses. Anyone can have a go at us, we're fair game'. And as for the psychological contract, 'I would never have been disloyal. But I'm not so silly now. It's a different feeling now. Now I'm just a number. Would I look for that trust and loyalty if I joined another organisation? I don't think so. There is no mention of career prospects at all. But there is a perceived loss of value, 'you have to see

us in a different light: we are not wasting time and money, we are incorruptible. We are creating a unique organisation. "Lose it," they say. It's all sharp-practice. It devalues the Civil Service. It's to be dismemberment by the opposition (the Inland Revenue). This will happen because of betrayal. Those who ought to be standing up for us will stab us in the back'. Her colleague, Mrs R, aged 47 with 27 year's service, is similar in the emotional tone of her response, 'I felt I made no difference to the organisation. I wanted to be loved and cherished. There was no one to share with. I had to work it out for myself'. This reference to a marriage contract gets close to an open-ended responsibility in the psychological contract. The change is described as it took place, 'it happened gradually. Looking at the organisation there were some good managers. John Reid was one. In those days I was in at the front end'. Her basic assumptions are challenged and her interpretation of current meaning and value very different, 'the Collectorate now are numpties. I just withdrew my good will. All I do is my role now. I don't give anything of myself at all. I'm just an HEO box 3 (average mark at Appraisal). What's my expectancy now? Just appraisal - and as long as the standards are not falling I shall be satisfied'. And finally, Mr F, aged 52 with 33 year's service and the Deputy Collector, 'My experience then was that you can't depend on the organisation for any trust. Perhaps I had rose-tinted view of things up to then in the department. But the way head office managers behaved was absolutely appalling. It sent out so many damaging messages. For all time organisational perceptions changed dramatically. The actions taken were totally opposed to all the messages they had been sending out. But I knew from this experience that I had to be self-reliant. Helping others helped me too. I used to say to others and myself, "let's see how you can restore your self-value".' This reference to self-value he then applies to himself, 'I started to restore more

self-value in myself and in others'. However, the focus psychological contract are now placed elsewhere, 'As far as loyalty and trust are concerned, all my energies are put into my family and friends rather than push myself at work. Now I just work my core hours. Life is about relationships and if in two year's time I can take early retirement then I would not object. I would take it willingly'. Certainly the relational side of his psychological contract has reduced to a pragmatic minimalism, which will find him happy to opt out sooner rather than later. Here the senior managers are the Board of the organisation, for at his level there are no other individuals for him to contract with.

Thus far then we can assert that the subjects dependent on the organisation for job security and continued career progression seem to have the basic assumptions alleged by the psychological contract literature – both transactional and relational. Indeed, the following quotation from the literature seems apposite, 'Failure to sustain enthusiasm and involvement could contribute to a body of dissatisfied employees with little inclination either to be productive or look elsewhere for employment' (Brown, 1998, p.250). It is significant that this universally depressing narrative of alleged betrayal by the organisation and ensuing withdrawal of good will by so many subjects occurs in this extreme form only in the Government Department we researched. Subjects in the other organisations used in this research do not respond quite so extremely to threats to security of employment and guaranteed career development. Indeed, not all subjects in Customs and Excise respond in this way, which brings us to subjects who have a different set of basic assumptions about their employment contract.

## **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS & INDEPENDENCE OF ORGANIZATIONS**

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We have already referred to subjects who show little or no dependence on the organization for job security and career progression. Such independent subjects are evident in C & E and their basic assumptions lead to a different interpretation and meaning to enforced change at work. Indeed, their responses are similar to independent subjects in private industry. Mrs P, aged 37 with 18 year's service is a good example. In their initial narrative about their work, independents are much more self-aware of their abilities and their response to work challenges. Their reasons for joining are often pragmatic, 'C & E was most attractive as its network was nationwide and I was in Aberdeen. This suited me as I was in control of my career and I could develop myself. I never felt constrained by the organisation. I just got confident working in the environment. It felt right to me'. She interprets the meaning of this in a reflective way, 'I am not a worrier. I have a feel for it. It's the track I take. I have no fear and I like people. I am very open. What you see is what you get. I can see an opportunity and take it. You have to promote yourself'. The value of the enforced change seems to have been the very exercise of basic assumptions independent of the organization and her self-promotion seems to have been an important factor in surviving the changes she acknowledges, 'more women had been coming into the department so although we were all very hierarchical there was a chance of breaking through. It was a question of knowing the right people who could help you do this. The good people got promoted quickly in the department. Peer group? I don't think I had one. I just had no worries and I got on and did the job. Women were beginning to break through in the department and I was able

to proceed quickly through the ranks'. There is no evidence of a change in her basic assumptions triggered by a surprise change at work. Indeed, it seems as though her beliefs have become reinforced by the changes forced on her. Each change is an opportunity to come out on top. Asked about the psychological contract she says, 'I would say I have been rewarded for my efforts. There was a time when I was getting to the point of saying 'to hell with it'. I went looking for a job but found that no one appreciates the experience you've gained in the Civil Service. They think you are just a pen pusher or a paper-shuffler'. This perception of her prospects outside colours her comments on career. I asked her about her value in the wider marketplace, 'Very limited' was the response. This time her interpretation is constrained by perceived barriers outside the organization, 'There is a perception of public service in a wider labour market that our work has no relevance to work as it is conducted in the private sector. So, whatever I have achieved is not rated that highly by outside organisations. Then I have a lack of management qualifications, which again makes it difficult to prove to another employer that I have something important to offer'. This temporary doubt about external validation of her value is soon eclipsed by more positive thoughts about her internal prospects, 'but since then I have progressed quickly and am now the youngest female Assistant Collector in the Scottish Collection. I have learned that the reward must come from me. I have to provide the ambition and drive for my own career. It's all about achievement and effort. You have got to deliver. Confront change, don't shy away from it. Ability may determine how far you get but attitude is far more important. You must be positive and enthusiastic'.

However, management ineptitude is not forgiven so lightly. Her basic

assumptions include particular responses by managers during enforced change, 'I didn't expect the enforced redundancies we had in staffing. I didn't expect the reactive and ham-fisted way we did this. I would say we are good at efficiencies as a department but that we lack skill in bargaining. I think we give too much away. We have much better systems than Inland Revenue, but we are being given away'. This last opinion about the organisation is de facto about the Board of Customs & Excise and its senior managers. Here personification is at work but it illustrates the point that subjects may not make clear distinctions between decision makers and the organisation in more general terms.

Her colleague, Mrs R, holds similar basic assumptions of independence from the organisation. However, her view of the enforced change at work is somewhat different, 'it was frustrating. There was good potential in the job. But we needed time to deliver. We couldn't do it in the time. In the end I volunteered to take a posting. I had had enough of being a training adviser. The training unit was sold down the river. So I looked for another job'. The result was two external job offers, which she decided not to take 'as I thought I did not have enough experience'. In the end she was offered a job in the staff support unit that counsels those going through difficult personal transitions. 'They just appointed me. I am very happy doing this job'. Thus far we might expect a classic happy ending and reestablishment of basic expectations. However, it is not quite so simple: 'I was always ambitious and competitive. I used to get very uptight about box markings. A box 2 marks you up for promotion. I wanted the T & D O post. But now I see it's only a means to an end. It's what everyone else expects. It's no longer enough just to want to climb ladders. If I didn't enjoy the job I'd get out. I've never felt like that before. I've always been very business focused

but now I feel differently about myself'.

For both these subjects the traditional elements of the psychological contract seem to be irrelevant. There is no mention of betrayal or breach or violation. The subjects survive any enforced change reinforced by their own self-awareness and independence. Both give similar advice to an imagined prospective new starter, 'Take every opportunity. Don't look at it just as a career. I go along taking what I need and I would do that anywhere. And as for qualifications, 'I might get an HR position eventually. But I think I'd chuck it and go back to University. Probably Caledonian University will be my option'.

Neither subject mentions a manager nor do they mention the organisation. Trust and loyalty are never mentioned either. If we look for the traditional responses expected of those exhibiting organisational commitment (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1984) there is no reference to values, effort, pride in the organisation nor is there the desperation of one who would take any job rather than leave. Their only difference is in the willingness to embark on qualifications that would make them more acceptable to an outside employer. Neither admits to having a peer group. But then neither did the first subject. The difference between dependent subjects and independents lies in the different basic assumptions of job security and continued career demonstrated by dependents. Such individuals lean on his or her manager and in the event of failure there is an immediate impact on the basic assumptions of organisational commitment in terms of loyalty and trust. There is an obligation invoked by the subject, which almost guarantees the response of violation when the expectancy of security of employment and continued career development is not fulfilled or is actively repudiated by the line manager. For independent subjects, there are no

such constraint and basic assumptions are likely to be statements of self-sufficiency. Managers may be helpful or not, but no great dependence is made on them. The only difference lies between subjects who look to become more qualified in order to be more attractive to a prospective outside employer and those who prefer to stay inside and continue to take advantage of their aptitude to work the system and get whatever promotion they want.

## **ORGANIZATION, CONTEXT OR CONTENT**

The distinctions that individuals express in their description of their organisation are worth examining in more detail before we move on to subjects who have reconstructed their basic assumptions. For it became apparent during this research programme that individuals with similar basic assumptions whether of dependency on the organisation or independence of career management may see their relationship with the organisation differently depending on the company they work for. It became apparent that few, if any, subjects responded quite so definitely and negatively as the civil servants did. In contrast, Pharmaceutical chemists might well be dissatisfied with the way enforced change was handled but they were not as fixated about the obligation of the organisation to continue providing them with a job and career progression. The descriptions of Syntex Pharmaceuticals are bounded by realism, particularly in the last days where individuals recognise the inevitability of the change that came about. The life described is one of satisfaction and opportunity for autonomy and control. Miss M, aged 52 with 12 year's service says, 'we always had the same goal in our work because each team was responsible for work on the same compound. It was a happy life with varied interests and lots of

autonomy and freedom to arrange our working lives, as we wanted. We really did our own thing unless a project need dictated that we work to interface with particular deadlines. It was a different culture, really. We were a bit spoiled, I think. We were not exposed to the real world. We couldn't have continued'.

What exercises their minds more specifically is not the organisation but its senior managers. The process of takeover found these latter managers taking off whilst leaving the workforce on site with few prospects and no opportunity to take redundancy. Feelings run high about that. Mr G, now a Director of the new company, aged 46 with 19 year's service with Syntex expresses a commonly held view, 'Roche closure was not surprising. Makes you question your own motivation. People don't think as creatively as they could do. I had lost the vision. The senior management betrayed us. Some of it was personal. Some of it was senior management feathering their own nests with golden parachutes and so on. I felt betrayed on behalf of others too. I wouldn't do it the same way again'.

Mrs H, aged 34 with 5 year's service, contributes to a commonly held conspiracy theory, 'They went around supposedly assessing what we did and then announced the closure of the site. There was a senior management build up of the site, supposedly to prepare us for a new buyer. But they knew all along they intended to close us down and just wanted to keep as many of us on site so that we would be more saleable'.

What concerns these subjects is not so much the change in organisation as the change in working practices. Mrs T, aged 37 with 8 year's service moved to find an organisation that could offer her what she had known at Syntex. She says, 'in

a pharma you have freedom and you can make your own suggestions. Here we are autonomous apart from a review every four weeks. There is development and we are lucky there is a good career structure. We should have had the same at Quintiles. We hadn't the same involvement with the development of the work. In a CRO (Clinical Research Organisation) your time is taken up visiting clients. For us the hours began to mount up horrifically and it became an increasing struggle to find people to do the work. The rewards are nothing like those in pharmaceuticals and nothing like working for a small company like Syntex. There you could find each other's company and involvement in the work interesting in itself. In Quintiles there was nothing like the same satisfaction'.

This different perspective on work put a different emphasis on the comments made about the process of enforced change. It was almost as if the organisation is a background to the interesting work which absorbs these, mostly PhD, chemists.

We can observe a similar perception in the team of sports trainers working in East Dumbarton District Council. The organisation is almost invisible in their narratives of work, which focus mostly on their sports projects that are mentioned by name and in great detail. Mr H, aged 24 with 3 year's service says, 'I got on well with the job. It was a blank page to me so I could write on it more or less what I wanted. The job was about managing, budgeting, and programming over the period. It was then that I got involved in CAOS - sounds ominous! It stood for Children's Activities Outside School. There were ten sessions, all themed. It took off well and we passed it over to a contractor'. Mr G, his manager, aged 34 with 11 year's service says, 'I ran fitness clubs and youth clubs in my spare time. If I was offered things I always said yes

because you never know where they might lead. I wanted to pick up on the admin side. At the time of Compulsory Competitive Tendering I wrote the specifications. I was doing that documentation for about two years'. Change for them was an everyday occurrence. It was coped with and provided opportunity to get more experience.

## **AUTONOMY AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT**

For the pharmaceutical workers, enforced change triggers reflection about the new company and some comparisons with the old, but not many. The working conditions did change and therefore the transactional elements of the psychological contract changed, too. Mr B, aged 39 with 11 year's service is ostensibly one of those who did well out of the merger with Quintiles. From a department of 4 he now runs a section with 21 staff. But his comments are factual and evaluative, 'Yes, I took over 4 people and now I have a staff of 21. I am in the managerial ranks. So, I have done well for myself. And overall I feel very positive. At a personal level I feel I have done very well'. So, what had changed were the controls surrounding everyday work, 'Yes, we went from compound-centred to billable hours. But what's the individual getting back? Is it money, reward? Dubious. What I feel is there has to be a feel-good factor on any project. There has to be recognition and feedback. I strive for that. But efficiencies? No, there has to be a feel-good factor. You can have efficiencies, but what's in it for the individual? It hits them harder. They are making so much money for the company. But, then they say, "We're going to cut back on training" or "Travel's cancelled this week".' I asked him how this affected morale, 'at a senior level not at all - they have their own jet-setting life style. At

the lower level people feel totally stressed'. His colleague, Mr, aged 42 with 12 year's experience, reflects in similar vein, 'I am cynical about Quintiles. I wasn't. I used to want success. This is human endeavour – it needs to engage the energy and enthusiasm of its people. But where's the reward and motivation for the staff? They're raking in the profit. There are management stock options, but what about the poor bloody infantry?' Mrs T who moved to a company similar to Syntex reflects on the effect of Quintiles on her psychological contract, 'It changed after Quintiles. Then we became just a factory, a production unit. The trust and loyalty were misplaced in Quintiles because they could not have cared less about the individual. As long as you are playing your part in achieving their targets then you are safe. But as soon as you aren't, you're out. And behind all this rush and tear there was nothing, no training, no support, nothing'. It sounds like a classic description of the collapse of the relational elements of the psychological contract but this time not because there were no prospects – as in the case of C & E – but because the nature of the work had been altered to destroy previous autonomy so valued by the pharmaceutical research worker.

## **THE MANAGER AND HIS OR HER SIGNIFICANCE**

For subjects working in the sports team at East Dumbarton District Council, the announcement that they were to be made redundant came during their Christmas Lunch. Their manager, Colin, made every effort to rescue what jobs he could and after two months of protracted negotiation, the small team was left while other workers went. Colin himself had to apply for the only job now available at Director level, failed to get it and was then without a job himself. The effect that this had on the team is mentioned in every subject's narrative.

The team member who took over as team leader, Mr G, aged 34 with 11 year's service says, 'I am only committed and loyal to the staff out there. During any decrease I will do my damndest to keep the team in being. But there is no strategic approach. That has to be the major effect. There is a need to save but nothing left to cut. The ethos is wrong. We focus on income, income, income. We can't cope with East Dumbarton provision'. Miss McK, aged 26 with 2 year's service, 'I don't feel as though I can trust the Council for a secure job. No one's safe now. Colin had been around for 20 years and look what happened to him'. Her colleague, Mrs S, aged 53 with 6 year's service said, 'I changed for the worse. Colin was always there. You had respect for the job he was doing. He came in at 8am every morning. He was committed to his colleagues. He would never have let them down'. So what remains for most subjects is to look for a way out or become totally mercenary. Miss J, aged 29 with 10 year's service, 'Basically, I don't have any loyalty and trust in the organisation now. I have no career prospects. I don't put in as much effort as I used to before. I do enough to get by on. If I were offered a job I would not think twice about it. I didn't think that would ever happen to me'. Mr H, aged 24 with 3 year's service says, 'I only give loyalty and trust if it means job security. After the reprieve I felt yes to that. I understood what was going on. But I look for more structure. I would like a 35-hour week'. There is a sense of the possibility of negotiation here. Traditional relational contract could be restored if other offers were made.

The effect of seeing the heroic leader destroyed has affected all subjects in the team. Pragmatism now seems to characterise their attitude to work and for the organisation there is little but contempt. The alleged trade-off between loyalty and job security has been breached and will not be reasserted by any of these

individuals. In the words of Mr H, 'if it happens again who's going to be fighting our corner? Will there be a public outcry? Will the boss fight? No!'

For some subjects the manager rather than the organisation becomes the focus of the job commitment. Mrs A, aged 33 with 5 year's service with Syntex is now both Site and National Safety Manager with Quintiles. She has accepted the challenge of Dennis Gillings, the founder, to come forward and take responsibility in her own field for the company. She is realistic about the changes, 'there's more pressure now and less laughter. Laughter was something you would hear in the corridors. There was more fun. There's more drive now. We thought we were busy then but we weren't really. Now we really are! Quintiles had its own Health & Safety. But I thought "why shouldn't Edinburgh be the centre for H & S." That was the thing that Dennis Gillings said, "If you see something, go after it," so I took it'. Her manager encouraged this initiative and when asked about her psychological contract she said, 'that's to do with your manager. You have to trust your manager. I know the staff do not like some managers. My boss pushed me for a long time. When I came I was encouraged to get on with it. Hopefully I merit that trust. I had a manager who kept monitoring. So now I get that support'. There is no fear of job insecurity, 'if it happened again I am safe in the knowledge that I could get a job quickly'. She interprets the meaning of this event, 'Sometimes you want something and you go out and get it'.

In both examples, the key role of the manager contrasts either with the organisation's no longer deserving respect because of its failure to uphold its obligations to a loyal servant, or the loyalty is transferred to the manager

entirely and no further mention is made of the organisation as the focus of loyalty.

## **RECONSTRUCTION & THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT**

As we have seen throughout the present research, there are some subjects who exhibit change from traditional dependency on the organisation to reconstructed basic assumptions and independence about what they expect by way of career support and development from the company. Within this group of subjects there will be variances both of context and content, which we can now compare.

In the words of Guest, 'the contract resides in the interaction rather than the individual or the organisation' (1998, p.650). And in as far as we can identify change within the psychological contract, the individual's ability to reflect on his or her commitment to career, manager, or organisation is a significant factor. For, 'commitments will appear to differ depending on how persons evaluate them' (Brown, 1998, p.245). Such interpretation of meaning and value of basic assumptions is central to reconstruction during enforced change at work.

There are patterns of similarity between subjects within this group of subjects who reconstruct their basic assumptions. For one or two there is a new way of perceiving themselves, their value, self-worth and their newly defined beliefs. We can expect the same anguish at the enforced change stage. Mr R, aged 51 with 31 year's service says, 'I became embittered. I was mishandled. I was misunderstood. I had sold my soul to Customs and Excise. I furthered the business in any way I could. I moved with the job and went anywhere I was needed. I passionately believed in the job'. The emphasis is flexibility in any job within the organisation, provided that this extended Mr R's career in a way

that he found congenial. When he was removed from training and lost the job at the merger of the two Collections, he was put in VAT collection. He went off sick for 6 months. 'I lost all sense of value in myself and not only my sense of value in the job but also as a husband and father. I lost my job to someone less good. They needed someone with background in organisational development. I had already done my diploma in organisational development. But that was overlooked. They were determined to do things their way. They told me they didn't know where to use me. A date was agreed and I was told I was going into VAT'. His psychological contract as far as transactional elements was concerned remained intact. He was still paid and his job held open, even if in a function that he did not want. But the relational side of development and career was directed in a way that was uncongenial to him. After several months he was able to find an opportunity to become Quality Manager to the Collection, a job that required to be designed from scratch. This new opportunity inspired him with a new enthusiasm, 'I will develop the job. I believe in the learning organisation and quality. Key players are interested and once we get a new collector on board we will bypass obstacles at collection level'. But they did not restore his belief in the organisation and its loyalty to him. 'Now the passion has gone. Now C & E are just a wage-payer. It came over me slowly. It wasn't a sudden thing. I was proud but now I am anxious - anxious to satisfy myself - to find a niche'. He comes across as having found a new focus for his loyalty and trust - other people in need. 'I have the ability to know the essentials of the job I am doing. I am able to comprehend and produce ideas that could motivate others with a vision of training and development'. His basic assumption now focuses on himself rather than the organisation, 'at the end of the day you should constantly revalue yourself. At the end of the day, if they don't value

you, you can always find people to put a value on you. I'm bloody good at what I do'.

His colleague, Mr D, with the same age and service, said much the same about the betrayal experienced at the hands of the organisation, having lost the top job in Excise and returned to managing a VAT section. Lack of support from his manager during a tragic incident involving his son, only reinforced his sense of injustice. So the traditional psychological contract had, indeed, been curtailed in its relational aspects but not at the transactional level. So, he would now consider his previous commitment to give all for the organisation to be at an end, 'before that I would have put the department before myself. Now I am only interested in early retirement'. But that is not the end of the story, for he would like to work on for Scottish Enterprise and even has thoughts of taking up law studies and finding an opportunity to work in a sector he considered in his youth but did not then pursue. His perceptions and priorities have changed, too, 'since the accident involving my son that made an indelible impression on me'. He reconstructs the basic assumptions he holds about himself, 'so now I do feel more passionately about things going on around me - like, look after the interests of the staff. I make the opportunity to do this. They come first. All the other things like personal aims, outputs, staff reporting, are less important and yet in the last few years we have spent millions promoting these things'. Both subjects now assert their individual mission within the organisation and it takes the place of the previous career that focused on the organisation and its needs and demands. It is a personal vision of service to ideals and their staff.

## **INTERNAL PROMOTION & THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT**

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There are some subjects who have ostensibly been successful in their career opportunities within the new organisation. Their managers might be forgiven for believing that they are happy with their new prospects and even grateful to the organisation. Interestingly, that happy readjustment which appears to have taken place in terms of their organisational contribution to day-to-day work objectives may be contrasted with internal doubts about the consistency and reliability of the HR messages of the new organisation. For Mr M, aged 44 with 11 year's service the issues are complex, 'I wrote my CV, looked at my options and thought about a parachute. From 300 we went down to 200 on site. I felt very positive about the future, too, because they needed experienced people'. His own career had flourished under the new owners and he is now a director of the company. But doubt remains, 'I don't particularly feel more in control. You're only as secure as your next business. I didn't have clear idea how things would go. Trust and loyalty? Takeovers never meet all concerns. Career development is a thing I'm not handling well at the moment. There is a question of morale and staff retention. My job is building up other people. Is this really what I want to do? The days when it was easy have gone. I feel a personal commitment to this kind of work. Quintiles talks about culture as a caring company. But it focuses on meeting targets. The days of working for one company have gone. I guess I'm a survivor and I don't want to end up among the dead wood'. His colleague, Mrs W, aged 50 with 7 year's service is similarly sceptical in spite of a good business opportunity being offered and accepted. The changes have affected the psychological contract in its transactional elements, 'Now I have to give 300%. I

want my life back. I am looking for a job – so are most Syntex people. There is no training. It's all about money. All they want is profit and if the budgeted results are not forthcoming then cuts on investment are put into effect immediately beginning with training'. Here we are getting closer to the relational aspects of the contract, 'the change in conditions was done in such a sneaky fashion. It was all so gradual. I'd have preferred honesty. But I've been lucky. I'm loyal, but... no one's ever asked how we feel. Here you are just a number and I miss the smaller organisation we had'. The loss of relational elements of the psychological contract is apparent in both subjects.

## **EXTERNAL JOB OFFER & THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT**

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For some subjects there has been an opportunity to develop outside their previous perception of possibilities. Sometimes it is triggered by challenge at a personal level in life that provides more resilience and a different self-awareness and perception. For Mrs S, aged 33 with 15 year's service, the challenge was the break-up of her marriage and the need to establish a home for her and her 7-year-old son. At the same time she was sent away from training into Fraud branch and decided to set up training there as a voluntary activity for fellow staff members, 'my house, job and marriage were all moving under me so I had to find security for myself. I had to plan the change in my marriage and in my job at the same time.' When asked about her psychological contract she replied, 'I feel betrayed in the way things turned out in the Training Department. We did everything the hard way. You thought to yourself, "I won't be there next year".' I asked what values she most appreciated in C & E, 'Recognition and attention – sometimes. But now it's too hands on, directive and interfering. It's even less

appealing now that we're being asked to work with inadequate resources'. And this reduction in transactional elements is mirrored in the relational elements, 'There is a lack of appreciation. They don't know what goes on. It's all about budgets, staff and resources. We are not recognised as people'. She has applied for a move to another collection to be near her new boy-friend and her final comment reflects her gratification that this move has been arranged in spite of evident working frustration, 'What I have disliked most is the promotional system. I feel bad just thinking about it. Trust? There are still cuts. I am more loyal than they are. It's a numbers game and everything is arbitrary. But now I'm happy. I have applied for a compassionate transfer and I think C & E is a worthy employer'. As for future commitment to an organisation, 'It takes time to give commitment. I wouldn't give it quickly. May be I would wait for 6 months. What I was leaving was miserable. Now I am leaving happiness to find happiness'. Another subject, who seems to have found similar release is Mrs McD, aged 32 with 6 year's service. From training advisor, she took on a contractor role and after 6 months went self-employed. Asked about her psychological contract she replied, 'I think my psychological contract has been different from others. It reflects my own belief system. People put in long hours. But their contract is not with the organisation; it is with people in the organisation. An organisation is essentially inhuman - by that I mean it doesn't really exist. What we've got is senior management devising the policy and then imposing it, passing it down to the people. It's not healthy and it breeds short-termism. I always said, after the takeover by Quintiles, "I don't care whose name is over the door, I just work for these people". The traditional relational elements of the psychological contract do not feature in these accounts.

## SUMMARY

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The present research has attempted to uncover the different journeys that individuals make in their beliefs or basic assumptions within the context of the traditional elements of the psychological contract. The idea of a journey suggests a starting point and it is here that the current debate has about it a predictiveness which assumes that certain elements will be present, if not in terms of a contract between two parties, at least in the perception of the individual in his or her expectations of the organisation.

The present research has attempted to demonstrate that individuals don't seem to have the same starting point of preconceptions or assumptions about the content of the psychological contract. Indeed, throughout these chapters, the traditional subjects expecting life-long employment and career development seem to lie within the public-sector organisation and even here they are senior, long-serving managers in their 50s with 30 year's service. In this regard we can agree with Goffee & Scase when they state, 'confronted with diminishing career prospects they are no longer prepared to sell themselves to their employing corporations' (1992, p.379).

But even in an organisation like Customs & Excise there are as many examples of younger, successful managers whose basic assumptions do not include such assumptions of organisational obligation to provide job security and career opportunity – this they are ready to undertake perfectly well on their own. Again Goffee & Scase's conclusion is supported, 'younger managers have rather more modest expectations of the rewards that are likely to accrue from employment' (ibid, p.380). We would add that they are more likely to value their own efforts

than the promises of the organisation.

Our third category of subjects has reconstructed their basic assumptions from organisationally dependent to independent and these subjects confirm the assertion that 'managers psychologically readjust their work orientations by limiting their dependency on any one organisation' (ibid. p.383). Indeed, we would go further and say that in some cases no organisation will hereafter be believed to offer a relational contract that would be trusted and valued by the individual.

How individuals evaluate the impact of enforced change at work will affect their commitment to several factors in their lives: career, manager or organisation. How these commitments are affected becomes significant when we compare the basis of their evaluation and link it with their basic assumptions, to discover whether the individual rejects, reconstructs or retains beliefs critical to organisational commitment. Looking at the overview of the subjects in all three organisations, it is clear that commitment to the company is likely to suffer most in any reassessment. Few individuals survive the experience of enforced change with their commitment to the organisation enhanced. But what we can observe is a greater focus on personal career prospects and active intervention in the jobs market both within and outside the company. Some researchers characterise the experience of enforced change as either 'calculative accommodation' or 'violation as entrapment' (Hallier & James, 1995). The subjects chosen in their research of NATS controllers are very similar in their basic assumptions to the older Civil Servants we have interviewed. However, they are dissimilar from the profile of expectancies exhibited by independents and reconstructs and these two groups of individuals together

comprised two-thirds of the subjects examined in the present research. In these latter subjects there is neither accommodation nor entrapment. Indeed, for some there is a positive sense of relief and recognition of opportunity.

The implications of this research for the theory of psychological contract suggests that a review is needed on just how valid is this mental model for reliably predicting what individuals expect, still less how they may respond to enforced change at work. In the words of Anderson & Schalk, 'when the perception of the employee about what the organisation offers comes outside the boundary of what is considered appropriate there are two possibilities: either the psychological contract is revised, creating a new contract with different boundaries and content, or the contract is terminated (1998, p.645). We would agree with Guest that psychological contract is 'a middle level construct around which to focus policy and practice on topics such as careers and job insecurity' (1998, p.650). But that a contract 'resides in the interaction rather than the individual or the organisation' is more difficult to identify and confirm (ibid). We would maintain that attempting to identify previously held basic assumptions is a useful prerequisite for examining exactly what is the basis of the individual's interpretation of organisational obligations. In this way we can compare how basic beliefs are retained, reformulated or abandoned after the experience of enforced change at work and assess how that will affect a change in both transactional and relational elements of the traditional psychological contract.

Hallier & James assert that there is a 'dearth of investigations examining the process by which workers alter their conception of the psychological contract' (1996, p.2). We hope in a small but significant way to have contributed to this investigation. However, we would suggest that the security of the

psychological contract as a universal concept is in doubt unless we conclude that for many individual workers it no longer exists in quite such an identifiable form as some previous theory has asserted.

# CHAPTER SIX

## RECONSTRUCTION REVISITED

### THE GARDEN OF EDEN

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Industrial work has meant for most people increasing discipline, required work outputs and constrained rewards. The invention of machines makes it possible to measure the efficiency of each operator as he/she conducts the work, to monitor his/her effectiveness with regard to the output and to ensure that if possible the reward is fixed to that output so that it can be demonstrated that each is rewarded fairly and equitably according to his/her output and imputed effort.

In this industrial organisational discourse there is an inherent logic that demonstrates to the individual that his/her work is organised in exactly the same way as fellow workers, monitored identically and rewarded objectively, too. As a management tool of control it also enables the organisation to blame any failure, which is not demonstrably mechanical, on the weak performance of the individual. Either, he/she is incompetent – more knowledge, skill or experience is required - or there is a question mark over his/her commitment. Blame can be apportioned to the individual for any failure of production and the promised reward modified accordingly.

Management practice has often welcomed opportunities to enhance the techniques of monitoring using division of labour and measurement of the operator, if possible by the system of production itself. The contribution of Taylor (1911) to this tradition of control through simple and discrete functions together with measurement of mean individual performance has been emulated in all

sectors of industry. Even individuals employed in the service sector can be and are monitored in this way and their performance appraised and rewarded (Fayol, 1949; Weber, 1947). Modern factories like call centres are as likely to monitor performance of operators just as rigorously. The theory thus far, therefore, might suggest that the individual is merely another cog in the machine that is industrial production. Management has only to employ the right technology and motivational techniques, conduct some appropriate training to induct the new worker into the mysteries of running the system and thereafter find the human cog operating both efficiently and effectively. The process need only be embarked upon again when management needs to introduce a new system such as Total Quality Management or Business Process Reengineering (Knights & Willmott, 2000).

## **A SERPENT EMERGES**

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Unfortunately, even early on workers seem not always to have demonstrated the compliant attitudes of passivity and acceptance that the theory of management would like to find. Workers seem to have a mind of their own: they get bored with constant repetition, slow down when they get tired and sometimes exhibit annoyance at being given conflicting or contradictory things to do (Storey, 1992; Ogbonna, 1992). They also remember promises made and not kept in the past, resent being treated subjectively or inequitably and can bear grudges against those whom they perceive to have treated them unjustly in the past (Fletcher, 1993). Apparently, this human animal has a problem inherent in its design: if it does not want to work, then it will not. Indeed, far from being an organism that responds to outside stimuli in a predictable way (Skinner, 1974), this animal is

capable of resistance. Failure to address this long term can give rise to alienation and withdrawal of good will by individual workers or groups which feel thus taken for granted or manipulated by management in a cynical way.

## **REDEMPTION IS AT HAND**

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Fortunately for management theory a new discovery happened by chance whilst conditions were being altered on a production line (Roethlisberger, 1939). The positive response of workers seemed to suggest that giving workers an opportunity to voice their own opinions would cause them to respond more positively to imposed change. Ignoring their opinions would make them become resentful and withdraw their good will. At this point motivational theory assumed an increasing importance in management theory and practice. Individuals have motivational needs, which can be charted (Maslow, 1954; Herzberg, 1957; McGregor, 1960). If a manager works with these factors in mind then workers become more satisfied and therefore work better. This revelation reinforced the belief that there are motivational techniques, which can be learned and then applied at work, so making it easier to manage individual employees. Indeed, individuals who are well motivated at work are even able to produce good ideas to transform their own industry without the intervention of managers at all (Trist & Bamford, 1968; Revans, 1974). The Human Relations School of writers make this assumption the basic tenet of their attempts to improve the interaction between individual workers and their working environment (Trist, 1981; Jacques, 1990). Human Resource Management as a theory can be seen in the same tradition though asserting much more stridently the proclaimed belief that individuals can be actively caught up in the excitement of management-led

achievement and commitment to organisational objectives (Beer et al, 1984; Formbrum, Tichy & Devanna, 1984). A new organisational commitment can then be put in place and the search for excellence can be embarked upon with confidence. The organisation's required outcomes can be generated by a new practice of management whose behaviours comprise a few simple dicta and proactive management announcements (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Wickens, 1987, 1991).

There seems to be a similar assumption behind the Organizational Development literature. If we look at early efforts to broker change in organisations we can see evidence that the techniques employed focused on the individual's being given time out to examine his/her own beliefs about self and the work (Lewin, 1947). There then grew up a tradition of counselling individuals through their doubts about enforced change into acceptance of what the organisation now required. This type of attitudinal change moved easily from personal or group endeavour into ownership by everyone in the organisation. We can see this expressed in the literature on organizational climate and early efforts to manage and modify culture in organizations. There had to be some process of consultation with the individuals and groups involved in the change at work. It was necessary to get them to own their feelings but come to terms with changing demands without diminishing the need for managers to manage (Schein, 1969, 1978, 1990, 1992). Thus, along with a change programme modifying visible artefacts, a programme was introduced intended to bring about acceptance by the workforce and a change in their values and underlying basic assumptions about new conditions at work. Thus, quizzical uncertainty or outright hostility of the workforce could be turned into the required compliance

and passive acceptance (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 1994). Change can be managed and there are validated steps for achieving it at work (Wilson, 1993, Lovell, 1994, Collins 1998, Carnall 1999, Thornhill et al, 2000, Burnes, 2000). Follow the prescribed steps laid out by the gurus and success in managing change is assured (Huczynski, 1993).

## **A PROBLEM OF CONTEXT**

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Thus far we could identify a common tradition of management intervention to achieve organizational results. Systems may become more complex, humans may become more sophisticated in the demands they make or the expectancies they have of their work. But, basically there is a way out of resistance and alienation by following the paths of consultation with individuals or groups and observing the stepped approaches defined by experts in the field. All of this theory assumes a context of control available to managers of production and knowledge alike. Basically, they have control and they would rather work the easy way – taking people with them –than the hard way – coercion or the instrumental power of ultimate dismissal. This debate brings us back to the epistemological claims of Modernism seen as a working assumption: that there is a pattern of management behaviour which reinforces the successful achievement of organizational objectives using people either in hierarchies or the more updated version of inter-disciplinary/project teams enervated by innovative leadership. It suggests that there may now be a different context for this debate – the Postmodernist interpretation of events (Hassard & Parker, 1993). Times have changed and the tidy solutions for achieving required results through people (Drucker, 1992) has changed too. Or, perhaps it is a different way of

thinking about what we do at work that makes prediction of management outcomes difficult to make in the way that was possible in the past. For some commentators such a debate may distract us from the important issues (Thompson, 1993). We would be better employed continuing to see industrial management processes as concerted domination of the worker as a scarcely hidden agenda while offering the acceptable face of caring parenthood in management rhetoric and day-to-day HRM strategies. What is important, it seems to the present researcher, is the quest to unravel what individuals themselves believe when they have been subjected to such enforced change at work. We need to examine in detail what individuals assume before change impacts on them, how they interpret what impacts on them during such change and what conclusions they draw about themselves, their work and the organization after the change. Such changes in the material conditions of the workers' means of production are 'manifested in transformations at intimate levels of experience – assumptions about knowledge and power, their beliefs about work and the meaning they derived from it, the content and rhythm of their social exchanges and the ordinary mental and physical disciplines to which they accommodated their working lives (Zuboff, 1988, xiii). It is these assumptions that we have attempted to unravel.

If we can achieve this closer inspection of changing expectancy and belief about organization and personal prospects then perhaps we can identify the pattern of personal responses which if replicated even partially throughout a workforce, might suggest that the pattern of behaviours on which Modernist theories of management are based is now for many individuals at work without theoretical foundation or personal acceptance as relevant in everyday employment. In order

to do this we need to examine what individuals exposed to enforced change at work think, feel and evaluate in their personal experience.

## **CONTROL & GOVERNABILITY**

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If we are intending to look at how enforced change at work affects individual self-perception then it makes sense to examine how criteria to adjudge experience are set up in the individual in the first place. There is a range of theories, which indicate the reinforcement of behaviours in the very young using disciplinary techniques, which bring about internalisation by rationalising causal relationships through stimulus-response repetition (Piaget, 1932). Similarly, some researchers identified frames, schemas and references to account for how individuals learn the steps of successful socialisation (Abelson, 1968; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Such steps or sequences of behaviour are learned, committed to memory and then repeated and reinforced by adroit management of learning until familiarisation makes them taken-for-granted behaviours, like how to enter a restaurant, order a meal and pay the bill before leaving (Greene, 1986, 38).

Now, this kind of analysis implies that an external agent inducts the individual into prescribed life-enhancing behaviours. Once the behaviour is learned the individual will continue to exhibit it, presumably because he/she finds that it makes life easier to achieve success in social situations. We can observe similar induction techniques applied at work. A new trainee starts and is trained to internalise acceptable behaviours which will make his/her stay in the work place easy and successful, because it enables the individual worker to achieve required social rewards and avoid punishment for non-achievement of required goals. Thereafter, repetition facilitates individual learning and enables the organisation

to control or govern many individuals in a uniformly managed way. Some commentators refer to this as 'normative control by daily practices' (Deetz, 1992), others put it more prosaically as 'companies produce people (Alveson & Willmott, 1992). The latter phrase seems to suggest that some deeper formation of the person takes place apart from the repetitious behaviour in which he/she is engaged.

At this point in the discussion on organization and individual induction there seems to exist an assumption that the individual is the pawn in a game whose rules have already been laid down. Geertz calls it 'an ordered system of meanings' (1973). There is here an assumption that the individual is inducted into a set of behaviours that is reinforced by training, which has its own inherent significance for the individual. This can give the impression that the worker is a tabula rasa or blank sheet waiting to be imprinted with a clear organizational message and absorbing it passively. We can accept that prescribed performances come with implied values and that alternative behaviours will be proscribed. Indeed, the early literature on culture defines itself in this way, 'espoused and manifest values that determine how group members perceive, think and feel' (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). The working environment contains instruction and discipline in performance and imposed value. There is here an assumption that the value will be internalised uncritically with the learned behaviour.

Cultural studies need to investigate not just the espoused and manifest values. A statement of value can be imposed, it may be required learning, it may even be enforced but it cannot be guaranteed. Individuals interpret their experience in different ways. If organizational change has espoused values, it can

also have a hidden agenda. Soft social issues may be promoted openly as desired benefits whilst managers look for harder-edged outcomes like increased profitability covertly (Legge, 1989). Similarly, if individual workers seem to espouse a value by adopting a new behaviour that is no guarantee that they accept such an imposed value uncritically. Indeed, here lies that classic distinction between culture as what an organization is and culture as what an organization has (Salancik, 1977). Behaviour is expressed by force of habit or requirement. But its meaning is inferred by the agent or implied by the observer. It can never be guaranteed that what is required of the individual is also believed and accepted by the performer. For interpretation is both personal and immediate and changes in individuals from experience to experience. At this point we are at a crossroad between individual and corporate values (Balnaves & Caputi, 1993). Each corporate value may lead to an interpretation by the individual and therefore this may come to predominate the interpretation of significant incidents or behaviours at work. We would argue that significant changes can occur when individual values are threatened by corporately enforced change, particularly when that change threatens personal basic beliefs, which remain unchanged in the face of enforced change at work. At the same time we have attempted to demonstrate that for some individuals change in required performance can alter the basic assumptions previously held about self and organization in a way that might not have been expected and thereafter make it impossible to manage an individual if managers are dependent on manipulating the same assumptions as before. What we are witnessing, then, may well be 'the opposition between purposefulness of individuals and the seeming givenness and instrumentality of work-process relationships' (Alvesson

& Willmott, 1992, 4) in a context of enforced change.

## **ENFORCED CHANGE, ADAPTION & RESISTANCE**

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Resistance as a phenomenon within the experience of the individual worker is often alluded to within the context of sociological movements. Indeed, 'in several sections of Capital, Marx indicated an awareness of resistance practices, but he did not connect these incidents to class-conscious revolutionary act, nor did he develop a theory of everyday resistance to capitalist domination' (Jermier, Knights & Nord, 1994). It would be twentieth century research into the world of the self that would provide a vehicle for examining how exactly individuals respond internally to unwanted external stimuli. Without opening a debate on the exact nature of self and personality and its role in mediating and modifying such stimuli it should be possible to accept that there is an individual site internal to each individual, which may be referred to as self or personality. This site is able to respond and react to external stimuli in a way that gives rise to an individual consciousness and decision-making about outside influences. How the individual interprets such stimuli may be guessed at but can never be predicted by the external observer. This production of meaning in human life is associated with the social psychology school known as symbolic interaction (Mead, 1934). For the purposes of the present discussion we need only posit 'an inherent rudimentary self - a set of innate interests and processes (e.g. exploratory tendencies, innate preferences and the motivation to relate and assimilate) - that develops as the individual interacts with his/her environment and with unintegrated aspects of the self' (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 4). This forum of internal thought and consideration becomes the vehicle for subjectivity or the internal

world of reaction, interpretation and response to outside stimuli.

For proponents of Labour Process Theory this has opened up the field of subjective consciousness (Braverman, 1974). This internal field becomes the focus of workers reinterpreting management imposition of result/reward links to their own benefit – a type of ‘playing the system’ (Burawoy, 1979). But, in one way we could say that this methodology is still observational and can be construed as individuals or groups colluding to subvert the system to their own ends rather than radically altering their opinion or belief about themselves as agents and their self-identity as workers. We are more interested in the formation and reformation of the self and suggest that this aspect of subjectivity is more accessible to us during periods of resistance to enforced change at work. In this methodology we wanted to investigate ‘the meaning subjects themselves attribute to their actions or behaviours’ (Jermier, Knights & Nord, 1994, 10) rather than the tendency to impose explanation of meaning by ethnomethodological studies.

## **THE DISCOURSE OF POWER**

If the purpose of imposing meaning from the management point of view is control of the individual worker, then it begs the question how the process of management can require control of meaning and the production of a self/identity acceptable to management requirements. There is a two-way process of discourse and power, which emerges from the definition at the outset of the relationship between dominator and dominated. The contribution of Foucault offers an interpretation of this interaction between individuals, in which the way their relations are described is not just definitional of their social interactions but

also defines their identity. Acceptance of an identity, whether as a patient with the doctor or the prisoner and warder, offer and sometimes require at the outset a set of principles for action that each can and sometimes must adhere to (Foucault, 1984, 101 – 102). For the objective of disciplinary techniques 'is normalisation, the creation of routines, predictability, control' (Clegg, 1994). It is inherent in prisons (Gramsci, 1971), schools (Holt, 1965, 1970) and work (Scott, 1990). In each context there is an inherent assumption that one of the contestants holds power over the other – and believes he/she has a right to do so. In this way the discourse provides early on the rules and relations of meaning which is expected to govern the relationship from its inception throughout the lifetime of the association. What we see here is the provision of 'an underlying rationale and required context of interpretation in which one agency must manage the sense-making process which fixes meaning' for both of them (Clegg, 1994, 281). From the point of view of the present research the concept he has in mind is 'reflexive self-organisation: subjectivities of its members framing assumptions of that knowledge' (ibid). It is in this definition that we find two links with concepts developed in other contexts but relevant to the present research: 'frames' and 'assumptions'. We can accept that initially in a relationship of control the language of dominance and governmentality is predominant, imposing frames of required behaviour. What we wanted to discover is how this discourse is reinterpreted, reconstructed or reframed in the face of radical change of inherent values or basic assumptions brought about by enforced change at work.

In his more recent work, Clegg develops the idea that 'meanings are ineradicably indexical in nature' (1998, 43). Interpretation is itself a cultural

contrivance in Weber's sense of culture as 'the endowment of a finite segment of meaningless infinity of events in the world with meaning and significance from the standpoint of human beings' (1947, 81). We can assert that any society provides a set of rules concerning ways in which reality is to be interpreted if the individual is to function adequately within that society. But what happens when enforced change at work breaks through this cartel of constructed self-interest? We would expect that the search is then on by the individual to look for another explanation of change and reset the conditions of normality. Certainly, there are many contributors to organizational development who have asserted that dealing with required change simply means unfreezing the basic assumptions and refreezing them round the new reality (Lewin, 1947), readjusting the mind-set to take account of dissonance at work (Festinger, 1957), even side-bets on the part of workers, preparing themselves for the inevitable or unpalatable (Becker, 1964) or some sort of cognitive calculus that enables the individual to come to terms with the trauma of change (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). All these could be described as coping strategies in which organizational intervention or individual self-preservation require the individual to come to terms with the new reality.

However, if the individual can question the rationale on which the whole edifice of his/her assumptions have previously been based, then a difference may occur which makes it impossible to reassert the old reality of subordinate relationship. Derrida describes this process as 'deconstruction' (1978, 1981, 1982). 'Derrida's project is founded on the postmodernist notion that knowledge and discourse have to be 'constructed' from a 'chameleonic' world' (Hassard, 1993, 10). In other words if all universal meanings are subject to movement then interpretation is not just more likely but may, in extreme circumstances where

previous expectancies were not realised, become absolutely vital to making sense of the changing reality around the self. Therefore the 'superordinate term' is dependent on the 'subordinate term' which, when it is threatened, will require reassessment of the validity of the defining category (ibid. p.11). An example might be that if job security, say, is the superordinate term then factors which threaten the elements which support job security will necessarily bring about a question-mark over the validity of the overarching concept. We could equally well describe a basic assumption as a superordinate term about not only the 'is' of reality but also its 'ought'. If we can observe these terms changing under the assault of enforced change at work then there is an opportunity of comparing and contrasting the subjects of such change and their response to a working world assaulted and overturned.

### **IDENTIFYING THE CRITICAL FACTORS OF REFLEXIVITY**

Researchers have been liberal with their descriptors of internal factors, which they assert that individuals hold internally. Such lists as 'evaluations, beliefs, practical judgments, opinions, ethics' (Sorokin, 1927, 321), 'myths, beliefs, history, norms, rituals, customs' (Casey, 1995, 93) are common among commentators and writers on change in organisations. They are equally prevalent among writers on culture. Such descriptors as visible artefacts, values and basic assumptions are identified confidently (Schein, 1990) and call for equal care in attempting to define their meaning. If we accept that expectancy theory has opened the way to the subjectivist aspects in motivational theory (Hassard & Parker, 1993), then it becomes more important to be explicit about terms which may be held at the individual level through, say, induction

processes at work, but is also held at a corporate level by groups within organizations or imputed to all members of the organization itself. Indeed, it seems to the present researcher that the search for the difference, if any, between personal and corporate beliefs may be apparent only at times of enforced change in that at other times such assumptions are less likely to be threatened or questioned. External threat to a personally held standard is more likely to cause individuals to express, acknowledge and, sometimes, defend it against such a threat whereas without such a threat it could lie unacknowledged and taken for granted indefinitely.

In our present research we have sought to allow individuals to express their own surprise at what they saw occurring to themselves and other workers during enforced change at work. We have made no assumptions about whether what they related was a value, violated norm, part of mythology born of internalised experience long before. We simply wanted subjects to identify what had surprised them that did or did not happen (disconfirmed) or what did not surprise them (confirmed) (Louis, 1980a & b). We were also interested in the result of reconstruction, readjustment, and normalisation that might or might not have occurred. For we recognised that once such deeply held beliefs are threatened then 'transformation becomes very urgent, very difficult and quite possible' (Townley, 1994).

## **THE IMPACT OF IMPOSED NEW REALITY**

The subjects in our present research described the changes occurring in day-to-day uncertainty and the disruption of imposed change at work compared with their previous perception of how things were before the change. We might

expect that for older workers with long service in an organisation the harking back to more settled times would be contrasted with the uncertainty of events now or the uncongenial nature of imposed change. But the narratives show a more objective appraisal of events. If we look at the longest serving and oldest subjects then their recollections often include not just required change but also well managed and survived change in the past. As Mr D, aged 52 with 30 year's service put it, 'From 30 Offices we went to a handful with a minimum of fuss and few problems. Our values then were that we did things with a minimum of fuss and few problems. We were of the people and we involved them. We let them know what was going on and we listened.' But this imposed change was different, 'I felt cheated. I was the boss of a Collection and yet I was told to go on the phone and further not allowed to tell anyone. It was dreadful. It was awful. I felt bitter'. For many such subjects the result was alienation in a way that they could never have imagined as good, successful workers over a long period of service. The ensuing drop into depression and demotivation correlated with the basic belief that the organisation had promised job security and reward for good service. Previous staff clear-outs might have moved on the workers who had no more to offer or those stuck in grades or jobs that had outlived their usefulness. But never had the senior, successful individuals in the organisation been so discarded.

In contrast we identified subjects in the same organisation who felt no qualms about enforced change at work and seemed to enjoy the challenge of survival on each occasion. Mrs P, aged 37 with 18 year's service, is a prime example of the different assumptions about employment and the organisation, 'I got confidence working in the environment. It felt right to me. I am not a worrier. I have a feel

for it. I am very open: what you see is what you get. Peer group? I don't think I had one. I just had no worries. I got on and did the job. It was a question of knowing the right people who could help you do this'. For this and other younger subjects there seemed to be no dependence assumptions on the organization. Networking, yes, but no waiting for others to define her successful career.

It is important here that we examine the categories used by researchers as they attempt to identify different groups of responses from individuals at work. Examples from qualitative extracts vary widely and can be solely narrative and descriptive, 'before the change to teams, my principal focus was on planning and directing. I determined what needed to be done and sent my instructions out to all my elements' (Barker, 1999, 146). The author then interprets the significance of the quotation in the context of an on-going discussion, sometimes entitling the paragraph with a significant title, 'Concertive Discipline and Directing' (ibid). A similar technique offers extensive interpretation by the research followed by relating the essence of the quotation to an academic theory, 'A Sociology of Cohesion in the Hidden Transcript' (Scott, 1990, 134), 'Hegel and the Production of Self-Enslavement' (Butler, 1997, 34). For other researchers the categories can be descriptive, 'the defensive self', 'the colluded self', 'the capitulated self' (Casey, 1995, 169ff). A similar use of categories can be suggested by a popular song, 'Bewitched', 'Bothered' and 'Bewildered' (McCabe, 2000, 209ff). In the present research the categories used refer to subjects who have evinced or divulged basic assumptions which include dependency on the organization for self development, career and job security – the dependents or, alternatively, subjects who have no such basic assumptions, or are independent of the organization for such development. The purpose of this distinction was intended

to allow a comparison between the responses of such subjects with regard to self-image, survival and implications for the existence of the psychological contract. What it also allowed us to do was identify subjects who might have started with traditional assumptions of dependency but following experience of enforced change at work have transformed or reconstructed their beliefs to reflect a new-found sense of independence from organizational dependence.

It was these latter subjects whose development we followed with greatest interest, observing how such an internal transition had occurred and trying to identify the critical factors triggering such a change. Once examples of all three conditions of response to enforced change had been identified it would be possible to compare and contrast subsequent outcomes, the interpretation of each experience and the possible derivation of new meanings from the events undergone. One such subject, Mrs S, aged 33 with 15 year's service, is typical of such a transformation, 'I feel stronger as a result of the experience. I proved I could do it. I feel happier now. I know I can survive. I had some doubts. But I had to be strong'.

We recognise that such a transformation can be more than just a moving around of the mental furniture of beliefs and assumptions, but also possibly a complete restructuring or reprioritising of values about work and life in general, such that previous world-views of both work and organizations might never be the same again. Here we went further than the cognitive calculus or cognitive appraisal approach to enforced change. In such cases the emphasis of the research assumes a calculation by the individual whose elements are predictive, what is the threat and how much can I modify what happens to me (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, Rusbult & Farrell, 1983). Such a

mental schema could be described as a pragmatic assessment calculation, which leads either to a coping strategy (independents) or to learned incompetence (dependents). Here we are looking at a total reassessment of previously held beliefs whose violation would previously have been thought impossible and which now requires a radical rethink of those beliefs as the reality of enforced change makes them impossible to sustain in their previous form. Alternatively, they may reject the new values and continue to attest a belief that the world of work should continue to be constructed in the way they once held dear. There is here a question about not just the 'is' of life's events but also its 'ought' – the belief retained in spite of evidence suggesting that it can no longer survive in the new world of reorganised work. Finally, there may be a complete resorting of moral priorities within the individual, a 'politics with ethics' (Townley, 1994, 166). In this transformation of beliefs we are dealing with ethics not just as 'a code which determines which acts are permitted or forbidden, but on ethics which determine the positive or negative value of the different possible behaviours (Foucault, 1984, 352). Indeed, enforced change at work may well be the prime opportunity of examining such a change in action. And for our subjects the eventual outcomes of survival, alienation or self-sufficiency may be a function of what basic assumptions were held about work and their role in it, the change that is made to those basic assumptions, or not and possibly, the complete abandonment of certain basic assumptions and a new and different set of interpretative assumptions in their place.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY REVISITED**

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The unpacking of individual basic assumptions and their reassembling by the individual at a time of enforced change raises a number of important issues for the wider debate on modernism and postmodernism and on the ability of the organization to impose an 'iron cage' and the all-embracing surveillance of pantopticon. If we accept that postmodernism is the rejection of total meta-narratives (Lyotard, 1984) then it makes sense to attempt to investigate how this occurs at the level of the individual worker. Similarly, we are told that 'in the post-modernist approach to knowledge we must also possess the ability to be critical or suspicious of our own intellectual assumptions' (Lawson, 1985). At the level of the observer or theorist such a dictum can be seen as a counsel of perfection – question the basis of your assumptions and assume nothing. But at the level of individual workers suffering from enforced change at work this context is totally different: security of mind is threatened, all the promises previously made to the individual may apparently be abandoned by the organization and then the simple restoration of those promises may become impossible to imagine or achieve.

If we examine the elements of postmodern knowledge according to Derrida (1982) they are five-fold:

**Representation** – 'attempts to discover the genuine order of things must be regarded as naïve or mistaken' (Hassard & Parker, 1993, 10). Certainly, the evidence of some subjects in the current research who have reconstructed some of their basic assumptions would attest to that.

**Reflexivity** – ‘we must possess the ability to be critical of our own intellectual assumptions’ (ibid). Again, most of our present subjects have had to confront their beliefs and assumptions about themselves and their continued prospects at work.

**Writing** – ‘the logocentric image of writing (which sees language as a sign system for concepts which exist independently in the object world) must be overturned’ (ibid). Certainly, the implication of reconstruction of basic assumptions at work requires such an examination by the individual.

**Difference** – ‘we must develop a strategy which reflects but does not capture the process of reconstruction’ (ibid). The individual who reconstructs basic assumptions at work offers the context in which this can be observed.

**De-centring the subject** – the grand isolation of the modern subject must be replaced with the notion of agency as a system of relations between strata’ (ibid). If we accept the individual as the focus of reinterpretation then other strata will be open to re-examination, too.

## **ATTRIBUTION & SELF-SUFFICIENCY**

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We have further examined our subjects’ responses to enforced change at work by looking at their feelings about their own self-worth, their response to the organization now and their feeling freer or not of their dependency on an organisation for survival in their future career development. Subjects who have held such a basic assumption of dependency for job security and career development exhibit feelings of alienation and weakness as a result of the enforced change. In this sense they are not self-critical of their own

assumptions. Indeed, the assumptions are defended and reinforced. They are even at times expressed more forcefully with an inherent moral revulsion that managers should have allowed such betrayal of personal trust to occur unchallenged. Most expressive are the images of commitment in terms of close personal relationship now carelessly and deliberately broken. Mrs R, aged 47 with 27 year's service said, 'I felt I made no difference to the organisation. I wanted to be loved and cherished. Angry? Yes! Any significant others? No! There was no one else to share it with. I had to work it out by myself. I felt WF (Head of Personnel) made no effort to fight for us. He wasn't interested. He didn't fight. DC (another senior manager) fought and he got whatever he wanted. But for us there was lack of support. That's how I felt'. The question of what advice she would give to someone joining the organization brings us into the realm of Writing: do subjects interpret the world of their work in the same way now. 'I would say No. Now if it was the Scottish Office that would be different. They are still taking people on for the new Scottish parliament. People opportunities have gone. I think the same opportunities are not there anymore. Once there was variety and change but now there is not the same opportunity for variety in the work'.

The process of reconstruction for dependents can include a decision to stay because there is nowhere else to go whilst blaming the organization for defaulting on their obligation to the individual worker. Alternatively, there is the search for another Garden of Eden where the old certainties can be re-established. Mrs Mitchell, aged 52 with 18 year's service in pharmaceuticals said, 'I don't feel stronger. There were a lot of values that I lost. Trust and loyalty meant a lot to me. I gave extra hours and the new company couldn't have cared

less. Scotia (her new company) is more like it was like at Syntex. I like to be highly valued and I like to work for someone I know. I was not going to stay and be miserable. I'm more of myself than before. I like to have respect for the people I work with'. Paradise is restored and the basic assumption of dependency can be relied upon again.

For the independents the account is different. Here survival is assumed rather than the organization finding solutions to problems of continued career development. A colleague of Mrs M, Mrs T aged 37 with 8 year's service moved to the same company in the same team. She explains, 'I definitely feel stronger. I can work well in a team I trust. I didn't think about before the change. But I feel I can do more if I have to. I would certainly move on and do something else. As you get older you get more confident in your own abilities. It's all about ability and effort, really. - being in the right place at the right time. I feel more in control I know what I want to do'. There can be no more confident assertion of self-sufficiency with attribution linked consciously to the traditional elements of control: ability and effort. The change has given the subject an opportunity to examine a previously taken for granted assumption of self-reliance and confidence in repeating the move should the need arise. Not all independents, however, move on. There is a pragmatic streak, which assesses how practicable a move might be and an acceptance of the reality of prospects that may be limited. Mrs P, aged 37 with 19 year's service, said, 'my value in the market place is very limited. There is a perception of public service in the wider labour market that our work has no relevance to work that is conducted in the private sector. So, whatever I have achieved is not rated that highly by outside organizations. Then, I lack management qualifications, which again makes it

difficult to prove to another employer that I have something important to offer'. In a sense, then, although independents may find it easier to survive enforced change at work, they may or may not feel able to move on with confidence. The organization is still the source of their career development. They may be clearer about the attribution of their success and determined to ensure it serves them again in the future. But radical change in the sense of difference does not appear to have been achieved.

Finally, then, we move to subjects who have shifted from dependence on the organization to independence. As we have noted above, subjects can be triggered into such a reconstruction of basic assumptions by the enforced change occurring at work or by personal trauma at home. Mrs S, aged 33 with 15 year's service said, 'for twenty-four years my mother had a miserable marriage. She would have been better off apart from my Dad. Then the Springboard course came along and I got a lot out of that. I had to ask myself what I wanted to attain, what were my goals in life. Then I had to plan to change my marriage and my job at the same time. I proved I could do it. I feel happier now. I know I can survive. I had some doubts. I had to be strong. I decided what was the right thing to do. I had control of my own destiny'. Offer of a job by outside contractors working in-house can also be the trigger for self-sufficiency, assessment of the defining abilities which have been recognised by others and even the uncontrollable attribution of luck. Mr M, aged 46 with 23 year's service said, 'the forward view is that PFI (Private Finance Initiative) started as a threat and is now seen as an opportunity. I can stay, I can perform well and I've got luck. There is no such thing as fairness or unfairness. You just have to make your own luck. I feel stronger. I have exposed my own

weaknesses. I know what my talents are. I don't need a Godfather, I have done it for myself'.

In subjects who have reconstructed their basic assumption of dependence on the organization there is much more evidence of both difference and decentring of the subject. These are the children of a post-modernistic epistemology. They are confident in their own abilities, rejoice in opportunity and luck and seem determined never to return to the travails of dependency and the modernistic promises of reward and fulfilment mediated by traditional HR management.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR TRADITIONAL ASSUMPTIONS**

We have come now to the crux of the debate between the epochal and epistemological positions and the definition of postmodernism. If the reconstruction of some key basic assumptions by some subjects causes them to discard beliefs, which previously caused them to give uncritical acceptance to an employing organization, then we could assert that the 'iron cage' that imprisons modern consciousness is finally broken never to be reconstructed in the mind of the individual worker. What remains to be identified is the trigger for such radical internal change that presents itself as an epistemological change in the individual, which makes it impossible for the organization to be viewed in the same light again.

The debate about how far we can reinvest in theoretical understanding of organizations will continue to ask whether the all-embracing ideas of organization as the home of meaning for the individual can ever be re-established. But if we accept the individual as the starting point of our theory building then we can also accept that the derivation of meaning between

any set of actors is mediated from moment to moment and is itself capable of retrospective redefinition many times over. Indeed, 'the rationality of a manager's action is dependent on the reaction of colleagues and subordinates, for it is they who supply the interpretations of propositions' (Gergen, 1989, 21 – 22). If that is the case, then it is the individual's interpretation that should be the beginning of the quest of making sense of organizations. For, if radical change in previously accepted beliefs about organizations can be found, it may indeed signal an epistemological change which points to the end of the modernistic paradigm and the beginning of a perception which requires the break-up of previously promoted consensual views about organizations and their role in work-value interpretation for the individual worker.

## **GOVERNMENTALITY AND FOUCAULT REVISITED**

Those who manage organizations may not be concerned about shifts in individual perception among workers. As long as it is possible to observe and monitor what is done at work, then the hidden agenda of control can still be achieved, perhaps. New technologies will enable managers to observe without being observed. Who accesses which Internet site is readily available to them and so even the nature of work disturbance or interruption can be identified at will (McKinlay, 2000). Such sophisticated systems of observation should amply make up for the personal internal dissatisfaction, which may lie within the individual. It should not then matter what individuals think, provided that they continue to deliver the output required at work.

There is increasing research to suggest that such conclusions may be premature and that the grounds for self-congratulations among supervisors are premature.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that workers in the topical field of knowledge management, for example, possess intrinsic knowledge about processes in IT and other arcane areas of expertise, which remain solely in their own possession. The process of managing such procedures is not available to managers because they are no longer inducted in or aware of the sophistication of the options now available. Such tacit knowledge is solely the possession of the operator who has found his/her way through a maze of possible options to one, which works both efficiently and effectively. This means that the power resulting from such knowledge makes the operator dominant and therefore able to withdraw labour and expertise at a moment's notice. A critical question now arises for managers: what can we do to take possession of this knowledge so that if individuals leave we have possession of this knowledge and its consequent power? There are increasing numbers of companies investing in initiatives to encourage teams and individuals to debrief themselves after a project and divulge exactly how they arrived at their solution and requiring them to consider and write down how they would seek to improve the processes in the future (McKinlay, 2000).

For one drug company a group was set up called Central Knowledge Support with the objective of delivering efficiency gains on drug development procedures and even 'Electronic Café', a set of linked web sites based on the stories of individuals linked to drug development programmes. 'The objective was to open up more – and unexpected – spaces for reflexivity, spaces that are dialogic and shorn of short-term deadlines' (ibid. p.12). The author states that the schemes were dependent on willing participation of the knowledgeable. It is ironic that the knowledge society armed with technology far outweighing any sophistication

yet put into the hands of individual workers should be even more dependent on their goodwill to divulge how successful organizational results have been achieved. It seems then that managers will always need the requirement of a science of acceptance, quiescence and motivation side by side with sophisticated systems of surveillance. Indeed, without freely given divulgence of processes and procedures the sophisticated capture of information is useless.

In other words managers still need the traditional assumptions about trust and loyalty in return for rewards both monetary and career prospects. We are back to the traditional topic of the content of the psychological contract. And when we revisit the subjects we have reviewed already the outcome is not encouraging to the traditional management view of control. For subjects independent of the organization there seems to be little to support the view that such a traditional contract was ever thought to exist or ever acted upon in the sense of a negotiated contract. Mrs McD, aged 32 with 6 year's service and now self-employed said, 'I think my psychological contract has always been different from others. It reflects my own belief system. People put in long hours. But their contract is not with the organization, it is people in the organization. An organization is essentially inhuman. By that I don't mean it doesn't exist. What we've got is senior managers devising a policy and then imposing it, passing it down to the people. It's not healthy and it breeds short-termism. A lot of people were surprised at how badly we were treated. But I always said, "Why did you expect anything better? Come on wake up. They're only interested in themselves".'

For those who have reconstructed their basic belief of dependency the question of traditional psychological contract no longer applies. Mrs W, aged 50 with 6

year's service, 'I do feel stronger. This is the real world and I've never been redundant. I could have lost my job. Now I've survived another change. I don't listen to rumour anymore. They didn't talk us though it. But my own marketability has gone up by times twenty. I have a career now in business development which I can take anywhere I want to'. The return to the traditional promises of Human Resource Management seem unlikely to be restored for either independents or reconstructs. This only leaves the dependents, most of whom are managers in senior positions tasked with leading entrepreneurial teams and looking forward to an early retirement which their organization often cannot afford to give them. Their lack of commitment is palpable and openly expressed. They still believe the elements of the psychological contract ought to be intact and observed. The fact that they aren't, is only a matter for alienation and withdrawal of good-will.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMPARISONS**

The question of ought raises the issue of ethics at work. 'Ethics are not to be seen in transcendental term but a practical critique, part of the concrete processes of ordering one's day-to-day existence' (McNay, 1992, 52). If we place Human Resource Management as a political strategy to deliver compliance in individuals at work in the context of this debate on ethics then for some writers it poses the following questions: How should practices be exercised? What should inform them? What is desirable? What are the criteria for governmentality? How do individuals govern themselves and govern others?' (Townley, 1994, 167). If this is the start for Human Resource Management as a discipline of knowledge/power, we have to say that the observation is two-way.

Individuals now know more about the system in front of them than the organization that supplied it. Each worker is capable to assessing just how potent this equipment can be for achieving organizational results and knows it before the organization does. Indeed, the organization depends on the individual to divulge that newfound effectiveness. The individual also knows that an audit trail can be picked up through the individual steps in logic and working procedure. However, the individual also knows that he/she has the power to withhold that knowledge, to conceal it, and if necessary to walk away with it at any time. Only the dependent will feel the need to stay on in a subordinate, if unwilling, capacity. Others may well break out of the mind-set of dependency, influenced by enforced change at work. Still others, increasing numbers of newcomers to the work environment, come without any need to feel or behave as if they need the protection and development allegedly offered in return for faithful service in an organization and deferral to the requirements of its management.

## **ORGANIZATIONS: CIRCUITS OF POWER**

The traditional description of organization as the locus of decision and action necessarily attributes such action as an 'indeterminate outcome of substantive struggles between different agencies' (Clegg, 1989, 197). The search for explanations of change from modernistic to postmodern forms does not sit easily with traditional, general theories of labour exploitation (ibid). We can examine these foci of power as descriptive profiles, characterised by negotiation, contestation and struggle between organisationally divided but linked agencies and then seek to identify the 'rules of the game which both enable and constrain

action' and thereby deliver the power division between the contestants involved (ibid, 200). But for commentators who view this struggle as demonstrating an epochal change the indicators that there are epistemological implications in that struggle are never far away. Rules can never be objective, even if expressed within a working contract. For their significance is dependent on interpretation and as such 'can never be free of surplus or ambiguous meaning. Ruling is an activity. It is accomplished by some agency as a constitutive, sense-making process whereby meaning is fixed' (ibid, 201). We would maintain that the present research has demonstrated that the nature of that struggle is to be found at the very heart of individual development of what is and is not right and what should and should not happen in the working life to the individual. The quest for meaning can be fixed by basic assumptions that do not change and the outcome may therefore be further quiescence and alienation. However, there is increasing evidence to suggest that some individuals survive such trauma of broken expectancies and disconfirmed assumptions to a reconstruction, which finds them dispensing with the need to adhere to organizationally focused compliance. Finally, individual subjects, particularly new entrants to the workforce exhibit dependency-free basic assumptions. They are confident, self-sufficient and pre-eminently survivors in a war of attrition between management subterfuge and increasingly broken promises and the expectations set up by such soft, social philosophies as Human Resource Management.

For Civil Servants, the changes required by continuous Government searches for reduced overhead and increased efficiency is easily spotted. In the Inland Revenue responses to flexible team working were often identified for what they were immediately, 'I think we worked out that after changes...we would actually

be dealing with 8,000 each, roughly. So, it just seems to be a very backdoor way of actually getting us to take on more work without us really realising' (Proctor & Currie, 2000). The benefit of team working means reasserting working group supremacy at the expense of the office as a whole, 'the teams have bonded but they've bonded to their own team and nobody gives a stuff about everybody else' (ibid p.14). Reorganizing work under a new style of management is just as difficult and sometimes more contentious, 'it can be quite divisive because some of the staff are aware that others are earning more than them and that can cause resentment' (ibid p.19). For those who are left, the traditional promises are not believed and staying is the result of a pragmatic decision. Mrs R puts it, 'Take another job? I haven't got the mental energy. I would feel worse. I need security on my mortgage. I could never get as much money anywhere else. At least I have the guarantee of a job here'. So, no change there, then. Scepticism is eventually replaced by cynicism and even those who stay cease to believe the assumptions that underlie the controlled compliance of organisational commitment.

The pharmaceutical sector seems no more cohesive in its joint ownership of management responsibility, 'we're a wired company, but not a wired organisation. You can have any piece of kit you like. We've connected desks and tasks, but not people and imaginations. Knowledge management – so far – has hard wired what we do already. We've wired our existing processes' (McKinlay, 2000, 8). Control, ultimately, belongs to the manager of the knowledge – the individual is the centre of knowledge and power. In Quintiles the imposition of profitability metrics should in theory account for every moment of the working day. The utilisation of the individual is accounted for and assessed. Even those

involved in expertise management (internal consultants, HR people and IT workers) are assessed in the same way. As one of their most successful young managers and survivor from enforced change, Mr B, put it, 'you have to have an attitude towards your career – one of stability. People are less willing today to wait for things to happen. They are more proactive now. Loyalty? I don't think it can exist to the same extent. Companies don't matter anymore. You can have this loyalty but it takes a blow and then you never trust again. But for the individual the result is you will have clearer goals about what you want to achieve'.

Finally, even for those who work in autonomous working groups inept management of change can always disturb their sense of security. Team working from the 'bottom-up' with a consensus style of management is the prescribed best pattern for achieving best results (Proctor & Mueller, 2000, 18). It takes only one unexpected and unethical action by management to find that consensus shattered and replaced by enmity and distrust. For the sports managers, dismissal during the Christmas Lunch was one thing, but the summary loss of the leader who had fought to save their jobs and then lost his own was something that would never be forgiven. Their surviving manager puts it thus, 'I lost commitment. Staff above me disappeared - just went out the door. In some ways that made me closer to the director level. But commitment? What's the point when only 37% of your staff is left? They have had to work much harder. Our level of activity and our targets have both increased. We kept the best but they're not inexhaustible. People want financial recognition. Salaries are taking a dive. I will have to move down south. I must get something else in order to progress'.

## **BACK TO BASICS**

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'Without an attempt at building inductive and grounded theorisations of power and resistance the theoretical progression of the labour process literature in the past twenty years may be seen as somewhat limited' (Clegg, 1994, 317). It is the contention of the present research that that theoretical progress has been in a small way contributed to by the examination of basic assumptions and attempting to chart their change during enforced change at work. In so doing we would assert that not only do individually held expectancies trigger review and reconstruction but these are also the basis of corporately held assumptions about organizations and their demands, rights and responsibilities to the individual worker. Our findings at least reinforce the question how far such initiatives as Business Process Re-engineering can be successful (Knights & Willmott, 2000). Simple ways of managing change in organizations have been with us throughout the development of industrial organisations and the techniques adduced usually involve management ideas for improving efficiency noised abroad to the workers as a new means of providing involvement, empowerment, work satisfaction, autonomous working groups (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; Hammer & Champy, 1995; Champy, 1995). The workers are to become self-managers, expertise managers, enterprise managers and they will feel totally involved in their own successful ownership of the brave new world of global competitiveness and the fight to be the best. Such prescriptions for excellence can be applied to all sectors and the desired outcome will be the same: ease of management as workers internalise new, smart technology which makes it simpler for them to achieve required effectiveness and also makes it simple for management to monitor and survey all they do (Fincham, 2000).

Sadly for its exponents, there is no management induced strategy for improving efficiency and guaranteeing effectiveness that does not have within it the seeds of its own possible destruction: the human being required to deliver the required outcomes. Resistance was always a distinct possibility and workers could always find a way to circumvent management requirements. Unfortunately for managers, the immediacy of surveillance offered by technological innovation also releases workers into a field of new knowledge, which offers immediate power over the surveillance systems themselves. This can be internalised and removed at a moment's notice. Whether it is or not may depend in large part on whether individual workers interpret management actions as beneficial or not and whether in the increasing likelihood of their experiencing enforced change at work they have had cause to alter their basic assumptions to non-dependence, self-sufficiency and organizational rejection. Knowledge and technology admit no borders and can move freely wherever their individual owner wishes. Retaining goodwill and reciprocity of duty and responsibility between worker and manager will, as it always has, be the gauge of continued worker commitment to his/her efficient application of skill and knowledge to the effective achievement of the organization's objectives. The difference now is that there are many individuals who start out unencumbered by beliefs of organisational dependency. Our research suggests that the process of enforced change can turn yet more previously compliant individuals into workers who owe no loyalty to any organization and are impervious to the traditional appeals to gain such commitment. It is our belief that flexible teams and inspirational leadership will make little difference to restoring the organization's control and the workers' compliance. The levers of power traditionally asserted by the exponents of HRM

no longer operate consistently in the internal world of reconstructed basic assumptions.

# CONCLUSION

## THE CONTEXT OF TRANSITION

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Every enforced change in an organisation brings challenge to the individuals involved. Mergers and acquisitions have multiplied by a function of four times between 1984 and 1992 (Hunt & Downing, 1990). But for proponents of HR theory the HR resource function is present to enable individuals to respond positively, be flexible, internalise the strategic elements of change and be committed to quality outcomes for all the stakeholders involved (Miller, 1987; Kochan & Dyer, 1993; Mant, 1996).

Only in the nineties did more evidence appear that suggested that all was not well with the victims of such changes. Cases studies began to illustrate that even where individuals were involved in change they did not always accept it or adapt to it as the rhetoric suggested they would do if correctly handled (Størey, 1989a 7 b; 1995). Indeed, some writers began to question whether the theoretical basis of HRM's claims were not beginning to look flawed to the point of being impossible to achieve (Blyton and Turnbull, 1992). Perhaps HR departments really could not deliver worker compliance by following the prescriptive paths laid out by the proponents at all (Armstrong, 1989; Keenoy, 1990a & b). In which case, what was needed was a closer look at the processes, which such enforced change brings about to the individuals who have to undergo it (Delbridge & Lowe, 1997; Beardwell, 1998). After all, 'the involvement of the HRM function is a matter of humanitarian concern for absorbing grief among those people who were acquired' (Hunt & Downing, 1990, 196). And though the theory propounds that their 'behavioural processes post acquisition are of prime

importance in success and failure' the reality may be that the immediate issues of merging two groups and the 'preference of macro contingency explanations over micro personal questions of adjustment may help explain the relatively minor role provided by the HRM function in most of the research' (ibid p.200).

Mergers are obvious examples of enforced change. There have been other initiatives, which have brought similar stress to individuals undergoing organisationally imposed change. TQM and BPR both require root and branch reassessment of work processes and seem to focus readily on the efficiency and effectiveness factors which they seek to improve rather than the human beings whose efforts will bring about the sought-for improvements. If we list the requirements of many such programmes they sound obvious:

- Products must satisfy the needs of end-users
- Products should conform to such end-user requirements
- Any deviation should be measured, reflecting the costs to the company of not getting things right.
- Companies should establish an internal market where supplier consumer chains pervade the organisation. (McCabe, 1998).

There is no mention here of the people who will actually deliver the newly required value-added factors which customers allegedly demand. There is no mention here of the requirement for involving those whose co-operation is needed to make all this possible. And even the original proponents of TQM, the quality gurus, 'implicitly subscribe to a one-dimensional view of power, perceiving it to reside in the hands of an omniscient and omnipotent

management who can tap into their employees' creativity by encouraging their involvement in problem solving' (Knights, 1999).

But worse is to follow. Business Process Engineering propounds a theory devoid of any belief in involving individual workers at all. The proponents, when confronted with the estimated 50 – 70% failure rate for any of the espoused benefits of such imposed change, merely suggest that problems have stemmed mainly from not doing 'real' engineering at all and not being radical enough (Hammer & Stanton, 1994), while Champy (1995) suggests that disappointments stem from a failure to re-engineer management first. This enthusiasm for pursuing required business effectiveness factors regardless of its effect on workers could only be interpreted as an offensive on those who cannot resist (Grint & Case, 1998, 557).

Early descriptions of impositional power sometimes offer different levels or dimensions applying to individual actors: '(1) naked power where differences are reconciled by the more powerful imposing their interests and will on others; (2) political power where certain issues are denied a platform or voice due to political manoeuvring or machinations; and (3) social power where subordinates internalise the values of the powerful, which has the effect of silencing any capacity that they may have to express conflicting or different interests' (Lukes, 1986). We may accept that the first level is similar to the instrumental power, which has always been available to employers for putting dissenters out of work. The second may be a consequence of the first, which the rhetoric accompanying the alleged benefits of imposed change makes even more likely (Applebaum, 1994). An example of this amelioration of terminology is common, 'reframing the concept so that downsizing is viewed as a continuous process of

corporate transformation and change' (Ket de Vries, 1997, 11). But, from the point of view of the present research it is the third dimension that is of interest to us. How do the managers of change know that individual workers have internalised the newly proclaimed good news of organisational change? Only by examining what those subjected to the process say is there any chance that we may find out.

## **TRADITIONAL SUBJECTS & OTHERS**

The present research has given us an opportunity of examining what individuals say about the meaning they ascribe to imposed change at work. So, we have sought to use their narratives to uncover what they believe should or should not have happened during that experience. We have identified subjects whose responses would coincide with the disaffected and alienated, not just those who could be described as losing expected career prospects and cherished jobs, but also those who watched others so used (Hallier & Lyon, 1993; Hallier & James, 1995). The experience for those who held basic assumptions about the organisation's duty to safeguard job security, to exhibit loyalty to those workers who have been loyal and trustworthy would be replicated throughout the job insecurity literature: abandonment, betrayal, disloyalty, denigration and marginalisation would be a fair summary of the responses.

It would be fair to say that such subjects tend to have been employed in their organisation for long periods of between 17 and 37 years. Several of them have reached very senior positions in the organisation. However, their disaffection is not just about the organisational promises in which they had put their trust. There can be inherent value in the way in which individuals have become

accustomed to working and among those factors autonomy is mentioned most frequently in the narratives. Both pharmaceutical chemists and health development managers appreciated the freedom to decide their work and its management and resented losing that and being subjected to a new, closely monitored scrutiny. The result of imposed change for these subjects has been alienation in the classic mode of disengagement from the work, loss of interest in organisational objectives, going through the motions at work, and refocusing on interests outside work altogether.

In contrast, we have identified subjects who seem not to have had such basic assumptions of dependency on traditional organisational promises at all. Their autonomy is not vested in work or job internal decision-making or freedom to decide the sequence of work process and priorities. They define the assertion of their self-identity in terms of their own control over their career destiny. Even joining the organisation is often described as a chance encounter. They would have been equally content to join other organisations – some have done. But from the time that they undertake to start working, their commitment to the job is firmly in the context of where it may lead next. The focus of their attention is summarised in one word: marketability. So, in the face of imposed change they do not express the same anger and feeling of being betrayed. They don't mention feeling devalued or denigrated or marginalized. They may well be equally condemnatory of careless management behaviour during the change and equally judgmental about promises made and not kept. But for them there remains the challenge, willingly accepted, of making change work to their own personal benefit.

Finally, there are subjects whose basic assumptions have changed from being traditionally dependent on the organisation to being free of feeling trapped by imposed change. Obvious candidates are those who have been offered employment by outside agencies or attracted offers from internal but independent providers who have seen them at work. But there are others who have experienced similar change whose trigger has been away from work and had the same effect of allowing them to experience control by surviving something they had always feared more than losing employment.

All of these subjects may well have survived to stay in the organisation. Their unsuspecting managers could be forgiven for believing that they have accepted the inevitable and are now settled back into ready compliance. Following them through the different responses based on their assumptions about change has enabled us to examine in detail whether such confidence is well placed or not. For, we would agree with the view that 'there is some danger in assuming that compliance reflects 'a new identity' because even in the case of prisoners who appear to conform to the rules of prison life, this does not extend to the point of identifying with the values of the guards or of passing off an opportunity to escape, should it present itself' (Knights & McCabe, 1999, 221).

## **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND THEIR LINKS**

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The initial stimulus, which triggered the present research, was the assertion of one subject who had endured a very harrowing experience during enforced change at work that she 'felt stronger' as a result. This led to the quest to discover why she interpreted events in this way when her peer group workers were expressing very negative views. We accepted that in explaining their

experience, subjects would express a number of opinions about what they thought should and should not happen to them in such a situation. This was the first step in our research approach and it indicated that there can be quite distinct expectancies lying behind personal interpretation, which predate the event itself and may well have been unchallenged until something different from the original expectancy occurs. Once these basic assumptions about change had been expressed it became possible to examine the implication of what holding such views might imply in related areas of perception and interpretation.

The question of control and optimism about the future suggested Attribution literature as a first step into further open probing. How do the classic stable or unstable elements relate to the different basic assumptions being expressed? We identified that subjects holding assumptions independent of the organisation for career progression and development focused on their own abilities and efforts and did not follow the dependents into depression, recrimination and alienation.

The statement of feeling stronger also raised the question of whether subjects felt more self-sufficient, particularly at the prospect of a further experience of enforced change at work. The literature on self-efficacy offered a context for comparison and possible linkage. In this respect a further distinction between confidence and behaviour coping strategies indicated that independent subjects expressed confidence about future survival but only in the context of the present organisation. Their self-perception did not extend to options outside the organisation.

Finally, the implications for the continuing debate about psychological contract related closely to the opinions expressed by our subjects. Was loyalty and trust

still alive in the perception of our subjects and would they seek to find it in another organisation or abandon it altogether? We found, again that independent subjects never held such beliefs in the first place and those that did, dependents, were more likely to have abandoned any hope of finding it again. A few, who were offered employment elsewhere, were prepared to offer tentative hope of its restitution. However, some subjects who had done well under the enforced change with new promotion and responsibility, continued to harbour doubts about a restoration of the traditional rhetoric of mutual care between employee and employer.

All of these conclusions are a consequence of the enforced change and the revelation of expectancy which it triggers about what should and should not occur in the opinion of the individuals affected. But, what about the antecedents? Why do individuals hold particular expectancies? We have seen that there are suggestions offered as to past experience which subjects suggest has been salient in forming beliefs and expectancies: a significant manager, past experience of change, a parent in self-employment, were sometimes cited as significant factors. Our own research has focused less on the anecdotal than the effect of enforced change on basic beliefs themselves. The subjects we have identified as reconstructing what they had previously believed reinterpret themselves quite differently as a result. To move from dependence to independence is a significant step for any individual to achieve. We have identified different factors that can give rise to that change, an offer of employment by an outside agent, a significant family loss, the reassessment of life through marital breakdown. Of all our subjects, these alone exhibit behavioural coping ability, which causes them to feel confident about prospects

out with the organisation, though not always in self-employment.

We have not attempted to generalise these findings. We acknowledge that the number of subjects is too few. Neither have we attempted to make any comparison between organisations. This would be a macro level consideration outside the scope of the present research. What we can offer here are pointers for future research. We would suggest that where links have been demonstrated between basic assumptions about work and responses about self-perception and self-sufficiency, there is scope for examining their existence across a broader band of subjects undergoing enforced change at work.

Whether organisations can continue to draw on the traditional assumptions laid out in the theories of psychological contract and by extension the theoretical assumptions of Human Resource Management depends on individuals at work continuing to link such beliefs to their self-perceptions of value, meaning and trust. We believe that there are now enough indicators to suggest that such beliefs and assumptions either no longer exist or do not link together in the way that companies and their managers have come to expect from the theory.

## **DECONSTRUCTION & RECONSTRUCTION**

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If the question of knowledge and power dominates the discussion on relationships between worker and employer then the question of how the iron cage is deconstructed becomes vitally important (Lyotard, 1979). If Human Resource Management and its unitary theory of control represent Modernistic employment theory, then deconstruction should dissemble the very foundations of empowerment for the individuals in thrall to its promises (Beer et al, 1984). The response of those who have internalised the promises of modern

organisations to enforced change at work would indicate that such a process has begun in earnest.

If we list the factors which individuals attest they have been deprived of it makes a formidable list of all that appeared to be promised to them by employing organisations: autonomy; status and respect; career prospects; fairness; involvement; listening; a friendly culture; variety of job and location; supportive manager; valued contribution; significant work results; achievement and good work procedures are all mentioned by subjects whose basic assumption is that the organisation owes them this. Why else are the cries of anguish and anger so heart-felt and the alienation so palpable?

In place of that, for most of them, came a diminution of all those valued aspects of their perceived employment rights and instead a regime which brought a closer monitoring of their labours; an imposition of profitability metrics; a world of instant response to failure to achieve targets by deprivation of the very things that they know they need to achieve value-added performance. They are confronted by a bricks-without-straw situation, which brings with it compliance and at best a willingness to stay until something better comes up or an active search for another organisation that will offer them the same supporting and nurturing environment, which they believe they had before imposed change shattered the reality.

In contrast, we have identified subjects who never held the basic assumption about the organisation being an all-loving provider of security of tenure and future prospects. Their autonomy is expressed not in terms of the work they do and their freedom to do it as they wish. Their autonomy is expressed in terms of

their ability to take advantage of change to further their own career interests. The basic assumptions here expressed as advice to others, for example, comes across quite definitely: 'I can see opportunity and take it'; 'you have to promote yourself'; 'business is business'; 'I had no peer group'. The focus of their commitment is not the previous Garden of Eden at all. It is the next opportunity to break out and get on with improving career prospects.

At this point we can refer to the long search for the essential element of commitment in the theory of Human Resource Management. It has been the object of such a quest both by managers and gurus alike (Hycinski, 1993). It had first to be identified (Becker, 1960, 1964, 1968) then built up proactively in the organisation (Buchanan, 1974), then actively pursued (Bartolome & Evans, 1979). For those who were looking for its antecedents there was an interesting discovery: organisational commitment was found to be antecedent to job satisfaction rather than an outcome of it (Bateman & Straaser, 1984). But that did not stop the continued search for this Excalibur of management control techniques (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Dubin et al, 1976; Kiesler, 1971; Salancik, 1977). The search was on and it was not to be diverted easily. More modern quests have continued presenting the concept of commitment in more up to date guises: it is a negotiational process (Walton, 1985a & b), it is essential to secure during change (Bate, 1992; Oliver, 1990; Guest, 1992; Iverson, 1996). Latterly, some researchers have been more guarded in the claims made for its existence. Warning voices began to suggest that organisational commitment is a diffuse concept. Its focus is multifarious and securing it is uncertain (Coopey & Hartley, 1991). It is, therefore, not nearly as easy either to identify or guarantee in employees. What we can say here is that

if feeling good about the organisation depends on the traditional beliefs of loyalty, trust and job security, then enforced change imposed on subjects who have bought into this belief brings about immediate repudiation of the organisation and withdrawal of good will.

However, for those who do not hold such basic assumptions of dependence there is still the interesting question of how their alleged autonomy affects traditional beliefs about career. Stages in a career have long been used to attempt to evaluate personal commitment to the organisation (Super, 1959; Rosen & Jerdee, 1988). This commitment needs careful nurturing during the first few months (Meyer & Allen, 1988) and then has to take account of these different stages and the perceptions they bring (Cohen, 1991; Caldwell, Chatman & O'Reilly, 1990). There are some interesting hints that not all workers can be secured by the simplistic promises of constant progression and significantly they lie among professionals who feel committed to the job and see the organisation as simply a vehicle to enable them to go on doing what they feel committed to anyway (Blau, 1985, Koslowsky, 1990). But overall there is one assumption that seems to underwrite most of the literature: by astute internal manoeuvring the organisation can keep hope of progression alive for the individual worker and thus secure his or her continued commitment (Metcalfe & Briody, 1995). What is accepted is that if the mythical organisational commitment is threatened, then it will effect job dissatisfaction, intention to quit and irritation with the organisation (Begley & Czajka, 1993). So, the managers of change will continue to conduct themselves astutely and be careful how they behave during enforced change at work (Goffee & Scase, 1992).

What we can attest from the present research is that many subjects do not

look for such planning and promise of progression from the organisation. These independent subjects are well able to look for it from their own resources. So, for them there is an internalised quest for job opportunity and employability. What may be lacking, however, is their confidence to make a successful career outside the organisation. Internal politics is the continued focus of their career aspirations. It is more typical of subjects who have reconstructed their basic assumption of dependence on the organisation to embark on the newfound career outside the organisation. That may be because the trigger has been an outside offer of employment but can equally be the survival of a personal or family tragedy which proves to them that they assert themselves without the need of dependence on an organisation – and if they can do it in their personal life, they see no reason why they should not do it in their working life, too.

The spectre of the organisation seeking to reinvent itself through transformation of work processes and the required supporting attitudes will probably be a constant however it is packaged and promoted. It rests on an assumption that job satisfaction and organisational commitment can somehow be secured (Curry et al, 1986; Shore & Martin, 1989). However, employee responsiveness is always mediated by their assessment of the reasonableness of such calls in relation to how they are treated with regard to job security, conditions of work, promotion prospects, etc. As the effects of the results of enforced change at work impact on individuals, it becomes apparent to them that 'commitment is often expected from but not given to employees' (Kamoche, 1998). Side by side with that demonstration comes reinforcement for many 'that the idea of a 'career' is constructed and reconstructed while the practices related to this notion are deployed and survive or fail' (Hatchuel, 1999). It is our contention

that such reconstruction is more likely when enforced change triggers a reassessment of the basic assumption of dependence on the organisation. For many of our subjects enforced change at work brought about that shift in expectancy of continuing dependency and career support.

## **DISCIPLINE, INTERNAL RESPONSE & MANAGEMENT**

The view of the organising of work as dominance of the individual by those who want to control society is central to writers who see capitalism as the hegemony of the few who own the means of labour over the many who have only their labour to offer (O'Neill, 1987, Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979). From this interpretation of labour processes comes the concept of power in its instrumental and social forms, which govern relationships between owners of capital and those who invest their labour (Lukes, 1986; Barnes, 1988). New managerial strategies derive from the apparently humanised exercise of this power dispensed in ways that would take individuals with it so that they would be less aware of the obvious dominance inherent in the relationship (Child, 1985; Friedman, 1984).

In Foucault's view language and categories imposed at the very opening of relations governed the disciplinary nature of the discourse between the parties to the relationship thereafter (1977, 1980, 1984). This imposed dominance could mean a monitoring of subjects in a constant panopticon (Fox, 1989) whereby the organisation and its managers could exercise control without being seen by the subjects themselves (Clegg, 1989; Deetz, 1992; Jackson & Carter, 1998). But, even with sophisticated techniques of observation, this compliance would still depend on some benefit for the individual. The danger to the organisation is the

belief that there may, in fact, be nothing in the promises made of reward for obedience (Jermier, Knights & Nord, 1994; Clegg, 1998). The dilemma for organisations is that they depend on monitoring behaviour and assuming from correct performance that the subject has acquiesced. But it may be that the subject is a good deal more adept at offering compliance and that the acquiescence does not denote acceptance at all (Henriques, 1984; Rose, 1990).

Enforced change at work enables us to examine how far internal compliance is still intact – if it was ever present in the first place – and how far the individual has radically changed his or her perception of the disciplinary relationship and if so, how this change has occurred. We have at this point to abandon the internal quest in subjects who are still dependent on the organisation to offer the promises looked for from the relationship. The focus of their anger is focussed on the organisation for reneging on the promises and apart from looking for an alternate organisation to offer a restored service; there is little or no personal attribution of responsibility for their own destiny or reconstruction of their basic assumptions about their employment rights. However, for subjects who were independent of the organisation then the factors which they attribute to their successful survival of enforced change is similar to the literature: effort, ability and political astuteness together, sometimes, with a supportive manager. Such subjects affirm that: 'it's all about effort and achievement'; 'proving you can do the job'; 'control of the situation and the effort you put in'; 'it's all about what you want to achieve for yourself'. Such subjects compare themselves with their dependent colleagues: 'it's the self sufficient against the whiners' and if they don't get what they want, then: 'look elsewhere'. The whole experience of enforced change confirms for some: 'there is a broad range of things I could do'

and the bottom line is: 'I am more marketable'.

For those subjects who have reconstructed their basic assumptions from dependency, there is a difference emphasis: 'I had to do it for myself'; 'I had an offer and it gave me prospects'; 'I had to take control of my life'. Not all received a job offer, some experienced the change through personal circumstances: a failed marriage; a son charged with a serious crime; a breakdown in health and recovery are typical examples. Perhaps such an experience triggers more objective personal assessment and makes subjects more philosophical about their survival prospects. Survival and self-assessment enables them to view themselves in a more self-sufficient light.

But the internal change experienced within has to relate to outside assessment of what is now possible in terms of risk-taking. Here we have examined two elements of self-sufficiency: cognitive control and behavioural coping ability (McCarthy & Newcomb, 1992). We have identified subjects who feel confident and experience no risk in making the move outside, compared with subjects who have proved their confidence but still feel uncomfortable about stepping outside the organisation. What has emerged is a distinction based on competence proven in a job but continued feelings of dependence on the organisation for employment, compared with subjects who have been offered assurance by an outside agency that their competence is recognised and so are ready to take the step outside the organisation. For some, experience and success in a new job does not bring self assurance: 'you're only as good as your next piece of business'; for other, more independent subjects their confidence reinforces the self-sufficiency to survive more change within the organisation and sometimes reinforces a feeling of marketability but doesn't lead to a move outside the

organisation. Only those subjects who have had their self-sufficiency validated by an outside agent or experienced and survived significant personal disaster seem to embark on the prospect of change with confidence.

Managing knowledge is a logical extension of panopticon in a world whose technology offers a new opportunity to observe while remaining unobserved. The prospects look encouraging and ought in theory to offer better prospects of control than ever. There are those who see in the management of knowledge a new opportunity to assert control techniques and re-establish hegemony over the important human resource. 'The wide use of teams in BPR and process improvement efforts has given senior management newfound faith in the ability of skilled knowledge workers to understand, re-shape and improve their own work' (Neef, 2000, 15). The evidence of this belief being justified does not look too encouraging. Workers in manufacturing seem to have the ability to see the hidden agenda in managers' attempts to inveigle them into team working schemes of production (Ezzamel, 1998; Knights, 2000). White-collar workers can be as resistant to such schemes, seeing them as a ploy to get more functional flexibility for less money (Procter & Currie, 2000). Even more disturbing for the proponents of this new control are findings that IT surveillance in the pharmaceutical sector may be as far away from establishing panopticon as ever (McKinlay, 2000). We would maintain that the tacit knowledge required by those who work in any organisation is the very thing that makes them employable and that they know this very well. Enforcing change on individuals may make them alienated, more aware of their own marketability or even reconstructed in a way that causes them to feel independent of organisations for continued success at work.

'Social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices - thus constitutively altering their character' (Giddens, 1991, 38). We would maintain that the present research has allowed a closer examination of this inner re-examination process during the experience of enforced change at work. The prospects for the management of knowledge do not look encouraging for managers banking on reasserting their traditional authority.

## **FUTURE OF WORK AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT**

The simple prescriptions of future working patterns have attracted the attention of writers from different traditions, both researchers and popular management gurus. The promise of unitary control, which the theory of Human Resource Management seemed to offer, promised linkage between efficiency and effectiveness whilst harnessing the good will and motivation of the worker. One of the key factors would be flexibility (Guest, 1987) by which the writers seemed to be referring to functional flexibility (Curson, 1984). A concerted approach to the tools of Human Resource Development would enable the HR department to co-ordinate the incentives to consolidate the commitment of individuals and consensus in groups and teams (Purcell, 1987, 1989). These flexible styles of working would affect the status of individuals within the organisation and core workers might find themselves in sub-contract or consultancy mode (Handy, 1989).

It took a few years to observe the effects of this brave new world. This new flexibility might have repercussions for both employment and the organisation (Morris & Blyton, 1991; Blyton & Turnbull, 1992) and some brown-field sites

attempting radical change among their traditional workforce encountered significant levels of resistance (Storey, 1989, 1995). Even the incentives offered to make workers feel part of the world of capitalist shareowners failed to emerge quite as its prophets had foretold (Dunn, 1990). The popular literature began to question whether the new world of flexible working had not actually achieved flexibility of cost, number and time but not the value-added functional skills, which the new worker would acquire (Handy, 1994). If the internal motivational consensus was now coming apart, how would organisations cope (Christie, 1994; Marcotte, 1995)? If people were indeed the most important asset of the company and they were being alienated, what was the chance of getting them involved in flexible working and high commitment (Ehrlich, 1994; Stewart, 1991)?

We have referred above to the discussion on whether psychological contract is a valid concept or a realistic basis for discussing the interactive relationship between the individual and the employing organisation (Rousseau, 1998; Guest, 1998). It is not our intention to reopen that debate here. However, we do accept that the elements of the contract as laid out in its transactional and relational factors are worth examining again. It is less important to discover whether the assumptions made by workers are reciprocated in fact in the organisation and if not whether a contract can be said to exist at all. What matters more is how individuals who have believed that their employment contract was underwritten in this way will respond to enforced change at work. In this regard, we have identified subjects who have held such beliefs of life long commitment to a professional position in return for loyalty, trust and promotion and heard how they respond to what they see as its breach. We have observed that such

subjects are likely to have served most of their employment with the organisation and are now reaching the last fifteen years of economically active life. Their response is predictable: a feeling of anger at betrayal; withdrawal of good will; unwillingness to leave until they have got as much as they can out of the organisation and willingness to consider alternative outlets for their energies, official or unofficial. The organisation has to face up to the fact that these are now their senior executives – responsible for motivating the younger, more dependent employees. Is this the result they really wanted? What is the interference cost to the organisation of totally demotivated senior managers?

But, one thing rarely emphasised in current research is the existence of subjects who do not appear to hold any of the elements of the psychological contract as they are traditionally described. Mostly younger subjects in this study feel no loyalty and trust and even view with cynical acceptance the fact that senior managers will lie about job security amid enforced change and then leave with significant emoluments, leaving fellow workers to fend for themselves. The focus of their own efforts will be to look after their own career prospects and advise friends: 'don't take it personally'; 'use the organisation as it used you'. They may not be confident enough to leave or see any opening for alternative employment elsewhere. However, in the meantime they have learned that the only thing that is important is to become more employable and that means identifying knowledge, skill and experience 'that will make me marketable'.

Finally, there are subjects whose basic assumptions have changed completely from dependence to feeling independent of the organisation for their future career prospects. Some have been headhunted; others have survived their own tragedies or seen parents wrestle with self-employment, sometimes with

catastrophic results. They can cope, they are self-sufficient, they are not afraid of a repeat of the experience of enforced change and they are willing to risk moving out altogether. Most of all they are confident and seem unlikely to drop back into any belief of need in others – organisations or individuals. Taken together, the independents and reconstructed subjects account for two-thirds of the subjects interviewed in this research. Given that the other third is already discontented but determined to stay on in an alienated state, we would be entitled to ask: who does believe in the promises of HRM anymore and more importantly, who now controls the workplace, workers or managers (Edwards, 1979)?

The subject of the future of work invites a final comment on Organisation Learning at this point. In the midst of enforced change at work, whether part of designed or accidental change, there is an emerging assertion that careful handling of change can offer valuable opportunities for corporate learning (Hendry, 1996; Beer & Eisenstat, 1996). It raises the question of the sense in which we can identify the process that might be involved in this learning (Tsang, 1997) and whether the traditional ways we think of the learning within individuals can somehow be taken over and used by organisations. If its claims are to be examined more closely, then it would seem logical to accept that individuals are the primary learning entity in firms and it is individuals who create the learning which facilitates organisational transformation (Nicolini & Mezner, 1995, 730). The authors offer the distinction between single-loop and double loop learning in which the first is learning of causal factors affecting the change they have undergone and the second is the interpretation that they put upon this experience. They speak of 'organisational social construction of

learning as one of the channels through which the managerial cognitive perspective and interpretation of the world is imposed as the received view and becomes the dominant way of acting and enacting' (ibid p.741). Looking at the range of responses reviewed in the current research, even successful managers under the newly imposed work regime have reservations about the sincerity of those who have implemented it. For the majority of subjects, dependent, independent or reconstructed, there is little evidence a received view will reinforce the desired learning looked for by the proponents and managers of change.

## **SUMMARY**

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The theory of Human Resource Management suggests that its aim 'is not merely to seek compliance but to strive for the much more ambitious objective of commitment' (Storey, 1995). This goal is connected with the need to succeed for 'commitment and loyalty of employees determines the firm's ability to maintain competitive advantage' (Purcell, 1989). In the pursuit of this aim, then, HRM is a 'cultural filter which embraces the uncertainties of employee existence, imposes order and meaning on them and provides the employee with a predictable, secure and carefully projected and rewarded understanding of organisational life' (Keenoy & Anthony, 1993, 243). Ideally, it is 'an internalised, complex set of practices which provide common sense, self-evident experience and personal identity' (Alveson & Willmott, 1992).

What individuals believe about their work and its value is part of a set of socially assumed expectations and in absorbing such values both knows and becomes known. The Foucauldian analysis of this process suggests the individual

becoming more controllable, the more he or she is known. The on-going interaction of knower and known makes it easier to manipulate and manage the subject and this discursive practice makes knowledge of the individual possible in the reproduction of power relations' (Rose, 1990). What is deemed as important here is the control of the 'processes through which meaning is produced' (McNay, 1992).

We have attempted to assess what happens to this process of acquired or imposed meaning in the event of enforced change at work. In doing this we have accepted that when confronted with the most unwanted outcomes in the context of their working career, individuals are faced with the position the 'as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes very urgent, very difficult and quite possible' (Townley, 1992, 17). In this we have sought to examine how individuals evaluate what is most important to them. We have accepted that the 'constructs we employ to make sense of organization are moral imperatives' (Hassard & Parker, 1993, 18). In getting individuals to reveal these we have examined the process of deconstruction in which the unthinkable must be thought: that the promises made by organisations are no longer to be kept.

Our subjects have exhibited different assumptions about the organisation. Some have demonstrated traditional assumptions about job security, career prospects, loyalty and trust. Others seem never to have held such views but work rather from an independent manipulation of opportunity taken and benefit derived from whatever occurs at work. For others, a new set of assumptions is triggered offering self-sufficiency and independence of previous indebtedness to the organisation for career prospects and future employability. For each

individual, there can be no return to the easily held promises of the past. The main loser would seem to be the idea of the organisation as reliable provider of employee development and continued commitment.

In their description of emancipatory studies, Alvesson & Willmott (1992, 454) suggested that 'the challenge for the critical ethnographer is to simultaneously concentrate on local actors' meanings, symbols and values; to place these within a wider political, economic and historic framework; and to prevent such a framework from pressing the material into a particular theory and language (a dominating voice)'. We would suggest that we have attempted to answer that challenge in the present research. We would further suggest that we have demonstrated that 'individuals are not mere objects in truth games. They are self-referencing and self-creating subjects and the new concept of truth games is one based upon evolving relationships between truth, power and self – a genealogy of how the self constitutes itself as subject' (McKinlay & Starkey, 1998, 243).

The present research accepts that the small number of subjects from three organisations is not sufficient to sustain the belief that radical change has occurred for most individuals in their experience of enforced change at work. However, it was our intention to seek to identify different responses to such change and examine how far traditional trust in the promises of HRM might have been affected, what difference enforced change would make to self-perception and what difference that would make to self-reliance and reassessment of trust and loyalty in employing organisations. We believe that sufficient links have been identified between these factors in our subjects to justify further research more focused on the same links in a larger number of subjects across more

organisations affected by enforced change at work.

Keenoy & Anthony (1993, 235) allege that Mrs Thatcher stated: 'I came to office with one deliberate intent: to change Britain from a dependent to a self-reliant society.' We cannot state to what extent this may have happened due to her efforts. However, we can say that if the subjects of the current research are typical of the changes, which those subjected to enforced change at work have undergone, then the fulfilment of her dream may have been achieved in a way she could not have imagined. This suggests an uncertain future for those managers who continue put their trust in the traditional promises that Human Resource Management theory can deliver compliant and committed workers in the face of continuing enforced change at work.

# APPENDIX ONE

## METHODOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

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During 1992 I conducted a number of programmes to prepare middle and senior managers for the impact of Market Testing on HM Customs & Excise in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Birmingham Collections. During the modules it became apparent that the majority of the attendees were uncomfortable about becoming the Action Officer, responsible for preparing the inside bid against an outside provider tendering for Civil Service work. I noted at the time that 80% of Market Tests were won by the in-house group and wondered why it was that the majority of managers viewed the prospect with foreboding. So it was that I embarked on research into managers' attitudes towards Market Testing for which I was awarded an MSc at the University of Stirling in 1994.

At the same time the Department published the results of its own staff survey in two parts Voice I, and two year's later Voice II. Again results showed that staff and managers had a poor opinion of the Service in its ability to handle change and that there was widespread dissatisfaction about comparative wage levels, their status as Civil Servants and their career prospects. The fusion of the two Scottish Collections in 1996 brought another opportunity to look at the effect of enforced change on the perceptions of some of the subjects affected.

In the same year another client, Syntex Pharmaceuticals, underwent a takeover by Roche, who after several weeks of assessment and encouraging individuals to

stay, then announced that they would close the site leaving 300 employees without a job. During the following nine months the staff experienced a management buy-out attempt and eventually a takeover by Quintiles, a worldwide, aggressively acquisitive Clinical Research Organisation. It was while conducting a management-training course subsequent to this merger that I spoke to one female manager who said, 'I feel stronger as a result of this experience'. This chance remark prompted me to want to examine why she and perhaps others might respond in this way when most of the anecdotal evidence suggested that people felt badly served by uncongenial, enforced change at work.

## **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS**

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The starting point for the research was the basic assumptions that individuals hold about themselves and their employment prospects and how these might be responsible for different individual responses in the face of enforced change at work. If subjects differ widely in their response to such change, perhaps they judge what is experienced according to different criteria. The question now remained: how can we get subjects to reveal what their assumptions or criteria are? The MSc strategy of preset questions using a Likert scale seemed inappropriate as a technique to draw out discursively the many different answers that might be forthcoming. Similarly, quantitative methods require that the researcher identify the factors around which evaluation will take place. Somehow the method needed to allow for the variety of responses that would be likely to be forthcoming from subjects from different backgrounds.

## **QUALITATIVE APPROACHES**

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In this regard the theoretical basis of ethnomethodology seemed most likely to coincide with the needs of the present research. 'from the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schutz and the symbolic interactionism of George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman' comes this concern to understand encounters in their own terms, and thus to explain the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions which characterise social situations' (Hassard, 1990, 98). 'For ethnomethodologists the attempts by lay actors to make sense of the social world represent mechanisms through which social structure is created and sustained' (ibid p.98). Here, we are looking at assumptions, leading to interpretation, leading to imputed meaning. This approach allows the researcher the opportunity to identify how different interpretation is dependent not on different experience, for the objective experience, ostensibly, is the same. What brings about a different interpretation would be a different basic assumption or expectancy held by the individual subject him or herself.

The analysis of transition has seen the employment of large-scale surveys seeking to pinpoint significance between subjects (Nicolson & West, 1988). However, such findings while offering insight and explanation for class changes among the subjects of change at work, offer few conceptualising variables (Starkey, 1990, 102). That females are found to move more frequently and accept risk more often than their male counterparts may be significant but fails to explain why such differences may be occurring, whether such differences will continue to apply or are just passing differences unattached to any internal factors of comparison between subjects. In contrast, Starkey suggests that Zuboff (1988) offers a different approach whose goal is 'to understand the living

meaning of a collective situation' (Starkey, 1990, 103). 'The interior, preconceptual, felt texture of human responsiveness is an immensely rich source of critical insight into the situation that a person is living. While this level of responsiveness provides for individual variation, the constellation of commonly felt meanings can be seen to be a powerful critique of a shared situation' (Zuboff, 1988, 423).

## **THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

Thus far, then, the semi-structured interview seemed to offer the most obvious approach to enable basic assumptions about self and organisational responsibility in the employment relationship to be uncovered. It was clear that individuals would need to be encouraged to speak openly with as little indication from the interviewer of bias in interest or direction the probing should take, particularly at the opening of the interview. Could the interviewer open the interview without divulging such a bias?

Whichever questions were used, they would need to include some reference to expectancy and previously held assumptions about what would happen during such change should it ever occur. This approach was reinforced by the question of ethicality (Townley, 1994, 167). What was it that individuals thought ought or ought not to happen in a situation of enforced change which might make subjects have to face up to the unthinkable? Whether a subject believes an incident is right or wrong depends on whether he or she believes it should or should not have happened. So, if you believe killing to be wrong then any incidence of killing will necessarily be condemned. On the other hand, if it is accepted as reasonable practice then the occurrence will go unremarked. So

ethicality seemed to be vital to the holding of basic assumptions.

It was here that the work of Louis (1980 a & b), in her work on surprise and sense-making, offered an option for triggering such an opening. She asked what was it that individuals found to be confirmed in their previously held beliefs and what was it that was disconfirmed to allow her access to the inner world of subjects' beliefs about what ought or ought not to occur in life events. We decided to follow a similar track to open our semi-structured interviews. This, then, gave us the first four questions: what did you expect that did/did not happen; what did you not expect that did/did not happen?

## **SUBSTANTIVE THEORY**

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At this opening stage of the interview we were allowing for the opportunity of hearing basic assumptions described by the individual him or herself. Like all self-related accounts we expected to be given widely varying accounts. In the routine accounts of ethnomethodology there is a suggestion that we should 'avoid 'constructive analysis' and instead confine ourselves to understanding the awesome indexicality of everyday accounts' (Hassard, 1990, 100). But the indexicality technique used in grounded theory requires a large base of subjects to identify common descriptors or significant accounts (Jacobson, 1987). It would be reasonable to question whether the scope of the present research offered sufficient base to make generalisations from. However, we would maintain that our purpose was to identify commonly held basic assumptions about how the organisation was perceived to have behaved during the enforced change and what interpretation and meaning revealed about the basic assumptions held by the individual. Only then would we seek to examine how

these initial responses related to a wider range of self-appraisal about future prospects in the organisation.

So, we are allowing the individuals in the research cohort to identify different oughts or ought nots which organisations seem to think they can get away with, but which the individual believes they ought not to have embarked on at all. In the terms used in grounded theory, we are allowing individuals to divulge the basis of the substantive theory and then allowing that revelation to offer us an opportunity to examine distinctions between subjects of what they believe ought or ought not to occur during enforced change at work in the future (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 32).

What this can offer is the opportunity to compare and contrast different sets of beliefs about enforced change. Does the subject, who feels stronger as a result of the experience of enforced change herself hold different basic assumptions from someone who did not feel strengthened or even felt weakened and do those assumptions change in some cases as a result of the experience?

## **FORMAL THEORY**

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The question of the context within which these responses fall has to an extent to be delineated by the researcher. For it was clear that there was already extensive research on the effect of unemployment on individuals, as also job insecurity and its effect on individuals. Our own approach has been to try and link differences in initial response to enforced change to other self-assessment literatures and then open a broader discussion of factors related to a wider debate on commonly held views on what organisations should or should not do

in the opinion of those subjected to that change.

We chose two literatures, which seemed to offer a logical connection with initial questioning provoked by the incident of enforced change. The first was Attribution literature, because it examines ways in which individuals link their experience of enforced change to internal factors of their own performance. The question of control and controllability in the literature was salient here: did feeling stronger as a result of change have something to do with the traditional elements offered in this literature about internal vs external and stable vs unstable elements? Further, the literature offers an insight into optimistic bias and that again seemed to approximate quite closely to the attestation of feeling stronger. At very least it might offer a contrast between those who felt optimistic and those who did not together with some insight into whether traditional internal, stable vs external, unstable ones made any difference to their apparent optimistic bias or lack of it.

The literature concerning self-sufficiency offered a further opportunity to examine the effects of enforced change on perceptions or surviving future enforced change. Here, again, the difference between subjects' basic assumptions can be compared with their perceptions of self-sufficiency. Particularly, whether self-sufficiency is linked to the feeling of being stronger through the experience of enforced change at work and whether that belief is based on affective or behavioural factors. In other words, we can identify whether new confidence triggers self-sufficient action in subjects, or new competence triggers confidence and self-sufficiency.

Whilst examining these differences, we have looked at subjects whose basic

assumptions are changed and reconstructed by the experience of enforced change at work. For, looking at both literatures we can assess different links between self-sufficiency and consequent action and the triggers, which are likely to make this reassessment happen for individual subjects.

## **CONTEXTUAL DEBATE**

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We made the context of our current research the psychological contract debate. In some ways it has been well aired in recent years. Enough coverage has already been given to whether the contract can in any real sense be said to exist at all and whether the alleged elements within the contract can be identified as relational or transactional or not and it is not our intention to extend the detail of those debates in any way.

However, it seemed relevant to address the individual elements as outlined in the theory to discover how far they remain relevant to individuals and to those who hold similar basic assumptions or something different. Whether they are held or not could indicate that the link between, say, continued loyalty and trust in the organisation was still thought to be important or, alternatively, no longer important at all.

At very least this would offer an explanation as to the affect of basic assumptions on traditional elements of the psychological contract and whether these remain intact after enforced change at work. It may also be possible to identify subjects whose basic assumptions do not include these elements or for whom they have ceased to be important. The implications for the claims of traditional HRM might then be reinforced, alternatively they might be considered

totally irrelevant in the light of the enforced change experienced by subjects.

In this respect we have actively introduced the elements of the psychological contract into the discussion with subjects during their interview and also asked them what advice they would give to those undergoing enforced change at work. This question has frequently been found to give rise to strongly held views about what should and should not be attempted by those who wish to survive future assaults of organisationally-triggered change at work. It is an opportunity to hear currently held basic assumptions thought suitable for future survival in the face of such change

## **SUBJECTS CHOSEN**

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We have interviewed 32 subjects in three organisations undergoing enforced change at about the same time. They were organisations we were working in at the time whose subjects we had known as an external provider of management training.

Within each group there is a representative selection of individuals with a spread of age, experience and career outcome. As near as possible the gender and age spread is representative of the demographic constitution of the workforce at the time of the enforced change. The interviews lasted one hour and a half on average and followed a format laid out in a logical sequence that guided the interviewer and is reflected in this dissertation. We included interviews with subjects who left the organisation and moved on elsewhere to another organisation. We also included two subjects who moved on to self-employment.

We accept that the weakness of the method will lie in the small number of

subjects interviewed. However, we maintain that our aim was to discover differences in basic assumptions and the links that these might have with other responses and outcomes both in self-awareness and self-sufficiency. We also wanted to identify those who had changed or reconstructed their basic assumptions following enforced change at work to identify elements that might have made a different outcome more or less likely. That such links exist would be enough to justify further research focusing solely on subjects having a profile of such assumptions and establishing their response under enforced change would seem sufficient justification to confining the first cohort to a small number before seeking further support in more general research. What we are seeking to achieve here is theory generation, grounded in limited comparison groups (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 133). In this respect we seek to 'make comparisons among an array principally to generate theory using preselected categories based on the logic of verification (ibid p.133).

We believe that we have based this methodology on the traditional assumptions of ethnomethodology. We accept that 'organisations have no material existence of their own. Instead they are social constructions whose identities can only be accessed through reference to the locations of their productions. Meanings are conferred upon social activities by 'competent' actors – actors who interpret events according to the social context in which they occur' (Hassard, 1990, 108). We maintain that this interpretation and its meaning has been examined in the present research methodology and that the significance of basic assumptions and their reconstruction and the link to related literatures relevant to enforced change at work has been established.

# APPENDIX TWO

## ORGANISATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

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Enforced change at work is a broad category, which could embrace many of the thousands of mergers and acquisitions that occur with increasing frequency here in the UK and in the USA (Hunt & Downing, 1990, 195). Indeed, there is an increasing number of case studies and research into managing such change not just in the private sector where unregulated change has always been apparent, but also in the public sector where it was not, until the advent of Thatcherism. And so, from the outset of that initiative for more entrepreneurialism in government, both local and national, there has been an interest in examining the process and effect of enforced change (Lovell, 1994; Bacharach, 1996; Lowndes, 1997; Schick & Wistrich, 1998). Some have offered the big picture of cultural change and assurance of objectives in change (Leach, 1996; Thomson & Pollitt, 1997), while others have focused on case study examining competence enhancement (Thomas, 1996; Pye, 1988). Increasingly, they are frank about the impact of change on the achievement of its goals: 'the issue is one of underachievement, where change initiatives which began with 'second order' ambitions (Watzlawick et al, 1974) end up having only limited first-order consequences (Brooks & Bate, 1994, 177). In other words, behaviour may change (first order), but attitudes do not (second order).

In the present research we have sought to focus on individuals within organisations undergoing enforced change at work and examine the effect on

internal interpretative factors at work. We will maintain that how feasible any programme of change is depends not only on achieving the outcomes or objectives embarked on in organisational terms, but the effect that it has on the individuals who endure the experience.

## **HM CUSTOMS & EXCISE**

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Customs & Excise traditionally employed just less than 25,000 men and women being one of the oldest and most prestigious departments of Government. There numbers were greatly increased and their profile extended by the inclusion of the collection Value Added Tax (VAT). They are organised into 14 Collections on a geographical basis and each Collection is headed up by a Collector, two Deputy Collectors and up to 12 Assistant Collectors,- the latter in charge of individual areas or functions within the business. They see themselves as similar to the Police Force and their rank structure mirrors it closely. However, their rewards have been allowed to fall significantly behind the appropriate ranks in their sister organisation, which has been a source of discontent to them (Randall, 1994).

In 1996 the Board set about reducing these 21 Collections throughout the British Isles to 14 in response to the Treasury's requirement that 20% of the workforce should be shed. It came as little surprise to many in the Department that the two Scottish Collections of Edinburgh and Glasgow were earmarked for amalgamation. In all, six senior managers at the two most senior levels were reduced to two at a stroke. Of 22 Assistant Collectors only 11 kept their posts. All staff functions, like Training and Personnel departments, replicated in the old Collections were reduced to one and moved from Glasgow to Edinburgh. Several middle managers found themselves interviewed for their old position competing

against a colleague who held the same office in the other Collection. Some managers were removed from training or personnel and placed in a VAT team or Fraud squad – work for which they had never been trained.

Following work with many of these managers since 1992 and research with them on the effects of Market Testing on 50 managers in Glasgow and Edinburgh I included individuals who had been affected significantly by the amalgamation. For, it would be fair to say that these were men and women accustomed to being regrouped and reorganised throughout their career, but not being put in a position that could now be described as redundancy or constructive dismissal.

The spread of 14 subjects includes a Collector, a Deputy Collector, three Assistant Collectors, with the remainder coming from Senior and Higher Executive Officers. Their ages range from the twenties to late fifties and age and service relate closely to rank achieved, though each has been affected by the amalgamation in a way that left them with no options and little notice of radical change.

## **EAST DUMBARTON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

The Local Government Act, 1988 (Competition in Sports and Leisure Facilities) Order, extended the concept of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) to the management of sports and recreation facilities. Organisationally, this represented a move away from monolithic service planning and provision and a move towards a bifurcated leisure service department grouped in client and contractor roles. Although the majority of initial contracts were won by in-house bids, constant review of performance is required in an increasingly competitive marketplace to ensure a successful transition. Moreover, during the

reorganisation of local government in Scotland, measures to reduce costs have developed an even greater imperative (Foley & McVicar, 1997).

At this time a new system of annual hours was introduced to get the most out of people involved in the service and ensure that they were on duty until eight pm each evening, ensuring they were not entitled to overtime for this work while offering a fixed number of hours over the year. In the middle of implementing this initiative, the Council were faced with a shortfall on the budget as Christmas approached and to ensure that they would meet their targets enforced redundancies were imposed.

The story of that enforced change on one team of 14 in the leisure section is featured in this research. The surviving manager fought to retain 7 staff members, the rest leaving within two months. The responses of the remaining members of the team are included in this research so that one complete team is included.

The popularity of teams and team working is in the ascendant at present, but some sobering case studies are beginning to emerge about the realities, which underlies their experience (Procter & Mueller, 2000; Marchington, 2000). The present research offers a similar opportunity to hear from team members subjected to enforced change at work.

## **SYNTEX PHARMACEUTICALS**

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The pharmaceutical industry has traditionally attracted a dedicated and highly educated workforce. The requirement of compound development has called on researchers whose specific research relates directly to a programme of drug

development. As such it would be difficult to minimise the effect of enforced change on such workers unless the change is solely one of ownership with no more than a cosmetic change of name.

That, indeed, is what seemed to be about to happen to employees of Syntex Pharmaceuticals. In 1996, Roche bought the company and the assembled staff was told by Roche's senior executives that Edinburgh was 'the sparkling jewel in our crown'. This assertion of assumed confidence was changed within two months to the announcement that the company intended to close the Edinburgh site. Employees who had previously been offered the option of redundancy should they want it, found that avenue closed. Some site managers fought to achieve a management buy-out. Others left with a golden good-bye and share options.

Six months later, Quintiles bought the Edinburgh site. The world's largest and fast-growing Clinical Research Organisation had adopted the site and there were meetings for the staff with Dennis Gillings, the owner, who espoused the current rhetoric of 'people are our most important resource and opportunity awaits all. If you have an idea, we have the finance. You are only held back by your own lack of vision'.

Site work changed from compound development to jobbing research on contract. Staff who were previously absorbed in their own research found themselves required to get the business in, contracted on price and time, manage the staff and work whatever hours it took to get excellence on time to the client who is always right. Worse than a change to what many saw as jobbing lab work, was the implementation of profitability metrics: a scheme more familiar to

management consultants, in which every minute of the day is defined as to its costed overhead and the process of each function costed and timed. Even those in the staff functions found their time defined by predictive value added assessments and a percentage yield required for all.

Corporate calculation was applied to all functions and any that failed to produce the required yield found that any overheads/investments would be cut until such times as the yields came back up to the required levels. So, travel, training and marginal costs of all kinds could be instantly frozen should targets not be achieved. On several occasions senior staff meetings requiring a flight had to be cancelled as some participants or their teams were designated as failing to achieve and suffered immediate cuts on the travel budget.

The announcement of the original takeover was announced during a management-training course, which the present researcher was running. The 11 subjects were drawn from one Director down through three Heads of department to lab team leaders and researchers. During the research two left for employment in another company (the same one) and another left to set up in business on her own – which she is still successfully engaged in.

Research in the pharmaceutical sector offers an opportunity to examine high-tech workers with a defined and circumscribed profile of skills and experience (Chiezza & Mancini, 1997). The access they have to computerisation has been the subject of research into the possibility of drawing from that close inspection the tacit knowledge that governs the success of their work (McKinlay, 2000). The findings so far are less impressive than managers had hoped for, 'that is, workers, not managers, effectively monopolise knowledge about how work is

actually done, a knowledge that has proved doggedly invisible to the scrutiny of the techniques of job design (ibid, p.10).

The present research intends to contribute to this assessment of the internal state of employees subjected to enforced change at work. The implication of these findings will affect how far the expected promise of new control through IT technology can be realised without wholehearted commitment from the workers involved. The effect of enforced change on these subjects does not offer much hope for renewed organisational control.

## **SUMMARY**

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The constant interest in company cultures and change continues to obsess managers and researchers looking for 'a social construction, consisting of webs or networks of shared meanings and outlooks which over time become deeply ingrained in the members' world-taken-for-granted and commonsense ways of thinking' (Bate, 1984, 182). But when we analyse a statement like this it begs the question: how do we know that all individuals think, feel and interpret situations in the same way? When we look for an answer it is often suggested that inner frames, references and schemas are learned early on and internalised, thus ensuring that those who inhabit a culture will interpret and impute meaning in a similar way to each other. We may accept that 'they are mental maps that enable people to make sense of their environment' and 'cognitive imperatives, which 'order' people to think in a particular way' (ibid p.182).

But what happens during the experience of enforced change at work? Here expectancies are often shattered. So, the options must be to retain the criteria once internalised, reject the criteria, or modify them completely. How that

process occurs is the subject of this research. Whatever the final outcome, it suggests that the diversity of response will find any culture or corporate perception shattered and perhaps impossible to restore.

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