

# **The Grounded Theory Review: An international journal**

**Volume 6, Issue no. 2, March 2007**

## **All is Data**

*Barney G. Glaser, Ph.D., Hon. Ph.D.*

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## **Creative Cycling of News Professionals**

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CPsychol*

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# The Grounded Theory Review

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# The Grounded Theory Review

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## From the Editor

This issue of the Review has given us an opportunity to focus on a substantive theme. In addressing key concerns of modern working life, the grounded theories (GTs) presented here give us a glimpse into the complexity of the world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Presenting these papers together also reminds us of the power of grounded theory to tap into such complexity and offer us insightful explanations for how such issues and concerns may be processed or resolved.

Work is fundamental to the human condition. We are a sense seeking, problem solving, creative species; to engage and produce is central to our being. Yet, there are challenges manifest in achieving our work-related goals. Perhaps more than anything, we have an innate need to reduce the cognitive dissonance in our environment (Festinger, 1957).

The GTs offered in this issue identify some key concerns that create levels of dissonance for many workers – the sense of insufficient time, the pressures of accelerated work loads, of persistent and unpredictable change, of work-related stress and injury, of striving to sustain our creative edge. These matters challenge many modern workers. The theories offered here explain how workers cope – how they process and resolve these key concerns.

My GT (**Rehumanising Knowledge Work through Fluctuating Support Networks**) suggests that knowledge workers seek the social support of like minds to overcome the dehumanising impacts of persistent and unpredictable change in their work and work environments. This informal, self-organising response not only rehumanises their work situations but it ignites passion for collaboration, creativity, learning and innovation. Hans Thulesius and colleagues (**Reincentivizing Work: A grounded theory of work and sick leave**) address

an issue of increasing concern for many organizations – the cost and the challenges presented by increasing rates of workplace absenteeism due to stress and injury. The theory of reincentivizing explains how, once a worker's drive to work has been undermined, it becomes a challenge just to return to the workplace and then identifies a number of drivers and traps that mediate the return to work process. Understanding impaired work drives becomes essential in devising strategies to facilitate - to reincentivize - the return to work. It is interesting to note rehumanising among the strategies offered for reincentivizing.

Astrid Gynnild (**Creative Cycling of News Professionals**) addresses the fundamental need of journalists for fulfillment through creative achievement – the need to make their contribution, to create and to do so in spite of the increasing pressures and challenges of the modern media production environment. The theory suggests that journalists sustain their ability to be innovative and productive through a process of creative cycling whereby they moderate and shift focus between periods of productive processing, breaks and shifts and inspirational forays. This process of skill development enables them to achieve output as required while protecting personal energy reserves and remaining open to the creative inspirations that can emerge unexpectedly and offer cherished opportunities for the unique contributions that distinguish a journalistic career. Gynnild's theory also identifies the dehumanizing impact of the modern newsroom with its siloed, time intense production format and proposes a need to rehumanise the news production environment.

Time pressures are the focus of theories offered by Helen Scott (**The Temporal Integration of Connected Study into a Structured Life**) and by Graham Kenealy and Susan Cartwright (**The Temporal Sensitivity of Enforced Accelerated Work Pace: A grounded theory building approach**). Scott's theory explains the process by which we attempt to integrate new commitments into already structured – and often time-challenged – schedules and how often, despite the best intentions and efforts to juggle and struggle to meet competing demands, we have to reassess our ability to do so and



our commitment to sustaining the effort and the sacrifices involved. Scott proposes an algorithmic calculation to express this process of evaluation.

Kenealy and Cartwright explore the impact of radical change on working conditions and the response of workers to the pressures created through a phenomenon that they term “enforced accelerated work pace”, an organization-level approach to addressing radical change in the environment. Particularly under tight time constraints and with limited resources, the “give” in the system falls to the workers. It is they who are relied upon to bring a project through to success; but, as Kenealy and Cartwright propose, sustaining these expectations over time becomes a challenge to which workers become resistant, suffering conditions of fatigue, psychological detachment and withdrawal. Again, one can readily see in Kenealy and Cartwright’s theory indicators of a progressively dehumanised work environment.

These papers offer conceptually rich explanations for some significant latent patterns of behaviour in modern working life. Concepts like rehumanising, reincentivizing, creative cycling, temporal integration and enforced accelerated work pace transcend the particular substantive studies from which they have emerged to form a basic lexicon that would receive nodding acknowledgement from many in the modern workforce. Each concept, as well, connotes general implications for aspects of life well beyond the workplace. For instance, one can readily recognize rehumanising efforts in many alternative health practices, alternatives to mainstream religions, alternative schools, organic food production, the slow food movement, even internet dating to transcend siloed lives! We can talk readily of reincentivizing our children to complete obligations, of reincentivizing ourselves to carry through on exercise and diet resolutions; of cycling activities to sustain momentum while warding off boredom and fatigue; of integrating commitments to achieve balance and manage conflicts.

The conceptual power of these papers transcends the particularistic details of the varied data sources employed in their analysis and theoretical development. From substantive areas as

varied as journalism, computer studies, management and health care, the authors have employed a wide range of data including personal interviews (both face-to-face and on-line), focus groups, casual observations and conversations, field notes, secondary analysis of interview data collected for other studies, statistical reports, corporate records, conference proceedings and empirical studies. It is fitting therefore, to commence this issue with Dr. Glaser's reminder that, "**All is Data**". This paper originally appeared as Chapter 11 of *The Grounded Theory Perspective: Conceptualization contrasted with description* (Sociology Press, 2001) and we include it here as an important reminder that as grounded theorists, we have the opportunity and responsibility to recognize and utilize all available sources of data in our analyses as essential to knowing and being able to explain what is really going on. In conceptualizing, we transcend the specifics of people, time and place and with this, the constraints imposed by the concerns of some other research methodologies with requirements for worrisome accuracy, full and detailed descriptive coverage and ethical commitments to privacy and informed consent. We use the data as we find it to explain the pattern of behaviour at issue. It is this conceptual power dimension that positions grounded theory as not simply for theorists but also for practitioners and the participants in our studies. This power is a primary reason that many of us are drawn to GT. We are motivated to develop theory that really matters, theory that is "vital, relevant and yields high impact main concerns" (Glaser, 1995, p.4).

- Judith A. Holton, Ph.D.

Festinger, L. (1957). *The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*.  
Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Glaser, B.G. (1995). *Grounded Theory: 1984-1994*. Mill Valley,  
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## Submissions

All papers submitted are peer reviewed and comments provided back to the authors. Papers accepted for publication will be good examples or practical applications of grounded theory and classic grounded theory methodology.

Comments on papers published are also welcomed, will be shared with the authors and may be published in subsequent issues of the Review. See our website [www.groundedtheoryreview.com](http://www.groundedtheoryreview.com) for full submission guidelines.

Forward submissions as Word documents to Judith Holton at [judith@groundedtheoryreview.com](mailto:judith@groundedtheoryreview.com)



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## **All Is Data**

*Barney G. Glaser, Ph.D., Hon. Ph.D.*

.....Although data is plural “is” sounds better

All is data” is a well known Glaser dictum. What does it mean? It means that exactly what is going on in the research scene is the data, what ever the source, whether interview, observations, documents. It is not just what is being, how it is being and the conditions of its being told, but all the data surrounding what is being told. It means what is going on has to be figured out exactly what it is for conceptualization, NOT description. Data is always as good as far as it goes, and there is always more to keep correcting the categories with more relevant properties.

All is data is a grounded theory statement, not applicable to QDA. Data is discovered for conceptualization to be what it is for a theory. It is discovered by constant comparison which generates a category and properties that vary it.

The data is what it is and the researcher collects, codes and analyzes exactly what he has: whether baseline data, properline data, vague data, interpreted data or conceptual data (see “Doing GT”). There is no such thing as bias, or objective or subjective, interpreted or misinterpreted, etc. It is what the researcher is receiving (as a human being, which is inescapable). Data is what the researcher is constantly comparing with tedium, to be sure, as he generates categories and their properties. Remember again, the product will be transcending abstraction, NOT accurate description.

While the QDA researcher may be disappointed with what he is collecting, the GT researcher’s job is to analyze its components, its type of data, and take a conceptual perspective on it. Good as far as it goes means the GT researcher is always doing a perspective on a perspective (data) with the goal of generating a theory that resolves continually a main concern, which, as I have said many times, accounts for the main action in a substantive area.

For the GT researcher the world is totally empirical. As he collects data his job is to deal with exactly what is happening, not

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what he would want to happen, not what his own interest would wish the data to be. The data is not “truth” it is not “reality”. It is exactly what is happening. The GT researcher has to be oriented to each course of action having its own meaning. To be sure it does. And once the GT researcher lets this meaning emerge and sees the pattern, he/she will feel “sure” that this is what is going on. This sureness can not be known beforehand. It emerges conceptually through constant comparison.

That the data may not be reality or the truth, should not disturb the GT researcher. He should keep in mind that, after all, socially structured, vested fictions run the world, accurate descriptions run a poor second. Thus data is what is occurring, it is socially produced and it is up to the GT researcher to figure it out, BECAUSE the participants are doing it, talking it, using it, think it, are it, respond to it, offer it and so forth. It is going on right in front of the GT researcher! For example, treating talk (an interview) as data comprises not just what was said, but that the talk was given, in a certain way, in a certain context, with a certain endurance, in a culture, with talk story attached etc., etc. The same reasoning applies to reticent talk, shyness, silence etc.

While the GT researcher is not concerned with forced accuracy, he has the job of being honest in comparing exactly what the data is on as many dimensions as possible. Again, not what he wants the data to be, nor what he did not take the time to figure out. This is part of the GT method brought out by constant comparisons, which conceptually bring out the proper distortions (fictions) inherent in all situations.

The “all is data” prospective requires many, many incidents to compare and saturate categories to emerge the variations, which others may term distortions. No one incident categories are part of the GT method, as they may be in impressionistic QDA (see “Doing GT”). The constant comparing of incident to incident and incident to category and its properties is a must, to bring out what data is actually going on. The one incident concept commits a version of the ecological fallacy. A particularistic (one person) source of a concept is generalized to a pattern applicable to many people. An impressionistically grounded concept leads to a grounded conjecture, not a grounded theory. It can be used with the pattern rhetoric and a macerated sound bit approach to saying GT has been generated, with no notion of the systematic nature by which it should be generated.



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In comparing incidents, in most researches this is dominated by one type of data, usually an interview-observation in field notes. This is not hard comparing; it just takes conceptualizing thought. But uniformity of data is not required for comparing. Diverse data from other emergent sources can be compared. By diverse I mean whatever may come the GT researcher's way while theoretically sampling: documents and current statistics, newspaper articles, questionnaire results, social structural and interactional observations, interview, casual comments, global and cultural statements, historical documents, whatever, whatever as it bears on the categories.

How far the GT researcher goes depends on his theoretical sampling, skill, maturity and the emergent. Most beginning GT researchers are somewhat timid about their ability to do GT. They, therefore, prefer the uniformity of data collection from a site where the area of interest goes on. This frequent approach of the beginner sets him/her up for description capture, since it mirrors some QDA requirements about uniform data. However the set up is a safe harbor until a true GT is generated; he can fall back on a QDA description. It is not unwise for a start in GT research, but not necessary!

How far the GT researcher goes in diversity of data to compare is based on some judgment, but more so on what emerges as the researcher goes to comparative groups. Diverse data is a delimited occurrence. Anselm and I, in doing the dying studies, as mature researchers, compared everything in sight to bring out our awareness context theory.

One frequent problem GT researchers have, especially beginners, is wanting the truth in an area dealing with "delicate matters". However, they just get properline data or what they are suppose to hear and see. There is no reason to be honest as a participant, as revealment can easily bring troublesome consequences. But properline data is the data, and it tells us what is going on to prevent people from knowing what is actually going on. The study can be seen conceptually as one of how the public is handled based on concealment, nonrevealment or hidden agendas. It may take infiltration as a participant-observer to find out what is concealed. This becomes another study. Vague data, interpreted data or conceptual data may result in the same study of derailing revealment. They all obfuscate. They are normative properties of spinning. The QDA quest for accuracy is out of place

in a GT research.

### **Data Worry, Data Doubt**

The concern with accuracy of data, comes from and yields an immense literature on data worry, data doubt and the need to produce accurate descriptions. Data is always suspected as bias, subjective not objective, untrue, poorly interpreted, bad or contaminated and otherwise distorted and suspect. It is suspected humbly by the researcher, who wants readers to believe it anyway, and strongly by critics, who say it just is not what is. This indictment is continuous, especially by arrogant quantitative researchers. Strenuous corrections are always advised.

This critique is moot for GT as GT produces abstractions not descriptions. Distortions are just more variables to conceptualize and make a part of the analysis. Remember though, to be relevant distortions must earn their way into the theory as they are conceptualized. GT reduces a distortion to the theory depending on what theory is emergent and how relevant it is to the theory as another category or property of it. Multiple methods of data collection are good for diversity of comparisons, but multiple methods of data correction are not necessary. All is data is “what is” as it comes “as is”.

At the end of this chapter I will deal with some of the discussions of overconcern with distortions of data type, to show how GT frees its researchers from this tyranny.

### **Transcending Worrisome Data**

Data worry, data doubt as I said, permeates all methods of QDA. It is a constant tyranny. All (almost) researchers, who describe, work the polar opposite of feeling the data is condemned to distortion and trying to legitimate it as objectified to the point of being accurate and of being evidence. They admit the distortion and insist on the legitimacy of their factual descriptions. They give up positivism yet use its canons for data: accuracy, objectivity, reproducibility and so forth. They constantly argue for acceptance of their somewhat wrong data as “OK” under the circumstances, conditions and contest.

I have not seen one article that considers conceptualization that considers abstraction from time, place and people that considers this as freedom from the tyranny of normal distortion by humans doing description. GT is a methodology that provides

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this conceptual freedom in a highly scholarly and useful way. GT makes the condemnation and preoccupation with accuracy and evidence moot.

GT gives this freedom from distortion tyranny to data that is sourced from interpretations, constructions, voice of participant, personal experience of various kinds, culturally differential, language differential, objective-subjective, value laden, behavior vs. spoken, truth vs. properline, credibility of informants, selective data collection, selective non-random sampling, multiple versions of the truth, historical, biographical, gender bias, varying interview and observation techniques. The reader may think of more sources. To repeat in this context, all that GT does is to rigorously generate conceptual hypotheses that get applied with fit, relevance and workability (explanatory).

Since there is no literature on the freedom from accuracy brought on by GT, I will consider here how GT frees up several sources of worrisome data.

### **Hard Data**

The elite, haloed data of science is hard data. It is the data of the biological and natural sciences. It is hopefully what survey researchers produce as quantified. It is bedrock data. By comparisons qualitative data is called soft and demeaned as such, implying that it is rife with subjectivity that make it inaccurate and uncountable. It is seen as another form of contrived journalism. It is seen as not being able to “sort fact from fiction” one authors says, because it has “no rigorous, critical standards.”

Without arguing on these merits, GT brings freedom to this invidious comparison. Categories and their properties apply fully variable. They leave the time, place and people of hard data or soft data. It is not truth that transcends; it is conceptualization! The data for GT research is not seen as limited data needing scientific support, as it is in QDA description. GT research data is just “whatever” data to compare.

### **Reproducibility**

Another worry about QDA data is whether or not it is reproducible by others. In this way, another researcher can come back to the same action scene and reproduce the events described by another to verify the descriptions. Or, would another researcher find the same material. This is a check on whatever

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bias may occur, so it will not be seen as particularistic to one researcher.

This is not relevant to the GT abstraction. It is conceptual and applies to any action scene. Furthermore new (albeit different) data from the same site simply get compared and modify the theory. The indicators need not be reproducible, just comparable and interchangeable for conceptualization. Theoretical sampling also takes the researcher to site spreading, which makes reproducing the same data for similar abstractions virtually impossible.

Reproducibility is also irrelevant for GT, because new data, whether the same or not just get compared to develop new properties of categories that saturate the categories. Saturation is that no new interchangeable indicators emerge to add more properties to the categories, which are of relevance. If another theory is developed from the same site since highly different data are found, then we just have another GT, that's all. Each grounded theory with its general implications stands on its own. For example one can find supernormalizing in similar data that yielded cutting back: in data on heart attack victims and sports injuries. They are a paired dichotomy, related by being at different ends of the same continuum but standing on their own. Each was a different dissertation.

If the incidents to compare are events that could never be reproduced, that GT is even more freeing and powerful, since it conceptualizes the underlying patterns in seemingly different events. An example is social protest events, any one which cannot be reproduced but many certainly can be compared for generating a GT of non political social protests.

### **Selection Bias**

Selection bias refers to non-random sampling for the purpose of consciously or not so consciously getting a preferred distortion in the data. Deliberate selection bias over — represents cases at one end of the distribution. This then confirms a preferred hypothesis or yields a preferred description, or it just produces preferred distortions with no purpose or an external purpose. The larger the sampling of people, cases, units or event selectivity the more general the factual distortions appear, but they still are distorted by bias.

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Again GT conceptualization by constant comparison will show the underlying bias as it emerges — for bias is just another variable. It is an independent variable which varies other variables in the preferred direction. GT conceptualization frees us from the tyranny of selection bias' affect on data and the tyranny of explaining it away.

Theoretical sampling is diametrically opposed to selection bias. The theoretical sample is chosen for theoretical saturation of categories. Theoretical sampling directs selection for a theoretical purpose. If bias creeps in, then it will surface as another category by constant comparison and saturation.

### **Writing Authority**

The implied claim of all writing in social science is that the description must be correct if it is published. The writer is assumed to be a competent observer who reports accurately on self and others. Publishing legitimizes descriptive writings. It is the mystique. Except for a few critiques, which most people do not read, publication certifies authoritativeness. Thus publication certifies distortions of the objective in descriptions. It is hard for most readers to appraise the research techniques used in a paper or monograph. We trust the editors who review the writing before publication and they may, and usually so, favor the bias in descriptions. This is just the way it is and always will be.

However, this authoritative attribution is moot for GT. GT categories and their properties are fully variable as applied. The applier is not wedded to any position as emergent fit goes on, as modification goes on and as generalizing is accomplished when applying the theory. It is the conceptions (categories and their properties) in writings that grab the reader and who knows how they will in fact use them. If the conceptual statements are reduced to description, the power of variable fit and relevance is lost. This reduction however does not ruin the abstract ideas and the abstract promise of GT.

### **Personal Predilections**

There are several ways that personal predilections distort descriptions. To mention several which all overlap, they are prejudices, value laden, ethics, ideology, psychological blocks, spinning distrusts, preconceptions that are unchangeable, oversimplification, axes to grind in favor of a position, human

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limits by culture, education, etc., differential perceptions and interpretations, intense reflexivity and self accounting as a researcher proceeds, an immaculate description need no matter how the data falls, methodological entrapment on how to process knowing, romantizing, exaggeration and so forth. I am sure the reader can add to this list. These are all quite human and inescapable totally. They are just able to be limited as much as possible in effecting the description.

GT rescues us from this personal biasing whatever the source. Once the theory is generated it, as we saw above, has total conceptual endurance and generality however someone may distort its use. Cultivating, supernormalizing, credentializing, desisting residual self, pluralistic dialoguing, cutting back, client controlling, enhancing creativity and so many others grounded in GT research just exist abstractly. Personal predilection variables simply emerge as variable in the theory and are put into relief by constant comparing and theoretical saturation. They are not discounted if relevant, there is no need to explain away the concept based for example on a particular value. The distorting effect of the bias must earn its way by working as part of the GT.

A last note on personal experience as data. From the point of view of GT, there is no such thing. It is just another interview and/or observation to be compared into the theory by constant comparison. It is no more. By comparing we then see how particularistic, eccentric, idiosyncratic, normative, structured etc., the experience is. This applies to journals on “lived experience”, biographies or whatever the source however rich it may appear. GT research is after conceptualization of social — psychological patterns, NOT of individual patterns whether described or conceptualized.

No matter how apparently insightful and objective an individual account may appear of an area of interest, it is still just individual. It is just a set of incidents to compare to many others from other people. Learned informants may be valuable in a research, but they must constantly be checked on by other data; must saturate by theoretical sampling of many other participant incidents. Personal experience research is just that, personal experience, not social psychological research.

In sum, GT is on an abstract level. It is bias neutral and fully variable. And to be sure it can be applied with bias by an

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individual who wants to issue it out, whether manifestly or latently, awaredly or unawaredly.

### **Construction**

One major worry in QDA research is a different take on personal predilection. It is seen as the researcher being a constructionist or a constructor of data. Listen to this author. “A strategy of inquiry comprises a bundle of skills, assumptions and practices that researchers employ as they move from their paradigm to the empirical world. Strategies of inquiry put paradigms of interpretation into motion. At the same time, strategies of inquiry connect the researcher to specific methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials. Most methods rely on interviewing, observing and document analysis. Qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive. The researcher does not just leave the field with mountains of empirical materials and then easily write up his or her findings. Qualitative interpretations are constructed.”

The point is clear in this orientation, data is constructed with interpretations. This QDA approach is clear, volumes of data are collected according to a preconceived framework. Writing up this mountain of data is not easy even with a framework. The QDA researcher constructs first the data and then the write up. The resulting descriptions therefore suffer from all the personal distortions mentioned above and more I discuss briefly below.

Listen to this author: “Transformations in data occur when ignorance and misapprehensions give way to more informed insights by means of a dialectical interaction. Knowledge consists of those constructions about which there is relative consensus among those competent to interpret the substance of the construction. Multiple knowledges can coexist, and these constructions are subject to continuous revision with changes most likely to occur when relatively different constructions are brought into juxtapositions in a dialectical context. Knowledge accumulates by a process of accretion with each fact serving as a kind of building block which adds to the growing edifice of knowledge based on more informed and sophisticated constructions which progress over time.”

GT research, again, transcends this constructionist cumulative approach. Properly done, GT research delimits the data collected and provides the emerging framework for analysis.

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This limits construction and then the ensuing conceptual analysis, as I have already said, abstractly reveals the biasing categories as well as the other categories. What is going on, goes on abstractly no matter the take of the constructions and interpretations based on more and more building blocks yielding more accurate meaning. More and more data for GT just leads to more constant comparison which leads to modifications and generalizability. This worrisome take of constructions on data collection and analysis for description and the accumulation of knowledge are moot for GT conceptual generation. All is data, and GT is good as far as it goes, and can always go further to more theoretical completeness for a substantive area and then on to formal theory based on comparisons of data from many groups.

For example, a theory on becoming a nurse can be put on a more formal level of becoming a professional by comparing the substantive theory to data from theoretically sampling of many professional schools on the relevant categories. The accumulation of knowledge for GT is not more precise data for description, it is more abstract theory or formal theory (see “Status Passage”, “Organizational Careers” and “More Grounded Theory Methodology,” all by Glaser.)

Another example is that a basic social process like default remodeling in corporate banking takeovers goes on, and is neutral to the distortions of data. In fact the whole study may be on the proper distortion of a basic social process, say on the properline that the takeover is cooperative. But the process is neutral to bias and a fully variable abstraction to be applied to all corporate takeovers with more comparisons based on theoretical sampling.

Lastly, a constructionist’s assumption is that constructs are constitutive of being human. Constructs are thought objects that try to grasp social reality which get more accurate as constructs get more sophisticated. By the same token GT conceptualizations are constitutive of being human also and GT becomes more verified as categories saturate and the theoretical completeness is reached. Fit and work and relevance is the goal of GT to strive for, not accuracy.

### **Verbal-Actual Behavior**

Accuracy of description is big on this source of bias between telling about behavior as seeing it. Given the popularity of



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interviewing in QDA, some authors worry: “The mistake is to treat the verbal formulations of subjects as an appropriate substitute for the observation of actual behavior”. Or “Such studies may suffer from the gap between beliefs and action, between what people say and what they do.” Or, “We only get into difficulties if we treat patients’ responses as standing in a one-to-one account with what happened in the actual consultation. Exaggerated stories give vent to thoughts which had gone on unvoiced at the time of the consultation.” Or, “stories, no matter their political spin, represent part of the substantive theory that will be generated. It is not that the participant is untruthful, it is rather that he does not wish to tell the whole story since this might put the story and him in a bad light.”

This is a perennial problem in accessing the distortion of a QDA description that is based on telling behavior much more than observing it. Participants properline to strangers with ease. The GT research method treats all as data and the study is on what is given to the researcher, verbally and actually, not an abstract view of accuracy, but an abstract theory of what is going on.

A preponderance of verbal data yielding a GT theory is merely modified by constant comparisons when observation or documents become part of the theoretically sampled for data. Grounded theory is good as far as it goes, remember! It may slowly be modified by observations bringing out more properties closer to reality, but never neglecting the reality of the participants’ view, while being sure that a gap is maintained between verbal and actual.

For the GT researcher the issue is all is data, whether private or public, revealed or concealed, words or behavior. It all bears on generating concepts for the core variable or basic social process being studied. The talk is data, the behavior is data and the gap between them and its sources is data. The emergent theory should sort it out conceptually. What actually goes on is all of it.

This verbal-behavioral data juncture goes on frequently in business studies, where properlining is the norm, since concealing information is so important. Descriptions may be inaccurate. But GT conceptual hypotheses can be quite relevant and subsequent data does not correct so much as it just generates

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modifications. For GT the quest for “what is really going on,” is just that, in full abstraction; it is not actual behavior.

### **Gender Bias**

The history of feminist thought has been brought out clearly in feminist qualitative research. As Virginia Olesen says, “Whatever the qualitative research style, and whether or not self-consciously defined as feminist, these many voices share the outlook that it is important to center and make problematic women’s diverse situations and the institutions and frames that influence those situations, and then to refer the examination of that problematic to theoretical, policy or action frame works in the interest of realizing social justice for women.”

Unless focused directly on women or a woman’s problem, male gender dominance in QDA research, according to feminists, still exerts control. However male oriented, influence frameworks as well as a healthy white female middle class dominant frameworks are crumbling in the face of steadily incisive criticisms of women of color, this world feminists, disabled women, and lesbian women. Now a substantial body of feminist research ranges over the full span of qualitative methods. Gender dominance favoring males is diminishing in qualitative description.

While important in QDA research, gender bias is irrelevant for GT research. GT research is gender neutral as it is for all face sheet variables. Gender like race, color, ethnicity, age, education, religions, culture, social class and so forth must earn its way into a GT as a relevant variable. When relevant in a GT, gender will emerge as a variant of the dependent variable.

For example in pluralistic dialoguing gender is only relevant if the males on the team either defer to “take charge” ladies (nurses) or dominate their stereotypes. It did not emerge. Competence was a major factor and there is no gender monopoly over competence. In another study of same sex (lesbian) marriages, we found that the emergent division of labor between the couple was the same for heterosexual marriages. Gender was not an issue. In another study of woman’s health clinics, gender did emerge as relevant in women relating to a female doctor sensitive to woman’s problems. Judith Wuest’s article: “Precarious Ordering: A Theory of Women’s Caring” focus’s on the demand on women to provide care. This bias focus misses the

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whole literature on entrapment care of disabled, elderly, infants, etc. which falls on spouses of either gender or family members of either gender. The demand for care, which is inescapable is gender neutral.

Thus in GT research when gender emerges as relevant, fine, bring it into the theory, but not until then. Yet the feminists will try to issue-out from the start a neutral conceptual analysis to being a woman's issue when it is general or gender neutral. The issuing-out comes after generating a conceptually neutral GT theory when it is applied and the issue can be turned many ways, for example, to color, economic class, type illness, age (elderly) gender or what. Gender has no priority on issues. The over-focus on gender may be fine for routine QDA feminist researchers. It has no place in generating GT which is abstract from people.

The tacit assumption of male tone, male dominance, male focus, is empirical in the data and neutralized in the conceptualization of the GT. Reverse dominance is just as relevant. So beginning bias is another preconceived forcing of the data.

### **Value Laden Inquiry**

There is probably no such research producing value free objective description, which transcends opinion or bias. Even hard science has its own soft work when it turns to interpreting hard findings by conjecture seeded with values. These interpretations are typical descriptive material only more or less grounded in other research conjecturally related to the findings. Only GT abstractions are value neutral. They can be applied based on any value.

There are several sources of value laden research which almost by definition ignores accuracy in favor of taking a position. Value laden inquiry comes from a particular world view, religion, a political stance, a gender stance, ethics, a hard-line methodological view, a granting organization with a cause, etc. This distortion of accuracy is not of concern to the QDA researcher doing the research. It is his job to distort properly. It is only of concern to the reader judging its merit. The reader tries to judge who owns the knowledge coming from the research sufficiently well which allows the researcher to cast it with appropriate values.

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This distortion overlaps with much of what I have said above. The value which distorts soon emerges as a category when applying GT methodology to the same data for generating a theory. It may be a value of the participant or the researcher. No matter, its impact in the GT will be seen abstractly, however unchanged the QDA description. For example in a study of disavowing credit among ward nurses, it soon becomes apparent that the disavowing was a value based on the authority structure in medicine. The nurse, whatever her achievement, should defer credit to the doctor in charge.

By the same token the researcher may add his/her values to interpretations of the data which distort it. Again GT being value neutral will begin to show the value as a category in analyzing the same data by GT methodology. This was seen clearly in a GT study of discharging patients in a private psychiatric residence. A previous study described the discharging based on curing very troublesome patients. Curing was successful and of great value. A GT study explained the discharging as getting rid of troublesome, incurable patients and keeping the successfully treated in order to maintain a calm sentimental order in the facility which made the facility appear as successful.

### **The Voice**

QDA research, once legitimized many years back, was revolutionary on the dimension that AT LAST it gave the participants the chance to be heard as they wanted to be heard, not as some preconceived questions would steer them. The participants voice was listened too! This, of course, ushered in the problem of worrisome distortion in reporting the voice to others. Could the researcher listen at all or listen well enough, was he patient enough, was he listening with bias, was he listening with cognitive disjunctures (speaking past each other), could the researcher handle the lack of uniformity of listening to many voices (when giving up the uniformity of preconceived questions) and so forth. We have seen above how “voice” data could be distorted in so many ways.

The QDA researcher listens to the data in terms of a preconceived framework to help him organize it. The GT researcher is in seventh heaven listening to what ever is voiced as he constantly compares to discover the participants main concern and the core category and sub categories. The GT researcher

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knows that latent patterns exist and will emerge complete with conceptualized distortions as variables relevant to a GT explaining the ongoing action. The constant comparing will correct and precise the meaning involved even as it abstracts the relevant categories. In contrast the QDA can only hope his pre-research devised framework will work to yield a not too distorted description.

Now-a-days QDA is in fashion and problems are studied from the perspective of the participants. QDA types will vary on their approach to the voice: one phenomenologist said “more precisely phenomenological research where the primacy of the subjective experience of the participant takes precedence over the interpretation of the researcher.”

Thus from a history not being heard research has swung to intense in depth listening to the voice. Critiques of how the “voice” is listened to actually often stifle the listening in the service of getting it right. Efforts at objective reporting description yield to subjective recounts. Objective pretence is given up. Writing authoritativeness is used in its stead: if it is in writing it must be close to accuracy. Verisimilitude is used: truth and proof are the same for tests of objectification. The canons of objective, natural science are still trying to be adhered to. Also these QDA researchers feel strongly that the researcher owes it to his participants to tell their story accurately. And also the QDA researcher owes it to the participants to tell them what is being told.

This struggle over how the voice is heard and related in research writings is non-existent for the GT researcher. It is all just data to be conceptualized for theory however the data comes. And, as I have said above, it is never advisable or owed for that the GT researcher tells the participants their conceptualized main concern and its continual resolving. The only exception to this is in carefully applied consultations or in action research, when substantive theory is applied for use rather soon after discovery. Remember GT generates categories’ labeling patterns, which is merely about what is going on, not for or against and not for corrective action. People disappear into these patterns which abstract their behavior. GT is not the participant’s voice, it is the patterns of behavior that the voices of many indicate. These patterns fit, work and are relevant to the behavior the voices try to represent.

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Put another way, GT substantive theory is not a privileged reporting of the participants voice because the GT researcher was “let in” to confidences. It is a substantive theory explaining voice productions. Participants often recognize the power of the conceptual grab of GT in making sense of the many voices in an action scene when GT is used as consultation. I cannot emphasize enough that the current unleashing of participants’ voices is just more data for GT research. That’s all! GT is voice distortion free.

Whose voice is a worrisome distortion? In “cooperative inquiry” which sounds a bit like participant-observation, the researcher and the participant have deep extended mutual sharing conversations. Interviewing is minimal, in favor of sharing. Thus is the voice a composite of both researcher and participant or more the researcher or the participant. Whose interests are being voiced? Has the study subtly been switched to the researcher’s concerns? Maybe, but if so, then that is what the GT research is studying! It becomes a study of subtle researcher manoeuvring participants, awaredly or unawaredly, and becomes part of the literature on researcher impacting changes on the research scene and its participants.

As educated people, researchers can easily have this distorting effect on less educated people. In cases of this nature, the GT researcher could clearly not know the problem he will study beforehand, and will probably be quite surprised at what emerges. He is likely to find that cooperative inquiry produces properlining, patronizing, unaware projections, cultural and economic dominations and consensus collusions in support of sharing rather than saying it as it is. Listening correctly is subverted by sharing and story competitions.

In contrast, with the preconceived framework to sort out conversations, the QDA researcher may get what he wants from the conversational data. However distorted it may be, he can force it with self determination and an appeal to conviviality. Closeness to the participant does not insure accuracy. In fact one author felt the closer the relationship the more unreliable the data. None of this applies to GT Research which theoretically samples with a myriad of interview relationships, lengths and styles in one research. And then treats all as data.

Cooperative inquiry data will be a challenge to the GT researcher doing secondary analysis of it. He is likely to find

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himself in the midst of a methodology research, rather than substantive area. Managed researcher research may be more relevant than the substantive material. It will be like the study of questionnaire response sets in survey research, when responses do not make sense.

Another word about action research is in order. In this case the GT researcher helps the participants do their own and/or share in his research going on in order for them to use purposively the resolving patterns of their main concern. This consciousness in the midst of action has its draw backs. It is hard for the untrained to have this research ability and perceptive-reflexive ability. The tendency is for participants to become defensive over fictions and ineptitudes and to become self-serving in lieu of being fully objective in applications. Also preconceptions easily run ahead of the research, as this is how they think. The need is for the corrective power of a consultant, who puts good judgment and limits on use of the substantive theory. The action oriented participants will perforce be descriptively bias, while the GT researcher is abstractly neutral. This conflict will likely be resolved for the former, since GT neutrality will be unacceptable.

In sum, the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it is laudable. The world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation (the “voice”) is thought to be constructed by social actors. The aim of attending carefully to the details, complexity and situated meanings of the everyday life world can be achieved through a variety of QDA methods. But all offer merely the inquirer’s construction of the constructions and meaning interpretations of the participants one studies, nothing more.

Remember, that no matter how different these offerings of data on the “voice”, for the GT researcher it is just data to be submitted to the abstracting of the GT methodology by the constant comparative method. The QDA struggle with worrisome distortions stops at the start of GT research, as distortions of voice are the data. Remember also, that it is just as human to conceptualize to this freedom from time, place and people as it is to somewhat bias descriptions with the wrestle between objective and subjective that takes so many forms. Facts become sacred for the written moment and concepts become easily modified by the next comparative.

### Evidentiary

GT relies on constant comparing of incidents to generate categories. Constant comparing saturates categories no matter what the data bias, nor how complete any one interview is. The data one gets is all the data there is. Field notes, observation notes and interview notes are sufficient for GT. They are part of the delimiting aspects of GT data collection.

GT does not produce findings or facts as I have said over and over; it produces conceptual hypotheses. Therefore taping for evidential accuracy in descriptions is an unnecessary waste of time and resources, and restricts theoretical sampling for concept generation. I have written at length about this in “Doing GT”.

Thus these statements by one well-known grounded theorist are just plain wrong. “Open-ended interactive telephone interviews were conducted to determine the participants experience of bereavement. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. All interviews were immediately transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the transcription.”

Capturing everything by taping in the service of evidentiary accuracy does not reduce data bias. It may increase it, since the best way for a participant to tell a story is to exaggerate it or to engage in extreme relativism to make a point. The GT researcher need only collect data theoretically and let bias emerge. He does not need full coverage per interview or evidence for incidents.

GT research teachers and students learn this lesson gradually with experience. Listen to this teacher from Portugal: “My students used to tape and transcribe the interviews. They give me the transcriptions and we discuss it in the group. Not taping and just doing some notes is tempting. We would gain time and above all we could start doing theoretical sampling. Something we could never do before.”

And Wendy Guthrie says: “Some months into the research, I was concerned that I might be missing important pieces of data by relying on memory. I also feared the delayed write-up of field notes might cause me to forget vital information. To guard against these dangers I decided to take a tape recorder with me on my visits. I soon realized that this was not the way forward and discontinued my trial recording. One reason I would not recommend taping is that it gives a false sense of security.”



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In short, taping does not do away with bias, it might increase it and after all is said, bias is not an issue for GT conceptualization. Complete interviews are not a source of accuracy and both are not needed for GT.

### **Poor Instrumentation**

To be sure poor instrumentation is a source of worrisome data. "All is data" is good as far as it goes. GT in abstracting from data can pick up bias from poor data collection up to a point. I have never seen this point reached, but it can be logically. I have seen unusable data from surveys, when people hired to administer questionnaires, just fill them in themselves to save time and make money.

GT can be used on any data collected by a myriad of methods, so the GT researcher must always be wary of severe collection problems and truly fake data. Overly preconceived frames in a collection method may severely miss the point. This seldom happens. The GT researcher can always ask the question: "Does the sensitivity of the data selection and data collection method match the needs of the research." The answer is mostly "yes" for GT research. The net balance of data collected which is used for secondary analysis is empirical, and becomes part of the research.

Whether secondary analysis or original research GT researchers seem to prefer qualitative data. They prefer deeper understanding data on small samples as opposed to large sample surveys. Thus virtually all of us use interviews, observations, and documents. Some tape record and many do field notes or a combination of both. It is important to always keep instrumentation in mind. There are many forms of interviews in theoretical sampling. They vary from long interviews to quick question shots on the fly. This lack of uniformity does not mean shoddy collection since it not a pretested questionnaire guide. BUT a disastrous interview now and then should be noted in the incident, and is probably part of the data. The interview fits like the emerging theory generated from it. A poor interview should be evaluated in this light, when and if necessary. A poor interview will be picked up by constant comparison with solid collected data.

The same reasoning applies to taking field notes. Most are written either on site or soon after. Waiting a few days to write

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field notes does usually deter good notes. But not necessarily. However, deterred field notes also occur on an association basis later on and can be quite good. Constant appraisal of data collection methods is necessary but cursorily easy. Aberrations from emergent patterns are picked up by constant comparison.

Taping interviews can have failures or interim failures. Forgetting to turn on the recorder or poor microphones can wreck data. Tape recorders more than interviews evoke properline data: people tell interviewers what they think the interviewer is suppose to hear. People do not like to worry about negative feedback from recorded conversations. For many QDA researchers this is poor instrument data, because their quest is accurate truths. For the GT researcher properline data is fine. It generates a relevant theory about the fictions of social life. Properline data is a very frequent form of data, which many QDA researchers deny or dislike or take as truth unknowingly.

GT is a theory of method with a view of collection techniques attached. The primary view is “all is data” no matter how collected, which itself may become part of the theory. Collection mix is not relevant until it becomes so. A GT researcher doing original research should choose the best fit collection method. Fit will be a combination of substantive, diplomatic and that allowed by authorities and/or informal culture-structure.

Fact orientation makes instrumentation far more important for QDA research than conceptual orientation of GT research. QDA researchers of different orientations dialogue about the best collection method for claiming accuracy. GT research is collection method neutral, because it can conceptualize any data, which makes it neutral to most poor instrumentation. GT is a general methodology usable on any data, and it is up to the researcher to figure out exactly what the data is.

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In sum, the many aspects of GT methodology and its conceptualizing of data, resolve and render moot these many sources of bias descriptions. GT is bias neutral when done properly and when “all is data”. I am sure the reader can think of more sources of bias on the descriptive level that become neutralized by various aspects of GT methodology which

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abstracts from time, place and people. The biases mentioned above overlap conceptually but are seen as empirically very separate sources of worrisome data that must be dealt with to some extent.

QDA is a multimethod area of research. No matter what the QDA method used, the research typically begins with the worrisome discussion of the type of data, nature of the data and how its reality is socially constructed with meaning and interpretation. The supposition is that the research will yield a description with “some” kind of accuracy. The QDA researcher justifies why the type of qualitative data is appropriate to study his research problem to ward off critique.

A socially constituted meaning is framed by the preconceived notions of a grand theorist of what accounts for social order. The forcing framework turns research to conjecture however subtle. A professional interest is elaborated. It all sounds so sensible, and to some degree it is, however worrisome the distortions. The aim is not to provide causal explanations of patterned behavior, but to fully describe how members recognize, describe, explain and account for the order of their everyday problems. Descriptions can become unending when forcing an overdue type of qualitative method’s data into a framework that does not delimit the descriptions however bounded the unit and the data collection techniques.

When “all is data” the above QDA quests and efforts do not matter. What matters is exactly what the data is, and then its conceptualization by GT methodology. There is no need to justify a type of data in relation to a problem. As we have seen from above chapters, it all emerges to generate a theory. Accuracy or data distortion is not the issue. Figuring out what the data is and then conceptualizing it is the issue. This occurs with constant comparisons yielding categories. Thus GT is an open methodology, which yields conceptions of patterns from any kind of The theoretical generation and integrations of these conceptions is detailed at length in my other books. The tyrannies of factual description do not occur in GT conceptualization.

Historically there has been a heavy emphasis on quantification in science. Those sciences that lend themselves especially well to quantification are generally known as “hard”. Those less quantifiable sciences, particularly the social sciences

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are referred to as “soft” denoting imprecision and lack of dependability. In the last few decades this positivistic position and its beliefs have come under scrutiny: the quantification methods miss the meaning given by the individuals studied. Ergo the growth of several qualitative methods have been employed to contribute this meaning.

No single qualitative method can grasp the subtle variation in ongoing human experience. As a result qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interpretive qualitative methods and always seek better ways to make more understandable the worlds of experience that are now being studied. These QDA researches over the years have led to the realization and conclusion that there is no value-free inquiry for studying human experience. Researchers now struggle to develop situational and transcending methods that apply to any qualitative research to reduce the level of worrisome distortion. They wish to record their own observations and interviews accurately while still uncovering the meanings their subjects bring to their action. Their success is asymptotic description accuracy: that is closer and closer to accuracy. The QDA methods compete in their struggle with more and more sophisticated and informed methods. The history of social research is on their side.

Then in 1967 along comes grounded theory, born out of descriptive qualitative research. After a few decades of maturing, it has become clear that GT has left behind the struggles of worrisome qualitative data. By its emergent abstraction or conceptualization of the data to generate a theory that, when applied, explains the very data the QDA researchers are trying to describe. GT transcends QDA research by rendering so many of its sticky struggles moot and thereby presents the next historical stage in social psychological research. It is a highly rigorous abstracting methodology which grounds theory in what is going on whatever the data.

# Rehumanising Knowledge Work through Fluctuating Support Networks: A grounded theory

Judith A. Holton, Ph.D.

## Abstract

Through the basic social structural process of *fluctuating support networks*, knowledge workers self-organise to overcome the dehumanising impact of a rapidly changing workplace context. Such networks operate outside the formal organisation. They are epiphenomenal - self-emerging, self-organising, and self-sustaining. Participation is voluntary and intuitive. The growth of fluctuating support networks facilitates a **rehumanising** process which serves to counterbalance the dehumanisation that knowledge workers experience in the face of persistent and unpredictable change.

The core variable of the theory, the basic social psychological process of *rehumanising*, is characterised by *authenticity, depth and meaning, recognition and respect, safety and healing and kindred sharing*. Rehumanising gives meaning to work while sustaining *energy and commitment*. Fluctuating support network relationships offer members validation and subtle support. Members pursue shared interests and passions. Activities are characterised by *challenge, experimentation, creativity and learning*. The resultant sense of achievement renews energy and builds *confidence*, enhancing *commitment* and *bonding* thereby sustaining network engagement.

## Social Structural Conditions Precipitating Network Engagement

Today's knowledge workplace is increasingly characterised by complexity, compression and intensification; the result of continuous and often rapid change (Foley, 2002) and where perhaps the only thing constant is change. Even the largest and most successful organisations may unexpectedly encounter a "zone of turbulence" (Pascale, 1994 in Kirkbride & Durcan, 2002). An increasing diffusion of boundaries within and between organisations renders knowledge work highly interdependent. At the same time, careers are largely viewed as "boundaryless" and

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workers as nomads moving from organisation to organisation, either of choice or of necessity, as their environments continually reconfigure (Drucker, 2002; Pittinsky & Shih, 2004; Sullivan, 1999). Added to this, the compression of time created by communications technologies and increasing workloads has fostered compressed, dehumanised interactions.

While there is an increasing recognition that knowledge work is more organic and interconnected, many organisations remain trapped in linear, assembly-line work structures and processes. Coping with the complexity, compression and turbulence of change has raised levels of workplace stress so that it is now a significant factor for many. In particular, the workload intensification so often associated with downsizing leaves line managers little time to focus attention on human resource management issues (MacNeil & Renwick, 2002). Managers describe the immensity of the change underway in organisations as causing many workers to give up and barely function. Motivation and commitment decline. Management in the midst of such change is much less about predicting, planning and controlling and much more about facilitating and coaching performance.

The dynamics involved in coping with change inevitably generate resistance (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Galt, 2002). Knowledge workers respond in various ways. Entrenchment is a common response as individual workers “silo” their efforts and work in pockets with minimal interaction or movement across the silos, keeping “heads down” and “staying under the radar”. The more people fear the uncertainty of further change, the more they seek to retain the status quo as a means of establishing equilibrium within their environment (Chakravorti, 2004). With sufficient resistance, the work environment becomes staid and segmented, effectively “dumbing down” the organisation and its people. The workplace ossifies. Over time, an aura of pendulous resistance pervades as systems and workers become stagnant and stale. Over time, the syndrome leaves workers less and less open to future change efforts. A cultural resistance to change produces increasingly tentative and qualified responses to subsequent organisational change initiatives. Engagement may be superficial and transient.

While recognising that change is needed, workers become risk averse. They lose their ability to trust and their confidence to

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move into the uncertainty of change. Instead, efforts focus on protecting turf and hoarding knowledge as a source of power. Secrecy, mistrust and competition escalate. A cynical disengagement ensues. The resultant fragmentation and diffusion of collective efforts further erodes organisational intelligence. Opportunistic behaviours may surface and raise the level of cynicism and scepticism. The outcome can be an intellectual and emotional paralysis brought on by a saturated coping capacity (DeMeuse & Marks, 2002). A deficit mentality sets in.

When resistance is insufficient to impede change, knowledge workers may deny its inevitability by seeking to undermine the planned change through 'flannelling', a strategy of dissent that quietly subverts rules of cultural control (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). Eventually, however, the dynamic tension between the persistent need to change and the cultural resistance to change builds until the balance tips. Overwhelmed workers, unable to let go of the past, 'awfulise' their work environments. In so doing, they personalise the actions of the organisation and management and adopt victim status. Awfulising contributes to the downward spiral of dehumanisation as perceived by knowledge workers. They may, in turn, be typecast and stigmatised within the changing organisational environment. In the process, responsibility for the problem of coping with change frequently shifts from the organisation to the individual and a mutual disillusionment follows as both workers and organisations wrestle with the challenges of coping with change and resistance to change. The result is a downward spiral of mutual dehumanisation.

In this environment of persistent and unpredictable change and mutual dehumanisation, the basic problem or concern expressed by knowledge workers is the loss of the human dimension in workplace interactions. This dehumanisation of the knowledge workplace is characterised by a work environment that is compressed, fearful, isolating, bureaucratic and legalistic; by interactions that are atomised and inauthentic; and by work assignments that erode autonomy and identity. Individuals hide out in cubicles, feeling alone and isolated.

The organisational quest for efficiency reduces opportunities to facilitate relationship building, compromises valuable conversations and erodes trust and collaboration as management

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attention shifts from managing people to managing scarce resources. Organisations 'churn' workers, shifting and divesting human capital as deemed necessary (Cappelli, 2004). Many workers are left feeling unrecognised and devalued. Even those who retain their jobs are not spared in this environment. The heightened stress, increased workloads and perpetual insecurity of this "survivor syndrome" can reduce job commitment, lowering morale and job satisfaction (Vahtera et al., 2004). Survivors of organisational transitions exhibit depression, distraction, loss of trust and confidence (DeMeuse & Marks, 2002). These job survivors also present with physiological conditions symptomatic of elevated stress levels (Pepper & Messinger, 2000a, 2000b).

### Rehumanising

The instability of many workplace environments results in a loss of autonomy and even identity for many knowledge workers. Over time, nothing feels real and they long to reconnect with what they value - what they are passionate about. They long for a place to be real, to feel safe to express their authentic selves, to explore, to play and to risk - a place where they can relax, release tensions and open up. In short, they long to rehumanise their workplaces. The concept of *rehumanising* explains how knowledge workers resolve their concerns with the dehumanising impact of a changing knowledge workplace – how they restore the human dimension in their work relationships and working environments. Rehumanising gives meaning to their work while sustaining energy and commitment.

### The Properties of Rehumanising

Rehumanising is characterised by *authenticity, depth and meaning, recognition and respect, safety and healing and kindred sharing*.

The bureaucratic relationships in many knowledge workplaces lack authenticity. They are power-laden transactions. Whether the power can be attributed to position, influence or alliance, the tensional shifts can leave individuals feeling uneasy, anxious, without a base or grounding. The need to play roles in organisations and to assume "corporate identities" also leads to inauthentic voices; disconnecting individuals from what they really feel. Identity and purpose in work are eroded as "everyone plays the script".



With increasing intensification and specialisation of knowledge, workers are siloed. The time available for more general interactions is reduced. Removing opportunities for broad interpersonal contact further dehumanises the work environment and reduces the potential for authentic engagement. For many highly skilled knowledge workers, moving up in the organisation has its down side as they find themselves taking on managerial roles that progressively distance them from their areas of specialised expertise. The stretch up the organisational ladder can leave them vulnerable and stressed. There is a risk of vulnerability, as well, in emotional disclosures in the workplace. Individuals frequently feel they have to restrict emotional displays or run the risk of being seen as weak – a vulnerability that can restrict career progression. Emotions are held in check and authenticity compromised.

*Authenticity* is highly valued as essential to sustained interaction. Authentic engagement fuels likening and bonding, facilitating an ease in working together and accelerating collaboration. The rehumanising process in fluctuating support networks aligns personal values and goals; these are places where egos and agendas are put aside so that real dialogue and caring for one another can prevail. Authenticity stretches the ability to see diverse perspectives, to challenge assumptions, discuss the undiscussable and examine sacred cows without the worry of causing offence.

Fluctuating support network members express feelings of deep connection to other members of their networks as well as to the work in which they jointly engage. They speak of seeking experiences that rise above the routine, that challenge and that spark their learning. Work takes on real *depth and meaning*. The connection goes beyond just accomplishing the task at hand. Here, the work itself really matters. This deep connection creates a stickiness that not only bonds individuals personally but also deepens their bond to their professional concern. As such, fluctuating support networks create “interspaces” (Nordanger, 2002) in professional work that enable knowledge workers to regain some control over their work situations and ward off intrusions that diminish creativity and well-being. Consequently, they can dig deeper into their work, further enhancing their commitment and enriching their knowledge and expertise.

Members describe the depth and meaning of their

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participation in fluctuating support networks as being intense, transformational, even life changing. Members speak of a strong desire to stay connected with individuals who have travelled with them through some tough times and to engage more deeply both professionally and personally.

The depth of these connections is often difficult to express to those outside the network and often results in their portrayal as exclusive and overly emotional, even cult-like. It is true that some networks can develop an almost tribal nature. This may be particularly evident among core members of a network as the individuals most committed to sustaining connections. This pull to a tribal affiliation may also be indicative of the level of dehumanisation that members have experienced in the organisational jungle of their workplace environment. As such, network ties may be a response to a felt need to band together for survival.

Lack of opportunity and mobility frustrate knowledge workers. While they have expertise, the layers of bureaucracy in many knowledge organisations may impede their ability to use their knowledge and experience. Without the opportunity to utilise their knowledge and expertise, they experience no new learning. Their ability to influence or make change is impeded. They sense a loss of autonomy and agency. One high-level knowledge specialist described the many layers of approval that he had to observe in the conduct of his work and commented, “I’m leaving because they have taken away the space for me to work”. Fluctuating support networks add variety and challenge, stimulating learning and creating the depth and meaning so desirable to knowledge professionals.

Fluctuating support networks offer a new organisational model where networked, lateral connections span boundaries and level voices and power differentials to build effective relationships with *recognition and respect*. These lateral transactions seed new ideas and create an arena for growth and renewal. Networks provide “neutral yet fertile” ground for hearing and respecting diversity. Members are encouraged to express individual quirks and creativity as adding value to network interactions.

I guess I really needed the validation of a group that I am more than the narrow role I play a work. To be described as an expert, wow, that’s

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humbling and gratifying all at the same time. Amazing how that opens one up to giving even more, to exploring, sharing, learning even more, honouring the experience and expertise in each of us.

As recognition and respect for the skills of other network members accumulates, members come to know each other's strengths and limitations. They know who to access when needed and how to leverage expertise. This enables them to call on and utilise one another very effectively in advancing both individual and joint enterprise.

Rehumanising offers *safety and healing*. Fluctuating support networks are a safe place for expressing vulnerability and building confidence; they serve as a respite from organisational turbulence, providing insulation or protection in unstable environments enabling members to cope with pressures in their formal organisations. Networks provide solace, comfort and tangible support; a place where members can let down their guard and be 'real' with others who understand their stress and needs. The emotional embrace resembles a family – a place to feel comfort and reassurance when needed.

Network connectedness can also serve as an "early warning system" for members, alerting them to potential problems or changes in the organisational environment. There is safety in numbers in times of uncertainty and subterfuge. Mutual support enables members to deal with setbacks and feelings of cynicism and frustration. Having a place to go where they can share concerns and problems rehumanises their situation. Over time, networks build social capital. Through participation members earn credits, as in a mutual trust bank, which they can later draw down as needed. Like a savings account that is healthy in balance, network participation creates a sense of safety, prosperity, well-being and progress for its members – an investment in the future.

When members face tough situations, they turn to others within the network for advice and support. They need objectivity but they also need empathy and compassion. *Kindred sharing* is the passionate reciprocation that takes place at the core of a fluctuating support network. Through kindred sharing, network members bond and develop mutual respect. They are able to

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share on a level that exceeds the norm in their workplace interactions.

Sharing within the safe environment of the network becomes a means of personal learning and growth. Honest opinions can be sought and offered without the potential for collateral damage to careers and reputations as might be the case in the formal organisation. Members offer mutual support through disclosure, exploration and shared understanding. Over time and with regular interaction, the sharing gradually becomes more intimate and more disclosing. This proves to be especially valuable when the situations or decisions they face require real courage. Members vent and release tensions; they move past venting to problem solving in a supportive environment.

Kindred sharing creates an easy and open environment that enables members to share ideas, generating an energy and creativity that may yield moments of epiphany-like illumination. These personal “Aahas!” often become defining moments for the network as a whole. Through kindred sharing, members can move forward with confidence.

### The Process of Rehumanising

The basic social psychological process of rehumanising includes three stages – *finding and likening*, *igniting passions* and *mutual engagement*. The finding and likening stage is a sub-core process that functions as an amplifying causal loop characterised by the development of *altruistic atmosphering*, *connectedness* and *trust*. As the level of altruistic atmosphering, connectedness and trust continues to build, or amplify, members move easily into the second stage of the rehumanising process - igniting passions. This stage has a catalytic effect on both the finding and likening stage as well as the third stage of the rehumanising process - mutual engagement. This third stage is also a sub-core process that functions as an amplifying causal loop characterised by *creativity*, *challenge*, *experimentation* and *learning*. As the catalytic middle stage, igniting passions facilitates the symbiotic relationship, continuous amplification and interdependent functioning of the sub-core processes of finding and likening and mutual engagement. Its dynamic capacity sustains the overall rehumanising process by continuously generating confidence, energy, commitment and bonding among network members.

## Finding and Likening

Fluctuating support network members find each other in various ways and through disparate connections made over time. They may be introduced through mutual connections. They may find each other through reputation. Frequent interactions build connections. Members discover mutual interests and needs.

Once *reputation* and *credibility* have been established, invitations to work collaboratively are readily offered and accepted. Through *mutuality*, members develop a rhythm in relating to one another. They identify areas of agreement and alignment. The experiences they share become the basis for a developing sense of mutual values, principles and responsibilities.

Mutuality accelerates when members experience a *psychic connect* - an instant attraction where they sense that “this feels right” or “oh, you’re one of us”. Even though such encounters are generally relaxed and informal, when individuals experience such strong interpersonal chemistry, the attraction and desire to network is strong.

...we’re bumping up against each other and recognising that we are related. We share interests, passions, values, connections and experiences. It’s a process of bonding...like family.

Psychic connects go beyond the intellectual. Individuals often speak of them as deep and intuitive. While members may not be able to rationalise this deeper sense of connection, they recognise it; they value the magic and the acceptance and assurance it offers.

*Likening* is the mutual attraction that develops between and among network members once they have found each other. It is the instinctual and emotive recognition of like minds - a recognition and excitement that creates the desire to connect and work together. Likening generates an authentic, reciprocal connection that builds respect and trust and removes the defensiveness that is so often a response to change and to new workplace situations. Likening opens conversations, reducing resistance and enabling engagement.

Dedication to a mutual purpose is important to sustaining interactions and fostering likening. The more frequent the interactions and the more open the communication, the more potential exists for building strong bonds. These attachments are

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the means by which likening develops into kindred sharing.

The initial toning of network relationships facilitates likening and fosters *mutuality*. Network members often identify in each other mutual or complementary interests and skills that enable them to work comfortably together and add value to each other's work and respective reputations. A synergy develops and the association is experienced as "enjoyment and power". The desire to experience this enjoyment and power will motivate individuals to seek out or create additional opportunities for collaboration.

The likening in fluctuating support network relationships contributes to rehumanising by creating *altruistic atmospherings*, *connectedness* and *trust*. Members comment on the "magic" in network interactions in contrast to formal work groups where they feel no sense of camaraderie. They speak of the joy and the sense of belonging. Networking takes them out of day-to-day busywork and gives them a place and space to think and reflect. The esprit de corps is non-judgmental, enabling the sharing of information and diverse perspectives and generally supporting the personal and professional development of members. Members describe the atmosphere as creating real community.

Likening facilitates a *connectedness* that deepens network interaction, overcoming the sense of isolation that many knowledge workers experience. Connectedness strengthens and sustains network interactions. As connectedness builds, interaction increases and the nature of the connections change. Network bonds become sticky, creating a perpetual connectedness as single dimension sharing transcends to a deeper personal connection. The desire to maintain connections is both personal and professional. Members comment on the quality of their network relationships as being both intellectually and socially stimulating. Once authentic connections are made, the network can fluctuate without fear as members know it will persist.

The deeply personal nature of this perpetual connectedness transcends the professional level. As such, it has the potential to undermine organisational affiliations and corporate intelligence. This poses potential challenges to the management of knowledge workers and the knowledge and intellectual property to which they are privy.

Connectedness within a network does not rule out individual

work. While mutual engagement is a significant outcome of fluctuating networks, individual members continue to work independently and call upon the network when needed. Connectedness builds over time as members experience repeated opportunities for mutual engagement. Lack of opportunities for mutual engagement will restrict connectedness. There is a recognition that membership will fluctuate as some members move on and new members enter the network domain but, at the same time, there is a confidence in the network's stability once a core group has emerged. Connectedness is particularly strong within a core group.

*Trust* is both antecedent to likening as well as an outcome. Individuals seek out those with whom they can develop a basic level of comfort and trust. Often, there may be some commonality in terms of organisational position, professional interests, values, knowledge or skills that promotes initial sharing and facilitates further interaction. Trust is cyclic; it facilitates likening and, as also an outcome of likening, it fosters kindred sharing and bonding.

Fluctuating support networks may compensate for the chronic irritations of low trust levels within knowledge workplaces (Ganester, Schaubroeck, Sime, & Mayes, 1990). Members value deeply the trust placed in them by others in the network. They strive to validate that trust and demonstrate mutual commitment. Reciprocity of trust and commitment builds between members.

Over time, however, likening can lead to exclusivity in relationships. As network members liken, they build a repertoire of shared history that inevitably includes inside jokes and stories. This helps to bond the network and create boundaries around membership, defining who belongs and who does not. While facilitating inter-network relationships, it can serve as a barrier to those outside the network, creating resentment and feelings of exclusivity or jealousy that may work against the vitality and sustainability of the network over time.

### **Igniting Passions**

As likening develops, passions ignite, creating energy for sustaining interaction and mutual engagement. This passion opens up possibilities and creates excitement, igniting the desire for exploration, learning and sharing. They value meeting others

who share a sense of energy and who are open to sharing their knowledge and skills. The dynamic interplay between passion and likening can feel out of control at times, but in a good way. Network members speak of reconnecting with previous dream jobs, with core values, interests and passions through their network experiences. Individual skills and abilities are stimulated by joint problem solving and collaborative creativity. The more members liken, the more passion is ignited and the more passion, the more likening is reinforced and increased.

In igniting passions, fluctuating support networks bring vocational passion into relief in an organisation. The unpredictability of their self-organising nature also creates energy. The fast pace required in responding to opportunities as they emerge creates excitement and stimulates further networking. The resultant tension is an enjoyable anxiety. Members describe it as edgy and stimulating:

What excites me is the pace of it. I like that, I like the energy it gives me and the energy it creates so I like it fast not slow.... I think it's very important. It feels like a life! Ahh.. sometimes it's too much for sure but I'll take any day of too much than too little.

The energy and synergy from mutual engagement fuel the desire to continue networking. There is a strong sense of fun, of pushing the envelope. There is little pretence or showiness in network interactions. Participation is rooted in purpose, value and meaning for those engaged. Yet, at the same time, it is fun. Members enjoy the action, the inevitable debates. In this stimulating environment, work advances and progress is made.

Igniting passions serves as the catalyst for moving a network from the process of finding and likening into the process of mutual engagement. As in the finding and likening stage, mutual engagement is also an amplifying causal loop that stimulates the catalytic effect of igniting passions while also building individual and collective confidence, re-energising mutual engagement, building commitment and reinforcing network bonds. By extension, mutual engagement also re-amplifies the finding and likening process loop thereby facilitating network sustainability.



### **Mutual Engagement**

Members of fluctuating support networks may bring diverse backgrounds and interests but they can develop a strong desire to work together to achieve a common goal. The goal may be practice enhancement, development of a joint project or a professional collaboration. There is recognition of the range and depth of talent within the network and a desire for *mutual engagement* to leverage that capacity. There is excitement in the potential to move the group ahead and to achieve collective potential. Members treasure the experience, both for the socialisation and for the work achieved.

I also enjoyed the problem solving. I like building things, making things. So, it was both the creating something and then getting down to doing it, making it happen.

Mutual engagement through fluctuating networks enhances problem solving by offering expertise and new perspectives that individual knowledge workers may not possess. Such access can enhance the efficiency and quality of problem solving outcomes. Enhanced outcomes build both individual and collective confidence.

Fluctuating support networks keep personal and professional passions from being eroded and even depleted in the hectic humdrum of daily organisational life. Networks follow a simple principle of self-organisation as members allocate energy to follow their passions. "If no one has passion, we should not be doing it." On the other hand, attempts to force regular engagement may actually reduce network participation over time. Force produces strained participation that undermines network vitality. It ends up feeling like work.

While social connections that rehumanise are a strong motivator for network participation, the real key to sustained network participation is the interplay between fulfilling rehumanising needs and bringing tangible value to the professional development of network members. Active participation fluctuates, coalescing when need arises or mutual interest culminates but remaining latent in the interim, functioning as an intelligent subsystem that monitors and alerts members of a call to action. Engagement is readily mobilised when opportunity or need is expressed by one or more members.

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Mutual engagement provides the arena for the release of collective *creativity*. It offers *challenge*, *experimentation* and *learning*. Mutual engagement builds *confidence*, *commitment* and *energy*. It enhances the *bonding* of network members.

The passions that ignite in a fluctuating support network spark *creativity*. Argument and debate also ignite passions in networks. Such intensity generates the creativity and problem solving power of the collective mindset in a network. It's part of the fluctuating nature of the network.

You can do creative things. You can do interesting things and you don't have to be doing routine stuff.... It's the excitement of creating something new. I think that really matters to each of us....  
It's what we share.

Fluctuating support networks *challenge* members to give their best. There is an expectation to do so and the support for stretching oneself. There is respect for taking a stand and challenging others in the network as well. Members recognise their personal power in challenging themselves and others and they develop a level of comfort in doing so more readily.

... it's the fun of it, the challenge of it... so you ask me why I say vibrant, I think at times, just scratching our heads about how we're going to do this... what's going to work, won't this work, what are we doing... so, it's just like creativeness, I think that's what ... as I look back on this... that was the charge in it.

Part of the value of networking is attributed to being tested and being able to sustain the effort by mixing the hard work with fun. Members express their enjoyment in the social and intellectual stimulation of networking but occasionally admit to feeling challenged intellectually. This is the stretch that fluctuating support networks can offer. The slogging actually serves to bond network members. While there is always a fear of failure mixed with the potential high of success. The higher the stakes; the greater the passion. Members thrive on that feeling of being on the edge. The challenge of risk and achievement can be very empowering. Success is sweetest when shared.

Fluctuating support networks also provide opportunities for

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*experimentation*, as places to try new things, to learn new skills, to have fun and to move past the strictures of formal organisational environments. Members describe their networks as practice fields where they are able to stretch their boundaries and take risks in an environment of trust. They speak of bringing what they have been exploring “out there” into the network, of testing assumptions. Ideas percolate throughout the network. Members are open to trying something new. They are not intimidated by the potential for making mistakes. It is seen as preferable to make a mistake than to do nothing. The atmosphere is open for experimentation and thereby innovation.

... because of the charting of new ground... we had to figure out a lot of stuff... there was nothing to go on... there was no model to adopt or emulate... We blew a lot of things... things we didn't do well but, nonetheless, it was trying to sort them through that was the fun. And having a real success, yeah... that would keep us going.

Collaborative creativity is increasingly important in complex knowledge work. Siloed knowledge workers find such networks an invaluable venue for experimentation. The more specialised their expertise or independent their work roles, the more valuable network opportunities become.

Individual passion for *learning* is stimulated and reinforced in a network. There is a strong sense of collective wisdom resident and accessible within the membership. Access to expertise that enhances learning is a powerful motivator for participation. Within networks, established participants mentor new members by sharing their knowledge and expertise. The altruistic atmosphere enables open sharing of ideas and concerns and fosters respect for a diversity of perspectives. The opportunity to learn together is both enjoyable and valuable. Learning transcends the individual to encompass the collective. Network members coach each other in applying new learning and maintain an interest in each other's progress.

The learning that results from taking on new challenges within a network adds depth and meaning to work. Restless organisational spirits are sated by continuous opportunities for reciprocal learning and sharing, getting past disengagement and

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non-performance, reminding individuals of when they “had a real hunger for their work”.

Networking builds individual and group *confidence* by fulfilling both ego and achievement needs. Confidence builds as network members pursue opportunities to test themselves. The testing may be of skill, knowledge or values. Confidence builds *commitment*.

I knew it was time to stand up and be counted. I also saw the impact we had by voicing our concerns, making recommendations and ultimately making things happen.

Members view their networks as a means to facilitate their commitment to personal and professional growth. Commitment comes from the depth and meaning of interaction. It feeds a passion that is shared by members and sustains network participation.

Tremendous *energy* is generated through fluctuating support network connections. Members describe their participation as revitalising. There is an infectious lunacy to the interaction, to the give and take. The adrenaline fix of igniting passions energizes network members and leaves them wanting more. Once established, the energy of network interactions can sustain a network. Even the removal or fading away of core or initial members will not threaten continuation of the network if the energy is there.

The passion that brings network members together is also the glue that bonds the network. Trust is the moderating factor in network *bonding*. Through sustained mutual engagement, ready trust is established within the network, facilitating participation in additional collaborative ventures. Once members have bonded, they stay connected even though they may move off into new organisations. There is an attraction to staying connected and to sustaining trusted bonds. It is a desire to re-experience the energy and excitement of the network connection.

### Implications for Management Practice

This study contributes to management praxis by raising awareness and offering insights into the practical value of fluctuating support networks as psychological infrastructure for rehumanising knowledge work. As an informal response to the

formal organisation, fluctuating support networks deviate from the conventions of the formal organisation, providing network members with a venue for fulfilling unmet social and psychological work-related needs. Knowledge and understanding of such networks may enable managers to understand their functionality in resolving knowledge workers' concerns and needs in response to persistent and unpredictable change and may offer managers an additional resource for achieving strategic organisational goals, especially those goals that require cross-functional integration and non-conventional perspectives to address increasingly complex organisational problems. Adopting the basic social process of rehumanising as a conceptual framework may assist managers and human resource professionals in developing organisational strategies that support a broader humanistic paradigm.

In particular, the theory of fluctuating support networks offers valuable insights on several issues of specific significance to management praxis in knowledge-based organisations:

### **Learning and Innovation**

Much of the challenge in knowledge work is the quest for innovation through complex problem solving. In contrast to routine work, innovative work requires scope for experimentation and flexibility of structures and operations (Szeto, 2000; Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbeck, 1973). Leveraging knowledge and wisdom is widely recognised as the key to competitive advantage and even organisational survival, yet this intangible asset is not readily accessible through the traditional channels of the formal organisation (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

By serving as venues for creative, imaginative and unconventional thinking, fluctuating support networks offer knowledge workers a practice field for the experimentation and flexibility that enables innovation. Rehumanising through fluctuating support networks re-ignites passion for creative engagement, offsetting the anxiety often associated with learning and change (Schein, 1992). The process of mutual engagement facilitates the creative process, building confidence while incubating innovative ideas until opportunities arise to introduce them into the formal organisation. From an organisational perspective, fluctuating support networks can be viewed as an emergent self-organising parallel learning system (Bushe and

Shani, 1991) that operates not as a replacement for, but as an informal supplement to the formal organisation, preparing the ground for learning in organisations by promoting co-operative peer group inquiry for both support and challenge (Reason, 1999). By building trustful relationships over time, networks can enhance organisational learning (Floren & Tell, 2004).

### **Job Security, Recruitment and Retention**

Recruitment and retention has emerged as a significant human resource management challenge, ahead of compensation and opportunity for advancement (Galt, 2003). The rise of non-standard work arrangements have increased perceived job insecurity (Parker, 1994), leading to job dissatisfaction and reducing organisational commitment which, in turn, can result in increased employee turnover (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Davy, Kinicki, & Scheck, 1991). The lack of a secure employment relationship creates a sense of alienation and loss of meaning in the workplace. Mobility and turnover in organisations may be moderated by secure anchorage in a primary group that supports the beliefs, feelings and ideas of members (Bennis, Berkowitz, Affinito, & Malone, 1968). Fluctuating support networks, particularly intra-organisational networks, may well serve as affinity groups offering a sense of belonging and security to organisational members.

### **Loyalty and Commitment**

A requirement for sustaining any social system is a degree of loyalty by its members and any threat to the system enhances this requirement (Gouldner, 1968). At the same time, the naturally cosmopolitan nature of highly specialised knowledge workers will promote their engagement in fluctuating support networks external to their organisations and thus potentially place them in positions of being recruited away. A suggested strategy is that of deepening the involvement of highly skilled workers within the organisation to engender a sense of local loyalty (Glaser, 1968). This local loyalty does not have to embrace the organisation as a whole. Loyalty may exist at many levels. Loyalty to a small work unit or an informal internal network may be sufficient to sustain commitment to the formal organisation. Thus, the existence of fluctuating support networks within the organisation may substantially support local loyalties, even in times of organisational threat or uncertainty.

Such membership is a way of reconceptualising the psychological contract between individuals and their organisations, with knowledge workers holding twin citizenship within the organisation and within their smaller work units (Handy, 1994). Loyalty to smaller units fosters liberty, incentive and initiative, while loyalty to the organisation mitigates duplication, inefficiency and misunderstanding. Fluctuating support networks offer knowledge workers a source of continuity and connection that many indicate they no longer experience in their organisations. Managers would be wise to leverage this subsidiary contribution while focusing organisational efforts on developing the third sense that knowledge workers espouse in their search for meaning in their work – that of direction or mission (Handy, 1994).

### **Employee Involvement and Productivity**

Employee involvement is crucial to knowledge organisations, as effort remains largely discretionary in knowledge work (Belanger, 2000). The concept of workplace democracy gives workers more autonomy and control over their work and their work environments (Semler, 1994, 2004). At the same time, it is worth noting that the move to greater involvement of non-managerial workers in the organisation and co-ordination of work may contribute to work intensification (Belanger, 2000). Fluctuating support networks enable a degree of self-organisation, autonomy and control for knowledge workers while also moderating potentially stressful impacts of work intensification.

### **Stress and Satisfaction at Work**

Workers in high-strain jobs have higher rates of disease than their counterparts in low-strain jobs. In fact, health care expenditures are nearly fifty per cent greater for workers who report high levels of stress. Stress can also result in increased absenteeism and decline in productivity (Williams, 2003).

Organisations that demand next to nothing of individuals can alienate and repress creative ability; but organisations that demand everything of individuals destroy autonomy and particularity with questionable demands made on an individual's time, psychic stability and social development (Leitche & van Hattem, 2000).

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... most often the sources of disengagement from a job don't involve salary and benefits, but things that managers do have control over, such as providing challenge, meaningful work and opportunities to learn and gain recognition.  
(Immen, 2004)

Rehumanising through fluctuating support networks holds both healing and revitalising potential for knowledge workers. Participation enables knowledge workers to better manage the stressful impact of a dehumanised workplace environment, establish supportive relationships and re-ignite their passion and energy for work. The residual benefit to the formal organisation should serve as sufficient incentive for any manager to develop an understanding of the significant role and value that fluctuating support networks offer for rehumanising knowledge work.

### **Methodological Notes**

The individuals who participated in this study were drawn from a range of public and professional sectors including secondary and post secondary education, nursing, medicine, social work, corporate training and development and management consultancy. Consistent with the parameters offered by Brint (2001) and Pyroria (2005) to define knowledge work and knowledge workers, the work of study participants requires the creative and innovative application of expert knowledge to the solution of organisationally contingent issues. Such issues routinely emerge as a result of persistent change and the application of new technologies and work processes that demand continuous adaptation, learning and collaborative problem solving. In summary, 61 individuals participated in the study; 27 through personal interviews with an additional 34 individuals participating in focus group sessions. These data sources were augmented with additional data from participant observations and casual conversations with knowledge workers as opportunities arose during the course of the study.

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## **Reincentivizing Work: A grounded theory of work and sick leave**

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### **Abstract**

Work capacity has a weak correlation to disease concepts, which are insufficient to explain sick leave behavior. With data mainly from Sweden, a welfare state with high sickness absence rates, our aim was to develop an explanatory theory of work and sick leave. We used classic grounded theory for analyzing data from 130 individual interviews of people working or on sick leave, physicians, social security officers, and literature. More than 60,000 words and hundreds of typed and handwritten memos were the basis for the writing up of the theory. In this paper we present a theory of “reincentivizing work”. To understand incentives we define work disability as hurt work drivers or work traps. Work drivers are specified as work capacities + work motivators, monetary and non-monetary. Incentives are recognized when hurt work drivers are assessed and traps identified. Reincentivizing is done by repairing hurt work drivers and releasing from traps. In our theory of reincentivizing work, hurt work drivers and traps are recognized and then repaired and released. The theory may add to social psychological research on work and sickness absence, and possibly inform future changes in sick leave policies.

### **Background**

The sickness absence rate in Sweden is one of the highest in the world (Ljungqvist & Sargent, 1998). Sweden has generous sick leave policies and strong job protection legislation. There is no upper time limit for sick leave, and a low risk of losing employment due to sickness absence. Monetary compensation from social security limits the loss of buying power to 0-20% after tax for people with low to average incomes on sick leave (Esser, 2005). A too soft and disincentivizing social security system was a central political issue leading to a shift in Swedish government 2006.

In welfare states such as Sweden monetary work motivators are weak as compared to laissez-faire economies such as USA

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(Rae, 2005) while non-monetary motivators for working such as plight and pride are stronger in welfare states (Johansson & Palme, 2004). Although Swedish sick leave compensation is generous a sick leave trajectory often involves shame and distrust. Against this background common disease concepts are inadequate to explain sick leave behavior since work capacity alone shows little correlation to disease severity (Melamed, Groswasser& Stern, 1992; Riegel, 199; Englund, 2000). Therefore our aim of this study was to generate an explanatory theory of work and sick leave.

### **Methods**

Data collection started in 2003. We did 22 formal and 40 informal interviews with people working and on sick leave, informal interviews with 30 Swedish health care professionals (physicians and nurses), and formal interviews and focus group interviews with 6 employees of the Swedish social insurance agency (Försäkringskassan, FK). We did secondary analysis of taped and transcribed formal interviews with 20 participants in a Swedish rehabilitation study (Grahn, Stigmar & Ekdahl, 1999; Grahn, Borgquist & Ekdahl, 2004) and 12 American employees of a public transportation company (Potts, 2005). We examined data from expert group meetings, conferences, and literature data as well as quantitative data on sick leave in a cohort of 196 people. Participation by the first author in international grounded theory workshops 2003-2006 was a source of both interview data and memos.

We did classic grounded theory (GT) analysis according to Glaser (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2005) aiming at generating conceptual theories that are abstract of time, place and people. Classic GT differs from most studies using qualitative data that often are presented as GT (Sekimoto, Imanaka, Kitano, Ishizaki & Takahashi, 2006) by presenting explanatory concepts rather than descriptions.

All of the data mentioned above was compared in the analysis according to the grounded theory "all is data" dictum (Glaser, 1998, p 145). Field notes from interviews not taped were coded and compared in the same way as transcripts from taped interviews. Concepts and categories emerged through a cyclic process of collecting, coding, and comparing incidents in the data by which concepts and categories relating to the incidents

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originated. These concepts were then compared with each other and new incidents as more data was collected and compared. Theoretical memos, in the shapes of text, diagrams, and figures, were written, typed, or drawn in the comparative process. More than 60.000 words and hundreds of pages of typed and handwritten memos sit in the memo bank from which this paper was sorted and written up. "Memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting and analyzing data, and during memoing" (p 177). Memos yielded creative ideas of where to sample more data (theoretical sampling), which was coded in a more selective way after a core variable was discovered. More memos were produced followed by sampling of more data and so on. Memoing is "the core stage of grounded theory methodology" and should be done at any time and place in order to capture creative ideas (p 177).

Memos were sorted and later written up in the last steps of the grounded theory methodology. We now thoroughly compared relationships between categories and concepts using different theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978, 2001, 2005), and eventually a dense substantial theory emerged. The writing of two working papers enhanced the sorting of the memos: in 2005 for a research report in Swedish (Thulesius, 2005) and in 2006 for a grounded theory seminar. The intensity of the analytic process varied but increased over time, and the theory was modified until the last writings of this article.

Many quantitative clinical research methods consider persons or patients as units of analysis, whereas in GT the unit of analysis is the incident (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The number of incidents being coded and compared often amounts to several hundred in a GT study since every participant often reports many incidents. When comparing many incidents in a certain area, the emerging concepts and the relationship between them are in reality probability statements and therefore GT should not be considered a qualitative method but a general method that can use any kind of data (Glaser, 2003, p 1). However, although they deal with probabilities most GT studies are considered as qualitative since statistical methods are not used, and figures not presented.

The inductive nature of GT with hypotheses being generated, not tested as in traditional quantitative research is important for

the method, and has its roots in quantitative inductive research (Glaser, 1998, pp 22-31; Lazarsfeld & Thielens, 1958). Thus, the results of grounded theory are not reports of facts but probability statements about the relationship between concepts, or an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses developed from empirical data. Validity in its traditional sense is consequently not an issue in GT research, which instead should be judged by fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability (Glaser, 1998, p 18). Fit has to do with how close concepts fit with the incidents they are representing, and this is related to how thorough the constant comparison of incidents to concepts was done. A relevant study deals with the real concern of participants and grabs attention. The theory works when it explains how the problem is being solved with much variation. A modifiable theory can be altered when new relevant data is compared to existing data. A GT is never right or wrong, it just has more or less fit, relevance, workability and modifiability, and readers of this article are asked to try its quality according to these principles.

This study was approved by the regional ethics committee at Lund University, and formal interviews were made with informed consent from participants.

### Results

The theory of “reincensivizing work” first requires the understanding of concepts generated for this study that explain different aspects of hurt incentives. Then we show how these hurt incentives are recognized, and finally different reincensivizing activities are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Reincensivizing work, theory outline.**

- Understanding incentives by specifying drivers and traps
- Recognizing hurt incentives:
  - driver assessments
  - mode traps
- Reincensivizing work:
  - capacity repair
  - capacity and non-monetary motivator repair
  - monetary motivator repair
  - trap release



## Understanding Incentives by Specifying Drivers and Traps

Understanding what incentives consist of is important for reincentivizing. The notions of traps and drivers can explain many issues regarding disability and sick listing. In this study drivers are specified as a combination of motivators and capacities to pursue a certain mode of occupation such as work. Traps are situations where drivers are locked in a certain mode.

A driver is what makes you go on in a mode and a trap is what prevents you from getting out of it”  
from theoretical memo

We define a *driver* as a combination of motivators and capacities. *Work capacities* are education, health, training, physical and psychological conditions, and social skills etc. Non-monetary *work motivators* are fellowship, identity, meaning, desire, plight, pride, and "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995) but also shame-avoidance (Sachs & Krantz, 1991) etc. Monetary work motivators (or non-work motivators) are wage and sick leave compensation but also unemployment benefits, fringe benefits or expenses such as meal costs, clothes, traveling, and time for repairs of homes, cars etc.

A change in motivators or capacities can hurt mode drivers. Illness may hurt a work mode driver if the work mode capacity goes down. Eventually a hurt work driver may cause sick leave. Hurt capacities and motivators eventually *trap* a person in a certain mode, (see below). In addition, time dependant inertia can trap mode drivers. This means that the longer a person has been in a certain mode the more difficult it is to change that mode, and thus the person gets trapped. Thus, if a person has been on sick leave for a long time it is difficult to go back to work since the inertia that comes from being in the sick leave mode for a certain time prevents the person from going back to work.

...after two to three months of sickness absence the patient often gets stuck in a sickness role that is very difficult to get out of” (physician expert, FK social insurance)

... after three months of sick leave it is difficult for people to return to work (physician, male middle aged)

### Recognizing Hurt Incentives

Many *driver assessments* are done in sick leave situations. This either results in reincentivizing or disincentivizing a work return.

*Mode driver calculation.* Primarily, every person aims for her optimal "being mode" by an automatic mode driver calculation (Mdc), modified after Ekström (2005). A Mdc has three main outcomes: preserving a mode, limiting losses within a mode, and eventually reevaluating a mode. The Mdc weighs up mode motivators and capacities in a cost-benefit calculus. Let's say an ill person is uncertain about being able to work since he/she feels depressed or suffers pain while working. So the work driver is hurt. i) Then mode *preserving* is first done: Enduring anxiety and pain by sticking to fundamental beliefs, strategies, and explanatory models. Keeping up habits, goals and daily life and continue working. ii) Or the person goes on to *limiting losses*: Trying to stay in the mode as long as possible. Trying to master the situation by seeking knowledge, investing in life style changes, new health care contacts, or cutting down work, changing work tasks, taking short sick leaves or holidays. iii) Or the person eventually *re-evaluates* the situation: Changing the mode by going on long sick leave, or changing job. If illness is severe enough the preserving and limiting stages are bypassed into immediate reevaluation.

Sick leave in itself can be seen as a mode with its own drivers. The Mdc basically determines whether an ill person works or stays at home. Ill health is then only one factor in the calculus. An ill person with an otherwise high work capacity combined with strong work motivators (monetary and non-monetary) has a strong work driver and a low risk of sick leave. Another ill person with an otherwise low work capacity and weak work motivators has a high risk of sick leave. (See Table 1)

*Being modes affect motivators.* While working the ill person primarily wants to preserve the work mode, but may eventually reevaluate the situation and go on sick leave. Having been on sick leave for some time the sick leave mode gets stronger through inertia. The Mdc now preserves another status quo and thus either reincentivizes work or chooses sick leave (see trapped mode drivers).

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Should I go on working despite my symptoms or stay at home?

Should I return to work now as my symptoms are reduced or should I stay at home until they are completely gone?

If I stay home from work what is the cost in terms of money and/or humiliation from my employer/fellow workers and/or the social insurance and what are the gains in terms of reduced suffering? (From a theoretical memo)

Other participants in the sick leave situation also make assessments and made driver calculations:

*Employer assessment.* Employers may use a calculus similar to the Mdc when an employee turns ill. *Preserving* the existing situation is first done. This is followed by *limiting losses*, i.e. having the person cut down on tasks. Finally, the employer is *reevaluating* the situation, often by replacing the person by another employee, eventually permanently. This replacement reevaluating strategy disincentivizes work return. But, if the employer regularly contacts absent employees and cooperates with the FK (social insurance) this can reincentivize work return. In rehabilitation planning the employer input is crucial for a work return.

*Physician assessment.* Physicians also calculate hurt work drivers in a physician assessment, which can either reincentivize or disincentivize work return. When writing sick leave notes physicians are either reincentivizing work return by being restrictive about sick leave:

You don't need sick leave for this condition; you can actually go on working! (middle-aged male physician),

or disincentivizing it by doing what the patient wants (Carlsen & Norheim, 2005):

How long sick leave do you want [me to write in the sick leave note] (middle aged male physician)

*Social\_insurance (FK) officials 'assessments.* When assessing requests for sick leave FK either reincentivizes work return by handling cases restrictively - "*Tiredness is not a reason for sick*

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*leave*” (FK executive), or disincentivizes work return by speeding up “client” turn-over and promptly providing sick leave benefits “*the trick is to feed the PUMA (permanent and automatic benefit payment without control of sick leave status, abbreviated PUMA in Swedish)*” (FK official). So whether an ill person goes on sick leave depends on the Mdc, and assessments of employer, physicians and FK officials. But there is also a higher societal or macro level that determines sick leave behavior:

*Macro level assessment.* On the macro or society level the social insurance has three ways to go in the sick leave situation. Either *preserving* the present sick leave policies regarding legislation and compensation levels; or *limiting* sick leave by moderately restricting policies or by influencing attitudes towards sick leave; or *reappraising* the situation by radical changes of policies.

*Mode traps* further explain why a person is on sick leave. A person can get trapped in a certain mode through different (dis)incentivizers such as inertia, changing motivators or capacities. There are different drivers for different modes and these can trap the individual from reincentivizing work, i.e. from going back to work or go on working. Below are a few examples of traps associated with work and sickness absence.

*Body trap.* A person suffering pain or ill-health can be said to have a body-trapped work driver. This is the traditional reason for sick leave. The work motivators may be there, but they are locked in the hurt body. Basically, “body trap” means that your body prevents you from working. Work motivators could be high but body capacity is low.

It is like your body energy is trapped, you can barely handle everyday tasks and work is unthinkable” (middle-aged woman)

When body says no, work incentives are low (middle-aged man).

*Poverty trap.* Monetary disincentivizers in the Swedish labor market have been recognized by the government report “Out of the poverty trap” (Swedish Gov Report, 2001). In Sweden, it is difficult for persons on long-term sick leave with a low income to increase their income by returning to work due to marginal effects of the social security system. These marginal effects are

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disincentivizing work by reincentivizing non-work modes.

*Fox trap.* A person on sick leave having a limited work capacity belongs neither in the work mode nor in the sick leave mode. Instead of being on full time sick leave or to go on working full time despite illness a person in Sweden partial time sick leave, which is quite common in Sweden. However, being without employment the person is in the fox trap - “*you are too healthy to be on sick leave*” says the FK official, while the employment service agent says “*you are too ill to be working*”.

*System trappers.* Some people in welfare states take advantage of the compensations in the welfare system. One might say that they are “working the system”, and we could also call them “system trappers” since their behavior could be compared to that of hunters and gatherers. In our data “system trappers” are more frequent in remote areas where people traditionally make their living from hunting, fishing, and forestry, and where regular jobs are limited. In scarcely populated parts of Canada it is considered acceptable to work as little as possible and yet get social security. In Sweden scarcely populated areas have the highest number of people on sick leave and unemployment benefits. Attitudes towards such benefits in these areas are less linked to shame than in other areas with a stronger labor market. So, work motivators seem to vary culturally, geographically and demographically.

*Honey trap.* Too much stimulation by strong motivators, both monetary and non-monetary will eventually trap a person in a high pace work mode difficult to get out of. This might provoke illness and a limited future work capacity. People working with creative tasks thus risk getting stuck in the honey trap. Family life and leisure becomes annoying breaks in work, which becomes the primary meaning of life. The honey trap involves a reincentivizing positive feedback mechanism. The incentive makes you work more, which gives more incentive, and finally you cannot stop working at a pace that is too high for your capacities.

At X the honey trap is a fact. People get here from all over the world. They love their work – solving problems etc, and if they don't watch out they get stuck in the (honey) trap... (Middle aged employee with creative job at multinational company)

**Reincentivizing Work by Capacity and motivator Repair**

Reincentivizing work is done through repairing hurt work drivers, i.e. hurt capacities and motivators for work. When drivers are hurt they need repair, and by repairing them the traps get released.

***Capacity repair***

Reincentivizing work by improving the health and well-being of a person on sick leave is fundamental. We call one aspect of it body repair. *Body repairs* for impaired body capacities are medication, physiotherapy, surgery, rehabilitation programs (Grahn et al, 1999, 2004) and alternative therapies. Successful treatments eventually reincentivize the work return. Irreparable illness often leads to disability compensation such as a sick leave pension.

***Capacity and non-monetary motivator repair***

*Self repair.* Socializing with friends and relatives, keeping pets, physical exercise, and hobbies may enhance non-monetary motivators and restore work capacity at the same time. This is achieved by an improved well-being which ameliorates work return. However, long duration of self-repair activities may weaken the work driver since time away from work disincentivizes work return.

*Work-place repair.* Making the work place a better environment for the employee can reincentivize work. Emotional strains caused by bad management risks eroding work identity, a powerful work motivator. It is therefore important that supervisors try to create a positive emotional atmosphere (Nordqvist, Holmqvist & Alexanderson, 2003). Structured back-to-work programs where absent employees are contacted and fellow workers informed of possible changes in task assignments when the absentee returns are also beneficial. It seems as the more employers are engaged in rehab programs the more work can be reincentivized (Nordqvist, Holmqvist & Alexanderson, 2003).

*Rehumanizing.* Strengthening non-monetary work motivators and thus increasing work capacity can prevent a person from going on sick leave. This can be achieved by joining support networks in the workplace that may initiate a

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rehumanizing process (Holton, 2006) promoting authenticity, safety and healing. By giving network members challenge, experimentation, and creativity, this can provide the worker with new energy and learning.

### *Monetary motivator repair*

*Controlling sick leave insurance.* There are three main ways to reincentivize work by controlling the sick leave insurance. First, making it more difficult to obtain by controlling its eligibility. Second, controlling non-monetary motivators, and third making it less financially beneficial to be on sick leave.

*Controlling insurance eligibility.* Reincentivizing would be enhanced by a stricter control of the sick leave insurance eligibility, which has been characterized as being too “soft”. A stricter control means that FK and employer assessments have to be tougher. Hence, the trust in the Mdc and physician assessment is often reduced. A 2006 government report suggests the use of Medical Disability Advisor (MDA) guidelines from the USA for limiting the length of sick leave periods (Swedish Gov Report, 2006).

*Controlling non-monetary motivators.* Shame, fear and plight could disincentivize sick leave. In national multimedia ad campaigns FK linked sick leave to shameful behavior and subtle fraud. Hence, by inflicting shame, and appealing to societal plight people would become less prone to go on sick leave.

...it (the ad campaign) puts a sick leave controller in the head of the person on sick leave. (Regional FK CEO)

*Controlling monetary compensation.* Hurt monetary motivators disincentivize a return to work for those who have been on sick leave long enough to trust the monthly payments from the FK. By cutting down monetary compensation levels of sick leave (and of unemployment benefits) it might be possible to reincentivize work.

Sick leave would probably go down if compensation levels were lowered... (Former national FK CEO)

*Strengthening monetary work motivators.* Making work monetarily advantageous in relation to non-work could be done

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on the macro level by using tax policies. This is used in the UK where working families get a special tax deduction as compared to families on welfare. In Sweden the new 2006 government launched a tax deduction eligible only for workers, not for people on sick leave or retirement pension.

### Trap Release

Traps are essentially released by the above repair strategies. Either body and/or work place repair can release from a *body trap*. Improving impaired health situations and work place conditions can help workers with health problems to return to work. Controlling sick leave insurance and strengthening monetary work motivators might get people out of the *poverty trap*. By all three strategies a *fox trap* can be released. Education or job training programs could release from the *fox trap* by increasing work capacity.

*System trappers* can be controlled by sick leave insurance repair. A stricter control of eligibility and reduced monetary compensation of different types of social insurance will prevent people from abusing the welfare system.

A *Honey trap* can be prevented by work place repair. Some employers are aware of “honey-traps” and prevent their employees from getting consumed by over-motivating jobs. They sense signals of over-stimulation and require that employees take time off. So a release from the honey-trap can be done through an initiative from the employer or another person in order to prevent a future damage to the work driver.

### Discussion

In this study of work and sick leave we present a theory explaining why it may be difficult to return to work after sick leave, and what can be done to reincentivize the return. “Reincentivizing work” indicates that work motivators, both monetary and non-monetary, and not only health related factors are important in the process of a work return (Fryers, 2006). Reincentivizing is a theory that fits with the wide range of data from which it was generated. It also works to explain many work and sick leave related issues. The theory applies to the Swedish situation with one of the highest sickness absence rates in the world, but we think reincentivizing is relevant for other settings as well. Reincentivizing starts with understanding incentives by



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specifying the driver and trap concepts that are central to comprehend the theory: then follows recognizing hurt drivers and traps. Third, reincentivizing work is done by repairing hurt capacities and motivators, and releasing from traps.

To develop the reincentivizing theory we did classic grounded theory (GT) analysis according to Glaser (1978, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2005). We interviewed people working or on sick leave as well as physicians and social insurance officials, and also analyzed literature. Our procedure was comparable to a previous study in a different substantive area Thulesius, Hakansson & Petersson, 2003). GT is the most quoted single method for analyzing qualitative data according to a Google Scholar search. Yet classic GT studies are rare. They represented <10% of 200 consecutive studies referring to the method in a PubMed search in 2005-2006 done by the first author. Most studies were descriptive and lacked a core variable theory, which is required in classic GT.

The concept driver is fundamental to this study and commonly used in contemporary Swedish language: “what is your driver?”, “what is the driver in your life...”. In GT this is called an in-vivo code, i.e. it comes from the interview data. Trap is another in-vivo code from the area of sick leave used by unions, employer organizations, and government agencies. The body trap concept is also an in-vivo code. To be in a honey trap resembles the colloquial expression “workaholic”. Poverty trap is a concept borrowed from a Swedish government report (Swedish Gov Report, 2001). A similar concept is called “low pay traps” that are disincentives for people to stay in the workforce (Quintini & Swaim, 2003). Fox trap is a concept found in a white-collar workers union report. The mode driver calculation (Mdc) is a concept generated by inspiration from two grounded theories – “Cutting back after a heart attack” (Mullen, 1978), “Keeping my ways of being” (Ekstrom, Esseveld & Hovelius, 2005) and Jeremy Bentham’s “hedonic calculus” (Bentham, 1996). Mullen suggested that people having suffered a heart attack “cut back” in their lives after a complex calculus. Ekström proposed that women in midlife apply a personal calculus to keep up their way of being when faced with insecurity caused by midlife changes. Jeremy Bentham in 1798 claimed that every person was aiming for ultimate happiness by applying a “hedonic calculus” in life: “promoting whatever factors led to the increase of pleasure and

suppressing those which produced pain”.

Our theory of reincentivizing work fits in the literature on work, sickness absence and unemployment in several diverse fields such as sociology, economics and medicine. It attempts to integrate previous research findings together with new empirical data in an explanation of what motivates complex fundamental human behavior such as work. Theoretical explanatory models for sick leave behavior are scarce. A process model explaining absenteeism with data from the USA has been presented (Steers & Rhodes, 1984). It includes different variables such as work-related attitudes, personal factors, market factors and cultural and organizational norms in an organizing framework for understanding absence research. Our theory of reincentivizing seems to fit into that framework, yet with a more parsimonious explanation. Historically work incentives seem to be about balancing between working for a greater good such as society or God, and working for profit (apart from working for supporting life processes). In our study the non-monetary and monetary motivators for working represent this balance. In typical welfare states such as Sweden plight motivators are stronger than in laissez-faire economies such as USA (Esser, 2005). This is reflected in high Swedish compensation levels and a weak control system for sick leave. The Swedish expression “writing your own sick leave note” typically indicates the ease by which sick leave may be attained in this country. Societal stability motives for having generous sick leave policies -- possible reduced costs of health care, basic social welfare, policing, and drug control -- could legitimize the present high compensation levels. But between 1997 and 2003 both unemployment and sickness absence increased in Sweden to levels allegedly threatening the working morale of the population and eventually the foundation of the welfare state (Rae, 2005) Hence, a crucial issue in the 2006 parliament election campaign was to reduce the high number of people outside of the work force. This led to the first shift in government for 12 years with the new government suggesting lowered compensation for sick leave and unemployment. This was a political risk taking since 14% of the Swedish population depends on sick leave insurance or disability pension for their daily living (Rae, 2005). A November 2006 government report suggested stricter sick leave assessments using the length of mean sickness absence periods in the USA as a standard (Swedish Gov Report, 2006).

It may be argued that the value of our study is limited since it is not traditionally deductive. Neither is it a full description of the sick leave phenomenon. It is rather inductive since GT is primarily an inductive method. Reincentivizing work is according to GT a theory with a certain degree of probability and ability to provide an explanatory account of the area under study. It is not a presentation of proven facts but a suggested conceptual explanation of what is going on in the area of work and sick leave. We admit that we may have missed data in our comparative analysis of sick leave and work. We did for instance not study self-employed people. Yet there is Swedish data showing lower odds of sick leave in self-employed despite more subjective illness as compared to matched controls (Holmberg, Thelin, Stiernstrom & Svardsudd, 2004). However, we trust that our theory is modifiable when “missing” data is entered into the analysis. Thus, by adding new data more concepts will eventually be generated that will add to the theory, not contradict it. We therefore encourage readers to pursue research in this field, and refine and improve the suggested theory of reincentivizing work.

### **Conclusions**

We have developed a theory suggesting that complex drivers determine people’s behavior. These drivers can work either to incentivize or to reincentivize different modes. To deal with sick leave according to the theory of reincentivizing work first requires an understanding of the concepts of drivers and traps. Then hurt drivers and traps are recognized and eventually repaired and released. The theory of reincentivizing work could give ideas for future research, and possibly inform changes in sick leave policies.

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**Table 2 Work Driver & Risk of Sick Leave**

A 2x2 table presenting work driver and risk of sick leave as a function of degree of work capacity and work motivators

	High work capacity	Low work capacity
Strong work motivators	Strong work driver = Low risk of sick leave	Average work driver = Intermediate risk of sick leave
Weak work motivators	Average work driver = Intermediate risk of sick leave	Weak work driver = High risk of sick leave

### Authors' Contributions

HT and BG together conceived, designed, and collected data for the study. HT did the grounded theory analysis and drafted the manuscript in collaboration with BG. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## **Creative Cycling of News Professionals**

*Astrid Gynnild, Ph.D.*

### **Abstract**

The theory of creative cycling emerged from my PhD study of news professionals in Norway. The study was carried out according to classic grounded theory principles (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978, 1998, 2001, 2005), and the area of interest was the performance of news journalism in the multimedia age. The theory runs counter to widespread tendencies of industrial age thinking in news media. It emphasizes news professionals' search for meaning in their daily work, and suggests that their main concern is self-fulfillment through original contribution. The dilemma and resolution, creative cycling, is a basic social process continuously going within inner and outer framings. It consists of three interrelated dimensions: productive processing, breaks and shifts and inspirational looping.

Key words: multimedia, news journalism, productive processing, inspirational looping, knowledge workers, self-monitoring.

### **Introduction**

News reporters worldwide are facing the most extensive changes in media history. Digitalization and global networks have provided new options for instant news dissemination, and many news reporters are seeking to establish new work practices and exploring means of orientation and adjustment across publishing platforms. Multitasking, instant publishing and staff reductions require skill crossovers and new work approaches.

Being a news reporter and a manager for many years myself, I was quite curious about news journalists as shapers of new knowledge in the multimedia age. In my own career, I frequently experienced that many aspects of daily news production are taken for granted and as such, they tend not to be identified or conceptualized. News production is still an under-researched field.

By studying news reporters I also hoped to get in touch with tendencies in the job market that might apply to other groups of knowledge workers. To the extent that media organizations can be considered showcases for upcoming business trends, the tendency is clear: Competition in the job market is increasing; individuals tend to be more concerned about losing their jobs, more and more news reporters earn their living as freelancers, and the socio-economic motivation to be a skilful and attractive journalist is stronger than ever due to greater investment and stiff competition between news media.

The theory of creative cycling was generated from a grounded theory all-is-data-approach: oral, written, and observational data from a wide array of sources; visits to more than a dozen Norwegian newsrooms including multimedia corporations, newspapers, online newspapers, radio and TV; about 20 qualitative interviews with news reporters; many informal talks with news journalists, face to face and by phone, and data gathered from books, chronicles, magazines, news stories and the web.

When referring to individuals I have, for practical reasons, consistently called them “he”. Gender did not appear to be of significant importance to the theory so “he” is simply used as a unisex term. Moreover, the reader will find that the terms news professional, news reporter and journalist are used synonymously. The terms include writers, photographers, managers, graphic artists, producers, designers, copy editors and editors, in practice all professionals involved in daily news making.

### **The Theory of Creative Cycling**

The main concern of news reporters is self-fulfilment through original contribution. Their aspiration is the development and realization of talents and capabilities through professional journalistic work. The main concern is resolved through creative cycling, which is a cyclic social process simultaneously going on at psychological and structural levels. Creative cycling is the opportunity and basic need for moving in and out, back and forth within and between inner and outer framings in such a way that individual creativity and innovation is invigorated. Creative cycling refers to a continuously ongoing

multiplicity of parallel processes at micro and macro levels in news reporters' lives, and is vital to personal, professional, and organizational development, learning and growth.

Creative cycling demonstrates the fundamental necessity of being in mental and physical motion in highly individuated ways. As will be further elaborated in the following, it represents both a dilemma and a solution to news reporters' needs for self-fulfilment through original contribution. In its essence, creative cycling is about ideas, how journalists as knowledge workers come up with ideas and develop ideas, and how ideas are handled, nurtured and eventually materialized within the frames of news dissemination.

Creative cycling consists of three dimensions which are closely intertwined with each other and with the core. The first dimension is productive processing, a sequence of stages similar to creative processes previously identified in creativity research. Productive processing concerns the basic transition from ideas to published products and is acknowledged as fundamental to any kind of knowledge work.<sup>1</sup> The stages in productive processing are preparing, concentrating, incubating, eureka, elaborating and presenting. It should be emphasized that typically, many productive idea processes go on simultaneously, both short-term and long-term.

Movement from one stage of productive processing to the next is pushed forward by breaks and shifts, which is the second dimension of creative cycling. There are basically three types of breaks and shifts that regulate pacing and motion of productive processing: scheduled breaks, external interruptions and mental time-outs. The break-and-shift dimension is in reality a two-step sub-process, which starts with a break that in turn causes a shift of attention. In turn, breaks and shifts are both openers and closers for inspirational looping, which is the third dimension of creative cycling. Inspirational looping refers to individual movements and actions intended to stimulate, extend and improve quality and pacing of the productive processing of ideas.

Metaphorically outlined, productive processing is the engine in creative cycling, breaks and shifts mark the necessity of switching between the gears and inspirational looping is the continuous fuelling of the engine. Whereas the six stages of productive processing is usually experienced as going from one

step to the next, possibly back and forth between stages, inspirational looping is multi-cyclic and as such quite unpredictable. The six aspects of inspirational looping that consistently apply to news work short term and long term are concerned with motivation, roles, time and space, collaboration, feedback and stages in a career. Each loop in itself represents a sub-process which can be further generated into separate sub-theories.

### **Framings and Change**

The outcome of creative cycling processes is conditioned by inner and outer framings for work. Outer framings refer to external limitations within which the daily news work is supposed to be carried out. Examples of outer framings are type, size and economy of a publishing platform, its daily formats, staffing, news criteria, working schedules and timeframes for publishing. On a day-to-day basis, outer framings are out of the individual news reporter's influence and control.

Inner framings concern news professionals' mastery of work within varying outer framings. Inner framings are the individual's latent repertoire of understandings, beliefs and potential actions. Which aspects of these variables the news professional applies in various contexts, and also develops over time, depends upon skills in professional self-monitoring based on practical, theoretical and personal competences.

Both inner and outer framings are changeable, and they have extensive consequences for the quality of news production. The deliberate use of framing instead of frames implies that the structuring of work, the structuring of an organization, and at a micro level, the structuring of the individual self, is a continuously ongoing process;<sup>2</sup> framings are changeable and developable.

The concept framing focuses on the way that anything is constructed or put together, shaped or developed right now, for instance a web newsroom, a complex news organization, or a news reporter's motivation for work. Moreover, framing is usually constituted by several systems of frames that operate simultaneously. From moment to moment the changes within one or more of the framings may not be overwhelming. But during a certain time span alterations may be more apparent, and all

kinds of changes at one level or other will influence surroundings and their response. Hence framing also means to adapt and develop for a special purpose; it contains both the possibility to form and the possibility to be formed. In the process of gathering facts, editing and publishing news, therefore, sets of both inner and outer framings are operative.

As Tuchman points out, news may itself be considered a frame through which a constructed picture of reality is presented.<sup>3</sup> This frame is constituted by the ways both news organizations and news reporters structure and define their work tasks. And “by seeking to disseminate information that people want, need and should know, news organizations both circulate and shape knowledge” (Tuchman 1978, p.2).

A news reporter, who considers himself strongly intrinsically motivated, says “*the stricter frames I impose on myself, the more my journalistic creativity is challenged*”. The statement points to the fact that when framings are self-imposed, the individual is able to regulate them according to his own capacities. When new frames are imposed by others, the individual is less in control of events and hence more vulnerable to changes.

This two-sided approach to framings takes into account the fact that news work first and foremost is a set of collaborative actions between professionals in hierarchically structured organizations. Some framings emerge as important for enhancing professional creativity and innovation, whereas other framings are apparently counterproductive to journalistic creativity. Taking only outer framings for work into consideration would be an insufficient short cut since it emerged that a news reporter’s individual skills in relating to outer framings are just as important as outer realities per se. This study of news professionals during a period of intensive change in media organizations therefore supports the idea that the responsibility for developing innovative and productive newsrooms is indeed a joint venture between employers and employees.

In the following, I will first present the six stages of productive processing. From there, I will discuss the breaking and shifting dimension and then the properties of inspirational looping. The three dimensions and the framing conditions which together form the theory will consequently be discussed in relation to practical and theoretical implications of creative

cycling theory.

### **Productive Processing**

The following stages of productive processing account for a basic movement in creative cycling:

At the preparing stage, the news reporter sensitizes himself to a task or situation which is to be solved. For instance, at a conscious level, news reporters may prepare by reading background material, making appointments, notifying and discussing with other people involved and visualizing possible outcomes of the assignment. They open up to what is going on through scanning news updates, investigating facts, doing person research, being in touch with a broad spectrum of people and environments, and collaborating with colleagues. Preparation also typically includes atmospherizing;<sup>4</sup> getting oneself and other people in a good mood for doing a task. Considerable information gathered at the preparation stage is subconsciously stored and might later be brought to consciousness when the situation calls for it. Consequently, all kinds of knowledge and experience may contribute to the fund of productive processing.

At the concentrating stage, the news reporter and possibly his co-workers intensively work to find out what is really going on and how it is going to be handled. In this phase, the news reporter is action-oriented and extendedly focused on relevant solutions to be reached rapidly. The more he digs into something however, the more complicated it tends to be. Shaping news is intermittently a condition of tension, discomfort, despair and extensive stress for the individuals involved, compromising and improvising in order to keep deadlines and other absolute limits for work. The time and space absoluteness of the news frame frequently force news reporters into the next stage quite quickly.

The third stage, incubating, could just as well be called the chaos stage. The individual news reporter, or a collaborative team, may find himself or themselves in a state of confusion and bewilderment, sometimes feeling overwhelmed by facts, data, and other kinds of impressions waiting to be sorted. The more data, the more chaos one must be able to bear and explore. The incubation stage is critical for productive processing to continue. This period of chaos calls for individual withdrawals that are often difficult for outsiders to respect and understand. The news

reporter needs to be mentally or physically “alone” in order to concentrate. It is a phase where apparently nothing interesting happens. Apparently, he just messes around “not doing proper work”, waiting for the best idea or approach to become conscious.

Put simply, the reporter needs frequent timeouts from the tasks he is struggling with. It manifests itself for instance through bathroom visits, getting a cup of coffee, going outdoors to have a smoke, a random walk or other more plausible excuses for keeping the head focused by giving the body a break. In extreme cases, news reporters may withdraw for instance to their home office or another protected shelter for months while working on tasks of some dimension. It frequently turns out that it is the ability to tolerate and accept one’s own messing around that prepares and makes ready for the next stage. Incubating usually involves breaking up one’s mindsets in order to create an openness that prepares for eureka. Incubating may last from seconds to years. It is a more or less subconscious phase of testing out a variety of solutions or alternatives, and it is usually very introvert.

The fourth stage, eureka, is the moment of discovery, the moment when new insight breaks through. Eureka is brought about by a real encounter with for instance people, places, situations or new data.<sup>5</sup> For instance, the photographer gets a glimpse of the ultimate visual scene; the writer gets an incidental phone call which causes a breakthrough in his investigative reporting. Eureka, the real encounter, is identified first and foremost through its effect on the individual news reporter. The E-moment evokes the yes-I’ve-got-it feeling among people. Eureka is an ideational breakthrough and as such, a phase of very short duration. It is associated with high spirits, exhilaration, relief, glow, and energy and is often spontaneously expressed verbally or physically. When the E-moment is reached, the rest of the task is done with more ease, since energy arousal is a physical sign that one is intuitively heading in the right direction.

Eureka originally stems from Greek, meaning “I have found” (it). According to Webster’s New World Dictionary, the exclamation was first uttered by Archimedes when he discovered a method for determining the purity of gold. Finding a good intro to a story, a surprising headline or an original lead are all eureka moments in news reporters’ daily work.

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The fifth stage, elaborating, identifies work that needs to be done next for the productive processing to result in a practical, real world solution to the initial problem or task. The elaborating stage is hence a period of carefully working out of conceived ideas. Journalistic elaboration includes detailed, goal-oriented gathering of facts and information relevant to the superior idea or problem discovery, and it includes the subsequent sequencing of data and editing.

At the last stage, presenting, something that began as an idea among many other ideas is elaborated on and ready for sharing. The purpose of developing ideas is to give them a form and a format for presentation. At this point, it becomes clear that the six stages of productive processing do not necessarily follow a linear pattern. Instead, individuals might jump back and forth between the stages and work parallel with many different ideas or projects.

For instance, there are many levels of presentation. An idea developed by a news reporter might first be presented to a colleague, then go through a new round of collaborate incubation, eureka, and elaboration before it is presented at a staff meeting or to a manager. Then possibly new rounds of elaborating, eureka, incubating, eureka, elaborating and presenting, and finally the news story might be disseminated to the public. Moreover, as mentioned above, ideas or news that do not arrive at any presenting, either to be submitted to colleagues or the public are not necessarily lost or gone. They are just left dormant for the moment. Although quick dissemination to the public is always the ultimate goal in news journalism, most news reporters have many stories on how ideas they got and almost forgot might be recovered and further processed much later, when suddenly the right moment comes.

Often, productive processing does not require any conscious effort or focusing. It just “happens”. At other times, a news reporter might struggle for months or years with questions to which he is searching for answers or solutions. He is stuck at one stage in the process and does not know how to continue to the next – until suddenly something happens which provokes the eureka moment. Such occurrences are explained and understood by the breaks and shifts that keep the creative cycling process going, and by individual skills in inspirational looping.



During the study of news professionals in the multimedia age, the six stages of productive processing were generated ahead of the overall creative cycling concept. It emerged that when shaping of new knowledge is involved, it presupposes productive processing going on. News reporters are continuously involved in many parallel aspects of productive processing, and it typically goes on without notice. After the stages of productive processing were identified, however, it became apparent that something was still missing. What happens before, between and after the stages? What causes the jump from one stage to another? And how do we know when an individual, a team or a group has moved from one phase of productive processing to the next? It emerged that the various phases of productive processing call for different kinds of breaks and shifts, and that productive processing is materialized in a number of ways, according to what aspects of inspirational looping that are operant.

### **Breaks and Shifts**

The second dimension of creative cycling, breaks and shifts, contribute to fluency in productive processing, and provide the individual with options for quick switching between ways of approaching people, situations and tasks. For productive flow, moments of breaks and shifts are just as important as that which is traditionally considered journalistic “work”. Breaks and shifts are concerned with moments of letting go, and are caused by combinations of outer and inner framings. To create something new, one has to let go of something old, May (1975) points out. The circulation of letting-go moments in news journalism is for the most part extremely high. In their daily work, news professionals are continuously exposed to a multitude of situations that call for speedy sorting and quick decision-making of ideas and possible actions.

News reporters typically have specific, unspoken rituals to which they turn in pressed situations. When they are on track of something important or a time limit is getting close, they may use a whole set of possible breaking and shifting strategies to increase awareness of important moments and simultaneously speed up production. Many such breaking rituals are caused by a real encounter related to the E-moment.

There are constant flows of selections related to all aspects of news production going on within strict time frames. The moments

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of letting go are concerned with quality assessments of ones own news work, and are influenced by three aspects of breaks and shifts:

Scheduled breaks refer to end points or intermissions that are planned and known to the people involved beforehand. Scheduled breaks are caused by formal outer framings such as deadlines, meetings, working hours and other preset conditions. External interruptions are also caused by outer circumstances. External interruptions include for instance unexpected news events that call for immediate action, phone calls, SMS, e-mails and other unexpected messages, spontaneous chats or discussions initiated by others, sudden group get-togethers and other kinds of sudden happenings that capture a news reporters attention for shorter or longer periods of time.

The third property of breaks and shifts, mental timeouts, serves as think-breaks that often spring from mental and physical restlessness connected to the intensity of productive processing. Mental timeouts help the news reporter empty his head when he is stuck in a certain mindset or perspective. Mental timeouts are achieved for instance by surfing apparently purposelessly on the web, chatting, paying e-bills, writing e-mails, even playing darts or going for a walk. Mental timeouts also manifest themselves as bathroom visits, lunching, phoning, coffee supplying, collegial pep talks, and equipment checks.

Mental timeouts that include physical breaks and shifts are observable to the surroundings, whereas others are carried out only in the individual's mind. Many times, physical breaks and shifts might appear weird and meaningless to others, a waste of time that does not make sense. Five minutes before deadline, for instance, when the collaborative atmosphere in a department is really hot and people's shoulders are close to their ears, a reporter suddenly leaves his computer and goes to get a coke instead of finishing his work task. An unwise desk editor might think he is totally out of control and that he needs quick-fix managing. In reality he is in full control, he just needs a short think break before the final letting-go of the story; the break is just a part of his creative cycling.

Developing sensitivity for optimal shifting moments is a constant challenge to most news professionals. One news reporter says,

The most important thing I learned from an older colleague, whom I have always admired for his speed, effectiveness and surprising solutions, is the courage to let go. If you're stuck in a work task, let go! Have a break and let the mind work! If there is time, he taught me, it's a good thing to sleep on it, but one or two swallows of coffee is better than nothing. This simple rule has got me out of a range of difficult situations, but it took me quite a few years before I realized that that's the way it is. Breaks are there to get you unstuck.

Sometimes, mental timeouts are simply needed for recovery after intensive encounters with tough reality. For instance, many news reporters need breaks after covering severe accidents. Usually such breaks are of short endurance such as taking the rest of the day off, or a few hours the next day. Sick leaves, daily leisure time and holidays also exemplify mental timeouts.

Various newsrooms typically develop their own norms and unwritten rules for acceptable, informal breaking and pausing. These habits are part of what "sits in the walls", as the saying goes. In general, smoking breaks tend to be less accepted than formerly. For instance, an online editor exclaimed, "I will never hire a smoking journalist. We can't afford people who have to take breaks every hour in our business". In quite a few newsrooms, one can observe tendencies to neglect each others' needs for breaks and shifts and to misinterpret the processes that are actually going on. In reality, both personal and leadership awareness of individual needs for breaks and shifts is crucial in keeping a healthy newsroom atmosphere, particularly in periods of intensive change.

In the multimedia age, skills in holding back emerge to be just as important as the courage to let go. With the introduction of online newspapers and instant publishing, the pressure of escalating the letting-go-moments to increase productivity is delegated to individual levels. The tendency is that the faster the medium, the harder the time competition and the more short-staffed the newsroom, the more short-cuts reporters are willing to take. News reporters who experience being under constant time pressure and with little individualized action space, approach productive processing more routinely than they would otherwise

have done. There is a constant rivalry between letting go caused by felt extrinsic expectations and holding back to ensure quality in accordance with own professional values and standards. The quality dilemma frequently calls for next-best solutions, and professional judgment is continuously challenged. In a sense, a news reporters' professionalism stands and falls with optimal breaking and shifting sensitivity.

Since needs for breaks and shifts are highly individual, their content vary a lot from day to day depending on work tasks and how processes develop. In short, the repertoire of breaks and shifts depend on both inner and outer framings for work, and are to a large extent integrated sets of action within the individual; it might be more or less subconscious, and it frequently goes without saying. It appears that to stimulate journalistic innovation and courage to create, breaks and shifts must be self-imposed to the extent that the news professional feels somehow in control with the situation. Many reporters suffer from an interruption overload that makes it difficult to be productive, whereas others strive with resolving needs for a higher frequency of mental timeouts.

Breaks and shifts are operative at a micro level, focusing on day-to-day varieties, and at a macro level, taking more long-lasting processes into consideration. Macro shifts deal with changes during a career, and include any change of field within the profession; change of work tasks, change of employment ties, even change of profession.

### **Inspirational Looping**

In-between moments of breaking and shifting, news professionals are engaged in patterns of inspirational looping. In practical work situations, a diversity of inspirational loops supplies the individual with energy, strength, confidence and stimulation to continue discovering and producing news items. The better mastery of practical, theoretical and personal skills, the more exciting and stimulating the inspirational looping gets.

The first aspect, motivational switching, accounts for individual decisions on the apportionment of ambitions, talent, time, and energy. The inherent ability to respond to outer events with immediate action requires frequent shifts of focus within the individual, alternating rapidly between issues in the foreground

and issues in the background. Motivation is a driving force in this internal decision-making process. Motivation is the individual drive, impulse or intention that causes a person to do something or act in a particular way. Motivation is closely related to will, choice and to action. The dilemma, at least from a management perspective, is that motivational aspects which in a given setting are likely to be decisive to one reporter might be indifferent to others. At another time and in another setting, the opposite could be true. Thus no general formula can be guaranteed to work when we discuss journalistic motivation, except that motivation is by nature cyclic and not static. Decisions might be deliberate and planned, or carried out more or less unconsciously.

News reporters tend to switch between seven motivational states: curious enquiring, interrogating, risk-taking, socializing, influencing, competing, visibilizing and storytelling. In each state, the news professional can be predominantly intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. For instance, the extrinsic aspects of competing mean that a news reporter mainly compares his own achievements with those of others. Journalists compete with each other to be first, for the most prestigious assignments, the best cover stories and so forth in order to get as much recognition from their environment as possible. When intrinsically motivated, by contrast, the news reporter is mainly challenged by self-competition. He compares his achievements with his own previous performances and tries to improve and develop as best he can. Sometimes it is a dilemma that self-competition, as a very strong motivational drive for the individual, is not apparent to his environment. In states of intrinsic motivation, news reporters tend to be more innovative and devoted to quality improvement than reporters motivated primarily through carrot-and-stick.

Role switching refers to cyclic patterns of behaviour concerned with movements within and between publishing arenas, physical arenas, content arenas, administrative arenas, proficiency arenas and socio-emotional arenas of news work respectively. Depending on outer framings, journalists either perform parallel cycling across the various arenas of work or they focus on in-depth aspects of one arena at the time. Parallel pacing is characterized by patterns of multitasking where the switching between a great variety of professional roles is integrated into short term or day-to-day work. When parallel medium switching is at the fore, for instance, the news reporter shapes news for

several media on a daily basis; focus is on mastering several publishing platforms simultaneously. Parallel switching stands in contrast to serial switching, which in practice means options for specializing in one field at a time. Serial switching typically involves concentrating and focusing on one particular aspect of news making over a longer period of time, and subsequent periodical moves into other areas. Switching across arenas is performed by generalist reporters, whereas switching along one arena strengthen specialist skills.

In most newsrooms, there is a tension between news reporters' evolving need for specialization and management's need for flexible generalists. Dependant upon direction and time span, any switching, horizontally and vertically, between the listed variables is possible. In the multimedia age, the most challenging alterations relate to the great expansion of publishing platforms and subsequent managerial expectations of and requirements of parallel switching between media. Running successful news websites is a matter of great organizational prestige, and so far it has been prevailing corporate thinking that parallel media switching is a more time-saving and efficient use of human resources than serial media switching. Accordingly, the conglomerate of possibilities for professional growth and development implicit in extended options for media switching stands in paradoxical relief to the general reluctance among experienced news reporters to grasp new opportunities.

In a newsroom survey of about 30 news reporters, I asked whether the opportunities for cross-media work made the corporation more attractive to skilful journalists. Almost everybody agreed but, as most professionals added, people need to be interested in cross-media publishing to do it. The emphasis on personal dedication to cross-media multitasking points to inspirational looping as a dimension of creative cycling that cannot be forced on reporters, only stimulated.

The third aspect of inspirational looping, temporal-spatial switching, concerns patterns for dealing with structurally imposed time and space limitations in the newsrooms. The two main outer framings that regulate the collective and personal pacing of news work are deadline and instant publishing. Deadlines involve an ordering of temporalities whereby times for news publishing is prefixed according to specific intervals.

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Deadlines are practiced in the traditional media, TV, radio and newspapers, whereas instant publishing refers to opportunities for constant news release on new media platforms such as websites and cell phones. Most news professionals work cross-media and therefore relate continuously to both types of timeframes.

Within these given framings, news professionals constantly search for creative ways to fulfil inherent needs for tempo shifts and also, needs for mental and physical switching of space. The less time disposable from preparing to presenting, the less visible the breaks and shifts and the more routinized the news production. The more short-staffed the department and the less time disposable, the more widespread are time saving strategies such as minimizing field work, minimizing sources, recycling of news through cut and paste, and limiting news criteria. In particular,

There is a general progression from operating in real settings to operating in virtual settings. In the era of 24/7 news, reporters are expected to be accessible irrespective of the time of the day and news work can be carried out from anywhere. Logically enough, it emerged that the harder the production pressure and the higher the degree of managerial control of time as experienced by the individual news reporter, the less movement in physical space.

Online news work in particular challenges skills in self-monitoring and sensitivity for balancing through weighing up: The less temporal-spatial cycling during work time, the greater the need for long leisure breaks and mental timeouts. In general, web reporters need longer periods off than their colleagues in traditional media due to the intensity of web news watch responsibilities. In order to balance the constant news flow at work, a web editor reports, he usually engages only in slow-time activities when off duty. Moreover, he needs considerable private space and withdrawal from other people. Also, the higher intensity of work tasks, the greater is the need for contrastive temporal-spatial switching. Sometimes, news professionals engage in daydreaming as a means of temporary survival of monotonous news work and lack of options for temporal-spatial switches.

The fourth aspect of inspirational looping is collaborative

switching, which means going in and out, back and forth between cooperative situations with others. The more restricted the time limits, for instance during a newscast, the more dependent collaborative participants mutually respect and trust each other to make things work. Collaborative switching points to the degree of engagement when participating in smaller and larger groups within or between newsrooms, and can intuitively be measured by sensing the level of invested energy. Engagement typically varies between vigorous contributing, practical adjusting, active resisting, passive resisting and focused retreating. Frequency of shifts and the dwelling at the various approaches depends on experienced inner and outer trust and recognition in the situation.

Vigorous contributing is characterized by high energy levels and third-solution approaches to issues. Efforts are focused on here-and-now aspects of an issue. To work at its best, vigorous contributing relies on a fluent switching between the other four ways of approaching collaborative situations. For instance, knowing when to withdraw from cooperative situations is just as important as knowing when to rebel and knowing when it is best to practically adjust to a situation. In practice, alternating between the approaches implies that the news reporter acts within his current circle of influence in order to widen it. By contrast, news reporters who repeatedly engage only in one or two approaches, in reality display signs of imbalance and temporary fixation. Particularly during periods of great structural change, staffers' collaborative skills and competencies are tested. It emerged that the most widespread way of dealing with expectations of collaborative change, irrespective of hierarchical role, is practical adjusting. In reality, practical adjusting is a way of adjusting to changes in outer framings without investing too much energy.

Feedback switching, which is the fifth aspect of inspirational looping, is the possible shifting between giving, getting, and seeking response. Included are frequent alternations between various providers of feedback. News reporters' most important sources of response are editors, co-workers, friends, family, news sources and the public. The last source of feedback is the news reporter himself. In reality, self-evaluation is fundamental in all kinds of work. It is done continuously and clearly affects further actions.



Principally, feedback switching operates in much the same way as triangulation in research. Getting formal and informal response from a broad variety of sources provides the news reporter with multifaceted information. By approaching the same situation from a number of viewpoints, the bias involved in considering something from one perspective alone is reduced. It makes it easier for the reporter to sort, synthesize, discriminate and apply information from others. It also helps him not to lose his way when he is under pressure from one group or another, since different feedbackers will usually contribute different perspectives on the same issue.

Whereas most news professionals tend to claim that there is too little evaluation and too little coaching in the newsrooms, that is, too little formalized feedback, it emerged from the data that informal feedback is more important than can be imagined. Non-scheduled, spontaneous, accidental and individually given responses are frequently a source of creative joy, development, motivation and pride which is hardly achieved in any other way. Depending on career stage, the feedback news reporters appreciate the most is provided by editors, colleagues and the public respectively. A good way of testing whether a journalist really wants to learn and produce to the maximum of his capacity, is simply to observe how he gets the feedback that he needs to improve. Successful news professionals make use of a great number of feedbackers and manage to convert any kind of positive or negative response or slice of information into professional development and benefit.

The last aspect, career switching, binds together the other aspects of inspirational looping as they emerge in the long-term temporal perspective of a career. Careers can be pursued within specific organizations and as such are typified as organizational careers (Glaser 1968), or they can be pursued through freelance work and looser attachment to one or more organizations and as such can be typified as professional careers (Glaser 1964). Many news reporters will cycle periodically between the two main types of organizational affiliation. Moreover, reporters might pursue parallel or serial careers by combining for instance journalism and fiction writing, journalism and farming or journalism and teaching.

Career switching involves cycling between three distinct

stages; accessing, qualitating and individuating stage. Within each stage, particular aspects of problem solving are focused. In the accessing stage, strategies for getting a job and being accepted by gatekeepers such as managers and editors are the most important. The entry level journalist concentrates on demonstrating flexibility through a variety of fitting-in qualities in order to be socialized and integrated into the newsroom; primarily, norm adapting through extended flexibility. The most important aspects are flexibility as for news issues, presentation formats, publishing platforms, pace of work and wages and length of contracts. In other words, a willingness to serve managerial needs in the newsroom is implicit in such entering flexibility, no task being too small and no task too big. Conforming to the informal saying-yes-rule is essential if one is to be allowed to stay long enough in the accessing stage to advance to the next stage. It means being willing to let go of individual preferences for the greater good – for a while.

The shift from the accessing to the qualitating stage is marked by a break and shift that involves a change in outer framings for the individual. The relationship between employer and a news reporter is formalized through written contracts in which wages and fields of work are specified. Such formal contracting provides the individual with job predictability and financial security that opens for further development and exploration of individual competencies relevant to the profession. The news professional is now predominantly concerned with quality development.

In this context, the concept qualitation is a synthesis of two concerns at this stage of careering, namely enhancing quality through individual qualification actions. Professional quality and competence concerns how well news work is done, both in relation to performers' own expectations and quality standards, and to the expectations of management and colleagues. This duality is demanding to cope with, since it touches on the individual's fundamental values and hence identity and work ethic.

Whereas the accessing stage requires a high degree of convergent thinking, adapting to norms and following superior's instructions, divergent thinking is of greater value and influence during the qualitating stage. Contrary to convergent thinking, which is strongly evaluative, divergent thinking is about ideation.

It is about seeing aspects of a topic in new ways, and the courage to take risks by taking unconventional actions when you are not sure about the outcome. It entails the courage to test out several ideas before consciously choosing the best one, and the courage and social skills to convince others that the ideas are worth going for. It is implicit in the qualitator concept that individual capacities, understandings and skills change and develop over a period of time.

Moving from the qualitator to the individuating stage is frequently marked by breaks and shifts that involve a change in outer framings, too. In contrast to shifts between the accessing and qualitator stages, however, the shift is now initiated or controlled by the news professional himself. Consistency between actions and personal principles is crucial. The shift often entails breaking away from a position, department or an organization, followed by an individual restructuring of work tasks and affiliation. Whether he is attached as a staffer, freelancer or temporary employee is not in itself important, as long as the attachment is consistent with the individual's needs and wishes. In the individuating stage, the various competencies that constitute the professional self are synthesized so that there is a consistency between a news reporter's action and his basic values.

The breakthrough or eureka that leads to outer change is often the result of a build-up of frustrations that waits to be resolved at the incubating stage of productive processing. Such frustrations are typically concerned with aspects of journalistic quality and the news professional's influence on news priorities, working processes and sorting by competence in newsrooms.

The three stages of career cycling are not static or given at any point in a person's working life. Moving from one stage of career switching to the next provide the individual with new insights and competence in intrapersonal and interpersonal collaboration, and resemble stages of dependency, autonomy and interdependency known from gestalt psychology. When the first of the two initial stages are passed, individuals may switch back and forth between the stages according to context. A conglomerate of learning curves and career directions are operative.

## **A Theory about the Development of Skills: A Skills Development Theory**

Creative cycling is a process basic to professional development, learning and growth. It is about staying open to new experiences and new knowledge and the flexible switching of mind-sets and actions. The theory suggests a direction for increasing the efficiency and innovative quality of knowledge production at the individual and organizational levels. As such, creative cycling is a theory about self-monitoring and the development of creational skills in relation to inner and outer framings. Creational skills entail the ability to synthesize insight, experiences and knowledge from different fields into new ways of seeing, understanding and shaping societal issues. In most media research, such skills have tended to be taken for granted and have therefore not been questioned. Self-monitoring refers to self awareness and capabilities of productive performance through self-regulated learning.

For most news reporters, it is a question of balancing between "how to fit in and still be yourself" and "how to be yourself and still fit in". Inner framings vary according to level of professional expertise, and the level of professional expertise co-varies with the news reporter's creational skills, that is, skills in creative cycling. The deliberate use of the concept skills emphasizes that news proficiency is a learning-by-doing process aimed at concrete, practical results, not only at getting competent insights.

The development of creational skills evolves through ways of innovative exploration (inspirational looping) of the relationship between mastery and chaos (productive processing), and is stimulated by frequent switches (breaks and shifts). The more conducive the framings are to productive processing, the more virtuously creative cycling processes are performed, and the more the individual news reporter's capabilities may be tested out without risking mental or physical burnout. Let us imagine a person balancing on a plank. The further out he walks on the one side, the more urgent the need for balancing on the other side. However, the more he dares on the one side, the more gain there might be on the other – if he takes the risk and can bear the insecurity.

The self-regulated fluency of switches between the practical, theoretical and personal skills included in all dimensions of creative cycling decides individual developmental tracks along a continuum from novicing to expertising (Benner 1984, Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986). At any given time, news professionals will be on their way from one field of learning to another field of learning, and they will normally be more skilled in some areas of news shaping than in others. News professionals frequently switch between roles as novices in one field, conventionalists in another field and possibly proficient improvisers or intuitive experts in a third field.

When novicing or conventionalizing, creative cycling processes are focused on performing basic craftsmanship according to detailed instructions from field authorities. Novicing means that certain sets of objective facts and features are recognized as guidelines for action, but situations are experienced almost context-free. Conventionalizing, by contrast, entails that basic skills are integrated to the extent that the news reporter know what to look for in a variety of situations and is able to see himself as separate from field authorities. He still chooses safe and well-established solutions to tasks and situations. When conventionalizing for prolonged periods of time, repeating the same approaches easily gets monotonous.

Proficient improvising entails the use intuitive understanding, constant evaluating and speedy decision-making in order to come up with exciting, insightful and surprising solutions. For instance, the proficient improviser might intuitively realize that he is on track of a breaking news story. Based on previous experience, he deliberately chooses between reorganizing schedules without notifying anybody until he knows more about the issue, or immediately involving managers and editors to start an investigative process as soon as possible. The illustration exemplifies that even proficient improvisers have to think deliberately about what to do. It is the necessity for such analytical thinking and planning that distinguishes actions of proficient improvising from expertise level.

At expert level, news professionals efficiently generate innovative and qualitative good outcomes to any task or situation within their particular field. The switch from proficient improvising to expertising lies in the integration of reflection and

action into fluent, intuitive performance. Instead of for instance conventionalizing, which entails jumping back and forth between three or four standard solutions to a task, a true expert intuitively comes up with surprising suggestions and results. Expert performance is effortless and virtuous and it comes fluently. If a solution does not work out after all, the expert will immediately come up with alternative ways of doing it. In the newsrooms, expertising is of particular importance when it comes to most kinds of rapid decision-making.

At any given time, an unlimited number of skill level combinations are found among news professionals. Organizational requirements of multitasking, frequent technological changes and hardening competition in the work market are all aspects that call for extensive and continuous skill development. Development and learning take place when the individual cycles between different fields or arenas so that his radius of possible action is broadened and raised to a higher level of proficiency. In general, news professionals who demonstrate high levels of proficiency in one field, jump easily from novicing to proficient improvising or expertising in other fields.

### **Practical Implications**

In practical work life, awareness of creative cycling processes might open up for new ways of organizing news work efficiently and innovatively. It might help individual news reporters and news organizations to ensure and improve the quality of their work, and thereby the quality of the news published. What changes that are needed according to the principles of the theory, is up to the people involved in each case to find out.

At an individual level, a crucial question is: Who is going to set the limits when work is potentially limitless? It emerges that self awareness and self-monitoring constitute a specific challenge to news professionals in the digital age. The requirements of 24/7 accessibility combined with a loosening up of absolute timeframes for publishing calls for extended personal skills in individual time management and self care. News reporters' dilemmas concerned with needs for creative cycling will reoccur, in shifting disguises, until they are resolved. The better the individual knows himself and his creative cycling needs, the easier it is for him to administer his time and projects in fruitful collaboration with

others.

At an organizational level, the theory points out that a crucial challenge lies in loosening up established routines for executive control of subordinate efficiency, and in switching mindset from industrial age to knowledge age. The tendency of measuring news items in quantitative terms tend to stimulate shortcuts that are conducive to creativity. Instead of talking about structural synergies, which presuppose that human ideas are limited in supply and therefore need to be recycled to save costs, the theory advocates the importance of developing human synergy effects.

Moreover, the theory indicates that the age myth in the journalistic profession might block rather than stimulate innovative actions in the newsrooms. Contrary to manual work, where productivity is expected to decrease with increasing age, knowledge work such as journalism is dependent upon experienced expertising. The more inexperienced the news reporters and the less time disposable, the more shortcuts and the greater the risk for fatigue and burnout.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Theoretically, the theory of creative cycling's contribution to the field of news production studies can be summarized in issues concerned with conceptualizing, rehumanizing, synthesizing, bridging and reframing central aspects of news production. I will elaborate on these issues one after the other.

First conceptualizing: Whereas most approaches to media studies have been either quantitative or qualitative, the theory of creative cycling emerged out of a conceptual approach. As a grounded theory it contributes with an integrated set of new concepts to the research field. The new concepts, which are centered around creative cycling as a latent pattern of human behaviour, provide a deepened understanding of the in-process character of journalistic work.

Second synthesizing: The theory of creative cycling emerged from systematically comparing data from a variety of newsrooms to written data particularly from the fields of psychology, learning, organizational theory and media sociology. The synthesizing approach contributes to widening the field of news

production studies instead of boxing it in.

Third rehumanizing (Holton 2006): There are many dehumanizing tendencies to be observed in contemporary media business. One is the corporate adoption and application of industrial terms such as delivery, production, platforms, productivity and efficiency. Another is the tendency to expectations of 24 hour accessibility, a third is staff reductions combined with expectations of higher levels of productivity and efficiency from the ones who are left. These are aspects of modern work life that so far are only scarcely dealt with by news production researchers. In spite of more than sixty years of media research, it remains paradoxical that the majority of studies, including research on new media, tend to omit the key participant in news processing, namely the journalist (Gynnild 2006). Consequently, central aspects of journalistic craftsmanship and identity – values, attitudes and work habits – are still primarily accessible through practical experience in newsrooms. The theory of creative cycling suggests the importance of mind over machine and advocates a re-humanization of news production studies.

Fourth reframing: By exploring journalists' strategies to speed up their productive processing, the theory of creative cycling turns several aspects of news production upside-down. First of all, journalists' creative skills have been taken for granted both by researchers and laymen. Second, journalist motivation for work, no matter the circumstances, has been taken for granted. Third, the effects of more stationary news work in the digital age have so far been paid little attention by researchers, in spite of increasing rates of sick leave particularly among young reporters. Moreover, derogatory myths abound and particularly those concerning age and competence conspire to undermine journalists. The gender myth for example has now been replaced by the age myth. The theory of creative cycling therefore calls for a reframing of established 'truths' about news professionals to encourage a more constructive and positive working environment.

Fifth bridging: The theory suggests a bridging of research and practice. A dilemma with many news production studies is that they are aimed primarily towards an academic audience. Much news production research is hence experienced to be of



little relevancy and interest for news professionals as practitioners. Consequently, much research is excluded from influencing the news field and researchers are reduced to the role of observer. The theory of creative cycling offers new understanding both to practitioners and researchers where its fit, relevance and workability can only be fully tested by practitioners. A further aspect of bridging, raised by the theory, is the need for reconnecting news professionals and the audience.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, creative cycling theory works counter to established assumptions about productive efficiency in digitalized newsrooms. It suggests a redefining of framings that stimulate innovative news shaping. The theory highlights that to ensure optimal journalistic contribution, breaks and shifts are just as important as periods of intensive work. Independent of technological or other structural changes, recognition, trust and individual action space are crucial for the outcome of creative cycling processes. Awareness of personal needs and wishes stimulates and supports innovative exploration. As shapers of new knowledge in the multimedia age, news reporters are in the profession not only to make a living but because they want to contribute to society. Finally, I would like to point out that raising the theory of creative cycling to a formal level (Glaser 1978, 2006), might contribute with more general insights into the very multifaceted, fragile and yet robust processes of shaping new knowledge in society.

### **Endnotes**

1. For more about creative processes, see for instance Robert Sternberg (ed.) 2000, Michael Michalko 2001, and Donald MacKinnon 1978.
2. Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (1984) is probably the most widespread approach to the interdependent relationship between human actions and social structures. According to Giddens' theory, social structures are rules and resources that are produced and reproduced by human actors. Other holistic perspectives on how individual actions relate to outer framings are found in gestalt theory, for instance Hanne Hostrup (1999).
3. Tuchman 1978. Her discussion of news as a frame through

which reality is approached was inspired by Erving Goffman's frame analyses, see Goffman 1974.

4. A concept generated by Barney Glaser.

5. The concept real encounter was introduced by Rollo May (1975), who emphasized that creative discovery is inspired and stimulated by real encounters.

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# The Temporal Integration of Connected Study into a Structured Life

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## Abstract

From the point at which a learner commits to undertaking a course of study, and conceivably some time before, that learner holds an intention to study. This paper offers a theory which explains how that intention to study is strengthened or weakened as a course of study progresses. It suggests that it is much less a matter of learners deciding to persist with or depart from a course of study and much more a matter of continuing upon a course of action embarked upon - of maintaining an intention - by its temporal integration into the structure of their daily lives. The theory of temporal integration explains the process enabling learners to engage in the learning experience and how for some students, the intention to learn is weakened to the extent that they leave the course, most often by default.

## Introduction

The paper commences with an explanation of the main concern of *connected learners* and, before presenting the core category of *temporal integration*, will introduce the related categories of *connected learning* and connected learner and their respective sub-categories of *time design* and *personal commitment structures*. It will also detail the properties (and their dimensions) of the category, connected learner which includes *personal competencies*, *value of study* and *satisfaction with study*. A brief overview of the temporal integration process, its three stages of juggling, engaging and evaluating and its feedback loop, 'the propensity to study', will be presented next. Different connected learners experience the temporal integration process in different ways and are distinguished by their personal commitment structures, personal competencies, value of study and *cost of failure*. Using these distinctions, four main types of connected learner can be discerned; juggler, struggler, fade-away and leaver. Since the temporal integration process is experienced differently by each, the temporal integration process is presented in detail first as experienced by jugglers, followed by the differing experiences of strugglers, fade-aways and leavers.

## The Main Concern

The main concern of the adult connected distance learner is to fit study into his or her life on an ongoing basis. Distance learning is taken on in addition to existing commitments and inevitably life intervenes and study gets in the way. The problem is that the learning materials do not go away. The 24/7 availability of the learning environment accessible from increasingly diverse locations and the *persistence* of learning materials means that lectures are always there to be attended and past discussions are waiting to be 'overheard'. The difference between the traditional distance learner and the online learner is the mode of delivery i.e. the Post Office or the Internet. The difference between the online learner and the connected learner is pedagogy. Where collaboration is built into the learning design then learners must communicate. This brings with it, its own special strains on a learner's diary; the more intense the pattern of communication, the greater the strain.

The problem of fitting study into a learner's life is achieved, more or less successfully, through the basic social psychological process of '*temporal integration*'. This is the process by which the structure points of the time design of a connected learning opportunity are combined into the personal commitment structure of the connected learner. Thus two related categories are of import to this theory; the connected learning opportunity and the connected learner, as are their respective sub-categories of time design and personal commitment structure.

## Connected Learning

The studying process occurs under certain conditions which are; the '*technology*' used, the '*language*' of the course, the '*knowledge domain*' of the course, the particular mix of personal commitment structures of the learners of the course and the '*time design*' of the course. The time design comprises *structure points* such as *start points* (e.g. start of course or assessment period), *end points* (e.g. end of course or assessment period), *assessment points* (hand in dates, exam dates), *organising points* (start of week, end of week) and *emergent connection points* (of learners achieved through for example, asynchronous postings, synchronous meetings).

## The Connected Learner

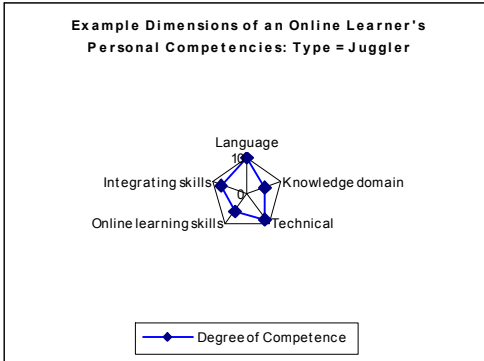
### Personal Commitment Structure

Prior to entering into a course of study there are typically four main strands to a learner's life: work, family, social and self. Each of these strands contains structure points which may be more or less fixed e.g. times to pick up the children from ballet, school or football; times to arrive at work and depart from work; times to be at choir practice or community meetings. The combined structure points from the intersection of all those strands form a unique structural condition which is the learner's 'personal commitment structure'. In undertaking a course of online study the learner will expand his/her personal commitment structure to include a fifth strand, of 'connected study'. For connected learners, temporal integration is thus the process of combining or integrating the structure points of their online study course into their existing personal commitment structures' enabling them to engage with and take part in the process of studying.

### Personal Competencies

A competent online learner will need to have or to develop the core competencies and skills which will enable them to manage the structural conditions and process the main concern viz; *personal competencies* in the *technology* of the online course, the *language* of the course, the *knowledge domain* of the course, *online learning skills* and *integrating skills*. The particular mix of skills of any one learner if graphed would illustrate the shape – the dimensions (Strauss & Glaser, 1970, p. 12) of that learner's personal competencies. Figure 1 illustrates one of many possible combinations of the dimensions of personal competence of one type of learner.

Figure 1: Example dimensions of an online learner's personal competencies.



## Temporal Integration

The 'temporal integration' of 'connected study' into a 'structured life' is the dynamic and iterative process of 'juggling', 'engaging' and 'evaluating'. Juggling is about taking, finding and making time in order to do the work of the course – to engage in study. Engaging is about complying with the course instructions and tussling with the issues of the knowledge domain. It is about taking in information by reading materials, listening to audio or video presentations and making sense of what is being perceived. It is not about the act of expressing through online chat, writing or posting. Engaging is thus the psychological aspect of studying as distinct from the behavioural aspect of studying. Evaluating is about assessing the value of study in terms of whether what is being learnt is useful or relevant, assessing the costs of integration and weighing the one against the other. The outcome of the evaluation stage is an intention regarding how much effort will be put in future juggling and engaging.

### The Value of Study or 'What's in it for me?'

Each connected learner will have identified a greater or lesser 'need for learning' expressed most usually as a need to develop competence for professional or work related reasons. Whilst for most learners, the principle need appears to be the learner's wish to possess professional competence, some focus on validation of competence through certification. Only a very few individuals identify a purely personal, primary need for self-



development and amongst the most committed learners are those individuals with an altruistic need to contribute to his/her society. A connected learner will also have initial expectations that the chosen course of study will satisfy his/her need for learning, and during the course, will continuously evaluate the degree to which the course is perceived to be satisfying this need asking: What's in it for me? Is what I am being asked to do relevant, useful, valuable, of interest, now or in the future? The need for learning and the degree to which studying is perceived to *satisfy the need for learning* determine the '*value of study*' to the learner.

### **The Cost of Integration or 'Is it worth it?'**

Each learner joining an online course will hold, consciously or unconsciously, expectations as to how the course of study will be organised. Severe tension can arise for those learners where a mismatch of expectations occur particularly where the course design expects the learner to flex his or her activities to the course timing and the learner expects to be able to flex the course to his/her life timing. The 'juggling' and 'evaluating' stages of 'temporal integration' cut across all the strands of a learner's life. However, where the learner 'engages' with the course in 'doing' study; the process of 'temporal integration', intersects specifically with the process of 'studying' at the point of engagement where 'engaging' is the psychological aspect of the behaviour of 'doing' the work of studying. The consequences of 'engaging' in 'studying' – to whatever degree – are that work is consumed, competencies are developed and time is used. To the degree that more time is used than can be comfortably accommodated by the Personal Commitment Structure, tension arises between a learner's current commitments, which the learner experiences as a state of being. This is '*Time Tension*' and which may be experienced either positively or negatively. Extreme cases of time tension result in a state of '*time tyranny*' which is endured because either the value of study or the negative consequences of failure and likely future hardships are too high.

The question '*what's in it for me?*' is followed by '*is it worth it?*' The answer is expressed in the learner's intention to continue with study, i.e. his or her propensity to study and thus impacts on the energies expended on future juggling and engaging efforts.

## **Propensity to Study**

The relationships between and amongst the categories discussed above combine to impact upon the learner's '*propensity to study*'. In a little more detail, the propensity to study can be viewed as a function of the 'value of study as a means of satisfying the learner's need for learning' (what's in it for me?) less the '*cost of integration*' (is it worth it?). The cost of integration being a function of the personal commitment structure, personal competencies and the cost of failure where the cost of failure may be counted in terms of reduced feelings of self worth, lost opportunities and/or as a financial cost paid by the learner. Describing the relationships results in a set of propositions as follows and paves the way for the identification of types of learners:

1. Where the value of study is high, the propensity to study will be high.

(a) Where the Personal Commitment Structure is also fully committed, there is likely to be a cost of integration. Personal competence co-varies with the Personal Commitment Structure to affect the level of pain experienced

- Where personal competence is also high, the cost of integration is likely to be tolerable and may be problematic (juggler)
- Where personal competence is low, the cost of integration is likely to be problematic (struggler)
- Where personal competence is low and the cost of failure is high, the cost of integration is likely to be hard to tolerate (struggler)

(b) Where the Personal Commitment Structure is not fully committed, the cost of integration is likely to be tolerable except:

- Where the cost of failure is high, the cost of integrating is likely to be problematic (juggler/struggler)

2. Where the value of study is low, the propensity to study will be low (fade-away) except where the cost of failure is high; the propensity to study will be high. Thus also

(a) Where the personal commitment structure is full and

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- personal competence is high, the cost of integration is likely to be problematic (juggler)
- personal competence is low, the cost of integration is likely to be hard to tolerate (struggler)

(b) Where the personal commitment structure is not fully committed and

- personal competence is high, the cost of integration is likely to be tolerable (juggler)
- personal competence is low, the cost of integration is likely to be tolerable and may be problematic (struggler)

These relationships can be expressed as an algorithm thus:

Propensity to Study = {[Value of Study + (Cost of Failure x (Cost of Failure/Value of Study))] - [Personal Competence Structure - (Personal Competence Structure x Personal Competencies)]} where Value of Study = Need for learning x Degree to which study satisfies learning.

$$\text{I.e. } P = \{[V + (F \times (F/V))] - [S - (S \times C)]\}$$

$$V = N \times D$$

Where

P = propensity to study

V = value of study

F = cost of failure

S = personal commitment structure

C = personal competencies

N = need for learning

D = degree to which learning satisfies need for learning

The cost of failure has little impact where the value of study is high and much greater impact where the value of study is low. Two further propositions are thus:

- The value of study and the cost of failure are the motivators for learners to engage in study or to disengage from study,

- the cost of integration is only a consequence of integration, and whilst it does not drive people to make a conscious decision to leave a course it may lead learners to re-evaluate the need for learning relative to other commitments and to commence on a downward cycle of reducing compliance and to fade away from the course.

### A Typology of Learners

A type is defined by the level of tension of the personal commitment structure in combination with level of personal competencies, the value of study and where relevant the cost of failure. There are four main types of adult online learners, jugglers who value study highly, have high levels of personal competencies and have full personal commitment structures; strugglers who also value study highly and have full personal commitment structures but have low levels of personal competencies; fade-aways who consistently fail to integrate study into their personal commitment structures and attribute a low value to study and leavers who are principally defined by a step change in their personal commitment structures. There follows an explanation of how each type processes – or fails to process - the problem of fitting study into their busy lives.

#### **Jugglers**

##### ***Juggling across all strands***

Jugglers are the successful learners who exhibit strategic behaviours prior to entering into a course of study; they *restructure* their lives, *plan* and *timetable* study so that when the course starts, there is already space for learning in their lives. Jugglers value study highly, have exacting commitments to work and or family and often also have social commitments. Whilst jugglers may not hold all of the core competencies associated with being an online learner, they will during the course of study, develop them. In restructuring their timetables, jugglers may *negotiate* time for studying from their employers or from their families, perhaps agreeing a day a week from work to study or agreeing a redistribution of family duties with a spouse. They may *take time* from themselves by routinely *extending-the-day*, getting up or early or going to bed late in order to study.

Learners juggle so that they can ‘fit in’ everything that they need to accomplish across all the strands of their lives. They

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juggle at an operational level (months, weeks, days) and at an implementation level (hours and minutes). For jugglers, a plan or a timetable is the starting point and the elements of the plan are successfully re-organised as necessary, in response to triggers received from their personal commitment structures. At an operational level, the trigger may be a period of travelling on business, a daughter's dental appointment, an extra rehearsal, a holiday. At this level, there is time to enable the trigger to be incorporated into a schedule. At the implementation level triggers are always unexpected such as missing the train home, a child-minder failing to arrive, a friend needing help, becoming unwell. Learners juggle and re-organise but under these conditions, studying is the victim of the re-organisation and is *squeezed out*. In order to squeeze studying back in again, the learner might make *opportunistic use of time*, engaging in studying whilst waiting an airport lounge or travelling on public transport or may chose to extend-the-day. If the learner is unable to retrieve lost time quickly then s/he is unable to complete sufficient work and falls behind. *Catch up* strategies are discussed below. Where this happens routinely the juggler may turn into a 'struggler'

### *Juggling within the studying strand*

The aim of juggling is to find time in order to study; success means that the learner is poised to comply with course requirements and to engage in study. At an operational level, the time design is the primary source of triggers. Time design is latent in an educational opportunity. Work is required to be completed, readings read, postings written, assessments handed in. Each task will take an amount of time and course work is usually organised by units of time. For example a course may organise its work in units of one week with the beginning and end of each week forming the Organisation Points. In the same way, Assessment Points will mark the start and end of assessment periods, within which period the work of the assessment must be completed. An exam is another example of an Assessment Point, preceded by a revision period marked by an Organisation Point.

Jugglers pace their work, completing on time. The structure points are known and jugglers *scope* the work estimating what needs to be done by when and *prioritise* and plan their activities accordingly. Variations in time designs conspire to thwart. For

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example, the learner who juggles out study to holiday with family may complete the required readings but may not be permitted to make postings ahead of time and is either forced into catch-up or is excluded from the activity. Where a poor time design requires excessive amounts of work, all learners will be challenged and jugglers, rather than over-committing themselves, will consciously resort to a '*partial withdrawal*' strategy prioritising tasks and excluding some.

The single most important variation in time design which causes learners the most problems is the '*connection design*' i.e. is the work designed to be carried out solo or in collaboration with other learners? Can the work be done at any time (solo) or is it required to be done at the same time as others (synchronously) or at similar times to others (asynchronously)?

Solo design causes little problem, an example of which might be a course teaching learners how to use a particular piece of software. Work can be completed at any time and may or may not be marked with a final assessment point or by an end point when access to the course is withdrawn. However when collaborative work is required, learners are constrained by being obliged to connect with one another either within a period of time or at the same time. The tighter the structure of the time design – the more organisation, assessment and connection points there are – the less the learner is able to be flexible, compromising the learner's ability to integrate, making it harder to complete the work on time. The greater the number of people involved in the collaboration, the worse the problem of organisation and synchronisation, the greater the time wasted, compounding problems of integration. Learners expecting the course to flex to them will experience the greatest dissonance under this design.

The main issue for same time collaborations will be the particular mix of the personal commitment structures of learners of the course. The greater the differences between the commitment patterns of learners, the harder it is for them to *time-match*. Time imperialism is rife. Learners in time zones to the west of the main group find it harder to time match and are often excluded from synchronous meetings, as are shift workers where the norm of the group is daytime employment. One learner from the West Indies wrote:

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We are 4 or 5 hours depending on the time of year, behind the UK and this causes major headaches in relation to the Virtual Classes. ALL the classes are either held when I am sleeping or when I am at work. This means I am always either late or don't attend many VCs..... [in one course] we were placed into Virtual Groups. In my group there were 3 guys from the UK and 2 of us from the West Indies. Of course, we met very sparingly and I don't think we were able to maximise the learning of being in a group.

The vignette in Text Box 1 shows a group of jugglers and a struggler (Bill) driven by an approaching assessment point trying to arrange a synchronous meeting during a synchronous meeting. The struggler is effectively excluded by the needs of the other group members, though the process is so subtle it is hardly noticed by the other group members, who seem to have no appreciation of Bill's circumstances.

### **Text Box 1 Vignette: Time Imperialism and Time Matching**

Bill enters the room Thursday 8.08 p.m.

Bill: apologies for late arrival, problems with v.slow connection

Carl: that people learn when they NEED to learn and lonely what they NEED to learn at the time for their own reasons

Carl: Look at us with deadlines

Bill: Must leave for work in five-ten minutes,

Amy: Can't we work on this on Saturday?

Bill: let me check.....

Carl: Yes Bill, I'm here for the duration - perhaps we should piece together something for PD and reconvene at 9 pm?

Amy: does 12am on Saturday mean first or last thing on Saturday?

Bill: sorry Amy, midnight Saturday.

Amy: Could we meet with Bill on Saturday (not cup final times?)

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Carl: Can we meet again on Sat am Bill?

Amy: About 10 am?

Carl: sounds fine

Bill: see you at 10am sat bye.

Denise: Is 11.00 too late?

--- Bill leaves the room Thursday 8.36 p.m.

Carl: should we reconvene at 10am Sat for all of us then?

Denise: Edward and I need to go to the wood yard

Amy: I have to take my daughter to dance class between 11.15 and 12.15 so 12.30 would be fine too

Carl: I can fit in with the rest of you

Denise: 12.30 would be wonderful; do we need to email Bill?

Carl: Bill's gone, and he says 10

Carl: yes ok email him

Amy: I'll log on at 10am as well and let him know if he hasn't read the email

Bill enters the room Saturday 10:00am

Amy left the room Saturday 10:03am

Bill enters the room Saturday 10:03am

Amy enters the room 10:04am

Amy: Hi Bill - we rearranged the time to 1230 as Denise couldn't make 10am

Amy: Can you make it then?

Bill: Hi, sorry that's way past my bedtime!

Amy: Have you been working nights?

Bill: Yes - been up all night

Under these conditions there is little that the excluded learner can do to resolve the situation other than remonstrate with the course designers requesting that groups be designed consciously and with awareness of the mix of the personal



commitment structures of the learners.

The problems of similar-time design are less severe than those of same-time design since there is greater latitude regarding the timings of connections. Extremes of differences between time zones can cause patterns of interactions to cluster around the postings of the individuals within time zones merely because the timings work for them. A momentum forms and carries the interactions such that it is hard for those in other time zones to join in. The discussion has passed whilst the others slept.

Depending on the pedagogic design of work, learners may be dependent on one another or interdependent. The dependent are vulnerable to the work patterns of others. For example the Juggler who has to summarise the week's discussion postings, needs postings to be made in a timely manner and can be resentful of those who post at the last minute since it upsets the juggler's ability to plan and integrate. Contrast this with the experiences of those who posted late, who were working in a different country having a working week which was organised around different points to that around which the time design was organised – and which caused these learners to be the last to post and thus to miss out on the comments of others.

Thus there are times when the juggler's integration skills and juggling strategies are severely limited and the juggler unable to successfully respond to the triggers emanating from the time design. Under these circumstances the negative consequences of exclusion, resentment and time tension are experienced and absorbed. Successful integration is maintaining a new and sustainable equilibrium in the expanded personal commitment structure.

### **Engaging**

Engaging is to do with taking information in and tussling with the issues. As an implementation level activity, it is also about using the core competencies of an online learner to defend the time won for studying by being *focused*, *disciplined* and independently solving their own problems, finding their own '*answers now*'. One of the consequences of complying and engaging in studying is that time is used. Implicitly or explicitly the 'time design' will incorporate an estimate of how much time that studying will take. As the learner complies, things happen to

*waste time* or to cause the learner to *take more time*. Specifically there are triggers from the structural conditions; the online connection is lost removing access to the learning environment, the server is off-line for maintenance, the reading uses language that is too dense, a new concept is used that is not understood, a child wakes, a door bell rings, a colleague interrupts. Different combinations of triggers from the different parts of a learner's life conspire to waste a learner's time or to take the learner more time than estimated or planned. To each of these triggers, a competence may mitigate the time wasted or taken. Knowing how to re-install the broadband access software, re-ordering tasks such that offline work is completed whilst the server is offline, organising support from family members and colleagues to protect the learner from distractions. Technology can *save time* in providing diagnostic software, translation programs or enabling instant recourse to answers online. A learner may be able to avoid wasting time through being technically competent but have poor online learning skills such that s/he is distracted by interesting but off-topic links or a visiting neighbour. The personal commitment structure - including the time design of the course - and personal competencies can co-vary within themselves and between each other to cause or mitigate time loss. Jugglers develop or possess the core competencies which enable them to manage the triggers received from their personal commitment structures to defend the time won for learning. The consequences of engaging in studying are that time is used, work is achieved, time tension is experienced and competencies developed to whatever degree. The learner will also be forming views on the degree to which this activity is satisfying his/her need for learning.

### **Evaluation**

During the Evaluation stage, the learner assesses the value of work in terms of whether it is useful or relevant resulting in an intention to study. This is not a linear process of actions more an omnipresent state of mind. Whilst jugglers are busy, they are also competent and manage to keep all the balls in the air without suffering unduly. They have a strong need for learning, and thus a high propensity to study which means that studying as an activity will receive a high priority during the juggling stage and jugglers will try hard to find, make or take time to work. For all the while that the work is considered useful or

relevant, jugglers succeed and find great satisfaction in their accomplishments. The conditions under which a juggler may change abruptly into a leaver or turns gradually into a fade-away are discussed in a later section.

### Strugglers

Strugglers face the same issues as jugglers plus a few more of their own. They value study highly, have jobs, social commitments and are likely to have families but crucially will, at least initially, also have lower levels of competence in one or more of the core competencies of an online learner. This is not to criticise the learner since the purpose of study is to develop competence both in the knowledge domain and in the new skills required to enable that learning in an online environment. At its simplest, lower levels of competence means that studying takes longer to accomplish thus what principally distinguishes jugglers and strugglers is the consequent pain of integration and the degree of time tension that strugglers experience.

Strugglers notice a simultaneous lack of structure and a surfeit of structure. Strugglers bemoan the absence of structure found in the face-to-face learning environment – requiring the learner’s presence at a stipulated time and place notwithstanding that this is the reason why they are unable to undertake face-to-face study. But whilst jugglers recreate the structure for themselves, many strugglers do not. This may be due in part, to the fact that those strugglers expect the course to flex to their lives and commitments and thus do not see the need to restructure their lives in order to make space for learning. Instead, they rely on their spare time and their ability to make, find or take time. This makes them much more vulnerable to triggers coming from their commitment structures and a good solution for strugglers is *routinisation* such that found time becomes routinely available. For the main part, however, strugglers are in a permanent state of ‘catch-up’ and disequilibria.

Strugglers then are over-committed. They have more to accomplish in the time available to them than they can comfortably achieve. Strugglers juggle in the same way that jugglers juggle - they find, make and take time. Strugglers engage and do the work of the course but are unable to accomplish all of the work. For those who lack competence only

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in technology and/or online learning skills, the problems caused by triggers from the environment, e.g. malfunctioning software or a plethora of postings, will diminish as competence develops over time. For those who only lack competence in the knowledge domain, the issues that mean that the struggler takes more time to accomplish work than the juggler, will again, over time, diminish. Developing competence in these areas is likely to enable the struggler to grow into a juggler.

It is those learners whose native tongue is different to the language of the course who suffer most. Gregory writes:

In my situation and with my language background and non-daily use of English literature, of course it takes much more time to read, incorporate English texts. I translated the texts, made abstracts in [my language] and this took several hours.

Thus there is an extra step of preparation to enable the learner to engage with the work and tussle with the issues. The 'doing' of work also takes more time: Sebina writes "I can say half I want and it takes me twice the time".

Couple this with a high need for learning and the consequences of integration become severe. Gregory wrote:

Reading back my [journals] the time aspect was dominant present, already from week 1: This awful, horrible, frustrating, discouraging fear of failure provoking time aspect was always mentioned somehow in most of my [journals]. Most of the time or weeks, I had the feeling of not keeping up, running behind, emotional fatigue and pushing myself to contribute, even at two or three o'clock at night sometimes..... I survived this time terror' with the focus on the learning outcome "**how not to design/coach a (online) course**".

Gillie wrote:

But I know in those text was a lot of useful information for me and for my country. Further months after it, I will be start my first experience like online teacher so that will very important for

me. Onde day I even cry!.... I was very tired and stressed so I cry. I almost can't to leave, I was very busy ....we soffred!

For these people competence in the language of the course improves but never sufficiently to alleviate the time tension. Since the propensity to study remains high, the negative consequences are cumulative and the tyranny of study is endured.

### ***Active displacement of study***

Where jugglers usually engage, strugglers may displace - though the active displacement of study can be carried out by both jugglers and strugglers - in response to triggers from their personal commitment structures. At an implementation level some strugglers struggle because of the routine and active displacement of study where some other commitment(s) becomes genuinely more important. This commitment is juggled in and study squeezed out. Jugglers are generally able to reorganise commitments and enable study to be juggled back in again. Strugglers, unable to negotiate the support that they need from their personal commitment structures, are often unable to do this.

Sometimes the absence may be prolonged. The *persistence* of materials means that the work does not disappear with time – the videoed lecture is still available to be watched, a myriad of postings have appeared and have to be navigated. Overwhelmed students ask for a way in. The tutor may offer a catch up strategy tailored to the individual; otherwise other learners point the way. Since it requires too much time to fully catch-up, a partial withdrawal from the work of the course is effected where some work is prioritised, engaged with and completed and other work is displaced and left undone.

### **Fade-aways: Evaluation and the Reducing Value of Study:**

A reduction in the value of study as a means of satisfying the learner's needs is brought about either by a step change in the personal commitment structure of the learner such that the relative importance of the need for learning reduces as some other need increases, or; that this particular course of study is disappointing and not meeting the learner's needs as a means of

satisfying his/her need for learning. Or both.

Learners juggle, engage and evaluate the value of learning. Whilst the need for learning remains the same, where the work completed is judged less useful or relevant, the value of study as a means of satisfying the need for learning falls. Where the cost of failure is high, the propensity to study is maintained. If the cost of failure is low, the propensity to study will fall and the degree of time tension, which will be tolerated in order to integrate study into the learner's personal commitment structure, will also reduce. The negative consequences of integration are fed back into the evaluation reducing further the value of study as a means of satisfying the need for learning and hence also reducing the learner's propensity to study. Under these circumstances the juggler will be proactive and effect a withdrawal strategy. The struggler however, will fade away by default. A reducing propensity to study means that less effort is put into juggling study 'in' and for every organisational period (e.g. week) that this happens more work is left undone with no intention to catch-up. There is thus reducing compliance where work is passively squeezed out of the learner's schedule and the learner just gently fades away from the course. Fade-aways are not therefore decisive, they merely keep failing to integrate until an assessment point or an end point eventually prompts a temporary withdrawal from a course where the learner requests a study break or an extension. Eventually, however, the temporary withdrawal turns into permanent withdrawal as the fade-away slips into becoming a leaver.

Where the value of study falls, a high cost of failure will maintain the struggler's propensity to study and the cost of integration will be severe where the personal commitment structure is full and personal competence low and may also be problematic where the personal commitment structure is less full. Under these circumstances the struggler struggles on.

### **Leavers**

Leavers decide to stop. This is a strategic decision and is usually the consequence of an unplanned and step change in the learner's personal commitment structure which causes a re-ordering of priorities and commitments and the abrupt transformation of the juggler or struggler into a leaver. The loss of a job for example, or the debilitating illness of the learner or of

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a close family member can render the need for learning irrelevant. Planned step changes in the personal commitment structure can also be a time of great risk, for instance the birth of a baby or taking a new job. Where step changes are planned however, there is also opportunity for re-structuring and may even turn the struggler into a juggler.

### **Summary**

In this paper, I have looked at the highly personal nature of the decision to persist or depart and identified the major factors that contribute to that decision. These are the learner's need for learning, the degree to which the learning opportunity satisfies the learner's need for learning – which together determine the value of study - the learner's personal commitment structure, the learner's personal competencies and where the value of study is low, the cost of failure to the learner. Together these determine the learner's propensity to study. I have also identified a typology of learners comprising jugglers, strugglers, fade-aways and leavers and explained how the different types experience the process of temporal integration of connected study into a structured life.

The literature on online distance learning makes clear that there are problems with the design and implementation of distance learning courses (e.g. Hara & Kling, 2000; V. McGivney, 2004; Pierrakeas, Xenos, Panagiotakopoulos, & Vergidis, 2004). It is not clear however what the problem is. Or what the solutions might be. This study theorises that from the perspective of the connected learner, the problem is to do with time and how a learner might make best use of time given the competing demands for attention from various strands of a learner's life. This theory suggests that whatever a learner is asked to do must be relevant and useful and worth the considerable upheaval that is caused to the learner – and to others in the learner's sphere – when the learner engages with study. It theorises about what conspires to make life worse or better for learners as they engage. Many of the issues were known about but the large number and seemingly unrelated nature of the issues meant that the complexity could not be well understood. The power of this theory is in its encapsulation of the main concern of learners, its theorising about the interrelationships between the issues and how these interrelationships determine a learners propensity to engage. It

is this power that confirms the choice of the Grounded Theory method as an appropriate one for this research study. The opportunity for this theory now is to inform designing for persistence.

### **Methodological Notes**

The primary data for this study came from online interviews with 32 adult online distance learners plus 3 campus-based online learners from 9 different countries, 23 of whom had studied on the same 20 week course and 9 of whom had studied on courses planned to run over 2 or more years. Five interviews were held with individuals using chat software; four were held face-to-face and the remainder were conducted using email. All courses were run from British Universities; 32 of the participants took part in learning opportunities based on a pedagogic design of collaboration. All participants had either first degrees or professional qualifications. Further data was collected from observations made whilst tutoring on postgraduate courses over a period of 45 weeks on three x 3 week online courses and three x 12 week online courses plus supervising four online projects students from 3 different countries; 2 for 3 months each and 2 for 15 months each. Secondary data was collected from the literature. Secondary data was collected from the literature; for example, Kember (1995; Kember, 1999); Kember, Ying, Wan & Yung (2005); Simpson (2003), Pierrakeas et al (2004), Shin & Kim (1999), Dupin-Bryant (2004), Lim (2001).

### **Endnotes**

1. From this point on, a distinction is made between the 'online learner' who does not engage with a collaborative learning opportunity and the 'connected' learner who does.

2. A competent online learner will be disciplined, focused, be able to cherry pick postings, type, be independent in finding an 'answer now' and where required have online group working skills.

3. The property is satisfaction (with study as a means of satisfying need for learning) having a dimension of degree, i.e. high degree of satisfaction – low degree or no satisfaction.

4. At the margins of type the balance between the personal commitment structure and level of personal competencies



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change. E.g. the juggler-on-the-margin will have a less full personal commitment structure and lower levels of personal competencies than other jugglers. And the struggler-on-the-margin will have higher levels of personal competence and a less full personal commitment structure than other strugglers.

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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

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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

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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

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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**

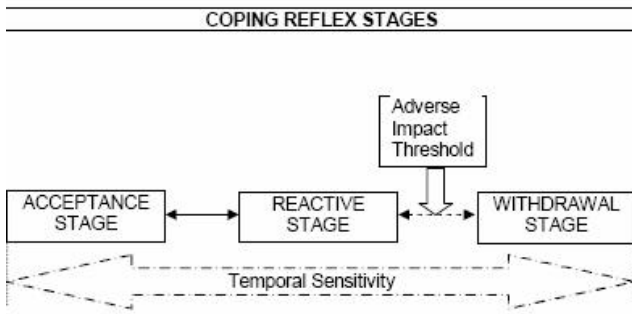
Coping reflex stages of 'Enforced Accelerated Work Pace' captures the essence of the three stage response behaviour that emerged in the substantive area. The term reflex creates a vision that some of the actions occur subconsciously; an involuntary response to events that ensures the individuals survival 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

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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



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

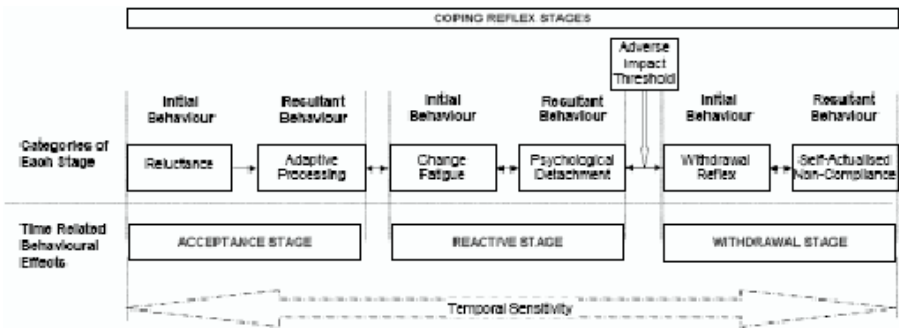
The first stage of this theoretical framework is not exclusive to this research. The acceptance stage assumes that the stages of resistance, normally associated with major change (Coch and French, 1948; Scott and Jaffe, 1988; Beer et al., 1990; Kotter, 1995) have been overcome and participants are more 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

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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 (classified 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;

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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

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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

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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

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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 concertinaed 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 were 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.

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*Psychological Detachment* – As time passed<sup>1</sup> 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:

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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

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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

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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

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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.

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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.

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On a theoretical level, empirical validation and elaboration of concepts and framework in other environments<sup>2</sup> 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

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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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