

MANAGING DISRUPTION:

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A MIDDLE-MANAGER

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## **Abstract**

The thesis describes and reflects on a middle-manager's experience of a market-led economic based restructuring project in a New Zealand public sector organisation. The thesis takes the form of an autoethnography, a reflexive account of the writer's personal experience while acting in a professional capacity. The use of autoethnography as a research social science methodology has been subject to criticisms relating validity and relevance. However, the value of this methodology is the potential to 'situate' the reader inside the events, providing a rich understanding of the lived experience of the emergence of a restructured organisation. The thesis shows how a hierarchical organisation, celebrating the primacy of management and the financialization of all transactions, required middle-managers to put aside their professional / vocational commitments to work and enter into and endorse fealty / loyalty relationships with senior executives. It shows how both the language and silences of organisational change served to rationalise a new 'ordering' of the 'moral mazes' of the organisation that not only demanded commitment be demonstrated through loyalty, but also positioned middle-managers, who were rendered as insecure as their colleagues / team members, as the mediators / controllers of the restructure project. The thesis argues that the negative affect exhibited by team members involved in the restructuring project was a direct consequence of the intervention methodology and communication style deployed by senior management.

**Keywords:** Autoethnography, affect, moral mazes, financialization, fealty, ordering

*Whenever nonroutine matters, or problems for which there are no specified procedures, or questions that involve evaluative judgements are at issue, managers' behavior and perspective change markedly. In such cases, managers' essential problem is how to make things turn out the way they are supposed to, that is, as defined or expected by their bosses. (Jackall, 1988, p. 77)*

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The thesis takes the form of an auto-ethnography (Ellis, 2004) incorporating aspects of ethnographic practice and ethnographic studies on organisations. It focuses on observing the organisational affect associated with the implementation of significantly changed management structures and personnel changes in a New Zealand public sector organisation. It is a reflexive account of my experience as a middle-manager written from the first-person enquiring ‘self’ (Venkatesh, 2012) following a process of planned disruption in order to discover not only truths about my own experience, but also to understand the emergence of social formation and new organisational practice (White, 2008). I consider four issues that will feature throughout the thesis: the shaping of moral consciousness through the impacts of the reordering of management; the ‘moral mazes’ (Jackall, 1983) of my work; the organisational regulation of emotions displayed; and how feelings are trapped inside institutional arrangements.

My place of work is no longer stable with much now uncertain; hence the title ‘Managing Disruption’. Boden (1994) provides a sense of the process involved in what she refers to as the ‘organizing of action’:

What looks—from [the] outside—like behavior controlled by rules and norms is actually a delicate and dynamic series of interactionally located adjustments to a continual unfolding and working out of ‘just what’ is going on and being made to go on, which is to say, the organizing of action (p. 42).

To put it briefly, organizations do not simply work; they are made to work. I present this ‘organizing of action’ as it unfolded in my organisation and the impact this had on myself and for those considered as the ‘target’ for planned disruption. Boden’s observation is made very clear in situations where senior management initiate planned disruption from above. My interest lies in the disruptions and adjustments provoking moral questions regarding what Jackall refers to as the ‘moral mazes’ of organisational life. I want to bring this focus on moral questions, a focus

incorporating affect and emotion, to the sparse accounts of interaction, configuring and reconfiguring that dominate both managerial and critical literature.

Put simply I asked myself the questions: ‘How does my work now work?’ and ‘How has the moral order of work changed?’

## **1.2 Ethnography and/or Autoethnography?**

The term ethnography has been used to refer to the written account of an observer, who may be a participant in and who has conducted fieldwork of the everyday life of a culture and people. In my case the field work was carried out in the organisation that employs me. Autoethnography refers to the written account of a participant observer written by someone who has personal experience of the everyday life of the people being studied. Autoethnography allows the expression of the writer’s own voice and values to interpret what is being studied. This reflexive approach allows the writer to be partially the focus of the study by being a participant inside the everyday worlds being studied. The written account explores and records the thoughts, feelings and emotions of the participant observer.

Autoethnographic research is the opposite of hypothesis-driven, or positivist, research (Ellis, 2004). Methods associated with this type of research include journaling and interviewing one’s own self as a way of connecting the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. She describes autoethnography as an ‘approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)’ (Ellis, 2010, p. 1).

She refers to the dissatisfaction expressed by researchers regarding the limitations of the use of the more accepted ‘value-free scientific’ method with its assumption that research can be done from a neutral, impersonal, and objective stance. She advocates autoethnography alongside the use of literature and story-telling as an alternative approach, as a way to more fully unravel and reveal the cultural, social and political

aspects of complex social worlds. This alternative approach adds aesthetic and evocative elements that provide further insight for understanding everyday life and patterns of cultural experience not otherwise available.

Jones (2005) describes an autoethnographer's perspective on writing and research as 'socially-just acts; rather than a preoccupation with accuracy, the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better' (p. 764). Consequently, autoethnography is an approach that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity and emotionality. Rather than hiding from the conflicts and ambiguities of events being observed and their affect, or assuming that they do not exist, these conflicts, ambiguities and their affect are drawn upon as sources.

Van Maanen (1988), writing about ethnography, has drawn attention to different narrative conventions deployed to represent worlds in storytelling. He describes ethnographic writing as 'a written representation of culture' (p. 7). He argues that it is a way of 'pointing to the choices and restrictions that reside at the very heart of social life' (p. 7) and recounting events in a narrative, or, as he describes it, in a 'tale', as a way of situating the reader inside the events to give a subjective experiential understanding of the events. He describes three styles or tales 'organised by the narrative conventions that define; realist, confessional, and impressionist tales' (p. 7).

Although he states that their order is not necessarily sequential, it is possible to see them in terms of a journey of discovery so that the next style is able to reveal a more complex level of insight than the former. He describes their differences:

- Realist tales are written with an absence of the author, in a documentary style, presenting the 'natives' view, and with the ethnographer as expert interpreting the meaning.
- Confessional tales are written with the author close at hand, showing the fieldworker's point of view and struggles, and revealing an apparent match despite obstacles with the writer's understanding of the work.
- Impressionist tales are events recounted in order and as unfolded, with people characterised and not impersonal, and with writing about the events in sequence before further narrative gives some understanding. (p. 7)



Within these three styles or tales he describes ethnography as having three constitutive (and overlapping) tasks of ‘fieldwork, headwork, and textwork — as a way to sketch out a few craft-like rules for ‘how things work’ within ethnographic circles’ (2010, p. 218).

He describes fieldwork as the process of people being immersed or embedded in the world that they are studying. He describes headwork as the interpretive understanding of the fieldwork based upon and filtered by one’s own knowledge, world views, experience, interests, intent, existing alongside and at the same time as a variety of other known and unknown factors. He describes textwork as the important tool for conveying to the reader what has been observed in the fieldwork and what has been understood in the headwork. It is through the subsequent reading and discussion that the ethnographic work becomes visible and understood: ‘Ethnography is a written representation of culture, but is not realized until the writing is read’ (Fayard and Van Maanen, 2015, p. 5). Van Maanen (2010) describes ethnography as ‘occupying a borderland between the social sciences and the humanities’ (p. 224) and that the writing and narrative style is critical to the reader’s understanding. His three types of tale and the three constitutive (and overlapping) tasks have emerged from developments in the history of ethnography.

In the early twentieth century Robert Park’s University of Chicago sociology students were encouraged ‘to pursue sociological involvement in settings close to their personal lives’ (Anderson, 2006, p. 375). This Chicago sociology is generally understood as the beginnings of a participant observer tradition that Anderson calls realist and analytic ethnographical studies. He contends that Park’s students and for much of the last century ethnographic studies lacked the evocative and emotional process of ‘explicit and reflexive self-observation.’ He argues that much of the emphasis in ethnographic work was ‘to downplay or obscure the researcher as a social actor in the settings or groups under study’ (p. 376).

The cultural anthropologist Hayano (1979) was the first to set out the case for self-observation and a self-narrative. He was a poker player who wrote about professional poker players as a participant / observer. Van Maanen (1988) identified this self-

narrative method as ‘confessional tales’ characterised by accounts of worlds including aesthetic and evocative elements. He also credits Hayano with an important role in the development of ethnographical practice describing the practice as a ‘wet’ term ‘signalling the cultural study of one’s own people’ (p. 106). Using the term ‘wet’ conveys the notion that making sense of a social world is not simply carrying out an objective study and producing a reasoned analysis. It requires recognition of the need for a multi-layered complexity of observations and forms of telling to build and create a more contextual understanding. Observations from a participant observer related through the telling of personal stories enables both the participant and the reader to develop deeper cultural understandings and insights. In Hayano’s case this involved a meshing of the realist and confessional forms of Van Maanen’s tales.

Venkatesh (2012) describes three more recent developments from the past few decades that have restored the role and importance of ethnography and direct fieldwork. The first approach he identifies is a multidisciplinary one in which ethnography is one of the tools from a mixed method toolkit. The second approach involves the use of evidentiary and ethical standards, literary devices from narrative journalism, and the use of the first person with empirical reflection as a tool. He argues that

scholars are turning to the self in order to discover not only truths about their own experience, but about the world out there,...drawing on the use of the self to generate insights, establish patterns, and bring the voice of their research subjects to light. (p. 4)

The third approach he describes as the ‘reflexive turn’ and from his perspective as being one of the most important ethnographic developments in the last twenty years. The reflexive turn is the process whereby scholars draw on the ‘use of the self to generate insights, establish patterns, and bring the voice of their research subjects to light’ (p. 4) therefore enabling the reader to be ‘situated’ inside the events. In contrast, Anderson (2006) suggests that this ‘reflexive turn’ research has become too narrow in its practice: ‘Autoethnography has become almost exclusively identified with those advocating the descriptive literary approach of evocative autoethnography’ (p. 377). Like Van Maanen he suggests that evocative or emotional autoethnography should be

considered as a sub-genre added to the long tradition in sociology of realist and analytic ethnography and, like Venkatesh, his concern is with recovering these other traditional ethnographic practices. In presenting the value of an analytic autoethnography he proposes the following as its five key features:

(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis. (p. 378)

This inclusion of the researcher's self incorporates the greater reflexivity that Venkatesh favoured; however, the research in my thesis does not include dialogue with informants beyond the self.

Watson (2010) describes ethnography in similar terms viewing ethnography as 'a way of writing about and analysing social life which has roots in both the sciences and the humanities' (p. 202). He argues that, in the study of organisations, understanding the role of managers in determining how things work can only come from inside observational or participative research and from the contextual understanding of the activities observed. For him the study of managers needs to be 'a study of how managers manage, how organizational change comes about, how micropolitics operate, and how employment relationships are shaped and maintained' (p. 204).

Watson emphasises how formal and informal power is used by individuals and groups to engineer their desired outcomes. He refers to these different deployments of power as the micropolitics of an organisation. He recognises that managers have greater credibility when talking with people inside the organisation. They have more credibility than an external university academic, and academic management textbooks are often unhelpful because much of their content is unrealistic. He further suggests that experienced managers writing ethnographic 'insider' accounts of their organisational experiences can bring retrospective ethnographic insights that enhance the more formal field research of 'outsiders'. This argument is developed by Holmes and Marcus (2007) in their account of the role of the para-ethnographer. They write about the complex world of central banks where ethnographers rarely have access to the everyday lives of the participants, where the actual complexity of this world is one

of the barriers for academic entry. They describe how the insiders (bankers) can, through the development of their knowledge gained through education or work experience, become in effect partners in the field of ethnographic study. Their argument points to a more distributed form of ethnography in which insiders and outsiders work together.

### **1.3 Positioning myself as an Ethnographer / Autoethnographer**

In addition to the arguments developed regarding the practice and writing of ethnography, my participant observer study as a middle-manager is also informed by three classic studies on organisational behaviour and the role of managers from the 1950s and two studies from the 1980s and 1990s. These studies have important relevance for me, as the authors are writing about what goes on with management practice inside large organisations. Although much has changed in the past 60 years, much of what was observed by the authors then is still relevant for organisations today. The more recent work in the 1980s and 1990s can be considered a refinement of these earlier approaches.

Mills (1956) in his book *White Collar* writes on the social changes over the preceding decades and of the rise in what he refers to as a white collar bureaucracy. The moral issue of personality with the pressure to dis-identify and to sublimate his or her self to the organisation runs throughout the thesis. His work drew from 'statistical calculations, intensive interviews, historical studies, and ethnographic observations, as well as from personal experience and works of fiction' (p. 129). He describes a new class of actors: hierarchies of middle managers and other roles in place within an organisation are directed and controlled by those at the top of the organisation. His major insight was that, despite the American myth of courage, creative energy and resourcefulness, those within these organisations have sold not just their time, but also their personality. In these institutions where 'rationality' rules, freedom and rationality for the 'little' people employed in bureaucracies has been usurped.

The material in Whyte's (1956) *The organization man* came from interviews with many CEOs of the then major organisations. His observations on the use of groups with the pressure to bracket his or her morality for the development of a more willing and compliant workforce runs throughout the thesis. His major insight was that people inside organisations are required to work in a collective way rather than as individuals and they call upon a 'social ethic' that has replaced the American myth of rugged individualism. He drew attention to the irony of this expressed belief in rugged individualism and a distaste for the welfare state being contrasted with a practice founded on the idea that groups make better decisions and that from making group decision personal risk is reduced. He observes that choosing to adapt to the needs of an organisation on the grounds of social usefulness and pragmatism comes at a price: 'The organization would look to its own interests, but it will look to the individual's *only as the Organization interprets them* [Whyte's emphasis]' (p. 397). In later works Whyte was recognised as a major proponent of the role of a participant observer.

Dalton's (1959) *Men Who Manage* is an ethnographic study of three factories and a department store, investigating how industrial managers manage. His argument regarding personal power and power struggles inside autocratic top-down organisations runs throughout the thesis. His ethnographic research method included formal interviews, participant-observation and socialising. He thought that the use of questionnaires and statistical records did not provide sufficiently detailed information to understand the issues. He observed the difference between the formal and informal organisational power structure and documented the official and unofficial ways of how things were done. His major insights included observing that personal power had more influence than position and recognising that the informal power structure could subvert official directives. He found that often the senior executive handed out unofficial rewards and penalties. Moreover, Dalton saw that compromises were critical, within both the vertical and horizontal groups, to make the organisation work. His notes in the appendix on his ethnographic research methods are of particular interest because they clearly state the role that he played, including being a participant observer, by doing this he enabled the reader to be situated inside the events and the organisations.

Jackall's (1988) *Moral Mazes – The World of Corporate Managers* was written three decades after the first three celebrated accounts of organisations. His theme of moral mazes with the shaping of moral consciousness through the impacts of the reordering of management runs throughout the thesis. Jackall revealed the inside political machinations of the corporate world, also observing and describing the practice of managers and how things work. He, like Dalton, questioned established myths such as the idea that the American work ethic rewards hard work and that making sound decisions gains promotion. Using a loose form of ethnographic investigation that included a large number of interviews and significant observational data in large companies, he uncovered a different version of how things happen on the inside of organisations than compared to their established myths. He documented that employees need a patron to gain promotion; that luck can play a part in promotion; that bureaucracy plays a significant role in shaping managerial morality; that personal fates are tied to moral choices; and he explored the 'moral mazes' within which managers live. The stated purpose of his research was to go into 'corporations to study how bureaucracy—the prevailing organizational form of our society and economy shapes moral consciousness' (p. 118). His description of these moral mazes includes notions from what would normally be considered as belonging to the mediaeval era: a world of patrimony and fealty existing within these organisations. Although his interviews came from a formal agreement on his research role inside the organisations, many of his observations came from being accepted by the interviewees as a fellow insider.

In contrast to Jackall's world of patrimony and fealty, Law's (1994) *Organizing Modernity* suggests other ways of understanding management culture. His argument regarding the multiple organisational 'modes of ordering' with their interaction and organisational impacts runs throughout the thesis. As an ethnographer, Law is interested in the organising and ordering of management through what he describes as four modes of ordering: enterprise, administration, vision and vocation. He is more concerned with the performance and mastery of work than Jackall, who focused on the careers of managers. However, like Jackall, he also discusses the social and

psychological feelings of worth felt by people inside organisations. In particular he draws attention to anxiety and the general feeling of a lack of self-worth.

#### **1.4 My Voice and Style**

My voice and textwork style have emerged from these diverse sources of ethnography, autoethnography and sociological arguments regarding organisations. My approach is an eclectic mix of ethnography and the approaches of the classic works described above. I am writing directly from the world that I am studying; I am using a mixed method toolkit; and I am presenting in a way that Van Maanen describes as a confessional tale that brings together the emotional responses and more conventional analysis of the social structure of managerial work.

In my fieldwork I perform not as an outsider academic ethnographer, but as an insider manager autoethnographer. I work with the autoethnographer's understanding that my knowledge as a 'real' insider means that my contextual understandings and insights are valuable. As an autoethnographer I have a perspective and a method to situate the reader inside the events not easily available to the external academic. I accentuate the aesthetic and evocative elements of the autoethnographer, deploying both narrative conventions and reflection. My aim is to narrate my personal experience, my subjectivity and my emotional and moral responses to what I have termed 'managed disruption'.

Expectations or hopes that this study can be used inside my organisation or similar organisations, although desired, should not compromise the reflections or the writing. Fayard and Van Maanen (2015) describe a case of corporate ethnographic research which, they were invited to carry out, when the managers of that corporation had unrealistic expectations of how that study was to be used. The managers often looked for a pragmatic analysis from which solutions could be found, with an expectation that they would be provided with advice on how their corporate culture could be 'improved'. These responses made the writers feel very frustrated: 'Most of the advice we have offered has taken the form of cautionary tales that question the

wisdom or even possibility of designing or altering organization culture(s)' (p. 17). Their appreciation of the differing expectations of managers and researchers resonates with my insider personal experience when dealing with my senior executive members. These interactions and discussions that I have had focus on pragmatic outcomes and solutions, leaving little room for developing a greater understanding of what is really going on. As an autoethnographer I continue to live with this dilemma. It is difficult to let go of the hope that the work I have carried out may actually be read to inform those in similar situations, but I am content with the notion that through using the autoethnographic methodology of inquiring of the self in order to discover not only truths about my own experience, but about the world 'out there', an outcome with value will emerge.

### **1.5 My Field**

In this thesis I reflect on the tensions, struggles and the feelings of void generated from the uncertainty within a significant restructure project in a New Zealand public sector organisation. I interweave my reflections with observations from authors writing in the field of management and organisational change. These reflections come from a two-year period starting with the announcement of the new CEO's impending arrival and finishing at a period of reflection in the early stages of the restructure project implementation. The previous CEO had resigned earlier in the year to take up a public sector CEO role elsewhere. As this announcement was made just before the end of the year, there was a break of some months before the new CEO actually arrived.

Soon after his appointment the new CEO announced a restructure project with the goal of taking out a whole layer of middle-management and significantly reducing staff numbers. The restructure project was described and communicated in an all-staff email as being 'a 'top down' review, starting with a look at the structure of the senior executive team, and then considering what the structure of functions should look like



underneath that team.’ Over the following year numerous change proposals were announced, reviewed and subsequently initiated.

The change proposal for my department came nearer to the end of that one year period in the following March stating that my whole department would be disestablished. The proposal was to transfer around half of the roles and staff to other departments, with the implication that the other half would be disestablished with these staff facing redundancy. As my team was in the latter group, the implication was that I and everyone in my team had the impending threat of redundancy.

A pivotal episode is my (Human Resources) HR ‘heads-up’ meeting in April coming one month after my department’s change proposal announcement. I was invited to a meeting with the senior executive member responsible for the development and recommendations for my department’s change proposal. This meeting was set up to advise me of my department’s change proposal outcome so that I could prepare my team members for the following day’s formal outcome meeting with the CEO.

Initially I was a middle-manager<sup>1</sup> in the organisation in a central function supporting various operational teams, with a small team of fewer than 10 people. At the time of my HR ‘heads-up’ meeting I was also the acting manager of the wider department of around 70 staff. Overall my organisation employed around 2,000 people.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 deal with the impending disestablishment. Chapter 5 deals with implementation with me in a new role.

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity I refer to middle-managers as people in any role within the hierarchy who have staff reporting to them, but without being members of the senior executive. In practice the role responsibilities of these middle-managers can vary greatly, but they all have two things in common: they enact (directly or indirectly) strategies and policies from the senior executive and they have staff to manage. When I refer to management or managers this is a more generic use that can include the CEO and the senior executive.

## Chapter 2

### Planned Disruption

#### 2.1 My HR ‘heads-up’ Meeting

The restructure project was a planned disruption to our business—as—usual operations in my public sector organisation. The chapter begins with a narration of a pivotal event: my HR ‘heads-up’ meeting held the day before my formal CEO disestablishment meeting. The meeting was pivotal as it signified the end of the proposal stage and the beginning of the implementation stage. Of greater importance the discussion at this meeting embodied the change in organisational management philosophy and culture. In my field notes written up soon afterwards I recorded the following:

*I’m sitting at my desk thinking about how I can make an impact, I’m working at conjuring up the appropriate words and phrases, but they are just not coming. I’m getting ready for my HR ‘heads-up’ 2:15 meeting on the newly decided organisational structural changes and on the impact that this will have on my team, all in preparation for the formal CEO outcome meeting the following day. For me and my team, tomorrow is a formality; I don’t need a ‘heads-up’ meeting to know that all of us will be disestablished with redundancy. Although HR doesn’t actually ‘make’ the changes I wonder if I am able to express those appropriate words and phrases. Well maybe, just maybe, something can change; or maybe not! Soon after his arrival the new CEO wasted no time in announcing a significant restructure project subsequently indicating that further changes would follow, but then, this is what new CEOs do.*

*It’s time. It’s just after 2PM. I feel powerless. I feel deflated. In these large corporate restructure projects it feels as if there are no right words to employ. As I walk along the footpath I tell myself that there is no use in ‘scoring points’ as all has already been decided and that scoring points would only be done to satisfy my personal feelings. Ironically it is a beautiful autumn afternoon with delicate pastel colours shimmering through the trees onto and through the fading leaves. The delicate colours and hues*

*all seem at odds with what is going on for me. No one responsible for making these changes has sat down with me saying 'we know this is difficult for you and your staff, now how can we help?' I have been given pamphlets by HR on courses about change and resilience and on Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP), all with an embarrassed, but detached look seemingly saying that this dilemma is my responsibility and not theirs. It feels like a real life Catch-22; if I need help then I am not worthy to stay, but if I don't get help then maybe I will not be capable enough to stay. This feeling of being in a void is a feeling that I have observed and seen expressed by many others.*

*Approaching the HR restructure project office, I think about the daily discussions I have been having with other managers; on who said what, on what is going on, on how to react, and on what can be done. In our discussions we are seeking information and understanding, or maybe we are just seeking solace. This CEO has publicly stated that he wants to remove a layer of management (in effect mine), to reduce the number of administrators, and to make the institution more efficient and more effective. I recall the statement quoted to me from a Union forum (that I did not attend) where the CEO stated that he will 'annihilate administrators,' and from a special high-level organisational meeting (that I did attend) where there were challenging questions asked with obvious strained tensions from around the room. At that special high-level organisational meeting the CEO sat at the corner of the large meeting table sitting slightly turned away from the more prominent staff members. The CEO answered their questions on the restructure project speaking in a defensive manner and was clearly not comfortable dealing with the contrary views that they aired. One question was on the specifics of the upcoming budget. He replied. 'Budgets are not the domain of this group; however, I will answer your question.' The dialogue was tense, more like a sparring contest with many difficult feelings simmering below the surface ready to explode. The mutual antipathy was palpable.*

*I have arrived at the office; I take a deep breath, and enter.*

*I am greeted by someone from HR. She apologises for deputising as her boss is away. In her role she is responsible for ensuring that everything follows due process and*

*that the organisation minimises unnecessary employment or legal risks. As she leads me into the meeting room it is clear that she has taken on a role acting as an agent of the organisation and that I need to be 'managed'. She describes the few minor portfolio changes that differ from the initial proposal:*

*'These changes have followed consultation and deliberations on what is needed.' She confirmed that my role and all in my team would be disestablished.*

*I mention the 'R' word at which point she responds:*

*'No, (pause) you and your staff have not been made redundant: your status has changed, (pause). It is now in a new phase, and there are other options such as re-deployment to be considered.'*

*Although this felt like an extraordinary statement to make, I let it pass, instead debating the re-deployment process. I say,*

*'The internal applicants for jobs are being asked to compete on the open market for newly established roles without being given sufficient support in these very trying times.'*

*She quotes HR policy:*

*'We need to advertise externally for some roles because of the legal requirements from the State Sector Act; however, some staff will be mapped across or redeployed if their roles are not too different.'*

*I notice as she reads extracts from her documents that she is covering parts of them with her hands. Am I not to be trusted? I pretend not to notice.*

*While listening to the formal telling of what has been decided I think over other recent events. I attend a weekly organization-wide manager's meeting where we are 'corralled', being fed snippets of information on what is going on from the senior executive concerning the restructure project and on other business matters. At a previous meeting the chairperson representing the senior executive asked if we should*

*keep these meetings going. One reply was, 'Well I don't think that they are really necessary, but I come just in case I miss out on something.' We are a meeting of compliant managers there to be told, listening for clues on our fate. In another of these meetings the chairperson expressed pleasure in having her new portfolio almost sorted with just two more roles to employ, stating 'I have 40 applicants for the two jobs and they are really good candidates. It's tough out there for people looking for jobs.' I looked around the room noting that basically all of us managers were sitting there just marking time waiting for our last day or maybe hoping for a chance to stay in a new role; the mood and silence were deafening.*

*In these difficult times not only do I need to look after myself, but I am also expected to look after the concerns and emotions of those around me. I feel like a prison inmate with a special badge of authority empowered to keep the other inmates in line so as to organise a tidy exit, a graceful termination. My genuine personal demeanour is hard to keep in check, but why do I feel the need to suppress my real feelings?*

*I continue on the topic of our staff competing for jobs, saying to her:*

*'We have many good people who have to compete with external candidates under a cloud of feeling rejected, and without an appropriate tangible support mechanism in place, I feel that this an intolerable position to put our people in.'*

*'Well, my experience has been that when people re-apply for their jobs they have this feeling of pride in winning back their positions.'*

*'So, have you ever been made redundant, and won back your job?'*

*'What, (pause) do you mean here?'*

*'No, have you ever had a role at any time where that role had been disestablished, where you re-applied for that role, where you have won that position, and you have had that personal experience of pride?'*

*'Well, (pause) no.'*

*The meeting is over with a polite thank you and a handshake offered together with some tentative smiles, and I'm out of the door walking back retracing my steps. Back in my office I check my diary. My next meeting is organising the closing ceremony for my wider department. Now, that is absurd!*

*After surgery a wound will heal, but agents are needed to help: maybe I can stay and help?*

I have reflected on this meeting and the discussion many times, particularly as a way to construct my sense of understanding on what had changed, on how the organisation now worked and for the course of actions that I could take.

## **2.2 The New CEO takes Charge**

This section describes the arrival of the new CEO with the initial uncertainty created from his arrival and the unfolding of initial events leading up to the announcement of the restructure project. I describe how the actual communication and the communication style had a significant impact on those inside the organisation as the communication expressed a profound reordering of management.

Despite the intensity of our surprise, it should have been expected that our new CEO would have announced the restructure project so soon after starting. It should also have been expected that the new CEO had not arrived in a vacuum: it is most likely that he had been given an agreed specific governance brief beforehand. Black (2009) describes the role of a CEO as 'the officer of a company or other organization responsible for seeing that decisions on principles by the board of directors are actually implemented in day—to—day operations' (n.p.). In management literature and in practice the CEO is the most significant role in any organisation, being the prime person in place to enact governance directions and decisions. Although in a public sector organisation the governance role can take various forms with or without a board of directors, the principle of governance direction being given to the CEO for implementation still applies. The communication to staff that gave the key reasons for

our CEO's selection, described the appointee as being someone who had an understanding of the broad issues facing our organisation and our sector, along with relevant central government experience and understanding.

The announcement of the new CEO created an immediate flurry of discussion and questions amongst colleagues: Who was this person and what kind of person was he? Where did he come from? What will he do? What will he change? We discussed the need for change, what needed to improve, how things are done and how things should be done, and what was needed to set things right. Many long-term employees compared how things had worked under previous CEOs, often having strong opinions on who was more and who was less effective. For those of us with experience of just the one CEO in this organisation, we discussed CEO effectiveness in our previous organisations. Every piece of new information was seized and analysed; media stories and interviews were referred to, and anecdotal stories unearthed and passed on. Opinions were freely given.

One media interview described the CEO's holiday reading from the previous summer; a book on globalisation and another on ancient history. Were these clues? Did the book on globalisation embody his business philosophy and would this then foretell the kind of changes that would be coming our way? Did reading a book on ancient history indicate that he had a wider array of interests outside the business world? We knew that this CEO came from a business and central government background rather than from our public sector. This created a mix of comments from staff ranging from 'this person will better understand how organisations should work and will sort out our malaise' to 'how can someone from the business sector understand how things work in the public sector?' The more pessimistic said 'It doesn't matter who they select as nothing ever changes.' All, however, did believe that for either good or bad, this new CEO would bring about change. A common viewpoint was that those at the top simply did not understand what was really going on inside their own organisation. Some expressed hope that this appointment would be different. Selecting a CEO who was prepared to listen and understand was deemed to be a high priority in our discussions and we hoped that this would be a part of the CEO's brief and of his

leadership style. In the period between the announcement of the new CEO through to the announcement of the restructure project, a gap of around four months, most staff energy was directed towards business—as—usual activities with a pronounced drop in development activities and new initiatives. Mostly people wanted to see what this CEO would do before they committed themselves.

The selection of a new CEO is a major event in the life of an organisation, providing an opportunity for those with governance responsibilities to reset expectations and goals. This has been increasingly important over recent decades. Goffee and Hunt (1996) observe that ‘whereas once we might have expected a new CEO to turn around a struggling business in five years, we are now expecting that manager to do so in 12 months’ (p. 4). I had expected the CEO would have carried out a detailed investigation of our organisation and our sector, seeking views from key stakeholders to form an opinion of what needs to be and could be done to meet governance board expectations, and, if required, for a level of organisation transformation. Jackall (1988) explains that in corporate culture, ‘The first action of most new CEOs is some form of organizational change with the intent of establishing a reordering of the management structure, with a shake-up rearranging the fealty structure of the corporation’ (p. 25). I had expected that change at some level was inevitable, but neither I nor others had foreseen the size and scope of the change when it was announced. By the end of his first year, the CEO, in line with Jackall’s observations, had made significant changes to the senior executive. The CEO had established new and significant corporate funding arrangements, initiated a major review of the organisational structure and staff roles, and had announced further significant reviews to follow. The amount of change implemented in that one year with the promise of more to come was a significantly higher level of change than had previously been experienced in our organisation. Jackall’s observation on corporate culture proved to be apt: the significant reordering of both the formal management structure and the informal arrangements were an example of a fealty relationship were announced and implemented (Jackall, 1988). The restructure project dramatically changed the formal management structure identifying new portfolios: change proposals affected all of the support side senior executive, middle-management and staff roles. Around 300+ roles



were selected for disestablishment, but with a number nearer to 100 new roles identified in their place.

The word fealty is more commonly identified with medieval Europe, describing the relationship between feudal tenants or vassals to their lord. Jackall's use of the word in a modern context assumes that the CEO as the 'lord' has all of the power and that staff as the 'vassals' are subordinate. In our more democratic egalitarian societies there is a perception that this notion of fealty belongs to the past, yet Jackall deliberately uses this term in his observations on CEOs and change. However, the metaphor and connotations did not feel out of place in my workplace. My HR 'heads-up' meeting was a carefully scripted 30-minute event, a script repeated elsewhere with other middle-managers in the same situation. In that meeting it felt as though I had met with an official from the lord's court, someone who had authority to speak on behalf of the lord, but unable or unwilling to speak on their own behalf. The new CEO wielded power and authority, announcing significant change soon after his arrival with these announcements being enacted without any apparent opposition from those directed to do so.

Communication from the new CEO made it very clear that decisions would be made from the top, reinforcing the gulf between those few decision-makers in the senior executive and staff. Communication to staff on the restructure project was carried out via emails, all-staff meetings, an intranet site, and to a lesser extent through formal middle-manager briefings. Direct all-staff emails became the official mechanism for formal announcements and a newly established intranet site provided the more detailed official information in place for supporting these announcements. The degree to which these meetings and communications impacted on decision-making may have been debatable, but who wielded the power and authority was not.

The first CEO communication that we received, one month after his start, was an all-staff email focussing on financial matters that stated, 'There can be no doubt that we are in uncertain times' and 'it is essential we maintain a tight control over costs, carefully use our resources and set clear priorities.' It came as a surprise that the very first communication to staff was on business and financial matters rather than on what

I considered as the more important operational issues. This suggested to me that this CEO would manage the organisation more as a commercial business. I was expecting a communication on organisational aspirations, hopefully acknowledging staff contributions and the value of the people within the organisation: this certainly would have been much more welcome. Social conventions dictate a warmer introduction indicating a level of respect for staff, but this cold introduction suggested otherwise. I was perplexed, thinking to myself that surely this new CEO needed to connect with people to outline possibilities and to encourage participation. It felt like a reproach on staff expertise, performance and professionalism. A couple of months later in May a formal middle-manager ‘heads-up’ meeting was held for outlining the planned structural changes. Directly following this meeting the second communication from the CEO, being the first official notification of the restructure project, was distributed to staff by an all-staff email that included various phrases as follows:

‘the review will focus on the activities’, ‘delivering services in a more cohesive and efficient manner’, ‘[and this will] be more cost effective and responsive’, ‘I have no predisposition in favour of in—house supply versus outsourcing’, ‘[I will] maintain financial viability while pursuing excellence’, ‘informed by our strategic planning discussions’, ‘optimal structure, expected impact on cost and expected benefits’, ‘impacts on services currently delivered’, ‘marginal revenue and costs’.

Word had already begun to filter through from those who were better informed that a restructure project with *significant* changes would be happening. I had noticed the raised eyebrows that accompanied these words, but until this meeting I had not been aware of the actual content and the size of the impact. This meeting radically shifted me from wondering what would change and the possible role that I could have for supporting bringing about change to the realisation that, along with many others, I was the actual target of that change. Walking out of that meeting I felt powerless as I recognised that my role, my team and my whole department were likely to be disestablished. Feelings of uncertainty prevailed with my carefully nurtured relationships and networks in a state of flux. It was explained in the meeting that these were just concepts, but it made sense that this level of change would not be announced without the likelihood of the plans, or something of that size and scope,

being implemented. I was given an opportunity to support the then departmental manager to present to the CEO our department's plans and financial performance reports. This initially gave me some hope, but as we did not receive any positive follow-up responses, I realised that plans for the future had already been decided with this meeting more for checking his current plans. Discussions were being held within a small planning group that included the CEO, the senior executive, governance members and external consultants. I expected that all middle-managers and staff would be vulnerable to being subjected to new expectations from the CEO and the senior executive. This had shifted my perception overnight from seeing myself as having a relevant part to play in the organisation's life to being someone sitting on the outside now looking in.

This happened so quickly that I found it difficult to connect my perceptions and feelings from before and after the announcements. The words used in the first communication—*activities, efficient, effective, responsive, outsourcing, viability, excellence, strategic, optimal, cost, benefits, services, and marginal*—could have applied to machines and processes. The discourse reinforced the feeling that something like an impersonal desktop exercise had been carried out. I listened to the briefing and read the communications, feeling that I and others at my level in the organisation were perceived to be the problem rather than being a part of the solution. A 50% reduction in the number of departments was announced; moreover, all major organisational and operational processes were to be reviewed and regrouped under what was described as 'logical portfolios.' This was proposed as the solution to achieve the goal of producing a more efficient and effective service delivery. New Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were being developed for each of the senior executive members and for their reporting middle-managers with the expectation that the senior executive members would be held accountable for their performance through reviews of their ability to meet these KPIs. An all-staff email announced that these changes were to 'reduce fragmentation and duplication, flatten reporting structures to reduce complexity and improve communications, and to be sustainable and consequently allow greater investment in the delivery of service.' The notion of eliminating 'standing armies' and of having people employed only when needed was

used as an example of eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy and waste. Jackall (1988) describes these management practice examples as ‘management—by—objectives’: ‘[This] creates a chain of commitments from the CEO down to the lowliest product manager or account executive’ (p. 19). With each new departmental review change proposal announcement it became clear that almost all middle-manager roles would be disestablished. Ironically, I and many other middle-managers would remain in place for some time to enact and perform the initial and crucial changes identified until the new middle-managers were selected and in place.

Such organisational reviews have been commonplace in the business sector for decades with this now being expected practice in the public sector. These reviews usually result in fewer jobs along with the expectation that staff are required to do more with fewer resources. Middle-managers manage people, budgets and resources and in our case we had had direct experience from previous years of negotiating our way through the regular annual budget cuts while seeking to maintain appropriate levels of service. We were however, not included in any planning meetings. Although middle-managers can be thought of simplistically as those in the organisation in between the senior executive and the front-line operational staff, Huy (2001) considers that they ‘allot considerable energy to finding the right balance between keeping the company working and promoting radical change’ (p. 78). My experience is that middle-managers are the ones who get things done, but often without due recognition from the senior executive on the importance of their work. Huy believes that the middle-manager contribution typically occurs in four major areas:

First, middle managers often have value-adding entrepreneurial ideas that they are able and willing to realize if only they can get a hearing. Second, they’re far better than most senior executives are at leveraging the informal networks at a company that make substantive, lasting change possible. Third, they stay attuned to employees’ moods and emotional needs, thereby ensuring that the change initiative’s momentum is maintained. And finally, they manage the tension between continuity and change, they keep the organization from falling into extreme inertia, on the one hand, or extreme chaos, on the other. (p. 73)

The horizontal relationships, networks and procedures created by middle-managers to get things done were dismantled. Not only was the connection between the senior

executive and staff disrupted, so too was what Huy identified as the important counter-balancing carried out by middle-managers between inertia and chaos. I sensed that if middle-managers were sidelined without something like an inspired leadership intervention to gain organisation-wide support, then falling into extreme inertia or extreme chaos was a real risk that would not be effectively managed.

### **2.3 Organisational Change has Method**

This section identifies the source of the management methodologies employed and connecting these methodologies to wider business and social changes in New Zealand and elsewhere. I describe the impact the restructure project with the more hierarchical business-like environment has on myself and on those working in the organisation.

Over the three previous decades similar changes to those in my organisation have been carried out in other parts of the New Zealand public sector. Hood (1991), Diefenbach (2009) and Forsberg and Stockenstrand (2014) describe these changes as ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) and as ‘financialization’. The New Oxford American Dictionary definition of financialization describes it as ‘changes focused on making market-led restructuring, focusing on economic imperatives with the aim of creating a more effective and efficient public sector’ (Stevenson and Lindberg, 2010). Although it is perhaps not common in daily usage, the term ‘financialization’ can from its wording be understood as referring to changing social trends within institutions and markets, with imperatives effecting decision making and the economy. Referring to these social trends, Forsberg and Stockenstrand (2014) observe that

one of the most important ingredients in the neo-liberal project is financialization that can be described as a global trend or a management fashion. It is this on-going process of change from a production to a shareholder perspective that has been called the process of financialization.  
(p. 172)

They describe the philosophy of neo-liberalism as a ‘political project’ (p. 169) influencing relations between people and between organisations breaking down

structures incompatible with its philosophy, seeking to implement perfect market thinking and challenging collective and cooperative structures. This form of management was first introduced to British public sector organisations in the late 1970s and has been a major factor in the New Zealand public sector since the mid-1980s. Until these times, organisational practice separated the private and public sectors: in simple terms, the private sector was all about profit and the public sector was all about service. This service expectation, however, came with the large caveat that the public sector was seen by many as self-serving, inefficient and too costly. Owing to the challenges of the 1970s oil crisis and its subsequent impact on OECD economies, the notion of public sector reform has been a continuing political and social issue ever since. NPM and financialization are examples of how reform has been represented and enacted. In my HR ‘heads-up’ meeting there was of course no mention of the ‘inefficient’ public sector: there was no need to mention it as this was the implied social understanding. HR believed that it was acting in the interests of the organisation, and that it was supporting needed efficiencies to overcome and to be a part of the overall reform of the inefficient public sector. The communication from the CEO referred directly to the ‘inefficiency’ of our organisation. This reference would have been premised on the understanding and belief that our organisation was part of the wider public sector inefficiencies and malaise that need to be addressed.

More recently the term financialization is accepted as the term describing this belief and practice; however, Diefenbach (2009, p. 893), using an example referring to NPM, has described what he considers the five core elements. I have inserted my observations in italics to illustrate how my organisation followed NPM / financialization methodologies:

1. Business environment and strategic objectives;

*The CEO’s first communication emphasised uncertain times; the restructure project was implemented to enable what was deemed a new more appropriate strategy; efficiency, effectiveness and productivity were emphasised, together with cost-reduction, downsizing, and the potential for outsourcing.*

2. Organizational structures and processes;

*The changes emphasised re-organisation, more flexible structures, a simplified hierarchy, improved processes, and standardisation of management practices.*

3. Performance management and measurement systems;

*The planned implementation of systematic measurement and monitoring of performance through explicit KPIs for guidance and control created the expectation that this enables all staff to achieve increased efficiency; productivity and quality; higher performance; and motivation.*

4. Management and managers;

*The new flattened structures were announced to enhance top management control, ensuring that the organisation would be more effective and sustainable.*

5. Employees and corporate culture.

*There were expectations that staff would fit in better with this more logical approach because of its reduced complexity and improved communication.*

The communication and initiatives implemented in my organisation matched these five core elements. What is equally telling is what was missing: communication and initiatives that value staff; rewarding expertise; developing skills; the promotion of learning; and the development of organisational networks and relationships. The assumptions underlying the changes were that the outcome of the intervention would benefit the organisation, management and staff, all as a matter of course. This was because the rationale behind making the changes was that the act of following accepted economic theories in itself would create a more effective and efficient public sector. Although perceptions from the public could have suggested that there was some level of public sector improvements over the past three decades, this is no comfort for those on the negative end of change, particularly when the intervention has targeted all, seemingly irrespective of individual or team capability and contribution. Some long-serving staff commented that change often restores aspects of what was in place previously, just like tidal or seasonal variations, so they expected these changes to be relatively short-lived and to last only until the next leadership change. Trends elsewhere show that staff that are not in senior executive positions have less involvement in decision-making. In an Australian public service study O'Donnell (1999) finds that

greater numbers of public service workers reported they were working more intensively and under greater stress, [with a] relatively declining control over decision-making and the hours that they worked and believed that their job security and career opportunities had fallen. (p. 18)

I recognised concepts and terms from my manufacturing management background used in a production and materials context now being used for people and processes. Hood (1991) notes that ‘the central concern is to ‘trim fat’ and avoid ‘slack’ using ‘just-in-time’, ‘payment-by-results reward systems’ and ‘administrative cost engineering concepts’ (p. 12). These terms were being translated for use in the public sector to be applied to people. In the original context these concepts can foster innovation and learning, but not necessarily as interchangeable attributes for organisational development.

Miller and O’Leary (1993) argue that current trends in the public sector include the adoption of private sector processes including the operation of budgets, financial measures, accounting principles and practice with strict application of financial controls (p. 188). This important organisational processes become divisive when it is appreciated that are to become the prime organisational measurement of success. They suggest that financialization therefore clashes with and breaks down professional values, work identities, morality and social capital. Because the initial CEO communications and subsequent actions were centred on the needs for financial viability and efficiency, it was difficult to argue against these imperatives. However, because the imperatives for change were expressed within such a narrow economic perspective, I felt personally demeaned. My role and place in the organisation was taken away, my professional values were challenged, my collegial principles were overturned, and the value of my relationship networks diminished: I was sidelined.

Communicating the removal of a layer of management using words such as *waste* and *bureaucracy* suggested that the blame was directed at those to be eliminated: middle-managers and staff. Although it was emphasised that this should not be seen as a personal reflection on individual performance, because of the top-down process and impersonal words being used it was difficult to see it in any other way than as a negative personal reflection. The sense of powerlessness and apathy prevailed particularly because of the knowledge that our individual survival probably now depended on our compliance with the economic precepts of financialization.



Everyday media stories communicate the need for New Zealand's political, business and community leaders to address the complexities of our ever changing and more complex world, with financialization and 'flexibility' presented as the mechanism to achieve organisational success. Thrift (1997) describes organisational managerial practice as shifting in recent decades from the 'idea of a management 'science' able to produce the cognitive wherewithal to predict and thereby control the world' (p. 37) to one now meeting the needs of the organisation's operations in less stable, fast moving environments. Deifenbach (2007) in his critique of managerialism describes the extent to which those inside organisations can be educated and changed to be 'able and willing to be behave as expected' (p. 134) taking on new beliefs and values: 'It might be defined as a strategic initiative, if not ideology, to make public sector organisations and the people working in them market-oriented and business-like' (p. 127). This shift to more a flexible entity requires the generation of new cultural traditions and, crucially, the fashioning an organisation of 'willing subjects' with these willing subjects themselves needing to develop more flexible approaches and values. The flexibility in question was not for the empowerment of staff, but for the flexibility of staff to conform to the market-oriented and business-like values inside a more tightly controlled top-down structure. My potential to become a willing subject was dependent upon the degree to which I would allow myself to believe in and support the restructure project goals and the change process, and in effect accept the ideology informing the restructure project. To formally become one of those willing subjects I had to apply for and be selected for a new role. On the other hand, there was an expectation that if I did not want to become one of those willing subjects, then I should be prepared to leave and quietly accept my fate. The sweetener of redundancy payments did mean that many quietly accepted this fate.

Although the authority to make management decisions is formally given from those with governance responsibilities, in practice that authority also comes from below, from those prepared to adapt and comply. Discussion amongst colleagues in offices and corridors included comments such as: 'I know that my organisation needs to change, but these plans and concepts don't feel right, but do we have a choice?' and 'Surely people in charge are better informed and must know what they are doing even

if that means that there will be pain for some of us.’ In some circles clichés such as ‘no pain, no gain’ became acceptable. The organisational support structure was focused on those who were to remain, with less attention paid to those who would be leaving. I heard the senior executive talking about the negative affect and the pain as collateral damage, implying that for the greater good and for the survival of the organisation these casualties were necessary and that if we did not go through the pain there would be no gain. In some circles the cliché was accepted as embodying acceptable and required business practice.

Those from the senior executive believed that they were the most able to lead the organisation. This was not just because they were in control, but because they were in control they therefore believed that they *must* be the most able. Thrift (1997) states that this ‘new managerialism depends on the notion that the world is uncertain, complex, paradoxical, even chaotic’ (p. 47). By identifying and communicating that these were indeed difficult times, the CEO and the senior executive conveyed the notion that they must find the means to steer a course in this fundamentally uncertain world: just by communicating this interpretation of the situation it seemingly gained credibility. Thrift describes the operation of managerialism: ‘There is an emphasis on being competitive, on knowledge management, on creating evolving strategies, on new leaders and leadership, on creating networks of trust, and on constructing organisational or ‘global dreams’ (p. 49). The first four of these descriptors were apparent in my organisation: in the use of business performance metaphors; in the emphasis on managing and improving operational processes; in the creation of a new organisational structure with a new leadership style; and in the adoption of new courses of action from a strategic management approach. Discussion on networking and what could be called ‘global dreams’ was less apparent because these notions were possibly more appropriate for what would be considered a future post-reconfigured state. Potential external partnerships were mentioned, together with significantly changed organisational offerings, but such talk seemed hollow and inappropriate. The more immediate change impact was much more relevant. These discussions and notions were either shelved or were more likely to be reserved for senior executive discussions.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Financialization, Consultation and Ethics**

#### **3.1 Mock Consultation**

This section describes the tension and issues within the restructure project discussing impacts from the financialization methodologies employed and the consultation process. I discuss the primacy role taken by the senior executive, with the corresponding reduced decision making role for middle-managers, the lack of real staff consultation and the corresponding negative affect on both.

How the outcomes from financialization implementation were experienced and rehearsed is a central subject of my thesis. In these uncertain and complex times of our 'modern' world and in the rhetoric of financialization only 'enlightened and capable' leaders may be trusted with management. As financialization is an ideological process, it can in many respects have known organisational outcomes: this is clear from what has happened elsewhere.

Communication through emails, staff meetings and the intranet site, although frequent and informative, did not give me an understanding the decision-making process and what was really going on inside the senior executive. Being at all-staff meeting presentations felt more like being at something in between a product launch and a political rally. I did not get the feeling that the presenters were on the same side as staff; rather, it felt more as though I was part of the target audience needing to be convinced or placated. I went to every meeting and to every presentation, and I read every document that was released. Although the senior executive genuinely endeavoured to be open and transparent, I could sense the underlying intent to manage our reactions and behaviour. I did not feel comfortable with what I was being told.

Although staff were promised that their would be sought and considered at the all-staff meetings, a long time passed before any staff feedback sessions began. Rather than being individual or group meetings with senior executive members, the meetings

were facilitated by what I would describe as inexperienced junior HR staff members completing an operational audit of tasks. This was nothing like the management briefing session that I had expected, in sessions where I would have been able to explain at a strategic level how and why things happened and provide what would have been a handover explanation of our important customer requirements. These actual one-on-one meetings explaining in simplistic terms the tasks carried out and who did what was humiliating. It was obvious that these inexperienced junior HR staff members could do no more than sketch out a series of formal tasks without being able to understand the overview or the nuances of how or even why the organisation actually worked. There were opportunities to provide written submissions on specific relevant proposals, which I duly completed, and in doing so I at least had the opportunity to describe more accurately what I considered was important. I managed to arrange two meetings with the senior executive member responsible for my change proposal, at which he listened and duly thanked those of us in the meeting for our concerns and our submissions. What was unknown was the extent to which any of these consultation feedback sessions and submissions actually influenced the outcome. It is likely that most of the modifications had come from higher level lobbying. By, Diefenbach and Klarner (2008) present the case for the importance of acknowledging feedback:

It is important to avoid mock-consultancy and provide stakeholders with a real opportunity of having an impact on change initiatives before implementation: the only thing worse than not listening to your employees is pretending to listen to them. (p. 32)

There was a mismatch between the declared intent of providing a consultation process and what was actually carried out, indicating that it was a 'mock consultancy' process. The process was vilified by all as mostly being a meaningless exercise very much reinforcing the belief that we had all been sidelined. When we reviewed the HR audit reports, they were littered with errors and omissions, very much showing the inability of these junior HR staff members to be able to map out the relational complexity of how the organisation actually worked. It took me some time to appreciate that neither I nor any other middle-manager would be given an opportunity to provide our

management briefing and handover. There was no attempt to grapple with how the organisation at our level worked: the senior executive just wanted to know what tasks were carried out and by how many people. This process left me feeling very angry.

I contrast this with Venturini's (2010a) exhortation on the need for understanding the controversies and complexity of social life as the way of understanding how organisations work. He identified the following two (of four) requirements in the practice of social mapping:

*First requirement:* You shall not simplify the number of propositions to be taken into account in the discussion,

*Second requirement:* You shall make sure that the number of voices that participate in the articulation of propositions is not arbitrarily short-circuited. (p. 268)

Our consultation process had been simplified and short-circuited. The process demonstrated to me the notion that the CEO and the senior executive considered themselves as the 'owners' of the organisation with not just the power to decide, but also the only ones holding the knowledge and capability on what to decide. We the middle-managers and staff as their employees were far less important, or, in Jackall's (1988) terms, their 'vassals'.

In his 'Covenant Corporation' case study Jackall (1988) quotes one of their managers: 'This CEO thinks that everybody associated with the company before him is a dummy. And so you have to prove yourself over and over again' (p. 26). It felt very much the same for me and others, we had a wealth of knowledge built up over many years of experience on who does what, what works, what does not work, what had been tried and failed. We had the capability to contextualise this knowledge to show what could have helped support developing new goals and objectives, but now it was all considered as superfluous to requirements. Staff were overwhelmed by the extent of the change, the recurring 'hard times' theme and the lack of acknowledgement or personal support. They understood that, rather than asking for our help, our senior executive was giving the message 'you will be told'.

The messages received were further compounded with the realisation of also being left with much of the responsibility for sorting out how to get things done. When describing senior executive style Jackall (1988) contends that superiors do not like to give detailed instructions to subordinates, '[T]he underlying reason is, first, to get rid of tedious details' (p. 20). Ironically, as the purpose of the consultation process had not been to allow the senior executive to understand the complexity of the organisation from a bottom-up perspective, the impact of the changes from the top-down perspective were not fully appreciated. Middle-managers were excluded from helping with the change project, but were still expected to make the changed structure work and to deal with all of the unintended consequences. The rhetoric on the need for change from the senior executive was offered, rather than the substance of what would be done. The answer to the question of how the changes would be implemented and what their impact would be was generally the same: the changes will 'reduce complexity and improve communications.' The tedious details of making things work and getting things done remained with the middle-managers and staff.

According to the theory and practice of financialization, when downsizing occurs, middle-management is one of the key targets. Thrift (1997) states:

Business organisations that take the managerialist discourse on board often become involved in programmes of direct 'downsizing', cutting back on the workforce with all the human misery this brings, made more of a shock, perhaps, because so many 'redundant' middle management 'layers' have been stripped out. (p. 51)

As expected, the downsizing included staff being disestablished: with Thrift's 'misery' being an accurate assessment of the affect and mood. The continual uncertainty about who would remain and how things would get done pressured middle-managers to seek clues from each other on appropriate behaviour. Partially this was to deal with the feelings of isolation, the need for self-preservation and uncertainty around dealing with underlying masked conflict that had reduced levels of commitment and collegiality. There was also competition for influence: a comment made one day to a 'friend' potentially could be perceived or used the next day as a

disloyal statement. I mulled over these conversations with my colleagues, wondering how to interpret what was really going on.

The change proposal and process reflected the senior executives' underlying beliefs that the previous weaker and less effective professional culture should be replaced by a stronger and more effective market-led culture. Unlike a 'for-profit' organisation where success can be easily measured in profits, 'not-for-profit' organisations have less tangible and more complex measures for their success. Now, however, the belief was expressed that both could and should be led by the stronger and more 'effective' market-led culture, and that both types of organisations need to operate as a 'for profit' business with the 'primacy of management' being an essential component for their resulting success. Diefenbach (2009) has described how this has been enacted in public sector organisations:

The primacy of management [is emphasised] above all other activities and the primacy of managers above all other groups of people. According to this view, managerial concepts and methods, skills and competencies, knowledge and expertise are portrayed as superior, as more important than any other concept, professional competencies and credentials. (p. 902)

Although 'primacy of management' creates the simpler outward appearance of better managing an organisation, it does not alleviate the continual uncertainty of change nor the ambiguity of managerial hierarchies. These all still co-existed. The changed management structure order meant that there was no place recognised for such ambiguities and a greater concentration of power was held by the senior executive.

The beneficiaries were the senior executive:

The importance of management for management's sake...increases the social status of managers, providing the managers with an ideological basis for their claim that public sector organisations shall and must be managed by managers. (p. 902)

The reduction in authority for middle-managers and the uncertainty surrounding their future, meant in practice that getting ahead and getting things done depended more on relationships with the senior executive members than with professional colleagues.

This also shifted the balance of middle-manager priorities: there was less emphasis on

managing operations and a greater emphasis on managing the relationships with senior executives.

Jackall (1988) provides evidence that in the corporate world of bureaucratic careers, patrimonial practices occur in the higher levels of management in large organisations. He describes organisations having front stage, formal rules of a bureaucracy, but this masks the different, backstage, rules of a patrimony, where fealty (loyalty or allegiance) is considered of greater consequence. It is a world where the CEO is in charge and is deferred to as the king, a world where anxiety-ridden managers participating as actors take part in alliances and power struggles inside autocratic top-down organisations. To 'get ahead' individuals need to be seen as flexible, competent and loyal in the eyes of their manager and to be better than the others, but not seen to be better than their senior executive managers. This was my dilemma and the tension that existed within my organisation. Jackall (2010) observes that 'the bureaucracy's hierarchical structure binds superiors and subordinates in reciprocal fealty relationships. Subordinates must be loyal to their bosses. In return, bosses have obligations to loyal subordinates' (p. 3).

Rather than encourage open and honest dialogue, middle-managers were expected to support their senior executive members in meetings. If they were able, they gave their more candid feedback privately afterwards. Such 'loyal' behaviour in meetings was carried out whether or not the senior executive member was actually present. When acting on behalf of the senior executive, middle-managers became a buffer between the senior executive and staff, rather than as facilitators of the free flow of communication, information and concerns. Jackall (2010) observes that 'bureaucracies separate managers from the consequences of their actions. Thus, for example, managers need never meet workers now unemployed by decisions to move factories abroad' (p. 4).

The process of restructuring protected the senior executive members from any meaningful emotional contact with staff. 'Troublemakers' were targeted and dealt with, those who were compliant were left alone. The previous flow of communication, information and concerns that had come through middle managers



was disrupted: this important feedback loop to senior executive members was technically still present, but no longer effective. The lack of informed feedback increased the risk of failure, because without that open flow of communication there were fewer recognised needs to require intervention.

The business principles being promoted by the senior executive may have seemed 'modern', but they were very much principles that still supported older forms of a bureaucratic hierarchical management. Diefenbach and Sillince (2011) describe formal and informal hierarchy in different types of organisation:

Even allegedly new management concepts (e.g. lean management, balanced scorecard, the learning organization, knowledge management) are still based on the principles of formal hierarchy (p. 1520).

They describe five different types of hierarchical organizations: bureaucratic/orthodox organization, professional organization, representative democratic organization, hybrid/postmodern organization, and network organization. Over time it will emerge which of these five organisational types or aspects will dominate, but in the transitional period aspects of the bureaucratic/orthodox organization were the most apparent. In the context of any of the other four organisational types my actions could have been directed more towards customer or staff interactions, whereas in my case my attention had been turned to look upwards to the senior executive in this bureaucratic/orthodox styled organization.

### **3.2 Situational Ethics**

This section describes the void and uncertainty created from the change processes within the restructure project. It highlights the ethical demands and dilemmas faced when choosing between social and economic values introducing the notion of 'moral mazes' as they were encountered.

My dilemma as a middle-manager in this transition period was how to perform my role in such a rapidly changing environment. It seemed to me that whatever choices I made presented a fresh set of issues with their own unintended consequences. This is

not to argue simply that the previous structure had worked and that a new re-structure, when implemented, would not. The dilemma was how to manage in the absence of any formally understood and agreed practice, behaviour and expectations. Old structures were in the process of being dismantled and new structures were yet to be developed and formalised. Some staff had been disestablished and had already gone; I and other staff were enmeshed inside the disestablishment process in this drawn-out transition period. Although new performance expectations were associated with the new structures, in reality very few new operational activities had been initiated. The transition period of many months was an interregnum, a state in change, a void, an environment in which the previous structure, authorities and people had been disrupted without any new tangible codes of practice, behaviour and expectations established in their place. Policies and process documents had remained unaltered, but the implicit and tacit organisational protocols ceased to have meaning.

Although this kind of temporary state can be thought of as just that—a temporary state—it can also be conceived as an ongoing sequence of temporary states. Miller (1997) sees organisational practice as a socio-technical construction of reality, suggesting that what appears as fixed and permanent is instead something maintained through the employees' tacit agreement. He visualises organisations as being always provisional assemblages of people, technologies and things. In this view, an organisation is in an endless sequence of provisional assemblages. My organisation and all organisations are therefore endless reconfigurations without ever becoming fixed and permanent, an endless and varied arrays of temporarily stabilised networks, always unstable. He asks:

How might one write the history of an assemblage? How might one describe the swarming multiplicity of actors, agents, practices, tools, instruments, inscriptions and ideas that forms from time to time, and that is defined by the temporarily stabilized networks of relations between its constituent parts, the abstract lines that pass between its components, rather than the contours that surround them? How might one capture the singularity of the process by which this teeming abundance of relations results in the creation of something new, even if it is made up in part of second-hand components that can in turn be re-used, re-connected, re-assembled and linked into a new set of relations, once the assemblage ceases to exist? (p. 355)

Miller's argument appealed to me as an insightful understanding of how things worked inside organisations. The answers to his questions come from understanding my relationship to the components mentioned and their assemblage. The restructure project had destabilised the assemblage that constituted me, leaving me as a middle-manager in a void without a script. In the previous state in which the appearance of something fixed and permanent was held together by the actors playing our roles, people knew what to do and were busy at work doing their work. Change may be directed from the top, but in reality change, or for that matter even continuity, can only be achieved through this 'multiplicity of actors, agents, practices, tools, instruments, inscriptions and ideas' agreeing to participate. I observed myself and others coming to work not knowing what to do. My office, desk, computer and files were all in place as before. An outside auditor could observe and summarise his or her findings, stating that no change had occurred, as all the components that made up my place of work still existed.

This dilemma was intensified when I reflected on the cultural, ethical and social factors arising from the restructure project changes. Personally my feelings about being excluded, of not knowing whom to trust and of working in this void impacted my feelings of self-worth. The wider social and community impacts encroached on my sense of justice, fairness and morality.

Creating a more effective and efficient public sector based on economic imperatives and market-led restructuring is a highly divisive approach, with proponents and opponents hold equally vehement views. Bolton and Lasser (2013) describes these tensions as being

inherent in an idolized market view: between economic values (rationalized views of people and a dominance of exchange and use values logic) and moral and, thus, human values (social dependency within a web of mutual reciprocity and essential recognition for human flourishing). (p. 509)

The notions of financialization and managerialism as theories and practice polarise people into opposing camps of economic-based solutions and human-based solutions with each camp often believing the other to be wrong. Not surprisingly, notions of

financialization and managerialism are more commonly held by managers than by staff. For those able to determine their feelings of self-worth based on their own individual achievements, reducing their feelings of social responsibility can seem a lesser sacrifice than financial reward. For those who come to work for social engagement and professional satisfaction, this is not a sacrifice that is easily made because for them individual success and financial reward are just two aspects of their intrinsic motivation. Within my circle of friends and family, and in many social settings with shared values, norms and ‘feeling rules’, I can feel comfortable being able to express and debate contrary views. However, at work I needed to consider the power imbalance in every interaction with a senior executive member and was accordingly more circumspect with my comments and views. Polanyi (1957, 1968) denies the tradability of labour, describing land, labour and money as ‘fictitious commodities’. He suggests that the psychological and social wellbeing of people is at stake when they are treated as tradable (like capital and machines) and fictitious commodities. Supporting this notion, Bolton and Laaser (2013) reason that, rather than markets establishing societal values, markets are, conversely, ‘mediated by institutions, individuals and communities’ (p. 514). The theory behind the restructure project was formed from the belief that a self-regulated market of its own impetus creates a better society and that through the energy released this better society comes into being. Bolton and Laaser give an example of how the market is mediated, referring to ‘lay morality’ and the action of a bottom-up morality approach:

Central to Sayer’s approach is the importance of actors’ ‘fellow-feeling’ and ‘inter-dependence’. In this light lay morality is central to an understanding of the social and moral dimension of life as it reflects people’s on-going moral evaluations about ‘relations to others, about how people should treat one another in ways conducive to well-being’ (Sayer, 2005, 951), but also about normative issues that economic practices pose upon social commitments and responsibilities. (p. 516)

This morality refers to the subjective social expectations of the groups and communities involved, and to the personal and social conflict that results when these social expectations are not adhered to. Taking the path of least resistance I could have dutifully carried out what was expected, hoping to be rewarded with a new role, and if

this failed then at least to receive a generous redundancy payment. This self-survival approach, however, was at odds with my 'lay' morality. I wondered what opportunities there would have been for me to find a new role with sufficient power and agency to have influenced the proceedings. I imagined that this influence would be minimal and of course depended on my making myself available for a new role, and for being selected.

The communication on the restructure project focused on internal issues and context. One exception to this was the issue of redeployment. Employment policies and actions needed to comply with the State Sector Act 1988. On our intranet staff FAQ under redeployment and redundancy we were advised that

Whilst there is an obligation at common law to consider employees who are to be made redundant for redeployment to any suitable vacant positions, the organisation must also comply with the statutory obligations in the State Sector Act. Those obligations require the organisation to, where practical, openly advertise all new continuous positions so as to maximise the likelihood that the best person available is appointed to each vacant role. In practice, the organisation will therefore openly advertise all vacant roles, unless there are compelling reasons why that isn't practical. When this occurs, employees who would be eligible for redeployment to a vacant role will be notified of roles that are available, and given assistance to apply for them, but given the State Sector Act obligations, it will be the exception, rather than the norm, for the organisation to offer automatic redeployment.

The issue of redeployment and redundancy created much controversy and dissatisfaction. The initial announcements were supportive of the redeployment of staff, and HR helped staff in disestablished positions to gain new employment, promoting redeployment as an option. However, later announcements did not even mention redeployment as an option. I wondered if this policy change had come from external legal advice or from a decision to reduce internal applicant opportunities, but whatever the reason, no explanation or even an acknowledgement on the policy change was offered. It seemed that by not wanting to draw attention to the policy change and by its very omission, attention was drawn to the policy change. Believing that redeployment was a genuine offer, I promoted redeployment in my team meetings. These team meetings were difficult emotional experiences. I now recognise that I had offered the hope of redeployment as a way of reducing their overall

negative affect. Looking back, I would have been better served to follow my instincts as I did not really believe that many (or any) in my team would be redeployed. Instead I became complicit with the senior executive in trying to minimise negative affect.

When the redeployment option was no longer emphasised I felt compromised. What had been the 'right' thing to say previously had become the 'wrong' thing. At formal and informal staff meetings I asked what had happened to the previous emphasis on redeployment and the reply was that our legal obligations needed to be followed. The answers did not acknowledge change; they just re-stated the obligation. Like many other responses this was not a direct reply to my question, ironically reflecting the fact that there was no acknowledgment of a policy change.

The communication changes on redeployment may seem trivial, but for me this represented another example of the middle-manager's pressure to bracket his or her morality. Personally, I have found that when given the opportunity to adequately debate plans and policies I am more able to carry out what has been agreed. I went over in my mind scenarios with family and friends where I had felt morally outraged when one of them had changed an important story without an adequate explanation. Yet here inside my organisation I accepted that this is how things happen. Generally those being disestablished who did not modify and adapt their behaviour did not stay, or, more to the point, were not given the opportunity to stay. My dilemma was to what extent I would allow myself to modify and adapt my behaviour without compromising my own personal morals. My moral dilemma was that I had to judge which issues I could let go of, which ones could I compromise, and which ones I needed to stand firm.

Public criticism of decisions and processes were tolerated, but as many as possible were directed to go through prescribed means and channels as 'feedback': we were asked to write formal submissions, we needed to ask to be invited to private meetings, but we could ask questions at arranged meetings and forums. I participated in all of these processes, writing a number of submissions myself or in combination with other staff members, also attending specially arranged meetings and forums. As time progressed, fewer people were invited to give feedback with specific restrictions

being placed on who was allowed to do so. Those deemed not formally directly effected were excluded, with the explanation that this eliminated unnecessary discussion with those who were straying outside their operational areas. The definition of who was being directly effected differed between the senior executive and staff. It was stated publicly and privately by the CEO and senior executive members that ‘the new structure will not be for everyone with some of you not staying.’ It was also stated privately that those who expressed themselves with inappropriate emotional outbursts were stuck in the past and not willing to move with the times. These comments marginalised many. Previously welcome critiques were now seen as inappropriate behaviour. I noticed that I was more circumspect and careful about what I asked and with my responses. My behaviour had been shaped.

Jackall (2010) observes that ‘bosses determine the day-to-day occupational ethics that actually guide behavior of subordinates in big organisations’ (p. 3). My HR ‘heads-up’ meeting was in place ostensibly to ensure that my team and I were aware of and prepared for changes being announced at the formal disestablishment meeting. These meetings however, were only instituted after the senior executive members had had to deal with emotional outbursts at previous such meetings. Whether these meetings were in place to protect the feelings of those being affected or those delivering the outcome was debatable. Knowing the outcome beforehand was beneficial, but there was an implicit expectation that I would be preparing my team so that they would conform to behavioural expectations.

Jackall (1988) questions the extent to which ethical principles are seen as an obstacle to career advancement in a highly individualistic society where success is deemed to be paramount. He argues:

Bureaucratic work shapes people’s consciousness in decisive ways...  
bureaucratic work causes people to bracket the moralities that they might hold outside the workplace or that they might adhere to privately and to follow instead the prevailing morality of their organizational milieu (p. 5).

I had previously placed importance in the organisations on the need to develop respectful relationships with senior executive members and with a relationship that

accepted that my moralities were not bracketed. In the restructure project I was concerned that candid honesty would be dismissed and that I would be seen as having inappropriate values and being stuck in the past. I worked hard on writing submissions and carefully discussed with senior executive members when able various options and ideas. I modified my words and responses in an attempt to enhance my ability to influence decisions. By modifying my responses I was conforming to Jackall's observation that 'actual organizational moralities are thus contextual, situational, highly specific, and, most often, unarticulated' (p. 6). I was not approached by anyone saying that I needed to be less inclined to offer a critique, but it was obvious to me that if I were to have any voice, that voice needed to be more carefully considered and modified. Some people advanced their careers by expressing their support for the decisions being made, or by acknowledging their approval for those now in charge, or by deliberately refraining from saying anything at all. This situation induced anxious feelings of being betwixt and between, a constant state of feeling as though I was on probation, of having no substance in my voice and most likely having no future. It was a difficult balancing act that undermined my sense of personal integrity. Criticising arrangements that enabled people to gain promotion was challenging, particularly when the critique would have been for those in positions of authority who themselves had breached their own personal moral codes to obtain their positions. I asked myself if I needed to 'play the game' and if my morals and ethics needed to be more flexible so that I could make an impact or more simply just to survive. Jackall describes this situation as an intricate set of moral mazes that can often be expressed as 'what is right in the corporation is what the guy above you wants from you' (p. 6). I resolved to feed back what I could respectfully, but without compromising my personal ethics, and to be prepared to leave if need be, not that choosing to stay was something that I had any control over. However, through these deliberations and the modification of my communication and responses I was allowing myself to bracket my moralities. Making my way through these moral mazes proved to be extremely difficult.



Bureaucracies place a great premium on the virtue of 'flexibility'. Tsui and Ashford (1994) describe middle-managers using 'self-regulation' as an enabling mechanism to reduce organisational conflict and to facilitate the working of an organisation:

Managers skilled in self-regulation can respond to the complexity and dynamic pace of their immediate environment in a timely fashion... These additional realities suggest that self-regulation by managers is in part a social process involving attempts to understand and influence the opinions of various relevant constituents in order to achieve organizational goals. (p. 93-94)

Being adept at self-regulation and flexibility are core capabilities required for every middle-manager inside an organisation. To be effective, I self-regulated my work, my performance and my behaviour. I also promoted staff self-regulation. My dilemma was not with the practice of self-regulation, as this was also my former practice; my dilemma was doing so when what I had considered to be acceptable moral social and work boundaries had been unilaterally changed.

Watson (2003) discusses ethical choices in managerial work within what he describes as in an ethically irrational world. He questions the extent to which managers have the scope to let their actions be informed by their personal moral criteria, when instead they are pressured to follow corporate moral criteria. In my situation this choice had become more contentious and visible. When I put on my 'suit of armour' to walk through the door at work, did that mean that I left my personal identity and values at home? Watson suggests that this is actually the case with corporate moral expectations. As middle-managers, our directives and communications to staff were expected to be shaped only in the best interests of the organisation.

My need to develop my management style could not be based on a simple rational argument of just doing the right thing and therefore expecting the best outcome. This would have been naive. Instead, I needed to consider what course of action would produce the best outcome (for all) in this irrational organisation and world. Watson (2002) describes Weber's (1949) notion of the ethical irrationality as being fundamental:

both to his political thinking and his sociology. It is a recognition that judgements about what is right and wrong cannot be derived from rational or scientific analysis of the human condition, given that no system of values can be established that will make every value consistent with every other or ensure that right actions always lead to right outcomes — or, indeed, wrong actions necessarily lead to wrong outcomes. (Watson, 2002, 457)

I recognised that my attempts to follow rational or even moral considerations was not easy. My social background had formed (constructed) much of my responses and I realised that without a better understanding of the world and beliefs of those around me my choices could be inappropriate. In this ethically irrational world then perhaps even with this understanding my choices could still be inappropriate, but at least I could take comfort in the notion that my choices were consistent with my personal morals and ethics. I considered two possible management extremes: simply going with the flow or adopting a morally assertive style. In aiming for a morally assertive style I recognised that, for my voice to be heard and to gain a future participatory role, I must not be seen to be straying too far from the flow. I debated with myself the possibility of balancing and reconciling these two contrary tensions, this being another moral maze that I agonised over.

If employees wish to advance within an organisation, there is pressure to dis-identify and to sublimate themselves to the organisation (Cremin, 2010). This entails ambiguity and anxiety, as it is not always easy to understand what the CEO and those in charge want. Despite HR claims regarding measurable objective criteria, performance appraisals are based on shifting subjective expectations. Performance appraisals provoke an underlying anxiety regarding whether the person being appraised is good enough to deserve continued employment. Recognition and promotion can be seen as being a reward for a job well done, but often for those being appraised it is not clear why this is or is not the case. Cremin (2010) observes that ‘We dis-identify temporally: we identify with a future goal as symbolic of the impossible moment when circumstance is constitutive of desire’ (p. 133). He adds that ‘the status of being employable is a fleeting one’ (p. 136). He identifies the process of dis-identification of the self in the workplace so that sublimation to the organisation can be achieved, enabling career advancement based on the subjective criteria of the

‘bosses’. I recognised that I was sublimating myself to the organisation in my relationship with my senior executive manager and that I was conforming to the organisation’s expectations for those whom I managed.

One aspect of corporate life described by Jackall (1983) is that ‘managers feel that there is a tremendous amount of plain luck involved in advancement’ (p. 124). This is in contrast to belief in a strong work ethic, the idea that hard work brings its own just reward. Jackall says that the latter is a core belief of middle-managers. Yet Jackall stresses the importance of being in the right place at the right time or the mishap of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. My team and I had performed well, but we were cast aside, while others who may not have performed well or had been perceived by others as not performing well had been retained. Some of the longer-serving staff talked about previous change proposals that they believed were initiated solely to get rid of people that ‘they’ did not like. This change proposal, despite being proposed as rational, could be seen as both deliberate and random in its consequences. Without having recognition for getting things done the chances of being selected to stay seemed random. From a senior executive’s perspective this randomness of corporate life is concealed by the assertion that successful managers need to find ways of fitting into changing corporate structures, to shape and suppress their public feelings, to subordinate their selves within the hierarchy, and to be able to communicate to others approved corporate stories. From a middle-manager’s perspective the ability to get things done and being recognised don not always match. Jackall (1983) argues that ‘instead of ability, talent, and dedicated service to an organization, politics, adroit talk, luck, connections, and self-promotion are the real sorters of people into sheep and goats’ (p. 122). What appears to be promotion coming from performance or even luck instead results from connections and politics. The sorting process is tied to fealty.

In discussing managerialism and career advancement Tracy and Trethewey (2005) describe how ‘employees [who] ‘buy into’ the money code of managerialism, pursue organizational ‘payoffs’ almost exclusively and ‘cash out’ alternative rewards’ (p. 175): by doing so they value moving up the hierarchy and gaining prestige above

things like ‘enjoying leisure time, pursuing meaningful and fulfilling work, or building strong communities’ (p. 176). It is expected by members of the senior executive that all staff with aspirations will hold the same values as themselves and that those who do not are therefore not suitable for promotion. Generally my staff enjoyed their work, valued their customer contact and considered their social connections at work with their colleagues as important reasons for coming to work. They, however, valued their families and their personal life more than their careers and saw their careers as being just a subset of their personal life rather than their main focus. Some employees are able to manage their own home, family and personal life well, but are not willing to sublimate themselves to the organisation. Their ideas of how to get things done are often not considered worthy to be listened. Ironically the opposite is probably more true. Tracy and Trethewey (2005) argue that ‘‘careerism’ is particularly corrosive when employees begin to treat their personal, social, and organizational relationships as utilitarian means for upward mobility’ (p. 176). For them the costs of failing to navigate Jackall’s moral mazes are high.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Trauma of Change**

#### **4.1 Managing Behaviour**

This section deals with the role of HR in managing much of the infrastructure of the change processes. I discuss the changing business expectations from newer HR methodologies on the development of organisational culture and social engineering. I discuss the varying roles played by HR, middle-managers and external consultants. I discuss the role that euphemism, euphemistic violence, doublespeak and doublethink have played in the outworking of organisational culture.

To reduce the ‘fragmentation and duplication’ identified by the CEO and to develop and merge the newly flattened structures into what he termed ‘logical portfolios’, much analysis and work was needed. HR completed a basic audit of tasks: much of the more complex analysis being carried out by external consultants. The engagement of an external management consultant firm can be rationalised on the basis that change management professionals have the experience, expertise and objectivity to complete this important work. However, they often lack subjective and contextual understanding and run the risk of producing something more like a theoretical desktop exercise. Huy (2001) describes the competition between external management consultants and middle-managers as both vie for the senior executive member’s ear:

Matters are often complicated when external consultants are brought into the picture. They may suggest an approach that middle management has already tried—one that didn’t work the first time, so is likely to fail again. Furthermore, middle managers are predictably not enthusiastic about sharing their deep knowledge with consultants who display a better-than-thou attitude and cast the managers as fumbling has-beens to senior executives mostly so the consultants can justify their own high fees and contract extensions. Middle managers too often have seen their good ideas fed to senior management by these same consultants, perhaps with more polish and better packaging than the middle managers would have used. Even if those ideas are pursued and successfully implemented, the middle managers don’t get any credit, so the cycle continues. (p. 72)

In my case this competition between external consultants and middle-managers was eliminated as middle-managers and staff were excluded from the proposal development work. The external consultants and HR worked with the senior executive, while HR worked with middle-managers and staff. There was no contact between the external consultants and middle-managers. HR acted as a buffer between middle-managers and the senior executive.

I am not aware of the external consultants' organisational relationship, but would have expected that HR provided them with the task audit data, so that the external consultants could advise the senior executive on options. There have been many media stories over recent decades claiming that external consultants provide organisational restructure advice that has resulted in severe organisational staff cuts. One example of severe staff cuts came from Watkin (2012) describing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spending \$9M on consultants to save \$25M. Some media stories have published not just news on the negative impact on staff, but also the subsequent negative impact on customers and eventually the negative impacts to the organisation itself. The Press (2013) described a consultant-led change in the Department of Conservation which highlighted the damage created to the department and to its customers all around New Zealand, from what had started out as a cost savings exercise.

I did not meet an external consultant, as to me they were invisible. I did, however, meet HR staff. The basic HR function is defined as 'the department of a business or organization that deals with the hiring, administration, and training of staff' (Compact Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus, 2009). Alongside these basic responsibilities our HR department provided various organisational tools, processes and training courses for organisational development and human resource management. The selection of HR to manage the restructure project was a surprise, although initially it was acknowledged with some relief by middle-managers and staff as they felt that the HR people knew the organisation and the people. I was concerned, however, with how much expertise our HR people had for managing such a large restructure project, and to what extent they were selected so that the CEO was more able to direct the process and outcome.

From the first all-staff email restructure project announcement through to my most recent all-staff email, all communication came from either the CEO or the HR Director. The more important communications came from the CEO, but the majority came from the HR Director.

Human resource management is considered an important organisational function for managing large organisational workforces. From its origins in managing basic employment and employee processes the function has developed into an organisational leadership role referred to now as 'strategic human resource management'. This concept has emerged over the last century from roots in scientific management and efficiency (Taylor, 1911) and human relations and behaviour (Mayo, 1933). When considering changes in organisational culture over the past century Barley and Kunda (1992) categorise different organisational phases as waves of industrial betterment in the 1870s, scientific management in the 1900s, welfare capitalism/human relations in the 1920s, systems rationalism in the 1950s, and organisational culture/quality in the 1980s. More recent trends include the integrated use of technology for supporting the development of virtual organisations. Each new wave has shaped and changed management organisational expectations so that the notion of organisational culture and its management are now central to management practice. Barley and Kunda (1992) observe that

the idea that organizations might profitably be viewed as cultures did not attract sustained attention until the late 1970s, when the notion entered managerial discourse via two paths. The first was through the work of theorists who argued that organizations should be viewed as socially constructed systems of meaning...[The second was] by heeding the symbolics of leadership and by attending to employees' values, managers could enhance their firm's competitiveness. (p. 382)

The notion of the development of organisational culture requires employees to merge their own welfare with that of the organisation. It requires managers at all levels to promote beliefs and emotions so that employees are able to demonstrate emotional commitment and conformity to organisational goals. The belief is that this emotional commitment and conformity are linked to an expected improved organisational competitiveness, leading to financial gain. Wharton (2009) observes that 'emotions

not only are shaped by broad cultural and societal norms, but also are increasingly regulated by employers with an eye on the bottom line' (p. 148). She uses the term 'emotional labor' (Hochschild, 1979) to describe the process by which employees are expected to manage their feelings in accordance with employer-defined rules and guidelines. Although this concept is mostly used in the context of managing customer interactions (smile and display appropriate emotions), it can also apply to staff in organisational interactions. The belief that managing culture and emotions leads to improving the bottom line suggests that the scripting of senior executive and staff interactions can be motivated by the desire for financial gain rather than by respect for staff as people. Wharton (2009) observes that 'a fundamental concern is understanding how emotions are regulated by culture and social structure and how emotional regulation affects individuals, groups, and organizations' (p. 148). Those who use emotional regulation as a means of gaining commitment and conformity to increase productivity assume that people are pliable and can be shaped as instruments to be put in place for the good of the organisation. They also assume that a form of superficial compliance is the same thing as commitment and that the people are not able to distinguish between what is genuine and what is manipulated. I heard the CEO and other senior executive members say that our new organisation will not be for everyone and that the 'collateral damage' from the disruption will be worth the pain, and that it is was even needed. These moments of candour may have been correct in ways not fully appreciated by the senior executive because that collateral damage potentially produced the very opposite of what was intended: an overall negative organisational performance outcome.

Modern trends in business using terms such as *Total Quality*, *Lean Manufacturing* and *World Class* emerged from the 1980s representing newly established and embedded thinking on how organisations ought to be managed. A few decades later the management of organisational culture and employees' thoughts and feelings are now established and embedded in business and management culture. Barley and Kunda (1992) argue that



strong cultures can be consciously designed and manipulated. Enlightened managers were said to be capable not only of formulating value systems, but of instilling those values in their employees. Management was advised to exorcise unwanted thoughts and feelings from the workforce and to replace them with beliefs and emotions that benefited the organization. (p. 383)

Organisational culture, organisational behaviour and organisational change are all concepts and now disciplines linked to strategic human resource management, which senior executives seek to integrate into long-term business strategies.

HR promoted workshops to help managers and staff cope with the high levels of change. Three examples of these advertised in all-staff emails were:

Working Successfully through Change - for all staff  
Leading in a Time of Change - for Managers/Leaders  
Growing Personal Resilience - for all staff

I attended the Leading in a Time of Change and Personal Resilience courses and encouraged my team members to attend the two courses that were for all staff. I found these courses well run and the tutors responsive and empathetic to the needs of the attendees. Everyone attending these courses had at some level been affected by the changes and many, if not the majority, were either in roles that had been disestablished or were about to be disestablished. However, the tutors in the two courses that I attended struggled to deal with the depth of negative affect expressed. The tutors engaged with the attendees when they could, but it was obvious that they had not been adequately briefed or prepared for the level of negative affect and anguish. I imagined that the tutors would have discussed and possibly complained to HR afterwards about their surprise at this. Despite the good intent of the tutors, I felt as though they had been directed to normalise and minimise the negative affect resulting from restructure project, so that staff could cope and become more compliant. The courses focused on personal strategies, either on how to manage personal feelings, or for middle-managers, on how to help enable staff to manage their emotions. These course were in place in order to address the genuine concerns of staff, but also to socialise staff (Wharton, 2009; Hochschild, 1983) and, as Goffman (1952) explains, to ‘cool out’ staff.

The great length of time taken to work through the various change proposals created a level of weariness for all involved. It took more than six months from the initiation of the restructure project for the first change proposal to be announced, and a further six months until my department's change proposal was announced. When even more change proposals were indicated, it seemed like a never-ending process. The sheer volume of information being communicated was daunting and at times confusing. At an all-staff meeting, a two-year projected revenue and staff number forecast was shown from which I was able to calculate that a reduction of around 200 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff was planned for over this period. The communication was made in good faith as being open and transparent, but I do not think that the CEO, when presenting, had realised what the background data displayed behind him showed. From this data I made a simple calculation. The CEO discussed a reduction in staff numbers and natural attrition, but without referring directly to the specifics of the reduction. In different slides I was able to see numbers of current staff, natural attrition rates and future staff numbers, all provided in a format simple enough to allow me to write down the numbers and to do the calculation while in the meeting. After taking into account a reasonable natural attrition rate, I could see a great mismatch between the words communicated and figures so that there would have to be a large number of redundancies to match the staff reduction. At a subsequent department briefing meeting soon afterwards I asked the CEO about redundancies and he replied that 'there were no plans for redundancies with, at present, all change proposals being just that, proposals'. He stated that he 'didn't get out of bed each day to make people redundant'. However, clearly there were plans for redundancies, but they were not yet sufficiently specific to say who and when. In less than two months major disestablishments were announced. The level of disestablishments confirmed the calculations that I had made in that meeting from that two-year staff forecast. This reduction was much more than could be expected from anything like natural attrition.

One month before my HR 'heads-up' meeting, three official significant change proposals providing a one-month consultation period effecting my department were announced and distributed through all-staff emails stating:

After extensive consultation, and in response to the current economic climate and government strategies which require the public sector to live within its means, we have today informed affected staff in the following department...to reduce, withdraw and rearrange.

At my HR 'heads-up' meeting the incredible claim was made that I and others were not about to become redundant, but instead were about to 'enter a new phase with a changed status.' This was an appalling choice of words. Although technically some might not have actually become redundant, it was obvious that many if not most of those identified would be made redundant. Knowing that this HR 'heads-up' meeting was in place to manage the emotional behaviour of staff, I felt that it was surprising that this choice of words was used. Did the HR staff member think that we would accept the notion of a changed status as being a satisfactory description? At the meeting I let the changed status comment pass, as I recognised that she only had a minor functionary role. I self-regulated my feelings, as I was not going to let this person know how I felt about what was going on.

These communications were expressions from a cold organisational perspective that treated people as a resource alongside capital, materials and processes. It felt as though I was talking to a person wearing a mask and acting in a role only representing the interests of the organisation. Although to me the words were inept, they had been carefully selected to reduce any feelings (or delusions) of power that I may have had. She had bracketed her morality and had dis-identified herself in order to be an instrument of the organisation. Words used in meetings and announcements made did not include the word *redundant*, but instead more palatable concepts and words were selected, such as *disestablishment* and *reductions*, or HR staff referred more to the *positive expected outcomes*. The words chosen were in a euphemistic language to disguise the contrary opinions and beliefs that underpinned the exercise. Jackall (1988) describes this use of language as a method for constructing 'fictive realities and concomitant vocabularies ... and euphemisms' (p. 5). He notes the need for constructing a more palatable view of the organisation that takes precedence over the facts. My HR 'heads-up' meeting was a private meeting where these inept words were only heard by me, but I could imagine them being repeated in similar meetings and

also in larger meetings when many people heard these fictive realities. Stein (1998) describes such use of business terms and phrases and their combination as creating a 'rational, technical, objective, reality-based, economic order' (p. 346):

This list can be seen as less a series than as an ideological center composed of interconnected euphemisms: bottom line, spin, outsource, reduction in force (RIF), downsize, rightsize, reengineer, restructure, managed care, (physician as) provider, (patient or sick person as) customer or consumer, cut or trim fat, cut down to the bone, gatekeeper, and the like. (p. 346)

He further describes these terms as being more than 'just business' in that their euphemistic usage represents the more 'violent' processes of change (p. 347).

Organisations use *downsize* rather than *get rid of* and *termination* or such bland verbs as *rightsize*. Using these business terms minimises the significance of what is going on, reducing people to inanimate objects interchangeable with machines. When used as metaphors, terms such as *reengineer* or *cut to the bone* have directly violent inferences. When the words are used euphemistically, the violence (to people) still exists, but is expressed in ways that are less unpleasant or embarrassing. In sporting terms a *dramatic collapse* could easily be a *valiant rear guard action*, or a player being *rested* could have been described as being *discarded*, *snubbed* or *dropped*. The choice of words does more than convey what is going on and can be used to shape understanding and actions. Organisations with people skilled in public relations and communications have the ability to portray positive aspects of an organisation in terms that can be understood and appreciated, but also in terms that can conceal. These people can use doublethink and doublespeak as a way of manipulating people's perceptions. I had entered a world in which doublethink and doublespeak were now considered normal.

## **4.2 Change is a Traumatic Event**

In this section I discuss impacts on change, the speed of change and the extent of change. I discuss the role that middle-managers are expected to play as promoters of loyalty and commitment, and introduce the notion and use of 'emotional labor' inside

an organisational setting. The section concludes with a description of the negative affect from the restructure project process and the resulting emotional trauma.

The restructure project unfolded over a long and difficult transition period. Change became the new constant. Kunda and Van Maanen (1999) describe change as a sociological phenomenon requiring organisations and people to adjust to new societal norms:

Change, on all fronts, personal, social, and institutional, is the mantra of our times; we are reminded endlessly and relentlessly that the only constant is change. To survive, we must come to terms with turbulent environments, thrive on rampant chaos, welcome rapidly changing markets, adjust to high degrees of uncertainty, and celebrate seemingly perpetual technological revolutions. If change is now the norm, lessons learned from the past are suspect. A new age, it seems, requires new solutions. (p. 65)

Although the notion of lifetime employment has long gone, the extent of change was much greater than I had imagined. As my organisation adapted to embrace a market-led form of employment, the CEO and senior executive assumed that only those who were able to prove their worth would or even should stay. The CEO and senior executive members admonished us in meetings to be prepared for being a part of the necessary change or perhaps to consider whether our future would be better elsewhere.

Receiving these admonishments made us feel as though we were being told that those ‘who are not for us are against us.’ This seemed very close to what, in other settings, could have been construed as a mass constructive dismissal. We were told that all was being done to ensure that our organisation survived and that in these difficult times those in charge (and only those in charge) knew what they were doing. Despite being on the pathway to disestablishment, I was still expected to manage the feelings and *display emotions* of my staff. I was told that an overt display of negative affect was unprofessional. Kunda and Van Maanen (1999) describe this as the management of ‘emotional labor’:

Managers and professionals, in return, were expected to bring to the job not only their cognitive capacities and technical expertise, but more crucially, a

willingness to put forth a form of what Hochschild (1983) calls ‘emotional labor’ a publicly displayed investment and passion for the work they do, the work relations they forge, and the company that employs them. (p. 65)

Staff enthusiasm and the public display of investment in and passion for their work was highly regarded, sometimes more so than the actual quantity and quality of their work. Negativity and emotional outbursts were frowned upon. The senior executive commented that such displays were an expression of employees’ own shortcomings, because they were not flexible enough, and that they were stuck in the past. Clichés such as ‘moving on’, ‘we have to work smarter, not harder’ and ‘going forward’ were used, often as a way of closing down debate and to stifle expressions of concern. Kunda and Van Maanen (1999) describe the role of a manager as including the promotion of managing the feelings and displayed emotions of staff as a way of developing staff loyalty and commitment. Their description mirrored my situation. They show that understanding this connection is important for understanding the world of work:

We believe that discovering and attending to these less noticed forms of emotional labor—in our case, the labor entailed in producing and presenting loyalty and commitment—will serve to broaden our view and enhance our understanding both of this concept and of the worlds of work within which it occurs. (p. 77)

Hochschild (1979) describes the displayed investment of ‘emotional labor’ as being a process composed of individual acts of ‘emotion work, social feeling rules, and a great variety of exchanges between people in private and public life’ (p. ix).

Coming to work every day and completing assigned tasks requires a commitment to working in groups as teams. The responsibilities of a manager are as much about the management of people and how they work together as they are about the management of the tasks and the actual work that they perform. Managing one without the other is ineffective. Throughout the restructure project I was expected to maintain an effective, efficient and harmonious workplace where staff treated customers, members of the public and other staff members with due respect, impartiality, courtesy and sensitivity. One of the key performance requirements for my role was to ensure that ‘high calibre staff are attracted, developed, and retained, and the team is enthusiastic

and committed to a common set of goals and objectives.’ Hochschild’s (1979) description of ‘emotion work’, ‘referring more broadly to the act of evoking or shaping, as well as suppressing feeling in oneself’ (p. 561) also applies to the role of managers in shaping and managing staff behaviour and compliance.

As people have a social need to belong and contribute to the communities in which they live, it also is reasonable to expect that when these needs are fulfilled in the workplace, these people will have a higher commitment to their work, with a corresponding positive effect on the organisation. Barley and Kunda (1992) explain how this relationship is managed for commitment: ‘As sentient, social beings, employees were said to perform more diligently when they were committed to a collective whose ideals they valued. Control therefore rested on shaping workers’ identities, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs’ (p. 384). *Facilitating, persuading, shaping* and *manipulating* are words representing different assumptions on how to manage relationships in an organisation.

I had chosen to work in my organisation because I enjoyed the work and the social contact; the role matched my perception of my career path; I felt that I was an effective part of a needed and worthwhile organisation; and the financial reward was acceptable. That work relationship had shifted to now being a ‘take it or leave it’ choice. Furthermore I was expected to be the promoter of this choice to my staff. Those who have higher personal commitment expectations may have found it more stressful to stay, unless they had allowed themselves to dis-identify and to sublimate the self. Ironically, those with a lower level need for personal commitment may have found it easier to stay. Contrary to the intention, the outcome would have therefore been reduced staff commitment and loyalty. The change implemented in the name of the pursuit of efficiency, quality and productivity had actually reduced social cohesion. The tacit social contract of work was disrupted. Kunda and Van Maanen (1999) describe this as being a result of the replacement of social values with economic values:

It is a neo-liberal, marketplace logic that treats individuals as the locus of decision making and holds that efficiency, quality, and productivity are best

achieved through markets existing both outside and, of increasing importance, inside the organization. (p. 76)

When the perceived gap between personal and corporate values is small, there is less personal conflict when people make compromises to retain personal commitment.

When that perceived gap is large, then to retain commitment to the organisation, the need to dis-identify and to sublimate the self becomes apparent. Mumby and Putnam (1992), observing the workings of 'emotional labor' in the workplace, describe this situation as 'the way individuals change or manage emotions to make them appropriate or consistent with a situation, a role, or an expected organization behaviour' (p. 472). Somewhere between this small and large perceived gap lies a grey fuzzy boundary between self-regulation and dis-identification. At either end of the spectrum, the difference between the two is clear, but as the culture changed, this grey fuzzy zone in the middle shifted. I reflected that if I wanted to stay and that if I could, would have I been able to enact my performance in a way that validated my personal ethos without needing to dis-identify and to sublimate the self. Ideally I would be selected for a role that allowed me to help mend the damage done by the restructure project, but I knew that this was wishful thinking. If my values and ethos were different to what was expected, then who would want to select me? I wondered if perhaps there could have been others in the senior executive who held similar values to my own. If so, their views were not being publicly expressed.

Understandably, staff morale was low with the likelihood of an external intervention unlikely. External pressure on the public sector for improved performance had been on the political agenda for decades without any simple resolution for removing this from public debate. Writing on leadership and affect in times of organisational change, Seo et al. (2012) explore and discuss the importance of the human element and express their concerns about a corresponding lack of staff commitment when this is ignored. They suggest that a large number of organisational restructure projects fail to deliver planned and expected results simply because they do not pay sufficient attention to the human element. They identify the impact of employee feelings and see positive affect on employees as a critical component and success factor, suggesting that 'resistance is not necessarily...the same as lack of supportiveness' (p. 123). They



argue that people need to deal with ‘the effects the change might bring to their jobs and careers [that] elicit feelings of high negative affect, such as anxiety, stress, and anger’ (p. 125). They suggest that managers need to understand these important factors impacting on affect in times of change. The negative feelings I encountered and dealt with included levels of despair, bitterness and anxiety about the constant theme of concerns from staff not being acknowledged or addressed. In individual and group meetings we discussed and worked through options and strategies for how to cope with high levels of their anxiety and stress. Hochschild (1979) refers to burnout following attempts to manage the contradictory demands involved when a person tries to influence the perceptions of others. I struggled with the tensions inherent in supporting staff, the emotional needs of staff and organisational performance. Middle-managers, as I observed, are especially vulnerable to burnout.

Gaining support and commitment from staff was challenging. Seo et al. (2012) state that

those who feel more negative affect are likely to show less commitment to change because their negative feelings serve as negative evaluative information about the change that directly undermines the desire and felt obligation to support it. (p. 128)

I did not come across anything that I would consider to be sabotage, but there was little evidence of any enthusiasm for making the prescribed changes. The messages as delivered did not communicate hope or trust; they did not describe or convey the idea of an organisation to which people might aspire to belong. There may have been reference to the value of staff, but this declared value was at odds with the process and with the negative aspects of the communication. Staff carried on mostly because of personal commitment to their colleagues and their customers. Seo et al. (2012) refer to research linking negative emotions and commitment with ‘a number of different sources suggesting that the intense negative emotions experienced by employees are at the heart of employees’ low commitment to change,’ and ‘negative emotions can cause the development of post-traumatic stress’ (p. 122). In their research they examined the short- and long-term influence of positive and negative affect on commitment and behaviour and on how this affect impacted on change

project success. In preparing for my HR ‘heads-up’ meeting I wondered what success our restructure project would have in the future. From my previous business project management experience, I considered that this project would struggle to achieve its desired goals and objectives. This was because the decision-making processes excluded staff and the processes followed financialization theories that prioritised economic outcomes above human and social outcomes.

Seo et al. (2012) use the term *affective events theory* (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) when writing about the impact of eliciting feelings of high positive and negative affect. They propose that ‘positive and negative affect will have both immediate (short-term) and enduring (long-term) consequences’ (Seo et al., p. 125) and that the elicitation of positive emotions creates an ‘affective commitment’ together with behavioural support for change and a ‘normative commitment’ to support with a sense of obligation, whereas the elicitation of negative emotions creates a resistance to change, together with passive resistance and even sabotage. Affective events theory explains how affect is central to an employee’s job satisfaction and job performance. In my organisation the negative affect created opposition to change in the form of passive resistance. I believe that the senior executive, rather than understanding that employee resistance was a consequence of their chosen process and communication style, mistakenly perceived it as evidence of staff being unwilling to change, being stuck in the past and being unsuitable for the new organisation. Hence, the senior executive displayed a degree of frustration, antipathy and even animosity toward staff. The impact of the staff negative affect was reflected back and forth, creating a further lack of commitment that reinforced a passive resistance cycle. A change process that elicited positive affect as described above would have produced a different outcome.

Lawler (2001) uses Homan’s (1961) *affect theory of social exchange*—a theory with similarities to affective events theory—to explain that when ‘exchanges occur successfully, actors experience an emotional uplift (a ‘high’), and when exchanges do not occur successfully, they experience emotional ‘downs’” (p. 322). In the course of everyday normal social exchanges, there is a mix of successful and unsuccessful exchanges; on a good day a greater number of positive interactions produce an overall

emotional uplift. During the restructure project the weight of the unsuccessful exchanges produced an emotional downward spiral as each day reinforced the previous emotional down. Simply being told that we needed to 'go forward' and 'move on' was not helpful, as this did not address the negative exchanges that created the emotional downs. Lawler explains that as 'social exchange is a quintessential joint activity' (p. 322) negative feedback mirrored from a negative emotional 'down' reinforces the emotional 'down'. As the acting departmental manager I managed the closure of some of our operations, organising the handover of remaining responsibilities, tasks and files to others in different departments. The social exchange in these circumstances could only be deemed to be an emotional 'down'. At the time the normal social greeting of 'Hi, how are you?' and the normal reply of 'Fine and how are you?' were no longer appropriate.

The quantity and quality of negative social exchanges were shaped by the events that created the potential for more than passive resistance to occur. However, the resistance never took a collective form of active resistance. Why was there no active resistance? Why did I not actively resist? Forsberg and Stockenstrand (2014) have described how 'resistance to neo-liberalism is possible when the resistance is prevented from becoming individualized and isolated from the wider society.' This accurately described my situation and explained why resistance did not occur. What instead was simmering beneath the surface?

Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) describe the need to make sense of such events to enable people to place themselves in new realities, described as the process of sensemaking: 'It is central because it is the primary site where meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action' (p.409). They cite Taylor and Van Every, (2000) noting that '[S]ensemaking is a way station on the road to a consensually constructed, coordinated system action' (p. 275). Establishing the organisational practice that was constructed, however, was not consensual. The construction had been forced and with the staff being coerced by the CEO and senior executive. For the CEO and the senior executive, the restructure project process was in place to produce an idealised future state. However, for staff, that future state was an unknown and

anything but an idealised state. Smollan, Sayers, and Matheny (2010) observe this difference and the affect, stating that ‘ongoing change could maintain a feeling of excitement, but could also result in prolonged anxiety or despair as participants struggle with constant adaptation’ (p. 29). I observed and listened to members of the senior executive describe their enthusiasm and excitement for the restructure project and potential outcomes. At the same time I heard their description of the need to downsize: this mismatch did not go unnoticed by those affected.

When discussing the influence of time on the emotions experienced during organisational change Smollan, Sayers, and Matheny (2010) observe that ‘organizational change may be construed as a major emotional, even traumatic event’ (p. 41). They show that managers perceive that they are being rational and in control, but at the same time they do not have sufficient awareness of the affect and impacts of the speed of change, the frequency of change and the timing of change on employees. In my organisation, my formal disestablishment meeting occurred more than one year after the initial announcement. Some members of the senior executive defended what seemed like a long process, stating that most organisations had not achieved as much in such a short time. It seemed, though, every month a new change proposal was announced with still more indicated on the horizon. Much anguish was felt and expressed by staff when a raft of substantial change proposals was announced just before Christmas: they had to take bad news home to their families at what would normally be a time for family celebrations. Currently, it is probable that more than another year will be needed for completion of the restructure project, meaning that this project will have lasted for more than two years. The current delays in the project mean that it could become three years. When the long-term consequences of change are taken into account, it will be much longer.

Emotional support from senior executive members was not possible as they were leading the change, HR were not well placed to provide support as they were facilitating the change, and middle-managers were compromised and only able to give limited support because their own fate hung in the balance. Staff were left to seek emotional support from their colleagues, family and friends, or from others outside

the organisation. Every day when I came to work, I was on guard, performing in every encounter and dealing with uncertainty and feelings of being in a void. I felt as though I was a participant in a long-term job interview, and for a role that I was not sure would be in my interests to take, even if it were offered. The restructure project became a struggle over the control of work and on how it was to be organised, the market-led values based on economic imperatives seemed to be very much in the ascendancy. The general emotional trauma that I have described followed from this assertion of power from the senior executive. For many the legacy feeling of negative affect was a traumatic event, producing what looked to me like high levels of post-traumatic stress.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Reassembly**

#### **5.1 Reassembly**

In the previous three chapters I have reflected on my thoughts and feelings on the possibility of remaining and, if given the chance to remain, how I would or could carry out my role inside what had become a very differently configured organisation. Two months after my formal disestablishment was confirmed, a suitable position matching my skills and experience was advertised. I applied for the role, received an interview and following a seemingly endless consideration period of around six weeks, I was offered the role and accepted it. My disestablishment notice period was four months, the new position started, by chance, the day that I would have become officially redundant. My new role was similar to my previous role, in a management team for a larger department of around 170 people.

This chapter focuses on the four-month period following my appointment into this new role. My situation had shifted from the uncertainty and feelings of being in a void in the restructure project phase to what became another form of uncertainty and feelings of being in a void in the implementation phase. In this chapter I reflect on the tensions and struggles that I encountered, but firstly I begin with a recap of what happened at my formal disestablishment meeting.

The day after my HR 'heads-up' meeting my team and I met with the CEO to receive the outcome of the change proposal. Unsurprisingly it was disestablishment for my role, for everyone in my team and for the team itself. There had been a period of more than a year between initially hearing about the restructure project to this formal disestablishment. My mood and feelings had spiralled downwards, starting with cautious hope, but ending with something more like despair.

The new CEO had arrived at a time when it could have been considered that our organisation was under-performing, but not actually in a crisis. More than a decade

previously an intervention had addressed a financial crisis, but in more recent years organisational development headlines were on operational issues. If I had been interviewed at the time of the previous CEO's departure, I would have expressed hope for a measure of reform to address the ability of our organisation to engage with the community and customers with an improved level of service. An important element would have included business processes with financial targets, but these elements would have been subservient to the more important community and customer aspirations. By contrast, the bold plans and change proposals emanating from the new CEO and the senior executive were more typical of those coming from the business sector as a means to increase profit and share value. This was not surprising as the introduction of the State Services Act (1988) shifted the selection of public sector CEOs to being based on business acumen rather than on specific sector experience and understanding. The outcome has been that CEO appointees are seen as interchangeable because 'the restructuring formula and managerial skills required were the same' (Kelsey, 1995, p. 139).

Throughout this fifteen-month restructure project period I reflected daily on my future, particularly when it had become apparent that my whole department, and with it my team and my role, would be disestablished. Accepting redundancy is not easy, with all who go through this process struggling with feelings of a lack of self-worth. For some the experience was so overwhelming that separating themselves and leaving the organisation could not come soon enough. My thoughts and feelings were not settled and I wondered whether, given the opportunity, I would accept an offer and choose to stay. If I did, I needed to discern whether this would be done from some form of hope that things could actually work out for the new organisation, from a loyalty to the old organisation, being pragmatic and based on my own financial needs, or simply because I was taking the path of least resistance. These were my thoughts and feelings as I prepared myself for the formal disestablishment meeting with the CEO.

My team and I arrived and sat in the anteroom making idle conversation. I had duly met with my team the previous afternoon, advising them that we would all be

disestablished, so this meeting held no surprises for them. What more could be said? The CEO and his support staff sat behind a long table with myself and my team sitting facing them. We were ready to sit through the meeting carefully repeating and listening to each other's scripted roles and lines. We were each given a formal document detailing the decision for the disestablishment, effective as per our contractual agreements. For me this was a four-month period of notice; for those in my team, a three-month period. The CEO read the decision, carefully explained the process, and asked us if we had any questions. There were a couple of simple questions, but all wanted the meeting to end without fuss as soon as possible. I did, however, have some comments to make. In my field notes written up soon afterwards I recorded the following:

*I said, 'My department and my team has performed at consistently high levels, and we do not accept that our disestablishment should be seen as a negative reflection of that performance.'*

*The CEO replied, 'The disestablishment is based on our organisation's restructuring needs with this not being a reflection on your team's performance. This is not the case in other departments.'*

*If (maybe) the CEO's reply was sincere it was somewhat cold comfort, but at least it was an acknowledgement expressing a level of validation of the work that my team had carried out, and they had heard this expressed.*

*I said, 'Given the opportunity, I would like to contribute to the rebuilding of the organisation.'*

I had said it. I wanted to stay. This past year I had mulled over my future, with my choice and commitment to stay now emerging. I had expressed an ambiguous desire to be part of the rebuilding. My statement was ambiguous in that it could have reflected the deep sense of loss because I was acknowledging that my organisation needed to be rebuilt, or it could be deemed as being so inoffensive that it actually supported the restructure project outcome. Although it is often expressed in simplistic terms, motivation is complex and is often not easily understood. My motivation,



however, was primarily concerned with restoring my lost sense of identity, structure, and social contact and for the opportunity to help others to restore what they had lost. I was aware that I would need to address how I enacted my role to support that restoration, but of course I would first need to be selected for an appropriate new role, which is what happened.

## **5.2 Bureaucracies**

This section deals with the place and importance of the bureaucracy. In this section I introduce the notion of modes of ordering, their differences and the perception that some have for modes that they do not identify with. I discuss the hope that I had for enabling change from the inside and how I go about doing so.

The word *bureaucracy* is often seen as representing a negative aspect of organisation life, particularly in the context of the public sector, with the words *administration* and *bureaucracy* being seen as interchangeable. A dictionary definition of bureaucracy is ‘a body of administrative officials, and the procedures and tasks involved in a particular system of administration, for example, a state or formal organization’ (Scott and Marshall, 2009). Bureaucratic and administrative functions are essential for an organisation to operate, in spite of the negative connotations. In simple terms, governance roles and the senior executive determine goals and policies; the (middle) managers interpret these into actions; and the teams and staff enact the resulting procedures and processes to achieve the goals. Without these bureaucratic layers and roles in place, a large organisation could not operate. Jackall (1983) stresses the importance of the managerial role within the bureaucracy: ‘Managers are the quintessential bureaucratic work group; they not only fashion bureaucratic rules, but they are also bound by them. Typically, they are not just in the organization; they are of the organization’ (p. 119). Rather than seeing managers and middle-managers as a function of the organisation, he suggests that managers enacting operational processes and procedures determine and make the organisation into what it becomes.

Management is more than just a role; managers give form to the whole that only a compartmentalised view could separate.

The senior executive expected that the restructure project, by reducing fragmentation and duplication and flattening reporting structures, would reduce the extent and power of the bureaucracy, thus diverting valuable resources to the more important service delivery. This view reinforced the negative perception that the original bureaucracy and administration with its extra layer of management was holding back the organisation. The struggle was not over the need for bureaucracy, but over its size, position and power: it was over the control of who made the decisions about how things were done.

Law (1994) replaces conventional ways of understanding organisation structures with his four organisational 'modes of ordering': enterprise, administration, vision and vocation. His modes draw on sociological and relative or contextual notions for understanding organisations, rather than on more formal structuralist notions. His description of the administration mode of ordering and its interplay with the entrepreneurial mode explains both the value of administration and the negative perception of the administration mode from the entrepreneurial mode and perspective:

The civil servant is told as the antithesis of the heroic agent. She routinizes. She picks over the details. She worries about formalities. She dilutes and diverts. In the stories of the heroes, the bureaucratic wheels grind slow and fine as they wear down the entrepreneur and his works. (p. 77)

The CEO echoed this negative view of the civil servant and spoke publicly about the need to eliminate a whole layer of management and to reduce the size of our wasteful bureaucracy and administration. The various change proposals were written from the perspective that defeating our wasteful bureaucracy would be a triumph and a benefit for the organisation. Nothing was said about what would emerge in its place.

For the other three modes Law (1994) describes enterprise and the place of agency as being about 'how people are, or how they should be', defining it as something that 'tells stories about agency which celebrates opportunism, pragmatism and performance' (p. 75). He describes vision as a mode that 'tells of charisma and grace,

of single-minded necessity, of genius and transcendence' (p. 75). He describes vocation as

telling of the way in which people embody expertise and skill. And it is telling of the creative and self-starting way in which expertise is properly linked to practice. It speaks of the importance of the roles that are played in this by the body and the eye, of the tacit knowledge acquired during the course of professional training which comes to shape both perception and action. (p. 81)

Miller (1997) suggests that, if an audit of the organisational tools and resources was carried out before and after a restructure project of the 'actors, agents, practices, tools, instruments, inscriptions and ideas' (p. 355), then surprisingly less will have changed than would have been expected. The actors and agents would mostly be the same. This was the case in my organisation. Organisational practice had basically not changed. Very few new tools or instruments were in place. The inscriptions, the operational and organisation documents detailing how things get done, were mostly unchanged. All the organisational components continued to exist, but without the former 'networks of relations between its constituent parts' (Miller, p. 355). The ideas that had been expressed on downsizing and simplifying had not yet been translated into action. It was like the tendons that attach muscles to the bone tearing and ceasing to function, but still being present, or like the synapse connections between brain cells being severed with a resulting loss of memory, but with all the cells still present.

What had changed was that, without the former lines of authority, the organisation was in a state of chaos and those inside remained in a void. People carried on with their work deciding as best they could what was required, based on a mixture of past practice or what they had perceived to have changed or was about to change. It was clear that a new structure and roles had been developed, but it was not clear how the new structure and roles were to be enacted. The senior executive had determined the new organisational goals and values with the new middle-managers such as me formulating and distilling into practice operational policies and procedures. A new bureaucracy was to emerge from the void, but I was left asking how and into what it would be shaped.

The reduction of the distasteful bureaucracy took the form of establishing a leaner, more subservient bureaucracy. Max Weber's (1949) five components of bureaucracy as summarised by Heery and Noon (2008), were still relevant to my organisation, but the content now conformed to the market-led priorities of financialization and managerialism. The following annotated list gives examples of how these five components were enacted:

Clearly defined duties and responsibilities of all organization members;

*The new structure had clearly defined duties and responsibilities, with every staff member affected being given a new position description, in which all position descriptions were written in a new simplified style and template. The position descriptions were more general and less prescriptive.*

A hierarchy of positions showing lines of authority;

*The new structure had been developed as quoted from the CEO's email to staff as a 'top down review, starting with a look at the structure of the senior executive, and then considering what the structure of functions should look like underneath that team.' A more clearly defined hierarchy was thus established.*

Written rules and procedures;

*New KPIs were established for each senior executive member and for their (at the time yet-to-be-appointed) reporting managers. The actual details of these KPIs along with the more simple rules and procedures had not been developed, but it was expected that new reporting managers would carry out that development and implementation. In effect, no new rules or procedures were in place.*

Meritocratic organization appointments;

*New organisational appointments were in almost all cases advertised externally. The State Sector Act (1988) requirement was to 'notify the vacancy or prospective vacancy in a manner sufficient to enable suitably qualified persons to apply for the position, with appointments giving preference to the person who is best suited to the position.'*

Rational decision-making;

*The new structure was endorsed as being a more effective and efficient structure based on being functionally rational and pragmatic with specific and appropriate goals. It was expected and communicated that the flatter and smaller bureaucracy with a more effective chain of command would enable a rational decision-making process for the creation of new formal rules and procedures that would be clearer and easier for staff to follow.*

For the implementation stage new middle-mangers were recruited with the expectation that those selected would be more closely aligned to the CEO's market-led hierarchical control over the organisation. They, or as now in my case, we, were to become those placed in the organisation in order to form this new leaner and more

subservient bureaucracy: we were the mediators and controllers of the restructure project implementation. However, the degree of control exercised over us as the mediators and controllers depended upon the alignment of the senior executive with the CEO's market-led hierarchical control over the organisation.

The new body of middle-managers was made up of new external appointments, some recycled appointments (like me) and just a few who had been retained more or less from their previous roles. Their selection, promotion and opportunities had one thing in common: they depended very much on the perceptions and favour of those from above. In my case I was fortunate to have a senior executive manager with whom I shared common values, and this was probably the reason why I had been selected. These shared values allowed me in some degree to enact my role in a way that would have been different had I reported to someone else. Although the new CEO had taken charge and diminished the authority of those below him, in this implementation hiatus the importance of the middle-manager's role for negotiating the new structure content and order of things became apparent. The senior executive directed and shaped the implementation, but in the void, the direction given often appeared to be randomly based on the currently most urgent issue to resolve or clever idea to implement.

Law (1994) writes that the mode of administration is concerned with details and formalities and for ensuring that due process for procedures and tasks is followed. The senior executive expected that once the new procedures and tasks had been developed and implemented, operations would return to a *normal steady state* albeit in a new *improved* state and into one that had become an advanced *continuous improvement* state. Miller (1997) argues that, rather than being an innovation, such a change is really a reconfiguration of the same components 're-used, re-connected, re-assembled and linked into a new set of relations' (p. 355) and formed into a new series of 'temporarily stabilized networks' (p. 355). His point is that organisations are always temporary and networked. In my organisation, the size and impact of the restructure project and its subsequent implementation removed the illusion that there is such a thing as a *normal steady state*.

What would have been expected to be a simple transition from the previous structure into the new structure became much more complex. At the end of my first four months, only the senior executive member and I had been appointed in management roles in my department, with the rest of our management team still in acting roles. Without an established management team, with many new procedures and tasks yet to be defined or implemented, and with other departments in similar states of chaos, the notion of re-establishing a normal stabilised state seemed extremely improbable. Staff who had been disestablished had now left, but many of the middle-managers remained in temporary transitional roles. On my appointment I was given two directives from my senior executive manager: to contribute to strategic and operational development plans and to simply make things work. I found myself in the situation of being able to facilitate something of a 'bottom up' review of the implementation of tasks, procedures and network relationships in my new department. This bottom-up review was the antithesis of the restructure project: I assumed that the knowledge and understanding of how things worked resided with the staff; that economic values, although important, were subservient to human values; that consultation was carried out before decisions were made; that communication was open and transparent; and that people were validated for their participation and contribution. Those were my aims. I had therefore some hope that I could actually make things work and make a difference.

There was, however, no escape from the legacy of the negative affect experienced by staff. People were not easily able to distinguish what work was important, what work was needed, or with whom they needed to establish new working relationships. Many had some form of survivor guilt, wondering why they had been chosen to stay when others, from their perspective, seemed to have been unluckily targeted and had been forced to leave. The workload levels were appallingly high and no easy solution to this problem was in sight. My only solution was to work with those who remained; in my case I worked with those who work within the administration mode and whose view of the world matched my need to create a sense of order. Law (1994) describes the priorities of a person with this worldview:

Have justice and equity been achieved? These are the acid tests in the story-telling of administration; smooth running, legality and rationality. So the good agent is careful and systematic and fair and above suspicion. She is committed to due process. (1994, p.78)

My efforts to work to achieve 'justice and equity', although satisfying my personal need to at least do something, felt feeble in comparison to the size and complexity of the problems we were facing. Because my management team was unformed, ineffective and apparently little was happening elsewhere, the chaos remained and people were still lost in this void.

I watched those from the senior executive slowly distance themselves from staff. For them too this would have been an emotionally draining time and experience. It appeared to me that they were hanging back and waiting. Perhaps they were waiting for the restructure project action and momentum to take effect and for the planned organisational and cultural changes into the *normal steady state* to happen. It surprised me that they had not imposed a tighter level of control, but then perhaps they were far too busy with their own restructure work and, no doubt, their own political machinations. It did occur to me that once they had come to grips with their own new ordering arrangements, then this tighter control would come. In the meantime I was left to my own devices to make things work the way that I best saw fit.

### **5.3 Continuity and Change**

In this section I discuss the choices I made between working for continuity or change with the impacts these choices have on inertia and chaos, and how I dealt with low organisational commitment in my bottom up review approach. I discuss what can be done for negotiating a new order of things and the moderating role that middle-managers have in organisations.

My new team was sited in four different buildings, a legacy of the different departments from which they were drawn. It had been formed from the transfer of operations and tasks into a newly configured department in which some of the people

were transferred along with the tasks. My hope was that by implementing a bottom up review with my team, I could prioritise what was needed to bring about some sense of order. I did have hope as I saw an opportunity to create positive social exchanges and to elicit positive emotions through this review. I recognised that those in my team were the experts, knowing what to do and how to get things done without needing me as their manager to be able to sort through the minutiae of tasks and priorities.

My previous feelings of powerlessness may have been replaced by hope, but this was tempered by the size of the task and scale of the chaos that remained. An early priority was the need to establish a balance between continuity and change. I recognised that my commitment to the official structure and changes was low, whereas my commitment to help build a team that validated the members as worthwhile people was high. I saw myself as being both inside and outside the official structure, having many different relationships and varying degrees of influence, more as an actor in a performance than as being in a functional organisational role. When talking with my team I chose not to criticise the senior executive members and their decisions, explaining that we were all part of the same organisation and that we needed to find ways of carrying out the directives and expectations from these more powerful people in ways that also allowed the needs of staff and customers to be met.

I had limited success with my approach. Huy (2002) describes the effectiveness of organisational change projects in which managers personally championed change projects and attended to the recipients' emotions, and contrasts this approach with a project in which only one of these was attended to:

Low emotional commitment to change led to organizational inertia, whereas high commitment to change with little attending to recipients' emotions led to chaos. The enactment of both patterns constituted emotional balancing and facilitated organizational adaptation: change, continuity in providing quality in customer service, and developing new knowledge and skills. (2002, p. 31)

Because of my low level of emotional commitment to the official changes, I ran the risk that my team and I would be subsumed by organisational inertia. It seemed obvious to me that one of the most important priorities was to retain and recover work that had been carried out previously. The senior executive may have expressed its



expectations that things would change, but from my perspective of what was going on, it was this mantra of change and discarding of the past that was causing so much of the negative affect. I thought that it would take time for my approach to establish new organisational practice, but I had confidence in the notion that taking a people-based approach rather than a task-based approach would be in the long run more effective. I was dealing with low emotional commitment to change because insufficient attention had been paid to the recipients' emotions. I had hoped that a personal approach would help with their emotional needs and that commitment to change would be redirected towards restoration. My actions were based on my experience of what did and did not work. I knew that I had to shift primacy to people and I knew that I had to create the illusion of a small, but separate authority structure somewhat removed from the senior executive without being seen as opposing the senior executive. On a good day I had the confidence that by respecting staff as people and by following what I considered to be appropriate due process, I would achieve a higher level of staff satisfaction, enabling the establishment of appropriate tasks, procedures and network relationships. On a dark day I felt that I was just a cog in the machine, inducing staff to feel more comfortable with a situation when the next day they might have been identified as being surplus to requirements. This difficult predicament troubled me every day.

My collegial network had been disrupted because my previous colleagues had either gone or were now in different parts of the organisation, and my new management team members were all in acting roles. I was able to discuss some issues with my senior executive manager, but this person's time, energy for my issues and availability were limited. I established working relationships with some identified internal customers, but I was not able to develop a network of trusted colleagues. Bryant and Stensaker (2011) describe the work that middle-managers carry out when they establish organisational practice:

Middle managers have to negotiate the new order of things on a day-to-day basis as large-scale change interrupts the established ways of conducting work. Such negotiation is likely to involve superiors, subordinates and perhaps also peers. A challenge of these negotiations is that organizational changes have usually been decided and formulated by the top managers, often with little input from middle

managers, which may create coercive order (Carnall, 1986) rather than negotiated order (2011, p. 359).

My ability to participate in the establishment of a new negotiated order was limited by the lack of colleagues and, to a greater extent, by the degree of what had already been decided through coercive order.

I attended organisation-wide middle-manager meetings that were chaired by various senior executive members. At one of these meetings an attendee commented on the need for change and that changing the culture was paramount for establishing a better organisation, stating that ‘these things have been decided and we need to just get on with it.’ My response to that willing middle-manager was that ‘even though these structural and operational issues have been decided, without allowing staff to participate at an appropriate level, then at best we may only get lip service.’ Although my response received a grudging acknowledgement of having some value, the need for getting on with it was restated as still being more important. There was no further debate, but I could sense the discomfort of many in the room who saw that coercive order values had taken precedence over negotiated order values, particularly as this support for coercive order values had been expressed by one of their own colleagues. This discussion embodied the ongoing organisational power struggle between a negotiated and a coercive order.

Larsen and Diner (1992) have developed the *Circumplex Model of Emotions* for mapping the emotional dynamics and affect engendered by continuity and change. Using this model, Huy (2002) describes the emotions of change-focused people as ‘typically varying along a cheerful-dejected axis’ while those of continuity-focused people are ‘typically varying along an agitated-quiescent axis’ (p. 36). The directives from the senior executive focused on change, whereas my intervention sought continuity. Looking back, I can see that, according to this theory, I had shifted the focus from change and the resulting cheerful-dejected axis to continuity with the agitated-quiescent axis. Perhaps this would not have resulted in the displayed investment and passion for the work that the senior executive had hoped for, but from my perspective, choosing continuity seemed to make sense. I was able to re-establish

valued work and reduce stress, and negative quiescence was to me better than negative dejection.

I still felt that I only had limited success with my approach. I was one small player in a large and complex organisation and I was relatively isolated as I lacked developed relationship networks. However, I still retained hope. I believed that there were actions that I could take to establish organisational practice based on human values that would have more positive outcomes than the prescribed drive for an efficient and effective service delivery. Gleeson and Shain (1999) describe the role of middle-managers as ‘mediators of change’, but as being constrained by bigger societal issues such as government policy and legislation changes; marketization of services; and employee responsibilities and accountabilities. They note the impact these changes have on the management of public sector organisations stating that ‘ostensibly, managerialism has been introduced into education and the public sector as a rational process, linked with new principles of funding, efficiency and professionalism’ (p. 465). They observe that middle-managers mediate change, but are caught in the middle, feeling that they do not have the tools to manage, being criticised by both the senior executive and staff. This was a tension that I encountered every day, knowing that I could not make things work entirely to please both. Middle-managers are forced to act as a filter between the senior executive and staff for ‘constructing the *art of the possible*’ (Gleeson & Shain, 1999, p. 461) and translating senior executive policies into operational actions deemed acceptable to both groups.

These observations expressed the dilemma that I faced as the senior executive expected my implementation outcome to conform to their model and staff required a level of acknowledgement to release them from the negative emotional pressure that they were under. Gleeson and Shain (1999) describe the strategic compliance carried out by middle-managers as a form of ‘artful pragmatism’, in effect being moderation and a balancing of needs. In practice for me the breadth of this artful pragmatism was made possible by the different spheres of my work. In the areas that concerned the senior executive I moderated my strategic compliance; in other areas I was very much

left to determine for myself what to do with promoting various initiatives for continuity and change.

#### **5.4 Words are Performative**

In the final section I recognise that change can be created from a performativity approach, but that this approach is constrained by the size and complexity of the issues encountered and by my feelings and limitations. I end by reflecting on the perception of my limited success, working through my own sense-making process in the circumstances that I found myself in, recognising that my mode of ordering has not been validated. My final reflection is on what the future may hold.

The balancing act required between continuity and change resulted from the varying daily demands and expectations from my senior executive and from staff interactions. I told myself that my aspirations needed to be realistic and pragmatic, but not so much so that I denied myself other opportunities. I was inwardly troubled and emotionally affected by the balancing act required and my ability to retain feelings of hope. In moderating my strategic compliance I risked compromising the very outcomes that I sought: restoring my lost sense of identity, structure, and social contact and the opportunity to help restore to others the security that they had lost. When reflecting on the anguish I felt from what I considered to be my limited success, I mulled over and considered my options. I felt isolated. I needed to form new relationship networks, but as my new management team was unformed, and our meetings were infrequent, time-limited, and carefully scripted, this avenue did not hold much promise. More important than my management team meetings were my one-on-one senior executive manager meetings. The CEO and the senior executive directed the organisation in a hub-and-spoke management arrangement. My management meetings were more about organisational administration and these one-on-one meetings were the method for getting things done. At our management meetings there was talk about strategy, collaboration and teamwork, but the reality was different. It appeared to me that, although the aspirations expressed by the senior executive were genuine, it was not

understood that the nature and practice of hierarchical hub-and-spoke management and collaborative teamwork conflicted, and at worst were mutually exclusive. I now had a greater dependence on my relationship with my senior executive manager and less dependence on my collective management relationships. This more hierarchical hub-and-spoke structure enabled the CEO and the senior executive to be more involved with decision-making at the micro level, which they frequently did. This more simple arrangement had not removed the complexity of interactions within the organisation; it just gave the appearance of doing so.

The timing and choice of my words were as important as the issues being discussed. Words and actions on their own do not change how people think and feel; it is through interactions and words used *between* people that new realities are created. If I describe and act as if I am in a new reality and others believe that they are also now in this new reality, then we begin to step into and form a new reality. Feldman (2000) describe this as a sequential process for establishing new patterns of behaviour. In her 'performative model of organizational routines' (p. 611) she describes how the iterations and participants' responses change and form different iterations of a routine. This is similar to Miller's (1997) temporarily stabilized networks as for both change is pervasive and ever-present rather than being the exception. The process and routine interactions create ceaselessly changing processes and routines leading to new organisational realities of temporarily stabilized networks. It felt as though the massive wave of planned disruption impacted on and changed all that it encountered. Nonetheless, through my performative interactions, my aim was to facilitate the negotiation of the new order of things and to institutionalise new, more appropriate organisational processes and practice.

Law (2007) describes the formation of new organisational realities and their ephemeral nature as an expression of their complex relationship and assemblages: 'together [they] enact a set of practices that make a more or less precarious reality' (p. 13). My own plan to make my own ripple felt so inadequate, because my efforts would most likely have only a limited impact on those with whom I interacted. The CEO and the senior executive's plans to bring about profound change were predicated

on the notion that they could create a better permanent reality by applying their social construction methodology. My plans seemed less than modest as I recognised that they would have a very limited impact. In reality the large wave from the restructure project and my modest ripple were just two of an array of forces that created new realities. The new organisational leadership and configuration had created a wide gulf between new and previous expectations, or, for me, a wider gulf between what I considered appropriate and what was now required.

In terms of Law's (1994) modes of ordering, it was the mode of enterprise that was in control. The CEO and senior executive, when trying to implement their restructure project, exhorted effectiveness, efficiency, simplicity and performance, and the communication itself was performative. In the name of efficiency jobs were cut; in the name of effectiveness the power of the previous bureaucracy was reduced; in the name of simplicity the hierarchy was both formalised and flattened; and in the name of performance those who remained needed to become compliant and if necessary to dis-identify and to sublimate themselves to the organisation. Law (1994) refers to the mode of enterprise's measurement of success: 'The acid test is performance: a successful organization is one that performs... in the market by selling goods. Or in terms of some kind of market equivalent, by scoring well on performance indicators' (p. 76). However, he notes with a word of caution that the measurement of success resides with the outcome and not with the theory: 'We are in the realm of performativity. Economics in theory is all very well, but economics in practice is different. And theory is only translated into practice if it is enacted—in practice' (Law, 2009, p. 151). I do not think, however, that shifting to a top down hierarchical management model would always fail and nor that there are by default better alternatives. From my perspective the top down hierarchy meant that a different arrangement was in place, creating different relationship networks for getting things done. The pathway for creating the new structure with its new realities resulted in collateral damage. The CEO and the senior executive stated that they were comfortable accepting this damage as the necessary price to pay for reform and progress. What I am questioning is whether that price was in fact necessary and worthwhile.

When considering Law's four modes of ordering—enterprise, administration, vision, and vocation—I identify with vocation. Having many previous years of middle and senior executive experience in the public and private sectors, I consider myself as a professional manager. That is not to say that my perspective is correct or even the best way of looking at things, but that this view embodies how I see and understand myself, my organisation, and how things get done. The restructure project was premised on the belief that a more market-led, economic based organisation would perform better and that the organisation had previously been captured by a wasteful and self-seeking bureaucracy whose malaise had infected the organisation. The collateral damage caused by the restructure project had captured my world and reduced the valuable contributions that I made from my vocation mode. It seemed that the CEO and senior executive made no distinction between administration and vocation. Had I been given the chance, I would have presented to the senior executive the case and the need for all four modes of ordering. I do not think that they are necessarily of equal importance, but there could be a negotiated order incorporating the different perspectives and needs of all in the organisation.

W. Edwards Deming an acknowledged leader in quality management, argues that management are responsible for system design with the system design accounting for 90 or 95 percent of performance (Deming, 1986). He attributes what management see as the poor performance of workers to poor system design and implementation from management. A common response to systems failure is to blame the workers, requiring them to work harder and to be more diligent. The perception from the restructure project leadership was that the middle-managers and staff were responsible for the perceived inefficient bureaucratic service delivery. From my vocational perspective I believed that the senior executive members should have taken this responsibility as they were responsible for the systems that existed. In a negotiated order informed by the four modes, this acknowledgement would have been understood and stated from the beginning. Perhaps this would not be an easy admission to come from the CEO or the senior executive.

There may be some obvious things that I could or should have done differently, but as I had chosen to remain within the organisation I had accordingly accepted the constraints. I have, however, felt like a troubled object caught in the margins deeply affected by the traumatic level of change, dealing with the grinding together of the series of events, interactions and ever-changing situations. I am relatively comfortable recognising myself as a part of that maligned, but essential bureaucracy. I consider that I have done mostly as well as I could in balancing the action and imperatives for continuity and change. I have agonised mostly on how I should best carry out my organisational role and on how I fit into this changed and ever changing organisation. At my disestablishment meeting I stated my intention to the CEO that, given the opportunity, I would like to contribute to the rebuilding of the organisation. Reflecting on my HR 'heads-up' meeting I told myself that possibly I could stay and help with the healing process. Internal motivations are difficult to understand and assess, but whatever these motivations were, I recognised that I had committed myself to stay. I recognised that through performative words and actions I could contribute to the rebuilding of the organisation and help to repair the damage. I have, however, no heroic triumph to celebrate. At best I can only describe limited success with possibly just a few examples of network relationships built on trust and respect and am now left to wait for events to unfold. I do not feel equipped to achieve anything even approaching what I had hoped. I have not uncovered a network of resistance and I feel very much isolated. Law (1994) studies the talk and words of managers to determine which mode of ordering is prevalent within each organisation. In my organisation, administration is portrayed as the enemy, vocation may be needed, but only to serve enterprise, vision is absent, and enterprise rules. Perhaps other unexpected waves incorporating these other modes of ordering will emerge for me to connect to with my limited success.

Do I think that, because of my feelings of only having limited success, that economic values have triumphed over human values? Probably attempting to answer this simplistic question is not possible, but from my viewpoint I tend more towards pessimism. Law (2007) contends that the notion of social construction within the complexity of organisational life is too great to be directed from a top down



methodology. This will particularly be the case for our organisation because it is very much based on the economic imperatives of market-led restructuring. The organisation will, however, become different and continue to change. It may be loosely connected to the past, but with configurations that previously did not exist. Not only have the workings of the organisational bureaucracy continued to shape the moral consciousness of my organisation, but I too have been captured inside these workings. The new CEO has taken charge; the organisational ethos is now based on economic and financial imperatives; the notion of the primacy of management through managerialism rules; culture is seen as pliable and is shaped to enhance organisational performance; ethics are situational as defined by the senior executive; and fealty and patrimonial relationships form the basis of how things get done. I have become part of the outworking of this implementation, helping people to feel more comfortable working inside our changed structure with its different management beliefs and culture.

The events that I have recounted have been traumatic for all involved, and for some, the situation has created ongoing post-traumatic stress that from my perspective that needs care and attention. The closest I have to an answer is that a future dialogue needs to be encouraged: the hubris of the chosen needs to be replaced by the ongoing negotiated order of the many.

## Conclusion

The planned disruption implemented by the CEO and the senior executive has created a very different organisation. The intent of my thesis has been to develop a wider understanding of the emergence of both new organisational practice and the 'void' produced by this planned disruption. I have used autoethnography as a research method as a way to more fully unravel and reveal the cultural, social and political aspects of this new organisational ordering. As a participant observer and an employee of the organisation I have reflected on the conflicts and ambiguities of events I lived through as both performer and observer. Using my voice and my values to interpret and gain insight I have shown how planned disruption is a reworking of the emotional life of the organisation.

The planned disruption, based on the market-led restructuring methodologies of financialization in my New Zealand public sector organisation, has been one of many such interventions over the past few decades. The implicit belief held by the senior executive of our organisation was that the organisation was characterised by inefficiencies and malaise found throughout the wider public sector. The organisation needed to be 'fixed'. I have provided insight into the negative affect that resulted from this fixing.

I have asked myself two simple research questions: 'How does my work now work?' and 'How has the moral order of work changed?' In answering these I have focused on moral questions that raise issues of affect and emotional response. In doing so I have added to the sparse structural accounts of interaction, configuring and reconfiguring that dominate both managerial and critical literature. I also note that unlike other more common organisational studies describing resistance to restructuring (Forsberg and Stockenstrand, 2014), resistance did not occur in this case.

In this conclusion I discuss three findings from my study, comment on the relevance of the classic studies on organisational behaviour, and comment on personal truths discovered from the autoethnographic methodology.

My first finding is that a hierarchical organisation, celebrating the primacy of management and the financialization of all transactions, required middle-managers to put aside their professional / vocational commitments to work and enter into and endorse fealty / loyalty relationships with senior executives. Far from being eliminated, as much of the literature on new organisations suggests, the middle-manager remained in place in my organisation, insecure and vulnerable, subject to emotional swings, but nevertheless caught between senior management and colleagues. He or she therefore remained a 'man in the middle', but this 'middle' is now a much more complex set of relations than those described in the literature in the traditional hierarchical firm: Weber (1949), Mills (1956), Whyte (1956). What Whyte (1956, p. 151) called organizational man as opposed to the entrepreneur is no longer expected to be simply a bureaucratic type. I and others were no longer able to reconcile our own modest aspirations with the demands of the organisation.

In the name of efficiency and effectiveness the old hierarchical organisation changed into a new more bureaucratic / orthodox hierarchical organisation. I witnessed a power struggle between a negotiated and coercive order over who made the decisions about how things were done. Power has been firmly shifted to the senior executive. It became abundantly clear that the senior executive is the owner of the organisation and the employees. In Jackall's (1988) terms the senior executive were the lords and the employees were their vassals in a fealty relationship.

The second finding shows how both the language and silences of organisational change served to rationalise a new ordering of the moral mazes of the organisation. This new policy not only demanded that commitment be demonstrated through loyalty, but also positioned middle-managers, who were rendered as insecure as their colleagues / team members, as the mediators / controllers of the restructure project. I

found myself in a hierarchical arrangement in which I was not only denied initiative, but was also not expected to display any. The removal of a whole layer of middle-management increased the social distance between the senior executive and staff and compromised the important moderating buffer role that middle-managers carry out in organisations. The transition to the new ordering left a void of uncertainty, creating much stress and anxiety. For me this felt as though I was performing in a long-term interview needing to establish every day what was required from the senior executive and from my staff.

My third finding shows that the negative affect exhibited by team members involved in the restructuring project was a direct consequence of the intervention methodology and communication style employed by senior management. The initial communication from the CEO was carefully crafted to convey to those inside the organisation the expectations of the new order of management. The organisation was described as a collection of activities delivering services, with no mention of people. These activities were to be shaped and moulded to form a more efficient and effective optimal structure. Communications described the imperatives for change in economic terms, constructing notions of the negative economic climate meaning that the public sector needed to live within its means by reducing and rearranging.

The intervention methodology of financialization followed rational economic values rather than human values, based on a shareholder perspective that sees people as instruments of production. This methodology was informed by the belief that market forces and a market-led restructuring would enable our public sector organisation that was perceived to be bureaucratic and wasteful to be transformed into something like a more able and successful commercial business. Middle-managers and staff were seen as the problem and the target for change. They were not included in any meaningful way in the consultation or planning phases.

I have investigated studies on affect and emotional responses resulting from organisational change studies referring to authors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Homans, 1961; Huy, 2002; Smollan, 2010; Seo (2002), and Larsen and Diner, 1992). The studies describe the negative response by employees to management

communication and interactions in change projects, in particular the resistance to change, emotional lows, outcomes of inertia or chaos, prolonged anxiety or despair, low commitment to change, and dejection. The authors also suggest that eliciting positive emotions and interactions can produce commitment, excitement and, of greater importance, the facilitation of adaptation to the required changes. By contrast I have described how my team and I were thrown into an ever-changing world, not knowing what was required and whom to trust. We experienced ongoing uncertainty and feelings of working in a void in which a downward spiral of negative emotions and interactions further reduced commitment.

The classic studies on organisational behaviour from up to sixty years ago still have relevance to my organisation. As described in the work of Mills (1956) and Whyte (1956) my organisation was 'owned' by the few at the top. Using Mills and Whyte's terminology, we, the middle-managers and team members, dis-identify and sublimate, and we sell our personality, in the name of rationality. We have allowed our power to be usurped, we have become more willing and compliant, and we have allowed ourselves to become subject to organisational interests.

The different organisational worlds described in the work of Dalton (1959) and Jackall (1988) emphasise power struggles, official and unofficial conventions and the moral mazes from the reordering of management. They focus on the role of patrons, and the role that luck and bureaucracy play in shaping managerial morality. They describe what I have experienced, that organisational worlds remain characterised by patrimony and fealty. The organisational world described by Law (1994) reworks these classic contributions by emphasising the interactions between different modes of ordering—administration, enterprise, vision and vocation—but like the classics, he also highlights the anxiety and general feelings of a lack of self-worth found in organisations and matching my experience.

My work has changed to match the new ordering orchestrated by the senior executive. The moral code of my work is their code. The truths that I have discovered from the

autoethnographic process I have undertaken reveal that my limited success in supporting colleagues and team members has been tempered by the realisation that I have been captured by the organisation as an instrument of the CEO and senior executive's agenda. Rather than seeing myself as creating something like a sanctuary, with those inside feeling safe, I now see that I have only helped those inside to feel more comfortable with the ongoing restructuring. I live with the realisation that I and my team will have roles in the organisation only for as long as we are seen as useful and, of greater importance, as compliant. The truths that I have discovered may not be palatable for my reputation and my ego, but they have validated the worth of the autoethnographic process.

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