Research Dilemmas in Management and Business Studies

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Abstract: This paper examines some of the philosophical and practical dilemmas that are faced by researchers in management and business studies – in the context of the epistemological and ontological assumptions introduced. The relevant methodological frameworks to be used stem from Strauss and Quinn (1997). The importance of employee language and organisational discourses are presented from the empirical data on "Aspects of Organisational Culture and Change" in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire to demonstrate the epistemological and ontological dilemmas faced by researchers in organisational analysis. Symbolic interactionism and stories are also used to highlight the importance of speech actors within an organisational change context in order to surface some of these dilemmas in business studies in general and management research in particular. These two provide alternative positions to Strauss and Quinn's "maintained" analysis of how organisations and managers implement change interventions and employees' reactions to these. Amongst some of my principal objectives is to demonstrate what can be contributed when researchers focus on what can be considered credible and valid knowledge that can be generalised in organisational and management studies.

Keywords: language, methodological dilemmas, epistemology, theory and practice.

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the exploration of some of the philosophical and practical dilemmas faced by researchers in business and management sciences. I examine Strauss and Quinn's (1997) methodological approach to the study of organisational and management practices to point out some of these dilemmas especially in the context of how employees experience organisational culture change. I question the rather structurally "maintained" position adopted by these scholars in deepening researchers' understanding of individual and collective, organisational behaviours in similar contexts. I use Magala's (2005) theorising and conceptual analysis of organisational cultural changes to critique Strauss and Quinn's position. Some empirical case study data from my initial findings on four organisations situated in two English counties have been used to demonstrate some of the epistemological and ontological dilemmas that such structural approaches to studying dynamic and complex phenomena as organisational cultural change could pose for researchers. This paper also explores what other research approaches such as stories and symbolic interactionism could contribute in resolving some of these dilemmas of research choices.

2. Strauss and Quinn's (1997) approach

In this section, I present the properties of Strauss and Quinn's theorising to see what these can contribute to the paper's focus. The second part of the discussions concentrates on Magala's work as the basis to criticise Strauss and Quinn and to bring out the richness and complexity in organisational cultural change studies as well as the dilemmas posed in their exploration.

2.1 Properties of Strauss and Quinn's theorising

Strauss and Quinn (1997) postulate that cultural meaning can be studied through an exploration of the "extra-personal" and the individual "intra-personal" positions. This seems to suggest what happens outside of organisations as well as what goes on in between personal boundaries can account for people's cultural values. In my current research into "Aspects of Organisational Culture and Change" I focus on how employees react when their organisations change their working practices and how these can be used to explore some of the dilemmas posed to researchers in business and management studies.

To identify employees' experiences of cultural change I use the notion of presence to examine people's contributions to the workings of their organisations-in my case, the extent to which employees are willing to participate in organisational cultural change interventions. I am interested in exploring the possible shift in employees' presence in terms of how the dividing line between the personal and organisational may be moved to the advantage or disadvantage of one of the participating parties such that the experiences of the personal or the organisational may be enriched or impoverished by this movement. This exploration will be compared with Strauss and Quinn's theorising especially on the level of "maintained" cultural values between managers and staff to determine to what extent the epistemological and ontological dilemmas in business and management research may be expanded using the collective experiences of employees in 2 regions in the UK faced with similar or varying cultural change issues from the ones Strauss and Quinn theorised on.

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What I aim to do is look mainly at the dynamics of how the personal and organisational are distinguished and played out.

The initial data capture forms of behavioural changes, new ways of organising and how the deep symbolic interactions between organisational members have brought about a wide range of employees' reactions and experiences especially when managers impose changes on other employees. In order to surface a wide range of these employee interactions inside and outside organisations and some of the experiences that these relationships could generate, I asked the following guiding research question: "What are the consequences on employees and others when organisations change adopting totalising tendencies in their efforts to improve efficiency and performance?" In this regard, not only are the internal and external relationships that shape the interactions between organisational members crucial as Strauss and Quinn maintain, but employees' choices of language to describe such interactions also becomes vital, an aspect that has not been fully recognised in Strauss and Quinn's theorising. Different levels of employees' languages have been identified in the chosen responses highlighted in this paper so as to demonstrate some of the dilemmas that different levels of employee and organisational discourses pose in researchers' claims to gaining, what could be considered by those who do not use such an approach, as credible knowledge of organisational cultural change.

The dilemma that Strauss et al's position poses me is to focus more on how the "intra-personal" and "extra-personal" interplay has brought about employees' preferences of engaging in certain interactions, certain cultural changes and making use of certain forms of language and symbols and not others. Both Strauss and Quinn (ibid) went on to postulate that such interactions have been "created and maintained" to produce organisational culture. To my mind, such "maintenance" could be regarded as transient relationships that evolve over time, dependent on which network of relationships and, by implication, which world of change employees wish to engage in.

Organisational culture as managerial theory (such as Morgan's (1986) and Schein's (1985) "shared" perspective to studying organisational culture and change) seeks to enshrine the need for all employees to work towards the attainment of collective organisational goals. This blurring of the boundary between the personal and organisational is similar to Strauss and Quinn's "maintained" position. In management literature this blurring signifies that employee and organisational presence (in the form of contributions) could bring about an enhanced organisational performance in which everybody is willing to participate in the fulfilment of tasks and functions. It is being proposed in this perspective that the presence of all employees guarantees organisational effectiveness. Such theory seems to deny that the boundary between the individual and organisational presence can be out of balance for any considerable period of time, and to propose that managers and employees eventually are bound to see each other as fellow human beings whose self respect, self esteem and personal identity need to be safeguarded. No special form of transcending dominance of either the personal or the organisational is deemed necessary, therefore. The theory explains such dominance as temporary only.

2.2 Study's initial findings

The four organisations contacted to participate in the study were Longhurst Housing Association (LHA), Laurens Patisserie, Prospects and Eden Supported Housing Ltd. At the time of writing the paper the names of some of these organisations may have changed. The 51 interviews took place between January 2004 and July 2005. The interviews were conducted on the basis of 18 questions. The questions were designed to provide data that might 'demonstrate the dynamic nature of the relation between different roles in organisations that experience stressful changes'. The categories of interview questions concentrated on management traits, and highlighted vision/mission/purpose and meaning, cultural and moral beliefs and values which also featured dimensions of empowerment and the extent of employee participation within the change processes. The questions were open.

To facilitate the analysis, the responses of the interviewees were transcribed and coded such that comparisons might be facilitated. In the analysis I re-constructed the experiences of managers by way of the notion of a platform, or world, in which managers attempt to 'colonise' employees. Next I re-constructed a platform from which employees react to the colonising or imposing managers. The constructions are based on the responses of the interviewees. The interviewees were asked to validate the re-constructions, and modify them where necessary. The results were used in the analysis.

The analysis of the findings raises the importance of employee 'presence' (i.e. an employee's contributions to the functioning of an organisation) either through experiences and reactions of maintaining it, increasing it

or reducing it by resisting against change. Therefore, this study has highlighted that the consequences of organisational cultural changes on employee behaviours could not have been maintained and sustained by top-down managerially imposed approaches as the behaviours of such 'colonising' actors have been resisted by employees through language and other less-overt reactions discussed in the paper. For example, an employee had this to say about his/her organisation:

> *"Management have some moral values but I have little to do with higher management. They do care about whether I am doing my job properly. I think senior managers do care but this gets diluted a bit further down the line, say at middle management level. It's a different ball game at middle management level. However, I must point out that junior support staff do not feel valued. They confide to us trainers and do not want this taken further up the management line. Support staff feel overworked and underpaid. If their line manager is not treating them as they wish then you understand how they feel".*

From the above respondent, it does appear that the employee's choice of language that bears resonance to the individual's cognitive representations of personal and collective experiences mark a significant departure from Strauss and Quinn's (1997) body of theorising.

To overcome and identify such emerging employee resistance it was attempted to manipulate the middle managers, and change their values from the group values to the managerial values such that middle managers would reinforce some of the growingly mechanised forms of managerial 'colonisation' and communication with employees. Methods to do so included for example having staff members "constantly" report to line managers and supervisors (in some cases) about whether they were meeting deadlines, production and delivery targets. Adherence to the managerial type of organisational culture was reinforced through constant control and supervision – thus starting to change them into total institutions ("maintained" according to management command and control mechanisms) such that employee presence in the boundary between the personal and organisational became blurred and impoverished (through employees' withdrawal of presence) during the shift in behavioural emphasis.

Such control procedures exacerbated employee stress levels. To meet customers' demands employees had to work longer hours, which curtailed their work/life balance and quality of life. The resulting outbursts of emotions (manifested in the use of some unsavoury language) demonstrated that staff started to become de-motivated and frustrated. Reactions included a reduction of presence (people started to fall ill or take days off) or withdrawal (staff became disengaged from participating) as well as an increase (employees started to spend time creating alternative communication channels resulting in "culture jamming" (Dery, 1993) and pockets of resistance, based on sub-cultural values). In one of the organisations the tendency to limit presence to small groups was strengthened by the immigration of relatively large groups of mainly Eastern Europeans. They introduced different work ethics by continuously striving to work long, shift hours and a heightened perception of (sub)-cultural and group identity.

As part of this development, the 'cultural divide' between managerially "maintained" and non-managerial positions also started to grow as was the case between the small emerging groups and other pockets of identity formations and consolidations. Such a social and organisational phenomenon differs from Strauss and Quinn's "maintained" position. Managers were being drawn into a strengthened blame culture, and employees started to change their expectations and reduce their interest in the overall development of their organisation and, hence, in proper and sufficient communication between groups with different roles and tasks. Rumour mongering and a recluse to group attachment became the norm in some instances. Various sub-cultural identities developed in a process of isolation, department and job site alienation and breakdown of the central chain of communication.

A clear indication of the emerging process of fragmentation was the fact that many employees no longer appeared to know their mission statement. For example, staff in the care industry (one of the four organisations I studied) reduced their presence by increasingly becoming more interested in their pay packages and other personally remunerating mechanisms than in the caring values management and shareholders were expecting them to espouse prior to and during the introduction of change interventions. Little or no effort appeared to be spent to develop such values which Strauss and Quinn purport to be based on "maintained" interactions. A culture of resentment, disengagement and outright resistance was allowed to grow, in defiance of the 'official', apparently integrative organisational culture of team-working, collegiality, care for staff and the desire to meet the quality standards through employee commitment and contributions. Expectations of future personal development disappeared. Staff even showed themselves ignorant of

management plans which were expected to foster an integrative approach to cultural change. Their world (presence) clearly had shrunk considerably in scope and participation and contributions to organisational cultural change had become reduced or withdrawn with some employees referring to a 'them and us' dichotomy.

Managers also changed their values, and reduced their presence – although in a different form and apparently with less regret than non-management staff. They started to think in terms of power and control and of manifesting their authority such that they became more and more 'colonising' of employees' contributions ushering in what was similar to a totalising institution. New disciplinary and intermittent punishment procedures served to distance managers from other employees, even though the new organisation was intended to be based on cooperation and integration of cultural value systems. In this sense, the managerial world seems to become mechanised and robot-like, and to increasingly lack communication structures beyond command, control and authoritative power frameworks. Managers lose presence, respect from staff and individuality – and no longer appear able to behave according to longer term strategic orientations. Unfairness creeps in with some employees referring to what has evolved to be 'the upper group' who enjoy special privileges such as longer holidays, friendlier shift-work patterns and so on.

Proposals to create an employment tribunal may be seen as attempts to re-establish secondary communication processes with distinctive sets of language and value orientations, be it only in a formal sense. Other attempts may include the introduction of new computer-based technology, clocking/signing-in and out of work and other routine-like reporting mechanisms. These technological developments did not appear to stop the fragmentation of communication, or prevent the increasing absence of secondary, non-command communication channels such as 'back' or outside-office talk and other informal modes of sharing employee expectations about work. Employees tended to underestimate the speed with which the latter needed to be re-established. Secondary communication processes may include information about the task of an organisation and its engagements with other organisations within the area but will also include exchanges about better wages, friendlier hours of work and more favourable rota systems. If this type of communication is missing, other content will develop, such as rumour-mongering, not turning up for training sessions, absences and other forms of letting management know of grievances and a reduction or withdrawal of employee presence. It appears that their introduction has to be minimally part of the change process itself.

The changes in the internal communication obviously affected the outside communication. Where previously there appeared to have been a relatively warm relationship with shareholders such as Job Centre Plus, Business Link, Learn Direct, Trade Unions, Learning and Skills Council and Connexions, this changed with the increasing need to "sell" the services of some of the organisations to their external communities. Relationships became colder, more formal and even conflicting – in some cases as some of these organisations were not able to adapt to changes in their local environment, but also because managements were seen to assume an 'air' of superiority, resulting in conflicts that were new to the organisations and their communities. Such phenomena contradict to a great extent Strauss and Quinn's theorising on how organisations culturally 'reinvent' themselves and how the revolving aspects and issues can be studied.

Strauss and Quinn's theoretical analysis of organisations and society have, on the whole, been premised on the understanding that societies and organisations can be perceived and studied as stable and integrated entities, which they are not. This realisation problematises the "maintained" perspective developed by Strauss and Quinn and seeks to explore a deeper and richer understanding of organisational studies through employees' "lived" experiences and "life-worlds" (Schutz, 1967). These platforms or worlds range from the imposition of managements' integrative values to the friendliness, cooperation and resistance that this has brought about in employees. In order to try to deepen my understanding of the complex range of employee experiences and possibly resolve some of the dilemmas identified in this study, I propose to examine Magala's (2005) analysis of organisational cultural changes and the importance of language, among other things, to see what these can contribute to business and management studies research.

3. Magala's (2005) approach

Since, according to Magala (2005), we do not "manage dispassionately" I question the rationality of Strauss and Quinn's (1997) body of theorising. The former recognises the crucial importance of emotional intelligence (EQ) and other approaches as complements of the cognitive processes through which employees' languages are expressed. The human cognitive process suggests that all beings (members of staff within an organisation) are capable of rationalising. Hofstede (1980), like Magala, highlights the

importance of the mind and cognition. Living (and, by implication organisational) entities can therefore be deemed to be subject to mental "software programming". Reactions of individuals to organisational cultural change and to the instructions of managers are due to enshrined social patterns, to the norms, values and deep-seated beliefs that result from their enshrinement.

This suggests that the differences between managers and staff during organisational change express such norms and values through various forms of language, stories and symbols. These communication forms are not necessarily "maintained" and mutually agreed upon by all participating organisational members. Magala (2005) examines various forms of communication carriers such as the media (television, video, computer games, mobile phones), our use of languages, accounts and coded behaviours as embodied in bowing, the shaking of hands and so on. All of these symbolic communication processes could account for the tacit curricula through which members of an organisation are socialised thus underscoring the multiple processes and cultural, sub-cultural and behavioural differences between organisational members. Such differences cannot be simply identified within an integrative and "maintained" framework as proposed by Strauss and Quinn but through a recognition framework that recognises the myriad of employees' cultural norms and values that constitute their identity and give meaning to their interactions with one another. The influential work conducted by McLuhan (2001) argues that new communication styles such as print, television, i-pod, "eye-bites", mobile-forms of working and so on will, of themselves, alter our socialisation and cultural processes and thus create more organisational cultural differences and shifts than Strauss and Quinn's (1997) "maintained" values perspective.

Magala's (2005) exposition of the cultural revolution from the oral to the written forms, the coding and recoding of writing from Plato's era to Gabriel's (2000) notion of "narrative deskilling" emphasise cultural transformations and shifts over time and the massive accompanying implications on people's cultural values and behaviours. Such richness in the diversity of theoretical perspectives, and some of the practical implications thereof, is more comprehensive and exposes the complex dilemmas than Strauss and Quinn's (ibid) rather rule-like generalisations of employees' behaviours and cultural norms and values. The richness of the theoretical discussions on how organisations culturally 'redesign' themselves is further enhanced by the empirical data on how employees experience such changes.

However, these propositions to theorising and understanding organisational cultural changes pose renewed dilemmas for organisations and managements. For example, Hofstede's (ibid) "cultures consequences" and the emphasis on language can be regarded as uniting networked and intermingled employee and organisational experiences and the memory that this produces with a fast growing multi-media network such as text messaging, emailing, cell-phoning and so on. This intermingling results in a new medium of communication between different individuals interacting within specific contexts, some of which are non-stationary. The full impacts of these evolving forms of interaction, ways of organising work and the communication processes through which these are surfaced, are increasingly computer-aided and the cultural values that they inadvertently create have begun to reflect on changing employee behaviours thus creating "paradigmatic" schools of thought (Kuhn, 1970) with massive ontological influences on how project teams, task and role cultures (Handy, 1993) operate in a growing number of organisations and businesses. This suggests that members of an organisation performing different roles and functions view and present their experiences according to how these have been influenced by their social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and relationships with those inside as well as outside of work, amongst others. Magala (2005) proposes that the cultural consequences will be as massive as those that occurred when oral communication gave way to the written word during Plato's era. Magala (ibid) states

> *"We are only just beginning to understand the increased risk accompanying outsourcing and off-shoring and the general retreat from large bureaucratic structures with clear chains of command and responsibility and tested roles in social and political systems" (Magala, 2005).*

Therefore, reality does not exist "out there", rather it is the result of what has been co-created between speech actors, experiences (of people on whom changes are being imposed upon by 'colonising' managers) and according to Magala the mass media that brings it to the fore and reports it. This is by way of identifying and reporting what happens in the interactions between organisational members in terms of how employees' innate cultural value systems may be influenced by what happens inside as well as outside of organisations. Such a position recognises parallel networks of relationships that are happening simultaneously. Thus media events and personal experiences that are reported in them should not simply be regarded as objects in daily life such as moving the world into cyberspace but simultaneously co-created between various individual speech actors with varying experiences and cultural values. Such differences in reality can also account for

part of the epistemological dilemmas that researchers who conduct snap-shot case-study analysis of organisations face. Part of this problem has to do with attempting to generalise their findings to other organisational or social contexts.

However, such researchers as myself, do not necessarily claim that their findings can be generalised. I consider the richness of the responses with regard to employees' complex behaviours as crucial in my study. Such richness is captured in the variety of employee responses that portray the dynamic interactions between organisational members experiencing cultural reorientation. Language is also a central part in accounting for cultural differences because it is through employees' uses of language and the extent to which they maintain, increase or reduce their presence during organisational change that different "spectacles" for perceiving the world are created. Presence provides the study with the variety of behaviours (at the personal and organisational level) in respondents' statements and stories of experiences of organisational culture changes such that an increase in employees' contributions brings about enriched lives or, alternatively, employees may choose to reduce their organisational contributions such that their experiences of cultural change have been impoverished. This theoretical and methodological orientation differs from the "maintained" position adopted by Strauss and Quinn. The importance of this visioning and imaging of the world (in terms of how employees view their world) to facilitate our communication processes and cultural identities makes some forms of communication possible while rendering others more complex and varied. Such varieties and complexities of employee behaviours and perceptions which I have identified and analysed in employees' languages and presence can be used to understand the idiographic nature of organisational culture and change.

I also question Strauss and Quinn's (1997) claims of "maintained" employee behaviours especially within organisations experiencing changes in cultural values. This position would appear to deny employees' abilities to not comply with managements' "maintained" corporate value sets and behaviours that they expect staff to emulate. This position also seems to deny employees' resistance to managements' imposed values in efforts to change. Such resistance manifested the overt and more subtle forms of some management and non-management staff not complying with the decision-making process. The study has identified employees who fall within this categorisation in the data analysis. Strauss and Quinn's (1997) structural, functionalist approach could be further critiqued in the sense that the variety of subjective employee opinions, emotional experiences, cultural backgrounds and different ways of seeing and representing the world present inherent conflicting demands on managements, organisations' and, possibly, individuals' desire for order, stability and integration. Such conflicts and tensions emerge when these are least desired by managers who wish to see speedy and cost-efficient implementation of change interventions in their desire to maintain organisational performance, quality standards and profits, amongst other objectives.

As employees interact with one another, there could arise what Durkheim (1938) proposed as "collective consciousness" which, could consequently restrict the sustainability of the argument regarding individually "maintained" cultural norms and values. Within this scenario individual and group culture should feature prominently in organisational analysis. Such a combination and the issues that arise from their interaction is what I identified in the notion of presence as reflected in the contributions people make within the realms of the personal and organisational. This critique poses the question about the problem of cultural order and the stability of employee behaviours in the sense that what might be regarded as cultural consensus, the acceptable status quo, the integrated "way we do things around here" (Deal and Kennedy, 1982) by a group of individuals such as management could be perceived by other individuals such as employees, for example, as totally unacceptable. This therefore raises the notion of conflict of interests and mismatch of values. These emerging themes have been highlighted from respondents' accounts and observation statements (depending on which platform they choose to engage in) during the interviews.

Furthermore, the maintenance, or at times, the changing of cultural norms and values could be shaped by what has been negotiated and mutually agreed by and between employees. This metaphorical concept implies that organisational members are in a constant process of organising and reorganising with one another (thus changing), interpreting and reinterpreting organisational values and norms so as to review what would appear to be their shared cultural expectations and actions over time. Culture can therefore be viewed as an emerging phenomenon, not by any means a static given awaiting study. Tendencies to 'impose' as well as to resist or be friendly are part of a conversation, a discourse or negotiated exchange that allows for proper functioning in daily life, but also for the possibility of more fundamental changes, e.g. in case of market forces or other possible external drivers to organisational cultural change. Negative effects, such as subversion, "jamming" and imposition, have to be seen as part of an emerging discourse, therefore: they signal through the emerging platforms that something needs to be changed or 'redesigned'.

The language of imposition and totalising as well as that of resistance, conflict, tension and cooperation could therefore be perceived within a transient context which depicts how employees view their definition of the situation at a given point in time. This element of change denotes that the expected roles being performed within the organisations studied could evolve depending on what has been mutually and implicitly agreed within and between groups and statuses as the appropriate ways of "doing things" such as complying with or resisting against management demands to change working practices. It seems to me that this element of change counteracts the argument that organisations are concretely stable, "maintained" and coherent entities and could be theorised and analysed as such without identifying and appreciating some of the dilemmas that such a naïve position poses.

4. Alternative research approaches

In this section, I present 2 approaches to see what they can contribute to unravel part of the dilemmas faced by researchers in business, management and organisation studies. These are symbolic interactionism and stories. The latter is presented sometimes in the form of accounts and, at other times, in the form of observation reports from the interviews that I conducted with 51 employees in 4 organisations. The organisations were selected because they were going through tremendous alterations in their working practices at the time of the research.

4.1 Mead's (1964) symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism refers to a perspective in sociology (Mead, 1964; Blumer, 1969) that inspires researchers to focus on how individuals experience their environment, rather than on the general conditions that shape the latter. It suggests exploring people's subjective 'definition of the situation', and the way this definition is negotiated through different interactions – and to link this definition to a collective characterisation of the interaction.

I use the notion of account as it is used by symbolic interactionists as explained by (Gergen, 1991):

> *"Accounts of the world...take place within shared systems of intelligibility -usually a spoken or written language. These accounts are not viewed as the external expression of the speaker's internal processes (such as cognition, intention), but as an expression of relationships among persons" (Gergen, 1991:78).*

I also find these accounts of employees' experiences highlighted the numerous sets of possible meanings (from employees' languages) that were being created in the interactions between different employment statuses. These included how top management, middle management and employees view their worlds. These accounts were also facilitated because of the interaction between the interviewees and myself in the course of the data collection process. From the findings, managers and employees offer these accounts as a way of identifying with their organisations, their sub-cultural groups, choosing which changes to cooperate with or not and so on. Viewed alternatively, they regard themselves as principal parties in comprehending, but, at times contesting (if needs be) the inequalities expressed in the "lay theories of organisational culture and change" as those of Schein (1985) and Handy (1993).

Managers presented themselves to the researcher as responsible and caring leaders that were interested in their employees' welfare. In their perception, such characteristics of management styles make them appear more fashionable. Thus, the accounts they offered of their management behaviour could be influenced by their anticipation of what their roles were supposed to be or what they intended I might have assumed their roles to have been. They appeared to denote an integrative approach to implementing organisational changes (mainly through imposition) in which everyone appeared to cooperate unquestioningly with management domination. For example this manager said:

> *"I think we have a very tolerant culture. We are very equal opportunities driven…There is no "them and us" and no blame culture. All the problems get sorted out at our team meetings which can be a bit heated. There is a lot of praise culture. I think the T&D Manager is partly responsible for the praise and encouraging culture. We have worked in other sections where a lot of praise was not the norm. You were undervalued [in the past] not necessarily with pay. We value staff."*

Although knowledge acquisition refers to a process that is essentially open (one cannot be sure that testing has been sufficient, that no adaptation of knowledge may be necessary), it does appear possible to achieve plateaus – periods where the need for further adaptation and survive market forces and external change drivers appears at least temporarily diminished as the above respondent seems to suggest. In such periods employee presence will appear easily negotiable, and its establishment may be considered 'friendly' and desirable by managers and shareholders. It happens when all parties proceed (in an enriching and non-dominating or totalising manner) within the constraints of overall adaptation to change requirements.

The above-cited employee response totally contrasts with the language being used by another employee of a different status along these lines:

> *"There is a mixture of praise and blame culture in my organisation. There is also a "them and us" culture especially reflected in the friendships between those in management. Ordinary employees do not enjoy some of these privileges. At very few times you are praised for doing a good job especially when the orders are not delayed but when these targets are not met on time then the production lines are blamed as a whole".*

Conflicts have a tendency to arise when they are least wanted, i.e. when there are other more pressing conflicts that need the attention of both managers and employees alike. This appeared to be exemplified by the periods of stressful change. Managers and employees no longer supported each other's presence, but tried to manipulate the latter to what they considered their own personal survival advantage. Managers tended to reduce their own presence (by mechanising processes of communication), while other employees at times tried to increase it – for example by bringing conflicts and other forms of resistant manifestations to the fore at what managers will consider the 'wrong' time. A clear dichotomy in the concept of 'them and us' (different from Strauss and Quinn's "maintained" position) signals the growing rift and tensions between management and employees. One such conflict concerned frequent cigarette breaks. It was intensified due to mutually incompatible linguistic systems between managers and employees. On the one hand such breaks were deemed to express the attitude of 'lazy staff', on the other they were seen as rightful ways to cope with disenchantment and disengagement from the change process.

Such differences in interpretation will not disappear when one language is made to dominate, e.g. to lead to measures to 'push' staff to become less lazy and more integrated with cultural change interventions. Differences in the linguistic systems being used by employees may create a sphere of mystery and alienation between managers and non-management staff. This sometimes is supported intentionally, as in the case of political figures using two such systems to communicate with those higher up and their electorate, those lower down. Unfortunately, the resulting form of command communication tends to be inefficient in high-level tasks – precisely the type of situation that organisational change is intended to improve.

In the interview process, I may have appeared to ask managers and employees to present accounts of what they might or might not have done through different levels of language. The latter option may have been wished for by employees. Such potential preference of interview issues could have skewed the data presented in this study to reflect some platforms of interactions more than others. Viewed alternatively, the aspects that respondents highlighted also showed the dynamic range of interactive experiences when employees undergo stressful cultural changes.

4.2 Stories

My interest in using interviews as a research platform to collect employee stories is linked to my principal research question "What are the consequences on employees and others when organisations change?" After collecting these stories I interpreted the sets of meanings (the other platforms) that emerged from the issues raised and validated by employees. In this approach, meanings are inter-subjectively shared between the respondents and myself. The world is understood and meaning is constructed through "social artefacts, (stories, myths, artefacts and symbols) products of historically situated interchanges among people" (Gergen, 1985).

Instead of a straightforward emergence of themes from the interview data there were some unexpected sub-themes such as implicit and explicit conflict, overt and covert resistance and so on that emerged from the main themes and issues evoked in the interviews, not just denoting the richness in research but part of human existence as well. It was such non-rule-like nature in people's cultural values that I tried to surface

from employees' experiences of organisational changes which are at odds with the Strauss and Quinn position. It was also by way of identifying employees' contributions within the framework of maintained, increased or reduced presence that I tried to highlight the extent to which employees' experiences have been impoverished or enriched within their interactions. Some employees tend to relate their individual expectations to what should be happening in their organisations and how managers need to behave in order to facilitate a smooth cultural change process. Sometimes, these expectations were at variance with organisational practices, expectations, policies, procedures and managers' actions, thus the sub-themes mentioned earlier. Such varieties of interactions and networks of relationships provide the study with its rich employee experiences which are not necessarily "maintained" in as integrative a manner as presented in Strauss and Quinn's theorising. This highlights some of the dilemmas that face researchers interested in complex management and organisation issues such as culture and change, among others. These dilemmas can be further broken down and categorised into 2 sections: ontological and epistemological.

4.2.1 Ontological dilemmas

I now wish to examine some core assumptions and dilemmas about ontology based on the study's findings. These are intended to provide an inevitably sketchy map for thinking about the different perspectives that various organisational and social scientists hold about human beings, their behaviours and the world around them. Each of these social thoughts has evolved in recognition of the existence and proliferation of other points of view, and, to some extent, developed as a reaction to competing methodological and theoretical viewpoints.

The social world and what could be considered as "reality" is a projection of individual consciousness. This paper has also recognised that the consequences of organisational changes on employee behaviours are created through the inter-subjective sets of meanings between respondents and researcher. I compared such individual rationalising using employee language and symbols as they related to the quality of the sameness of the statements and experiences before being classified under collective experiences in the form of platforms. The varieties of experiences denote a combined collection of sets of cognitive recollections of people's reactions and the sense they make of their organisational changes. It was this body of knowledge that I tried to represent in the emerging platforms that demonstrated the interactions between the personal and organisational domains.

Social reality and meaning are found in the nature and use of these cultural modes of interactions that are worthy of interpretations. These provided the basis of employee experiences from which I question Strauss and Quinn's theorising. Capturing symbolic modes of meanings in employees' daily "lived" experiences of cultural change may be shared with managers', but, at times, multiple assumptions and cultural differences (that account for the conflicts, tensions and resistances) have also been recognised in this study. This poses yet another dilemma for the social scientist who intends to generalise his/her findings in an integrative way. Thus to discuss organisational culture within an entirely integrative framework appears to me too idealistic and utopian as it fails to fully account for the existence and recognition of other fragmentary and sub-cultural "ways of doing things".

Social and organisational reality rests not on following rules but in what the system of interactions mean to respondents that presents itself to the researcher as following a pattern. Piecing out a pattern of the interactions between respondents' stories and statements would appear rule-like. This seems to render the phenomenological researcher rather structuralist thereby defeating the very notion of depicting employees' "lived" experiences, adding to the dilemmas of researchers.

4.2.2 Epistemological dilemmas

These different ontological assumptions also pose epistemological dilemmas. The various world-views expressed imply different forms of knowledge for the social and organisational worlds we inhabit in and try to construct and analyse. From one assumption to the other one what could be regarded as the subjective/objective continuum, the nature and form of what really makes up knowledge varies. For example, the objectivist perspective of what constitutes the world as a concrete structure would encourage an epistemological position that stresses the importance of studying relationships that are rendered concrete, static and, in Strauss and Quinn's (1997) view "maintained". Such knowledge implies an understanding of research phenomena with much emphasis on the empirical analysis of concrete and causal relationships. It yearns for what appears to be "objective" form of knowledge identifying the nature of rules and relationships among phenomena. Such events such as employees' behaviours are considered social "facts" (Pugh and

Hickson, 1976a, 1976b). The famous Durkheimian (1938) dictum that we should consider social facts as things and recognise them by the way they constrain us is an early origination of this argument.

At the extreme end of the epistemological continuum is the subjectivist perspective of reality as a projection of human experience and interaction. It contests the causal and rule-like basis on which knowledge of organisational phenomena such as culture and change can be claimed. It is more inclined towards a study of processes through which organisational and social actors render their interactions concrete. This phenomenological and subjective stance challenges the notion of "objective" knowledge that can be transmitted in any concrete form. This is because the knowledge created could merely be regarded as an expression of the manner in which the scientist (a subjective being), has subconsciously imposed a personal reference frame on the world, which is quite often, wrongly regarded as lying in an external and separate sphere (Husserl, 1960). The bases for the creation of and claims to knowledge in the assumptions stated herein are quite divergent because their viewpoints on what forms organisational and social reality (such as the dynamic interactions between members during organisational culture change) are equally polarised. This is part of an ongoing set of dilemmas in management and business studies.

5. Results of analysis

The results of the analysis may be summarised as follows. Without an understanding of the notion of presence, managers tend to show behaviour with unreasonable levels of destructive effect, i.e. behaviour to the detriment of the organisation as well as to its employees. By initially recognising and trying to manage presence – increasing it, decreasing it in terms of overall performance of some organisation – such behaviour may be avoided and may make companies (private-sector organisations in this case) better places for employees to work in, to learn and develop. Typically, such companies strive continuously to re-design their organisational structure to deal with internal and external challenges and increase their competence, i.e. their ability to work systematically and cooperatively (Hammer and Champy, 1995). Changes of this nature depend on suitable forms of communication in the interactions between top and middle management and employees in the organisations studied. It was noted that many attempts tend to be made to improve communication, for example through Staff Forums, newsletters, notice boards and so on, but that these remain ineffective if they are not geared to increase and balance employee presence. Making employees feel valued and dignified human beings need not imply that companies cannot change or downsize. It means that they can do so without first increasing or maintaining the damage that they try to reduce.

6. Concluding remarks

The theoretical and methodological position I have maintained in this paper is one in which the phenomenological approach to research in management and business studies makes its case as one moves from the objectivist end to the interpretive and subjectivist end of the research continuum. I have tried to sustain the argument that Strauss and Quinn's (1997) culturally-"maintained" position is questionable by using symbolic interactionism and stories as alternative approaches. These theories and methods facilitated through the interview platforms recognise the importance of language and organisational discourses validated by speech actors through which consequences of organisational cultural changes on employees' experiences and reactions can be richly understood. I have tried to distance myself from reducing the complexities and dynamic interactions entailed in this study to an "objective" form of measuring relationships in what would appear to be rule-like, concrete, static and regulated. However, the accompanying epistemological dilemma which renders this knowledge generated from employees' experiences of cultural changes as relativistic and context-specific still remains. I also accept the thrilling complexity, ambiguity, fuzziness and unpredictability of culture and change studies and striven for a more interactive approach to understanding the consequences on employees and others when their organisations change.

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