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The Temporal Sensitivity of Enforced Accelerated Work Pace: A grounded theory building approach

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Abstract

This research explores how a large national UK government organisation copes with radical structural change over time and provides an insight into the temporal effects of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' on behaviour and receptivity within an organisational context. The stages of 'Acceptance', 'Reaction' and 'Withdrawal' capture the essence of the 'Coping Reflex Actions relating to Enforced Accelerated Work Pace', all sensitive to the effects of time. 'Temporal Sensitivity'; the duration of the changes to work patterns played a large part in the behavioural responses. The underlying logic of this research is grounded theory building, a general method that works well with qualitative data collection approaches and involves inducting insights from field based, case data (Glaser, 1998). A methodology discovered and developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), negating all others.

Keywords: Organisational Change, Organisational Behaviour, Accelerated Work Pace, Change Fatigue.

Introduction

Change justification and content are well researched, well rehearsed and very well accepted but the temporal and situational aspects of change have largely been ignored by the researchers of the past. Furthermore, there is a distinct absence of strong social science theorising about change receptivity linked to the pace and rate of change, a view well documented by Pettigrew et al., (2001). Whilst the nature of organisational change has generally been acknowledged as dynamic, empirical studies have approached it largely in a static way. Researchers have frequently used comparative cross-sectional 'snap-shot' methods to understand organisational change. Even when

granularity of time scales are introduced where different time frames reveal different things, change itself remains conceptualised as static and the same cross sectional 'snap-shot' method employed. In simple terms, change has been conceptualised in terms of structure rather than action; the emphasis has been on 'change' rather than 'changing' (Weick and Quinn, 1999; Amis et al., 2004). More recent research has also identified the lack of temporal sensitivity of past research into organisational change dynamics and has concluded that in complete contrast to the single snapshot methods historically adopted by researchers that temporality is an essential integral feature of organisational behaviour and as such should not be treated implicitly (Avital, 2000; Pettigrew et al., 2001).

Pacing and receptivity are analytically interdependent and alignable (Pettigrew et al., 2001) and there is no doubt that research into the pace of organisational change is important to revealing more about the dynamics of radical change programmes and that there is an obvious shortage of empirical research in this area with obvious gaps in the literature as a consequence (Pettigrew et al., 2001; Amis et al., 2004).

The Research Setting

The subject organisation is The Environment Agency (EA), a UK government organisation responsible for pollution control, regulation and improving the environment. Employing over 11,000 staff with an annual budget of £650 million the EA is spread across eight regions of England and Wales namely: Southern Region, Thames Region, South West Region, Midlands Region, Anglian Region, North West Region, North East Region and Wales.

Methodology

Grounded theory building was chosen over all other methods because of the project focus, that of looking at rarely explored phenomenon for which extant theory did not appear to be appropriate. In such situations, a grounded theory building approach is more likely to generate novel and accurate insights into the phenomenon under study rather than reliance on either past research or office bound thought experiments (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The primary instrument of data collection was the

unstructured interview, designed to elicit open-ended description of what is happening in terms of change behaviour, all supported by the interviewers own observations. Informal observations, impressions and comments at each visit, particularly at informal meeting points such as lunchtime and coffee breaks were recorded in the form of hand written notes.

Purposive sampling initially recruited 24 participants. The participants were identified as those being subjected to the greatest levels of change and were chosen from a group of individuals who had recently been identified in a parallel, non-related study. The researcher conducted interviews during several site visits at four area offices. Other data used to ground the theory included data derived from past research which was conducted recently at the organisation, investigating organisational performance, attitudes and beliefs. Category refinement provided more depth in specific areas leading to the process of theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling triggered a further 40 interviews continuing the process of abstraction and integration to the point of saturation.

The interviews were not taped but unobtrusive contemporaneous notes were taken, as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1998). Field notes were generated immediately after the interview to underpin the basic notes generated in the interview itself. The notes were transcribed and subsequently coded. This time the data collected and the subsequent coding were more selective, allowing integration and abstraction to develop freely without the incumbency of non-relevance. A number of the respondents were interviewed again three months after their first interview and again three months after that. The purpose was to see if time had affected the respondent's perception of the change process; focusing on the main themes that had emerged in their first interviews.

The Coping Reflex Stages of Enforced Accelerated Work Pace

In this section there is a detailed account of the grounded theory analysis, focusing on the key categories and their underlying concepts and relationships, ultimately leading discussions onto theoretical conceptualisation of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' and the dynamics of 'Temporal Sensitivity'.

Despite the number of themes that emerged at the start of the substantive coding process, as the incidents were compared and theoretical coding took over, it became clear that the main concerns amongst the EA staff was that of increased workloads and an increase in weekly working hours. Respondents continually cited this as the main hurdle that stood between them enjoying work and just, as they saw it turning up for work and going through the motions without real interest or commitment. Theoretical sensitivity led to the researcher hypothesising that the main problem in reality was the aggressive nature in which work pace was continually accelerated, leaving participants with the sense that they have no choice; either increase weekly hours or fall behind and run the risk of standing out as being incapable or even incompetent. The important factor here was that the increase in the working week in respect of contributed hours was perceived as being obligatory; enforced upon them rather than volunteered making more to become sensitised to contributing more than their contractual obligations. 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' embodies the quintessential meaning of the emergent problem. Identifying the problem in this way, drawing on all of its properties, linked to how participant's actions and behaviour handle and cope with the problem form the basis for theory development.

The Problem

The impact an organisation can exert on its members depends heavily on the importance of its goals, the demands put on the individual, and on the sanctions and rewards. 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' is the term used in this paper to describe changes to work patterns. It connotes a change to participant attitudes and beliefs as a consequence of the changes to work pace during the implementation phase compared to that of the pre-change period. It also relates particularly to the strength of the pressure exerted on individuals, within the organisation to keep up with the change process. This is not always easy, radical change implies that everyone within the organisation will be affected by the change programme to the same degree; in reality it affects some areas of the organisation more than others. The human resource department for example suffered very little change compared to those in the regional area teams. The Information Technology (IT) department found that they were in

a continual flux of change because of technological improvements and advances synonymous with their profession. This is not unusual, other researchers have identified in their research that they found incremental change in some parts of the organisation and radical change in others (Child and Smith, 1987; Pettigrew et al., 1994).

Identified as the main concern amongst participants, 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' was deemed sensitive to the effects of time. The temporal sensitivity relates closely to how the individuals resolve the problem. The core variable; the way individuals resolve their problems shifted, dependent upon the temporal stages of the change process. The temporal effects of this condition emerged with very specific behaviour patterns formed by the way that participants manage or cope with the condition. These patterns can be broken down to three very specific, demonstrable stages and will be discussed in detail.

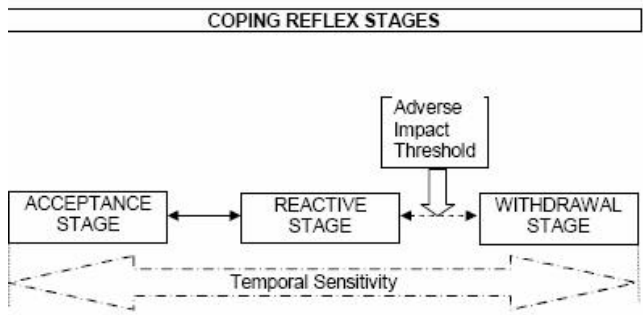
The Coping Reflex Stages

Coping reflex stages of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' captures the essence of the three stage response behaviour that emerged in the substantive area. The term reflex creates a vision that some of the actions occur subconsciously; an involuntary response to events that ensures the individuals survival within the organisation as well as maintaining their own psychological wellbeing. The term sets the action apart from one that is calculated and deliberate to cope with a situation that is unnatural; being forced, due to circumstance, to work at a pace beyond one's ability. The three very distinct behaviour patterns referred to above are all sensitive to the effects of time on receptivity. The first stage was that of 'Acceptance' leading onto the 'Reactive' stage and ultimately to 'Withdrawal'. The diagram below provides a visual of the theoretical connections. The substance of the connections in the theory is written in the subsequent body of text.

Figure 1 (below) shows all the stages that were identified during the course of the research. Shown as a linear schema it suggests that there is a linear order to the sequence of events in relation to time. This would certainly appear to be the case (albeit the sequences should not be considered uni-directional). It's important to point out that not all respondents progressed through every stage of the model. Some only progressed to the

first or second stage; some passed the early stages at break neck speed creating the impression of entering the sequence at later stages, missing out some of the earlier behaviour traits, whilst others undoubtedly progressed through every single stage at a much slower pace. It's equally important to point out that whilst some respondents had reached the middle stages of the schema the data suggests that some actually reverted back to the preceding stages over the course of the research.

Figure 1 Response Stages of Enforced Accelerated Work Pace



This reverse trend was indeed attributed to the participant's perceived reduction in workload and consequential work pace that occurred at the time of the reversal. The emphasis here is that the model should be interpreted as bi-directional rather than single direction. The movement and duration between one stage and another is dependent upon the amount of pressure exerted and the time-frame over which it was exerted. Suffice to say, behaviour traits changed at different rates for different individuals, dependent upon individual resistance and tolerances to the levels of pressure, workload and change. Nevertheless the model identifies all the stages encountered in this research; it shows the complete life cycle in terms of the behaviour that was displayed by individuals faced with enforced accelerated work. It is important to note that the problem is not inextricably linked to change but rather the pace of work that came out of the change process. It has been linked in this instance to change because of the extra work and time pressure that radical change invariably brings. It is believed that the coping reflex stages of accelerated work pace is a reaction that could result from any project that has tight time constraints without adequate resources to do the work

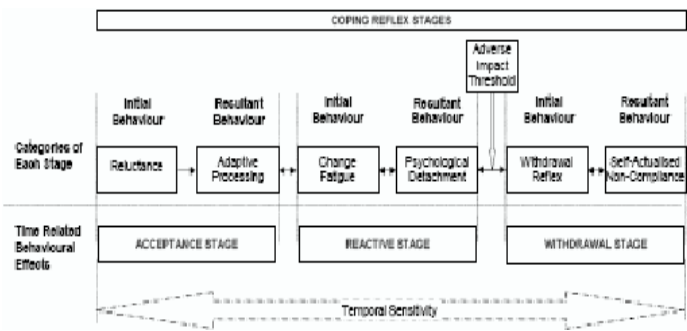
in the specified time frame; a trend that is only too common in modern organisations today (Kodz et al., 2002; Bird, 2004).

The first stage of this theoretical framework is not exclusive to this research. The acceptance stage assumes that the stages of resistance, normally associated with major change (Coch and French, 1948; Scott and Jaffe, 1988; Beer et al., 1990; Kotter, 1995) have been overcome and participants are more willing to accept that it will happen irrespective of their negative stance or objections. However the greater the pressures of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' are placed on individuals the greater the possibility of a negative reaction, particularly when the pressures are sustained over longer periods. The dynamics appear to be complex with a large number of contributing factors; the amount of pressure exerted, the duration of the pressure exerted, the individual's susceptibility to increased pressure and external factors that may be being exerted on the individual such as the effects from their home life. Nevertheless this research showed that most individuals when faced with situations of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' will indeed reach a point that will result in a reaction in one form or another. For some this 'Reactive Stage' simply entailed complaining to colleagues and friends or even discussing the problem with line managers or team leaders. For others though, it meant applying themselves even harder to the task at hand, in an attempt to reach their self-imposed aims and objectives sooner ultimately to return to the steady state of equilibrium. By way of self preservation, the strongest reaction by far was that of complete withdrawal; completely withdrawing voluntary support for the change altogether and imposing a work to rule mentality. For most this regress point (termed the Adverse Impact Threshold) occurred as the organisation forced further increases in work pace at the point when the individual is already demonstrating behaviour that is consistent with the latter stages of the reactive phase. This excessive pressure, workload and pace combined with the element of time forces withdrawal, causing individuals to reduce their working week back to contracted hours. Strangely enough, for a large proportion of those who reach withdrawal, there is another step. A short break from excessive hours showed some reversal to the withdrawal trend. Not back to the reactive stage as expected. This research showed that they were still in fact contributing high levels of additional hours. This denial was justified in their minds because the extra time was not recorded on their official

time keeping records, it was work conducted mostly at home. Further justification was given as the type of work that was carried out at home i.e. reading or planning (classed in their eyes as ‘not being real work’)

The Figure above can be expanded further to show not only the behavioural effects (process stages), of the ‘Temporal Sensitivity’ of ‘Enforced Accelerated Work Pace’ but also their unique properties, the sub-categories that have emerged under the main category during the course of the investigation. This results in a three stage, two-tiered model.

Figure 2 Stages and Categories of Enforced Accelerated Work Pace



Each of the three stages comprise of two contributing subcategory. Each category relates to the response behavioural patterns that emerged in the participants’ stories, all sensitive to the levels and duration of accelerated work pace.

Acceptance Stage

The properties of (a) Reluctance and (b) Adaptive Processing are integral to the Acceptance Stage. Both properties are sensitive to the effects of workload, work pace and time.

Reluctance - This was the initial coping behaviour that came out of ‘Enforced Accelerated Work Pace’, in this case it was the result of a radical change programme. The coping reflex stage identified here as reluctance symbolises the actor’s reluctance to move forward too quickly without having sufficient time to adapt and fully accept the inevitability. It has been well documented (Scott and Jaffe, 1988; Rashford and Coghlan, 1989; Clarke, 1994;

Nortier, 1995) that some individuals faced with change often go through a traumatic process of shock then denial before acknowledgment and acceptance. It has also become expected that change will be met with resistance. Fundamental change, in whatever form often triggers intense emotion (Bartunek, 1984) which in turn will affect how different groups interpret a proposed change and how they behave as a consequence.

In complete contrast this initiative saw an array of cognitive coping strategies; coping reflex stages that helped individuals to manage the change. The stimulation and motivation to accept or block change can come from a number of sources. Participants consider the impact of change on their working life as well as how it could affect their personal life, away from work, before they are satisfied that the change is right for them. Therefore change stimulus functions, that is, what occurs psychologically in response to a change stimulus (positive or negative) is fundamental to shaping attitudes and core beliefs. The most dominant change stimulus effecting participant attitudes and beliefs so early on in the process was that of 'Historical Grounding' and 'Social Positioning'.

Historically Grounding - Individuals use their experience of the past to decide on a course of action for the future. Historical grounders call on their experiences to determine the significance or relevance of resisting. Historical grounding will generally result in an indignant resignation by actors that it will happen irrespective of negative feelings. The core belief amongst participants in this research was that they had been through radical change programmes before which made very little difference to the way they worked. This was demonstrated by one respondent who said:

My feeling, looking back at the last radical change, was that there'll be a change within the wider organisation but it won't affect us very much and we will just carry on. So just get on with it. A little naughty, but based on the views of other people I work with, who have been here for thirty years and have probably been doing the same job through five different re-organisations you can understand why.

Taking cues from others in the organisation in this way is what Raffanti (2005) called the sizing up process. Shaped by historical grounding this research demonstrated very few signs of the shock or denial behaviour that has been reported by a number of researchers working in the field of organisational change. Nevertheless scepticism and mistrust from the employees about the likelihood of real change are significant if historically real change never happened, it would leave most reluctant to go through major disruption again. When history shows that change was just something to do about nothing it then becomes easy to understand how negative behaviour such as that of reluctance emerge, assimilated as yet another unnecessary change that would amount to nothing. This was borne out in a response from the very first interview:

I know that we've just got to get on with it, but I've got to admit I just felt puzzlement when I heard about the re-organisation because everybody seemed to be working very hard anyway and it was working well the way it was. I couldn't actually see the justification for it, despite the messages from above.

I'm certainly not opposed to change if you can see a clear business case but it just seemed to be yet another change just for the sake of change.

Others, particularly those in the IT department saw the change as secular; they felt that they were constantly changing anyway and that a change resulting from technological advances was the very nature and essence of the IT profession worldwide and not peculiar to the EA.

Social Positioning – Most actors don't just consider the outcome of the change as simply emerging at the other end with a new role in the new structure. Many consider how the change might affect their status within the organisation. Some consider the loss or the potential loss of pay within the new structure as important. Others consider the changes to their job grade and the loss of status within the organisation along with the loss of control that this could bring, as more important. Maintaining ones grade and control within the new structure is not always enough. New structures could affect career paths and progression leaving one unable to develop further thus stymieing earning

potential. Ultimately social positioners consider the change from their own personal perspective; how would it affect them and not necessarily how it affects colleagues or team members.

Most participants considered the timescales of the implementation to have a decided effect on the work pace that was consequently imposed on them. Increased work pace can have a positive effect, forcing people to evaluate and accept the situation quickly and move on with a common purpose and aim. With others it could have a negative effect causing a reluctance to move forward.

The term reluctance was used in this instance to differentiate between the more radical resistant state normally associated with the early stages of the change implementation process. Resistance implies a totally negative response from all involved. This did not appear to be the case at the subject organisation; participants simply felt protective, they wanted to secure their own future by securing the future of the organisation; they failed to see the reasons or justification for the large scale disruption that they knew accompanied radical change programmes. This research calls into question the use of the resistance terminology used by so many to describe the initial response behaviour of change initiatives. It is not so much that the statement appears wrong; simply that it is over-generalised and in many cases inaccurate. Either way, how organisations attend to an extensive range of employees' emotions could facilitate or hinder the progress of ambitious change (Huy, 1999).

The reasons for resistance or the methods for breaking down resistance to create a general acceptance for change have formed the basis for many research projects (Coch and French, 1948; Beer et al., 1990; Kotter, 1995). This project goes beyond the acceptance stage to investigate the effects of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' on individual behaviour. Above all the study presents a powerful insight into the effects of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' over time.

Adaptive Processing – The initial reluctance behaviour rapidly changed to adaptive processing. This is how individuals synthesise the information around them to adjust their cognitive coping behaviour to deal with the changing environment. Initially participants feel that the extra work and increased pace is necessary to effect sustainable change. Participants' stories

demonstrated that they are willing to work the increased workloads, increases in work pace and even an increase in working hours to stay abreast of the change process.

Both external and internal stimuli and its relationship with time affect the core attitudes and beliefs. The organisations core attitudes and beliefs are constantly evolving and modified, changing over time. They are all played out in their stories that demonstrated a supportive culture not just within individual departments but also across departments. Some individuals working in areas where the changes had little or marginal impact (in terms of workload and pace) demonstrated extra-role behaviour (Organ, 1988; Morrison and Phelps, 1999), they supported their less fortunate colleagues by picking up some of their tasks, albeit, as they saw it at the time, a temporary expedient. The most dominant change stimulus effecting participant attitudes and beliefs in this later part of the reluctance stage was that of 'Equilibrium Seeking' and 'Social Jockeying'.

Equilibrium Seeking – Once the change implementation process had picked up pace most participants sought routine in their daily lives. The psychological effect of returning to some sort of normality; to re-dress the balance, triggered by a surge of effort from all those involved. The uncomfortable situation of, not being exactly sure where job role boundaries started and finished, contributed to the surge to 'pull it all together'.

Social Jockeying – Combined with the new insurgence against negative feelings some saw the new positive spin as an opportunity to redress issues of social positioning. They saw this as their opportunity to progress within the organisation maybe even to gain promotion and move up within the ranks.

Adaptive processing therefore contains both elements of equilibrium seeking and social jockeying to allow individuals to adapt and change core beliefs and attitude to stay attuned and cope with this stage of the change.

Reactive Stage

The properties of (a) Change Fatigue and (b) Psychological Detachment are integral to the Reactive Stage. As with the Acceptance Stage the properties of this stage remain sensitive to the effects of workload, work pace and time.

Change Fatigue – This was the initial behaviour that was characteristic of the reactive stage. As the interviews were coded and compared it became clear that change fatigue, the original focus of this part of the investigation, was not emerging as a major category. Respondents were unfamiliar with the ‘change fatigue’ terminology and spoke more about a sense of weariness and tiredness to describe their feelings towards the new change initiative, complaining that they felt that there was a never ending barrage of change without, as they saw it, realistic aims and objectives, particularly in respect of the planned change timescales. Nevertheless, in the absence of a definition from the extant literature the theoretical coding process determined that there was a strong inference that the ‘weariness and tiredness’ categories were describing the same phenomenon. The perceptions of the individuals living the experience initially suggested the phenomenon simply described weariness due to the lack of rest and from being unsettled; a result of the change. However, theorising refocused attention on ‘Enforced Accelerated Work Pace’ as the main cause of ‘change fatigue’ where ‘weariness’ became an effective property of this category.

Fatigue in this sense is not just simply a tiredness or weariness feeling due to workload or work pace that can be relieved by rest; it is a negative psychological effect with debilitating consequences. This transient state, categorised by signs of participant discomfort, loss of efficiency and a lack of response to stimulus indicates the integration and consistency of core attitudes and beliefs for those involved.

Whilst the negative psychological effects are fundamental to this research, it's important to note that it cannot be assumed that increase job demands and the resultant increases in work pace are always classed as barriers to positive change stimulus and that they necessarily always lead to dissatisfaction, even if they are perceived as high. The mere mention of fatigue in this context implies that all change response behaviour is negative. This may not always be the case. In a recent study Van Yperin and Janssen argued (2002) that an individuals goal orientation may explain why some employees feel fatigued but satisfied with their jobs when faced with heavy workloads, whereas others perceptions of high job demands are related to both fatigue and dissatisfaction. The important difference here is that this research has not considered fatigue on a superficial level; it is a

condition that is more than just a feeling of tiredness or weariness with the potential, if not redressed properly of leading to the more serious condition recognised as occupational stress.

As the pace continues to accelerate the sense of fatigue heightens and participants become more and more aware of the debilitating impact of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace'. Their natural reaction is to find ways to overcome the effects.

Hurdling – Whilst the change appeared to be accepted with very few signs of resistance before and at the early stages of the implementation phase, opinions and behaviour for some individuals changed as fatigue and weariness took hold. Some respondents felt that timescales were unrealistic; that their new job roles were poorly defined; the clarity of communication was poor; and management's ability to manage change effectively was called into question.

Change fatigue is a popular but vague concept used by a number of commentators (Buchanan et al., 1999; Abrahamson, 2000; Buchanan and Doyle, 2001) to describe the effects of initiative overload, change related stress, frustration, cynicism and burnout that some individuals feel when faced with one organisational change programme after another. There is a general acceptance of what the terminology means without any real attempt to define the terminology in any specific context. Using this research as the main point of reference, it was felt appropriate to promote a greater understanding of what is meant by 'change fatigue' by way of a definition.

Change Fatigue can be described as:

The diminished reaction to stimulus or the complete inability of an individual to work normally and efficiently caused by weariness for further change, brought on by prolonged, high levels of change related enforced accelerated work pace.

Hurdling is an array of cognitive behaviour traits that seek solutions to the discomfort and fatigue feelings; to find ways of returning to efficient working. Individuals will find an array of ingenious reasons for not being able to start or even to progress change related tasks, in many cases looking for others within and external to the organisation to blame. The emerging insight

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linked fatigue to poorly managed change rather than just the levels or indeed the type of change as was originally expected.

This response is characteristic of the feelings towards management:

The change milestones are never met. When are we going to get the new job role descriptions? When are we going to see the new structures? When do I have to apply for my job? When are the interviews? When do we get the new job offers? The problem is that they are very erratic and they don't stick to the programme dates. So you think right, in May I'm going to find out what the jobs are going to be and then they say it will be June which then slips to July, which is very stressful because everything gets concentrated into a much smaller time frame and you still don't know where you stand at the end of it all....It gets to the point where it simply becomes monotonous and tiring.

It would appear that whilst the key start dates slipped back again and again there was never any movement to the end date, forcing the original change programme into a smaller time frame. Constrained implementation timescales and the consequential increases in work pace was by far the biggest concern amongst the employees at the subject organisation. Other 'hurdling behaviour' entails glossing over tasks to tick the appropriate "task completed" box. The perception here was that if there isn't enough time to do all the tasks properly by the specified deadline dates then something will suffer as a result.

The second set of interviews conducted three months after the first showed further increases in change stimulus barriers. Some individuals cited poorly defined work boundaries as the main cause, particularly those who undertook certain tasks to help support colleagues seemingly under more pressure, found that they had been lumbered with the task permanently. Further resentment and cynicism started to appear when individuals found themselves reworking supposedly completed tasks or rushing to complete important tasks that had initially been completely overlooked, mainly, as they perceive it, as a result of change mismanagement.

Psychological Detachment – As time passed¹ with the increase in pressured accelerated work pace the core belief amongst participants changed, eventually reaching detachment. Detachment, in this sense has dual meaning. On the one hand it is the intuitive awareness (the feeling of being detached) on the other hand it is the process action (the action of detachment).

Intuitive Awareness – A product of feeling rather than a deliberate judgement coupled with a consciousness of ones surroundings; the psychological state of no longer feeling involved; being pushed aside; no longer feeling part of the process.

Process Action – This is the physical action of detachment; a response action to the change stimulus which could either be categorised as an automatic or purposive response. An automatic response is an individual's unconscious, innate ability to survive; a mechanism by which one copes with 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace', played out in the form of some participants drawing away from the change activities, only taking on tasks that demonstrates compliance to organisational requirements; that of taking on tasks of the position for which they were originally employed. This rebuttal of change activities can be likened to an adventurer in the wilderness who lights a camp fire to keep warm; if he gets too warm his unconscious response is to move away from the fire to a point that is more suited to his comfort requirements. A purposive response is the very conscious effort of an individual to build artificial barriers to safeguard and protect ones own wellbeing. In this case the detachment behaviour relates to individuals purposely making themselves unavailable for progress meetings, scheduling meetings and certain project meetings to avoid incurring further workloads and to avoid owning up to not meeting deadlines set at earlier meetings. Strangely, this reaction was not restricted to the lower grade workers; it also came from team leaders and middle managers alike, indicating that the 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' was driven from top management, down.

In an attempt to further understand 'detachment', interviewee questioning moved to discussing employee commitment and that of the psychological contract. Some of the statements below helped to develop clearer perspectives on detachment:

Their original promises have not materialised. This chaos is continuing far too long and now I feel completely out on a limb...Isolated, if you follow... which may sound strange, considering I work in a team. I haven't got the same commitment anymore. I can't decide whether that's my own fault...you know...an element of disinterest, or simply that I am punch drunk.....but I do feel out of sorts..... I have got to the stage where I no longer feel a part of all of this. It's my own professional pride that's keeping me going at the moment.

What you've got here is a really committed workforce.....they are committed to protecting the environment and they are abused; the management and the system abuse them, they know people really care about the environment and we're not here for the pay and they abuse the situation. Especially post initiative....I'm afraid it's not going to last....there's already too many who feel that they are no longer really involved, who feel that they have been pushed out. Personally I think it's more of a desire not to be involved.

Psychological contracts are based on information available to individuals regarding their organisation, their work groups, and their motives. Such contracts are composites of individual and organisational factors, as interpreted by individual contract holders. Individual factors make each psychological contract potentially unique. However when a contract is shared, its nature and meaning may shift. Normative contracts occur when several people (colleagues and co-workers) agree on the terms in their individual contracts (Rousseau, 1995). Rousseau (1995) suggests that there are fundamental questions that need consideration when interpreting psychological contracts. Particularly in the sense of what they consider as promises. Primarily, what leads employees to interpret organisational actions as promissory? He continues to say that the legitimacy of the promise maker in conveying commitments affects his or her credibility. An influential supervisor is likely to make commitments that are more readily relied on than those made by a boss who is believed

to have little influence. The 'normative contract' based on the interviewee statements, presented above shows that the encoded messages presented in the pre-change management rhetoric have clearly, in their minds not been met. The common belief was that individual contribution and commitment would force the change through quickly.

The key feature of a commitment-signalling event involves some sort of punctuation or break between what was and what is to come. As time progressed, a large portion of the change participants felt that whilst they met their side of the contract the organisation failed on their commitment. The signal that their commitment was coming to an end would have been the stabilisation of work load and that of work pace however, most believe that work pace and work loads were, in fact still escalating.

Adverse Impact Threshold – This was the transitional phase between the reactive stage and the withdrawal stage. The principal property integral to this stage was the property of submission. As with all the earlier stages the property of this stage remains sensitive to the effects of workload, work pace and time.

Submission - The property of submission is used to describe a participant's ultimate reaction to prolonged 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' and prolonged psychological detachment. Participants feel that they have no more to offer, materialising as a 'couldn't care less' attitude. This is demonstrated in some of the participant's responses in the latter stages of the change programme:

This can't be allowed to carry on.....I'm not going to allow this situation to continue....I love working at the Agency but I think they are asking too much of us all.

There's only so much of this we can realistically take before something gives. My friend describes us all as lemmings sitting on the edge of a parapet waiting for the first one to jump.....in time we're all going over the edge.

They are getting away with this at the moment.....but if you think about it, if you rev an

engine at full revs eventually you will run out of petrol worse still the engine wears out.....We can't keep this pace up... eventually we'll all give up the fight.

The complexity, disorganisation and frustration are all natural aspects and normal features of organisational life, which can have severe psychological consequences (Huy, 1999; Mullins, 1999; Wanberg and Banas, 2000; Bovey and Hede, 2001). Complicated organisational dynamics with respect to time, the levels of increased workload and the levels of work pace, along with the individual's ability to absorb such pressures means the exact point of the 'Adverse Impact' is difficult to determine. Suffice to say, everybody has a point at which attitudes and beliefs will change and no two individuals will react at the same point in time. Nevertheless, the 'Adverse Impact Threshold' and 'Submission' is just a short step after 'detachment'; an interim stage before reaching 'complete withdrawal'.

Some participants will simply remained detached whilst others expectations are far greater. By detaching themselves, not just internally (in their minds) but externally (by their actions), the hope is that it will trigger a reaction from the organisations management to redress the imbalance of work pace and work load against their contracted hours. That said, it was noted with this research that those managing to maintain some level of extra working (in the sense of pace and additional hours) for the longest periods were, in the main those individuals who had a relatively short service history at the subject organisation or individuals at the early stages of their career, who had not been through a major change programme such as this before i.e. those without any real historical grounding in which to base any judgement and those who had originated from a culture of well-organised continuous change.

This is not unusual, when managed properly continuous change doesn't appear to be a problem. Indeed it has become common place in some industrial sectors where continuous change is synonymous with the service and/or products they provide thereby adopting continuous and rapid change as an organisational culture (Tushman and Anderson, 1986; Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997; Brown and Eisenhardt, 1998). In this instance however, actors were willing to work at a faster pace and contribute additional time without the feeling of it being forced

upon them. Poorly managed change initiatives over sustained periods, on the other hand appear to result in negative responses from those involved creating an increased sense of fatigue. The most universal characteristic of continuous work is that, if it is sustained for a sufficient period of time, it shows a general falling off in the subject's efficiency. Commonly referred to as the 'general decrement' Robinson et. al's research (1924) shows that the accuracy or quality of work in many cases suffered a more marked decrement than the speed of work as the net result of several physiological factors all contributing to the concept of fatigue.

Withdrawal Stage

Still sensitive to the effects of workload, pace and time, the integral properties at this final stage of (a) Withdrawal Reflex and (b) Self-Actualised Non-Compliance are the ones that emerged the most dominant from the respondents' stories.

Withdrawal Reflex – Withdrawal Reflex can be described as a response stimulated by any unexpected threat to the well-being of the individual, characterised by the sudden movement away from the potentially damaging stimulus as a natural survival instinct (Corsini, 2002). The data shows that individuals who find that they have reached 'Detachment' very quickly move to the 'Adverse Impact Threshold' and withdraw voluntary support completely. When the increase in workload is considered to be too high because of constricted time scales, the pace is forced unnecessarily high to the point where participants feel it to be too disruptive. In many cases individuals forced to work at an increased work pace will not sustain the pace over long periods, they revert back to working contractual hours only. Withdrawal enables individuals to order some semblance into their lives and rationalise their own thought processes, ultimately having the feeling of taking back control.

Reflective Psychology is a pertinent feature of individuals taking back control. They consider the intended action in terms of the cause(s) that brought them to this point and the potential effect of the intended action. The self-questioning relates to how much the increased work pace was self imposed; self blame is one of the unusual but not uncommon behaviour traits of reflective psychology at this stage along with a reflection of how they see others coping with the same impositions. Reflecting on the effects

of withdrawal ranks high in the minds of those who reach this point. Typically actors contemplate the potential damage to their integrity, career and status before acting out the withdrawal.

Self Actualised Non-Compliance – Withdrawal reflex; the complete withdrawal of voluntary support is not the final response. Unexpectedly there are secondary behaviour traits that often emerge from withdrawal. Organisational culture invariably plays its part in shaping core beliefs. A strong work ethic and cultural commitment to maintain a professional approach and to overcome obstacles will undoubtedly refocus change participants attention and in some instances, regain support. This does not entail actors returning to one of the other stages, described above but moving to a new stage with completely different behaviour traits.

Some individuals outwardly convey the message that they are no longer willing to sacrifice personal time for the benefit of the organisation. In reality, this rarely happens, whilst the amount of extra time spent at work is reduced, they continue working more than their contracted hours, starting earlier in the morning, working through lunch breaks and taking work home, all in varying degrees. The sense of professional pride and obligation remains and in reality their non-compliance was self-actualised to the point of self denial. Denial, in this sense, can be described as the refusal to acknowledge an emotionally inducing event, feeling or memory (Freud, 1966).

Speaking about her concerns regarding the amount of her perceived contribution to the organisation one informant said,

If you're money orientated don't come and work for the Environment Agency – Most people at the Agency, or certainly the ones that I come in contact with, on a daily basis, do the job because they care about the environment, they consider it to be their vocation in life to conserve the earths natural resources for future generations. We feel quite privileged because we are doing a job that actually means something to us. What is the alternative, working on voluntary assignments for voluntary conservation organisations, but how would we live without a regular income.

She also stated that most people in the organisation have devoted their lives to conservation and the environment. Using her words, “you just have to look at peoples’ backgrounds to understand people’s devotion”.

Interestingly in this instance a review of interviewee qualifications showed that more than 90% held a degree or a higher degree in an environmental science or a natural science subject. Individuals with a strong academic background such as those at the Environment Agency are better equipped to cope with stressful situations and in general terms show a stronger commitment towards meeting project aims and objectives compared to those with a non-academic background. Whilst not part of this paper the influence of academic achievement would be a worthwhile topic for future research and papers. The influence of academic backgrounds and commitment to see projects through has been the subject of debate by other researchers of the past (Cartwright and Cooper, 2002; Carson et al., 2005).

It was considered the commitment to their profession (rather than the organisation), high academic achievement and the supportive work culture that triggered self actualised non-compliance behaviour. On the one hand respondents felt duty bound to support their colleagues yet the need to take back some control on the other. This control was played out by refusing to work extra hours (at the office).

Temporal Sensitivity of Enforced Accelerated Work Pace

There is a great emphasis here, placed on the temporal effects of the ‘Enforced Accelerated Work Pace’. Temporal sensitivity means, certainly in this context, the duration of the intense pressure exerted on staff to maintain the work pace levels. It also refers to the changes to work patterns which became necessary to effect change and which played a big part in the behavioural responses. Changes to the work pace for relatively short durations didn’t appear to have an effect, indeed to maintain the work rate most individuals were willing to (voluntarily) contribute extra hours at work even though they didn’t get paid for out of hours working. Willing participants started with the core belief that ‘accelerated work pace’ was necessary for sustainable change and for the secure future of the

organisation, which transcends normal work patterns. However those individuals encountering 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' for longer periods particularly when the acceleration was the result of mismanaged change exhibited a more severe response.

Research Limitations

The contribution of this study must be considered in light of its limitations. The use of grounded theory was certainly instrumental in interpreting the complexity of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace'. Although this study provides a useful step forward towards understanding the effects of pace; its relationship with time and its impact on participants of change it is important to recognise that the research design focused on a single organisation. Extending the research to other environments will help to establish the formal theory of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace'. Such usage will determine its wider value to this area of study and provide valuable information for possible improvements.

It would also be beneficial to develop further perspectives on the Adverse Impact Threshold. Is there a level of accelerated work pace at which there is very little chance of change fatigue developing? Are the feelings of change fatigue more acute and more prevalent at the subject organisation because of its history of continuous change interspersed with periods of radical change or would the results be the same for organisations with a less disruptive past? Would the results be any different in organisations in the private sector with a similar background of disruptive change?

Conclusion and Future Research

The theoretical framework in this paper matches the qualifications conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Primarily it fits the substantive area of study. The concepts and themes are all central, intimately related to and emergent from 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace'. Furthermore, the resultant theoretical framework is sufficiently general to be applicable to a range of organisational change implementation situations. More importantly, from a grounded theory perspective it is readily understandable by academics and practitioners alike and should accordingly serve to be useful direction in change management designs.

On a theoretical level, empirical validation and elaboration of concepts and framework in other environments² is essential. The theoretical framework was produced by examination of 4 area offices in the same organisation, albeit the examination was an in depth study. Further empirical grounding and comparisons will serve to strengthen and enrich the concepts and framework generated herein, and renders a more involved understanding of the phenomenon.

Amis et al. (2004) in their research argued the benefits of forcing the pace to complete the change as quickly as possible. They cite Miller and Chen (1994) and their work on overcoming inertia arguing that forcing the pace creates the momentum necessary complete the change successfully. Other commentators have argued that indiscriminate rapid change across an organisation is not the appropriate method for engaging in large scale radical change (Child and Smith, 1987; Pettigrew et al., 1994).

Management research usually focuses on the technical elements of change with a tendency to neglect the equally important human element which is often crucial to the successful implementation of change (Steier, 1989; Tessler, 1989; Huston, 1992). This research has purposely focused on the human elements as a consequence of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace'. That said the 'Temporal Sensitivity' that greatly influences this state presents some challenging propositions for change agencies and managers with a number of implications for the practice of organisational change implementation. In particular: the framework provides a useful resource for enhancing the understanding of complex work pace dynamics. It supports the argument for slowing the change down to monotonic levels, if the desired effect is sustainable change. Furthermore, where the radical change requires a combination of a number of initiatives to affect the desired organisational redirected goals, considerable thought should be channelled towards planning and scheduling of each event to avoid a possible uncontrollable clashes of peak workloads and an uncontrollable imbalance of workloads for different departments and/or individuals. Scheduling events would also reduce the risk of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' for long periods resulting in 'change fatigue'.

In terms of driving change, comparisons can be drawn to the physical world. Consider an oversized peg driven into a

marginally undersized hole. Drive the peg hard enough and it may fit with inevitable damage to the peg and the hole. A better solution would be to increase the cross section of the hole or reduce the cross section of the peg, making it a snug fit and resulting in less effort and energy to drive the peg through the hole. Pettigrew (1997) found that changing core beliefs was vital before there was any attempt to make structural or strategic change. The point being, more time spent at the beginning of the process, shaping and developing all the components ensures they all fit together properly without resistance or damage to the components, with inevitably better results. In the case of this research it focuses attention on time rather than task. It allows sufficient time for participants to accept the change and time to ensure the change is managed and communicated effectively before full implementation takes place. Part of this management strategy would include scheduling change initiatives to prevent work overload and reduce consequential loss or damage.

Endnotes

1. Although the repeat interviews and real-time observations clearly demonstrated a shift in behaviour patterns, the exact point in time when these patterns changed varied for different individuals. For some it happened relatively quickly for others it was longer, dependent upon the individual's ability to cope.
2. The framework developed in this paper lends itself to testing participants of change in complex organisational environments, specifically public service providers whose work output is not easily quantifiable such as Academic Institutions, Central Government, Local Government, the National Health Service (NHS), Police and Fire Service.

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