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CESR

Review

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University of the
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CESR Review

- is produced by the Centre for Employment Studies Research, Bristol Business School, University of the West of England.
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- Is aimed at employment relations and HRM practitioners, trade unionists, researchers, lecturers and students in these and related fields.
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- the structure and functioning of labour markets
- the role of social agents and government.

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John Neugebauer & Jane Evans-Brain, Making the Most of Your Placement, Sage Study Skills Series, September 2009

It is estimated that about 30 per cent of UK university students undertake some form of placement as part of their university degree courses. This SAGE study guide gives practical and academic advice to students to navigate their way through placement alternatives and options, applications, interviews and assessment process, and learning from the placement, including reflective learning practice and managing research and dissertations.

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Nick Wilton, An introduction to human resource management, Sage, September 2010

This exciting new introductory text in human resource management moves beyond a prescriptive approach to provide a holistic overview of the role of HRM in its contemporary context. Acknowledging and reflecting upon key trends in HRM, the labour market and the broader economy, the author offers critical discussion of the theoretical and practical issues surrounding HRM.

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The dynamics of employee voice in the UK's high skill sector

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'Employee voice' and related processes of employee involvement and participation have been subject to a considerable quantity of research in recent years, much of it seeking to explore potential relationships between voice and factors such as organisational performance and employee well-being (for example, Appelbaum et al. 2000; Bryson et al. 2006). There exists a lesser quantity of research that considers the dynamics of employee participation at the workplace level and less still that focuses explicitly on skilled and professional workers. This article explores patterns of employee experience of voice mechanisms in three high skill workplace settings and highlights institutional factors that prevent the emergence of meaningful workplace democracy. The research for this was conducted with CESR colleagues Sue Durbin, Mike Richardson and Stephanie Tailby. A full analysis of the results is published in the Human Resource Management Journal, Vol.19, Issue 4, 2009

Employee voice and skilled workers

An overview of current survey and case study evidence of voice processes at work would find it hard to discern any consistent patterns. The most recent Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS 2004) provides a mixed picture of employees' perceptions of the utility of different voice mechanisms; though direct communications were found more helpful than representative structures (Kersley et al. 2006: 139-141). Other surveys have uncovered more negative patterns. For instance, works council employee representatives have tended to view the quality of information and consultation provided by corporate management as inadequate and employees themselves have experienced limited direct influence over managerial decision-making despite the growth of direct participation techniques over the past two decades (Waddington 2003; Kessler et al. 2004). Case studies on this theme are less common than survey research but the overall impression they provide is one of a significant gap between the rhetoric and reality of information disclosure and consultation. Perhaps most significant here, in the context of competitive business environments, is management's insistence that the provision of employee voice should not impair its prerogatives and control strategies (Marchington et al. 1994; Timming 2007; Beaumont and Hunter 2007).

There is much less evidence of the dynamics of these processes in workplaces dominated by highly skilled professional employees and there are grounds for assuming more positive outcomes in such knowledge-intensive work environments. Purcell et al. (2009: 128-133) have characterised professional knowledge workers as

"Our hypothesis that skilled professional groups are more likely to have access to a relatively large volume of well developed employee involvement techniques was borne out by the case study evidence"

"Staff felt that they experienced no real consultation on most issues listed"

well paid, high status employees experiencing high levels of intrinsic motivation and employed in workplaces that require substantial creativity and initiative. These high pressure work environments require management systems that shape employee behaviours in order to generate

greater initiative, innovation and co-operation. In these circumstances we might expect to see more sophisticated HR techniques that 'manufacture' a sense of belonging to the organisation, especially in larger firms, by 'engaging in some cultural manipulation to influence how knowledge workers view themselves and their relationship to the firm' (Purcell et al. 2009: 132). Two core hypotheses arise from this. First, in such knowledge intensive environments we might anticipate well developed employee voice techniques fostering

high levels of direct consultation (as well as indirect forms) as necessary components of a high commitment strategy. Second, greater employee satisfaction with information disclosure and consultation processes should ensue from this.

This article explores these questions by providing some comparative case study analysis of employee experiences of direct and indirect consultation in three high skill workplaces employing large numbers of professional staff. Three case study organisations were selected specifically on the basis of their employment of significant numbers of professional employees, many with graduate qualifications.

The first we call DesEng. This company is part of a multinational organisation operating in the aerospace industry. The second, FinCo, is a mutual society and mortgage and insurance services provider. Finally, GovSci is

a large, government-owned scientific research organisation employing many staff with post graduate and doctoral qualifications. In each case, trade unions were recognised and all adopted different forms of partnership relations with management. At DesEng and FinCo these were formalised into agreements whereas the partnership at GovSci was a more informal arrangement. Nearly 120 interviews were conducted with design engineers and managers At DesEng, sales consultants, project managers and senior executives at FinCo and scientists, technologists and managers at GovSci. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to a sample of staff at all three establishments with returns totalling 737.

Our hypothesis that skilled professional groups are more likely to have access to a relatively large volume of well developed employee involvement techniques was borne out by the case study evidence. In total, there were twenty different types of practice in operation that are associated with information disclosure and consultation. Thirteen of these operated at DesEng and twelve at both FinCo and GovSci. Most of these were categorised as two-way communication processes. For example, team briefings, intranet and email consultation, intranet chat-rooms, 'meet the directors' briefings, staff focus groups, breakfast meetings, continuous improvement groups, suggestion schemes and regular attitude surveys. Indirect (trade union) consultation processes included union representation on the board of directors (GovSci), representation on a European Works Council (DesEng), representation on national councils (in all three cases) and representation on site negotiating committees and staff consultation

“Staff felt that the flow of communication was primarily top-down and open discussion was restricted in the interests of managerial prerogative”

“Patterns of work overload experienced by staff... constituted a second factor”

committees. All of these practices were active processes involving either frequent or recurrent use. In addition, more than half had been in use for longer than five years.

High volume but is anyone listening?

The staff survey questionnaire included questions on the extent of direct consultation by management and views on the extent of influence, both direct and indirect (though trade union representation), on nine organisational and employment items. Additional questions probed the amount of direct and indirect

influence employees felt they should have, what we have termed desired influence. The range of items encompassed the themes of company strategy, investment strategy, staffing issues, pay and conditions and changes to working practices.

In each case, question responses were scaled: 'a lot', 'some', 'a little', 'none' and 'unsure'. Space constraints prevent presentation of the full results but the main trends are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

The first pattern to note is that, despite the volume of information sharing practices in place, staff at the three case study organisations tended to provide a poor assessment of the extent of direct consultation (as a meaningful two-way process) . Significant proportions of staff felt that they experienced no real consultation on most issues listed. Even larger proportions of staff felt that the consultation processes afforded them little or no direct influence on management discussions about these issues. The pattern of results tended to be slightly better at FinCo but worse still

Table 1: Direct consultation and influence: Proportions of staff indicating no consultation or influence.

Extent of direct consultation on the following issues:	Staff indicating 'None' (%)	Extent of employee influence through consultation on the following issues:	Staff indicating 'None' (%)
Employer's financial performance	47	Employer's financial performance	66
Employer's strategy for the future	41	Employer's strategy for the future	71
Employer's investment strategy	63	Employer's investment strategy	86
Employer's outsourcing strategy	61	Employer's outsourcing strategy	76
Changes in staffing levels	46	Changes in staffing levels	67
Redeployment of staff	58	Redeployment of staff	73
Pay and conditions	49	Pay and conditions	74
Changes to work practices	30	Changes to work practices	46
Health and safety at work	26	Health and safety at work	43

Table 2: Indirect (trade union) consultation and influence: Proportions of staff indicating no influence and desired influence.

Extent of indirect influence via union consultation on the following issues:	Staff indicating 'None' (%)	Extent of desired union influence on the following issues:	Staff indicating 'A lot' or 'Some' (%)
Employer's financial performance	64	Employer's financial performance	32
Employer's strategy for the future	59	Employer's strategy for the future	39
Employer's investment strategy	65	Employer's investment strategy	32
Employer's outsourcing strategy	59	Employer's outsourcing strategy	46
Changes in staffing levels	51	Changes in staffing levels	60
Redeployment of staff	50	Redeployment of staff	58
Pay and conditions	41	Pay and conditions	71
Changes to work practices	44	Changes to work practices	68
Health and safety at work	41	Health and safety at work	67

at DesEng and GovSci. Additional analysis not presented in the tables showed that these patterns were not a function of staff disinterest in employee involvement and participation. For instance, majorities of staff, in some cases very large majorities, indicated that they desired greater influence over such issues as the employer's strategy for the future (58 per cent), changes in staffing levels (71 per cent), outsourcing strategies (52 per cent), pay and conditions (82 per cent) and changes to working practices (83 per cent).

Table 2 shows the results for indirect influence via trade union representation. In this case, employees' overall assessment of influence tended to be lower still. The results presented are for all workers, union members and non-members alike. The corresponding results for union members only did show some higher ratings (particularly at DesEng and GovSci) but generally, the differences were not substantial. Again, significant proportions of employees indicated a desire for greater influence via their unions, particularly over questions of staffing, pay and conditions, working practices and health and safety.

Why was the pattern of survey results predominantly negative? Interviews with staff highlighted a number of factors that constrained the emergence of more meaningful employee voice. The first was that despite widespread acknowledgement of a high volume of management communication via a broad range of direct consultation techniques many staff felt that the flow of communication was primarily top-down and open discussion was restricted in the interests of managerial prerogative. Notable in this respect was the influence of extant hierarchical management structures that institutionalised a form of remote, low trust management. One view typically expressed was:

"Staff...emphasised how remote communication, through the use of email, intranet, video conferencing and similar techniques, had become the most important means of sharing information"

"I feel quite intimidated by management. It is quite hierarchical. And what makes them intimidating is that you don't ever see these people. The only time you see these people is when they send out a communication and they put a little photo on the bottom or something." **(Customer Consultant, FinCo)**

Patterns of work overload experienced by staff at each case study site constituted a second factor. Apart from impacting on stress levels and employees' sense of well-being work overload diminished any potential for employee participation through formal and informal consultative channels by reducing the time – and interest – that could be devoted to this. As a DesEng worker commented:

"I'm not sure we're actually any good at communicating our problems up the chain. I mean in theory the group would complain to the group leader and he'd take that complaint on to the management meeting for the department. But because we're all so busy and we all know our boss is busy, it's difficult to whine that you're overloaded because you know he's overloaded and he's overloaded and all the other group leaders are overloaded." **(Mathematician, DesEng)**

A third factor concerned the increasing reliance of both managers and workers on electronic modes of communication and consultation. Many staff at each of the case study sites emphasised how remote communication, through the use of email, intranet, video conferencing and similar techniques, had become the most important means of sharing information. Such processes can facilitate more 'efficient' communications, but equally, they can result in a 'de-collectivisation' of direct consultation. In other words,

interaction between management and employees becomes increasingly atomised as group discussion is diminished and replaced by remote communications between individual managers and isolated subordinates.

A final factor that had a clear bearing on staff experiences of indirect consultation was the prominence of co-operative or partnership-based union relations at the three organisations. Many workers we interviewed articulated the feeling that their unions' proximity to management, and lack of independent voice, resulted in an inability to change management strategy since their unions were being used to legitimise change rather than challenge it. The following view was typical:

I don't think they are very influential. I don't think the union is really a huge part of life here...from a comparative point of view based on my experience in other industries, I would say that our trade union people are too involved in the firm really. That does have advantages but on the other hand, I think there are too many management assumptions that our trade union reps share because it's all common ground whereas a non-GovSci trade unionist would probably throw up their hands in horror.

(Technologist, GovSci)

Conclusion

The three high skill organisations investigated in this study seemed to offer favourable conditions for high levels of employee voice and influence at work. Compared to general patterns in UK workplaces (identified by WERS 2004) the three organisations operated a large number of employee involvement and participation practices that incorporated a broad range of organisational themes into their consultation agendas. Despite this, employee evaluations were mostly negative. The research showed that a number of organisational factors shaped these experiences on the office floor: the imposition of managerial prerogative in low trust, hierarchical managerial structures; the effect of effort intensification on staff willingness to participate in consultation processes; the 'low on power' individualisation of consultation via computerisation; and finally, whilst the strength of employee voice was dependent on the legitimacy and effectiveness of trade unions in representing employees' interests at the workplace, forms of union organising based on partnership relations were

"[The] unions' proximity to management, and lack of independent voice, resulted in an inability to change management strategy since their unions were being used to legitimise change rather than challenge it"

detrimental to this. For these reasons, the pattern of professional worker experience of consultation processes at work cannot be easily distinguished from that of other occupational groups.

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Newcomer Information Acquisition: Evidence from two studies in China

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China has been undergoing a gradual shift from an ossified centrally planned economy towards what is, ambiguously, referred to as a 'socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics' since 1978. The adoption of the policy of 'Economic Reforms and Opening up to the Outside World' has led to a sustained and high-speed economic growth in China's national economy. Against the backdrop of tremendous changes of economy and ideology in Chinese society, significant changes have also taken place in employment policies and practices. A remarkable consequence of these changes has been a dramatic increase in job mobility for employees who have to adjust and adapt to new settings more than ever before, and as a result, high rates of voluntary turnover have become a substantial problem for many Chinese organisations. In particular, the highest voluntary turnover rate has been reported to occur during the first few years after newly hired employees (i.e. newcomers) enter the organisation.

Faced with this challenge, and in spite of practical concerns and research calls aimed at improving the understanding of newcomer adjustment, little research to date has devoted attention to explore this issue in the context of China. Historically, newcomer adjustment has been studied from at least two perspectives based on western experience. The dominant emphasis on the first perspective lies in the work contextual factors such as organisational norms and socialisation strategies. In general, research on this perspective assumes that individuals tend to be overwhelmed by the existing organisational settings. The other perspective has argued that facing the uncertainty and new working environment, newcomers themselves are motivated to take an active role in engaging proactive behaviours to reduce uncertainty and to master new skills. Furthering the understanding of those contextual factors and individual behaviours, Bauer *et al.* (2007) pointed out two most frequently discussed key antecedents which are considered to impact newcomer adjustment based on the extant literature. They are organisational socialisation tactics and newcomer information acquisition. To illustrate, organisational socialisation tactics refers to organisational strategies and approaches to transform individuals from outsiders into insiders, which emphasises the role of the organisation on newcomer adjustment. Newcomer information acquisition refers to the process in which newcomers seek and acquire information and resources to settle down, which emphasises the proactive role of newcomers themselves.

In the present article, instead of involving all of the key factors discussed in the study of Bauer *et al.* (2007), the focus was restricted to newcomer information acquisition because several recent Chinese studies have found that a formal, structured, and planned policy appear to be more effective for newcomer adjustment, compared with

“Due to this consideration, Chinese newcomers may tend to worry about seeking ‘simple’ information and being considered as incompetent and insecure”

a unique and relatively unplanned approach (e.g. Chen and Eldridge 2010; Yi and Uen 2006). In general, these results are consistent with findings in the western context. However, although the significance of information acquisition has been widely recognised, very few studies have explored this behaviour in a non-western context like China. To address this omission, this study is expected to provide an initial attempt at unveiling this behaviour, particularly

looking at the influence of Chinese cultural factors and the role of supervisor support on newcomer information acquisition. This article could be of significance and benefit to organisations in guiding the design of appropriate policies and strategies to speed up newcomer adjustment, particularly for those employers from western countries but working in China.

Characteristics of Newcomer Information Acquisition in China

First, Sully de Luque and Sommer (2000) indicated that newcomer information acquisition was different in 'specific-oriented' and 'holistic-oriented' cultures. According to their explanation, people living in specific-oriented cultures, in countries like the United States, are likely to favour 'a more intensive direct-inquiry approach'; while people in holistic-oriented cultures, in countries like China, tend to prefer 'more indirect inquiry and intensive monitoring strategies'. The reason behind this argument is possibly because employees in China are particularly careful when looking for help because it may threaten feelings of independence and competence, which may result in losing 'face' (*mian zi*). 'Face' stands for the image of the person as well as a safe cover of their prestige, dignity and standing in the group. A variety of face-related expressions in Chinese society shows the importance of face in another way, such as 'just like trees need bark, men need face'. Due to this

consideration, Chinese newcomers may tend to worry about seeking 'simple' information and being considered as incompetent and insecure.

Second, it is often suggested that Chinese newcomers are far more likely to follow the supervisor's guidance, and to obey what they are required to do. Employers are often considered as having a dominant role in the Chinese workplace, and Chinese employees may prefer direct guidance especially from someone with proper authority and power (Cheng and Cascio 2009). This phenomenon can be explained by the emphasis of social hierarchical order and power distance rooted in the philosophy of Confucius (551 BC - 479 BC). In Chinese society, people often adhere to a strict social hierarchy structure where each role in relationships is defined by interactions with other individuals in the group. Admittedly, political conflict may exist between employees and employers due to an imbalance of political, social and economic power, but it does not deny the fact that the respect for hierarchy and authority is valued in the Chinese society and each person has his or her own responsibility to provide benefits to other members in order to maintain harmony relationships within group (Bond 1986).

In addition, according to Hofstede's (1980) work, Chinese culture is characterised by being collectivism-oriented. Under such a context, people tend to constrain their personal needs and desires in order to avoid interfering with the needs and goals of significant others, and thus individuals are more likely to engage in group activities rather than engage in activities alone (Triandis 1995). Morrison *et al.* (2004) further suggested that organisational insiders in collectivistic societies were more likely to take the initiative to provide information to newcomers as they took it as their responsibility. This argument is also supported by the argument of Cheng and Cascio (2009) who suggested that due to the influence of power-distance in the Chinese culture, the responsibility for providing feedback is usually assigned to those in senior or management roles. Hence, given all those indications, it is suggested that Chinese newcomers are more likely to rely on superior insiders to provide information.

Third, it is believed that information provided by superiors or authorities is more likely to be perceived to be reliable and truthful than that provided by others in the context of China. This phenomenon is attributable to the traditional Chinese legal system, which is characterised by being ruled by people (*ren zhi*) rather than by legal principles (*fa zhi*). Bozionelos and Wang (2007) provided an explanation of such a cultural scenario by suggesting that inter-personal relationships have traditionally carried more weight in the Chinese society. From those arguments, it is clear that the awareness of personal rule may affect individuals' judgment about the truthfulness of the acquired information. Influenced by this awareness, it is not hard to understand why Chinese employees are more likely to believe the words and information provided by superiors.

The arguments above have discussed some typical features of Chinese cultures that might explain newcomer proactive information acquisition. To sum up, it suggested that:

- information acquisition through inquiry may be not favoured by Chinese newcomers due to the worries of losing face;
- newcomers are more likely to rely on superiors' guidance in seeking information;
- newcomers tend to believe information and sources particularly provided by superiors.

As it can be seen, the notice of power and authority is in particular emphasised in the Chinese work place. The supervisor appears particularly important and relevant for newcomer adjustment by providing information, resources, guidance and support. To further explore the role of the supervisor support in newcomer information acquisition, the author performed two separate studies in China during 2008-2010.

Study 1: Newly Hired Insurance Agents

The insurance corporation examined in Study 1 was one of the largest life insurance organisations in south China. Within this organisation, there were over 5,000 branches and roughly 65,000 employees working within a variety of divisions, including administration, compensation and performance, training and development, information technology and audit. My research revealed that the organisation had a consistent structured system for newly hired insurance agents: each was required to attend a two-day intensive course at the training centre usually after a three-month orientation in their branch. During these three months, newcomers were guided by their supervisors in their daily job. Each morning of a working day, newcomers were required to have a brief meeting with their supervisors, and supervisors were expected to give feedback and provide guidance to improve newcomers' performance. Therefore, it was clear that social interactions between newcomers and supervisors were frequent in this organisation.

Then, 320 questionnaires were administered to newcomers in seven local branches, and a total of 177 complete questionnaires were sent back to the researcher (55.31% response rate) for further statistical analysis about the role of the supervisor in newcomer adjustment.

Study 2: Newly Appointed Doctors

For Study 2, corresponding data were collected from a medical university located in southeast China. First of all, preliminary interviews were conducted in that university with three HR officers and one principle doctor. They revealed that the formal orientation of newly qualified medical staff in the hospital setting was relatively short. It may only take one or two days to understand the basic work conditions, benefits and hospital regulations. Then,

"The supervisor appears particularly important and relevant for newcomer adjustment by providing information, resources, guidance and support"

a newcomer was assigned to a specific department and usually worked along with an experienced member from one week to several months, depending on the job role. During this period, newcomers learned mostly on the job, but could also try to do some additional tasks on their own under the supervision of those experienced staff.

After getting the general information of newcomer adjustment in the medical sector, questionnaires were distributed to 510 newly appointed doctors coming from six evening classes when they registered in 2009. All participants were doctors who had working experience, and were attending the evening courses for self-improvement. Most worked in a range of hospitals in southeast China. Finally, 245 complete questionnaires were sent back (48.03% response rate) for further analysis.

Supervisor Support in Newcomer Information Acquisition

Statistical analysis of these two studies suggested that although newly hired employees took an active role in information acquisition to integrate into the group (i.e. group integration) and to master new skills (i.e. task mastery), newcomers' work relationships with supervisors played a significant role in their adjustment. For example, high quality newcomer-supervisor relationships could compensate for the influence of newcomers' own information acquisition on their group integration. This result was not surprising as newcomers with good relationships with their supervisor are more likely to be involved in the group activity and thus develop a feeling of belonging in the group. Moreover, as a good relationship with supervisor may counterbalance the effect of information acquisition on newcomers' group integration when newcomers' values do not match those of other group members because supervisory support may strengthen newcomers' belief that they are trusted and valued, employees are therefore likely to feel safe and accepted on the basis of an important alliance with the supervisor (Erdogan and Enders 2007).

However, it is necessary to note that although the results of both studies supported the crucial role of supervisors in newcomer information acquisition for their group integration, interestingly, a slightly negative relationship was found in Study 1 for newly hired insurance agents. One possible reason may be due to the fact that the participants worked in a more competitive environment. They are more likely to be influenced by the concept of The Doctrine of the Golden Mean in the Confucian school), which can be understood as meaning mediocre or ordinary talent. According to this belief, newcomers with good relationship with supervisors may be considered to be 'eager for showing' or a 'boot licker', which may adversely influence their integration into the group. In contrast, newcomers who have poor relationship with their supervisors may get sympathy from other group members. Meanwhile, as

they cannot easily obtain access to their supervisors due to the poor relationship, they are more likely to contact group members to gain information which may indirectly influence their group integration.

“Newcomers’ work relationships with supervisors played a significant role in their adjustment”

In addition, it was found that the newcomer-supervisor relationship served a compensatory role influencing the effect of information acquisition on newcomers' confidence to perform a task. This result could be explained by the fact that under a good relationship, newcomers are more likely to gain information and resources and they tend to be liked by supervisors, and as a return, their efforts are inclined to be recognised and appreciated, which may further solid newcomers' confidence in task performance.

Conclusion

This research brought newcomer information acquisition into focus by suggesting that organisations may find it possible to facilitate newcomer adjustment if they make efforts to encourage supervisors to cultivate effective work relationships particularly with those who are hesitant to seek information. This finding is particularly important for managers from western countries but working with Chinese newcomers because the western concepts of individualism and interest-oriented social interactions may be not so relevant in a collective context where newcomers value face-saving, superior's guidance and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, an open communication channel and clear introduction become essential in such a context to ensure that the resources are perceived accessible and approachable for newcomers.

Moreover, the results of this research clearly indicated that newcomers with a high frequency of information acquisition and a good relationship with supervisors were more likely to have a higher level of social integration and task mastery. Therefore, although it is essential to provide necessary supervisory support for newcomer adjustment, newcomer information acquisition is still believed to be beneficial for both newcomers and organisations. Although newcomers who 'shut up and put up', that is, keep working exceptionally hard for very low pay and very poor conditions, and don't complain, are very beneficial for organisations (including western companies eager to exploit Chinese workers) strategies to stimulate newcomer information acquisition should be aimed at increasing newcomers' awareness of the benefit of information seeking, especially when they do not have a good relationship with supervisors. Further exploration about organisational interventions on stimulating newcomer information acquisition appears necessary and useful.

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Front Line Emergency Services: Skill mix and task allocation

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The UK public sector is under severe budgetary pressures. The coalition government justifies “austerity measures” on the grounds that “there is no alternative”. Underpinning this position is a neoliberal logic that seeks to cut both the size and the scope of the public sector, along with the idea that more efficiency savings can be squeezed from public services without reducing the quality or quantity of provision. Note, however, that this is presented as ‘saving’ and ‘protecting’ the front line at the expense of an anonymous and bloated, back room that is both expendable (privatisable) and inefficient. The distinction between the front line and back room in public services is not as clear cut as is often made out and is, furthermore, often contested (Mather and Seifert 2010). It was given credibility by the influential Gershon Report (2004) that accepted, unproblematically, the distinction and suggested delivering efficiency savings through targeted reform of backroom functions. We will, however, place the terms ‘front line’ and ‘back room’ in scare quotes in recognition of these issues.

This policy backdrop provides the context to this paper, which is based on a wider study of changes in the working lives of ‘front line’ staff and their union representatives in the police, fire and ambulance services. All groups are highly unionised with most fire fighters and associated control room staff in the Fire Brigades Union (FBU); all police officers below the rank of Superintendent are in the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) with other staff mainly in UNISON (although in London police civilians tend to belong to PCS); and ambulance staff are members of UNISON, the GMB and UNITE. All of these, bar the PFEW, are trade unions affiliated to the TUC. The PFEW is not a trade union, but operates a post-entry closed shop under statutory controls.

The current situation in these services is one of job cuts, challenges to conditions of service, adverse changes in pay and pensions and a more explicit anti-collectivist management style.

Much influence comes directly from the coalition government, and is a graphic illustration of the neoliberal agenda, wrapped in the rhetoric of the small state and big society, and presented as achieving more for less with no harm done (Chomsky 1999). Our research reveals that as managers seek to resolve the labour problem (relatively low labour productivity), different ‘solutions’ have surfaced in each service – central to this has been the management of task allocation in each service. This short paper will concentrate on this issue.

Conceptualising and contextualising the emergency services

Emergency staff have a high public profile. Errors are widely scrutinised, and labour management is an important part

of managing and delivering emergency provision within tightly controlled central budgets allied with centrally and politically determined targets and priorities.

Senior service managers are under pressure to protect service quality but cut costs, while reassuring users that the emergency service ‘front line’ is protected. This presents contradictory pressures, talking up the value of ‘front line’ services and of those working on the ‘front line’ while at the

same time reducing their pay and job security. As the government have sought to challenge the status quo so those on the ‘front line’ have resisted. Staff and unions representing these emergency service groups are already complaining that cuts in jobs, pensions, and pay levels (real and absolute) alongside changes in performance management targets and skill and task mix allocations will reduce the quality and quantity of services for the user. The Hutton report (2011) on public sector pensions, the Winsor report (2011) on police pay, and a range of joint statements from the local government Employers’ Organisation and NHS

Trusts as well as representative bodies and pressure groups variously point to a deterioration in service provision.

One of the government’s chosen ways of assuaging the economic ‘crisis’ is to reduce unit labour costs whilst attempting to maintain standards. The emphasis is on how managers pass on the cuts. One solution is an intensification of current trends around task reallocation. These are far from new ideas. Indeed, thirty five years ago, Braverman used the work of 19th Century theorist Babbage to explain decisions about division of labour ‘which add to the productivity of labor’ (Babbage in Braverman 1974:55). Braverman’s analysis emphasises the centrality of decisions about task allocation in any occupation. He reminds us that, in the first instance,

“Much influence comes directly from the coalition government, and is a graphic illustration of the neoliberal agenda, wrapped in the rhetoric of the small state and big society, and presented as achieving more for less with no harm done”

any labour process entails decisions about the separation of work into its constituent tasks and their subsequent prioritisation. The division of labour can, and often is, taken a stage further so that constituent tasks are undertaken by different categories of workers - the benefit for employers is the prospect of savings in labour time attaching to task completion.

While task reallocation may deliver cost savings, the conundrum for managers is to cut costs while responding positively to the political and service imperative to protect the emergency service 'front line'.

This means some engagement with the nature of the tasks involved and level of skill required to perform the task so that users are reassured. 'Skill', however, is a slippery concept. Competing definitions create confusion both for managers, who state that service standards will be protected, and for workers, who claim standards fall when their skills are under attack. Allied to this are longstanding debates about how professional groups act together to claim special competence and legitimacy in their role - this serves to protect them from attempts to reconfigure or dilute their job boundaries Larson 1977; Abbott 1988).

“While task reallocation may deliver cost savings, the conundrum for managers is to cut costs while responding positively to the political and service imperative to protect the emergency service ‘front line’”

Analysis of the CSO role reveals little skill content in terms of discretionary powers when compared with the conventional policing labour process – this relates again to the non-warranted status of the role. The incorporation of the role within the police family has been driven by task allocation rather than skill-based issues. Service managers have been able to manage downside

risk because the consequences of things going wrong are relatively small, and when they do, police officers quickly become involved to correct matters.

Division of labour and task allocation in the emergency services

Each service has sought to accommodate the twin pressures of reducing cost and maintaining service quality through attempts to allocate and reallocate tasks in different ways. The division of labour that has marked out both the police and fire services has developed on a hierarchical, quasi-military-style basis. This is evident in the organising of ranks into, for example, constables, sergeants and inspectors in the police service. The military-style discourse also features in policy arguments that have been headlined around the protection of 'front line' staff, akin to protecting front line troops. The military analogy is less obvious in the ambulance service given its place as part of the wider NHS.

Within this general pattern of the division of labour, our research has revealed three distinct types of skill mix emerging in each service. Whilst some changes were initiated as part of the general modernising impulse, austerity measures have sharpened management interventions around task allocation and division of labour decisions.

Externalisation of task allocation involving the externally-imposed addition of different grades to an existing occupational group

This type of task allocation is most evident in the police service, as illustrated by the introduction of Community Support Officers (CSOs) as a new grade within 'front line' policing in England and Wales. The CSO role represented

a ministerially-imposed, rather than mutually negotiated change to the division of labour. These are civilian posts with separate terms and conditions of employment, and lower pay rates, to those of warranted officers and with severely circumscribed powers of arrest. CSOs constitute over 10% (16,376) of all police officers (Dhani and Kaiza 2011). The introduction of CSOs increases police visibility in neighbourhoods, as their primary task is to patrol the streets. This provides a cheaper alternative to employing more warranted police officers to do the same job - an example of the substitution of cheaper for more expensive staff.

One police officer explained that over the long term there would be more use made of CSOs because they are cheaper but "they tick the box because they're on the street". This accords with the blurring of police roles in Sir Dennis O' Connor's recent report (2011), captured in the 'visible', 'specialist', 'middle' and 'back office' roles. Visible roles are defined as responding to 999 calls, attending to traffic accidents, and patrolling neighbourhoods and therefore embrace CSOs. This is important in light of current ministerial rhetoric about saving the 'front line'.

While the cost arguments are alluringly straightforward they mask a range of problems. CSOs are primarily engaged to undertake non-confrontational duties – they were never meant to perform the job of a police officer, or as one PFEW representative remarked, "they have no statutory rules of engagement that matched the PCs themselves". This demarcation between the two roles derives from differences in the civilian and warranted status of the two occupational categories. However the mix of standard and discretionary powers attaching to the CSO role creates two problems: it confuses members of the public, and it creates additional work for warranted officers (Meade 2011). One police sergeant explained that members of the public were well aware of "what they can get away with with the CSOs". Police officers talked of "failures in the CSO role" and they felt that the workload of police officers was increasing because CSOs either do not, or can not, deal properly as the first port of call in an incident.

The division of labour between CSOs and police officers has rendered problematic the relationship between the two roles. While some police officers and PFEW representatives acknowledged that CSOs have a difficult job to do, the general view was that they were expendable in the current

budgetary climate. Several representatives called the CSO role “pseudo-policing”. This may in part be explained by a more general view of CSOs as “not part of the police family” and “they don’t have a public service ethos”. Their reasoning was based on CSOs having clear working hours and not the 24/7 on-call work ethic that characterised police work. As one police sergeant commented, “in a recent incident the police constables were ordered to stay, but the CSOs went home when their shift ended”.

Our data from PFEW representatives emphasised how task allocation decisions such as those discussed here were interwoven with defending the labour market position of warranted police officers: “Police officers are the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system. We can’t have policing based on ‘cheap as chips’. ... it’s better to have fewer, better people who are well paid and looked after, than more that are no good”. What seems clear is that the relationship between task allocation and skill is an important one - it provides the basis for the demarcation line between the two occupational groups and is caught up with debates about job territory and therefore job control issues.

New division of labour within an existing occupational group by agreement

The management of downside risk is particularly acute in the ambulance service where task allocation decisions can involve a life or death outcome. The downside risk of task reallocation to lesser skilled workers is, therefore, potentially of huge significance. There is no obvious way to allocate the work of a paramedic to a lesser skilled (and lower paid worker). The NHS Agenda for Change (AfC) exercise offered one way of resolving the problem through internal restructuring of the labour process of ambulance staff, especially in the creation of a new internal job hierarchy as part of the new job families. As a result ambulance workers are divided into several discrete categories linked to periods of training and qualification, and to associated duties and responsibilities. The two main categories associated with emergency work are ambulance practitioners (formerly technicians) and paramedics. The job titles reflect the development of both job boundaries and entry routes into the job (NHS Modernisation Agency 2004).

The disaggregation of ambulance work into its discrete components has meant that the division of labour between different groups, on different levels of pay has been achievable. For example, ambulance practitioners (technicians) respond to emergency and routine calls and support paramedics. The paramedics have a more complex labour process that involves taking medical decisions in an emergency, administering drugs and undertaking medical procedures such as intubation and ECG. Only 10% of ambulance journeys are emergencies. This means that a majority of the work has been allocated to ambulance drivers, as part of Passenger Transport Services (PTS) or what one interviewee called the “taxi service”. This attracts lower pay than ambulance workers and a narrowly defined skill requirement in the job.

The new pay and grading structures were predicated on the identification of skills and competences, resulting in six bands, revealing explicit attempts to draw out links between skill and pay (McBride and Mustchin 2007). In this newly defined division of labour, close attention has been paid to task allocation. As one interviewee explained, this has meant the displacement of the “traditional scoop and run” service traditionally associated with a manual labour process requiring less medical skill and know-how. He went on to note that “we’re now expected to stay and play”. He was referring to the pressure to resolve incidents without having to take a patient to hospital.

“Over the last twenty years there have been attempts to change working practices, especially with regard to staff deployment and shift patterns”

Alongside these changes there have been terminological shifts as paramedics are increasingly cast as medical professionals who can ‘save lives’. This has occurred in the context of longer journeys between hospitals (following the closure of small rural hospitals) and is buttressed by target response times and professional standards. The sharpening of the division of labour in this service has had the effect of intensifying the task for those involved

in service delivery. Associated changes in other parts of the NHS, notably NHS Direct, introduced added pressures. One paramedic referred to this as “NHS Redirect” when explaining that a majority of calls were redirected to the ambulance service “just in case”. He cited examples of responding to numerous calls that were for minor ailments as part of the system now involved in telephone diagnosis.

How have unions responded to these changes? One UNISON representative captured the general feeling, observing that, “It’s more of a professional service now”, based on “proper qualifications and proper access to a real career”. The catch, however, is that alongside this better paid professional group has been the creation of a new, lower paid and larger group of technician staff.

Redefinition of the tasks of individual workers within the same grade

FBU bulletins and interview data emphasise the high-risk nature of the work undertaken by firefighters and therefore the difficulties associated with task reallocation. As one FBU representative noted, “the chief fire officer has recently made clear that there are two lines that he won’t cross: fire-fighter safety and community safety”. This illustrates the downside risk associated with cheaper job substitution in this service.

Over the last twenty years there have been attempts to change working practices, especially with regard to staff deployment and shift patterns. Firefighters have been under pressure to be trained to assume some of the resuscitation work ordinarily undertaken by paramedics, an attempt to redefine and extend the tasks undertaken by firefighters. Such developments, however, amount to only limited internal task reallocation. Our data reveal that task allocation remains a thorny issue in the fire service. One FBU representative commented that “you can’t join the FBU if you accept the principle or practice of co-responding”. He explained that this meant crossing the demarcation line between fire fighting

and paramedic/ambulance work. While technological changes may reconfigure some aspects of the job, firefighters see this as enhancing the skill content of the job that does not detract from the essence of the firefighter labour process: "new technology still relies on more skilled workers – computers and more display screens lead to better information and more training and safer jobs for firefighters".

Service documents such as annual reports point to a degree of demilitarisation in the fire service, as evidenced in moves to risk assessment and rank to role relationships. This said, senior managers do not press for the creation of cheaper sub-grades within the fire service because of inherent dangers of the work. It would be difficult to externalise such work because of uniformed, command style arrangements within the fire service, - it would be difficult to create a sub-grade not able to do the work or obey commands. There are also a high degree of specialisms within the grade, equipped to deal with, for example, chemical spillages and highly flammable/dangerous materials.

Whilst a major aim of management has been to change working practices, this has not historically been possible because of the pay indexation system which meant that the FBU did not have to negotiate on the basis of 'something for something'. The 2002-2004 dispute was concerned with precisely this issue (Seifert and Sibley 2011). Since then, and the move back to collective bargaining and 'something for something' negotiations, there have been some modifications to shift working and 'down time' practices but little change in task allocation.

One theme to emerge from the research was the tendency for firefighters who were leaving to be replaced with cheaper staff. In practice this meant offering a smaller benefits package. Another development is concerned with rapid deployment where attention focuses increasingly on minimum crewing levels. One fire fighter noted that "you need a minimum of five firefighters per appliance" and that this minimum number had reduced. He was clear that "they want the firefighters to do more, not less and keep doing all tasks, rather than dilute the task". The change from pay indexation to free collective bargaining has meant an opportunity for both sides to negotiate over pay, conditions, and task allocation. As a result there has been more local variation, especially between the three mainland nations, and this has created the conditions for more local disagreements with local employers about task allocation and skill mix changes.

Conclusions

Our research suggests that one consequence of the austerity measures has been a concerted effort to further develop task reallocation already underway during the pre-austerity period. When this creates a skill mismatch (i.e. wherein skill does not fit with the actual task allocation) we might expect a worse service delivery. Senior managers, not those 'on the ground', decide which tasks have to be done and this may mean lesser skilled workers completing the task to a lower standard. This is less efficient, and outcomes may even deteriorate over time, but it offers senior managers the benefit of being cheaper. The language of efficiency,

which provides the gloss of legitimacy, combined with the difficulty in measuring service quality, allows the allure of cheapness to prevail.

It seems that whilst managers have paid close attention to the division of labour and task allocation, a range of mediating factors impact upon their allocation decisions in each of the three services, inter alia: the nature of the task itself; the consequences of failing (i.e. the management of downside risk); the balance between 'emergency' and 'front line' work; the level of technology; changing service demands and the shifting priorities of state decision-makers as paymasters. While the outcomes for each service are different, the pressures are the same. As cost pressures bear down, so control over the labour process becomes more important. This in turn creates more complex divisions of labour, more imperium and dominium in labour relations, and often the reduction in union power and influence. Skill mix and task allocation, therefore, become the battle ground over which workers and their representatives attempt to defend their job territories and high quality service provision.

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(How) Can we measure wellbeing at work?

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In autumn 2010, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, remarked: "It's time we admitted that there's more to life than money and it's time we focused not just on GDP but on **GWB – general wellbeing**" (Guardian 2010). Whilst it was intended to galvanise a more holistic approach to life (although it also deflected attention from the introduction of swingeing economic cuts), it glossed the fact that wellbeing is not easily defined and measured. Moreover, if "what a society measures will in turn influence the things that it seeks" (Dolan and White 2007: 81), then the very act of measuring becomes crucial in constructing the world we live in. This short paper is intended to introduce some of the problems encountered in defining and researching the measurement of wellbeing in the specific context of the workplace.

Several ongoing projects in the Centre for Employment Studies Research revolve around issues of wellbeing at work and ways to measure it. Whilst wellbeing at work is almost certainly influenced by factors like stress, lack of job satisfaction, work pressure, work intensification and so on, measuring these factors, and their impact upon wellbeing at work is fraught with difficulty. Let us start by noting, as Fleetwood and Hesketh (2010: 161-2, emphasis added) do, *that whilst absolutely anything be measured, the question we need to ask is "would the resulting variable anything?"* In other words, the simple fact that things measured does not mean that the measures are meaningful. How many of us would ever consider trying to measure the love we have for someone close to us? We don't do it because it would have little meaning.

Wellbeing at work has been conceptualised and 'measured' in many ways often using comparisons of accident rates, reductions of working hours, levels of wage rises, changes in absenteeism/staff turnover, and job satisfaction surveys etc. One indicator of wellbeing at work, job satisfaction, has been used to predict future quits, absenteeism and productivity and as Clark (1997: 344) writes: it "may be as close as we are likely to come to a proxy measure of utility at work, upon which a lot of microeconomics is based". Whilst various economic indicators of (general) wellbeing have also been trialled, economists believe they have 'no need to unpack the black box of desire' (Collard 2006: 345). Something like desire, however, might be necessary to obtain a more sophisticated understanding of wellbeing at work.

In one example of the wellbeing approach, Clark and Oswald (2002) 'costed' the life-financial impact of negative events. They produced astonishingly high numbers. For example, to 'compensate' for, and restore wellbeing to, the level where it was before a person became unemployed

would cost £15,00 *per month* until new work was found.. This is, of course, open to the objection that money may not be the cause of happiness, since "differences in income explain only a low proportion of the differences in happiness among persons" (Collard 2006: 347). It is also open to the objection that we are not sure which way causality runs here: it is possible that happiness is a major influencing factor in boosting earning power. Statistical analysis cannot establish the *direction* of causality. Moreover, the causes of happiness are likely to be many, varied, to switch on and off, to be more or less powerful and so on, casting doubt on any simple, mechanical X causes Y process.

Another study devised an archetypal artificial 'benchmark individual': aged 40, in excellent health, with (a defined) 'medium education', married, a homeowner, non-unionised, working 35 hours per week, for a manufacturing firm of 25-199 employees, in a professional/managerial role. Survey participants were then measured against this benchmark, to assess job satisfaction (Clark 1997: 349). However in a multicultural, multi-ethnic working world there is arguably no such 'standardised employee'. For example, working over Christmas is not likely to be too bothersome for a Muslim, but is probably more upsetting for (nominally) Christian employees as it impacts on family/work-life balance etc). A Muslim working long hours during the moveable feast of Ramadan, by contrast, could find *that* stressful (Tausig 1982:56). The (lack of) agency/control of one's own work is, for example, often cited as predicting work stress.

"Whilst wellbeing at work is almost certainly influenced by factors like stress, lack of job satisfaction, work pressure, work intensification and so on, measuring these factors, and their impact upon wellbeing at work is fraught with difficulty"

Stress and work

Whilst various forms of work strain and stress seem to be a popular proxy measure of wellbeing, 'stress' is not operationally well-defined. It is often split into two areas:

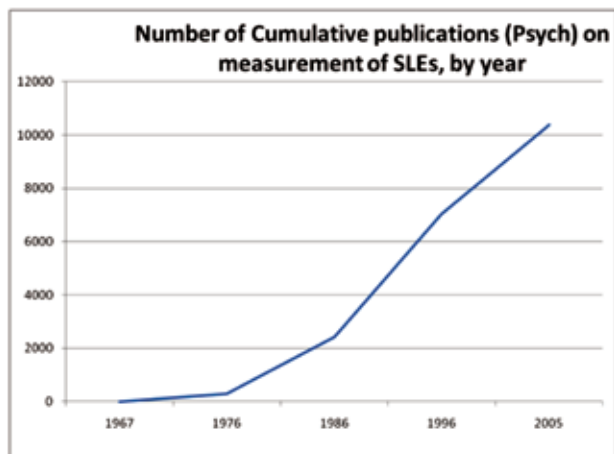
- (i) cause – i.e. of major life events or daily hassles, and
- (ii) effect – i.e. subjective, individual reactions this can be sub divided into appraisal and emotional response phases (Kopp *et al.* 2010: 211).

Life change is often considered stressful, and work, being subject to various kinds of change, seems an ideal arena for stress research. Ross and Mirowsky (1979:176) remind us to proceed with caution, asking: “is life change, in and of itself, a noxious stimulus that precipitates disease and distress? Or is the apparent effect of change spurious, being actually due to its association with undesirability?” If truth be told, we do not know.

‘Stress’ is cheaply and rapidly assessed, via one or more of a battery of questionnaires which have been developed in health research (especially in psychology). One of the seminal attempts at quantifying stressful life-events as a predictor of illness was the LEI (Life Events Inventory) developed by Homes and Rahe in 1967. Subsequent researchers have remodelled both the notions and numerous resultant variables or instruments, and now dozens of derived studies have been trialled across cultures, social groups and special categories of people. Employment stress management has also become a burgeoning industry (Green 2001: 54) as has research into how to apparently measure stressful life events. Indeed, Figure 1 indicates the cumulative number of published academic papers on the subject of Stressful Life Events (SLEs) in psychology journals alone, from 1965-2005. Publication on the notion of stress does seem to be a high-growth area.

Figure 1: Chart of cumulative Psychology journal paper publications about stressful life event measurement, by year based on numerical data in Dohwenrend 2006.

But whilst stress is an oft-researched entity, it is extremely complicated. Tausig (1982:52) observes that: stressful life events “are a necessary but not sufficient predictor



of illness ... the question ... is whether a particular finite set of items can represent adequately the full range of events”. Ross and Mirowsky make the vital point that “stressfulness is not a property of events in the same sense that frequency, intensity and duration are. Stressfulness is not inherent in an event. Nor is it in the eye of the observer, like undesirability and change. *Stressfulness is a function of the response of the distressed*” (1979:169, emphasis added). Most dependent measures in (medical and health-related) stress research are physiological (pulse, endocrine function etc.) because there is less room for problems of conceptualisation and measurement of physiological variables. Common ratings tables (and those usually self-rating) used in Occupational Health and HRM research usually contain questions on both psychological and physiological events/behaviours.

Methodological problems

Some of the life events usually analysed may even be symptoms, not causes, of illness and thus will correlate with any subsequently diagnosed conditions, *because they are the same thing*. For example whilst dismissal from work

might be triggered by psychiatric issues, the continuing symptoms might then be considered (in a post hoc questionnaire) as being *due* to dismissal. If psychiatric issues are scored as a consequent illness caused by the workplace life eve, then a serious conceptual

muddle occurs where “we may be relating illness to illness” (Tausig 198: 53). This kind of conceptual difficulty could be prevented with contextual interviewing to provide qualitative information to augment the quantitative data.

Individual differences are a major problem in generalist checklist tools, being prey to differential perceptions of events, which can create validity (and other) problems. One person’s ‘serious illness’ is another person’s ‘influenza’ - and Likert-type scales can, as Dohwenrend (2006: 479) writes, evoke “experiences ranging from the catastrophic to the trivial” for ‘the same event’. While “strength can be measured by the a man can lift”, wellbeing at work and general happiness are different issues (Collard 2006: 347). Moreover, even when we can define these concepts, we have to acknowledge their nebulous nature.

Many questionnaire and interview categories suffer from lack of event independence (intra-category validity) problems. While several ‘different’ events or behaviours may be listed separately in a questionnaire they often are not independent. Two commonly-covered topics are sleep habits and eating experiences. The onset of noticeable sleeplessness might, however, relate to a change of eating habits (or vice versa). If both are given *separate and independent* scores then, as Tausig (1982: 53) notes: “we may increase artificially the reported frequency of events for certain respondents”. We would, therefore, be misclassifying them as having high numbers of life events” and so produce an aggregated score for some participants

as being in (or at risk of) an illness state, when they are actually perfectly healthy.

Scaling-type questionnaire tests are rapid and simple to administer, thus making them cheap options when costing research projects. Low cost, however, often comes at the price of lost precision. Some instruments are purely clinical. Psychiatric/diagnostic tests are often used inappropriately by social scientists as workplace measures when they have not been designed for this purpose. Some tests are indicative only - with above threshold scores demanding clinical follow-up which social scientists cannot provide. Some tests measure 'something' (stress, etc.) and do not predict 'something' (illness, absenteeism etc.) at all. Some tests only predict without accurately measuring anything. Some tests are validated on specialist and highly-stressed occupational populations (for example fire crews, law enforcement officers) and thus may not be more broadly relevant to general workplace measurement. Assessment methods covering this area need to account for duration of stressor/event, cognitive factors and onset time, as well as ascertaining whether the problem is acute or chronic (Kopp *et al.* 2010: 212).

Employment contract type is likely to affect the context and, thereby, effect of some answers on many of the common scales. For example, temporary workers will expect to be laid off as part of their normal environment, while permanent workers will not. A common scaling question, however, relates to 'being laid off' and (mistakenly) scores that as a predictor of stress, equally for any worker – permanent or temporary (Dohrenwend 2006: 479).

Collard advises that when designing a questionnaire one should be sure to 'include in your list of factors affecting wellbeing, everything to which your *respondents* attach importance' (Collard 2006: 350, emphasis added). Goldacre (2010) cites the example of a pharmaceutical company developing a new drug. The company avoided reporting a common side-effect of their product (*anorgasmia*) by directing their research team not to question trial patients about sexual dysfunction. Instead they asked questions on 72 other health and life factors, to generate a positively-skewed wellbeing outcomes dataset. The point of the example is beautifully captured in Goldacre's sarcastic remark to the effect that he personally could not think of 72 things in his life which were *more* important to him than ability to achieve orgasm!

Conclusion

This short article has used the issue of stress to illustrate how notions of wellbeing and happiness are extremely difficult and perhaps impossible to define and (meaningfully) measure. If, however, researchers continue to define and measure these phenomena, then at the very least they need to proceed far more cautiously. They need to examine their motivations for attempting it, scrutinise how they are doing it,

and above all avoid damaging (albeit unintended) consequences arising from the fact (noted above) that the very act of measuring can play a crucial role in constructing the world we live in. It would be deeply ironic if researchers ended up creating a new, and marginalised, group of people who are (statistically, and therefore 'scientifically' proven to be) unhappy and lacking in wellbeing.

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'Neither fish nor fowl: The professional self-employed and the need for a better regulatory framework'

Patricia Leighton, IPag Business School, France



When someone tells you they are self-employed, what thoughts are conjured up? Do you imagine they work in a craft occupation or construction, or perhaps that they are a freelance journalist, or an IT contractor or perhaps they are a consultant? Or possibly your thoughts turn to them being a small business, say, running a shop, a website design company, a café, or specialist recruitment agency? All of these occupations are skilled, mobile and likely well rewarded.

However, the label 'self-employed' is also applied to many who are less skilled, work in vulnerable occupations and who are more at the 'edge' of the labour market. Typically, the label 'self-employed' is applied to them against their will and included in this group are people widely referred to as 'casuals', seasonal staff', zero-hours workers and most agency temps. They tend to work in catering and the leisure industry, manufacturing, agriculture and service sectors. They are easily dispensed with by employers, often poorly paid and face considerable insecurities and other problems.

This brief overview demonstrates not only that the self-employed community (3.5 million in the UK or around 13 per cent of employment) is a very diverse community but also that the demarcation between self-employment and small business/SME is a fine, and often contested, one. The contests are often generated by the fact that many skilled self-employed have their own limited company and define their professional loyalties in terms of business rather than employment. There are also strong psychological factors at work, such that these workers see themselves as self-reliant, autonomous, flexible and as having a desired life-style. They definitely do not see themselves as employees.

However, there are other debates and contests regarding the more vulnerable self-employed. These tend to focus on whether their declared self-employed status by an employer is a 'sham', a 'disguised contract of employment' or 'false' self-employment (Casale 2011; ILO 2010). These questions challenge the 'label' given to the relationship and suggest that if the employment realities of the relationship were explored, the outcome would (and should) be that they are really employees. Their apparent self-employed status was, in effect, foisted upon them by an employer wishing to reduce employment law and other costs.

But perhaps the central debate concerns the question: How does legislation and case-law differentiate the employee from the self-employed? Some have protective rights; others do not. The short answer is: In a very unsatisfactory way (Leighton and Wynne 2011).

What do we know about self-employment?

We have UK, EU and global data (ILO 2010; OECD 2010; EC 2010(a)) that many consider not entirely reliable as it is based on self-classification and that, in turn, depends on perception, attitudes and possibly inaccurate contract documents. Some data merge self-employment with employers and other data include the self-employed with the 'entrepreneur' category or SME. Indeed, as will be considered below, the whole question of definitions and categorisation is fraught with problems and is calling out for greater clarity and for appropriate conceptual frameworks. The quantitative data reveals wide variations across countries, with, for example, Japan having relatively few self-employed but China having considerable numbers.

Within the EU, the overall percentage for self-employment is 15 per cent (EC 2010). In recent years there have been small rather than dramatic increases, with the highest growth in Netherlands, Czech Republic, Germany and Sweden. In some states, there

have been declines, for example, in Spain, Poland and Latvia. What is interesting is the marked variation in the incidence of self-employment, even between states with similar economic and cultural features. We also know that within the EU, as many current employees would prefer to be self-employed as prefer employee status (Eurofound 2010). Despite the high numbers stating a preference for self-employment, there is a major gap between that aspiration and the perceived reality of attaining it. For example, in the UK, 41 per cent report a wish to be self-employed but only 31 per cent consider it 'feasible'. In Portugal the equivalent figures are 48 per cent and 16 per cent. The familiar problems of accessing finance, negotiating bureaucracies and the risks involved were identified. Much, it seems, hinges on whether education and training gave a positive image and support to self-employment. Interestingly, a more positive image is reported by people in USA, China and Korea. This, again, may be a dimension of the European Social Model and its continuing global influence.

However, by far the most important dimension of recent EU research (EC 2010(a)) is that it illustrates clearly that the composition of the self-employed workforce is changing

dramatically. Overall, numbers of self-employed may not have grown greatly in the last decade, but the number of skilled self-employed has (EC 2010(a)). There has, in effect, been a major switch by highly skilled people from being employees to becoming self-employed. Data are disaggregated by High Skilled Clerical-HSC (including professional groups), Low Skilled Clerical - LSC; High Skilled Manual - HSM and Low skilled Manual - LSM.

Within the general shift towards self-employment by both HCSs and HSMs some of the most dramatic have been in the Nordic states. For example, over the last decade there has been an increase in HSC of 21 per cent and for HSM 30 per cent. In Germany, one of the traditional 'homes' of the European Social Model, there has been a 24 per cent increase in HSC self-employment. In the UK, although there has been an increase of nine per cent in HSCs, the major growth in self-employment has been by HSMs. To sum up: An increasing number of skilled people are working as self-employed persons and, it might be postulated, are bringing increased levels of self motivation, self-reliance and innovation to workplaces.

Qualitative research data is more limited. It is mostly focused on the self-employed themselves. There is only limited work on the management issues within the organisations that employ them (Leighton *et al.* 2007). Mckeown *et al's* seminal work in Australia on their motivation, work experiences and attitudes to work risks clearly identifies that psychological factors play a major role (Mckeown *et al.*, 2008; 2009). Their findings are broadly replicated by the research undertaken in the UK by the Professional Contractors Group (PCG 2009; 2010). We also know from EU studies that levels of job satisfaction are higher for the self-employed than employees and, perhaps counter-intuitively, the self-employed report they have more opportunities than employees to improve 'work organisation or work processes'.

So, to sum up: Self-employment is a feature of all economies, though there are considerable variations in the incidence and features of self employment. For example, in the UK a lawyer who is a sole practitioner would probably self-define as a self-employed professional, a similar lawyer in Germany would self-define as a member of a liberal profession and would differentiate themselves from craft and other occupations classified as freelance or self-employed.

There have been significant shifts in the composition of the self-employed workforce with, increasingly, skilled work being performed on a self-employed basis. We also know that self-employment is particularly attractive to young professionals and middle- aged people and that successful self-employment needs a combination of personality traits. Most relevantly for the debates and tensions set out below, we know that the skilled self-employed tend to report positive work experiences and well-being and are unlikely to consider themselves vulnerable or victims. By contrast, the less skilled and those who are involuntarily self-employed

are likely to see themselves as vulnerable and will seek the support of legal protective rights.

Why are there tensions and debates?

The tensions and debates tend to focus on the dividing line between employees and the self-employed and between the individual self-employed and a micro-business. The tensions and debates are both long standing and intense. They are caused by a wide range of factors, including taxation ('Some people are fiddling tax and expenses'); social security ('It's wrong that the self-employed who contribute little should be able to claim benefits when things go wrong'); employment law ('Why should a well paid consultant suddenly decide they want to claim unfair dismissal when a contract is ended early?') and company law ('Isn't it odd that a company director can claim from the Redundancy Fund in the UK when the company goes bust?').

There are also wider issues. Within the EU, non standard workers, but especially the more flexible and mobile freelancers, are seen by many as presenting a threat to the so-called European Social Model of secure, well rewarded work within a stable environment. Then the cry is; 'These freelancers will undermine stable employment and the low paid involuntary/apparent self-employed, such as casuals, will steal our jobs'.

Trade unions remain generally hostile. Evidence suggests that self-employed workers form their own associations which have, as a major function, lobbying law-makers and influencing policy development, rather than collective bargaining. Generally, the picture from industrial relations or a collective dimension is more complex and nuanced than one might expect (Heery 2006).

If there are deep seated suspicions and complexities around the freelance/contractor/consultant workforce, there has been widespread agreement on the need to try to develop protections and rights for those involuntarily 'self-employed' who, as a consequence of that status, are denied access to all but the basic employment rights. The rights they do have include health and safety protections, equality rights and in some countries such as the UK, access to the National Minimum Wage. Yet, research data often confirm that workers labelled 'casual' or 'stand-by' are long serving and loyal (Leighton 1983). The reasons for this are not hard to find. If they do not respond to a call to go to work when an employer offers it, they know it is only a matter of time before work is no longer on offer.

Within the UK there has been no legislation to provide such workers with support or employment rights. The UK's flexible labour market, especially with its peripheral segments containing marginal and vulnerable workers as well as many self-employed, and actively promoted by governments of all political persuasions, has proved powerful in ensuring no extension of protective rights. The increasingly strident calls for 'cutting red tape' (which includes employment law) and for 'simplification; and reducing 'burdens on

"We need to re-assess both the benefits and issues that self-employment brings to employing organisations and economies"

business', has made change even less likely. However, from 1997 and the Part-time Work Directive, the EU law makers have taken a different view. Their view is that the casuals, agency temps and those on fixed term contracts should have access to rights, regardless of the 'label' given to their relationship. This reached its height in 2008 with the acrimonious adoption of the Temporary Agency Work Directive, that seeks to provide parity in terms and conditions of employment between a temp and a comparable directly employed employee. It is tempting to think of this a measure for social justice for individuals. In fact, it is probably more concerned to ensure temps are not used to undercut wages and destabilise workforces. In other words, the spirit of the European Social Model is still very much alive.

The Directive's transposition into the UK has been especially fraught. The legislation is highly complex and in many respects unclear, not least in terms of whether self-employed temps are covered. Many will be, but where a temp has their own limited company and is 'in business on his own account' they will fall outside the protections. This is not a problem for the skilled temps in, say, medical research, IT, engineering, teaching, medicine, as they will likely be earning more than a comparable worker at the client employment and many will not seek protective rights anyway. But it is a problem for unskilled temps delivering pizzas.

It is worth mentioning, albeit briefly, the likely impact of the 2011 Agency Work Regulations. The Regulations come into force in October 2011, but at time of writing the statutory Guidance to the Regulations is still subject to disagreements and uncertainties. Nonetheless, it provides a perfect example of the tensions that have been outlined above. At their heart is the fact that much of the lobbying on the practical impact of the Regulations has been to ensure that people are not, in effect, ensnared by the legislation. Skilled contractors who are strongly committed to working on a self-employed basis are fearful of the regulations. They fear that, a consequence of seeking to help vulnerable temps, providing them with access to social facilities at the client's premises, and treating them comparably, will be that the tax authorities will find it easier to challenge their self-employed status. In essence, this is a 'one size fits all' piece of legislation. It has been quite properly devised to provide protections for the genuinely vulnerable, but in so doing has raised many issues around the nature and role of employment protective rights and who they should be for. It has also thrown a spotlight on the nature of self-employment and the extent to which the self-employed should have access to protective rights.

Some current issues

This article has urged that not only should we know more about self-employment but also that there is a need to note the recent changes in the nature of self-employment. We need to re-assess both the benefits and issues that

self-employment brings to employing organisations and economies. The need for this has been heightened by a number of recent EU and UK developments.

In 2010, the EU adopted an amended equal treatment directive for the self-employed (Council Directive 2010/41). Amongst other changes, the directive requires that self-employed women should have access to the basic maternity protections provided by EU law. This implies 14 weeks leave and basic statutory maternity pay. Clearly, this represents a major policy shift, in that the orthodoxy has always been that the self-employed make their own provision for maternity, sickness, injury etc. Does the right indicate a shift towards re-enforcing the basic 'floor of rights' enjoyed by virtually all workers? The anomaly is that

a British woman who has always been self-employed would have only paid Class 4 social security contributions, which should give her no more than limited access to social security rights. This directive has yet to be transposed into UK law, but we await the government response with interest.

In 2010, the European Parliament developed an initiative to provide a new directive to protect 'very atypical' workers. These are the casuals, zero-hours and other very vulnerable workers. Initially, the report also included the self-employed, who from a European Social Model perspective would also be vulnerable as being wrongly classified. (Report A7-0193/2010 July 2010). It took some very hard lobbying to convince the Parliament that self-employment was not always equated with vulnerability and was, indeed, a legitimate form of working.

The UK government, through HMRC, pursued a similar line in its challenge to apparent self-employment in the construction industry in 2009. The document's title; 'False self-employment in Construction: Taxation of Workers' makes plain its objectives, though strong opposition led to its withdrawal in 2010. More recently, there has been a review of the highly controversial I.R 35 process, also designed to eliminate 'false' self-employment. The Office for Tax Simplification has led the review and although we have an interim report it is unclear what the final outcomes will be.

Underpinning much of what is written here is the problem of differentiating the genuine self-employed from the genuine employee. Legislation in the UK is effectively silent on the matter and legislation in other states is generally not helpful. Legal tests applied by UK courts from the middle of the nineteenth century have proved unsatisfactory, conflicting and, in that overused phrase, 'a lottery'. Predicting the outcome in a particular case is very difficult, not helped by the shifting sands of judicial approaches and reasoning. Some judges are willing to intervene, and to carefully scrutinise documents in a context of identifying the employment realities. In effect, they have been willing to challenge 'sham', 'disguised employment' and 'false employment'. Others, applying basic contract and

commercial law rules, see the written and signed document declaring employment status as the final word. In a context where our law of contracts contains no notions of balance and fairness, this puts many of the casuals and other vulnerable workers at a severe disadvantage. This raises questions about the very survival of employment law in a context where commercial law norms and approaches are becoming increasingly dominant.

Finally, we might consider the politics of self-employment. There is a schism between those who see self-employment as simply a different form of interpersonal employment relationship from standard employment and those who see it as a business-to-business transactional relationship (Phillips, 2008).

Conclusion

In sum, there has to be agreement, politically and legally, as to what precisely self-employment is. We know it is not generally SME status as many self-employed do not want to take on staff themselves. Is self-employment to be defined by economic factors, such as investment and risk? Or are factors such as autonomy, discretion and choice to be the hallmark? We do not know. What we do know is that the current situation is highly unsatisfactory and leads to friction, debate and conflict.

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Public sector employment relations

Stephanie Tailby, Professor of Employment Relations, Centre for Employment Studies Research, University of the West of England



The public sector employed six million people, a fifth of aggregate UK employment, in September 2010, in central government (the civil service, the NHS and HM forces), local government and public corporations. Its workforce in aggregate is more female, white-collar and unionised in comparison to that of the private sector. Women are two-thirds of the public sector workforce. They are two-fifths of the private sector employment total. Two-thirds of public sector workers are professionals, associate professionals, or administrative and secretarial staff compared to a third in the private sector (Matthews 2010). Whereas 56.3 per cent of public sector workers were union members in 2010 and 64.5 per cent were affected by collective agreements, the proportions for the private sector were 14.2 per cent and 16.8 per cent. The public sector currently accounts for 62.4 per cent of all union members (Achur 2011).

There has not been a sharp legal distinction in the UK between public and private sector industrial relations (although strike action to date has been proscribed for the police). The state as employer, however, has shaped public sector industrial relations. Governments have to account for their use of public finances; standardised employment practices can avert accusations of patronage. For electoral considerations they have to be mindful of a range of stakeholder interests; for example, citizens as tax-payers and as public service users. Through their employer role they can assert standards of 'best practice'.

Referring to the period of welfare state expansion from 1945, Fredman and Morris (1989) characterised the state as a 'model employer' that set an example to the private sector by endorsing principles of fairness, involvement and equity in workforce treatment. Associated with this was encouragement of union membership and centralised collective bargaining. Relatively quiescent public sector industrial relations were disrupted in the 1970s, however, as governments cut public expenditure in response to the 'fiscal crisis'. Conservative governments from 1979 were ideologically pre-disposed to 'shrink' the state sector. They engaged in the privatisation of nationalised industry (and major confrontations with the trade unions in the process), the creation of quasi markets in public services and encouraged the importation of private sector management techniques: policies that became known as the new public management. Public sector employment fell to 5.2m in 1999, or from 29 per cent of total UK employment in 1979 to 19.3 per cent, as jobs were lost or transferred to private sector contractors to the

"Two-thirds of public sector workers are professionals, associate professionals, or administrative and secretarial staff compared to a third in the private sector"

"The Comprehensive Spending Review proposed public spending cuts totalling £81 billion for the next four years"

public sector. This expansion of what Julius (2008) later referred to as the 'public services industry' continued under New Labour from 1997 and its programme of public sector modernisation.

From 2000 to 2008 New Labour raised substantially public expenditure investment. Health and education were the main beneficiaries. Under the rubric of bringing public services into a '21st Century consumer age', it intensified performance management from the centre whilst continuing with policies of 'marketisation' and private sector involvement. Whereas Conservative governments had sought to exclude the trade unions and marginalise their influence, New Labour invited union involvement in social partnership forums to achieve reforms of pay, grading and occupational boundaries.

Trade unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and non-TUC unions organise in the public sector. The latter include 'professional trade unions' such as the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nurses in the NHS. There are public sector TUC unions, of which Unison with 1.3 million members is the largest, and others that recruit in the public and private sectors (e.g. the GMB and Unite). However, the boundaries between the public and private sectors are increasingly blurred and unions have renamed themselves to indicate their greater 'openness'; for example, the Public and Commercial Services Union. Eight unions (TUC and non-TUC affiliated) that recruit primarily in the public sector are among the UK's 14 largest unions (with 100,000 or more members). Each increased its membership in the period 1999-2009 (Certification Officer Reports). In

aggregate union membership increased by 522,000 in the public sector to 4.1 million in 2009. The growth did not keep pace with the increase in employment, however, and union density declined by 3.8 percentage points, from 60.4 per cent.

Public sector employment increased on average by 100,000 per annum until 2005 when it peaked. There were three years of slight decline. Employment growth continued in some sub-sectors, notably the NHS. However, the large spurt in the public sector total in 2008-9 owed to the 'nationalisation' of failing banks (Matthews 2010). The costs of the bail-out, the revenues lost and increase in job seeker allowance benefit claims in the economic downturn that followed the banking crisis combined to swell the public deficit that the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, formed in May 2010, is committed to eliminating by 2015. Over the summer of 2010 it announced radical reforms of public services, including education and the NHS (notwithstanding the Conservative Party's election pledge to eschew further top-down reform of the health service). A two-year pay freeze for public sector workers and review of public sector pensions followed. In October, the Comprehensive Spending Review proposed public spending cuts totalling £81 billion for the next four years. An estimated 0.5 million public sector jobs are to be shed.

There has been protest from public service users and public sector trade unions. Students demonstrated at the end of 2010 against increased tuition fees. Many joined the TUC-coordinated March for the Alternative: Jobs, Growth, Justice in London on March 26th. However, the universities' sector faces a 40 per cent reduction in government funding and a majority of its institutions are proposing to charge the maximum tuition fee permitted (£9,000) for some or all courses in 2012. At the time of writing, in the absence of a negotiated settlement, the proposed reforms of public sector pensions threatened a 24-hour joint union walk out on June 30th affecting schools, universities, courts, ports and job centres.

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In conversation with Brendan Barber Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC)

Interviewed by Stephanie Tailby, Centre for Employment Studies Research,
University of the West of England



Earlier this year Brendan Barber took the time among his many appointments to visit Bristol to contribute to the University of the West of England's Distinguished Executive Address series. The DEA gives students and staff at UWE and practitioners in the local business community the opportunity to hear directly, from those leading organisations that drive UK economic performance, about the challenges, issues and decisions being made at the highest level of strategic leadership. Brendan's presentation on April 6th was soon after the mass rally in London, on March 26th, that the TUC coordinated as part of its All Together for Public Services campaign. The march and the broader campaign were central in his address and the interview that he gave Stephanie Tailby for the CESR Review.

The TUC coordinated March for the Alternative on March 26th was impressive in size. What points would you make about its composition, given that much of the press predicted it would rally no more than the 'usual suspects'?

Well I think the march was enormously impressive, certainly because of the size. Our estimate and I think the estimate of the police too was around half a million people, may be even more than that. It was certainly the biggest trade union march in my lifetime. But it wasn't just trade unionists. It involved people from every part of the community - members of volunteer groups, local community groups, and trade unionists - passionately concerned about the impact on the services that they value so hugely and the damage the government's cuts are going to do. So I think it was middle Britain on the march. It was not just the usual suspects.

The march was against public expenditure cuts and in defence of public and welfare services. Critics might argue it was a march of 'public deficit deniers'. How would you respond?

We're not deficit deniers. There is a public spending deficit that we have to remedy. We can't just allow that to hang over our economy indefinitely, requiring interest payments year on year which could be used so much more productively in other ways. So we don't deny the importance of the deficit. But what we argue strongly is that there is a better way of approaching the deficit reduction challenge than the way the government are going about it. And it's an alternative that's based on economic growth. Let's get real solid established growth in the economy, which we haven't got that at the moment, and as a part of that let's get people back to work. There are two and a half million people, eight per cent of the working population according to the official statistics, out of work and forced on to benefits rather than being able to contribute to the economy, to taxes and so on.

What points would you emphasise, to convince the sceptical, that public investment in public services is central to the restoration of growth and industry competitiveness?

Well our public services are vitally important. They are important to our social policy and rights and they are a big, big productive part of our economy. I get very angry when people talk about education, health services, our transport infrastructure as things of no benefit, as if these were things regarded as a cost, a drag on the economy. They are important to our economy and to our quality of life. So sustaining a solid, productive, public realm has to be a part of getting real recovery. The idea that you slash and burn health and public services and that's going to deliver salvation to our economic problem is just crazy.

The case against the government's public expenditure cuts includes the damage to public services, the unfairness of the cuts and the negative impact for the economy as a whole. What would you emphasise about these arguments?

Well there's no doubt that the cuts are going to hit the poorest and the weakest the hardest. I think independent commentators confirm that. All the evidence is overwhelming that that is the case. We know that the increase in VAT is a regressive move in the tax system. We much prefer to see measures that actually look to those who can afford to make a bigger and a better contribution than the increase in VAT, which hopefully the government will change. And as regards the spending cuts, our research shows that the lowest decile, the poorest ten per cent of the population, are hit 15 times harder than the top ten per cent because they rely more heavily on the services that are being cut. They suffer a real material hit because of the spending cuts, the poorest in the community. So it's deeply socially unjust.

We have to recognise that in a whole number of ways we have got to produce a different balance in our economy; a different balance between the financial sector, manufacturing and other parts of the economy, but also a different balance geographically. And again it is very clear that the poorest regions are going to be hit harder by the spending cuts than the wealthier parts of the country.

The impact of the damage to the public services will be much greater in poorer inner city areas, more reliant on the public sector for jobs and for the services they deliver too. The government's answer to that is to say 'well we have a regional growth fund, and that's a fund of about £1.4 billion to support economic regeneration projects in the regions'. The trouble is that is a third of the budgets that were previously available to the regional development agencies for funding and investing in regeneration. So yes we need to see active regional policies to counter some of the problems that different regions face, but that's not what the government has delivered.

The government has been criticised (for example, by the outgoing Director General of the CBI) for not having in place an economic growth strategy. Is that a fair assessment?

Well I think the government realised in the run up to the budget that the emphasis they had put on deficit reduction was leaving them extremely politically exposed. I mean we are not going to produce long term prosperity and the new balance in our economy that we need, simply by worrying about the deficit, important though that it is. So we began to see rhetoric about the importance of economic growth. We were told there was going to be a budget for growth. Indeed we were told there was going to be a white paper on growth. That has never appeared because when the Treasury and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and other parts of the government tried to look at what in practical terms they could point to as a growth strategy, frankly they realised that the cupboard was bare. So there is no credible strategy from the government to promote economic growth. They are simply focusing on the budget deficit. And that's going to make our economic problems worse not better.

What impact might we expect the proposed relaxation of unfair dismissal protection legislation to have on jobs, their quantity and quality?

We have the least regulated labour market amongst the advanced industrial economies by common acknowledgement and the idea that that's going to be an engine for growth, taking those protections away, there's not a single piece of evidence to support that.

It has been argued that public demonstration and mass rallies have limited impact on

government policy. What in your view has been achieved by the March 26th March for the Alternative?

Well one of the things that came through strongly on March 26th was a recognition that there's a huge argument here about the cuts and the approach to reducing the deficit, but behind that issue, there's actually a bigger issue as well, which is the government's vision of really shrinking the public realm, really changing the nature of our public services and welfare state. We see that most graphically perhaps in the reform of the health service with the idea at the heart of the Bill in Parliament at the moment of 'any willing provider' coming in to deliver different areas of current NHS services. In other words everything is up for grabs for the private sector. The same idea is around in every other area of public services too. In six or seven years' time we could see our public services looking really unrecognisable from what we have now. And I think people have realised that and as they do, I think that we are beginning to see signs of the government just taking half a step back in thinking. They are realising that they are really getting massively out of touch with the British public. I think our demonstration and our campaign has played a part in helping them take that half a step back and we're going to keep pushing until they start stepping back a little bit more.

How is the TUC's All Together for Public Services campaign to be continued, following the March for the Alternative in London on March 26th?

Well we always thought of the march really as one part of a broader longer-term campaign to really look to apply pressure on the government to change policy. One day in London, however impressive and important, is not a campaign it is only part of a campaign. And what do we see? Well in just about every town and city across the country we see local groups coming together, sometimes via their concerns for particular services, library closures, walk-in centres closing, changes to the support services that the elderly rely on, or leisure-centre facilities - the things that matter to people in their daily lives.

At one stage we were presented with a kind of theoretical proposition: "do we need the cuts? Oh yes, we need cuts?" Well they need to feel some pressure in their back yard. So a part of the campaign is about local activity of that kind. But beyond that we'll be campaigning very strongly on the implications for particular sectors. The government has announced a pause or listening period on the NHS reforms. Well we'll be pressing the Ministry very, very hard. We've been encouraging people up and down the country to press their MPs very, very hard, to say before you take the decisive step to put our NHS up for sale you had better start thinking quite how much that's going to attract massive opposition. So the campaign will be going on in all sorts of different ways and we're going to make the government see the opposition to the cuts in public services. ”

In conversation with Roger Mosey, BBC Director, Olympics

Interviewed by Dr John Neugebauer, Centre for Employment Studies Research, University of the West of England



With twelve months to go before the London 2012, attention now focuses on the preparation for the Games themselves, and how we will actually see them. For some, that will mean seats at the events themselves. But for many millions more, catching the thrills and drama of the Games will depend on what we see, hear and read through the media.

So many millions will depend on Roger Mosey's role as BBC Director for the Games and with it his responsibility for all the BBC's Olympics coverage on TV, radio, and digital media.

About Roger Mosey

After university Roger worked in local radio. His first job in network radio was on The Week in Westminster. He then moved to Today Programme as a producer and to the BBC's New York bureau, and became editor of PM in 1987. Roger was editor of Radio 4's The Today Programme from March 1993 until his appointment as Controller of BBC Radio Five Live at the beginning of 1997.

Under his editorship, the Today Programme won Sony Gold Awards in 1994 and 1995, a British Environment & Media Award, and was named Radio Programme of the Year by the Broadcasting Press Guild in 1995. BBC Radio Five Live was named the Sony National Radio Station of the Year 1998; and BBC Television News won a number of Royal Television Society awards for journalism - including Programme of the Year for Newsnight (2002) and the Ten O'Clock News (2004). The Ten O'Clock News also received BAFTA awards in both 2004 and 2005.

In talent development, Roger has introduced a number of 'household names' to wider national broadcasting. He recruited James Naughtie to join the Today broadcasting team and introduced Nicky Campbell, Victoria Derbyshire and Richard Littlejohn to Five Live. He brought Dermot Murnaghan and Natasha Kaplinsky to the BBC to present Breakfast. He is a Fellow of The Radio Academy.

“ Roger, it is almost a cliché to talk about 'unique career opportunities', but responsibility for the whole of the BBC broadcast output for the Olympics is surely a unique opportunity. Can you outline what your role will actually be?

The BBC sees 2012 as more than only the Olympics Coverage in the summer. In many ways 2012 will be an event in itself - for example, we also have the Queen's Diamond Jubilee that year. The Olympics are also more than the games during the summer, important as they are – the BBC will also be looking at Olympics events throughout the year, including the Olympic Torch Relay, the Cultural

Olympiad, and the games themselves which represent twenty six simultaneous world championships.

And how will you organise to undertake this role?

The BBC's Outside Broadcast Service will be a co-supplier for some of the Olympic Events for host broadcast feeds and then separate additional feeds as well.

So, we will be heavily reliant on large scale project and programme management. The Steering Group for all this will be chaired by Mark Thompson the Director-General. We see the Olympics as reputation-defining for the BBC as a public service broadcaster. The BBC has a pivotal role as the nation's public broadcasting service. We want broadcast output which reaches as many people as possible and is seen as providing higher quality broadcasting as well. This is important for us in its own right, but the benefits of providing high quality broadcasting for the Games will ripple into other BBC broadcasting too. For example, part of that comes from media output which may fall outside conventional BBC Sport coverage - such as the Twenty Twelve original comedy series.

In terms of your own background, how does a career path prepare you for a challenge like this?

It's difficult to answer this question, because the position is, in so many ways, unique. My earlier roles in political broadcasting are really valuable here – especially in balancing the needs of key stakeholders, such as the International Olympics Committee, LOCOG, (The London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games) and the Office of the Mayor of London – although they are all working in the same direction, they do have diverse needs, and navigating a way through different stakeholders' needs is therefore very important.

What do you see as the key leadership and management skills which you and your top

team need to deliver successfully?

Yes, this is a big leadership role. At its simplest it is about being the cheer leader for the Olympics within the BBC and in defining editorial policy for the Games. But underlying this is a bigger single theme which is about demonstrating the importance and excellence of the BBC in public services broadcasting – 2012 will absolutely show this. BBC levels of engagement with the Olympics are strong right across the nation, even in regions and areas which may not have direct programming on the Games. At grass roots level within the BBC, many people are coming up with very creative ideas on how to produce programming linked around the Olympics/2012 themes. But the leadership challenge in this is not just to produce creative material, but programming which is also viable.

And what is your own leadership style?

In this role, leadership is very much part of the day job. You do need to be politically astute, approachable, and able to work with a range of stakeholders. But you cannot afford to be approachable if that just leads to inefficiency or ineffectiveness. So it is important to know and understand where the balance and critical mass of BBC decision-making will come from.

Your role affects many stakeholders – many with competing needs – how do you balance these in practice?

Of course, project and programme management are important here – but in the end they cannot replace the need for good editorial judgment – so here are guiding principle is RQIV – Reach, Quality, Impact and Value.

So, really knowing about how the BBC works and who to approach are really important. For example, the disaster would be to engage the huge amount of creative ability we have but without any real focus

Similarly, you are having to plan resource allocation – both people and equipment – as event plans and information themselves are still emerging – what challenges does this give you and your team?

In terms of people planning, there is workforce planning across the BBC and this means working very closely with our HR Business Partner. Additional stretch for us is that the Olympics will be happening during the holiday season, as well as in the year after BBC Sport's relocation to Salford. And technical resources will be used to full capacity too, not only within the BBC, but also with our outside partner services

So from an editorial perspective, just how do you prioritise resource and media output?

We take our editorial position very seriously – not only as a public service broadcaster, but also in the quality and reach of audience, and the media through which we provide

them with content. And on an editorial framework we have five Editorial Themes. The first of these is bringing the nation together through Events – ensuring that the BBC engages with the widest possible range of audience, encouraging participation, and looking for long term benefits; the second is Sports, for what will be the biggest ever sports event held in the UK ; third is News; fourth is Digital from which the BBC will support digital innovation and offer broadcasting output through an unprecedented range of choice and personalisation; and the fifth Legacy – so not the Olympics alone, but all the great things happening in 2012 including the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Cultural Olympiad; and the Olympic Torch Relay.

The BBC is renowned for quality but also has to manage in a strong value framework as well. The people resource for the Olympics broadcast will cover both permanent and contracts staff – how do you manage quality and values over such a wide range?

The team we have running Olympics coverage across the various broadcasting genres within Sport and News is very strong and experienced. We will also have contracted people working for us. Here, we must never be complacent, but I am confident that through excellent team leadership, and business continuity planning, both the quality and the values of what the BBC stands for will be very apparent in 2012 coverage.

And finally, I'd like to ask you about BBC talent. You have been credited with bringing some household names into BBC broadcasting. To what extent does resourcing of broadcast talent differ in any way from management talent development in a field such as your current role?

In many ways, they are very similar – on screen or off screen, it is the need for 100% belief in engaging the best talent.

So, identifying who is 'talent' is to some extent intuitive. On screen, there are few objective tests to apply. For this talent, it cannot be about points scoring alone – we cannot have balanced broadcasting with – say- three presenters who look and sound alike. In broadcasting, you really need to provide texture for the presentation team. We need iconic faces and personalities, and with great people backing them up off screen.

But more generally, talent management is about judgment – and we need to debunk it from sounding more than this. For example, we took the decision many years ago on 5 Live to move Nicky Campbell to wider audiences and this has been successful in ways which have really exceeded our expectations. In many ways, that same need to have a diversity of skills and approaches is also true in the management team – diversity leads to a team balanced with great skills.



Emma Parry and Shaun Tyson, (2010) Managing an Age Diverse Workforce, Palgrave Macmillan

Reviewed by Dr John Neugebauer, Centre for Employment Studies Research,
University of the West of England

Managing an
Age-Diverse
Workforce

Age diversity remains relatively new as a topic within employment studies. The term 'ageism' is itself often attributed to Butler (1975:35) who conceived of it as 'a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this for colour and gender'. The USA first introduced age discrimination in employment some forty years ago, and abolished a mandatory retirement age in the late 1980s. Europe responded with a variety of Council Resolutions since 1994 with Council Directive 2000/78 determining that all European Community States should pass legislation by 2006 to protect all workers - younger as well as older - from discrimination on the grounds of age.

Having previously used voluntary codes of practice to prevent workplace ageism, the UK just met the European Directive deadline with the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, which were then incorporated into the Equality Act 2010. Even so, ageism in the labour market remains problematic. With UK unemployment at 7.8% in February 2011 (ONS 2011a), those in the 16-24 year age band and those age 50 and above are more likely than those in the 25-50 age band to be unemployed and for those age 50 and above, once they are unemployed, tend to be unemployed for longer than for other age groups (ONS 2011b, Section 9). At the same time, UK experience has seen the number of age-related cases submitted to Employment Tribunals rise from 972 in 2006, to 5,200 in 2009-10, and now represent 6.9% of all UK discrimination cases (Employment Tribunal Services Annual Reports, 2006 to 2010). And age discrimination is not a single issue: there is evidence (and recent publicity through Employment Tribunal cases such as O'Reilly v BBC) that women suffer from age discrimination at a younger age than for men – the so-called discrimination in combination referred to in the 2010 Equality Act, or double jeopardy (de Beauvoir 1972 and others) or intersectionality (a concept developed in the setting of employment notably by Acker 2006; Bradley 2007; Bradley and Healey 2008; Walby 2007, 2009; Durbin and Conley 2010).

Parry and Tyson's new edited collection on age diversity in the workplace provides valuable further insight into what is still a relatively new area of research in the workplace. As the editors make clear in their introduction, it is important to look beyond merely the legislative implications of workplace age diversity. So the book draws together chapters from a wide range of UK and international researchers. In doing so, it considers age diversity from five different perspectives: The Importance of Age Diversity; The Nature of Age and Age Diversity; the Employee's Perspective; The Employer's Perspective; and Managing an Age-Diverse Workforce Across National Contexts.

The Importance of Age Diversity

In the first chapter, Buttigieg looks at the business case for age diversity, and restates the arguments in terms of longer working lives, and the economic and social imperatives for enabling – though not requiring – older workers to stay in employment longer. Ironically, the economic recession does, however, reinforce other writers' (for example, Noon 2007) critique of the 'business case' so that diversity needs to be part of a broader social justice agenda.

A concluding chapter on the impact of age discrimination from Herring notes that trying to stop discrimination within the workplace through legislation alone is 'unlikely on its own to effectively combat the impact of [workplace] ageism in older people' (p.39). Instead, Herring argues for a higher level of respect to be paid to the dignity of older workers.

The Nature of Age and Age Diversity

Riach explores the arguments for age diversity and how age research may differ from other equal opportunities research. Carrying with it the observation that, if we have strong views on what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviours based on age in society as a whole, we are surely likely to take those views into the workplace. Therefore age equality policies must take account of the social forces which may be external to the organisation, but are nevertheless brought into the organisation by employee beliefs and behaviours.

In the same section, Loretto and Vickerstaff consider the relationship between age and gender. They conclude that the older work force is both gendered as well as aged, but that gendered ageism is under-researched (and that separate considerations may apply to men and to women), with older women representing untapped potential – indeed marginalised and invisible (p.79). By this, Loretto and Vickerstaff see older women as an important, but

under-used part of the current and future workforce. However, the nature of gendered ageism towards women has tended to leave them marginalised. The authors conclude by questioning whether human resource management policy can ever be 'objective', leaving accepted 'good practice' as 'merely rationalising and reinforcing gender and age divisions in the workforce'.

The section continues with a chapter from Pitt-Catsoupes *et al.* on managing age diversity in the 21st Century workplace. The chapter examines what the authors describe as 'the prism of age' and the extent to which managers may seek to use this (or be confused by it) in age based diversity practices. The 'prism' is a metaphor for multiple constructions of age. These constructions include; socio-emotional age (addressing different stages of adult development and work-related transition and experiences); subjective age ('you are as old as you feel'); social age (how others perceive your age); relative age (relative to others in the workgroup or social setting), and so on. The 'prism' is intended to enable managers to see and understand that concepts of age go well beyond chronological age (a person's date of birth). Of course, this begs the question of how far managers have the interest, and the willingness, to interpret and apply this level of analysis to workplace diversity.

In the final chapter of the section, Parry and Urwin analyse the extent to which practitioners may see 'generation' – for example, the Baby Boomer, Generation X, Generation Y – as having defining characteristics of the workforce. Critically analysing the predominantly practitioner literature in this area, they question both the underlying concept, what criteria should be used, if indeed any, to define generation bands, and the extent to which national contexts may also contribute to generational cohort differences.

The Employee's Perspective

The section starts with a chapter from Carmichael *et al.* on the experiences and perceptions of older workers, based on qualitative research. This considered the sources of ageist stereotypes both in employed and unemployed older people with negative self-perception, and negative perceptions rather than focusing on the potential contributions of older workers.

Brown-Wilson's following chapter on motivation and barriers to fulfilment in older workers emphasised the importance of career contexts as much as individual career choice *per se*, and the need for renewed attention to the needs and aspirations of older workers as individuals.

In contrast to a tendency across the book to focus on age issues as affecting mainly older workers, Mayrhofer *et al.*'s chapter considered the career and future expectations of younger workers – in this case Masters students in international management. The chapter gave a different perspective on Parry and Urwin's earlier chapter on

generational differences in career aspirations: here, a preference for later opportunities and the importance of values were seen as critical, with a strong need for work feedback and therefore implications on how organisations attract and retain talent – indeed, only 49% of respondents were looking for a long term career with one organisation.

The Employer's Perspective On Managing an Age-Diverse Workforce

Black's chapter discusses practices which employers may adopt to extend working lives or retain older workers. Using qualitative research techniques, the chapter explores the implications of flexible working, reward, job design and learning.

Learning is the same theme for the second chapter in this section as Felstead considers the implications of formal and informal learning from three separate UK surveys and concludes that older workers tend to lack strong incentives for training, and so do need positive support from their managers to do this. All this is necessary to tap into the skills of older workers.

Finally, Harper reviews the importance of health in older workers, and, to the extent that work capacity may decline with age, argues that environmental modifications can accommodate much of this, so as to retain the wisdom and work experience which older workers can offer.

Managing an Age –Diverse Workforce Across National Contexts

Finally, separate chapters look at UK/German and US/ Japanese experiences. In the first, Muller-Camen *et al.* compare and contrast the UK and German experience – both covered by European Union policies on age. In both states, the authors note the existence of institutional ageism, although it is manifested in different ways. In Germany, older workers with their tendency to longer term job security and age based pay, tend to be seen as providing less value than their younger colleagues; whereas in the UK, older workers are seen more as a 'reserve army' and with shorter time horizons.

Looking at Japanese/USA experience, Higo and Lee found major cultural differences affecting attitudes towards older workers. In Japan, older workers tend to be better integrated into the workplace – not surprisingly since the Japanese society is expected to remain one of the oldest in the industrialised world. The authors conclude that whilst the global economic downturn may mean that policy and practice towards older workers may change, Japan can provide major lessons for other countries in age management in the workplace.

Conclusion

Many of the chapters in this book call on practitioners and managers to change the way they looked at workplace age, but did so on the basis of research-based chapters which many authors acknowledged required further review and study. It is difficult to think that practitioners will see this as a clear call to action on the value of older workers.

Even so, this volume provides an interesting and broad review of many of the issues in age diversity. Some of the chapters do, indeed, take our thinking forward on the issues in age diversity. But other chapters provide a summary of perspectives which have already been addressed in a range of literature. So there remains space for future updates to this edition, for example, to consider the issue of gender and 'dual combination' and intersectionality, younger workers, and the role of managers.

Whilst the needs of younger workers are mentioned in several chapters, the main thrust of the book is on older workers, and the volume would have benefited from an exploration of the needs of younger workers too.

Finally, there is also a wider agenda to look at the role of managers, and to explore in more detail how and why managers respond to age in the workplace as they do. The Department for Education and Employment (2000:7) noted that line managers and co-workers had a key role in determining the experiences of older workers, and despite the complexity of the relationship, attitudes of managers and supervisors had not been fully explored in research literature. More recently, Bond, Hollywood and Colgan (2009:39) noted in their research commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission on integration of employment practices on age, sexual orientation and religion or belief in the workplace that 'organisations felt that it was essential to have support from managers at the most senior levels in order to pursue an equalities agenda effectively'

The book will certainly contribute to the development of knowledge in the area of age discrimination. But truly tackling workplace ageism will require more understanding of managers' roles and behaviours.

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