The nature and impact of the ‘new work culture’ on ‘white collar’ workers in the UK, 1997-2010

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Dedication

To my loving husband Barney, who has made so many sacrifices on my behalf while I have pursued my study over the years, and always supported me. Also to my dear mother Elsie and late father Bill, who have always had faith in me.

To you I owe everything.
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Abstract

This thesis explores the argument that in the UK since the mid-1990s there has emerged a neo-liberal ‘new work culture’, characteristic of Anglo-American forms of capitalism, and examines the drivers behind it. These drivers, or political choices, have led to changing organisational forms, restructurings and increasing use of contingent labour as businesses pursue competitive advantage and labour flexibility. The ‘new work culture’ is characterised by individualised employment relationships: by managerialism, performativity, growing work intensification and ongoing change. It is not restricted to private sector organisations and has spread to all parts of the UK economy.

This thesis uses Braverman’s book Labor and Monopoly Capitalism: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century (1974) and Sennett’s The Culture of the New Capitalism (2006) as points of reference to examine what has been argued to be the degradation of work under capitalism at the turn of the 21st century. It takes an historical perspective to examine evidence for Braverman’s contention that capitalist ideology becomes a material force in the machines and procedures of work, and that progress in advanced technological societies has been achieved through ongoing commodification and intensification of work resulting in worker alienation.

Survey and qualitative data are used to explore the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) as an instrument of Capital, and the impact of the new work culture on UK white collar workers since the late 1990s. Connections are made between post-modern HRM, in the form of ‘high-commitment’ practices, and the subordination of workers, turning them into the ‘willing slaves’ described by Bunting (2004). The concept of psychological contract is used as a framework for analysis. Evidence is found of worker alienation characterised by loss of a sense of job security, long working hours, lack of work-life balance and loss of meaning and autonomy at work.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 The focus of this research

It has been argued that there is a new work culture of capitalism (Sennett, 2006). The overall aim of this study is to examine evidence for the existence, nature and impact of the 'new work culture' on the working lives of 'white collar' employees in the early years of the twenty-first century. One way of thinking about this is in terms of changes in what has been referred to as the 'psychological contract' between employees and employers, the assumptions on each side about what can/should be expected from each side, and what cannot reasonably be expected'.

'White collar' employment expanded significantly after the Second World War and the term 'white-collar worker' here refers to a salaried professional or an educated worker who performs semi-professional office work involving for example administrative and sales coordination tasks, as opposed to a 'blue-collar worker', whose job requires manual labour. It also encompasses management workers, professionals and specialists, such as doctors and teachers.

This study is grounded within both sociological and managerial theoretical contexts. It uses Braverman's book Labor and Monopoly Capitalism: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century (1974) and Sennett's The Culture of the New Capitalism (2006) as points of reference to examine the propositions that, under Anglo-American forms of capitalism, white collar work is being 'degraded' and that 'the new work culture' has deleterious effects on the social and psychological contracts of 'white collar workers'. Braverman wrote about the management use of technology to commodify clerical white collar work in the 1960s. Sennett (2006:10) draws his conclusions from his observations of knowledge workers in elite high-tech, finance, and media industries. Though these industries are only "a small part of the whole economy," they "exert a profound moral and normative force as a cutting-edge standard for how the larger economy should evolve." This thesis focuses on the white collar populations Sennett refers to.
This thesis takes an historical perspective to examine more recent evidence relevant to Braverman’s Marxist contention that capitalist ideology becomes a material force in the machines and procedures of work and that so-called progress in advanced technological societies has been achieved through the ongoing commodification and intensification of work and worker alienation within the “free” labour force. In *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (1974), Braverman predicted that worker deskilling, and the degradation of work more generally, would extend beyond ‘blue-collar’ to most forms of ‘white collar’ work during later periods. This thesis examines if, and how, managerial and professional work is currently undergoing a transformation similar to that described by Braverman.

In more recent times, in *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, sociologist Richard Sennett has provided an overview of the rapid and radical changes to the work-world of modern capitalism since the mid-1990s. This thesis focuses on changes to the work-world since the late 1990s, and Sennett’s depiction of the new work culture resonates strongly with the author. Like Braverman, he examines the nature of work under earlier forms of industrial capitalism but he also surveys the major differences between this earlier version of capitalism and the more global, more febrile version that is taking its place. When global capitalism came into being, Sennett argues, the focus in many businesses shifted to share price and to trading in companies rather than goods. As a result, companies operate to very short-term agendas and this affects the way they deal with workers.

In *The Corrosion of Character: Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (1998), Sennett describes the potentially deleterious effects of the new work culture on white collar employees. In an environment of rapid organizational change, where ideas of employee satisfaction and motivation could be seen as potentially meaningless, the psychological contract provides a useful integrative concept around which to converge the concerns of the contemporary workplace.

In this study, the notion of the psychological contract is used as a theoretical platform to understand employee responses to workplace changes. Although the concept was introduced by Argyris in 1960, it came to prominence in the 1990s as an analytical device in social and organizational research to describe, understand and predict the consequences of changes occurring in the employment relationship (Shore and Tetrick, 1994). Over the past two decades in particular, a number of researchers have used the term to describe what is implicit within the employment relationship in terms of reciprocity and exchange. Because psychological contracts involve employee beliefs about the reciprocal obligations between
themselves and their employers, they can be viewed as the foundation of employment relationships (Rousseau, 1995; Shore and Tetrick, 1994). Various scholars suggest that it is the psychological contract that mediates the relationship between organizational factors and work outcomes such as commitment and job satisfaction (e.g. Marks and Scholarios, 2004; Guest and Conway, 1997).

There are two main definitions of the psychological contract. The first, which is described by Herriot and Pemberton (1995a) as the "classic" definition, derives from the work of Argyris (1960) and Schein (1978). This refers to the perceptions of mutual obligation, held by the two parties in the employment relationship, the employer and the employee (Herriot et al., 1997). According to the second definition, which is based on the work of Rousseau (1989:122), the psychological contract is:

'An individual's belief regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party. A psychological contract emerges when one party believes that a promise of future returns has been made, a contribution has been given and thus, an obligation has been created to provide future benefits'.

In this definition, the psychological contract is formulated only in the mind of the employee and is therefore about "individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange between individuals and their organization". However, in terms of underlying constructs, there remains no overall accepted definition of the psychological contract and this exchange relationship is very complex and dynamic, with a wide range of factors shaping employee perceptions of how they experience the deal.

While there is ongoing debate about whether the psychological contract is based on 'expectations' or 'obligations' (see Chapter Three), there is consensus that psychological contracts extend beyond legal contracts to beliefs or expectations an individual and an employer might hold toward the other. In other words, psychological contracts relate to individuals' beliefs regarding reciprocal obligations: what obligations the employee owes the employer and vice versa. When individuals believe they are obligated to behave or perform in a certain way, and also believe that the employer has certain obligations towards them, these individuals are said to hold a psychological contract. When one or other party is perceived to have reneged on their obligations towards the other, the psychological contract is thought to be 'breached', or in the case of severe breaches, 'violated'.

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1.1 My interest in pursuing this study

My interest in the 'new work culture' arose through my work in the field of management development and research for over twenty years and through becoming increasingly aware of potential consequences for white collar employees of some of the changes to the workplace since the mid-1990s which might be described as the features of a new work culture. In the first half of my career I worked in publishing, was a secondary school teacher and then management development manager in a large American multi-national firm (Company A). These various experiences were enriching and varied, but also caused me to question why so much of what was happening in organisations appeared to be dysfunctional and potentially harmful to the well-being and motivation of individuals. At Company A in the early 1990s I witnessed, but did not personally experience, some of the damaging consequences of organisational change for employees (including managers).

Company A had been on a continuous growth curve for the previous thirty years. It was a non-unionised environment with a reputation as a good employer. It offered good terms and conditions for its (mainly full-time and permanent) employees, sophisticated career management schemes geared to vertical career progression for 'high flyers' and employee development opportunities for other employees. By the mid-1990s Company A's business model was being challenged by the advent of new forms of competition. In line with Tayloristic efficiency thinking, Company A chose to restructure its international businesses and introduce new business processes, including 'lean', 'total quality' and related technologies to improve productivity and reduce cost. Company A became an early adopter of 'downsizing' (or laying off employees), 're-engineering' (or remodelling processes and structures and in the process usually laying off employees) and 'delayering' (or the removal of hierarchical management layers to produce 'flatter' structures).

The combination of redundancies with the loss of conventional career opportunities, as hierarchies were collapsed to produce 'flatter' structures, challenged the previous 'givens' of the employment relationship between Company A and its employees. I was struck by the apparent and lasting impact of these changes on employees' morale. I worked in management development at the time and thus had many opportunities to converse with employees who, even though their own jobs were not at risk, nonetheless talked about feeling 'betrayed' by their employer since they recognised that their employment relationship
had been changed unilaterally. They were aware that all the risks and fewer of the benefits of the employment relationship were now being passed to them. Managers in particular seemed to struggle with loss of status implicit in flatter structures. Moreover, as their workloads expanded, people were starting to experience the effects of work intensification.

Employees appeared to be suffering anomie and alienation. Trust was gone; could it ever come back, especially when executives could apparently not see that there was a problem? At the same time the company was presenting these changes as part of an exciting new strategic direction, and urged everyone to 'go the extra mile'. How, I wondered, was this going to happen, when employees had become, in today's practitioner-parlance, 'disengaged'?

I was interested to understand how widespread such reactions might be, how this might affect people's relationship with their employer, and whether this had potential consequences for individual and corporate performance. I became interested in the concept of 'psychological contract' as a means of understanding what might be happening in the employment relationship at a micro i.e. individual or group level. I considered this a useful theory since I believed that I had observed symptoms of psychological contract breach amongst employees I had worked with at Organisation A. Psychological contract theory has also been explored to explain employee turnover behaviour with the advent of corporate downsizings (Van der Brande, 1999). Psychological contract breach is also associated with emotional exhaustion, higher turnover intentions, actual turnover behaviour, lower job satisfaction, lower trust and commitment, and reduced organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) - defined by Organ (1988: 4) as:

'(...) individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization'.

I was also interested to understand what might replace the paternalistic assumptions inherent in the old psychological contract, which to some extent at least had appeared to be mutually beneficial to the organisation and its employees. I had the opportunity to follow up these interests when I joined Organisation B, a small management institute with a strong charitable ethos in the south of England in 1994. By the time I joined it, Organisation B had been a management college for thirty years but it had maintained its tradition of pioneering developments in learning methodology in order to equip people to help themselves in today's complex workplaces. While working with participants attending Organisation B's
development programmes. I found that many perceived themselves to be experiencing considerable amounts of workplace change and loss of satisfaction.

At Organisation B I started to carry out research into how people were experiencing the changing workplace, in particular the effect of organisational restructurings on careers. To investigate how employees were experiencing the changes in their workplaces, in 1997 I initiated an annual survey of (white collar) employees working in UK organisations (the UK Employee Survey or UKES) which continues to this day, although I was directly involved in writing and analysing this survey only until 2005/6 when I left Organisation B to join Organisation C.

For the purposes of focusing my PhD, I carried out a broad meta-analysis of the UKES (2000-2003) and found evidence of growing work intensification and job insecurity in employee responses. These features I supposed to be potentially symptomatic of a new work culture. I also found intriguing signals within the UKES which helped me to clarify the research questions which I wanted to follow up in more detail. I therefore investigated in more depth some of the areas within it which seemed to be most problematic, including the extent to which employees' perceived a loss of meaning in their work within the new work culture. I have also subsequently investigated the role played by the HR function in developing a culture of performativity and individualised employee relations. In addition, I have reflected on my own experience as an employee and a manager throughout this period. In particular I have reflected on how my own psychological contract with my employer at Organisation B was adversely affected by the deliberate introduction of performativity as a means of transforming a previously collegial organisational culture into a more commercial and transactional culture.

For me therefore this thesis is a way of gaining a different perspective; a way of addressing the question – why does knowledge and understanding not always lead to better forms of practice? This inquiry arises from my belief in the value of a humanised, progressive view of the nature of work which I have attempted to promote through my various writings (books and articles). My writing sets out advice and what I have considered good practice with respect to human relations, yet to a large extent such practice is not operationalized in organisations and the lived reality for many employees is very different from what I have been advocating. I am therefore drawing on my own experience as a manager, as well as my management research and writing, and adding a sociological element, taking a critical view of mainstream theory which is often advisory and presents an idealised picture of the workplace.
1.3 Research Questions

This thesis examines evidence for the existence of a 'new work culture' of capitalism in UK organisations at the turn of the 21st century and what that means for white collar workers' satisfaction.

In order to undertake such a study, I have adopted a 'pragmatist pluralist' strategy for the development of my argument. Critical pragmatism derives from critical theory and is a methodological orientation that believes that social science research should illuminate ideological domination, hegemonic practices, and social injustice. It entails building a conceptual framework suitable for the area of research, and advocates an eclectic methodological experimentalism in the pursuit of this illumination. Both Herbert Marcuse (1964) and Antonio Gramsci (1971), from whose work critical pragmatism derives, urge the need for research into the ways in which societies reproduce themselves and the ways in which people are persuaded to embrace ideas, beliefs, and practices that may not be in their best interests.

In relation to the overall aim, this study considers the following broad research questions:

1. What are the macro political, economic and technological changes which have led to the emergence of a 'new work culture'?
2. How do HRM practices contribute to the development and advancement of the new work culture?
3. What are the characteristics of the new work culture, as perceived by employees?
4. How do employees experience the 'new work culture'?
5. To what extent are employees able to exercise agency?
6. How do HRM professionals view their role with respect to the new work culture?

1.3.1 With respect to research question one, while it is too large a task to analyse all aspects of the context within which organisations are operating, this research analyses themes from political, historical, managerial and economic literature to identify key influences on the process of degradation of work for UK white collar workers. In particular I have reviewed literature which considers political and economic changes initiated in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US, and continued since that time under the 'New Labour' project. This was the political economic strategy to encourage and
foster the principles of a neo-liberal form of capitalism (Friedman, 1977) and related social practices. I argue that this strategy has had a significant impact on employment practices in all sectors of the UK economy, as a result of which the white collar employment relationship has undergone dramatic changes, largely to the disadvantage of employees (Edwards and Karau, 2007; Hakim, 1994; Hall & Moss, 1998; O’Reilly, 1994; Sims, 1994; Weick, 1996).

1.3.2 With respect to research question two, I argue that a key factor in the development of the ‘new work culture’ has been the adoption of forms of human resource management (HRM) designed to emphasise individual responsibility for work performance. It is my contention that, at the start of the period of this study, many white collar workers were still experiencing a relatively benevolent employment relationship with their employers based on mutual interest, but that this was starting to come under significant strain as a result of the restructurings, the effects of managerialism and the introduction of performative work practices. Consequently many of the implicit assumptions of reciprocity and mutuality of interest in the employment relationship between employers and employees were starting to be exposed as myths, or at least obsolete ‘truths’.

1.3.3 With respect to research questions three and four, I attempt to critically examine some of the literature relating to the ‘new work culture’, as well as mainstream and critical ‘HRM’ theory and literature relating to performativity and the psychological contract. A neo-Marxist orientation assumes the existence of hegemonic struggles within capitalism. Capitalist social relations engender both systemic inequality and structured antagonism (Watson, 2010). This arises out of competitive market relations: employers compete for employees while employees seek to maximize their opportunities and rewards from employers. But, simultaneously, employers are competing with others in product and service markets, and are under pressure to minimize labour costs in order to sustain and improve profits or other benefits. In consequence, this ‘structured antagonism’ engenders a ‘natural’ conflict of interests within the employment relationship for the employers’ interest in minimizing labour costs constantly rubs up against the employees’ interest in maximizing rewards and/or reducing the duration and intensity of work (the effort-wage bargain).

Both a study of ‘Meaning at Work’, and the researcher’s reflections on her own experience and practice, provide data on the extent to which employers’ interests are being optimised at the expense of employees’ interests.
1.3.4 With respect to research question five, the study considers how much employees can influence the situation in which they find themselves within the new work culture, in particular the extent to which they can act as free agents when employed by others. The psychological contract serves a number of functions for employees. It reduces their uncertainty by establishing agreed-upon conditions of employment that cannot all be specified in the formal employment contract. From the employee perspective, it provides them with a sense of control over their own destiny, since they can decide whether to fulfil their obligations and be party to the implied contracts. From an employer's perspective, it enables the employer to control the employee without having to exercise surveillance (Hartley, 1999). Thus any change brought about by employers in the nature of the psychological contract is likely to affect employees' agency, or sense of control over their own destiny.

The structural theoretical resource most drawn upon within this study is Giddens' (1986) structuration theory. This draws together the two principal strands of social thinking – structure and agency. In the structuralist tradition the emphasis is on social structure (which is primarily seen as a form of constraint over human behaviour). Structure consists of the rules (that is the behavioural norms) and resources (that is accumulated knowledge and expertise) that guide behaviour in a social system. In the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions, which this study embraces, the human agent is the primary focus. For Albert Bandura (2001), a prominent social learning and social cognitive theorist, agency is the 'essence of humanness' which is contained in a 'capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life'. Bandura's definition of human agency incorporates his theory of self-efficacy:

'To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions...the core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self development, adaptation, and self renewal with changing times' (2001:2).

People exhibit agency through developing intentions and thought before events; self-regulation through self-reaction; and self-reflectiveness about their capabilities, performance, and the meaning and purpose of what they do in life. Bandura developed the concept of reciprocal interaction, in which humans are regarded as highly active processors of information who are continually interacting with the social environment.

Structuration theory attempts to recast structure and agency as a mutually dependent duality. Behaviour and structure are intertwined; people go through a socialization process and become dependent on the existing social structures, but at the same time social
structures are being altered by their activities. In other words human actors display agency, but in a structural context, and this mutually dependent relationship (structure influences action, action influences structure) evolves over time and space. Structure both limits and constrains organisational behaviour because organisational members tend to adhere to existing rules for interaction. Moreover individual behaviours are constrained by the knowledge resources available to them; organisational members tend to behave in ways which conform to existing mental models for how the organisation should operate (Senge et al, 1999). The phrase the 'way we do things around here' is often used to describe organisational culture, which is both shaping and being shaped by human agents.

However when individuals or groups begin to draw on new resources or apply new rules for carrying out their work together, the structure of the social system becomes amenable to change. In this way many micro actions come to constitute the social interaction. The theory helps illuminate both how participation is embedded in its social context and how it evolves over time. Technology is in this context socially transformative, as well as socially transformed, and hence any process study needs to consider the interdependence of human action and social structure.

This theory allows for the Marxian idea that capitalism stabilises itself through structures which then become naturalised and taken-for-granted. Pre-existing frameworks of interpretation, as shaped by various contextual, cultural and normative assumptions, necessarily affect processes of knowledge construction (Kuhn, 1970). In capitalist societies positivist assumptions become rationalised in institutions, denying the reality of underlying structures and thus reinforcing the status quo. This suggests that the key to understanding group practices, such as performativity, is through analysis of the reciprocal interaction between structure and agency. This is explored through people's accounts of their responses to the changes imposed on them within the new work culture.

1.3.5 With respect to research question six, the HR function represents the public face of the employer, in that it is the HR function which is formally charged in many organisations with responsibility for managing employment issues and employee relations. This question explores how senior HR practitioners view the role of the HR function, in particular the extent to which they align HR priorities to business interests, to employee interests, or both.
1.4 Research themes and periods

The themes I pursue in this thesis are concerned with the destabilisation of the bureaucratic employment relationship (or the ‘old deal’ described by Herriot and Pemberton, 1995a) by the thrusts of ‘downsizing’ (or restructuring resulting in job losses) and ‘delayering’ (or flattening of management hierarchies) which became characteristic of neo-liberal organisational practices from the late 1980s on, and with the installation of a new work culture characterised by performativity, work intensification and commodification of workers.

Given that this study has taken place over a number of years and has a number of research questions, themes relating to different aspects of the new work culture and its impact on employees are explored through different but related strands of research. This is therefore a multi-strand and a multi-method study involving both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. On the whole, the fieldwork has involved using ethnographic methods such as life history interviews, focus groups and reflexivity. For the sake of clarity I have subdivided the research period addressed in this thesis into the following sections.

1.4.1 During the first period of my study, organisational restructurings, including re-engineering, downsizing, flattening of management hierarchies (or ‘delayering’) and mergers and acquisitions were increasingly common practices. The first strand of research for my PhD studies involved carrying out a meta-analysis of the UKES between 2000 and 2003, to explore key themes emerging from how employees described the changes taking place at work and their perceptions of the impact on them of these changes. From this I identified a number of themes which I wanted to explore in more depth.

1.4.2 Arising from the first strand of research, the focus of the second strand of research (2004-5) which forms part of my PhD is on how employees perceived a loss of meaning at work within the new work culture, and how their aspirations and expectations of work appeared to be changing. The conclusion of this strand of research resonated with Sennett’s observation that employees find it difficult to sustain a life narrative that comes out of one’s work. This led me to wish to explore the third strand of research.

1.4.3 The focus of the third strand of research (2006-2010) for my PhD is an exploration of the views of senior HR practitioners about the role of HRM and the new work culture. I was interested to explore the extent to which ‘leading-edge’ HRM functions concern themselves
with the employee experience of the new work culture. I analysed the discourse of senior HR practitioners to discover their perceptions about what counts as 'success' from a business-focused HR function.

A timeline depicting these research strands is to be found in Appendix 1.

1.5 Factors driving the emergence of 'the new work culture'

It could be argued that a new work culture has come into being since the mid-1990s. The central issue in this study is how this impacts on the working lives and psychological contracts of white collar employees with their employers. This section provides a brief historical overview of some of the key factors which may have led to the emergence of a 'new work culture' which will be considered in more depth in Chapters Two and Three.

Any discourse about people management lacks context without consideration of the changing nature of organisational environment, employment models and the employment relationship (Wong et al, 2009a). Factors such as the global economy, the environment, advancements in technology and the changing demographic have, and will continue to have an impact on work, the shape and nature of organisations, and the state of the employment relationship.

1.5.1 Neo-liberal economic theory and globalization

Since Braverman's time, the British and American forms of global capitalism have embraced neo-liberal economic theory. This claimed to maximize individual freedoms through the deregulation of markets, thus enabling competitive capitalism to become free from interference from the state and to maximise the production of wealth, so that everyone gains. Hutton (2010) provides a strong critique of the neo-liberal values upon which our current economic model is based, calling it 'free market fundamentalism' and argues for a wholesale reconstruction away from the ideals of free market.

In the 1970s, Britain's old model of mass industrial production and capital accumulation began to fail. Growing pressure from labour for increased wages was undermining profitability. There was collapse in the rate of profit and a systemic crisis. Out of this crisis grew a new and invigorated global capitalism which originated in Britain and the US and was subsequently advanced as a political project by the New Right.
During the Thatcher years there was a political commitment to new forms of market, in particular to encouraging the growth of the financial services sector. The development of this form of capitalism was assisted by the development of new information and communication technologies which began to transform traditional manufacturing and distribution systems. The utilization of knowledge and culture as economic resources created new types of post-Fordist firms, products and markets. Much traditional manufacturing capability migrated away from the developed countries to parts of the developing world. The West became predominantly a service economy, with the UK in particular seeing the development of high technology, financial services and travel and tourism as major growth areas. Since the Thatcher era, various UK governments have continued to support regulatory and employment legislation reform to support economic growth.

By the mid-1990s the impact of globalization, of the financial services model and of Thatcherite economic and fiscal policies on the UK economy was becoming clear. Free trade was the mantra. Corporations, especially multi-nationals, were beginning to wield more power than national governments. By changing their investment patterns they could put local economies at risk. The role of business was conceived as being almost exclusively about making wealth for shareholders and investors. Sennett (2006) argues that Anglo-American forms of globalisation, driven by capital, have resulted in many organisations coming to see themselves purely as short-term investment vehicles. Sennett charts how people suffer when they work within short-term regimes.

The broader social consequences of the adoption of neo-liberalism were becoming increasingly evident during the 1990s. Scase (2006) describes this as the ‘Age of Individualism’ whose popular ethos was about individual freedom, entrepreneurialism, consumerism, greed and wealth creation. Films like ‘Wall Street’ exemplified the fiercely competitive behaviours and values of extreme forms of capitalism. This was to some extent reflected in Margaret Thatcher’s infamous, if misquoted, 1980s dictum: “There is no such thing as society” which in turn echoes the neo-liberal views of Milton Friedman. Friedman described the growing demands in the 1970s for US business to have a social conscience as ‘pure and unadulterated socialism’. He argued that ‘business has a duty to make profit first; anything else will create confusion’.

There were of course alternative economic models to neo-liberal Anglo-American capitalism available to politicians. As Giddens (1999) points out, ‘globalization is political, technological and cultural, as well as economic’. However, other forms of capitalism afford more protection for workers. In contrast to UK and US forms of capitalism, ‘Social Europe’ has long favoured
stakeholder capitalism, where shareholder needs are only one set under consideration (Hyman, 2003; Kelly et al, 1997). Stakeholder capitalism encompasses collective regulation, decommodification and solidarity, and 'social partnership' is institutionalised in many European countries. An embedded workplace voice is not left to the choice of employers but mandated. This institutionalised relationship creates forms of dialogue and constrains parties to negotiate with each other to find solutions. However, the European social model is imprecise and systems vary radically across countries. Moreover prior to the financial crisis which began in 2008, within Europe there increasingly appears to be bounded convergence with Anglo-American capitalism, with a general consensus in Brussels towards market liberalism and maximising shareholder value. The impact of European enlargement means that there is increasing fragmentation of bargaining, with a range of systems being brought into Europe which are more similar to the UK voluntarist models than to European kinds.

1.5.2 The pursuit of flexibility

Under the Anglo-American form of capitalism, the pursuit of competitive advantage has provided the rationale for widespread organisational restructurings over the last thirty years. Ostensibly the objective is for organizations to be able to react quickly and easily to changes in the environment as well as to develop more cost-efficient ways of producing and selling goods and services. To enable this flexibility, employers have sought to reshape the employment relationship to achieve greater labour flexibility and reduce labour costs (Gamble, 2009; Reed, 2010; Millward et al, 2000).

In the large organizations of the 1970s - with their bureaucratic structures based on the division of labour with a central unity of control, vertical integration, command and control management styles, and a large pyramid of managers and supervisors, working in remote command chains decentralised their structures and created independent business units with specific remits and targets - labour flexibility was low. Similarly, there was little labour flexibility in the more decentralised structures of the 1980s.

By the 1990s however, structural forms increasingly reflected aspirations to move beyond the ‘modernist’ era of large bureaucratic production to smaller, leaner ‘post-modern’ organisations with responsive and delayered management structures. These ‘flatter’ structures were presented to workers as enabling greater initiative, being freer, more flexible and participative, although the primary reason for delayering, as many employees perceived it, was to achieve cost savings (Holbeche, 1996). There was medium labour flexibility at this
time. Many workplaces became subject to 'new' management ideas, such as ‘Japanese’ management practices, including the redesign of core processes, Total Quality Management (TQM), continuous improvement and horizontal integration (Hasegawa and Hook, 1998; Hammer and Champy, 1993; Peters and Waterman, 1982). Similarly, HRM-high performance work practices, such as team working, were promoted. Hudson (1989) argues that the use by organizations of technology and methodologies designed to increase productivity gains in effect resulted in employee deskilling and represents just a reworking of modernist production methods.

Atkinson and Meager (1986) developed the concept of flexible firm strategy to explain how Western firms consciously subdivided their workforce into core and non-core (peripheral) groups in order to achieve greater flexibility in hiring and firing, in the numbers of hours worked and in worker remuneration. The 1990s saw considerable restructuring of the UK’s Public Sector, with ‘purchaser/provider’ splits and many public services outsourced to third parties, often to the lowest cost bidder.

The current period, it is argued, is the era of nimble or ‘agile’ production (Francis, 2001), where organizations pursue ever greater flexibility and global reach, technology is facilitating the rise of the virtual world and, thanks to a determined approach to using technology to replace expensive ‘human resources’, the nature of work and the workplace continue to be transformed. Various terms describe the ‘post-bureaucratic’ organization (Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994) which is designed to be able to adapt quickly and easily to changes in the environment. These include the ‘ambidextrous organization’ (O’Reilly and Tushman, 2004) ‘knowledge-creating’ (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995), ‘high performance’ or ‘high-commitment work’ systems (Pfeffer, 1998), and ‘boundaryless company’ (Devanna and Tichy 1990).

As technology enables the opening up of new markets and means of production, rather than being a fixed entity, organizations are increasingly task-oriented organic structures, characterized by a small core centre and alliances with suppliers and customers. ‘Core’ workers remain in an organization’s employ and ‘peripheral’ workers are outsourced. The flexible and the informal co-exist with formal, integration mechanisms. Decisions are based on dialogue and consensus rather than authority, the organization is a network open at the boundaries rather than a hierarchy (Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994).
1.5.3 Flexibilisation of labour

Moreover, the drive to develop more flexible structures and increase labour flexibility meant that employment practices changed significantly in the last two decades. Market disciplines were applied to employment practices from the late 1980s onwards. Long-term employees came to be viewed as negative cost factors and white collar workers now increasingly found themselves experiencing the kinds of employment practice previously reserved for blue-collar workers. Flexibility for employers meant that employees could no longer rely on unchanging job descriptions or continuous employment with the same company. Instead of a ‘job for life’ in return for loyalty, and the opportunity for progression up a vertical hierarchy in return for high performance, the new structures and related HRM practices, such as performance management, emphasized the decline of the ‘old’ career model.

The new career model, often referred to as the ‘New Deal’ (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995a), involved white collar workers taking responsibility for managing their own careers by developing their skills and making themselves more ‘employable’ internally, and externally, if they were no longer needed by their employer. In the ‘new deal’, instead of vertical career progression up a career ladder, workers were expected to reframe their expectations of progression in terms of lateral development, i.e. sideways moves at the same level within the same company. While younger workers may have been able to take these changing employment practices in their stride, many older workers, unable to keep up with ever-increasing demands, were haunted by the ‘specter of uselessness’ (Sennett, 2006:83).

The pursuit of labour flexibility since the late 1980s has resulted in the growth of outsourcing, flexible work arrangements such as working from home and ‘non-standard’ work (e.g. casualisation or the ‘contingent workforce’). Reported employer motivations for using casual labour include the pursuit of flexibility, dealing with high-peak production periods and providing specialist skills (VandenHeuval and Wooden 1999), but there is also considerable employer interest in off-loading employee responsibility, risk, management and training burdens (Watson, 2003). Hall et al (2000) also found that decisions to employ casual workers were considerably influenced by economic rationalist thinking which focuses on product rather than people, and engages with managing suppliers in preference to participating in ‘non-core’ activity.

Sennett (2006) argues that as changes in industrial organization mean that specific jobs and tasks have a shorter life-span, flexible competence substitutes for short life-cycle jobs. Thus
the risks of flexibility lie largely with employees whose ability and willingness to be flexible may be the crucial determinant of their career success. As a consequence rather than by design, people who can adapt, and who have the behavioural and cognitive competencies associated with flexibility, find themselves, rather than their roles, taking on the characteristics of permanent or core employees. Those without such competency face the prospect of downgraded or outsourced roles.

Given this context, the impact on employee interests and career options seems to largely depend on the relative degree of ‘bargaining power’ individuals can exercise in the employment market, with low-skill workers having low bargaining power. The decline in trade unionism and the increasing reliance on individuals to manage their own employment, careers and skill development makes for severe vulnerability among those with least financial and educational capital (Virgona et al, 2003). Since 2004 many organizations requiring flexible labour have preferred to employ highly skilled migrant workers from EU accession states on short-term contracts. As Britain has progressively moved towards becoming a high skills knowledge or service based economy, there have been growing gaps in life opportunities between ‘knowledge workers’ and people with few or low work skills.

1.5.4 Technology

Labour process theory, of the kind advanced by Braverman, highlights how ‘the rationality of technique in the modern industrial enterprise is not neutral in respect of class domination’ (Giddens 1982:38). It could be argued that technological advances have accelerated the commoditisation of routine white collar work. Commoditisation is the process by which goods that have economic value, and are distinguishable in terms of attributes (uniqueness or brand), end up becoming simple commodities in the eyes of the market or consumers (Rushkoff, 2005). Thanks to call centre technology, routine office and production work can be outsourced to third party suppliers in locations where requisite technical and English language skills are available, labour costs are relatively low compared with the UK, and service is available on a 24/7 basis.

Braverman (1974) predicted that Taylorism, which involves the separation of conception from execution, would become a blueprint not only for the managerial control of clerical and administrative workers, but also for the work of professionals. Technology offers a key means for capital to achieve this separation within ‘knowledge’ work. International service centres now offer a wide range of professional or functional services in a diverse range of
fields, including publishing where previously 'core' activities such as editing are increasingly outsourced to vertically integrated production units which can be based in any geographic location and are staffed by multi-lingual, professionally qualified graduates.

It could be argued that new technologies, especially information and communications technology (ICT), provide new ways of intensifying work. The use of internet technology and emails has enabled remote working but has also contributed to increased workloads and shorter lead times. Work can be, and is, carried out from anywhere, leading to a blurring of boundaries between work and other aspects of life for many people. The phenomenon of workers who take their laptops on holiday and work each day is not uncommon.

1.5.5 Demographics: The ageing workforce

Scase (2006) argues that there is a growing systemic 'talent crisis' in the West, due in part to changing demographics (referred to in the past as the 'demographic time-bomb'). Throughout Western Europe and the US the workforce is ageing, and in Europe and the US, declining birth rates generate future shortages of both employees and consumers. By 2020 there will be 2.7 workers to every non-worker, compared with 4:1 in 1990 (DTI statistics). It is predicted that people of the 'baby boomer' generations will be among the last to be able to enjoy a comfortable retirement from the age of 60. Conversely, the ending of the default retirement age and the closure of most final salary pension schemes, and other pensions concerns, are forcing many older workers to postpone their retirement. Consequently the labour pool for many jobs is becoming ever more multi-generational.

Moreover employers will need to provide opportunities for younger generations of workers (often stereotyped as Generations X, Y and 'Net Generation') who may have different values-sets and expectations of employers from their 'baby boomer' forebears. They are also the most 'connected' generations. Technology underpins the growth of social networking and the burgeoning of online communities. Increasing use of chat rooms and services such as 'My Space', 'Face Book', 'You Tube', seems to potentially counterbalance the apparent fragmentation of society by enabling people to create their own online identities or avatars and have access to thousands of new 'friends'. Erickson (2010) argues that younger workers in particular have been strongly influenced by their exposure to multi-media stimuli, and in a short-term focus workplace, develop a fractured and externalised sense of self which can only be experienced through their latest achievement. This, she argues, leads to a desperate search for recognition at the individual level, and through Face Book and other social media.
sites, the construction of an ersatz life. Underneath this, Erickson proposes, young people have a strong desire for community.

1.5.6 From collectivism to individualism

A central argument of this thesis is that neo-liberalism, globalization and the availability of technology have provided the political rationale in Anglo-American capitalist economies for organizations to drive through radical changes in business structures and employment practices which have resulted in a largely one-sided employment relationship, with the balance tipped in favour of the organisation, at the expense of employee interests.

Until the 1970s, British industrial relations were characterized by a collectivist culture. Thatcher wanted to cure the ‘British disease’ of industrial unrest by weakening the unions and during the Thatcher years there was a conscious political attempt to restructure employment to support the market freedoms demanded by employers. Margaret Thatcher’s political philosophy and economic policies emphasized deregulation, particularly of the financial sector, flexible labour markets, and the selling off or closing down of state-owned organisations and withdrawing subsidy from highly unionised industries such as the automotive manufacturing industry. The recession of the early 1980s saw manufacturing, the main area of union strength, shrink by half, while unemployment soared to over three million. Following the ending of the miners’ strike in 1984, the unions went into steep decline. They lost their power, influence and a large swathe of their rights. Union membership plummeted from a peak of 12 million in the late 1970s to almost half that by the late 1980s.

British industrial relations since the 1980s have been based on bounded Europeanization since, as Maas (2004) points out, the internationalisation of markets and capital means that national industrial relations regimes are no longer able to deliver what they once did for trade unions and that this forces them to look further afield for solutions:

Unions may be pushed or forced to seek co-operation across national borders because they no longer find allies, protection or rewards in national arenas. (Visser, 1997:231, in Maas, 2004:3).

Various UK Governments since the 1980s and until the present day have consistently promoted the interests of business over those of workers, arguing that the economic growth that business can generate when freed from control is in the interests of workers (Marquand, 2009). For instance the New Labour governments resisted, ‘opted out,’ or caused to be
significantly modified, the Working Time Directive. British employment law on Equal Opportunities was imposed by EU directives. The implementation of the Information and Consultation Directive, again a European policy initiative, operates inconsistently in the UK and appears to be an accommodation between European models and British voluntarism.

1.5.7 Managerialism

Following the economic crises of the 1970s, with the decline of collective UK industrial relations and the subsequent rise of the New Right, efficient management came to be seen as a panacea for a number of economic ills. In its application to the private sector, 'managerialism' became associated with a critique of maximisation for a single interest group, i.e. passive shareholders. By the 1990s, references to managerialism in literature became associated with the introduction of New Public management (NPM) introduced by the Thatcher governments in the UK and the Reagan governments in the US. NPM has been described as follows:

"A new paradigm for public management has emerged, aimed at fostering a performance-oriented culture in a less centralised public sector."

(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1995:8)

Managerialism has been characterised in a variety of ways, for instance as a "set of beliefs and practices, (that) will prove an effective solvent for ... economic and social ills" (Pollitt, 1990: 1). It is generally held to refer to the adoption by public sector organisations of the organisational forms, technologies, management practices and values more commonly found in the private business sector (Deem, 1998). Pollitt (1993: 2-3) described the features of managerialism as including:

- The use of 'ever more sophisticated technologies'
- A labor force disciplined to productivity
- Clear implementation of the professional manager role
- Aimed at continuous increases in efficiency.

Since that time, supportive governments have encouraged confidence in the right and power of managers to manage. While the full extent of the application of scientific management techniques in Britain is debated, what appears incontestable is that its latter-day manifestation takes the form of 'new', or 'neo'-managerialism. Critical management scholars
argue that neo-managerialism, with its development of pervasive management controls, aided and abetted by technology, consists of an updated version of an older tradition embodied in the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor (Terry, 1998: Pollitt, 1990) which has been pushed as a form of social domination (Clarke and Newman, 1997). They typically argue that managerialism involves an abuse of power, either by government, or by the professional manager class and that managerialism results in the commodification of professional work (Grey, 1996).

Commodification (first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1975, origins Marxist political theory) describes the process by which things which would not normally be seen as ‘goods’, such as ideas, are turned into commodities and assigned a value. Thus, where knowledge or skill can be codified, it will most likely be traded or commodified. Hence commodification describes how market values can replace other social values, including a modification of relationships, formerly untainted by commerce, into commercial relationships in everyday use. Once knowledge and skill has been commodified, it can subsequently be commoditised. This is the process by which goods that have economic value, and are distinguishable in terms of attributes (uniqueness or brand), end up becoming simple commodities in the eyes of the market or consumers. It is the movement of a market from differentiated to undifferentiated price competition, from monopolistic to perfect competition (Wardley, 2008).

High levels of unemployment during the 1990s allowed managers to control recruitment, introduce more flexible structures and to further embed managerialism in diverse social spheres beyond the private sector. Davis (1996: 305), for instance argues that, in its latest mode, managerialism has “refashioned the world in its image and captured for itself the modern state.” This is reflected in the political attempts to achieve a closer functional relationship between the state and a ‘modernising’ of the public sector according to the precepts of New Public Management (NPM), under the UK’s Labour Governments (1997-2010), a feature of which was the replacement of ‘administration’ by ‘management’. Clarke and Newman (1997: ix) talk about the managerial state and consider managerialism as a cultural formation and a distinctive set of ideologies and practices which form one of the underpinnings of an emergent political settlement. They further argue that recent changes “have installed managerialism as new regimes of power structured through the domination of decision-making, agenda setting and normative power” (1997:82).

According to Deetz (1992), the increased influence of management may be interpreted in terms of a ‘corporate colonisation of the lifeworld’ in that all cultural and institutional forms
become progressively subsumed within the logic of capitalism. This wholesale shift in power towards ‘managers’ (Parker, 2002), reflects the dominance of organisational interests within the employment relationship.

Braverman had predicted that de-skilling would be extended to the professional classes. Perhaps one manifestation of this could be identified in the centrally-imposed public sector targets set by Labour governments (1997-2010) which challenged the ‘trust-us-the-professionals’ model. Whether or not targets have led to improved services, they have had the function of enabling politicians to be seen to hold public servants to account, and also to be able to publicly castigate institutions or individuals who are perceived to be failing. Individual stellar practitioners are brought in to ‘turn around’ or close down institutions, such as schools which are perceived to be failing. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is currently a national shortage of qualified people wishing to take on some public sector leadership roles such as head teacher.

1.5.8 Human Resource Management (HRM)

In recent decades Human Resource Management (HRM) has come to be the preferred international discourse to frame employment management issues. It has also emerged as a pervasive theme in the literatures of organizational behaviour, strategic management, business policy, international and inter-cultural management. The nature of HRM is contested, though there is some consensus that HRM is a business concept reflecting a mainly managerial view of the employment relationship, with theory, policies and practices geared to enabling organisations to achieve competitive advantage and high performance. One definition of HRM is:

‘A philosophy of people management based on the belief that human resources are uniquely important to sustained business success. An organization gains competitive advantage by using its people effectively, drawing on their expertise and ingenuity to meet clearly defined objectives. HRM is aimed at recruiting capable, flexible and committed people, managing and rewarding their performance and developing key competencies’ (Price, 2003: 31).

The predominant view implicit in American models of HRM is unitarist i.e. it assumes that employees and employers are united in the common endeavour of achieving business success. Such views represent a legitimising management point of view. This overtly
unitarist and managerialist framing of HRM has progressively edged out pluralist perspectives on the employment relationship, including what are described as ‘traditional’ personnel management or old-style industrial relations (Francis and Sinclair 2003; Wright and Snell, 2005).

Braverman considered the systematic deskilling and dehumanizing of labour to be the consequence of new managerial techniques, grounded in the separation of the conceptual from the practical dimensions of work. It could be argued that Human Resource Management (HRM), as a key element of managerialism, is a significant contributor to the deliberate shaping of a neo-liberal new work culture characterized by flexibility, work intensification and performativity. From a critical HRM perspective, mainstream HRM approaches are thus a managerial tool for controlling and managing the workforce in ways which are designed solely to meet business needs but which appear less directive than the command and control structures of previous decades. These approaches include ‘high performance work practices’, such as team working, which Sennett (1998: 28) describes as "the work ethic of a flexible political economy" since it relies on "the fiction of harmony" and stresses mutual responsiveness at the expense of original thinking.

More specifically, practices that are grouped in the mainstream human resource management literature under ‘performance management’ (Armstrong & Baron, 1998; Beardwell & Holden, 2001) have a strong shaping function and, from a critical management perspective, form part of an array of means of securing management domination over work. The use of performance management has grown steadily over the last ten years (Bach, 2000), especially in medium-sized and large organisations. This term roughly denominates a varying set of HRM practices that are aimed at managing the job performance of individual employees, tied together by "a strategic and integrated approach" (Armstrong & Baron, 1998) which stresses both control and ‘development’ of employees. Practices commonly associated with performance management are appraisal interviews, 360-degree feedback, competence assessments, performance-related pay, peer appraisal, and others.

Such approaches are intended to encourage employees to self-regulate their attitudes and behaviours to be consistent with business needs. In contrast to the views put forward by prescriptive mainstream accounts of performance management that stress the development of innate qualities of individuals, critical scholars argue that the prevailing paradigm is one of performativity and the degrading instrumentality that this assumption engenders. For instance, Townley (1994, 1998), drawing on Foucault, has argued that HRM practices such
as appraisal and selection have an important shaping effect on employee subjectivities, discursively re-constituting them in line with local organisational objectives. This discursive shaping of the individual project may be conceptualised using the notion of subjectivity; thereby invoking a concept which emphasises the relational and constructed nature of the self, embedded in social (power) relations.

Critical HRM scholars have long argued that such practices in fact reconstitute the subject by means of a set of linguistic concepts, which graft performativity in the self and simultaneously reinforce the notion of a free, autonomous individual (Illes & Salaman, 1995; Fournier and Grey, 2000; Deetz, 2003; Keenoy, 1997, 1999; Du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Keenoy & Anthony, 1992; Legge, 1995). So in performance appraisal discussions for example, as employees recount and evaluate their work experiences and ambitions, they do so in a situation where they are observed and judged by others. They create a narrative of their experience using the discursive resources of the local organisational context (Alvesson, 2003), with all the intricacies and implicit values embedded within these resources. Potentially, this has important effects on the way in which people look upon their working life. In this way, it is argued, the subject’s conception of the employment relationship shifts away from former collectivist ideas, toward a more individualist version, where the primary responsibility for performance lies with the employee, continually free to “opt out” if he or she so pleases.

HRM thus reflects ‘implicit issues of performativity, surveillance, information and communication technologies, empowerment, self-actualisation, the demise of hierarchies, individualism and instrumentality as well as aspects of consumerism and consumption-based values’ (Foley et al, 1999).
1.6 Overview of structure of the thesis

To allow the reader to negotiate a way through this thesis I will now introduce the chapters:

**Figure 1.1 – The Structure of the Thesis**

Examination of Literature and Setting the Scene

- Historical perspective on capitalism, work and employment practice
  (Chapter 2)

  - HRM, performativity and the psychological contract
    (Chapter 3)

Methodology and Analysis

- Research Method
  (Chapter 4)

  - The new work culture and its impact on employees
    (Chapter 5)
  - The shaping of subjectivities
    (Chapter 6)
  - The search for meaning
    (Chapter 7)

Conclusions, Future Research and Reflection

(Chapter 8)
• In Chapter 2 I review in more detail literature theorising the context of the new work culture, its economic and political drivers, in particular the neo-liberal political economic philosophies operationalized in Anglo-American forms of capitalism. I shall also consider the role of managerialism as a key element of the new work culture and examine in more detail the strengths and potential limitations of Braverman’s and Sennett's arguments. I draw on a variety of literature sources, including academic and management press, and will also refer where appropriate to my own published articles, reports and books (see Appendix 2).

• In Chapter 3 I will continue to review literature relevant to the new work culture, in particular components such as HRM practices and performativity. I shall also review literature relevant to the individual experience of the new work culture, in particular the changing nature of the psychological contract.

• In Chapter 4 I shall describe my theoretical framework, describe the core and empirical research questions and critically evaluate the methodologies I employed in carrying out the research, focusing particularly on the interplay between the research questions examined at different periods in this study.

• In Chapter 5 I shall examine the evidence for Braverman's contentions regarding the degradation of work, and for Sennett's analysis of the characteristics and effects of the 'new work culture' by reviewing findings from the UKES 2000-2003.

• In Chapter 6 I will examine the impact of performativity, a key aspect of the new work culture. I shall use reflexive methodology to produce a personal case study to examine how a performative work culture came into being in one organizational/management context, and its impact on one employee, in particular her perceptions of how her psychological contract was violated by performative practice and managerial discourse. I shall also consider the role of the HR function as an instrument of managerialism in suborning employees to the business agenda by examining the discourse of a number of senior HR practitioners. As O'Doherty and Willmott (2001:6) suggest: "The researcher's concern should be to discover how relations of production are accomplished in practice".

• In Chapter 7 I will examine in more detail employee perceptions of a loss of meaning at work, and the question of what employees find 'meaningful' in their work. Based on my findings, I propose that this reported loss of meaning is symptomatic of unbalanced psychological contracts arising from the effects of the new work culture.

• In Chapter 8 I will draw conclusions from my findings, highlight limitations to the implications which can be drawn and suggest areas for potential future research.
Conclusion

Thus, in summary, this thesis examines evidence for the existence of a 'new work culture', and for its impact on white collar employees. The latter, according to Sennett (2006) reflects neo-liberal ideology and the competitive ambitions of managements and owners of organizations. It is underpinned by free market principles and individualistic values. Within organizations it is characterized by managerialism, use of technology to transform work and products and commodify work, by performativity, a focus on customers, and by the ongoing quest for greater flexibility, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The 'new work culture' is enabled by individualised employment relationships, reduced employment security and the increasing use of contingent labour as businesses pursue labour flexibility. Within this context, with little employment protection, white-collar workers become subject to commodification. Key players within this new work culture are representatives of capital, including managers, leaders and HR professionals who devise and implement policies and working practices supportive of the new culture, as well as employees themselves.

In examining the cultural, political and economic significance of the new work culture in UK organisations within the recent history of the UK, there are two main loci of investigation. The first focus is on the external influences which have provided the rationale, or legitimization, for the unbridled organizational pursuit of competitive advantage and market freedoms. These include the emergence during the 1980s of a political agenda reflecting the belief in effective management as a route to economic regeneration. A corresponding cultural shift was also presided over, with an emphasis upon the enterprise economy, self-improvement and competitive individualism. The practices of the resulting new work culture have long been accepted as the norm, 'business as usual' and therefore unchallengeable. 'Management', and Human Resource Management in particular, constitutes an important area of practice where a number of these issues become manifest.

The second focus is on how the conventional assumptions about exchange in the employment relationship and reciprocation in the 'old' psychological contract have been undermined in the new work culture from the mid-1990s onwards. I examine how these shifts in the employment relationship have impacted on employees' perception of their working lives.

In this thesis I am attempting to reveal the reality of the daily lived experience of HR policy and practice, within which the psychological contract acts as the weather gauge of the
employment relationship. I believe that, potentially, this offers a grounded, intellectually coherent and explanatory framework for understanding the changing employment relationship which can be useful to employees and to organisations. In the next two chapters I shall review literature relevant to the aims of this study. This analysis informs several of the research questions and the chosen methodology. In particular, the next chapter's analysis provides a response to the first research question: What were the macro political, economic and technological changes which have led to the emergence of a 'new work culture'? 
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Historical perspective on capitalism, work and employment practice

2.0 Introduction

The themes I pursue in this thesis are concerned with how the new work culture impacts on employees' working lives, as viewed through the lens of psychological contract. In this review I shall examine literature relating to the key questions this thesis addresses. The literature review has two main objectives, the first of which is to delineate the field in which this study is located. The second objective is to identify key emergent themes in the field and to identify knowledge gaps, in particular relating to the role played by HRM in the shaping of this new work culture and in the degradation of work.

This review draws upon a wide range of disciplinary sources, including strands of management thinking, political economy and sociological intellectual traditions which generate the literature, and therefore characterise work in theory, and in particular critical HRM and psychological contract theories. In discussing the theoretical contributions to this thesis it is important to make a distinction between the theoretical traditions and concepts which this research draws upon and those providing a source for analysis - that is, the knowledge which constitutes the fields of HRM, the sociology of work and psychology. The latter includes workplace surveys, a case study, interviews and focus group accounts which provide the primary source of analytical material and are discussed in detail in Chapters Five to Seven.

2.0.1 How this literature review is organised

Given the broad expanse and complexity of my field of enquiry, I have split the themes of this literature review across two chapters. In this chapter I review literature which provides a historical perspective on the changing context of work and employment practice and which highlights if, and how, a 'new work culture of capitalism' has developed. These include themes relating to the macro political, economic and technological changes which may have led to the emergence of a 'new work culture of capitalism' (Sennett, 2006), and to the nature of the 'new work culture' as described in the literature.
In order to create an overall picture of the topic, I draw on a wide range of literature sources, including political journalism and economic history relating to the political, economic and social consequences of the political project known as Thatcherism. I examine literature which, from various theoretical standpoints, examines links between neo-liberal forms of capitalism, a 'new work culture' and the relationship between individual and organization. I also review literature relating to managerialism.

Although much management and Human Resource Management knowledge has been produced both by the business academy and by business consultants, a substantial area of knowledge is derived from the sociology of work and organisations. The field of organisation studies, being an area of sociology, has therefore been used within this study both as a theoretical resource and an object of analysis. The more sociologically-derived analyses of management practice which have emerged from within business schools tend to treat management as both a social and political practice, being concerned with asymmetrical power relations and organisations. Such analyses, while often emerging from a variety of philosophical orientations, (e.g. Marxist, post-structuralist or feminist positions) not only offer critiques of management and of many of the issues concerned with the practice of management, but also question the epistemological basis of much management and HRM theory.

I draw in particular on approaches which have tended over the past decade to be labelled 'critical management studies' (CMS). Interestingly, those analyses which tend to be considered 'critical' within management studies, would be regarded as 'normal' sociological analyses. The relationship between what may be considered to be mainstream 'managerialist' management knowledge and 'critical' management knowledge (Grey and Mitev 1995a) is discussed further with respect to Human Resource Management in chapter three. In particular I refer to Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital, the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century (1974), and I describe Braverman's Labour Process Theory and consider critical accounts of this. I also consider Sennett's account of the characteristics of the new work culture. Through analysis of these various literature sources, I hope to address research question 1: What were the macro political, economic and technological changes which have led to the emergence of a 'new work culture'?

In Chapter Three, I review literature which sheds light on how HRM practices contribute to performativity, together with their impact on the employment relationship and the degradation of work. Thus my analysis should inform research question 2: How do HRM practices contribute to the development and advancement of the new work culture? I review
key debates within managerial and HRM literatures, drawing distinctions between positivist mainstream research theories and more critical management theories.

In addition, I explore psychological contract theories and related elements such as 'types' of psychological contract, the significance of trust and job security, contract violation and breach and their consequences, and meaning at work. I refer in more detail to Sennett's accounts of the consequences of new capitalism for the well-being of workers. Finally, I examine empirical research from management and social policy studies relating to the individual or micro experience of work which shed light on the impact of the new work culture and on the social and psychological contracts of employees in 'white collar' careers, which I shall use as a point of reference when answering research questions 3 and 4: What are the characteristics of the new work culture, as perceived by employees?: How did employees experience the 'new work culture'?

I shall refer back to this literature when presenting my empirical research findings in Chapters Five to Seven. I begin this literature review with a brief examination of the changing nature of what Marxian scholars call 'Monopoly Capitalism'.

2.1 Monopoly Capitalism

Writing during the emergence of Industrial Capitalism, Marx observed the effects of industrial intensification and identified the essentially different interests of employees and employers. Unlike the classical economists, Marx recognized that such an economy was inherently unstable and impermanent and was essentially a battle of competition fought by cheapening commodities. Among Marxian economists "monopoly capitalism" is the term widely used to denote the stage of capitalism which dates from approximately the last quarter of the nineteenth century and reaches full maturity in the period after the Second World War. It was then that the concentration and centralization of capital, in the form of the early trusts, cartels and other forms of combinations began to assert itself; it was then consequently that the modern structure of capitalist industry and finance began to take shape.

The early post-war decades were a period of rapid capitalist expansion during which the US established its global hegemony. Its strategy was to build a mass market for consumer goods which would sustain demand for industrial production. It was thought that a high rate of economic growth, falls in unemployment and the expansion of welfare provisions would
curb working class disenchantment with capitalism and would incorporate labour into a lasting political consensus.

The 1940s and 1950s witnessed the emergence of new trends of thought within the general framework of Marxian economics. These had their roots in Marx's theory of concentration and centralization. Marx's theory remains basically unchanged, and even more so the role of what Marx called the credit system, now grown to enormous proportions compared to the small beginnings of his day. Monopoly capitalism:

'(...) embraces the increase of monopolistic organizations within each capitalist country, the internationalization of capital, the international division of labor, imperialism, the world market and the world movement of capital, and changes in the structure of state power' (Braverman, 1974:252).

The particular form of monopoly capitalism prevalent in Braverman's day was corporate capitalism which has dominated the latter part of the 20th century (i.e. a marketplace characterized by the dominance of hierarchical, bureaucratic, corporations, which are legally required to pursue profit). The process of expansion of capital by large corporations extending their operations beyond their country of origin was largely achieved with the active and positive support of their governments. Corporations have limited liability and remain less regulated and accountable than sole proprietorships. Many of these large multinational corporations have become powerful enough to develop their own strategies of expansion beyond the control of individual government policies. This transition of capitalism from its competitive to monopoly phase was accompanied by an equally important transition in the labour process. For capitalists, the way to succeed in a competitive market is to cut costs and expand production, a process which requires incessant accumulation of capital in ever new technological and organizational forms. A monopoly capitalist sees labour as a human resource that can expand his ownership of more and more capital, and therefore as a cost to be controlled. (ibid, 1974:149).

2.1.1 Crises of capitalism

In his many works (published and unpublished), Marx suggested that capitalism would experience at different points and under certain circumstances a 'crisis of capitalism', or a period in which the normal reproduction of an economic process over time suffers from a temporary breakdown. A key characteristic of these theoretical factors is that none of them is natural or accidental in origin but instead arise from systemic elements of capitalism as a
mode of production and basic social order. Marxist scholars consider all such crises as crises of overproduction and immiseration of the workers.

In his later work, Sweezy (2004:3), reflecting on his and Baran's failure to create a comprehensive theory of monopoly capitalism, stressed the crucial role of technological change in the development of monopoly capitalism. What was needed was a systematic inquiry into "the consequences which the particular kinds of technological change characteristic of the monopoly capitalist period have had for the nature of work, the composition (and differentiation) of the working class, the psychology of workers, the forms of working-class organization and struggle, and so on". In addition, and perhaps most importantly, the new theories seek to demonstrate that monopoly capitalism is more prone than its competitive predecessor to generating unsustainable rates of accumulation, leading to crises, depressions and prolonged periods of stagnation.

In the next two sections I shall provide a brief overview of Braverman's and Sennett's propositions with respect to the changing nature of work and the employment relationship.

2.2 Braverman and Sennett as points of departure

Work, Marx (and thus Braverman) asserts, is central for the human animal. It is through work that men and women realize their humanity. Marx considered capitalism a progressive development, since, in overthrowing feudalism, it prepares the way for the revolution that will bring about communism. However, under a capitalist system work is degraded to serve the interests of capital. Capitalism is a system built around private ownership of the means of production, creation of goods or services for profit in a market, and increasing capital.

2.2.1 Labor and Monopoly Capital, the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century

Braverman's (1974) work provides an interesting perspective on the social psychology of work under capitalism. In particular Braverman was concerned that the "mode of production," or the manner in which labour processes are organized and carried out, is the "product" of the social relations we know as capitalist. This, he argued, had significant consequences for workers. Of course it could also be argued that the capitalist mode of production is the determining factor since it includes certain types of social relationship and constitutes the foundation on which all other relations within the society tend to get
constructed, rather than the other way round. I shall here summarise some of Braverman’s key arguments.

Braverman argued that, because our economic and political system is dominated by capitalism, the entire socio-cultural system is organized around the need to expand capital. The value of all goods and services (all commodity value) is created by human labour. Braverman classifies a large portion of the labour force as a proletariat and when he refers to ‘old working class’ he describes general labourers. Under capitalism, labour itself becomes a commodity to be sold; in fact, labour power is the only commodity that the worker has to exchange for necessary goods and services. In order to expand his capital, the capitalist invests in the purchase of labour for wages, then attempts to get more value out of this labour than he has invested in it. The more surplus the capitalist can expropriate from the workforce, the greater the profitability and accumulation of capital. It is this drive that is behind the ever more detailed division of labour, the adoption of computers and other technologies to commodify work and replace workers, leading to the ‘degradation’ of work and workers, and growing polarization within societies.

2.2.1 Scientific management or ‘Taylorism’

Braverman began with a historical analysis of work and employment, starting with pre-capitalist production, moving to the outworking system, to the factory, to the detailed division of labour, to mechanisation, Taylorization, and to personnel management. In the past the labour process (how the work is planned and done) was the responsibility of the craftsperson, now it is the responsibility of the capitalist and his handmaiden or surrogate agent, the manager. Braverman argued - based on his own empirical findings - that the history of the labour process from the early 20th century was dominated by the acceptance - and promotion - of ‘scientific management’ or ‘Taylorist’ practices devised by Frederick Winslow Taylor and famously adopted within the Ford Motor Company in the US in the 1920s.

Taylor believed that working practices and decisions based upon tradition and rules of thumb should be replaced by precise procedures developed after careful study of an individual at work, including via time and motion studies. Mechanical Taylorism involved the knowledge of craft workers being captured, codified and re-engineered in the shape of the moving production line (Brown et al, 2010a). Such divisions led to the separation of mental from manual labour (or conception from execution) and resulted in the de-skilling of much of the labour force — the ‘artisan’ or ‘craft worker’ of the working world, a decline in intellectual
worker input into their individual work product and a monopoly over knowledge held by management to control each step of the labour process.

Since Taylor did not generally trust or respect labour, scientific management's application was contingent upon a high level of managerial control over employee work practices which necessitated a higher ratio of managerial workers to labourers than previous management methods. Taylor's methods were widely adopted in manufacturing firms as a means of improving productivity. They included the process of performance measurement and the fragmentation of workers' skills which led, in Braverman's view, to the degradation of skills, first of manual workers and then of craft workers.

2.2.2 The 'degradation' of work

Braverman presents an argument against what he calls the 'degradation' of work through the divisions of labour achieved using Taylorist methods (1974: 347-348). He argues that the Taylorist process of separating conception from execution was extended and converted to office work by the early applications of computerised data-processing which he witnessed, turning office routine into:

'A factory-like process in accordance with the precepts of modern management and available technology... the modern office becomes a machine...' (p.348).

The use of Taylorist methods, he suggests, ended any residual pretence of mutuality of interest between labour and owner. Moreover he portrays management as having no concern for the work force as people. He argued that in the decades following the 1930s worker dissatisfaction and resistance was manifested in low productivity, an increase in absenteeism, wildcat strikes and a reluctance of workers to commit themselves to their work tasks (1974:31).

Braverman was willing to accept technology and its impact on labour and capitalism. What he refers to as the 'new working class' includes engineers, technical specialists, scientists, lower supervisors and lower management, and other specialists or professionals to include marketing, finance, administrators and workers in the hospital, school and government businesses (p.403-4). He considers these as agents of the capitalist because he believes they have a position of control over the labour force (p.404-6).
A large part of Braverman's argument therefore centred on the systematic effort in a capitalist economy to "deskil" jobs in order for capital and its representatives to be able to more efficiently control and coordinate the labour force, pay lower wages and thus maximize profit. In his explicitly anti-Taylorist critique of practices being applied by leading US organisations during the 1960s, Braverman (1974: 320-324) found evidence of classical Taylorist approaches to monitoring and measuring the output of the growing ranks of workers employed in large offices. Its manifestations included work intensification; the shifting of control from the worker to management by the removal of 'thinking' work from 'doers' to 'managers' and consequent de-skilling of workers. Jobs were continually broken up into simple tasks. Workers were increasingly seen as machines which could be adapted to the requirements of any job. Thus de-skilled, workers become dispensable and replaceable.

For the capitalist class, Braverman argued, this view of man as a machine has become more than mere analogy, it is also how it has come to view humanity. Each succeeding generation has to be acclimatised to the new mode of work, socialized to overcome the initial revulsion to the ever more detailed division of labour and the consequent rending of human beings. This process of turning workers into commodities, Braverman claims, becomes a permanent and ever-expanding feature of a capitalist economy. Such views of man-as-machine or commodity, Braverman argued, typically generate friction between workers and managers, and social tensions between the blue-collar and white-collar classes.

### 2.2.3 Labour Process Theory (LPT)

Thus Braverman's Labour Process Theory explains how wages are lowered in order to support 'unproductive' labour activities in a surplus-extractive division of labour. Briefly, Braverman argues that, given the dictates of capital accumulation, capitalists and their managements are constantly driven to renovate the productive process, in particular by using the battery of techniques associated with scientific management and the scientific technical / revolution as an instrument of control. He proposes that capitalists treat labour as they do other raw product resources - to be used to the full. By de-skilling workers, he argues, capitalist managements can find cheaper, alternative means of production. Workers who remain employed must work even harder for lower wages to produce surplus value. In time fewer skilled workers would be needed and would suffer the personal consequences of de-skilling, rationalization, and hierarchy (1974:415).

Braverman predicted that capital would increase its control over professionals and higher skilled workers by de-skilling and proletarianising them through the use of technology.
'Unproductive' labour is at the core of the labour process of extracting surplus value on behalf of capitalists. Unproductive labour is found in those occupations that do not directly engage in production, such as accounting, finance, human resources, marketing, surveillance and senior salaries who ‘rest upon the backs’ of productive labour (p. 206-7). Similarly Marxist scholar Ernest Mandel (1968) argued that the three characteristics of modern labour under capitalism as defined by Marx—i.e. its key role in the productive process, its basic alienation, its economic exploitation—have been extended in the neocapitalist society of the twentieth century to include a wider range of skilled workers, since the productive process, especially automation, tends to universalise industry, and to integrate a constantly growing part of the mass of wage and salary earners into an increasingly homogeneous proletariat.

Braverman’s book (1974:31) was published following a decade of what he refers to as a period of dissatisfaction with work. It brings to the foreground some of the moral dangers that can befall a capitalist society, especially in the area of employee management and job satisfaction. The dominant culture of pre-Sixties America was that of ‘Science, Protestantism and Capitalism’. It was characterised by ‘modernism’; a belief in science and technology; trust in ‘objective truth’ and ‘objective reality’ which people were confident would lead to a better world. During this time, there was a growing protest culture towards the monolithic modernist US culture. The counter-culture was concerned that the values, attitudes and methods of science were so thoroughly integrated into modern industrial society they threatened to destroy all humanistic values and would lead inevitably, according to Marcuse (1964), to the domination of man by man.

As Braverman himself states, the "radicalism of the 1960s" was "animated" by the discontent with capitalism in its success (p.14). Braverman argues that the discontent of workers in the 1960s lends credence to Marx’s view that the greater accumulation of capital and wealth is directly proportionate to the increase of misery and unemployment (p.389). Braverman’s position is that capitalists treat labour as they do other raw product resources. This is why we have a field of study and management specialist in human resources training, development, and management. However, rather than these fields aiming at improving labour’s job quality situation, Braverman argues that they simply reflect management “efforts to reduce costs and improve profits” (pp 37-8).

Braverman’s attempt to fill the gap in the theory of monopoly capitalism stimulated great debate when Labor and Monopoly Capitalism: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century (1974) first appeared. His Labour Process Theory (LPT) did much to stimulate
renewed research into changing trends in work processes and labour relations in the late twentieth century. Following its publication, Braverman's book was criticised by many academics for its broad-ranging theoretical sweep. Some of its critics wanted to take a more nuanced view, finding it too deterministic, and argued for a greater recognition of agency and organisational context.

Braverman died in the 1970s before the coming to power in the UK of Margaret Thatcher and the New Right project in the late 1970s or the collapse of the Soviet bloc from the end of the 1980s. After Braverman's time Marxist analysis within academic circles became largely diverted into criticism of Thatcherism or else suppressed beneath largely neo-liberal mainstream economic theories.

Braverman set in motion a debate which has not yet run its course. His labour process theory has come to sit within critical management scholarship (CMS). This is a disparate field encompassing critical versions of postmodernism (Alvesson and Deetz, 2005) and radical humanist approaches (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) among others. According to Watson (2010), CMS's motivating concern is the social injustice and environmental destructiveness of the broader social and economic systems that these managers and organizations serve and reproduce, rather than focusing simply on the practices of managers themselves. For Watson the common core of what CMS offers to mainstream management theory is deep scepticism regarding the moral defensibility and the social and ecological sustainability of prevailing forms of management and organization. This is with a view to radically transforming management practice.

2.2.4 Criticism of Braverman's Labour Process Theory (LPT)

Braverman died before the debate which he started with the publication of Labor and Monopoly Capital had really got under way. For a time his book stimulated considerable discussion and political/socialist commentary by Marxist writers. In the UK, labour process theory was highly influential for a time, with industrial sociologists in the 1970s and early 1980s (Nichols and Benyon, 1977; Thompson, 2009) finding theoretical coherence in Braverman's work. Then the debate started by Braverman was followed by accusations of the exhaustion (Storey 1985), and irrelevance (Lash and Urry, 1994) of labour process analysis, whilst repeated doubts have been expressed about its theoretical coherence and purchase (Littler and Salaman, 1982).
Smith (2011) points out that labour process analysis carries through inequality from market relations into capital-labour relations in the workplace, and suggests that the dynamic of this unequal social relationship both limit, condition and drive the structuring of work. However Smith also points out that, in some countries, labour process analysis lost its way when it became imbued with discourse analysis, which according to Smith (2011:3) produced:

'(...) highly abstract and rarefied commentaries far removed from Braverman's desire to link the practical experience of those working for capitalism with a grounded political theory of the dynamics of the system'.

Smith also points out that Braverman's book undervalued the way the labour process is embedded within socio-cultural contexts which lay out different ways of putting together the employment relationship. Therefore Braverman's message about work degradation fits some societies better than in others.

The general form of Marxian critique is that core LPT is today alienated from its Marxian roots (Braverman, 1974) and that it is managerialist, meaning that it treats managers as having too much discretion, independent of any systemic profit or surplus-value extraction imperatives, to determine the nature of work (Tinker, 2002; Hassard and Rowlinson, 2001). This critique is rooted in a belief that core LPT is fundamentally flawed because it derives from Braverman's (1974) analytical concepts which were applicable to understanding of monopoly capitalism, though are perhaps not helpful in understanding contemporary global-competitive capitalism.

This orthodox (i.e. Marxist) labour process analysis has been criticised for the neglect of agency, subjectivity and resistance which are central to the structuralist and economistic features of Marx (e.g. Burawoy, 1979; Knights, 1990, 1997; Knights and Willmott 1989; O'Doherty 1993; Willmott, 1994, 1995; Thompson 2009). For the critics of this orthodoxy, the marginalisation of worker subjectivity is problematical because, not infrequently,

'employees' feelings of identification with ... the enterprise' are supportive and stabilising of a 'modus vivendi' between managers and workers (Littler and Salaman 1982:260).

Storey's (1985) quarrel with orthodox labour process theory is that it rests upon the (functionalist) premise that capital constructs systems of control in order to secure the structurally necessary extraction of surplus value from labour. In contrast the 'anti-realist' or
deconstructionist position invites the abandonment of analysis that has traditionally been orientated by the polarities of 'structure' and 'agency'.

Post-modernist writers O'Doherty and Willmott (2001) develop a third, 'hybrid position', one that is informed by poststructuralist insights but does not neglect or reject established traditions of 'modern' sociology and labour process research. This may offer an instructive way of understanding how people are rendered subjects and become complicit in the accomplishment and reproduction of capitalist employment relations and is the approach I embrace in this thesis.

In contrast to the critics, I am more sympathetic to the arguments of one of Braverman's intellectual heirs in the US, David Gordon. In his book *Fat and Mean: The Corporate Squeeze of Working Americans and the Myth of Managerial 'Downsizing'* (1996) Gordon uses an array of quantitative evidence of overall employment patterns of the previous decade to argue that US corporations have gone "mean" rather than "lean," employing more managers and supervisors per worker than ever before. These ever-increasing functionaries control company payrolls and pay themselves generous salaries—at the expense of average workers. Instead of sharing profits with their employees, thus encouraging them to work harder, management has more often opted to prod workers by instilling fear of layoffs.

Today in the UK there is ample evidence of what Gordon was talking about. For instance there is currently a review of public sector pay being conducted on the principle of 'fairness' and the ratio of CEO pay to the average worker's pay has risen from 25:1 between 1950-1970, to 250:1 in some cases today. Again, history may be repeating itself in the light of the economic downturn, with many employers using the excuse and the opportunity of challenging times to lay off large numbers of employees.

In this thesis I explore evidence for Braverman's argument of capitalist labour control as de-skilling. I also consider this in relation to the major changes to the political economy since his time, together with the debate about managerialism, and reconnect it to employment practice of the current period. It could be argued, for instance, that the advent of the neo-liberal new work culture and technological advances have simply extended the range of instruments available for managers to increase control. I shall consider whether degradation of work is a feature of, and is made easier by, the new work culture; indeed whether the 'new work culture' is an active force in the degradation of work. Moreover I will consider if the division of labour today, as Braverman predicted, is being extended into most types of white
collar work, including many professional jobs, with special skills, knowledge, and control reserved for those at the top of the hierarchy.

2.3 Richard Sennett and a ‘New Work Culture of Capitalism’

In *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (2006), Sennett provides an overview of the changes which have taken place in recent decades with respect to work and labour. Sennett first looks at bureaucracy in early capitalism. Most businesses were short lived and unstable. However, in the latter half of the 19th century, business was modelled on predictable military lines where all roles were defined and career progression could be mapped out. Within the bureaucratic model, described by Max Weber, pyramid-like corporate structures aimed at social inclusion. Individuals knew their place and planned their futures – most would work at the base of the pyramid, hopefully progressing to the tip.

This work more obviously bridges into the theme of psychological contract. Sennett (2006) argues that the new ideal of the lean, flexible firm, which appears to liberate society from oppressive and inefficient bureaucracies, has destructive practical consequences for individual workers. In particular, the ‘old’ psychological contract (or the ‘old deal’ described by Herriot and Pemberton, 1995a) at the heart of the white collar employment relationship was deliberately dismantled by employers, since it was considered an obstacle to labour flexibility.

In *The Corrosion of Character* (1998), Sennett provides an ethnographic account of how middle level workers made sense of the ‘new economy’. He explores how new forms of work are changing people’s communal and personal experience. Sennett argues (1998:16) that Weber’s ‘iron cage’ of bureaucracy, which rationalized use of time, is looked on with disdain by modern capitalism since too many superfluous people are employed for organisations to remain competitive. Instead, modern capitalism requires that people constantly adapt and prove themselves to be assets. Today’s corporations provide no long-term stability, benefits, social capital, or interpersonal trust. Work is reshaped to stress short-term goals, chop-and-change professional paths, decentralized structures, incessant risk, and teamwork as against the hierarchies of yesteryear. Due to mechanization and the need for ‘upskilling’, managers as well as their subordinates face the possibility of obsolescence. In modern management practices there is an emphasis on flexibility – of working and also of contract. The notion of career in such circumstances is no longer a meaningful concept.
Therefore, in large modern businesses, the majority of workers face uncertainty and find it difficult to conceive of a life narrative. As a result, Sennett argues, personal character expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, or through the pursuit of long-term goals is corroded. In such a context, he asks,

‘How do we decide what is of lasting value in ourselves in a society which is impatient, which focuses on the immediate moment? How can long-term goals be pursued in an economy devoted to the short-term? How can mutual loyalties and commitments be sustained in institutions which are constantly breaking apart or continually being redesigned?’ (Sennett, 1998:10)

In The Craftsman (2008), Sennett makes the point that, in today’s organisations, concepts such as craftsmanship and getting the job right are seen as wasteful and somewhat obsessive. Yet, he argues, every human being can become a craftsman in ways which play to their intrinsic motivations, i.e. they can learn a skill and adjacent skills deeply, gain pride in achievement, and self-respect. However, to truly acquire a craft takes time and requires the craftsman to think about, experiment and learn deeply, understanding the relationship between problem solving and problem finding. In the modern world, skills – interpersonal and managerial – substitute for craft and are often acquired in order to compete with others, rather than for their own sake. Moreover, the development of skills is often treated as a mechanical exercise, with the learner relieved of having to think through unsolved problems to find solutions since s/he relies instead on the use of technical and other tools to cut corners in the development and application of a skill. As a result, skill is reduced to mere procedure. Thus, with echoes of Braverman’s depiction of Taylorism, the separation of hand and head does not lead to a state of real knowing. Sennett suggests that it is only by reaching a more balanced state that the craftsman can focus externally and really build up his/her own capacity for learning.

In this study I examine how employees experience the changing work landscape and the extent to which they are aware of the need to maintain and grow new skills in order to avoid obsolescence. I also explore the extent to which employees find it difficult to conceive of a life narrative, and how this manifests itself in their accounts of their working lives.
2.3.1 Alienation

Thus both Braverman and Sennett argue that the capitalist labour process is potentially damaging to workers. Braverman hints at the human consequences of the capitalist labour process. Labour which can be transformed into accumulated surplus is destroyed. Misery accumulates in direct proportion to the accumulation of capital in the pockets of CEOs (1974:396): "The pyramids were built with the surplus labor of an enslaved population" (p. 64). Coercive methods were required to turn 'free' craftspeople into "habituated cogs in the machine".

Critical theorist Herbert Marcuse (1964) thought that alienation and dehumanisation were the inescapable hallmarks of capitalism. Similarly, according to Mandel (1968:5), capital's appetite for profit is unlimited, and this involves exploiting human surplus labour. Consequently capitalists "haggle ever more furiously over seconds and fractions of seconds, as in time and motion studies". Moreover, labour under neo-capitalism is more than ever alienated labour:

'(...) forced labor, labor under command of a hierarchy which dictates to the worker what he has to produce and how he has to produce it. And this same hierarchy imposes upon him what to consume and when to consume it, what to think and when to think it, what to dream and when to dream it, giving alienation new and dreadful dimensions. It tries to alienate the worker even from his consciousness of being alienated, of being exploited'. (Mandel, 1968:9)

The degradation of work thus achieved has moral and social consequences. In today's context of economic turmoil and widespread job cuts, there is the possibility that alienation will become an ever more familiar aspect of working life for many.

2.4 Technology

Both Braverman and Sennett also point to the potentially deleterious effect on workers of the use of technology in the modern work process. In the 1970s there was widespread belief in the power of scientific and technological progress to change people's lives for the better. However Braverman drew attention to the increasingly dehumanising effects of technology on work. He argued that technology is driven more by the capitalist machinery and not for the wellbeing of mankind: that science and technology have changed from a "relatively free floating social endeavour" to a tool of capitalism (p.156).
Similarly, Braverman’s contemporary, E.F. Schumacher (1974:80) argued that the potential of technology to ease mankind’s burdens had instead been used to enslave him, turning virtually “all real production into an inhuman chore which does not enrich a man but empties him”. In particular, the type of work which modern technology is most successful in reducing or even eliminating is skilful, productive work of human hands, in touch with real materials of one kind or another. Schumacher foresaw potential revolt against the conditions within which work is carried out within the monopoly capitalist system:

‘The modern world has been shaped by technology. It tumbles from crisis to crisis; on all sides there are prophecies of disaster, and indeed, visible signs of breakdown. Human nature revolts against inhuman technological, organisational and political patterns, which it experiences as suffocating and debilitating.’ (1974:101)

Echoing Braverman, Schumacher argued that there is a form of Parkinson’s Law by which the prestige carried by people in modern industrial society varies in inverse proportion to their closeness to actual production.

### 2.4.1 Technology as a managerial tool

Technology has been subsequently used by management to extend its control over the white collar labour process. By the 1990s there was a general evolution of office work as a result of the far-reaching organisational changes taking place in the banking industry linked to the introduction of new generations of information and communication technologies (Bain et al, 2002). Back office operations were being centralised and a new form of ‘front-line’ facility was being developed in the form of 24 hour, customer-servicing call centres. Bain et al (2002:173) argue that the call centre labour process represents new developments in the Taylorisation of white-collar work. In particular, technology enables a combination of target-setting and monitoring in ‘real time’ which makes management control of the labour process more complete. As a result,

‘Companies developed the capability to not only distribute work and measure output, but also had the means to assess – and intervene in - the quality of an employee’s performance in ‘real time’.’

Moreover, in the current era of knowledge capitalism, companies are attempting to increase surplus by reducing the cost of knowledge work through a technology-assisted process of knowledge-capture that Brown et al (2010b:8) call ‘Digital Taylorism’.
'In short new technologies have increased the potential to translate knowledge work into working knowledge, leading to the standardization of an increasing proportion of technical, managerial and professional jobs that raise fundamental questions about the future of knowledge work and occupational mobility'.

As a result, even high skilled and professional forms of work are potentially exploitable by managements as commodities, leaving workers de-skilled and with less control over their 'knowledge capital'. Tinker and Feknous (2003) describe how, in American higher education, the widespread take-up of distance learning on the premise of enormous cost savings in educational delivery systems is leading to a "real subsumption" of educational labour. Educators are reduced to being 'minders' of software and hardware delivery systems that are developed and delivered by other specialists. This loss of control and autonomy frequently results in an educator feeling powerless when confronted with changes that seem beyond their control.

Sennett (2006) argues that new information technologies appear to cut through traditional hierarchies and communication channels. But at the same time as they undermine older forms of bureaucratic command, such technologies also support a new kind of centralization, giving upper management a kind of panoptic control over the far reaches of the firm. Automation, along with the casualization of labor, has exacerbated the relative flattening of hierarchies by eliminating much of many firms' blue-collar base and white-collar middle strata. Today, Sennett (2006) argues, automation, globalization, and restructuring cause workers to be anxious about the "specter of uselessness."

It could be argued then, far from liberating people, technology has indeed 'enslaved' them. Today, thanks to emails and the internet, work has are no real boundaries of time or space. For those who let it, work can take over all waking hours. And no matter how much work is done, it is never enough. In that sense the capitalist machine is voracious and unforgiving. Critical analysts have drawn attention to the 'tyrannical dimension' of new technology, such as driving employees to engage in intranet discussion forums for fear of being 'unseen and left behind' (Maravelias, 2009: 350), or the perception by workers that they may lose advantage and status through sharing and codifying knowledge (Flood et al, 2001). For me, Braverman's book highlights the unfairness and imbalance inherent in capitalist employee relations and the seemingly inexorable advance in the process of degradation.
2.5 Managerialism

According to Marx and Braverman, labour and capital are opposite poles of capitalist society; antagonism is therefore integral to their relationship (1974:377). Braverman (1974) argued that, while early capitalism used outright force and coercion to attain maximum advantage over labour, management must now exercise more subtle methods of control. How then does capital control a 'free' labour force?

Between the publications of Braverman's book *Labor and Monopoly Capital, the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* in 1974 and Sennett's *The Culture of the New Capitalism* in 2006, new capitalism had taken root. As discussed in Chapter One, the neo-liberal economic growth policies of the Thatcher governments in the 1980s and 1990s led to a new form of Anglo-American capitalism. This was aided by various forms of deregulation, and in order to capitalise on greater market freedoms, organisations embarked upon waves of merger and acquisition, downsizing and delayering.

As well as breaking union power in the UK, Thatcher also sought to produce a more proactive and professional cadre of management. Charles Handy's 1987 report entitled "The Making of Managers" often referred to as "the Handy report", assumed a link between national economic performance and a deficit of good managers. The report recommended that Britain should develop her managers more systematically through Business School Education. Management was increasingly professionalised and placed at the vanguard of social and economic restructuring throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Pollitt, 1993; Marquand, 2004).

Alongside this, it is argued that a new work culture was installed, characterised by managerialism, performativity, work intensification and the commodification of workers (Scott, 1994). The term 'managerialism' usually refers to the application of private sector management techniques and ideologies within the sphere of the public services (Pollitt 1993; Cutler and Waine 1994), often named 'new public management' (NPM), whose ideological language reflects economic concepts, such as 'freedom of choice' (Bauman, 1998) and 'the customer'. These penetrated public organisations such as schools, social services and healthcare from the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s (Christensen et al, 2002; Dent, 2004).
2.5.1 Mainstream and critical management theory

In the field of management studies Grey and Mitev (1995a) distinguish between the mainstream i.e. 'managerialist' and the 'critical' management studies (CMS). In this section I consider the differences between these perspectives.

Mainstream management theory gained high public profile across developed economies from the 1980s onwards through the well-publicised work of a variety of 'management gurus' (mainly American). A plethora of management theories was developed, often by management consultants. For example Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* (1982) popularised the notion of organisational culture and strategy as being key to competitive success was highly influential with practitioners at the time. The quest for the management 'formula' for lasting corporate success continues unabated (see for example Collins and Porras, 1994; Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Katzenbach, 2000; and Joyce *et al*, 2003).

'Managerialist' researchers consider that research should be unitarist, i.e. operating for the benefit of management and aiming to contribute to organisational and managerial effectiveness. One of the arguments given to support unitarist practices is that since the interests of all lie in the success of the business, management is merely exercising its mandate to manage in that common interest (Legge, 1995). The dominant theoretical framework for mainstream scholars is functionalism, focusing upon possible modifications to the design of organisational structures or processes, or changes to external factors in order to improve the situation of an organisation.

2.5.2 Criticisms of mainstream management discourse

Various scholars have attempted to summarize the intellectual character and analytic agenda of Critical Management Studies (CMS) (see, for example Alvesson and Willmott 2003; Spicer *et al*, 2009). Critical management academics, according to Grey and Mitev (1995a) are those who seek to problematise management practice with reference to its social, moral and political contexts. Fournier and Grey (2000:18) argue that boundaries should be drawn around what CMS is on the basis of anti-performativity, de-naturalization and reflexivity.
Grey *et al* (1996) note that functionalism is underpinned by the basic assumptions of positivism, a legacy of the influence of scientific and engineering disciplines upon management. This assumes a direct correspondence between the forms of representation used and the 'objective' world. Critical scholars have comprehensively critiqued positivism - the view that the application of science to the problems of management is able to generate true, value-free knowledge since such a view assumes political neutrality, and does not acknowledge the influence of the interpretative framework of the author or the context within which the representations of reality are constructed. Critical scholars are generally united in their attack on the dominance of one-sided accounts of change, written largely from a managerial perspective (*Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991; Quinn, 1980* and *Mintzberg, 1988, 1994*) since much of this literature trivialises the socio-political dimensions of change. This has led to demands for more robust theoretical models which can also be accessible to practitioners.

Critical Management Studies scholars are probably agreed upon their antipathy towards managerialism, though this does not necessarily reflect a rejection of management *per se*. Critical management scholars argue that the ideology and discourse of managerialism legitimates the *status quo* of power over the production process and plays a role in continuing the gap between hierarchical control by capital/management and workers' democratic governance of their work. Braverman states that:

‘Management is habituated to carry on labor processes in a setting of social antagonism and, in fact, has never known otherwise. For corporate management this is a problem of costs and controls, not in ‘humanization of work” (1974, p.377).

Thus, he argued, as long as labour tries to attain higher pay and benefits or improvements in the work environment, while at the same time management tries to reduce production costs, the distance between the goals and desires of two parties will grow.

Critical scholars argue that managerial ideology promotes performance and competitive advantage as the 'natural' routes to follow for 'success'. For instance *Peters and Waterman (1982)* argued that 'excellence' requires a 'strong culture' by which employees are persuaded to 'buy in' to a managerially dominated labour process. I agree that mainstream management theory appears plausible and, since its focus is on organisational success, that should produce success for employees also (in theory). However I have gradually become aware that much management theory works by:
‘(...) masking specific interest (e.g. capital accumulation of labour surplus into senior management/owners hands) through general theories, demonstrating how bourgeois conceptions of justice or democracy (e.g. Total Quality Management, Business Process Reengineering, team management) mystify capitalist hegemony (power manipulations that are too subtle to notice) over the working class’ (Best, 1995: 248).

According to Boje (2010), Hammer and Champy’s business process reengineering (BPR) reinforces managerialism by bringing in expert "science-imitators" to divide the labour process into outsourcable chunks and to make designs more controllable by senior management. Similarly, Boje (2010) critiques ‘Japanese management practices, including Total Quality management (TQM), arguing that, contrary to its rhetoric, TQM does not promote democratic worker control but instead, like Taylorism, shifts worker knowledge to technocratic experts who tweak the system as a whole into higher states of centrally controlled labour process. By creating ‘quality’, ‘customer visions’ as in the general interest of workers, the particular interests of senior executives are masked by clever rhetoric. These managerial ideological assumptions and discourse become ‘naturalized’ and assumed to be the correct order of things.

Grey and Mitev (1995a) contend that, despite the existence of critical research, the technical mainstream still prevails, thereby reinforcing rather than challenging technicist understandings of management. Boselie et al (2009) for instance argue that the way performance is conceptualised in most studies looking at the impact of HRM on the employee, is predominantly unitarist and managerialist. The success of this discourse in academic spaces can be attributed, at least in part, to its resonance with broader social economic changes, including what Fairclough (2003: 4) describes as ‘new capitalism’ to refer to the most recent of a historical series of radical restructurings through which capitalism has maintained its fundamental continuity. Yet, even while critical stances are largely marginalized, so too ‘the mainstream itself has, in turn, been largely ignored by practitioners’ (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010, p.799).

After Thatcher’s policies led to a tightening of control over the UK’s higher education establishment, much of the academic debate which Braverman’s book had started died down and much of it was later subsumed into a critique of Thatcherism. Critical management theorists such as Alvesson, Willmott and O’Doherty have continued the debate although CMS is itself often accused by mainstream scholars of being critical without making a positive contribution to the development of new theory. Some CMS researchers have rejected the notion that they should seek to encourage ‘better management’. Moreover there
remains a significant gap between academic and practitioner worlds (Cascio, 2007), and debate has intensified about the nature and reasons for this gap, together with calls for research to be more 'evidence-based' (Briner, 2007).

2.6 UK political and economic landscape (from the 1970s to 1997)

In the next section I examine Braverman's claim that work would be deliberately degraded by capital to benefit capital by reviewing accounts of the late twentieth century political and economic landscape in the UK, drawing particularly on the works of political commentators and historians such as Andrew Gamble (2009) and David Marquand (2008).

2.6.1 Twentieth century crises of capitalism

Marx (1958) argued that capitalism has the capacity to overcome crises by radically transforming itself periodically, so that economic expansion can continue. Various authors argue that periods of crisis are usually accompanied by fundamental changes of political economy which lead to major changes in the rules of employment and production, and what might be called the 'moral economy' (Klein, 2007; Gamble, op cit.; Peston, 2008). These changes however do not just happen - they are usually political experiments to reshape the economy. For instance during the prolonged Great Depression in the 1930s, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt was able to gain political and financial consensus for his 'New Deal' programme which involved committing to vast spending programmes on national infrastructure building, and helped lift thousands of US workers out of unemployment (Garraty, 1973).

Habermas (1977) pioneered ways of thinking about crises as political events which arose because the dominant interpretations of political reality were no longer accepted. He developed the theory of legitimation in response to the second major capitalist crisis of the twentieth century, the 1970s stagflation. The Canadian author and social activist Naomi Klein takes this thinking further in her book Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism (2007) in which she describes how political elites take advantage of the opportunity afforded by economic crisis to raid the public sphere and override democratic will by bringing in unpopular policies and claiming that they are unavoidable:

'I call these orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities, "disaster capitalism".' (Klein, 2007: 6)
In his book, *The Spectre at the Feast; capitalist crisis and the politics of recession* (2009), political economist Andrew Gamble distinguishes between periods of 'capitalist crisis' and conventional recessions and 'economic downturns'. He argues that while there were several 'crashes' there were only two real crises for capitalism during the 20th century – these were during the 1930s and the period of 'stagflation' in the 1970s.

Following the Great Depression during the 1930s the world was plunged into the Second World War. The post-war consensus on economic management embraced the 'efficient government thesis', the belief that government could acquire enough knowledge and capacity to manage capitalism successfully. The 1950s and 1960s were recorded as a period of successful progress. Orthodox Marxists argued against the discourse of the welfare state and the mixed economy which Keynesianism promoted. Some supported Kondratieff's theory that, rather than the conventional ten-year business cycle of the nineteenth century, there were longer cycles, lasting fifty to sixty years, and characterised by boom in their first half. They predicted that the boom of the post-war period would eventually wind down and lead to another period of crisis which governments would be unable to control.

By the 1970s Britain's old model of mass industrial production and capital accumulation began to fail. Growing pressure from labour for increased wages, the oil crisis, adversarial industrial relations and an increasingly uncompetitive UK economy triggered the first major crisis of Anglo-Saxon capitalism since the Great Depression. Gamble argues that though the 1970s stagflation was of a lesser scale than the Great Depression of the 1930s, it still resulted in major changes in the structure of the economy, in national and international politics and in dominant ideologies. Out of this arose a new and invigorated global capitalism which originated in Britain and the US.

2.6.2 The Thatcherite ‘project’

As Gamble (2009) points out, after the 1970s stagflation, the crisis was politically managed. Under Margaret Thatcher there was an orchestrated attempt by the right-wing political elite to redraw the political economy to achieve what they considered to be the only remedy to the intractability of those elements involved in the crisis. In the 1980s both Britain and the United States under Ronald Reagan adopted 'neo-liberalism', a political project for facilitating the re-structuring and re-scaling of social relations in accord with the demands of an unrestrained global capitalism (Bourdieu 1998). The influential Chicago School of economic
theorists promoted the efficient markets thesis - the belief that markets if left alone would always price assets accordingly. Milton Friedman’s ‘shock therapy’ was applied to the British economy and to the working class. This became a ‘formidable discourse’ especially in the Anglo-sphere but also more broadly (Klein, 2007).

### 2.6.3 From collective to individualised employee relations

The 1980s, arguably, saw the major transformation in the climate of industrial relations in Britain after Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979. Monetarism became the dominant economic philosophy, and a period of capitalist expansion began (Gamble, 2009:69). Thatcherism began with a policy of non-intervention in the markets, allowing areas of industry to decline, finding their natural levels. In effect this was a policy of de-industrialisation and, to obtain non-intervention, the power of the unions was reduced; they would have fought to prevent industries going into decline (Wheen, 2004).

Within organisations collective employee relations involving unions have been largely replaced in the UK by individualised HR practices (Beardwell *et al.* 2004). This individualism has been mirrored by the reduction in collective bargaining. Without collective protections, an individual can only show dissatisfaction with the organisation by leaving their employment. This does not wield any power; only if there was a mass exit of employees would the organisation investigate the cause (Farnham, 2002).

Moreover Margaret Thatcher deliberately centralised power in central government and sought to reduce the power not only of trade unions but also of intermediate institutions (Marquand, 2008). She ‘virulently attacked the progressive social influences of the civic counter-cultures of the 1960s while at the same time marketising them in consumer culture and in the social relations of new industries’ (Rutherford, 2009). In particular there was a deliberate political attempt to reduce all sources of potential critique. For instance the cultural power of the BBC as the public service broadcaster was challenged and undermined, leaving the BBC damaged, and seemingly delegitimized. The civil service, the educational establishment and universities in particular, as potential centres of intellectual challenge, were effectively neutralised by a modernisation agenda which included the development of business schools.

During the 1980s a series of reports commissioned by the Thatcher Governments resulted in the public sector becoming progressively managerialised, with power over decision-making gradually wrested away from professionals. These reports were all part of a political ‘reform’
agenda i.e. a “top-down” system-wide approach based on external processes. With the strengthening of the power of management came the rhetoric of accountability. For instance the *Griffiths Report* (1988) launched general management into the NHS, replacing so-called consensus management. This led to a managerial cultural revolution and a period of significant change within the NHS which continues to this day. Lord (Norman) Fowler, the then social services secretary who implemented the report’s recommendations, remarked in 2009 on the political nature of the subsequent ‘reforms’ this made possible:

“You could not have done the internal market without general management. It was absolutely crucial that you changed the management structures. Once you did that, you could go on to other things” (Davies, 2009).

### 2.6.4 Capitalist expansion

With the restructuring of capitalism in the 1980s, there was a resulting intensification of the processes of globalization which accelerated in the 1990s following the fall of the Soviet Union (Gray, 1999). Capitalism came to be treated as a global system of accumulation. Neoliberalism gives priority to capital, so the priorities of finance came to predominate in the shaping of economic policy and industry was expected to adjust to the rules that this establishes. The discrediting of the Keynesian and social democratic regimes allowed the new philosophy of deregulation and arms-length regulation to flourish. The US abandoned the fixed rate system, and sought to maintain its dominance by crafting a different kind of order which was less unpredictable and which depended on the expansion of the financial markets as a leading sector (Hutton and Giddens, 2001).

Late capitalist or post-industrialism ideology points to the advantages of capitalism, free enterprise, and self-organizing markets. The ideology is used to oppose all forms of state control and to celebrate private ownership. It is the market that “determines, “legitimizes,” and "rationalizes” lay-offs, downsizing, merger, acquisitions, plant relocations, and temporary employment (Alvesson and Willmott, 1986: 158-9). Similarly neo-liberalism proposes that labour markets should be made as flexible as possible in order to create the best conditions for markets to flourish.

Globalisation is understood as both a set of processes which it is often claimed are gradually creating an integrated global economy, and as a particular ideological discourse about those processes (Michie, 2003). Separate from this is the discourse promoted by some business schools about hyper-globalization, intertwined with neo-liberalism which has ‘gripped the
imagination of many in the political class across the world' (Gamble, *op.cit.* p.68) and is about the end of the nation state, the creation of a borderless world in which connections (especially economic ones) between different kinds of societies were multiplying. With the collapse of Soviet Union and the widespread adoption of neo-liberal economic policies within the newly independent former Eastern bloc countries, US-style capitalism was triumphant and neo-liberalism unchallenged by the end of the 1990s.

2.7 ‘New Labour’

Marquand (2008) labels the period of New Labour (1997-2010) as ‘phase three’ or the renaissance of ‘untamed capitalism’ characterized by:

’(...) the strange mix of ferocious centralism in the polity and hyper-individualism in the culture and economy, that it seems to have brought in its train’ (2009:363).

Under the ‘New Labour’ Governments led by Tony Blair and later Gordon Brown the Thatcherite ideology was continued and extended (Monbiot, 2000). As Rutherford (2008:10) points out.

‘New Labour achieved power by appealing to this social democratic sensibility while accommodating itself to the neo-liberal ascendancy. To manage this contradiction it abandoned traditional class-based politics for its own brand of aspirational individualism’.

Marquand (*op.cit.* p.376) notes that, far from rejecting neo-liberalism, Blair sought to:

’(...) root Thatcher’s legacy in the nation’s soul by softening its hard edges and making it less divisive. The most frequently used word in his speeches was “we”.’

‘Financialization’ or the attempt to reconstruct the finances of every organisation and of every individual citizen to allow them to borrow and increase their spending became the driving force of the new growth model that was to produce the 1990s boom. Left-wing economists and commentators, such as Will Hutton and John Kay, urged a redesign of the architecture of British capitalism but this call was ignored. Like Blair, Brown saw renascent global capitalism, gross inequalities of reward and increasingly powerful financial markets as givens.
Similarly, throughout this period of study there has been a sustained attack on bureaucratic structures in the UK’s public sector which have been subject to wholesale transformation or ‘modernisation’ in line with neo-liberal political agendas underpinned by notions of value-for-money, competition and marketization (Esland et al., 1999, p.175). For instance New Labour enthusiastically adopted the funding of major public infrastructure projects such as the building of roads, schools and hospitals through Private Finance Initiative arrangements with the private sector.

Under New Labour there were government attempts to control public sector work through ‘New Public Management’ (NPM). This sought to break down unity of production in the public sector through control of funding mechanisms, targeting and outcome control, and to effect the managerial transformation of public sector work (Gamble, 2009; Peston, 2008). This involved policy makers and management redefining and de-skilling work in ways which were inimical to professionals since implicit in such controls is the reduction of professional autonomy. Local government was the locus of early experiments in labour commodification, and the segregation of conception from execution, for instance with restructurings to produce ‘purchaser-provider’ splits and public service delivery achieved through commercial providers or in ‘partnership’ with social enterprises. Similar moves were made in the NHS with the splits between commissioning/monitoring bodies and those delivering the services. The National Health Service, Schools, Further Education and Higher Education progressively became key targets for ‘modernization’.

As Braverman might have predicted, Taylorist ‘modernization’ processes such as these were instrumental in breaking down the autonomy individual professionals could exercise over their work, as well as undermining the basis of the ‘old’ psychological contract expectations of the public sector worker i.e. job security and career progression through hierarchy in exchange for loyal service. As a result, job security in many sectors was no longer a ‘given’ (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995). The Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) (Kersley et al., 2005) is a UK national survey of workplaces and their employees conducted periodically. Its findings highlight how long working hours became commonplace in the UK from the late 1990s. In the early years of this century, the lack of work-life balance experienced by employees became a much researched phenomenon. The Health and Safety Executive (2007) noted work-life imbalance as one of the principal causes of stress and have attempted to provide guidance for managers on how to avoid or mitigate the worst effects of stress.
This causes me to question if the reported lack of work-life imbalance is symptomatic of the combined effects of performativity, managerialism, work intensification and lack of job security characteristic of the ‘new work culture’ and resulting from deliberate company strategies and policies.

2.7.1 Entrepreneurial capitalism

Corporate capitalism itself underwent further transformation during the 1990s. Although large firms remained influential, many of those that had survived the turbulence of the 1970s and 1980s were radically restructured to make them leaner and more ‘flexible’ rather than heavily staffed and tightly integrated. In the 1990s writers, including the political economist Robert Reich (1991) and management writer Peter Drucker (1993), argued that prosperity was based on a global competition for ideas, knowledge and skills. It was assumed at the time that the technological superiority of Western countries would limit this competition to OECD economies. New Labour’s adoption of the politics of individualisation is reflected in the 1998 Competitiveness White paper, *Our Competitive Future – Building the Knowledge-Driven Economy* which set out a policy framework in which the market and its values were central. National prosperity depended on the ability to create a knowledge-driven economy.

Much of the business and policy literature focuses on knowledge, innovation and creative enterprise and a new alignment of institutional forces which have coalesced to allow a resurgence of entrepreneurial activity. Various names have been given to this new stage of capitalism since it made its appearance: finance capitalism, imperialism, new capitalism, late capitalism and entrepreneurial capitalism defined as:

'The system of markets energized by a shift from industrial and labor capital to intellectual capital that has been forced by a continuously increasing rate of technology-related businesses by individuals who can, in many cases, act without enormous quantities of financial capital, and who bring their innovation to markets eager to embrace new products and services that, in turn, yield more innovation'.

(Schramm, 2006:2).

Fairclough (2003) suggests that the transformation taking place towards ‘New Capitalism’ involves both the ‘re-structuring’ of relations between the economic, political and social domains (including the commodification and marketisation of fields like education (which becomes subject to the economic logic of the market), and the ‘re-scaling’ of relations
between different scales of social life i.e. the global, the regional (e.g. the European Union), the national, and the local.

Schramm (2006) argues that, in the emergent system, the predictability and order of bureaucratic capitalism is being replaced by the unpredictable. The new entrants, the entrepreneurial firms, are ‘aggressively non-bureaucratic’ (p. 10) and the idea of starting and scaling firms without the need for capital has significant implications for capital markets. In an increasingly knowledge-driven economy the value of labour, as ‘human capital’ producing intellectual capital, has provided the rationale for major investment in higher skills in OECD countries.

2.7.2 Digitalization

In an economy increasingly dependent on exploiting knowledge and service-intensive work, information technologies and new structural forms should enable greater human interaction for the purposes of knowledge and value creation. Sennett (2006) argues that, if anything, the new work culture is counter-productive to knowledge creation. Similarly, Whittington and Mayer (2002) point out that the exchange of knowledge across diverse centres works better through the enduring and trustful relationships to be found in more integrated organisations. Trustful relationships may be a casualty of change, undermining the reciprocal exchange between employers and employees.

Braverman predicted that high skilled work would eventually be proletarianised. In a policy review of the implications of the globalisation of knowledge for the UK economy, Brown et al (2010a) describe the shift towards global standardisation within companies and efforts to digitalise knowledge that had previously been the preserve of high-skilled workers as a manifestation of ‘Digital Taylorism’. This involves the ‘extraction, codification and digitalisation of knowledge into software prescripts and packages that can be transmitted and manipulated by others regardless of location’ (p. 15). Thus codified, the idiosyncratic knowledge of workers becomes available to the company rather than being the ‘property’ of an individual worker. Routinized work can be off-shored to low-cost centres of production.

The trend is towards greater experimentation with ‘high-end’ work in low-cost locations. Brown et al (ibid) refer to Blinder’s (2007:16) analysis of the potential impact of off-shoring on the jobs of American workers which shows that higher skilled workers are just as likely to see their jobs off-shored as low skilled workers. Creative work is being separated from routine analytics and in the UK ‘permission to think is restricted to a relatively small group of
knowledge workers'. Brown et al argue that, while it took decades for manufacturing to 'lift and shift' through standardisation, the process when applied to service sector employment is likely to be much faster, "because the only hardware you need can fit on the average office desk". Digital Taylorism thus becomes a key mechanism in the degradation of high skilled work and the reduction of labour power.

2.7.3 ‘Untamed’ capitalism

The new form of 'flexible capitalism,' which Sennett (1998) describes as the 'New Economy', has become increasingly evident since the early-1990s and is characterised by globalisation, increasing competition and rapid technological change. Within UK society the last two decades have witnessed a burgeoning of consumerism and ever-advancing capitalism. Materialist and secular values have become dominant, the media have promoted a cult of celebrity, authority figures are generally discredited and the MPs expenses scandal suggests that the culture of greed, rule-bending and personal enrichment has spread form the bonus hunters, mortgage hawkers and tax avoiders of the financial sector into the heart of Britain's representative democracy.

Richard Sennett (2006:178) describes the characteristics of 'new work culture' as follows:

'Consuming passion (i.e. passionate consumerism)...meritocratic concept of talent...idealized self publicly eschewing dependency on others... These are cultural forms which celebrate personal change but not collective progress. The culture of the new capitalism is attuned to singular events, one-off transactions, interventions'.

Sennett argues that the cultural ideal of the new capitalism involves people developing their potential, getting rich by thinking short term, and regretting nothing since they no longer hang on to the past. In order to progress, Sennett concludes, a longer-term perspective is needed.

During the period of this study the successful growth of the financial services industry and the burgeoning market for new financial products resulted in rapid global movements of capital. Business and investment analysts and bankers, along with governments, to a large extent now appear to set the mandate within which firms operate. In such a context, a longer-term perspective is penalised; organisations become vulnerable to takeover by investors or competitive predators if they appear too cash-rich and/or too organic and long-term in their approach to strategic development. Within firms, senior management, as
representatives of ‘owners,’ set short-termist agendas which derive from these mandates. These are the agendas which shape the new work culture and to which employees are required to respond.

The pursuit of labour flexibility by employers was aided the relative lack of workplace protections afforded to British workers compared with their counterparts elsewhere in Europe since, unlike in many other European countries, in Britain employee representation through Trades Unions has been relatively low-key since the 1980s. The 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Study (Kersley et al, 2005) demonstrated a progressive fall in trade union membership since 1998 amongst the British workforce - down to just 33 per cent in 2004. In addition, workplaces were less likely to recognise unions for bargaining over pay and conditions than in earlier years.

Moreover, ‘New Labour’ was careful to avoid imposing too many legislative restrictions on employers and slowed down or stalled the implementation of mainly European Union (EU)-driven workplace regulations and employment legislation designed to protect workers. For instance the Employment Relations Act 2004 implements the findings of the review of the Employment Relations Act 1999, the centrepiece of which was the establishment of a statutory procedure for the recognition of trade unions by employers for collective bargaining purposes. This was seized on by trades unions as an opportunity to increase the influence of the Trade Union movement.

One of the most significant pieces of legislation with respect to individual rights is the Human Rights Act which was implemented in 2000. Without collective employment protections individuals have to fight their own case against abusive employers and the number of cases brought to employment tribunals by individuals has risen significantly throughout the period of study. Prior to implementation of the EU Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations Directive in 2005 there were no requirements on British organisations to inform and consult employees. Other EU-driven employment legislation has included the Work and Families (parental leave) Act (2006) which extended the ‘right to request’ flexible working to carers as well as parents.

Thus, throughout this period of study (1998-2010), the UK has been an easier location for global companies to carry out restructurings which could be less easily implemented elsewhere. Sennett (1998) argues that the new technologies have assisted ‘delayering’ (the flattening of management hierarchies) and re-engineering whose real aim is reduce the number of workers in a company. Moreover downsizing has a direct connection with growing
inequality, Sennett argues, since only a minority of the middle-aged workers who lost their jobs in the US between 1985-1995 found replacement labour at the same or higher wages. Similarly while Victor and Stephens (1994) acknowledge that new organizational forms may be effective at generating surplus, reducing costs, leveraging competitive advantage, etc., their ‘radical design...entails losses as well as costs’ (ibid: p.481).

Even some of the architects of some of the fashionable management approaches, such as re-engineering, by the mid-1990s were becoming uncomfortable about the effects of downsizing. Hamel and Prahalad (1994) described organisations which had shed too many employees as suffering ‘corporate anorexia’, and Arnold Kransdorff (1998) wrote of ‘corporate amnesia’ to describe the loss of company knowledge, culture and history as a consequence of laying off experienced employees. Given that both the UK and US were increasingly aspiring to lead in the development of knowledge and service-intensive work characteristic of the so-called ‘Knowledge Economy’ this was potentially problematic.

No doubt it could be argued the neo-liberal political agenda driving the development of the flexible labour market in America and Britain has resulted in economic growth over the period of this study. However, it has become apparent in the wake of the economic crisis and recession of 2007-9 that the relatively sustained growth of the UK economy (1998-2007) was largely fuelled by consumer spending, thanks to cheap credit and low cost Chinese imports, while the underlying ‘real economy’ may have been growing less strongly. Business practices have been driven both by profit growth and by cost-reduction.

Robert Reich (1992) argued that in a global economy, elite ‘symbolic analysts’ become key to economic well-being, such that wealth now follows the educated. Similarly UK government economic and education policies since the late 1990s have been based on the assumption that Britain will successfully compete in the global marketplace on the basis of a high skill/high pay economy. However, as Brown et al (2010b) point out, technology and the educational policies of developing economies such as India are enabling them to compete globally on the basis of high skills/low cost. Consequently UK white collar workers are likely to find themselves competing in a high skills/low pay labour market and are left seriously exposed to the full force of the ‘global auction’ for talent, as Brown et al (2010b: 141) note:

‘People may ... be doing everything that is expected of them in terms of acquiring marketable skills, investing in further learning, or going that extra mile to meet unrealistic sales targets, but it may not deliver the expected returns in terms of jobs, salary, or career progression’.
2.8 The current ‘crisis’ of capitalism

'Long wave' theorists predicted that the next real crisis of capitalism was due in the early years of the twenty-first century. Andrew Gamble (2009) argues that the West, particularly the UK, is currently experiencing the third crisis of neo-capitalism. Just as the crises of the 1930s and 1970s have been seen in retrospect as major turning points in the way in which the global economy and its governance developed, so, Gamble argues (2009:69), the economic crisis which began in 2008 may come to be seen as another such turning point for capitalism:

'The global financial crash of 2008 did not just prick the asset bubbles of the financial markets; it also burst the bubble of neo-liberalism which had been inflating for three decades, and cast doubt on the claims of the hyper-globalists'.

For Gamble, politics and economics are intertwined and, at the present time, politics drives economics. Keynesian economists such as John Gray (2008) argue that there is an existential problem in the way the financial system relates to the real economy. There is a mismatch at the heart of market economics with the 'crowd effects' of the market happening faster within the financial system than in the real economy. They argue that the implosion of financial institutions is irreversible; normalcy in the form of debt-based financial capitalism based on a global free market cannot be re-established. As Marquand (2010) puts it in a Guardian article:

'The crisis stems, above all, from lax and incompetent public regulation of private economic power. That in turn stems from a profoundly dangerous economic philosophy, which holds that government failure is more prevalent and more damaging than market failure, that markets are always wiser and more rational than governments, and that if private market actors are allowed to pursue their private interests without interference from public authorities, the invisible hand of the market will necessarily deliver the best possible outcome for society as a whole'.

Political economist Will Hutton (2010) argues that the free market hypothesis was the biggest intellectual mistake made by various governments, behind which were vested interests: US Republican politicians and their think tanks identifying 'truths' which became the benchmark for the West. Wholesale money markets paid themselves huge sums of money (salaries and bonuses of partners in UK hedge funds averaged £10-20m per annum). Regulators and New Labour did not challenge economic agents who were chasing profits on
what seemed a rational model and therefore there was no basis for challenge. Consequently the few warnings emanating from academics about what could happen were not heeded.

The impact of the current 'crisis of capitalism', is beginning to be felt in the real economy – with increasing youth unemployment in the UK. Various national economies are under severe pressure, and with widespread public sector cuts and the income and prospects of so many people seriously affected, the potential for major pressures on governments is leading to protests and serious civil unrest in some countries. In the UK the state has intervened to attempt to mitigate the effects of crisis, not only by bailing out failing banks but there are also international proposals to re-regulate the financial services industry and in the UK to curb excessive bonuses for bankers. There are reportedly low levels of public trust in institutions or their leaders, and growing demands for greater transparency. The 2010 ‘Wikileaks’ exposure of confidential memos obtained from ‘secure’ US government websites appears to confirm cynical assumptions about the gap between rhetoric and reality in state affairs and the degree to which the state is to be trusted.

What the future holds is full of ‘unknown unknowns’ as former US President G.W. Bush’s economic adviser Donald Rumsfeld put it. Gray (2008) argues that the global economy is at the first stages of a deep shift, a geo-political change involving the meltdown of the neo-liberal model of debt-ridden capitalism – and it is not yet clear what will replace it. Gray suggests that this is unlikely to be a new universal paradigm and more likely to be fragmented, akin to what happened to former Soviet Bloc governments following the collapse of Communism.

Gamble argues that this new crisis of capitalism is likely to lead to a new political economic settlement. This will take time, and there will be much resistance from entrenched interests, but we are seeing this process already in the reaction to finance capital - and especially the 'bonus culture'. There is also a good deal of concern about the amoral culture which has supported the capitalism of the past three decades. Hutton (2010) argues that Britain today is more polarised than 10 years ago: the economic bubble has created both a new super-rich and a disenfranchised underclass. He points out the unfairness of the situation in which the British have lived through the biggest bank bail-out in history and the deepest recession since the 1930s, and are being warned that they face a decade of unparalleled public and private austerity, while:
'Those who created the crisis — the country's CEOs and bankers, still living on Planet Extravagance, not to mention mainstream politicians — all want to get back to "business as usual": the world of 1997 to 2007’ (Hutton, 2010:4).

Schumacher (1974:156) was perhaps as visionary as Braverman when he argued that “a way of life that bases itself on materialism, i.e. on permanent, limitless expansionism in a finite environment, cannot last long”.

2.9 Conclusion

In The Enigma of Capitalism, David Harvey (2010) argues that the essence of capitalism is its amorality and lawlessness and to talk of a regulated, ethical capitalism is to make a fundamental error. However, he also makes the case for containing crises of the current sort within the constraints of capitalism, and for a social order that would allow us to live within a system that really could be responsible, just, and humane. Similarly, Hutton argues that at this historic turning point in British capitalism we need to return to our core moral values and find a new way of making a living:

‘There is a genius in capitalism, but the paradox is that it flowers best in an environment that capitalists themselves think is hostile. Paradoxically, fairness is capitalism's indispensable value’ (Hutton, 2010: x).

Sennett (2006) too argues that the nature of the current crisis is essentially moral. He suggests that, in banishing old ills, the new economy model has instead created new social and emotional traumas. Loyalty between the company and the employees is no longer visible because workers know that they are simply a tool that can be replaced with the twist of a wrench. He describes what we are doing to ourselves as we reshape our work to stress short-term goals, chop-and-change professional paths, decentralized structures, incessant risk, and teamwork as against the hierarchies of yesteryear. “Only a certain kind of human being can prosper in unstable, fragmentary institutions” he argues (2006:3). The culture of the new capitalism demands an ideal self oriented to the short-term, focused on potential ability rather than accomplishment, willing to discount or abandon past experience. This leads to alienation, or ‘corrosion’ of character, since character is expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, and through the pursuit of long-term goals.

In later chapters of this thesis I explore evidence for Sennett’s contentions, based on employee perspectives of the new work culture. In the next chapter I shall review literature
which explores themes relating to performativity in the workplace and the part played by HRM in creating the new work culture.
Chapter 3
Literature Review – Human Resource Management, Performativity and the Psychological Contract

3.0 Introduction

A central argument of this thesis is that, within the 'new work culture', 'white collar' work and workers have become progressively degraded and commodified by managerialism and that this commodification exemplifies the Marxian contention that capital progressively dominates and de-skills labour and subsumes knowledge artefacts for profit. Braverman argues that de-skilling is achieved through latter-day Taylorism, the essential elements of which, according to Braverman, (1974:119) are the:

'(…) systematic pre-planning and pre-calculation of all elements of the labour process which now no longer exists as a process in the imagination of the worker but only as a process in the imagination of a special management staff'.

Human Resource Management (HRM) theory and practice, it could be argued, represents the site par excellence where this process occurs.

This chapter examines the literature, and outlines some of the central debates, relating to the purpose, nature, role and impact of HRM on organisations, work and workers. In this chapter I propose to review some of the main conceptual moves which feature at the core of the logic of HRM and of the development of a 'new work culture'. Whilst I will draw on literatures of HRM, organizational behaviour, labour relations and strategic management to explore the managerialist functions and justifications for employment practices under the rubric of Human Resource Management, this literature review explores HRM mainly through a critical lens. I will seek to question the assumptions made within mainstream HRM as a philosophy and practice, and how the norms inherent within this approach have implications for the way that employees are conceptualised, managed and treated within organisations.

There are two broad categories of theory within this growing theoretical field. There is the dominant managerial mainstream of HRM which offers many models of HRM theory and encompasses 'hard' and 'soft' approaches (which will be discussed later in this chapter). The
other perspective derives from critical management scholarship (CMS) and is known as Critical HRM (CHRM). The mainstream largely ignores the Marxist view that the employment relationship has been characterized by 'three great struggles' over interests, control and motivation:

'In one respect 'HRM' is merely the latest managerial discourse deployed to massage the perennial issue of how to optimize labour costs and ensure employee performativity while simultaneously stimulating and maintaining employee motivation to work' (Keenoy, 2009:466).

Thus the nature of HRM is contested and its practice within organisations is often constrained and determined by dimensions of size, structure and culture. However, there is some consensus that HRM is a business concept reflecting a mainly managerial view of the employment relationship, with theory, policies and practices geared to enabling organisations to achieve flexibility, competitive advantage and high performance through people. The field of HRM focuses on the study of the employment relationship, and provides a framework for analysis of a wide range of issues relating to work and work organisation, management policy and practice, employee resourcing and development, organisational culture, employee motivation and performance as well as employee relations and employment regulation (Boxall et al, 2007).

This thesis problematises the ethics of HRM from a position of essentially modern ethical frameworks: notions of justice and the social contract. In particular I will include themes from the literature which address the potential role of HRM in the degradation of work. For example, Keenoy (2009) argues that, as a discourse of control, HRM embodies a discipline of 'individualised performativity'. Moreover within managerialism, HRM has emerged and become consolidated around a particular framing of work, management and identity which places subjectivity and a particular kind of 'self' at the centre. 'Work' has become the ground upon which the modern 'self' defines its life, and managerial discourses such as HRM are now central to the modern political, social and cultural body. I shall explore in more detail the ways in which subjectivity and 'work on self' have become central to work and management in contemporary organisations.
3.1 The emergence of HRM

Over the last twenty years Human Resource Management (HRM) has emerged as a global discourse and has become a recognised semiotic for 'modern people management' (Paauwe, 2007:9). Jacques (1999) argues that the origins of 'HRM' can be found in the ideas which emerged between 1900 and 1920 from the historical conjunction of scientific management, the employment managers' movement and industrial psychology. The development and expansion of Human Resource Management (HRM) since the late 1980s, at the expense of Personnel Management and Industrial Relations, reflects the perceived political need to expose all parts of the UK economy to the values of business, and for HRM to achieve a closer functional relationship between the needs of business and 'human resource' practices.


The gradual consolidation of HRM (in organisations), into the general repertoire of managerialism is the outcome of a complex and paradoxical cultural process. On the one hand, HRM appears to have become less coherent, less centred, more dispersed and insubstantial when compared with other technical specialities of management such as strategy or marketing. In spite of this appearance, though, HRM has become a very strong cultural programme capable of extending its range to emerge as one of the most significant grounds of managerialism itself (Costea et al, 2007). Delbridge and Keenoy (2010) point out that since mainstream HRM became the dominant discourse relating to management practice from the mid-1980s on, what Keenoy (1997) terms "HRMism" has enjoyed 'unparalleled success'.

3.2 Mainstream HRM approaches

David Guest (1997) presents a normative model of HRM that defines functional areas of personnel management and sets an agenda regarding what HRM must achieve - which includes integration of HRM to organizational business strategy, employee commitment,
flexibility, and quality. He represents HRM as having two focuses within a single framework with specific links that can be tested. Guest argues that HRM’s scope extends beyond that of personnel management since it is both a new way of managing people and also focuses on creating a workplace culture that leads to employee commitment to the organization (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1: Guest (1987): Personnel Management versus HRM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PM compliance</th>
<th>HRM commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological contract</td>
<td>Fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay</td>
<td>Reciprocal commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of control</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee relations</td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td>Unitarist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low trust</td>
<td>High trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing principles</td>
<td>Mechanistic</td>
<td>Organic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal/defined roles</td>
<td>Flexible roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top-down</td>
<td>Bottom-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centralized</td>
<td>Decentralized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy goals</td>
<td>Administrative efficiency</td>
<td>Adaptive work-force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard performance</td>
<td>Improving performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cost minimization</td>
<td>Maximum utilization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Guest (1987)*

The possible implications of mainstream HRM for employees have been highlighted by the division that has frequently been drawn between what Storey (1992) described as ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ versions of HRM. The ‘hard’ version focuses on cost reduction and containment, links with business strategy and the role of HRM in furthering competitive advantage. It is widely acknowledged to place little emphasis on workers’ concerns and, therefore, within its paradigm, any judgments of the effectiveness of HRM would be based on business performance criteria.

‘Soft’ or (high-performance/high-commitment/high involvement) HRM builds on human relations traditions and its discourse is more dominant. Some claim that HRM offers a new model of the management of people at work, based around attempts to increase their commitment (Guest, 1999). While ‘soft’ HRM is also primarily concerned with business performance, it is more likely to advocate a parallel concern for workers’ outcomes since its function is to identify employment practices directed towards winning the commitment of
employees in order to build a common cause of organisational advancement (Guest, 1999; Walton, 1985; Kochan et al, 1986).

The task of this ‘high performance’, ‘high commitment’, ‘high involvement’ HRM is to ensure that employees are ‘engaged’ in their work, ‘aligned’ to what the organisation needs and managed in ways that enable them to perform at their best. ‘High commitment’ HRM practices encourage employees to identify with the organisation and its brand. For instance Bunting (2004) argues that, by so doing companies sell products and also shape employee behaviour. Typical engagement measures include discretionary effort – willingness to ‘go the extra mile’ and commitment to achieving the organisation’s objectives; positive affect for the organisation – organisational pride, loyalty and optimism for the future; positive identification with the organisation - employee advocacy, willingness to recommend the organisation as a good place to work, and overall satisfaction (Francis, 2003).

A key feature of new-style HRM practices is their focus on notions of high trust, high commitment, teamwork and increasing worker autonomy in the workplace, often grounded in the idea that employees can (and are willing to) become self-managing and self-reliant in ways that serve the firm’s interests. This notion of the self-reliant worker has led to increasing interest in the development of ‘emotional capital’, where employees are required to effectively manage their feelings and displays of emotion at work, arguably leading to a more, rather than less instrumental orientation of employees (Fineman, 2000).

Within mainstream HRM theory, mutuality of interest between employers and employees is emphasized, implying a social contract through which employees are governed but receive benefits through which they are enriched and renewed. Walton (1985) defined HRM as “mutual goals, mutual influence, mutual respect, mutual rewards, and mutual responsibility” and furthered the notion that HRM must enhance employee commitment and move away from control styles. However, this perspective is unitary, i.e. assumes that employees and employers share a common interest in the success of the business and that what is good for the business must be good for employees. As Legge (1995:64) points out:

“The new HRM model is composed of policies that promote mutuality-mutual goals, mutual influence, mutual respect, mutual rewards, mutual responsibility. The theory is that policies of mutuality will elicit commitment, which in turn will yield better economic performance and greater human development.”
Similarly, Walton further added that while the ‘psychological contract’ under this high commitment model is one of mutuality, it is a mutuality strictly bounded by the need to operate within an essentially unitary framework (Walton, 1985).

Since the 1990s the HRM emphasis moved away from altering employee values, to change programmes described as ‘results-driven’ that focus on outputs / behaviours, based on the view that organisations can achieve fundamental change in employee behaviours in the short-term through "hard" structural change strategies that are more "task-driven" (Burnes, 2009; McHugh 1997). However it could be argued that, from its inception, HRM's appeal to management was the claim that it was a route to excellence and high performance (Overell, 2005) and that 'soft' human resource management, in practice, reflected the managerial agenda to the disregard of workers' concerns. This thesis explores the ways in which senior HR practitioners conceive of their role with respect to the managerial agenda, and also to the interests of employees. These findings are discussed in Chapter Six.

3.2.1 How genuine is ‘mutuality’?

A recurring theme in critical HRM (CHRM) literature is the guise of mainstream HRM in purporting to represent a new, more altruistic form of employee management when, in reality, it constitutes a rational response to wider, contextual drivers. In a flexible labour market the driver is to reduce fixed costs such as labour. HR functional activity is conventionally aimed at attracting, motivating and retaining people through, for instance developing an enticing 'employer brand', initiatives geared to 'employee engagement', development and reward strategies. However, under HRM, HR itself has been ‘captured’ by business agendas, according to Esland et al (1999:178):

‘To overcome the supposed burden of inflexibility, superstructural devices such as HRM and HRD are put in the service of change management, and employees, often unaware that they are now regarded as a variable cost, are actively encouraged to procure their place in the new flexibility, and to ignore the paradox that long-term employment is now based on an ability to move from one insecure job to another in a never-ending series, and possibly all the way to retirement’.

CHRM scholars have argued that, while high commitment HRM practices may provide enhancements in employee discretion, these come at the expense of stress, work intensification and job strain (Legge 2001). They point to the controlling effects of the language of commitment and engagement, and the extent to which these pose a threat to employees, materially and emotionally. For Scott, HRM's “distinctive character stems from
an attempt to persuade workers to give their best efforts to the enterprise for which they labour" (1994:4). Here, HRM represents a more insidious form of ideological control and identity appropriation, rather than offering any real substantive change in the employment relationship (Geary and Dobbins, 2001; Legge, 2005).

3.2.2 The 'new industrial relations'

Marx had argued that the interests of owners and their representatives (managers) and those of workers were inherently in conflict. 'Old' Industrial Relations (IR) were essentially a wage-effort bargain between capital and labour, with workers’ rights protected through the process of collective bargaining. This is typically cast within the familiar terrain of management seeking to maintain control and generate worker consent, creativity and commitment (D’Art and Turner, 2008).

From the ‘high commitment’ perspective, it is rare for texts on HRM to conceive explicitly of the employment relationship in terms of the contested nature of work (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). The high commitment/involvement HRM perspective proposes that employees are partners within the organisation, that they can wield the same power as their employers. However, in a market economy there are inevitable tensions between the ‘buying in’ and use of labour as a commodity and its human element. The commoditisation of labour will be more or less pronounced depending upon the particular approach to people management and prevailing economic and political circumstances (D’Art and Turner, 2008).

In practice, power in the employment relationship is one-sided, with the employer holding the largest share:

'the employment relationship, although is contractually based and freely entered into, removes all the freedom of action from the individual'. (Beardwell et al, 2004)

In this sense HRM advances a "vision of the ideal organisation which amounts to a sophisticated unitarism".... "its policy prescriptions have advocated practices which have inhibited employees' belief that their interests were separate and distinct from those of management" (Scott, 2004:12). Within the perspective of a more modern sophisticated unitarism, managers have been encouraged to refashion employee relations in ways that have encouraged workers to relate to the organisation as individuals, rather than primarily as members of a distinctive interest group. Ethics are subsumed within a taken-for-granted market mechanism.
Those who view HRM as simply a new, commodified form of managing employment argue that the stimulus for the development and application of new managerial techniques and the demand for co-operation and commitment in labour relations was aided by the socio-economic, legal and political changes of the 1980s, in particular the intensification of international competition (Foley et al, 1999; Scott, 1994). As discussed previously, during the Thatcher era, managers’ ‘right to manage’ was asserted and the installation of managerialism across all sectors of the UK economy from the 1980s onwards was aided by the deliberate undermining of trade union power by the political establishment following the political confrontations with the Thatcher Governments.

Thus the emergence of HRM and the deliberate transformation of industrial relations in the UK formed part of the Thatcherite political project to replace the largely adversarial collective relationships with a new industrial relations based on human resource management practices geared to winning employees’ ‘hearts and minds’ to a shared task (i.e. the managerial agenda). The aim of mainstream HRM is to foster a more positive and less adversarial organisational culture, within which greater performance (and lower labour costs) can be achieved from employees (Keenoy, 2009). Trade union researchers speak of this in terms of ‘the transformation of industrial relations’ (Kochan et al, 1986), of ‘new industrial relations’ (Kelly and Kelly, 1991), and of the ‘new workplace’ (Ackers et al, 1996).

For Keenoy (2009), the projection of a seemingly humanistic ‘philosophy’ of HRM, along with the deregulation of markets, were part of the strategic shift from state and collective regulation to the ‘market’ and ‘management of meaning’ (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Legge, 2005). However, in the reframing of personnel as HRM, the fundamental discursive shift, as Keenoy (2009: 460) points out, is the replacement of the pluralist framing of the employment relationship (in which it is assumed to recognize and institutionalise different interests) with a ‘unitary’ framing of issues (in which all members of an organisation are assumed to have mutual interests). There is no mention of worker interests, trade unions, nor is there any wider concern about social justice and the uneven distribution of rewards.

Employment relations scholars (non-Marxist) reject the neoclassical economics assumption that labour markets are perfectly competitive. They see the employment relationship as a bargained exchange between employers and employees such that employment outcomes depend on the elements of the environment that determine each others’ bargaining power (Budd et al, 2004). In a context of rising unemployment in the 1980s, many managers took advantage of their increased bargaining power afforded to them by applying measures to
'increase the degree of effort which the employee is expected to surrender to the firm' (Baldamus, 1961:105-107).

There are a growing number of organisations within the UK that have replaced union presence with 'partnerships', though these do not have the power to change a corporate agenda. Most unions now feel that, with the increase of individualism, partnerships are the only way they can be involved in employee negotiations (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004). Moreover, many new workplaces, especially those in international, more knowledge-intensive and the creative industries, have preferred not to recognise unions at all (Millward et al, 1992). With relatively little employment protection, despite European employment legislation, and low job security, many employees have had to accept an extension of managers' prerogatives.

Scott (1994) puts forward two contrasting possible explanations for this seemingly passive acceptance by employees of the new balance of power within the employment relationship. On the one hand, as the old orthodoxy declined, the lack of employment protection afforded employees was accepted by some workers in return for higher wages, thus re-establishing a new wage-effort bargain. On the other hand, the more collaborative working relations between management and unions in the form of 'partnership working' in recent years may reflect their increasing consensus and 'realism' about the necessity for change given the challenges of the increasingly competitive global marketplace.

### 3.2.3 Direct communication, participation and involvement

Similarly, mainstream HRM high-involvement/high-commitment theories view cultural approaches that encourage direct communication, participation and employee involvement positively, whether these take the form of meetings for diffusing information or dialogue between managers and employees. However, in practice, the extent to which employees have the opportunity for direct involvement in decision-making may be limited. Failure of employee communication programmes is commonly attributed to the lack of genuine intent to solicit and incorporate employees' views in business decisions (Dessler, 1994).

In today's fast changing environment, employers are reported to be in a state of flux about giving greater decision-making to employees in order for them to feel empowered and to use their skills. As Sparrow and Cooper (2003: 85) suggest:
The pursuit of downsizing and the intensification of work effort have not created the best conditions for implementing high commitment work practices in a coherent and sensible way.'

Indeed, many managers are said to prefer tighter surveillance and control in order to increase a sense of predictability, as Gallie et al (2001: 1090) point out:

'Organizational pressures may then have combined with technological opportunity to swing the balance from empowerment to control, irrespective of the costs in terms of the commitment of employees to their organisations.'

Willmott (2002:24) argues that, without collective employee relations, even where policies might purport to encourage 'direct involvement,' employees may be unable to make full representation of their views, leaving them vulnerable to coercion: "Might it not be that the pressures placed on workers to conform to management plans have been increased?" The extent to which these practices are genuinely employee-centric, except for a few elite employees, is doubtful and HRM practices therefore have something of a 'wolf in sheep's clothing' element about them (Keenoy, 1990:4).

Marxist scholars such as Mandel (1973) argue that the structural crisis of late capitalism led to the reinvention of a more subtle means of control over labour – through worker participation. Burawoy (1970) suggests that capitalists (or employers) are increasingly using such methodology as a means of subtle coercion and to manufacture consent. Such practices may represent Marx's 'invisible power' whereby employees have 'false consciousness' or are unaware that it is not in their interests to be subservient to the organisation. Scott (1990:72) argues that Marx's 'false consciousness' occurs in 'thick' and 'thin' versions:

"The thick version claims that a dominant ideology works its magic by persuading subordinate groups to believe actively in the values that explain and justify their own subordination. The thin theory on the other hand maintains only that the dominant ideology achieves compliance by convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable. The thick theory claims consent; the thin theory settles for resignation".
Similarly, based on an analysis of large-scale British workplace data, Peccei (2004; 2007) questioned whether the set of HR practices that are good for management, from the point of view of enhancing productivity, for example, are necessarily also equally good for employees in terms, for instance, of enhancing their well-being. This clearly raises important questions about potential trade-offs between organizational performance and employee well-being in contemporary organizations, and the role that HRM plays in such trade-offs (Peccei, 2004). Paauwe (2007) argues that more research is needed to examine the benefits of a 'value-laden' approach for management as well as for employees and other stakeholders.

3.3 HRM-performance (HRM-P) research

The dominant stream of HRM research since the 1990s has explored the link between HRM and performance. This reflects a common belief in both the business and the academic world that the human resources of an organisation (rather than the technology, products or marketing strategies) can be a source of competitive advantage, provided that the policies for managing people are integrated with strategic business planning and organisational culture (Beer et al, 1985):

‘The distinctive feature of HRM is its assumption that improved performance is achieved through people in the organisation.’ (Guest, 1997:269)

Subsequently, across the Western World and beyond, a raft of practices have emerged that attempt to ensure that the people management within an organisation is successfully aligned with business strategy in the hope of facilitating success.

HRM-performance research assumes the managerial perspective. HRM is conceptualised in terms of carefully designed combinations of practice (variously defined and often referred to as 'the black box') that are geared to enhancing organisational effectiveness and performance. Boxall and Macky (2009) explain that any ‘HR system’ encompasses two broad types of practices; employment (i.e. concerning the recruitment and deployment of workers in line with the job and organizational requirements) and work practices (i.e. the way work is organised e.g. self-managing teams). It is argued that together, these practices, embedded in an HR system, should affect performance on multiple levels from the collective to individual (Purcell et al, 2003).

The urgent issues within this mainstream HRM discourse are how to make HRM more effective in achieving managerial interests, and how to forge ever tighter links between HR
work and firm financial performance. Numerous studies by academics and management consultants have attempted to find causal links between particular 'bundles' of HR practice which simultaneously promoting employee 'high commitment' and 'high performance' and producing measurable firm performance (Huselid, 1995; Purcell et al, 2003; Fleetwood and Hesketh 2006; Huselid 1995; Guest et al, 2003; Wright and Snell, 2005). While opinion varies as to which HR practices are most closely correlated, if not causally linked with performance, the most extensively adopted performative practices within organisations include performance management and variable (performance-related) pay. Other high performance work practices include team working and practices derived from so-called 'Japanese management' methods, such as continuous improvement and 'six sigma'.

3.3.1 Does HRM really deliver performance?

With respect to theories which really link HRM to performance, the field has advanced from rather simplistic models in the 1990s in which HR practices were simply shown or assumed to correlate directly to rather distal indicators of (financial) performance, to more sophisticated ways of thinking about the relationship between HRM and performance. 'High commitment' practices in particular are commonly thought to lead to high performance since they are assumed to affect the attitudes and behaviour of employees at individual level which, in turn, affect key behavioural or HR outcomes which, subsequently, might impact on organizational or firm-level outcomes.

However, the 'evidence' that has been presented about how HRM achieves its objectives is highly contestable, as is the meaning and role of HRM in relation to other business practices. As Manning (2010:151) points out, "there is a need to question the veracity of the link between Human Resource Management (HRM) and performance." Boselie et al (2005: 80-81) analysed 104 studies of HRM and concluded that 'no consistent picture exists of what HRM is or even what it is supposed to do' and because of the 'sheer variety of methods used for measuring HRM, performance and the relationship between the two, it is not possible to compare results from different studies'.

Similarly, in a detailed analysis charting 25 years of HR practice in Great Britain, Guest and Bryson (2008:142) observe that, although personnel management is now more embedded and more professionalized than in the past, their overall results "are almost the opposite of those we expected to find. There is precious little evidence to support the assumption that HR practices have improved performance". They go on to suggest that where personnel specialists are present, including qualified specialists, performance tends, if anything, to be
poorer. This raises challenging questions for the personnel profession and has also created residual analytical problems; in particular, a failure to develop a coherent theorization of HRM. This issue has increasingly exercised leading proponents of HRM (see Guest 2001; Paauwe 2004; Boselie et al, 2005). My research explores the accounts of their role by a number of senior HR practitioners and their views will be discussed in Chapter Six.

3.4 HR’s own change journey

Within the mainstream HRM discourse, the case has long been made for the HR function to provide cost-efficient and effective HR services that are perceived to add value to its ‘customer base’, including employees, line managers, the senior management team and relevant external stakeholders. These issues can be understood within the long-running debate about the changing roles of HR professionals (e.g. Legge, 1995; Tyson and Fell, 1986; Ulrich, 1997). As a result, the HR function has itself undergone large-scale structural transformations in HR service delivery to reduce costs, increase firm competitiveness and achieve a tighter alignment between HR practices and business strategy. The HR transformation agenda is also being shaped by talk of ‘reputational drivers’ - as employers seek more sophisticated technocratic means to link their people strategy and the company brand in order to achieve differentiation in the labour market (Martin, 2008; Leary-Joyce, 2004). The evolution of the HR function is summarised in the following table:

Figure 3.2: From personnel to business partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approximate Dates</th>
<th>Key Business Issues</th>
<th>HR Role</th>
<th>Title for Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920s – 1930s</td>
<td>Organizational Growth</td>
<td>Hiring, Training, and Caring for Employees</td>
<td>Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Technologies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s – 1970s</td>
<td>Diversification</td>
<td>Productivity</td>
<td>Employee Relations/Labour Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Negotiations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s – 1990s</td>
<td>International competition</td>
<td>Downsizing</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shift to Services</td>
<td>Change Programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Performance Management/Rewards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 +</td>
<td>Globalisation</td>
<td>Talent Development</td>
<td>HR Business Partner/Strategic HRM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Strategic Capabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reinvention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: After Mercer Delta Consulting
A specific spur to the emerging form of HR structures was the publication of Ulrich's book *Human Resource Champions: the Next Agenda for Adding Value and Delivering Results* (1997). Ulrich promoted a business-oriented philosophy of HRM and proposed an HR Business Partner model by which HRM was urged to align itself with business strategy and so organise itself to be able to 'partner' with the business. In its more developed form this would mean that HRM would be systematized and focused around an organisation's strategic planning functions where decisions about the deployment of staff are seen in relation to the financial and market pressures which impact upon it. (Esland et al, p.162). While there is no single model of business partnering, generally it is seen as a way forward for HR staff to build greater links with senior managers and the strategic aims of their organizations, so requiring them to gain and display greater business awareness and skills, and often internal advisory, coaching and mentoring skills (Caldwell, 2008).

Despite the inherently contested nature of HR discourse, it has been evident for some time in mainstream HRM writing, increasingly consensus in orientation (Keegan and Boselie 2006), that HR work is largely framed as a business issue and the hegemonic project of commerce is now widely naturalised within mainstream HRM theory (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006). The notion that HRM is primarily about the business, and this acceptance of HR's business-facing priorities is manifest in the development of HR business partnership as part of the academic discourse (Paauwe, 2007; Kenton and Yarnell, 2005; Reilly and Williams, 2006, Lepak et al, 2005; Guetal and Stone, 2005).

The unitarist and technocratic (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996) framing of HR transformation as 'natural' and 'self-evident' plays an important role in obscuring questions around HR's role in advocating employee well-being, and is a theme that I will develop throughout this thesis. Such transformations are presented as urgent and inevitable, and the morphing of ordinary HR practitioners into HR business partners seen as a natural step in the evolution of HR work in a globally competitive environment (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005).

The 'HR Transformation' agenda has spawned a rich new stream of research into new HR service delivery models (e.g. Martin et al, 2008). Integrated HR functions are being replaced (wholly or partially) with variations of the 'Ulrich' framework of operational delivery through shared services, 'centres of excellence/expertise' and business partnering, with strategic alignment achieved through a small corporate centre (Reilly et al, 2007). 'Centres of expertise' refer to the concentration of advice on HR specialisms such as recruitment,
development and legal services, often as part of a shared services centre (Reilly and Williams, 2003).

The development of shared services models is primarily driven by cost reduction and service efficiency goals, with provision often outsourced to third party suppliers. These represent a highly integrationist approach to centralizing HR administrative and operational processes, related to the desire of the HR function to make line managers and employees more responsible and accountable for their own HR data in the form of technology-mediated self-service often referred to as 'e-HR'. With respect to e-HR, the sub-text could therefore be seen as largely Taylorist, as being about more centralized control (Linstead, 2005), making people do more for less, putting workers under increased surveillance and increasing job instability as the employment relationship and the psychological contract are re-engineered.

As research into the field of HR Transformation has grown, new theoretical frameworks have emerged to explore the 'absorptive capacity' of HR functions, and the problems faced in moving from face-to-face HR to a technology-mediated model associated with the segmentation of roles, distancing of HR from employees and front-line managers and imbalance between business-focused and people-centred roles (Martin et al, 2009; Hope-Hailey et al, 2005; Keegan and Francis, 2008).

There is also a narrowing of focus in the mainstream HRM research agenda which is now dominated by a concern with the HRM-performance issue (Paauwe, 2004; Keenoy, 2009) and the need for the HR function to transform itself in order to fulfil its business function. In this discourse, HR work is considered too important to be left to HR managers, and is in fact ideally carried out by line managers and senior executives (Beer 1997. In fact, line and general managers have been instrumental in the adoption of HRM - often pushing changes through despite the resistance of personnel specialists (Storey, 2001:7).

These issues can also be understood as part of the debate about the centrality of line managers in the enactment of HRM practice (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Purcell and Kinnie, 2006). This includes a body of literature that draws on the construct of the psychological contract and perceived organizational support (POS), to examine this pivotal role of line managers and associated 'black box' of processes that link HRM with organizational performance (e.g. Boselie et al, 2009; Purcell and Hutchison, 2007; Boxall and Purcell, 2008).
A relatively neglected area of research concerns the question of the potentially conflicted identities of HR practitioner with respect to the roles they are required to carry out under the HRM/ business partner discourse. This is an area I address in this thesis.

3.5 Critical management (CMS) and Critical HRM (CHRM) perspectives

As the debate about the HRM 'black box' has heightened, more intellectual space is being given to critical management studies in HR research (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010; Spicer et al, 2010). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a comprehensive review of CHRM literature. A selection of arguments are presented below, and my methodology chapter will outline key theoretical underpinnings to this particular study and signal to the reader ways in which this resonates with current debates within the field. Key critical research themes include the ineluctable control of employee subjectivities (Rose, 1999; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), the management of meaning (Gowler and Legge, 1983) and the cultural construction of employee identities (Keenoy and Anthony, 1992). For Keenoy (2009:466) what unites all critical HRM perspectives is a concern with the absence of any meaningful consideration of social power, differential interests, cultural variation and potential value conflict in the HRM literature. The commonest approach adopted by critical theorists is some form of discourse analysis.

Watson (2010) summarises three broad themes which characterise the CMS/CHRM agenda and have direct relevance to a contemporary understanding of HRM. These are an overriding emphasis on the socio-political context of social action; a wide-ranging critique of management discourse (or 'denaturalization' – see Chapter Four); and a concern to include excluded and alternative voices in any account of management practice. I shall explore these literature themes over the next few sections.

3.5.1 Emphasis on the socio-political context

In contrast to mainstream HR theory, with its primary focus (echoing the philosophical concerns of market individualism) centred on the psychology of the employee and on such factors as individual motivation, discretionary effort and commitment, CMS assumes that the practice of management can only be understood in the context of the wider social-economic, political and cultural factors which shape - if not determine - those practices. Of fundamental significance here are the essentially capitalist economic relations which are seen to regulate
the global economy. In this respect, CMS has an explicitly political agenda which draws its inspiration from an eclectic mix of Marxian, Weberian, post-structuralist and humanist roots.

Legge (1995) was among the first of the commentators who critically questioned the consequences for HRM of the economic determinism of neo-liberalism. Legge’s work (2001) critically evaluates and confronts the rhetoric of organizations with the realities of practitioner existence in a post-modern context (Keenoy, 1999). Herriot and Pemberton (1997:46) argue that, with the advent of HR ideology and practice, the implicit assumption in many formulations (that employees are human capital to be deployed in the interests of business) has frequently been expressed in practices which operate upon that human resource without its consent.

For instance HRM came to be seen as an influential element in theory about the high-performance manufacturing organization, often referred to as the ‘Japanese model’. The dominant discourse in this literature is about the apparent success of certain manufacturers in combining ‘high-commitment’ HR practices and ‘team-based work systems’ with the technical features of ‘flexible production’ plants such as Just-in-Time (JIT) and Total Quality Management (TQM) and the ‘lean production’ model of manufacturing management. The ‘Japanese’ model and lean production have been used to argue that employees no longer need the protection of trade unions from their employer since a new unitarism will characterize contemporary workplace relations.

The debate around ‘Japanese practices’ centres on whether this combination of tightly controlled technical systems with flexible, high-commitment, team-based social systems that incorporate increased worker skill and involvement is a ‘universalistic model’ which can and should be transposed, regardless of setting. Theorists question how well these new approaches are working in practice and whether the benefits outweigh the costs. Delbridge (1998) for example, in his study of two manufacturing plants using Japanese methods found strong evidence to question the intentions of management at the plants with regard to worker participation and also that the workers themselves were not persuaded to contribute discretionary effort. The research shows that the workers at the two plants had not identified with, nor accepted, managerial goals. They were experiencing a harsh and coercive managerial regime and were complying because they believed that they ‘had to’.

According to Watson (2010), CMS’s motivating concern is the social injustice and environmental destructiveness of the broader social and economic systems that these managers and organizations serve and reproduce, rather than focusing simply on the
practices of managers themselves. As Watson points out, such a position stands in sharp contrast to mainstream management research, both by reintroducing pluralism and by analytically privileging a concern with the structures of domination and the distribution of power within and between organizations. This suggests that an understanding of how the employment relationship is structured and regulated and a concern with how managers manage such endemic potential conflicts ought to be at the heart of HRM. At present, this is not the case: the employment relationship is treated very much as a given, part of the 'background' context; and its complex impact on managerial practice is of marginal concern (Boselie et al., 2009; Keenoy, 2009).

3.5.2 New capitalism as ‘discourse-driven’

Fairclough (2003) argues that the common idea of new capitalism as a ‘knowledge-based’ or ‘knowledge-driven’ socio-economic order implies that it is also ‘discourse-driven’, suggesting that language may play a more significant role in contemporary socio-economic changes than it has had in the past. If so, discourse analysis has an important contribution to make to research on the transformations of capitalism. Underpinning neo-liberal thinking is the discourse of market individualism. Moreover ‘work’ has become the ground upon which the modern ‘self’ defines its life and managerial discourses such as HRM are now central to the modern political, social and cultural body.

Organisational discourses frame how people think about the world around them, their identity and the nature of the employment relationship. In this sense discourse can be seen as a set of ‘rules’ that shape the way people construct their world (Watson, 2002; Fairclough, 2001). That is because, although discourses are concerned with language, they extend beyond it to shape consciousness and action. Foucault used the concept of discourse as a ‘framework and logic of reasoning that, through its penetration of social practice, systematically forms its objects, than as any use of language in a social context’ (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000:250).

Foucault (1977) traced the role of discourses in wider social processes of legitimating and power, emphasizing the construction of current truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them. Foucault argued that power and knowledge are interrelated and therefore every human relationship is a struggle and negotiation of power. Different forms of knowledge are in the service of power, and they function in a disciplinary way, amongst other things by establishing normality and deviation. Established conceptions
in science and other societal institutions thus contribute to regulating the self-consciousness and the actions of individuals.

Discourses work in three ways: they enable, they constrain and they constitute (Storey, 2002:129). Coining the phrase 'power-knowledge' Foucault (1980) stated that knowledge was both the creator of power and creation of power. Discourse is related to power, according to Foucault (1977, 1980, 2004), since it operates by rules of exclusion. Power produces reality: through discourses it produces the truths we live by, as well as constrains the truth. Discourse therefore is controlled by objects, what can be spoken of; ritual, where and how one may speak; and the privileged, who may speak (2004:29). If ideas are believed, they establish and legitimate particular 'regimes of truth'. Modern societies create regimes of truth that are enforced by power structures or the truth-generating apparatuses of society (schools, disciplines, professions, laws).

3.5.3 HRM discourse

Following the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies across many of the world's economies from the late 1980s onwards, HRM has become consolidated by mobilising cultural resources external to work organisations and thus developed a variety of vocabularies and practices through which subjectivity has become the central element of the management of people at work. By applying managerial concepts such as 'customers', 'return on investment' and 'markets' to HRM, both the nature of work and labour itself becomes commodified (Grey and Mitev 1995a).

During the 1980s both 'practical' business discourse and textbooks transitioned from speaking of 'personnel management' in favour of 'human resource management' (often modified with the related terms 'strategic' or strategy'). The very term 'human resources' is itself contentious. 'Personnel' are persons and people, and as such, are subjects. 'Human resources', as assets and property for supplying 'some want', are objects. Inkson (2008:272) argues that while treating people as a resource to be invested in, rather than as a cost to be minimised is a 'step in the right direction', emphasis on the 'resource' metaphor means that labour continues to be treated as a commodity, to be used as management sees fit. As objects, employees may be treated discursively as one would with other 'material resources', making them subject to discussions of economic optimization, without recourse to analysis of the impact of actions on living and breathing human beings.
I argue that this discursive shift represents more than just a change in jargon, but rather reflects a change in managerial mindset. As objects whose cost must be minimized, the discursive construction of employees as ‘human resources’ has then allowed for other managerialist discourses such as ‘re-engineering’, ‘right sizing’ and ‘outsourcing’. This unitarist and ‘technocratic’ (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996) framing of HR transformation as ‘natural’ and ‘self-evident’ plays an important role in obscuring questions around HR’s role in advocating employee well-being, and is a theme that I develop throughout this thesis.

As Francis and Keegan (2007) point out, within this discursive space, the expressed priorities of HR work change over time and are a source of debate and contention. Discursive resources reflect different understandings of the priorities of HR work, and are invoked to influence the way language constructs particular types of HR reality and governs the way HR issues are talked about, understood and experienced (Harley and Hardy, 2004). While for some scholars and practitioners, the protection and advocacy of employee interests are integral to HR work where the ethical treatment of workers is emphasized (Winstanley and Woodall 2000; Legge 1999; Kochan 2004), for others the main priority of HR work is to contribute to firm competitive advantage and maximize the returns to shareholders.

Schuler (1992), for example, emphasized that the HR function had the opportunity to shift from being an 'employee advocate' (associated with personnel management) to a 'member of the management team'. Schuler’s view was that this required HR professionals to be concerned with the bottom-line, profits, organizational effectiveness and business survival. In other words, human resource issues should be addressed as business issues. In similar vein, the extensive business-driven restructuring of organisations of all sizes and sectors in recent years is often presented as an inevitable response to market requirements, rather than as a strategic choice which involves shedding jobs to save labour cost.

Keenoy and Anthony (1992) contend that HRM manufactures, mediates and administers cultural transformation in an environment of work softened up by recession and unemployment. More broadly, from a critical perspective, HRM reflects:

‘(...) implicit issues of performativity, surveillance, information and communication technologies, empowerment, self-actualisation, the demise of hierarchies, individualism and instrumentality as well as aspects of consumerism and consumption-based values’ (Foley et al, 1999:170).
Delbridge and Keenoy (2010) argue that the discursive attempt to leverage maximum advantage from what Legge (1995) calls the twin discourses of the ‘market’ and the ‘community’ – which differentiate the so-called ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ approaches to HRM - may be one reason why so much attention has been paid to deconstructing the ethical pretensions of the discourse of HRM.

Such discourses serve to conceal the tensions inherent in the management-employee power relationships and the gaps between rhetoric and the reality of employee or practitioner experience, as described by Legge. In Chapter 7, the discourse of senior Human Resource professionals interviewed as part of this study is analysed in order to assess the nature of HRM priorities from a practitioner perspective.

3.5.4 The manipulation of meaning and shaping of subjectivities

Critical researchers pay attention to the processes through which structured antagonism is realized, and to the discourses which are deployed to legitimize inequalities of power and persuade social actors to accept and endorse managerial objectives. Discourses not only order the possibilities for thought and speech, but also who is so authorised to do. For Foucault, discourses are:

‘(...) practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak... they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention’ (1977: 49).

Much has been written about the politics, ethics and practicalities of ‘meaning-making’ in the workplace which are reflected in the way the ‘levers’ of HRM draw on the language of commitment and engagement and are used to shape people’s understanding and behaviours (e.g. Keenoy, 1997; Legge, 2005). The question of how subjectivities are shaped is therefore pertinent to this study. Whether, and why, employees have acquiesced to these demands is a key focus of my thesis, as is the question of how subjectivities are shaped (research questions 2 and 5). In the next section literature relating to the ‘shaping’ role of HRM is examined.

In research question 3, I ask: How do HRM practices contribute to the development and perpetuation of the new work culture? Neo-liberalism characteristically develops indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals without being responsible for them. At state level, governments exercise governmentality (Foucault, 1978) by establishing specific ends, means to these ends, and particular practices that should lead to these ends. Of course,
attempting to control outcomes in such ways may have unintended consequences. As Marquand (2009) points out, in the state sector, relentless targeting may well have made public services, such as teaching, narrower and more instrumental.

Governmentality is contingent upon the structuring of knowledge for the purposes of regulating, supervising and governing specific groups of individuals: knowledge is necessary to the operation of disciplinary power. Foucault’s concepts of ‘regimes of truth’ and ‘technologies of power’ also provide useful additions to neo-Marxian understandings of power and knowledge. These concepts may also be considered as complementary to social constructionist analyses of knowledge. Foucault identified a number of technologies of power through which governmentality is achieved – the technologies of the market, and of self, through which individuals transform themselves in order to attain a certain state. One technology of self – responsibilisation - entails subjects transforming social risks such as unemployment into a problem of ‘self-care’ (Lemke, 2001:201), all of which, critical scholars would argue, are manifest in HRM.

Within organisations, HRM functions exercise governmentality in a very real way since they organize practices (mentalities, rationalities, and techniques) through which subjects (employees) are governed. Mainstream HRM academics, over the past ten years or so, have provided an almost unique, humanistically-inclined voice among the seductive, dominant discourses of ‘business as usual’ despite the adverse impacts of increasing competitiveness on the quality of life. Keenoy and Anthony (1992) argue that the language of Human Resource Management is riddled with metaphors and rhetorical devices used to hide the harsh realities of the ‘Thatcherite’ free enterprise effects on many businesses. They argue that managers become missionaries in this context, using the figurative language of HRM as an evangelical discourse to elicit enthusiasm and commitment from staff.

In HRM discourse the ever-changing working conditions and new concepts of flexibility, teamwork, decentralisation, control and delayering are presented as offering new opportunities for self-fulfilment to employees, but in reality these create new forms of oppression, ultimately disorienting individuals and undermining their emotional and psychological well-being (Sennett, 1998). For instance the UK Skills Survey (Felstead et al., 2007) found that ‘teams’ merely accentuate the stress and pressure experienced by employees by intensifying the control and monitoring of their work.

As I shall discuss in later chapters, the impact of organisational change on employees is often perceived by them to be harsh. Bunting (2004) argues that the weakening of the trade
union movement, neo-liberalism and New-Ageist ideology have all contributed to a work environment that is more and more intolerable for workers. She argues that work has enslaved us, as it has taken over our consciousness, creating psychological hardships such as stress and burnout, with the result that other aspects of our lives suffer, such as family relationships and queries why employees appear to have acquiesced to these working conditions.

Another technology of power - normalisation - works on the basis that those who wish to achieve 'normality' will do so by working on themselves, controlling their impulses in everyday conduct and habits, and inculcating norms of conduct into others, with norms enforced through the calculated administration of shame (Rose, 1999:73). It achieves its ends by causing workers to 'work on self' to conform to what they believe is required of them. Such 'power-knowledge' mechanisms are thought to play a decisive discursive role in constituting employee subjectivities to ensure that employee performance(s) can be 'managed'. Barbara Townley (1993, 1994, 2004), a significant exponent of Foucault's postmodernist notions, focuses on how HR practices impact on employee sensibilities and privilege the regulatory effects of such practices.

Foucault theorized that discourse is a medium through which power relations produce speaking subjects. Subjectivity itself, as a complex, contradictory and shifting view of the self, is transformed or reproduced through social practices, which express power (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 541). Foucault took the view that historically and culturally determined practices precede and form subjects. The individual is an effect of power. As Rowan and Cooper (1999:2) put it:

'Within a modern world characterized by 'one man, one job'- along with such 'grand narratives' as linear development, progress, and the scientific search for truth – the notion of an autonomous, singular self moving towards its own most future seems deeply credible, to the point of being transparent. But in a world characterized by multi-fragmented social positioning and the deconstruction of absolute truths, the notion of a unified self begins to stand out like a relic from a bygone era. In its stead, postmodern thinking has heralded the 'death of the subject' swallowed up by the 'blank and pitiless' (Gergen, 1991:157) forces of language games, discourses and texts. From this perspective, subjectivity is no longer the writer but the written; no longer the signified but a signifier in a two-dimensional world of free-floating, interconnected signifiers.'

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Winstanley and Woodall (2000) produced a sustained ethical critique of HRM discourse, arguing that such quasi-normality contrasts starkly with the waves of dishonesty and venality as necessarily animate the commercial world. With its stereotypical claim that ‘people are our most valued assets’ HRM is a discourse that encourages employees to ‘work on self’ often to the detriment of their own wellbeing. Even the language framing of ‘soft’ commitment-seeking models of HRM ‘bespeaks passivity by the employee’. Wood (1989) argues that high performance approaches or ‘high involvement’ and ‘high commitment’ practices, such as the development of shared visions, individualized reward and direct employee communications, are just another way for managers to gain control over labour through ‘attitudinal restructuring’. Willmott (1993:517) goes further, arguing that many of the ‘soft’ or high commitment best practice approaches to HRM amount to ‘governance of the employees’ soul.’ From this position, the ‘manipulation of meaning’ by employers (Townley, 1998; Francis, 2007) and contemporary managerial rhetorical ambition, now embraces ‘the subject in its totality as an object of governance’ (Costea et al, 2008:670). As Ball (1994: 22) notes:

'We are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows.'

But are employees powerless to resist and unable to exercise agency in such contexts? Understanding of agency within the field of HRM is relatively weak and both CHRM and HRM-P streams have been criticised for sharing a common view of the worker as essentially ‘objects’ that are being exploited to the benefit of the organisation, thereby slipping into some kind of structural determinism (Fleetwood and Hesketh, 2010).

As discussed in chapter one, Giddens’s structuration theory (1986) conflates structures and agents, seeing connections between the most ‘micro’ aspects of society - individuals' internal sense of self and identity - and the big 'macro' picture of the state, multinational capitalist corporations, and globalisation. Archer (1995:14) criticizes the ‘elisionism’ of Giddens’s structuration theory, arguing that structure should be reconceptualised since today’s context of rapid change represents ‘untramelled genesis between the cultural and structural domains’, producing ‘new games’. This, Archer proposes, is evident in the fast changing nature of work and employment such as in the end of ‘jobs for life’ and the global transfer of skills. In everyday life people will have to confront more discontinuities and the scope for routine action is reduced. To cope with this ‘new game’, Archer argues, calls for greater reflexivity at all levels. This is the mental capacity of all normal people to consider themselves in relation to their social contexts and their society contexts in relation to
themselves. In this study I explore the reflections of white collar workers, with respect to their perceived loss of meaning within the new work culture (research question 4).

### 3.5.5 Excluded voices

What unifies the critical accounts is a concern about the absence of any meaningful consideration of social power, differential interests, cultural variation and potential value conflict in the HRM literature. As CHRM theorists point out, the fundamental shift in the move to HRM involved the replacement of a ‘pluralist’ framing of the issues - in which the employment relationship is understood to involve and articulate differential interests - with a ‘unitary’ and managerialist framing of the issues - in which all members of an organization are assumed to have mutual interests.

This mainstream framing of HRM has resulted in more and more alternative voices being excluded. Such a perspective ‘naturally’ marginalizes the possible contribution of those ‘external’ to the organization, such as the state or trade unions, as significant actors in devising HRM policies and practices. It also excludes overtly pluralist perspectives such as those described as traditional personnel management or old-style industrial relations (Francis and Sinclair 2003) where HR practitioners had a clear role in balancing the interests of workers and employers. Within mainstream HRM literature there is little specific reference to unionized workplaces or to the rise in highly repetitive and highly programmed call-centre work arising from the various forms of sub-contracting to which HRM itself has been exposed in the pursuit of greater flexibility and cost-effectiveness (Kinnie and Deery 2004). Other excluded voices in the employment relationship within mainstream HRM are small and medium-sized firms, feminists and the potentially rich diversity of cultural influences thanks to globalization. Any employment relations not characterized by HR ‘bundles’ (MacDuffie, 1995) are marginalized or excluded.

Scott describes the ‘new industrial relations’ as comprising techniques which emphasize that employment should theoretically be founded upon extensive mutual obligations and a shared sense of dedication towards a common goal. In reality, mutuality of interest may be largely missing. Keenoy (2009) argues that the adoption of the managerialist conception of the discourse of HRM which has come to dominate research over the last thirty years, has meant that the analysis of employment management has become increasingly ‘myopic and progressively more irrelevant to the daily experience of being employed’ (Keenoy 2009:456).
Scott (1994:5) points out that, in practice, the balance of power in the employment relationship has shifted towards managers:

'Driven by awareness of greater market competition, the ascendancy of 'realism' may therefore have encouraged managers to believe that their decisions no longer required workers' approval'.

The most obvious voices that are routinely marginalized in the evaluation and analysis of management practices are those of employees themselves (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010). Yet employees are, after all, the primary recipients and consumers of HRM. At best employees are assumed to have a passive role, irrespective of what approach is adopted (Grant and Shields, 2002). This includes managers who, more often than not, are subject to the same discourses of control as any other employees. Legge (1978) produced a highly sophisticated and innovative analysis of the personnel function which focused on the relative powerlessness of those entrusted with people management. The power relations implicit in such role relationships will be examined to some extent later in this thesis.

### 3.6 Performativity

Thus critical HRM scholars represent HRM practices as a means by which employees are rendered subject to managerialism. Performativity, and its related Taylorist instruments, performs a similar shaping function. Performativity is "a policy technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition and change" (Ball, 2003:216). These policy technologies have the 'capacity to reshape in their own image the organisations they monitor' (Shore and Wright, 1999:570). Many theorists argue that the trend towards performativity, a process rooted in the political economy, is a product of the increasingly international nature of markets and capital, the intensifying competition between major corporations, and the growth of an enterprise culture based on individualism.

Sennett (2006) proposes that the new culture of capitalism arises from a move towards shareholder power in large companies, where empowered investors demand short term results rather than looking to the long term. The combined effect of unleashed capital and the pressure for short term returns has transformed institutions. Moreover, he argues, the advent of new information technologies has changed the style and substance of management. With email, for instance, directives can now be communicated from the top of organisations to all staff without the need for mediating and interpretative layers of bureaucracy. Having delivered the orders,
Sennett argues, bosses expect them to be acted on immediately. What he calls the ‘new regime’ views stability and routine as a sign of weakness in an economic environment that now prefers the language of innovation, new opportunities and enterprise.

Neo-liberal economic philosophy has also entailed a change in the view of how public operations should be run, going from a view of public administration and the older technologies of professionalism and bureaucracy to a view based on management and enterprise (Du Gay and Salaman, 1992). Braverman (1974) predicted that the extent of management definition of, and control over, professional work would increase. Performativity is quite deliberately geared to changing workplace cultures and underpins ‘reforms’ of the public sector to enable greater organisational flexibility and productivity (OECD 1995:29). These shifts have involved ‘giving managers greater freedom in operational decisions and removing unnecessary constraints in financial and human resource management’ (OECD, 1995:29).

Much of the academic literature on performativity focuses on changes within the UK’s education sectors which were implemented by the Labour governments (1997-2010). The political goal of performativity involves installing work cultures supportive of neo-liberal managerialism, and undermining cultures which could potentially compete with, or be a source of critique of such practices. Ball argues that in the case of Education, performativity, the market and managerialism are three interrelated policy technologies used to ‘reform’ the education sector to the ends of business. Within the broad strategy to produce stronger links between education outputs and the requirements of a capitalist economy, the manner in which education is delivered is increasingly subject to market scrutiny and commercial management practices and values.” (Hatcher, 2001:48).

Ball makes the connection between policy decisions taken by New Labour and their “rendering of education itself into the commodity form” (1999:198). It would seem that performativity is a key plank in realising Braverman’s prediction that all forms of work would eventually be commodified and workers de-skilled. For Ball (2003:217) what helps create these new work cultures is the constant flow of changing demands and related structure of surveillance:

“(…) a flow of performativities... expectations and indicators that makes us continually accountable and constantly recoded”.

New roles and relationships are reflected in new terms. In professional settings such as schools, some teachers become ‘managers’ who have the right to assess the work of other
teachers. Within the public sector resources and responsibilities are split out so that work is carried out by 'suppliers' and assigned and measured by 'commissioners'. Ball (1999:190) argues that the reforming of relationships creates new power bases and subjectivities. Language reflects seemingly self-renewing 'regimes of truth' in Foucauldian terms, forming and legitimising market, management and individual-rights discourses, as well as the movement of consumerism (described by Bauman, 1998) into society. There is increasing polarisation of the workforce with respect to career opportunities, based on whether people are judged to be 'on-side' with managerial priorities and language. Recruitment activities gradually bring into organisations people who conform to the new work culture.

Ball (2003:216) argues that what have been lost with the erosion of professional cultures are values, integrity and an ethical basis for work. The new ethical systems are based upon institutional self-interest. This can be empowering for some but for others may require 'intensive work on the self' to set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation.

Sennett (2006) has charted the disorienting effects and personal consequences for workers of this form of capitalism with its short-termist regimes. He argues that the alienation that was once considered the preserve of the old proletariat is now being experienced by workers in the 'knowledge economy' and public sector. He argues that the work ethic is changing, that new beliefs about merit and talent are displacing old values of craftsmanship and achievement and that 'careers' are no longer a meaningful concept. In The Corrosion of Character, Sennett (1998) argues that, with the degradation of work, pride among workers has dissipated and people don't look "long-term". In today's workplace one must be very flexible, therefore loyalty and commitment are not part of a fast-paced, "short-term" society. Workers know that they are simply a tool that can be replaced with the twist of a wrench. Consequently, Sennett argues, people's interests are with themselves. People don't look at what they can offer, but instead at what they want to receive. In such a context, Sennett argues, people struggle to sustain a life narrative that comes out of their work. As a result, Sennett (1998) argues, personal character is corroded.

### 3.6.1 Work as commodity

The shifts towards performative work cultures reflect the conceptualization of work as commodity from mainstream (neoclassical) economic theory. According to Labour Relations scholar John Budd (2010), when work is commodified in this way (conceptually), it is analysed as an economic quantity independent of non-economic concerns and ignores
issues of human agency and dignity. Work and workers are thus treated like any other factor of production, as ‘resources’.

Budd (2010) and others argue that commodity production has become the predominant mode of relation between worker and work, extending across ever wider reaches of society, touching every sphere of human existence and causing other conceptualisations of work to be overshadowed. For instance employment relations scholars see work as occupational citizenship – an activity undertaken by citizens with inherent equal worth who are entitled to certain rights and standards of dignity and self-determination, irrespective of what the market provides (Crouch, 1998).

The overshadowing of organisational citizenship by commodity conceptualisations of work is evident in Ulrich’s influential model of HR roles (1997), in which the roles of ‘employee champion’ and ‘administrator’ were considered to be tactical and therefore of lesser value than the strategic business partner and change agent roles. The unitarist managerial orientation of mainstream contemporary HRM theory embraces the notion that employees are ‘resources’ and costs to be managed. Moreover, when work is viewed as a commodity, its allocation is seen as governed by the impersonal “laws” of supply and demand in a free market. On the supply side, work is something that individuals choose to sell in varying quantities in order to earn income and maximize their individual or household utility.

The commodity conceptualisation of work is embedded within the new individualised HRM industrial relations and reflected in HR practices which install and reinforce performativity. In essence, HR practices are intended to ensure that organisations have the people required and the means of achieving performance from their workforces in the most productive and cost-effective way possible. The basis of shared purpose - the ‘common goal’ referred to by Scott (1994) - is about survival in the marketplace. Market survival applies not only to organisations but to individuals too:

‘Employees are simultaneously required, individually and collectively, to recognise and take responsibility for the relationship between the security of their employment and their contribution to the competitiveness of the goods and services they produce.’ (Willmott, 1993: 522).

Unless employees possess specific forms of labour power, they are essentially resources which can be deployed or dispensed with at the will of the employer. Contemporary HRM
practice may therefore be at odds with stereotypical organisational rhetoric such as ‘our people are our greatest asset’.

Brooks (2010) points out that Marx conceptualises alienation as a contradictory phenomenon. While commodity relations are alienating, workers are not blind to the realities of capitalist labour process (Lukacs, 1974). They strive to ameliorate their alienation through a mix of informal shop floor cultures, misbehaviour and even overt resistance (Linstead, 1996). Pragmatism and self-interest rather than professional judgment and ethics are the basis for new organisational language games’, or as (Bernstein, 1996:169) puts it, ‘value replaces values’.

3.6.2 Performative HRM practices

HRM practices have become a primary vehicle for enacting managerialism and performativity since they provide the mechanisms for creating the conditions within organisations in which employees are willing to apply their labour to performance goals. These include performance management systems and processes that appear to have a strong shaping and controlling effect on employee behaviours (Armstrong and Baron, 1998; Beardwell and Holden, 2001). Practices that are grouped in the mainstream human resource management literature under ‘performance management’ include appraisal interviews, 360-degree feedback, competence assessments, performance-related pay, peer appraisal, and others. These collectively constitute the ‘disciplinary practices’ regulating social behaviour at work. Their use has grown steadily in the private sector over the last twenty years particularly in medium-sized and large organisations (Bach, 2000) though within public sector institutions the emphasis on performance measurement and management is more recent.

The nature of control exercised through performative HRM is both explicit and subtle. From an organizational perspective, ‘HR practices send strong messages to individuals regarding what the organization expects of them and what they can expect in return’ (Rousseau, 1995: 162). HR practices represent communications, ‘calculated messages’ or ‘intended signals’ regarding the relationship between the employer and employee. Within organisations performance management is often marketed internally as being employee-focused since one of its ostensible aims is to ensure that employees can receive fair feedback and be appropriately rewarded for their performance. In practice, contrary to the views put forward by many mainstream HRM accounts of performance management practices that stress the development of innate qualities of individuals, critical scholars argue that mainstream HRM approaches construct a highly utilitarian approach to people management.
Such approaches encourage the discursive shaping of the 'individual project' i.e. employees self-regulate their attitudes and behaviours to be consistent with business needs (Townley, 1998). The employee is seen as an object to be practised on, and in this regard there is little acknowledgement of the agency role of employees (Grant and Shields 2002: Francis, 2006). So in performance appraisal discussions for example, as employees recount and evaluate their work experiences and ambitions, they do so in a situation where they are observed and judged by others in social (power) relations. Potentially, this has important effects on the way in which people look upon their working life. In this way, the employee's conception of the employment relationship shifts away from former collectivist ideas, toward a more individualist version, where the primary responsibility for performance lies with the employee and the primary risk in the employment relationship is theirs.

The new performative worker is an enterprising self, with a 'passion for excellence'. Ball (2003) points out that teachers, for instance, are encouraged to work on themselves, to think of themselves as 'enterprising subjects', or as 'neo-liberal professionals'. The requirement to comply or mould self according to the prescribed discourse of the 'good' worker can be an opportunity for some employees to make a success of themselves. For others, embracing such an identity creates cognitive dissonance, producing inner conflicts, inauthenticity and resistance. This, Ball argues, creates within employees "... a basis for ontological insecurity – are we doing enough?", leaving employees with constant doubts and uncertain self-worth (2003:220). This new subjectivity produces feelings of guilt and uncertainty; we act upon ourselves and one another in order to make us particular kinds of being (Rose, 1999:161).

Various surveys conducted by academics and consultants (e.g. Workplace Employment Relations Survey, 2008-DTI; Towers Watson, 2008; EAPM/Boston Consulting Group-Caye et al, 2008) provide evidence of increasingly performative organisational cultures, comprising a combination of systematic work intensification, profound employment insecurity and new forms of performance management which, together, produce a strong coercive impetus to drive employees to achieve ever more challenging work targets and higher performance.

The Tayloristic nature of these processes has resulted in a significant reduction in worker autonomy and an increase in work pressure. Official skills surveys show a significant decline in the proportion of workers who report that they have much influence over how they do their daily tasks – from 57% in 1992 to 43% in 2006 (Felstead et al, 2007). Gallie et al (2001) suggest that:
'(...) declining task discretion has played a major role in preventing a substantial rise in organizational commitment... changing forms of control make a further negative contribution' (p.1095).

Similarly Willmott (2003) refers to how new performance-driven production methods at a car plant placed workers under high levels of continuous stress. Even though workers believed that their jobs were secure and their prospects good, these traditional sources of anxiety were replaced by new ones based upon close monitoring of individual performance.

From a critical perspective, such practices form part of an array of managerial domination over work. Performance at individual, group and organisational levels is understood as capable of being dissected, measured and assessed. Measurement and monitoring are key features of performativity and, thanks to technologies, work and workers can be continuously monitored. Within call centre environments for instance the level of monitoring is overt; in other situations monitoring might be more subtle. Unlike in bureaucratic or professional cultures, where trust is an assumed feature of the work environment, performative cultures reflect the assumption that employees cannot be trusted to perform to the levels required.

Within the new (performative) work cultures, employees are subject to regular appraisal, review and performance comparisons. For those not able to perform at the level required, there are ‘managed exits’. With the ending of ‘jobs for life’ for white collar workers, continuous employment depends on an individual’s ability to meet specific standards and changing targets. Organisational flexibility and efficiency require that those who do not perform to the right standard are replaced by others who can. Such instrumental utility of the HRM banner without adoption of any HRM ideals has led to accusations of HRM being “amoral” (Miller, 1996) in that HRM becomes “a covert form of employee manipulation dressed up as mutuality”, whose aim, according to Fowler (1987), is to achieve “the complete identification of employees with the aims and values of business-employee involvement, but on the company’s terms”

The task of the manager is to instil the ‘attitude and culture within which the worker feels themselves accountable and at the same time committed or personally invested in the organisation’ (Ball, 2003:220). Given the instruments of performativity, there should be no requirement for ‘command and control’ management styles (McGregor’s ‘Theory X’ which assumes that workers cannot be trusted to work). After all, through HRM’s performative instruments, such as appraisals, reviews and performance-related pay, the individual performances of employees are made visible and the managed are ‘opened up’ to
assessment and control. Through HRM, managers are encouraged to embrace 'Theory Y'-the participative management styles which encourage employees to trust and share their best ideas with their employer. In practice, it could be argued that performativity instruments perform an ever-strengthening 'theory X function' within HRM practices purporting to theory Y.

As Ball (2003) points out, there is a paradox in that the apparent move away from 'low trust' methods of managerial control via high commitment HRM, in which management responsibilities are delegated and initiative valued, has been simultaneously matched by the installation of very immediate surveillance and self-monitoring in the form of appraisals etc. making employees subject to greater assessment and control. Smith and Reeves (2006:8) suggest that,

'The drive to accountability in all corners of organisational life - what Michael Power (2001) calls an 'audit explosion' - has meant that too many organisations are leaning too heavily on the rule book to the detriment of professional intuition and ethical behaviour'.

As a result, professionals become gradually subsumed and controlled within a set of standards and practices imposed by managers.

The activities of management drive performativity into practices and relationships (Gallie et al, 2001:1086) Lyotard (1984) argues that implicit within performativity is the law of contradiction. The economic drivers of performativity include strong cost management, therefore work is intensified while costs are reduced. However, the development in recent years of monitoring and evaluation regimes means that at institutional level there are two cost challenges: both from the intensification of first order work (e.g. to serve the customer) and also from the costs of second order activities such as performance monitoring and management. Consequently, in order to serve the customer and monitor performance costs go up.

Similarly, Watkins (2010) argues that, in a school context, a focus on learning can enhance performance, whereas a focus on performance (alone) can depress performance. The effects of performance orientation include greater helplessness, reduced help-seeking, more maladaptive strategies, and a greater focus on grade feedback. If performance orientation is dominant in the culture, without a learning orientation:
There is an increase in strategic behaviour; a focus on looking good rather than learning well’ (2010:5).

This, as Watkins points out, is not a strategy for success and I believe his comments have wider relevance, given the evidence I present in later chapters of this thesis.

Thus the literature suggests that a new work culture may have come into being. Its characteristics include short-termism, flexibility, managerialism, performativity and the replacement of direct, by indirect controls over the workforce. To better understand the impact of the new work culture on employees, as discussed in Chapter One, I will employ the concept of the psychological contract which has been widely used by analysts to explore the changing employment relationship between the individual and the organisation (Guest and Conway, 1997). In the next section contemporary debates about the psychological contract are outlined.

3.7 Psychological contract

The employment relationship has often been described as an exchange relationship between employees and employers (Rousseau, 1990; Guest, 1997; Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (1998). Whereas the traditional employment relationship model of industrial relations consists of ‘regulated exchange’ and collective representations between management and employees (Sparrow, 1996: 76), today’s exchanges with the employer are more individualised and run the risk of becoming unbalanced as well as unregulated.

Social exchange theory argues that, when one party gives something to another, it expects the other party to reciprocate by providing some contributions in return (Blau, 1964). As well as an explicit exchange, there are also more implicit and psychological or social exchange processes occurring within the workplace. Aspects of employment relationships such as job security, performance management, human capital development, opportunities for growth and the firm’s core philosophies of HRM may have a profound impact on the development of perceived mutual obligations (Rousseau, 2000; Francis and D’Annunzio-Green, 2005; Sparrow and Cooper, 2003). The employment relationship is therefore increasingly conceptualized as involving a ‘psychological contract’ which reflects the individual and subjective nature of the employment relationship.
Research has commonly focused on contract content and outcomes, i.e. the nature, scope and impact of exchanges between employer and employees (e.g. Rousseau et al., 2009; Guest et al., 2004). Critics argue that, in its present form, the concept of psychological contract symbolizes an ideologically-biased formula designed for a managerialist interpretation of contemporary work and employment (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006). Moreover, in terms of underlying constructs there remains no single accepted definition of the psychological contract and this exchange relationship is very complex and dynamic, with a wide range of factors shaping employee perceptions of how they experience the deal. Any psychological contract is malleable, since it is personal to every employee and will change as an individual's needs and expectations change over time.

Despite these difficulties, as Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000) point out, the psychological contract framework may be of particular value in understanding non-traditional employer-employee linkages since it provides a complementary or alternative framework for examining changes occurring in the employment relationship at the individual level. The extent of the balance/imbalance appears more important to the nature and health of the contract than the specific content of the contract.

3.7.1 Social and psychological contracts

Some authors argue that psychological contracts are strongly conditioned by existing and changing social contracts. Indeed Edwards and Karau (2007) question whether the changes taking place in the workplace are impacting the social contract or the psychological contract. They define a social contract as the set of norms, assumptions, and beliefs that society conceives as fair and appropriate for parties involved in employment relationships. This includes the general beliefs and norms pertaining to reciprocity, job security, loyalty, good faith, and fair dealings that should be maintained by employees and organizations. Most centrally, organizations significantly influence the social contract (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Different social contracts can exist that define what is appropriate behaviour in different societal contexts, such as employer-employee, teacher-student etc. Behaviour that is considered appropriate according to one social contract may be considered inappropriate under another (Clark and Waddell, 1985). Rowan and Cooper (1999) argue that individuals adapt to different social settings and roles as 'plural selves', and can thus operate successfully within different and changing contexts.
The psychological contract differs from the social contract in several ways. Whereas the social contract is developed at societal level and establishes assumptions and norms regarding a wide variety of employment relationships, the psychological contract is developed at an individual level and is the set of assumptions and expectations between a specific employee and a specific employer. Therefore, actions that may violate a specific individual psychological contract may be within the norms of the social contract. Thus, breach of a psychological contract between an employee and employer will be perceived at an individual level (Robinson and Morrison, 1995; Robinson et al, 1994), whereas violation of the social contract will, most likely, be perceived at an organizational or societal level.

With respect to career expectations for instance, various writers (Hakim, 1994; Ellig, 1998; Maxwell et al, 2000) suggest that the new employment relationship consists of a social contract requiring that employees be responsible for acquiring their own skills and employability. These changing social contract assumptions may or may not influence how individual employees view their psychological contract with their employer at any point in time. Edwards and Karau (2007) suggest that the interplay between the social contract and the psychological contract has been little explored.

### 3.7.2 Who speaks for the organisation?

The question about who speaks for 'the organization' in psychological contracting is under-theorized within employment relationship research and analysts warn against the anthropomorphising of the organisation in this regard, giving it its own human-like set of intentions (Herriot and Pemberton, 1997; Coyle-Shapiro and Shaw, 2007; Guest and Conway, 2001). While we naturally talk about organisations much of the time as if they had a more concrete existence, Watson (2002: 224) warns us of the risk of falling into a unitary language that oversimplifies the actual reality of organizational life, glossing over differing perceptions and values held by organizational members.

Notwithstanding this cautionary note, the personification of the organisation usefully allows people to find a way of relating to it (Lievens et al, 2007). In general however, it is assumed that the HR function plays a key role in the psychological contracting process since it is responsible for employer branding, recruitment and induction processes through which employee expectations are shaped before, or at the start of their employment.
3.7.3 Psychological contract fulfilment or breach

Social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity have been used as theoretical frameworks to explain how psychological contract fulfilment produces beneficial outcomes. For instance in what Tsui et al (1997) describe as the 'mutual investment model', there is a mutually beneficial transaction between an employer willing to ensure the wellbeing of the employee (e.g. health and wellbeing, career opportunities, training and appraisal), and an employee who knows what is expected and offers up the appropriate behaviours to meet those expectations. High mutual obligations are significantly more likely to lead to better outcomes for the organisation, such as higher employee commitment and the associated benefits of discretionary effort, pro-social organisational behaviours and so on.

In order for there to be social exchange, the employee has to be able to trust others to discharge their obligations. Guest (1997) argues that, from an employee standpoint, the value of the new psychological contract will be assessed according to:

- The extent to which the organisation has kept its promises/commitments about job security, careers and the demands of the job and workloads (delivery of the 'Deal')
- Trust in management to keep its promises and look after employee's best interests
- Fairness of treatment in general and specifically with regard to reward allocation

This ideal balance of interests is however unlikely to be achieved in a context of downsizing, ever-increasingly tight control of resources by employers, in which employees who survive redundancy are expected to take on increasing workloads.

There is ongoing debate amongst academic writers about the nature, extent and consequences for both parties of breach and violation. Breach of the psychological contract occurs when an employee feels that the organization has failed to deliver satisfactorily on its promises (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Rousseau, 1995). For example, if an employee's psychological contract is founded on the expectation that the organization will provide training and development opportunities, failure to do so results in a contract breach. However, since the psychological contract is perceptual, unwritten and hence not necessarily shared by the other party to the exchange (Rousseau, 1989; Lucero and Allen, 1994), employees and employers may hold different views on the content of the psychological contract and the degree to which each party has fulfilled the mutual obligations of the exchange.
Rousseau (1995) argues that, because psychological contract breach is a subjective experience which emanates from a sense-making process, its effects on employee behaviours may be influenced not only by situational variables (e.g. perceptions of (in)justice - Kickul et al., 2002) but also by individual difference characteristics (e.g. Ho et al, 2004; Raja et al, 2004). Some theorists argue that organisationally imposed change continues to threaten evolving forms of psychological contract (Hiltrop, 1996; Holbeche 1997) while Guest and Conway (2002), argue that the extent of the impact of change on employees has been exaggerated. They suggest that, despite the downsizings and restructurings of recent years, many elements of the so-called 'old' psychological contract have remained in place.

Amongst the possible causes of breach, HR policies and practices can and do represent implied promises or obligations on the part of the employer in the employee’s understanding of the contract (Guest and Conway, 1997). If employees perceive that the employer has changed the terms of their psychological contract without explicit negotiation, for instance when employers impose more flexible employment contracts, there is significant likelihood of ongoing psychological contract breach and violation, with potentially negative consequences for employees and employers. Circumstances like organisational timing (e.g. mergers) or market factors (e.g. redundancies, cutbacks) can lead to feelings that the contract has been broken (Turnley and Feldman, 2000).

Social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity are also used to explain how perceived psychological contract breach results in negative consequences. In such circumstances, employees tend to redress the balance in the relationship through reducing their commitment and their willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviours. If balance cannot be achieved longer term, one or both of the parties will seek to terminate the relationship. Fisk (2002) points out that not all employees feel the same about the new working environment and the psychological contract is constantly being redefined while Rousseau argues that some impacts will generically affect most employees. However, as Cappelli notes:

‘Managers who believe that they can draw up a new employment contract that will deliver high performance based on lowered expectations and heightened individual responsibility for ‘employability’ have some nasty shocks in store’ (in Sparrow and Cooper, 2003:60).
Moreover Herriot and Pemberton (1997) contend that, in addition to the mitigating factors identified by Guest (1997), the 'new deal' is also mitigated by perceptions of fairness such as workloads, equal opportunities, bullying in the workplace, pay and performance and working conditions. They argue that, from an employee perspective, the 'new deal' is violated mainly in these areas rather than by changes in career practice. In the current economic and employment climate, with pay freezes, public-sector pension issues and redundancies, perhaps the most obvious perceived collective psychological contract violation of all must be the one between the state and its staff. The implicit deal for public-sector employees was that, though paid less than workers in the private sector they would, in return, have more secure jobs and decent pensions. Even if employees do not blame the employer, what will such broken promises do to trust, commitment and the desire to perform well?

3.8 The psychological career contract

A major focus of psychological contract theory during the 1990s concerns careers, especially the shifting locus of responsibility for career management which was widely acknowledged to have moved from the employer to the employee. The reason for the prominence given to this issue was the destabilisation of the employment relationship described as the 'old' (paternalistic) psychological contract. For white collar workers this is typically described as based on mutual expectations that in return for job security, and the possibility of vertical promotion/career progression, the employee will work hard for, and be loyal to the employer. Essentially, such psychological contracts are based on an assumed 'relationship' between employer and employee; a belief that a good employer will 'look after' its employees.

While it might be argued that many of these assumptions were based on myths, nevertheless such beliefs were widespread and were reflected in career practices from the 1950s onwards when white collar workers would tend to work for one employer throughout their working life (or 'career'). However, the restructurings, downsizings and delayerings (or flattening of management hierarchies) of the 1990s challenged the assumptions underpinning the 'old deal' and the notion of a 'job for life' became anachronistic. The core elements of this old deal were to be replaced by a less clear-cut 'new deal', the development of which, and its impact on employees this thesis is concerned with charting.

In the context of ongoing change and a more diverse and 'boundaryless' employment landscape, the psychological contract is viewed in much of the literature as dynamic and evolving (Hall et al, 1996; Cappelli, 1999, McInnes et al, 2009). New kinds of employment contracts are emerging, in particular 'organisation-centred' contracts that tend to be imposed
and short term, giving the organisation greater control. The flexible firm theory, shortened planning horizons and internationalization of market forces have led management practices to stress labour force flexibility and reinforce market forces within the firm. There is a growing literature (Korten, 1999) which suggests that corporations themselves are the biggest causes of such turbulence, so much so that the main threat in the environment comes from other organisations. Cappelli (1999:243) argues that any single organization’s discretion is extremely limited and, in their quest for flexibility, employers will offer mainly short-term and unstable jobs.

Moreover McInnes et al’s research (2009) suggests that, rather than being restricted to contract workers, organisation-centred contracts are now applied to employees in general. With such psychological contracts, employees tend to show less normative and affective commitment. Herriot and Pemberton (1997) argue that the new employment relationships are no longer relational but strictly transactional, in which contributions and benefits are actively negotiated, with the risk in the employment relationship resting with the individual. Guest’s research suggests that employees working for large organisations are likely to experience a poorer psychological contract than those working in small and medium size organisations.

3.8.1 The ‘New Deal’

One of the best known texts about the new psychological contract -which the authors refer to as the ‘New Deal’ - is by Herriot and Pemberton (1995a) who present a contextual and processual model of the new psychological contract. They describe elements of the modern career as follows:

- In place of promotion and job security, employees should focus on employability and job portability.
- In place of loyalty, employers should focus on enabling high performance and developing high commitment work practices.

Employers are demanding more flexible hours and ways of working from employees (Herriot et al, 1997; Johns. 2001). People remain employed on the basis of their current value to the organisation, as opposed to long service and seniority. Thus key factors in the ‘new deal’, both explicit and implicit, include various aspects of the employment contract such as career development, job security, training and employability.
There are two popular theses on this topic. The first is labelled the 'employability thesis' (Rajan, 1997) which suggests that 'enlightened' employers have been offering a new deal to employees since they can no longer offer job security. The assumption is that the modern employee will be 'flexible' and self-manage his or her career, making themselves more employable through skills and abilities which they accumulate through training, willingness to learn, performing a variety of tasks, and adapting their portfolio of activities. By so doing, employees become more efficient for the organisation and better equipped to handle the pressures of the new marketplace (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995; Sparrow and Marchington, 1998).

This new deal involves the employer providing assistance to enable and encourage employees to develop, mainly as a way to add value to the organisation, but also as a backstop should they need to look for other employment. Organisations are expected to become ‘learning’ organisations in which ‘empowered’ employees take on greater responsibility for their work, training and careers (Hendry and Jenkins, 1997). Byrne (2001) argues that the enlightened ‘new deal’ environment represents a risk to the employer since it will encourage employees to hoard their specialist knowledge to retain their employability value. He argues that the ‘new deal’ is a contradiction to the ‘knowledge company’ and that companies should choose one approach or another. However, in practice it is questionable how much the ‘learning’ organisation concept has come to fruition in organisations.

The other main thesis is that the new deal will drive an increase in demand for training which will be less employer-driven and more employee-driven. As Herriot et al (1998) have suggested, it is employees who are looking for more training because they perceive the old psychological contract to be broken (i.e. security for loyalty) and have low trust in the rhetoric around ‘employability’ in place of job security. The new contract has a self-reliance orientation that is significantly removed from the concept of ‘devotion’ to a specific employer, with the role of the organisation open to debate as individuals move with much greater frequency between different employers to attain the rewards that they believe is due to them (Maguire, 2002). Hall and Moss (1998) described this as the new ‘protean’ career contract which is directed by the needs and values of the individual, with success being described as internal (psychological).

To pursue a ‘boundaryless’ career, (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) individuals will experience more frequent changes between jobs and periods of inactivity. This will require constant readjustment, lifelong learning and an entrepreneurial mindset on the part of employees.
Beard and Edwards (1995) suggest that, as employees adjust to the new climate of job insecurity by taking on board the rhetoric of employability, they may have developed a heightened set of expectations of what they are 'owed' by employers in training and development, and often feel let down by what is actually delivered by their organisations.

Given this career definition, the importance of the psychological contract in providing a schema for employees to develop a set of expectations concerning mutual obligations between themselves and the organisation is problematic. Maguire (2002) examined the extent to which this increased emphasis on self-serving personal and organisational strategies made the concept of psychological contract irrelevant. Maguire (2002) found that the psychological contract continued to provide a means of establishing effective relationships between organisations and their employees. Assertions that the workforce was more likely to change employment rather than remain with an employer if there was a perception that a better deal could be struck elsewhere was not empirically supported by this study. However, within this finding it was also suggested that employers would require ways of adjusting the terms of the psychological contract to meet the needs of a potentially increasingly mobile and less predictable workforce (Maguire, 2002).

With increased mobility as a consequence of organisations becoming more competitive, the psychological contract in such an environment would tie the individual more to a profession rather than an organisation. With a workforce increasingly self-focussed, it has been suggested (for example, Rousseau and Fried, 2001; Shore et al, 2004) that the uniqueness and peculiarities of each work context could allow for the negotiation between employer and employee of specific work arrangements. Such agreements have been referred to as idiosyncratic deals, and it could be argued that the existence of such understandings may negate the need to change employer.

Although responsibility for career development lies primarily with individuals, the new psychological contract still represents a form of partnership of mutual interests between individuals and organizations, with different requirements of both 'partners' (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995) consisting of 'an individual commitment to career self-management' and 'organisational support for career self-management' (Lankhuijzen et al, 2006:94). HR practitioners are key to the organisational partnership since many of these areas are traditionally the focus of HRM policy (Guest, 1997).

Of course, the expectations and practices of the two parties to the new psychological contract may not converge. For instance, the level of self-management with regard to career
development is the significant dimension along which expectations about careers may vary (Lankhuijzen et al, 2006). People who do not self-manage their careers are viewed as traditional careerists. With the removal of the default retirement age and the general reduction in pension values it is likely that many people will have to work until their mid-sixties and beyond. As employees age it is possible that their ability to continue to work at the pace required in today's workplace will reduce, leaving them facing the 'spectre of uselessness' described by Sennett (2006).

Under-researched areas include the extent to which employees think of their careers according to these concepts; the extent to which organisations are willing to give employees the freedom and support required for career self-management; the extent to which people in mid-career have adjusted their expectations of career to embrace the flexible career model is also a relatively under-researched area. Other under-developed areas of research include the potentially different career expectations of younger employees, stereotypically referred to as Generations X and Y; and, given the likelihood of longer working lives, the implications for careers in a multi-generational workforce.

3.9 Increasing confluence of theory

From a critical pragmatist stance, I am interested in theory and methodological orientation that illuminates ideological domination, hegemonic practices, and social injustice. At the same time I am interested in theory which can be practically useful. Debate about the nature and impact of the 'knowledge-practice gap' in HRM has attracted growing interest in academic and management circles (Rousseau, 2006; Starkey et al, 2009). It is within the context of these debates that 'relevance' and 'usefulness' are discussed as creating value for practitioners (e.g. Lepak et al, 2007), or developing actionable knowledge that has maximum impact (Antonacopoulou, 2009).

There is a small but detectable confluence of thinking from within the mainstream and to a lesser extent among critical theorists to close the 'knowledge-practice gap' (Pfeffer and Sutton, 1999). Boxall et al (2007:7) for instance, developed the notion of 'analytical HRM' to emphasize that 'the fundamental mission of the academic management discipline of HRM is not to propagate perceptions of 'best practice' in 'excellent companies' but, first of all, to identify and explain what happens in practice. Analytical HRM is concerned with why management does what it does; with how contextualized processes of HRM work in practice; and is interested in questions of "for whom and how well, with assessing the outcomes of
HRM, taking account of both employee and managerial interests, and laying a basis for theories of wider social consequence”.

Boxall et al (2007) also acknowledge that HR practices are not universally applicable, that much HRM research has failed to recognize adequately the cultural and organizational context, or that different social actors may pursue different goals in HRM. There is also acknowledgment that the employee experience of HRM needs ‘to be more closely examined for moral and ethical reasons’ (Paauwe 2004; Boxall and Purcell 2008). Critical pragmatist theorists Spicer et al (2009) advocate the ‘denaturalising’ of taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning the plethora of ‘how to’ guides on HRM which tend to encourage an unreflective adoption by practitioners of dominant vocabularies at play within organizational settings and beyond. However, other critical HRM scholars such as Delbridge and Keenoy (2010) still consider the managerial intent of analytical HRM to be the key divisive issue between the mainstream (performance) and critical scholars.

It is within these debates that I am attempting to ground my study, both from the practitioner perspective and from the academic, in which relevance is seen as a necessary condition for rigour (Starkey et al, 2009).

In seeking to understand how HRM contributes to shaping the new work culture, my aim is to challenge the overtly unitarist and managerialist framing of HRM that has progressively edged out pluralist perspectives on employment management including what are described as traditional personnel management or old-style industrial relations (Francis and Sinclair 2003; Wright and Snell, 2005). Watson (2010:920) identifies the need for CHRM ‘to ensure that the voices of those who tend to be excluded from mainstream analyses are better represented in HRM theory and practice.’ Increasingly mainstream scholars such as Paauwe (2009:134) also call for mainstream HRM research which:

“(…) attends to the concerns and well-being of employees, recognizes the potential differential interests of the various ‘stakeholders’ and takes a more multi-dimensional perspective on performance”.

I am interested therefore in the extent to which HR practitioners, given their transformation into ‘business partners’, have maintained a focus on employee well-being and employee interests. To date, employee-focused studies have been strongly influenced by the field of organisational psychology, largely located within the literature on the psychological contract,
and used to examine the direction and strength of employee reactions to HRM, with the focus usually placed on how employees ‘respond to’ HRM (Grant and Shields, 2002). There remains a tendency to treat employees in instrumental terms, viewing them as largely ‘consumers’ of HRM practices (Paauwe, 2007), or of employer brands (Martin and Dyke, 2010), rather than ‘producers’ of HRM/brands, thereby failing to sufficiently acknowledge the ‘agency role’ of employees in shaping HR practice, nor accommodating competing conceptions of HRM (Janssens and Steyaert, 2009; Grant and Shields, 2002; Francis, 2006).

Within this context there are increasing calls from analysts to move beyond the either/or orientation about HRM, to new ways of thinking that create a more ‘balanced agenda’ (Francis and Keegan, 2006; Boselie et al, 2009). For instance Boselie and colleagues acknowledge that the conceptualisation of performance used in the performance stream is highly managerialist and unitarist in outlook, often represented as what is good for the employee is good for the organisation, and the other way round (Boselie et al, 2009; Guest, 2002). This idealistic view of the workplace, places managers in the ‘driving seat’ of change and adopts an optimistic (if not naive) view of the HR function’s role in generating employee commitment in order to enhance organisational performance.

As these sentiments gather momentum, there is some evidence of competing perspectives coming closer together, reflected in more ‘intellectual space’ being given to Critical HRM (CHRM) in mainstream journals (Delbridge and Keenoy, 2010). Current developments within this body of literature have been described as a promising way forward in terms of developing more nuanced and employee-centred approaches to the study of HRM-Performance (HRM-P) (e.g. Grant and Shields, 2002), and in combining different levels of analysis. Within the HRM-P stream, this is reflected in the following quotation by Paauwe, (2009: 134):

‘Bringing employees back into the equation between HRM and various kinds of both individual and organisational level outcomes, including financial performance, is a ‘conditio sine qua non’ for advancing the field as a respected discipline’.
3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused principally on literature which examines the role of HR professionals as institutionalised employer ‘agents’ in shaping and enacting the ‘new work culture’. The literature suggests that, as institutional agents, HR practitioners provide significant input into creating the new work culture by designing specific policies and practices, by developing and transmitting the discourse in which these are constituted, and by the level of support around the devolution of HR work to line managers (Wong et al 2009a). HRM practices represent and produce the establishment of new form of control, a ‘controlled de-control’; a ‘hands-off, self-regulating regulation’ (Du Gay, 1996).

For Watson, significant attention should be paid to denaturalizing the taken-for-granted categories and assumptions which typically inform the mainstream analysis of HRM (and management practice more generally). In particular, the morality of the use of performativity to produce a compliant workforce should be questioned. HR’s role is therefore complex and potentially paradoxical. On the one hand many HR professionals are attracted to HR by the thought of working with people and helping them to have satisfying work lives. On the other hand, in its current state of evolution the HR function is the pivot point between managerial and employee interests converge yet HRM as an instrument of managerialism must prioritise business interests. For many HR professionals this creates cognitive dissonance.

This review of literature relating to the new work culture and the role of HRM points to the gaps which I believe my research findings will address. In particular:

- How does the new work culture impact on the ‘psychological contract’ and wellbeing of white collar employees during the period of my study?
- How are subjectivities shaped by performativity?
- To what extent are HR practitioners themselves agents or subjects of performativity?
- How do HR practitioners construe their role?

In chapters five to seven I examine the empirical evidence for the degradation of work in the new work culture, in particular work intensification and performativity. I shall explore the extent to which employees are rendered passive subjects by the capitalist labour process. I shall also explore the roles of HR practitioners in shaping the new work culture and the extent to which they appear to be agents or subjects of this managerialism. In the next chapter I will describe my research design and methodology.
Chapter 4
Method

4.0 Introduction

This thesis examines the nature and impact of the 'new work culture' on the social and psychological contract of employees in 'white collar' careers (1997-2010). The intention is to focus on the experience of the 'new work culture' by the individual actor, the issues that impact upon them, and the reaction of individuals to such events, in order to facilitate a greater understanding of their interpretation of the features that resulted in the (re)formulation of psychological contracts. In particular the role of HRM practices in shaping of the new work culture is considered.

This chapter describes and explains the considerations that shaped the research design and the methods used to answer the research questions. To help the reader navigate this chapter I shall outline how the chapter is constructed. I begin by considering how the research questions arose from my own work experience and some reflections on my own role as researcher. I then outline my research design, together with the core research and empirical questions. Next I provide an overview of my methodological approach to investigating the research questions; and, given that this is a multi-strand, multi-method study, I discuss how ethnography, phenomenology, discourse analysis and reflexivity have played a role in my methodology, before describing each strand of research in turn, in each case outlining sampling, methods of data collection and analysis, strengths of limitations of these. I discuss research ethics specifically in the section which describes the strand of research relating to HR leaders, but this reflects my overall approach in researching the different strands of this study.

When reflecting on the thesis, a number of methodological limitations were identified. These are highlighted in this chapter and discussed further in Chapter Eight. First I highlight why these issues were of interest to me and how my PhD study came out of my work experience, which has to some extent shaped the data collection process.
4.1 An autobiographical approach to the research question

My interest in the question of how the ‘new work culture’ and HRM practices impact on the social and psychological contract of employees in ‘white collar’ careers stems from my own values and work experience. I believe passionately in the right of individuals to exercise a degree of autonomy over their work and to have enriching and satisfying work lives. During the first half of my career I worked as a secondary school teacher in various comprehensive schools in West London. I was very interested in careers teaching, and active in preparing young people for the workplace, not as ‘cannon fodder’ but to ensure that they were equipped with the skills (including social skills), the critical thinking and influencing ability to help them succeed in the workplace and shape their own career routes in future years. For instance, I helped gain company sponsorship for various workplace schemes, devised a practical vocational GCSE subject in travel and tourism, arranged work experience exchanges for young people with Ealing’s French twin town etc.

This interest in helping people to develop, and to be able to exercise agency in their working lives, is maintained throughout the second half of my career (since 1989), where I have worked with adults as a management developer, researcher and consultant. I worked for Organisation A, a large American multi-national corporation at its UK headquarters for five years, as a manager of management development. There I was exposed to commercial disciplines as well as to some of the HR practices which were considered at the time to be excellent. I then moved on to Organisation B, a smaller UK-based organisation which provided management development services, where I was research and strategy director (1994-2005). At Organisation C (2005-7) I directed the leadership and consultancy business and at Organisation D (2007-9) I was director of research and policy. I have therefore been an employee, manager and executive, a researcher, writer and commentator on workplace issues; I am a developer of others and have myself been developed by others.

My initial interest in pursuing a PhD was sparked by my experience of working in management development for Organisation A. This was a period where there was a proliferation of management theory, much of it popularised by consultants such as Tom Peters, Michael Porter, Jim Collins and Michael Hammer. Much of this theory advocated a close alignment of structures, processes and systems with business strategy. Organisation A implemented many of the structural and process ‘improvements’
advocated by these various management 'gurus' and was often featured as an organisational exemplar in management books in the mid-to late 1990s. This was also a time when, like many Human Resource functions, the 'Personnel' function at Organisation A rebadged itself as 'HR'.

While I enjoyed many opportunities for personal growth at Organisation A, I also witnessed first-hand the impact of organisational change, especially the flattening, or 'delayering', of management structures, on managers’ careers during the early 1990s. As a management developer, I worked with managers whose roles and responsibilities were being adjusted, and whose terms and conditions were being downgraded to reflect their new status e.g. now a 'team leader' rather than a manager. I was aware that many people appeared to experience a wide range of negative emotions, including shock and sense of loss etc, and that some people appeared to recover from the impact of such changes faster than others. I noticed that people who appeared badly affected by such imposed change often became less productive subsequently and in some cases chose to leave the organisation. I became interested in examining the question of psychological contract, initially to explore the potential impact of perceived breaches or violations of the psychological contract on individual and organisational performance. However, at the time, I accepted that organisational changes involving restructurings and downsizings were 'natural' and an inevitable part of organisational life in a commercial organisation.

At Organisation B, I continued to work as a management developer and began to serve also as a consultant. I worked mainly with 'white collar workers' i.e. executives, managers, professionals and HR practitioners from all sectors of the UK economy, and became aware of how apparently quickly managerialist ideas were spreading across sectors. I also gradually developed a wide-ranging research portfolio geared to exploring the workplace largely from an employee perspective.

One of the research vehicles I developed for this purpose was an annual survey, the UKES, completed by employees from many sectors of the UK economy. Thanks to this, I became more aware of the seemingly widespread nature of issues and pressures facing employees in the workplace. I gained the impression that a new work culture was emerging which appeared to inject market disciplines into non-commercial workplaces, such as public service and not-for-profit organisations, whose previous cultures and practices had been based on different ideologies, such as vocationalism and professionalism. Characteristics of this 'new work culture' included managerialism, ongoing change, performativity, the
flexibilisation of work through technology, such as through outsourcing, and the proliferation of human resource management.

I started to question whether the pressures for organisational change were ‘natural’ and inevitable. I wanted to gain a better understanding of where these pressures for a new work culture came from. This led me to my first research question: what were the macro political, economic and technological changes which led to the emergence of a ‘new work culture’? I began to read literature from a variety of sources and fields, including economics and politics, which, together with UKES findings and other workplace surveys, such as the WERS surveys, led me to recognise that many of the workplace pressures facing employees were the consequences of neo-liberal economic policies, of managerialism and the use of technology to commoditise white collar work. I became interested in literature relating to the neo-liberalism and its impact on UK economics, politics, business- practices and society.

I read Braverman’s *Labour and Monopoly Capital: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (1974) and found interesting parallels between Braverman’s description of the degradation of clerical work in American office-based workplaces in the 1960s and what appeared to be happening in UK workplaces at the turn of the twentieth-first century. I explored literature relating to the new work culture and human consequences of neo-liberal thinking, including Richard Sennett’s books *The Corrosion of Character* (1998) and subsequently *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (2006), and other literature relating to the psychological contract and trust. I found the concept of agency and the self to be interesting and relevant to my thinking.

Initially I was interested in understanding how the new work culture was affecting the career psychological contract of white collar workers. I carried out several research projects looking at managers’ careers in ‘flatter’ structures and had written a book in 1997 ‘Motivating People in Lean Organisations’. However, as I explored people’s accounts through the UKES survey, both about the characteristics of this new work culture and its impact on employees (research questions 3 and 4), my interest broadened beyond the theme of careers. So, my primary interest thus became to document what the new work culture looked like and how it was experienced by people, in particular with respect to their satisfaction. Essentially the UKES acted as a tracking mechanism, allowing me to identify areas of potential research interest worthy of deeper exploration in my PhD studies. These areas formed my six core questions.
As an employee myself I was keenly aware of my own reaction to the introduction of performativity to the culture of Organisation B. To explore these questions I also reflected on my own experiences, both as an employee, and as a manager in Organisations A and B (discussed in Chapter 6). In some ways, the findings related to these questions about the employee experience of the new work culture are reminiscent of the following observation by Bardwick (2007:13):

'A not-so-funny thing happened on the way to the twenty-first century: people stopped caring about their jobs...Now after years of downsizing, outsourcing and a cavalier corporate attitude that treats employees as costs rather than assets, most of today's workers have concluded that the company no longer values them. So they, in turn, no longer feel engaged in their work or committed to the company. The reality of mutual co-dependence between employees and organizations, and the advantages gained from long-term mutual commitment and engagement, have been lost'.

One of the key themes arising from the UKES, most noticeably between 2000 and 2004, was about a perceived loss of existential meaning at work reported by many white collar employees. I assumed that this apparent loss of meaning might reflect employee feelings about/reactions to an impoverished psychological contract. Accordingly I decided to explore this theme in more depth for my PhD studies, using focus groups and interviews, during 2003-4. Initially I had assumed that it might prove difficult to locate research participants for this topic and placed an open invitation to participate to interested parties on Organisation B’s website. There were many willing volunteer participants, suggesting that the topic was potentially of relevance to white collar workers from many organisation types and sectors. In practice I ended up having to restrict the numbers of people who could take part in focus groups since my resources were limited. The findings from this study are discussed in Chapter Seven.

I was very struck by the seeming mismatch between business aspirations to be able to achieve financial success through innovation and more flexible and cost-effective ways of operating, and the needs and aspirations of employees, on whose productive output such business results were largely dependent. Accordingly I wrote two books in 2005 in which I attempted to marry up these different needs and prescribed ‘better’ management and HR practice, based in part on some of the research I was conducting at Organisation B. These were: Understanding Change: Theory, Implementation and Success, and The High Performance Organization: Creating Dynamic Stability and Sustainable Success.
My interest in understanding the broader macro-political context of the contemporary workplace was sharpened when I became Leadership and Consultancy Director at Organisation C. I chose to work there because I was keen to learn more about public policy with respect to work and employment. Organisation C was a left-leaning think tank, whose core mission and therefore campaigning purpose, I helped to refine as being about 'Good Work' (Coats and Lehki, 2008), a concept that suggests that for work to be 'good' it must not only achieve desired business results, but must also involve ethical and fair treatment of employees.

Good work is defined as "whatever advances development by supporting the fulfilment of individual potentialities while simultaneously contributing to the harmonious growth of other individuals and groups" (Csikszentmihalyi et al, 2001:244). While this may sound idealistic, I am using this as a standard by which to evaluate changes in work patterns that have occurred. Under this rubric, employees should have 'voice', i.e. not only be kept informed of developments by management but also have the chance to participate actively in issues relating to business and the workplace. Consequently, employees are assumed to want to exercise agency, and to be motivated to achieve mutual benefits for themselves and their employers. I felt very attuned to this agenda since the importance of people being treated as people, rather than as resources, is a continuing theme throughout my professional career.

Alongside this, I became increasingly sceptical about the purpose and effects on employees of some HR practices, such as performance management. I was curious about the role played by Human Resource management theory and practice in the development of the 'new work culture' (Research question 2). At Organisation B, I had provided consultancy, development and research services to white collar workers, including professionals, managers (mainly middle and senior) and HR practitioners. I also wrote many practitioner-oriented articles and a book Aligning HR and Business Strategy, (1999) specifically aimed at HR practitioners.

As a developer of HR professionals throughout the period of study, I became very aware that many HR staff who had previously been in 'Personnel' and who had been attracted to this function because they were interested in working with people, were becoming disillusioned by their role and by feeling obliged to conform to a new stereotype of 'hard-nosed' business agent. I read widely within mainstream literature, seeking to better understand the rationales provided for aligning HR practice to business needs, indeed for the HR function to become 'business partner' without an equal priority being given to the needs of employees. I also started to read critical HRM, and despite myself being critical of the lack of emphasis on

The fact that I have worked extensively with HR practitioners over twenty years, meant that I had good access to leaders of the HR profession. I was interested to understand how senior HR practitioners, especially those who might be considered leaders of the HR profession, viewed the role of HR with respect to the new work culture (research question 5). Did they see HR as shaping, responding to, or challenging aspects of the new work culture? To what extent did they appear to recognise the importance of unmet employment expectations of white collar workers? How interested were they in employee relations? My intention was to examine the schema of the participants and the sense-making process that was undertaken in the formulation of their role. Watson (2007) criticises Boxall *et al* (2007) for failing to acknowledge that different social actors may pursue different goals in HRM. I would endorse Watson’s observation since interviews with these HR Leaders revealed many different political and other motivations and goals pursued by actors in HR leadership roles. I will consider this further in Chapter 6.

4.1.1 My role as researcher

My own experience is that of a researcher-practitioner in a variety of organisational contexts, as described by Hodgkinson and Rousseau, (2008). I embrace the pragmatic-realist approach described by Watson (2010:917). This ‘pragmatic style of thinking’ advocated by Watson is aimed at developing knowledge which might more realistically inform action than what has come before. I am attempting to develop a well constructed line of argument for a particular way of understanding the origins, the practices and the effects of the new work culture, from which choices for potential action might subsequently be derived.

As noted earlier, the issue that appears to fundamentally divide CHRM scholars from the HRM mainstream revolves around managerialism. While I am antipathetical towards managerialism, yet I am generally sympathetic to managers and to the mainstream HRM argument that performance is critical to organizational success and that, unless organisations remain viable, the employment relationship becomes largely irrelevant. As Watson (2010) makes clear, antipathy towards managerialism is not the same as antipathy towards managers. The concerns, goals and objectives of managers are of interest to me. Managers are often dealing with multiple challenges and constraints. Much of my career over twenty years as developer, consultant and researcher has involved working with line
managers and HR practitioners with the intent of helping them as managers and as employees to successfully navigate the organisational contexts in which they find themselves. Indeed, based on my experience, I agree with Legge (1995) that managers often feel ‘powerless’ (or portray themselves as powerless) to act within the managerial system in which they find themselves.

I realize that over the course of my career I have relatively uncritically adopted managerial language, especially with respect to the role of the HR function in helping organisations achieve ‘competitive advantage’ through ‘alignment with business strategy’ in the pursuit of ‘high performance’ etc. I have been active in helping senior managers understand how to bring about change using organisation development approaches and what Schein (2005) calls ‘embedding mechanisms’. What leaders pay attention to is a ‘primary’ embedding mechanism whereas HR policies, such as reward, are secondary change mechanisms, causing people to adapt their behaviour and comply with new requirements.

Moreover I have enthusiastically promoted the use of such concepts when working with managers and human resource professionals in development programmes and in writing a number of books aimed at managers and HR professionals. This was because I was keen to help the people with whom I worked whether they were clients or students, who, like me, were trying to do the best job they could under challenging conditions. Indeed, I might appear to have been an agent of managerialism, acting directly to influence managers and employees to promote managerialist objectives.

However, I have increasingly become an ‘internal critic’ of managerialism, adopting an ‘inside-outside’ perspective (Goodman, 2010) and attempting to work with the tensions implicit in a more balanced dialectic. For example, while I have trained managers in managerial practices such as performance management, I have always encouraged them to engage sceptically, and with a view to ensuring that employees are beneficiaries of the process as much for their own sakes as to meet the organisation’s goals. While the process essentially serves to turn employees into assessable objects, the strategies I have helped design have been oriented to giving employees both legitimate voice and an active role in the process. Equally, I have been frustrated by the lack of insight from critical theory about how things could be improved in practice.

Consequently I am aware of my own cognitive dissonance with respect to management and managerialism. While I dislike managerialism, I am a management developer and adviser,
consequently I am implicitly an advocate/supporter of managerialism, even though my personal values are at odds with managerial approaches such as performance management which seek to contain individuals and reduce them to a set of ‘tick-box’ competencies. As Berger (1974) argued in his psychosocial analysis of modernity, the pluralization of social life worlds and its effects on the subjective consciousness (i.e. self-concepts) of individuals mean that: ‘Modern man (postmodern?) is afflicted with a permanent identity crisis’ (Berger, 1974: 77-9). I am aware that it is only since carrying out research for this thesis that I have been more willing to adopt an openly critical stance to the HRM and to management practice. At the same time I feel very driven to want to help managers and HR practitioners with the challenges they face on a daily basis, and recognise that many people find themselves coping with divided identities and motivations also.

Business School academics may find themselves with similar divided identities. As Grey et al, (1996) point out, the influence driving the development of mainstream management knowledge and education is functionalist and does not problematise itself. It fits within a ‘given’ context of a neo-liberal system, therefore management knowledge is compromised and becomes a ‘marketised epistemology’ i.e. the market favours the non-problematised in which there is no reflexivity about whether the effects of such approaches are good or bad, especially in human terms.

A similar cognitive dissonance is reflected in stereotypical manager attitudes towards HR policies. Are managers themselves passive subjects of HR policies? While HR policies are in theory aligned to business strategies, in my observation HR policies often seem to be considered by managers to be irritants or constraints on what the managers themselves are trying to achieve, rather than enablers. In many cases I have come across, including my own, managers deal with HR policies by ignoring them, challenging or subverting them, especially if these are perceived to have a strong controlling intent over managerial freedom to act.
4.2 Research design

Yin (2003) suggests that every type of research has an implicit design, yet research can often be undertaken using several designs and the researcher must choose the design that best fits their aims and epistemology. A researcher's epistemology, according to Holloway (1997), Mason (1996) and Creswell (1994) is literally his or her theory of knowledge, which serves to decide how the social phenomena will be studied. My epistemological position regarding the study I undertook can be formulated as follows: a) data are contained within the perspectives of people that are involved in contemporary workplaces, either in a manager or employee capacity and b) because of this I engaged with the participants in collecting the data. I agree with Keegan and Francis (2006) that 'a more discursive space' needs to be created for employee-centred conversations to flourish.

A good research undertaking starts with the selection of the topic, problem or area of interest, as well as the paradigm (Groenewald, 2004; Creswell, 1994). Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 157) define a research paradigm as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action", or the researcher's worldviews, according to which design actions are taken.

With respect to research paradigm, I have worked on the whole within an interpretative paradigm. That is because I was mindful that, as Van der Ven (2007) points out, our understanding of the 'real world' is limited. All facts, observations and data are theory-laden and consequently a reliance upon linear, statistical modelling fails to capture this dynamic, and is often perceived to be unhelpful to practitioners because of a lack of attention to the 'real world' of practice. Since my main interest in this thesis was to understand the meanings participants gave to their activities, a hermeneutic/interpretive approach, in which attention could be paid to political, ethical and reflexive concerns, seemed therefore more appropriate. In other words, rather than following a problem-solving approach, the interpretive approach:

'(...) is informed by a concern to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity...it sees the social world as an emergent social process which is created by the individuals concerned' (Burrell and Morgan, 2008:28).
Robson (1993:150) recommends that the researcher, in designing a study, needs the following:

- A conceptual framework
- A set of research questions
- A sampling strategy
- A decision of methods and instruments for data collection.

The conceptual framework involves the main features of the research process and considers the relationship between them. It enables the researcher initially to become more focused, selective and to decide on the most important features of the research. There is a link between the conceptual structure and the research questions. Often the conceptual structure allows the research questions to emerge. This process can be reviewed and the framework can be modified to allow the change to take place. For Watson (2010), the conceptual framework must be suitable for that area of research, selecting theoretical resources on the criterion of 'their power to illuminate aspects of the realities of social life'. The outcome of the research should contribute to the theoretical understanding of the impact on employees of the new work culture and the role of HRM in bringing this about.

This study took a long-term view of the way that changes in the employment relationship, arising from the neo-liberal pursuit of market freedoms, have fed into people's perceptions of their working lives. Its empirical component has focused on the individual actor and attempted to explicate and unpack individual interpretations of 'new work culture' factors that were relevant to the psychological contract, for instance how white collar workers responded to pressures put upon them within the new work culture and to which they are required to adapt. A key thread running through my arguments related to inherent tensions between the exercise of agency (individual autonomy) and structures (social, political, cultural and economic forces) shaping the new work culture.

Since my conceptual framework was developed over some time, as discussed in section 4.1, I want to summarise the research plan of my project to explain the development of the research process. The research design provided a link between the process of designing the questions, collecting the data and interpreting the results.
4.3 The core research questions

The research questions determine the data collection process. In my case, an initial set of three questions was devised which became central to the study but, as is common in interpretive research practice, a further three questions were added based on evidence emerging from the UKES data. The six core research questions are as follows:

1. What were the macro political, economic and technological changes which have led to the emergence of a 'new work culture'?
2. How do HRM practices contribute to the development and perpetuation of the new work culture?
3. What are the characteristics of the new work culture, as perceived by employees?
4. How did employees experience the 'new work culture'?
5. To what extent were employees able to exercise agency?
6. How did HRM professionals view their role with respect to the new work culture?

These core questions were explored in various strands of this multi-method research study. In the next section I outline the empirical questions developed in order to explore these core research questions.

4.3.1 The core research and empirical questions

1. What were the macro political, economic and technological changes which have led to the emergence of a 'new work culture'?

This question involved an exploration from within the literature and a secondary analysis of the UKES to identify key external triggers for change in the workplace. My intention in the literature review was to provide a sociological and historical analysis of the macro economic and political forces which have led to the emergence of a 'new work culture' (Sennett, 2006). Related questions include:

- How is the 'new work culture' defined in the literature?
- What are the key macro-economic and political drivers for a new work culture?
- How is technology used within the new work culture?
- How well is the role of HRM in the new work culture represented in the mainstream and critical HRM literatures?
I have set out a cultural/political critique (in Chapters Two and Three), in particular of the human resource practice and the dominant managerial discourses, values, ideologies and agenda endorsed by it, which have become prevalent in current employment practices within the UK. This analysis suggests that a ‘new work culture’ has thus come into effect, within which some critics argue that white collar work is being degraded. I have also located and deepened the concept of the psychological contract within the context of ‘the new work culture’.

2. How do HRM practices contribute to the development and perpetuation of the new work culture?

This question is informed by critical HRM literature. There have been very few sociological analyses of the performative role of HRM within a capitalist post-industrial society and relating that to processes of degradation of work. In particular, my interest in asking this question is to better understand the part played by mainstream HRM theory and HRM mechanisms in destabilising the ‘old’ psychological contract, and also in instituting a more performative work climate in order to engender employee compliance to managerial requirements. Given that there remains no single accepted definition of the psychological contract, and that this exchange relationship is very complex and dynamic, perhaps not surprisingly, the construct of the psychological contract has been regarded as somewhat elusive to practitioners who have struggled to connect with:

(…) ‘a construct that seemed so central to what HR was about, but which appeared too intangible and too individual for HR to grab hold of, manage and really make a difference’ (Sullivan et al., 2009: 26).

This question is also explored through a secondary analysis of UKES data (discussed in Chapter Five), a reflexive case study about the effects of performativity on one individual’s psychological contract (Chapter Six) and through the study of Meaning at Work (Chapter Seven).

Empirical research questions include:

• How does HRM practice and discourse impact on the ‘normalisation’ of the new work culture?
• In particular, how is performance management used to develop the new work culture?
• How does HRM career management practice affect white collar career development?
3. What were the characteristics of the new work culture, as perceived by employees?

Using Braverman’s Labour Process predictions and Richard Sennett’s description of the new work culture in particular as my starting point, this question allows for an exploration of the various effects of flexibilisation, commodification, work intensification, ongoing change, performativity and HRM theory and policies. I have attempted to assess the evidence for the existence of a new work culture in the various strands of research within the thesis but more specifically in the meta-analysis of UKES (Chapter Five) and the reflexive case study about the effects of performativity on one individual’s psychological contract (Chapter Six).

Empirical research questions are as follows:

- What evidence exists of increasing work intensification?
- What evidence exists of increasing flexibilisation of work?
- What evidence exists of the commodification of white collar work?

4. How did employees experience the ‘new work culture’?

The fourth question related to the behaviour of the research participants as a consequence of issues that were identified and seeks to understand how employees' psychological and social contracts were affected. This question was examined in all the empirical research strands, but particularly through the Meaning at Work study (Chapter Seven) and the reflexive case study (Chapter Six).

Research data are compared with definitions of the contents of the ‘mutual’ ‘old’ psychological contract (i.e. job security and career progression in return for loyalty and hard work) and also with the ‘New Deal’ (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995) i.e. career self-management and employability in exchange for hard work and flexibility. They describe the ‘old deal’ as a real relationship, cemented over time, where the two parties of the contract learned to trust each other and fulfilled their sides of the bargain. This deal was also supposed to involve each party helping out, regardless of whether this would be rewarded or reciprocated (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995a). Conversely, they perceive the “new deal” as
being strictly transactional, where inputs and outputs can be quantified and there is no
loyalty and affection.

Existing literature also indicated that, once psychological contracts were violated, they
became increasingly transactional and self-interested in nature (Rousseau and Wade-
Benzioni, 1994; Herriot and Pemberton, 1995a, 1995b). The assumption was that, if
violation had occurred, individuals would concentrate activity in areas that generated
personally valued reward and return (Bocock and Watson, 1994; Parker and Jary, 1995).
The question allowed for an analysis of how employees experienced violation of their
psychological contract, for example the impact of organisational change on workloads,
growing job insecurity or the 'hollowing out' of individual meaning as an effect of the new
work culture.

Herriot and Pemberton (1995a) argue that the ‘New Deal’ still represents a form of
partnership between employer and employee. On this analysis the employer can no longer
offer employment security and the ‘New Deal’ is said to rest on the offer by an employer of
fair pay and treatment, plus opportunities for training and development. This question
addresses employees’ perceptions about how well this partnership was working. Implicitly
therefore, this question also considers the effect of the new work culture on the balance of
interests, and power, within the employment relationship.

Empirical research questions include:

- How were employees reacting to increasing workloads and long working hours?
- What evidence exists of employees experiencing increasing job insecurity?
- To what extent was the ‘employability thesis’ working?
- What support did employees expect/hope for from their employers?
- What evidence exists that employees no longer trust their employers?
- To what extent is there evidence of what Sennett (2006:5) argues is the “cultural
  ideal” of new capitalism i.e. “self oriented to the short term, focused on potential
  ability, willing to abandon past experience.”?
- To what extent were employees experiencing existential loss of meaning in the new
  work culture?
5. To what extent were employees able to exercise agency?

Sennett (2006) argues that institutional changes, involving the shift from managerial to shareholder power in large companies, undermine the ability of workers to organize their lives into narratives. Even worse, the new flexible institutions cause workers to lose any sense of agency, leading individuals to appear to themselves as passive victims of senseless or incontestable forces.

In *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (1974) Braverman marginalised the role of subjectivity in the mediation of capital-labour relations, viewing preoccupation with it as reactionary. Subsequent Bravermanian analysis aspires to exclude consideration of the role of consciousness and action in the reproduction and transformation of the interdependent, though asymmetrical, relations of capital and labour (O’Doherty and Willmott, 2001). They argue that the researcher’s concern should be to discover how relations of production are accomplished in practice.

This question was therefore explored throughout the study and facilitated an examination of the extent to which the individual was able to influence or change his or her work environment. Mainstream HRM change models take an instrumental view of employees who are largely portrayed as ‘consumers’ of HR practices or of ‘employer brands’, (that is to say the marketing of the organisation as a good employer for the purposes of attracting potential recruits). These have a highly unitary framing of HR practices which assume that what is good for the employer is always good for the employee. This raises the question of how much individuals can exercise agency within the employment relationship. Are they merely passive objects moulded by performative practices or are they able to exercise agency in various ways, including overt or subtle resistance? The question also allows for an exploration of the issue of employee passivity/subjectivity versus agency in the face of growing demands made of them. To what extent were employees willing to continue responding to organisational demands for long working hours, or to sacrifice their personal life to career advancement?

The increase in performativity in many organisations over the period of study would suggest that the individual had less scope and freedom to respond to change (Dearlove, 1998; Salauroo and Burnes, 1998). While I recognise the need to be mindful of the potentially manipulative/harmful effects of HRM noted above, I take the view of Keenoy (2009) and others, that employees are not simply passive receptacles for management ideas or corporate ‘mono-cultures’ (Francis, 2007; Grant and Shields, 2002) and that more needs to
be understood about the exercise of agency and ways in which people exercise choices, even within a 'constrained employment context' (Bolton and Houlihan, 2009:6).

The questions examined empirically were:

- What evidence exists of employees complying with managerial demands for increasing workloads?
- How well do employees appear able to cope with the increasing demands made of them?
- What evidence exists that employees are willing to continue to make personal sacrifices in order to progress their careers?
- How willing are employees to manage their own careers?

6. How did HRM professionals view their role with respect to the new work culture?

Given that the HR function is intimately involved in most aspects of the employment relationship, this question explores the extent to which senior HR professionals consider themselves to be acting as agents in shaping the new work culture, or whether they consider themselves to be shaped by the exigencies of this culture.

This question was explored in particular through life history interviews with a number of senior HR practitioners and related findings are discussed in Chapter Six. The discourse of senior HR practitioners was analysed to detect their perspectives and priorities with respect to their role. Empirical research questions include:

- What does the discourse of senior HR practitioners reveal about their focus and priorities?
- What does this discourse reveal about the nature of the 'partnership' between employees and employers within the employment relationship?
- To what extent do these HR practitioners appear to act as subjects, or agents of the new work culture?
- How do these practitioners seek to develop the next generation of HR practitioners?

Within the mainstream models of HRM-based change, HR practitioners are portrayed as organisational 'change agents' (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005). With respect to organisational change, the analysis of my research is informed by Stacey et al (2000)
who enrich thinking from complexity theory with ideas drawn from relational psychology, social constructionism and Hegelian philosophy to offer a perspective on organisations as socially constructed, self-organising systems of patterned, communicative action. Such a perspective draws attention to the way organisations are continually being made, sustained and transformed through self-organising ‘complex responsive processes’ of people relating together, and that the primary medium in organisational life through which this is taking place is through conversation.

A table summarising how the core research questions were investigated empirically in different strands of research is to be found in Appendix 3. The next section will consider the methodological approach that was used to gather data to address these questions.

4.4 Methodology

Theoretically the thesis draws upon a variety of perspectives, rather than upon a single theoretical tradition or range of concepts. The structural theoretical resource most drawn upon within this study is a neo-Marxian political economy. While a neo-Marxist orientation is conceptually useful for analysing macro-level political or economic configurations or policies, this form of analysis does not easily extend to such issues as workers’ daily experiences of the workplace or incorporate a complexity perspective. Braverman relied on secondary sources and survey data as well as reflexively interrogating his own direct work experience and knowledge of technological and occupational change (Thompson and Smith, 1998). My research also involves the use of secondary sources, survey data, qualitative data collection and reflexively interrogating my own work experience.

The following section outlines how the research unfolded.

4.4.1 Multi-method approach

As Robson (1993) points out, the method and instruments for data collection explains how the researcher gets the information. This process has to be the most appropriate for each researcher. Needing a flexible research design that would enable a fluid approach to the development of theory over a ten year period, after some investigation I chose a multi-method approach (Brewer, 2006; Bryman, 2006; Creswell, 2007) to accommodate the challenges within the different but related research themes and questions.
The literature review suggests methodological gaps which I hoped my research could fill. For instance, with respect to the evolving role and influence of HRM, Paauwe (2007) calls for more longitudinal studies while Watson argues for a wide variety of conceptual-theoretic and methodological resources, such as in-depth qualitative analyses and, in particular, various forms of discourse analysis which have been influential in the deconstruction of HRM. Similarly, many previous studies in the psychological contract field have focussed on breach and violation using attitudinal-rating scales to explore the nature and content of the psychological contract in respect of breach and violation. These studies essentially involved the researcher selecting transactional and relational aspects and then measuring employee perceptions of their employer's obligations towards them. However, as Herriot and Pemberton (1997) pointed out, the psychological contract is specific to individuals and, to understand fully, required a more expansive and interpretive approach to the investigation. The methods used must therefore permit access to people's social meanings and activities and involve close association and familiarity with the social setting.

As I have suggested, I would like my research output to be useful to practitioners, and the development of my PhD studies has involved a number of research questions, data sources and methodological approaches which are somewhat unorthodox. Within this multi-strand study there is more than one research method and hence source of data. The intention of this research at the outset was to gather data regarding the perspectives of research participants about the phenomenon of the new work culture and their experience of it. I have drawn on a selection of existing data derived from an annual survey of UK employees working in all sectors of the UK economy (1997-2006). This UK Employee survey (UKES) was designed and analysed by me for my work purposes and incorporated both quantitative and 'open-ended' elements. The survey explored how UK white collar employees described the structural and other changes taking place at work such as delayering and restructurings along with work intensification, long working hours, performativity and other pressures.

The first aspect of data collection therefore involves a partial secondary analysis of the original data (2000-2003) to consider the key themes relating to my research questions which emerged during those years. During the first period (1998-2003) re-engineering, downsizing and delayering were increasingly common restructuring practices. From this meta-analysis, a number of key themes were identified about the situations employees were facing. These related to the impact on white collar employees of aspects of the new work culture such as ongoing change, performativity and work intensification. They included for
instance the increasingly individualised employment relationship and how employees perceived the impact of these changes on their career opportunities.

Essentially I used the UKES in two main ways; both as a sensitising exercise, as a way of identifying themes and issues which were worth pursuing in more depth via the PhD, and also as a source of data which helped me to address existing research questions. For the purposes of my PhD, I followed up on intriguing signals within the data through other strands of research, in order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the issues. These themes were the perceived loss of meaning at work, as perceived by UKES participants; and the accounts of HR practitioners about their role in developing the new work culture. These themes were explored using qualitative methods.

Thus, although I originally devised the UKES for work purposes, I also used it later for both the identification of PHD themes and also as a means of gathering data for my PhD (for instance by inserting a few specific questions to explore the Meaning topic).

In terms of typology, quantitative and qualitative data are collected sequentially (Morgan, 1998). In a sense therefore this thesis involves engaged grounded research as described by Van der Ven (2007) since it was the people (i.e. the white collar workers) who participated in the surveys and related research activity who were shaping the research agenda.

As Knight (2002:114) points out, "if there is a problem with single-method designs it is that social inquiries are usually about phenomena that are complex, fuzzy, shifting and multifaceted, so that mixed methods are needed to capture that complexity". Dadds and Hart (2001) argue strongly for methodological inventiveness, which involves going beyond conventional positivist or qualitative approaches where appropriate:

"The importance of methodological inventiveness.

Perhaps the most important new insight for both of us has been awareness that, for some practitioner researchers, creating their own unique way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus. We had understood for many years that ... what practitioners chose to research was important to their sense of engagement and purpose. But we had understood far less well that how practitioners chose to research, and their sense of control over this, could be equally important to their motivation, their sense of identity within the research and their research outcomes." (Dadds and Hart, 2001:166)
It was important to design a plan that was neither too loose nor too rigid. If it had been too loose, there would have been a danger of not selecting the necessary data. Yet, as Bryman (2006:99) points out, while a decision about design issues may be made in advance and for good reasons, when the data are generated, surprising findings or unrealized potential in the data may suggest unanticipated consequences of combining them.

In his discussion of educational policy and reform within the UK, Ball (1990; 1994) combines critical policy analysis with post-structuralism and critical ethnography. Although critical ethnography within this study is replaced to a certain extent by a phenomenologically-derived social constructionism (Jones, 2001), this research aims for a similar confluence, with elements of critical ethnography e.g. discourse analysis and life history method, used alongside a reflexive case study model. Robson emphasises the important strategy of “let your research questions be your guide” (1993:166), in determining how the data is collected, the principle I followed throughout the research.

According to Welman and Kruger (1999:189), “the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved”. In contrast to positivists, phenomenologists believe that the researcher cannot be detached from his/her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise (Hammersley and Gomm, 2000). In this regard, Mouton and Marais (1990:12) state that individual researchers “hold explicit beliefs”. Harré and van Langenhove (1999:3) argue that whatever form of social constructionism one adheres to, the common feature is the epistemological challenging of the traditional way of doing psychological research: ‘that radically breaks with a psychology based on an uncritical and often inaccurate imitation of the methods of the physical sciences’.

Van der Ven (2007) argues that a complex reality demands the use of multiple perspectives while Watson (2007:9) advocates setting up ‘participative’ research projects which draw on the ‘perspectives’ of the range of ‘stakeholders’ who are involved in the area being researched. Such parties include the researchers themselves, together with ‘users, clients, sponsors, and practitioners.’ This suggests that, in terms of methodology, elements of an ethnographic approach would also be appropriate for this study. Ethnography, described by Wolcott (1999) as a ‘way of looking’, is a style of research rather than a single-method and uses a variety of techniques to collect data, in which:
'(...) the search for universal laws is rejected in favour of detailed descriptions of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture of the social rules or patterns that constitute it'.

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:8)

A distinction has to be drawn between ethnography as process as opposed to product (that is a piece of ethnographic research as opposed to a process of ethnographic research). An ethnographic approach presents an appropriate methodological approach because of the inherent iterative learning and change process embedded within it. Ethnography's range of techniques includes in-depth interviews, discourse analysis, personal documents, and vignettes, alongside participant observation. These methods are also used in non-ethnographic research and what distinguishes their application in ethnography is that they are employed to meet the objectives that distinguish it as a style of research, namely the explanation of social meanings of the people in the setting by close involvement in the field.

This thesis attempts to engage with the new work culture as a 'discursively constructed object' (Grant et al., 2004). In considering the changing psychological contract within the 'new work culture', it makes explicit enquiries into the nature of social reality as viewed by 'agents' and 'subjects' within a constrained world. Discourse Analysis and Reflexive Methodology, (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000) were used in this study both to inform the research methodology and in the processing of differing data sets. Discourse-based studies allow for more sophisticated treatment of management practice which eschew the either/or thinking prevalent in mainstream accounts.

4.4.2 Discourse analysis and 'denaturalization'

According to Critical Management Studies (CMS), mainstream management theory seeks to establish the market mechanism as the 'natural' medium of socio-economic exchange while simultaneously promoting a philosophy of individualism as a fundamental social good. The significance of language in these transformations is recognised by social researchers. While there are a number of variations on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Van Dijk (2001) argues that what they have in common is a focus on the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance (Van Dijk, 2001:300).

In CDA, discursive events are identified as being constitutive of, and constituted by, social context (situations), by objects of knowledge (institutions) and the social identities of (and relationships between) people and groups (social structures) (Glynos et al, 2009:17).
Bourdieu & Wacquant (2001) for instance point to a ‘new planetary vulgate’, which they characterise as a vocabulary (‘globalization’, ‘flexibility’, ‘governance’, ‘employability’, ‘exclusion’ and so forth), which ‘is endowed with the performative power to bring into being the very realities it claims to describe’. That is, the neo-liberal political project of removing obstacles to the new economic order is discourse-driven.

CMS scholars argue that the unreflective adoption of managerial language and definitions of reality in mainstream research has led to the promotion and development of a one-sided, if not singularly misleading view of how organizations function and of how they are governed. For instance, in mainstream management theories various ‘imperatives’ are invoked (e.g., globalization, competitiveness) to legitimize a proposed course of action and to suggest (implicitly or explicitly) that ‘there is no alternative’. CMS is committed to uncovering the alternatives that have been effaced by management knowledge and practice.

In order to correct these inherent distortions, Fournier and Grey (2000) argue that researchers should engage in the process of ‘denaturalization’. This involves subjecting to scrutiny and challenging institutionalized forms of understanding such as ‘best practice’ policies, procedures and processes which, it is argued, appear to be a ‘neutral’ and rational objective but actually reflect the power inequalities which typify capitalist socio-economic relations.

Treating discourse in this way draws attention to the socially negotiated nature of meanings, and the power of prevailing vocabularies which include or exclude certain ways of thinking, talking and acting within the workplace (Francis, 2006). It also reveals the linkages between these ways of talking and the broader social and economic practices outside the firm (Fairclough, 2003; Keegan and Francis, 2010). As practices take root to reflect the language used, they become imbued with meaning which then shapes further action (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). In one strand of this study, in-depth interviews were carried out with twenty-four senior HR practitioners and I considered the order within their discourses to uncover the priorities which appear to drive their practice.

In analysing discourse to attempt to understand the perspectives of actors producing real work relations, I acknowledge the importance of language in organisations, increasingly recognised amongst analysts as being intimately linked to action, the workings of which are of particular concern to scholars within the critical HRM literature (Grant et al, 2004; Keenoy, 2009). Discourse analysis also helps identify the impact on structures of those who take a negative view or a positive view of those structures, thereby changing them.
In summary, the approach used in this study utilised elements of critical ethnography and life history alongside discourse analysis and a reflexive case-study. So far, I have explained what is meant by phenomenology, ethnography, discourse analysis and denaturalization and outlined the research paradigm. I shall now outline the blend of data collection approaches used in this study.

4.5 Data collection

This study is based upon grounded research conducted over a long time period (ten years +) using a variety of methods, both quantitative and qualitative. Data was collected over this ten year period in four main ways, through separate, though related, research themes. In summary, these sub-themes included:

- A meta-analysis of the UKES, with a special focus on the years 2000-2003
- A reflexive case study based on my work experience in 2002-3
- A study of 'Meaning at Work' conducted between 2004-5
- A study of the life histories of senior HR practitioners carried out principally between 2007-9

In describing the methodology for data collection used for each of these four sub-set studies, I shall also describe the research sample for each, or more appropriately in a predominantly qualitative research design of this nature, how I located the research participants. Following this I shall outline data-storage methods and an explanation of the analysis or 'explicitation' (Groenewald, 2004) of the data (comprising several stages). I shall also discuss the strengths and limitations of each method of data collection.

4.6 Meta-analysis of the UK Employee Survey (UKES)

In terms of how I have used the UKES data in this thesis, I have attempted to draw some general inferences and point out specific correlations where these may have more general interest. The main value of the UKES data is that it has provided a spur to further research in this thesis. It has also provided a research instrument/vehicle for the purposes of collecting data in response to specific research questions.

I originally devised the annual UKES survey for work purposes in 1997 as part of my role as Research and Strategy Director at Organisation B. Its purpose was to detect trends in employees’ experience of the workplace. My interest in devising the survey was to find out more about the challenges facing employees so that when I and my colleagues were
working with them as developers we would be better placed to help them deal with these.
The primary audience was therefore colleague-practitioners. Some elements of the findings
were written up in the form of research summaries and also referred to in books (Appendix 2).

The aim of the UKES was to find out about the issues and challenges that people were
facing in the workplace, and their ability to adapt to the changing nature of organisations and
organisational life. The survey design each year was based on exploring issues arising from
focus groups of white collar workers who were drawn from a variety of groups including
people attending development programmes at Organisation B and previous UKES
respondents. These groups, typically involving six to ten people in management, technical
specialist and HR roles, discussed potential research issues which had arisen in the
'classroom' in a management development context at Organisation B and also considered
some of the trends in the business and management press at that time.

Questions were developed that focused on what was happening within organisations and
also how employees were experiencing these developments. Each questionnaire was
piloted with the focus groups that had contributed to the identification of issues to explore.
General themes in which questions were developed included:

- Organisational Change
- Organisational Life
- Organisational Culture
- The Employee Deal
- Working Across Boundaries.

Although some items remained similar each year, there was scope to include new questions
to explore areas of interest arising in any given year. The survey instrument included forced
choice questions which were analysed statistically and also open-ended questions which
were thematically analysed, without the aid of software packages such as NUDIST until
2006.

The period studied in this thesis is between 2000 and 2010. For the purposes of my PhD
studies I found areas within the findings of the UKES in the period 2000-2003 that I wished
to explore in more depth. I have therefore included a summary meta-analysis of findings
from this period, since it is in these years that a key sub-theme of this thesis became
apparent and led on to the study of Meaning at Work in 2004-5. A copy of the UKES 2004 is
to be found in Appendix 4 since this contains the questions which were intended to be part of the means of exploring the question of loss of meaning at work (Chapter Seven).

4.6.1 The sample

The survey was based on opportunity sampling within a given category i.e. UK-based white collar workers. Throughout the period of study, the UK Employee Survey was based on responses from 400 white collar workers on average, mainly UK based, drawn from a wide variety of organization types and sectors, with a roughly even split of men and women respondents, mostly in managerial or professional roles, and mostly aged 28 years of age or older. The typical response rate was just over 20 per cent which was encouraging given the lengthy questionnaire would take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

The 2004 UKES sample

The UKES used opportunity sampling in that respondents were self-selecting and were drawn from a wide variety of organisations and white collar occupations although these were in the main of professional/technical and managerial rather than clerical levels. However, the invitation to participate in the UKES was sent to people listed on the database of Organisation B. Organisation B, as described previously, provided a range of development services relating to personal and organisational effectiveness. Its database comprised ‘clients’ i.e. people who commissioned projects or who ‘sent’ staff on development programmes, as well as some of the ‘consumers’ of these programmes. Clients tended to be senior managers and/or HR Directors. So, although the sample was self-selecting, most of the people responding were likely to be familiar with Organisation B’s strong business values and service offerings, and might therefore be more inclined to provide responses to match. I attempted to counter-balance this risk by purchasing use of part of the database of the Chartered Institute of Management (CMI), where respondents were less likely to be aware of, or influenced by Organisation B’s approach.

Demographic charts detailing UKES samples for the years between 1999 and 2003 are included in Appendix 5.

By way of illustration, the demographics of the 2004 sample were as follows:
Sample size – 735, representing a response rate of 12%.

By role:
Professional – 45%
Specialist – 21%
General management – 34% of total sample. By seniority this broke down into 11% were Board Directors, 38% were in senior management; 36% middle management and 15% in junior management roles.

By gender
Men – 52%; women – 48%

By age
The majority (50%) were aged between 31 and 50, with 41% over 51 years of age.

By sector/role type
The sectors with the highest representation were: Financial services (12%), Consultancy (11%), Charity/Not for Profit (8%), Central Government (6%), Education (6%), Light manufacturing (6%). The private sector was on the whole more strongly represented than the public sector which represented 28% of the whole sample. Organisations were defined as operating as UK only (38%); 30% as global; 32% as Europe and international.

The majority of male respondents were in technical, financial or sales/marketing roles, while female respondents tended to work as specialists, professionals and general managers. More men (73%) than women worked as Board Directors. More men than women were senior managers (54%) and partners (68%).

By organisation size
The majority worked for well-established organisations with only 14% working for organisations less than five years old. 51% of respondents worked for organisations employing more than 1000 staff, 32% for organisations employing 5000+ staff.

The majority of respondents (43%) had worked for their organisation for less than four years, while a third had been with their organisation for over 11 years. Nearly half (47%) of respondents in the 51+ age category had worked for their organisation for 11 years or more.

There was a significant relationship between how long people have been in organisation and their age and between age and level, but not between years in organisation and level (see Appendix 5).

Earlier UKES samples (see 2000 sample in Appendix 4) tended to have higher proportions of employees who had worked for their employer for five years or longer. My assumption was that most of these longer-tenured employees would be familiar with the conventional expectations within the 'old' psychological contract, which were likely to be tested in the light
of the changes being instituted in their organisations. While this survey cannot claim to provide representative data about the UK’s white collar work force, the number and diversity of respondents does provide some sense of the (changing) experience and attitudes of these workers.

4.6.2 Data analysis both for the original (work) purpose, and for the meta-analysis 2000-2003 for my PhD purpose

Different statistical tests were used to analyse the quantitative data depending on the type of analysis and the measures used in the questionnaire. In the main Chi-Square ($\chi^2$) tests were used to look at significant differences between groups and Spearman’s Rho ($\rho$) for relationships. In comparing categorical data between years, Chi-Square was used while Spearman’s Rho was used to compare ordinal data or ratios. The open-ended responses were coded manually and thematically analysed.

The meta-analysis presented in this study therefore summarises the broad trends reported by employees concerning their experience of working life. Alongside this, a re-analysis of themes arising from open-ended question responses provides the basis of the overview of employee perceptions of the new work culture and its impact on them in Chapter Five.

4.6.3 Strengths and limitations of the survey data

Much of the UKES quantitative data takes the form of simple percentages and ratios. The quantitative data has not been subject to deeper statistical analysis within the thesis since the UKES sample group was not identical each year, and although there was a core of questions which were asked in every survey, new questions were included each year to explore themes emerging in any given year. Since the survey was completed anonymously, it is possible that people may have responded more negatively than they actually felt, especially when being critical of their own management.

However, since most respondents made the effort to complete the survey, including in some cases providing fulsome open-ended responses, it seems less likely that they would have done this in order to ‘score points’. Indeed, several respondents regarded completing the survey as a form of development in itself and as one respondent put it: “completing this survey gives me the chance to reflect over the last year; not something I would make time to do otherwise”.
4.7 Reflexive case study

In Chapter Six I include myself as a reflexive case study, in particular with respect to the impact of performativity, a key aspect of the new work culture, on my own psychological contract with my employer at Organisation B. Stake (2005) states that case study research is not a methodology, but a choice of what is to be studied (i.e. a case within a bounded system). It is 'the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances' (p. xi). Creswell (2007) proposes that case study research is the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a 'bounded system', such as a context or setting. For Denscombe (2007) the focus in a case study is on individual circumstances, rather than a wide spectrum of issues. The aim of a case study is to illustrate the general by looking at the particular.

The strengths of this approach is that case studies can give an in-depth analysis of a particular phenomenon, and as Denscombe (2007) suggests, is that they allow the research to explain why particular results have occurred, rather than just finding out what the results were. Similarly, Nisbet and Watt (1984) suggest an advantage of a case study approach is that the results are accessible to a wider readership, providing that the report is well written. The main weakness is that individual case studies are not easily generalisable, as Nisbet and Watt (1984) point out. However Stake (2000) suggests that case studies need not make claims about generalisability. Hammersley and Gomm (2000) report the view that what is important is that others can make use of the findings, and that the aim of a case study is to capture the uniqueness of the case, rather than to use them as the basis for wider generalisation.

More generally in this thesis I have adopted interpretive methodologies of data collection. One of the aims of more interpretive forms of research is to produce some understanding of social phenomena. As Watson (2009:424) suggests, "truth is provisional, always subject to fallibility by further enquiries." The relationship between subject and object, where the researcher places him or herself in relation to what or who is being studied, is problematised. Wolcott (1999) argues that, when applying an ethnographic approach, a distinction must be made between participant as observer and observer as participant. Both positions acknowledge the integral presence of the person doing the research; however clarity needs to be made on whether the observer is there purely to observe or is in fact an active participant in the process. Both positions will be present in this study as my role as researcher varied as opportunity and circumstances arose throughout the study.
Coffey (1999) argues that fieldwork is of necessity an embodied activity. According to reflexive methodology, the researcher, as a historically produced entity, must acknowledge his or her own biases and must take into account contextual issues and the relationship between context and theory when interpreting data. My reflections then are at two levels – first about the data I gathered through the process of research and then about my own experience and perspectives on these issues, together with my potential impact on the data collection and interpretation.

Quality of outcomes is dependent upon how this process of reflection is undertaken (Schon, 1983; Johns, 2000; Mason, 2002, 1996). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), state that reflection is useful in helping the observer / researcher to understand their own and other people’s paradigms. They argue that word ‘reflexive’ has a double meaning, also indicating that levels are reflected in each other. A dominating level can have reflections of other levels (p.271). Ideally the researcher allows the empirical material to inspire, develop and reshape theoretical ideas. At the same time the researcher’s repertoire of interpretations limits the possibilities of making certain interpretations. In particular the researcher’s own emotions strongly overlap with cognitive bias and the two elements reinforce one another. If one has worked a lot on a particular theory, one becomes as a rule emotionally attached to it (p.273).

The application of critical thinking, based on applied Critical Theory, impels the researcher as a participant and observer to consider their own historical, cultural and social situatedness (Alvesson, 1996). Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) investigated the psychology of personhood and the many facets of the self, particularly the link between the private and public ways of being. Harré defined the individual as the ‘singular self’ and explains how the individual’s mental capacity creates the different public and private actions.

Given that this thesis is concerned with the changing psychological contract, it would be naive not to recognise that the various claims I make here are subject to the same processes of interpretation and cultural and social influences as those being studied. As a white middle aged woman whose entire career has been based in the UK, I am bound to be influenced by the assumptions, attitudes, values, expectations and behaviours of those around me over the course of my lifetime and in particular by my workplace experience. Consequently, as researcher I shall be reflecting on my own changing psychological contract as well as my own views, feelings, experiences and role in carrying out fieldwork. While, like Coffey (1999:19), “it was never my intention to produce a wholly autobiographical, self-
referential text”, I believe that my personal experience of an aspect of the new work culture makes a valid contribution to the data.

Moreover it is important to engage personally and emotionally with the whole research enterprise, not only the data collection phase. Lofland and Lofland (1995) recognize the importance of autobiography in qualitative research but identify the need for balance between reflective fieldwork and self-indulgence. They stress that emotional engagement is necessary for the completeness of the project. However, Hammersley (2007) points out that the turn to reflexivity can limit the space for reporting of research findings and seeks to maintain a separation between facts and values.

4.8 HR leader research

In this section I describe the part of the research process I undertook to answer the research question: How did HRM professionals view their role with respect to the new work culture?

According to Hycner (1999:156) “the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa), including even the type of participants.” This part of the study took the form of life history interviews with senior HR Leaders. It attempts to understand the influences upon, and values reflected in, their discourse and implicit within HRM practice.

I want to summarise the research plan of this research strand to explain the development of the research process. My research design was in two stages. Initially I had in mind to carry out research based on the themes of the power and influence of HR practitioners, HR practitioner development, agency and perceptions of their role. This interest had been in my thoughts over several years, most particularly because the UKES and other surveys I conducted at Organisation B consistently raised issues in my mind about the role of HR in the enactment of performativity.

4.8.1 Clarifying research questions

I was initially unclear about the research questions I would use to elicit data. To ground my ideas I read through the available mainstream and critical literature about HR transformation, notions of HR leadership, HR practitioners’ professional work, and about reflexivity. In my reading, I became particularly aware of the business-driven discourse implicit in much mainstream HRM literature. I decided that asking questions directly would be likely to produce what I expected to hear i.e. positive sounding, ‘professional’ responses.
From this reading, allied to my main themes, I established that a life history approach would be very appropriate. I was keen to understand how participants had achieved success in their roles, what their early career motivations were and whether these still applied and were being enacted through their roles. I considered it potentially more likely that participants' responses would be more 'open' and reflective. It became obvious that these were my focus, but these were broad areas and needed more detail. My return to the literature helped define six key areas of interest (below) and, although the original issues were not changed significantly, I was happy with my research plan.

4.8.2 Areas of interest

1. Career background and early career motivations
2. What this implied about participants' values
3. The nature of their role now, their priorities and how they measure their success
4. Their view about how much agency, influence and power they believe they have
5. Their view about (the importance of) employee relations
6. How they develop their own teams and their view about how future HR professionals should be developed.

The six areas were now the focus of the research and were developed into a number of empirical interview questions which were sent to interviewees prior to the interviews (see Appendix 6). The subsequent data analysis and interpretation formed the evidence of my research and became the basis of the empirical Chapter Six.

4.8.3 Locating the research participants/informants

I wanted to gain insight into what leading HR practitioners thought about their role in creating the new work culture, so, rather than random sampling, I chose purposive sampling, considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the initial sample of twenty-four senior HR professionals. I selected the sample based on my judgement about those who "have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" (Kruger, 1988:150).

I was fortunate that I had relatively easy access to, my research sample. Many of these 'HR Leaders' I selected for interview were known to me personally, or by their reputation as
thought and practice HR leaders. In particular I chose these individuals because most of them were in senior HR positions within their own organizations, and might therefore be assumed to act as agents and 'shapers' of discourse and therefore practice, rather than being passive recipients of managerial discourse. I had the cooperation of the subjects of my research.

4.8.4 Strengths and limitations of sample
In many respects, the sample was probably representative of the most influential senior leaders of the HR profession at the time of the study. I had selected them to invite to participate as I believed them to be amongst the most visionary individuals with respect to the HR profession, and would therefore be most likely to have reflected on the nature of their role and on what they were aiming to achieve in it.

The limitations were that of course this was a special and possibly non-representative group with respect to the HR profession as a whole. From their life histories, their career backgrounds were somewhat atypical of the majority of HR professionals in that many had not begun their career in HR roles. There was also the possibility that since they were in some way known to me, and vice versa, some of them at least may have responded in ways they felt were 'appropriate' for a leading HR professional to say, and that they believed I wanted or expected to hear. I was sensitive to this risk and, in selecting the final sample of fourteen, I attempted to select only those people who I considered were likely to be open, confident yet self-critical in their responses. Thus I believe I was able to gain insight into what senior HR Directors were thinking, with their interests and biases.

Before discussing data collection, I wish to consider the issue of Research ethics.

4.8.5 Research ethics
One definition of the word ethics is 'what one ought to do'. In this study I explore ways in which subjectivity and 'work on self' have become central to work and management in contemporary organisations. In undertaking this study I have therefore interviewed many individuals, conducted focus groups and encouraged participants to share with me their thoughts, feelings and experiences of being employed in the new work culture.

Robson (1993:29) summarises the ethical concerns in carrying out research on humans. "How is our 'right to know' balanced against the participants' right to privacy, dignity and self-determination? And should the investigator act as both judge and jury?" In carrying out this
research I have worked within the ethical guidelines produced by the British Psychological Society which act as a checklist to this concern (Robson, 1993:470):

- Respondents should have confidence in the interviewer
- Mutual trust must exist
- The investigation must be considered from the standpoint of all participants
- Any threat to their psychological well-being, health, values or dignity must be avoided
- Differences in age, gender and culture must be recognised by the interviewer
- The interviewer must inform the participants about the objectives of the research
- Researchers must realise they are in a position of power over the subjects so must not use their authority over them
- After the debriefing, the withholding of information or the misleading of participants is unacceptable
- Before the study is carried out the researcher must give sufficient information to the subjects at the earliest stage of the process
- After collection of the data participants should receive necessary information to complete their understanding of the research
- The respondents have the right to withdraw their consent to any material which may be used
- Where detail about personal and private lives are involved, the participants must be protected from stress, including a promise that answers will be withdrawn if requested by the respondent
- Investigators share responsibility for the ethical treatment of their colleagues.

The main ethical issues for me were about power, trust and confidentiality and informed consent (Holloway, 1997; Kvale, 1996). In order to ensure ethical research, I conducted the study within a protocol which allowed me to address these concerns. Based on Bailey's
(1996:11) recommended items, I developed a specific informed consent 'agreement', in order to gain the informed consent from participants, namely:

- That they are participating in research
- The purpose of the research (without stating the central research question)
- The procedures of the research
- The risk and benefits of the research
- The voluntary nature of research participation
- The subject's (informant's) right to stop the research at any time

Interviewees were given, in advance of an interview, a Participant Information Sheet and an accompanying Research Participant Consent Form. The Participant Information Sheet described the purpose and nature of the study. Within this document the research questions, the methodological approach that was to be used, and the planned output. The ethical considerations were also outlined. This document explained to all potential participants why the research was being undertaken and what the involvement would be if they were selected. It also described who was conducting the study and it gave my contact details as the academic researcher. Most importantly, the information sheet assured the interviewee of confidentiality and it explained the meaning and implications of that assurance (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The information sheet also made clear that participants in the research could withdraw from the process at any time and without any consequences and that other persons would not be informed of such a move.

The information sheet described how the interview would be recorded and what steps would be taken to safeguard that recording. This document also made clear that care would be taken to ensure that it was not possible to associate a quotation from a particular interview transcript to be traced to an identifiable site still less to any particular individual. It was noted that all sites and the names of individuals would be anonymised unless they requested to be named. Interviewees were also given a 'topic guide' in advance so that they were aware what kinds of issues were to be discussed - though they were not given the precise questions.

The Research Participant Consent Form gave a summary of the key points of the interview process in which a potential interviewee was about to engage and this form also made clear that if consent was given, then the form should be signed and dated. This form was also signed and dated by the interviewer and the document became a 'contract' between the
parties. Interviews were recorded and interviewees were shown transcripts of the interviews. Although they were not offered editorial rights over the resulting transcripts, however, if a transcription error had occurred, this was pointed out and corrected. The interviewee then signed off the agreed transcript.

4.8.6 Data collection

With respect to the interviews with HR practitioners carried out for Research Question 5, the life history technique was incorporated into the approach. The subjective interpretation of the situation in which people find themselves, past or present, is its cornerstone (Plummer, 1996; Cohen and Musson, 2000). It was deemed fundamental that participants were allowed to speak for themselves and the research questions related to the behaviour of participants as well as their current and historical perceptions. This allowed participants to describe and account for their actions in the social world over time.

In overview, the process of data collection involved sampling the methodology through a pilot interview with one interviewee, initial life history interviews with twenty-four participants and follow-up interviews with fourteen participants. The recorded data were transcribed and discourse analysed.

I shall now describe the data collection process in more detail. The life-history approach in this study made use of autobiographical accounts arising from in-depth interviews. I asked one of the interviewees to help me test out the appropriateness of the questions, (the Career Background section of the interview schedule in Appendix 6), the setting for the interview and the interviewee's ease or discomfort at answering the questions of a personal nature. The pilot interview was semi-structured. When a question was answered, I was free to explore the response further or move on to a new question. After the interview, I reviewed the process with the interviewee and as his reflections were all very favourable, I felt comfortable to continue with the process in the same way with each person.

Participants were asked to provide curriculum vitae in advance of the interviews. These were informative in terms of the career path of the participants and facilitated a greater depth of understanding of past decision-making in respect of job movements. For example, had the participant moved frequently between jobs whilst in industry employment?

The interviews took place mostly (though not exclusively) at the offices or homes of the interviewees. The interview method allowed participants to talk about their life histories in order to unearth their understandings and the opportunity to describe their careers in
order to consider the interplay between life and career activities. In practice, it generally proved unnecessary to work through questions methodically, since interviewees quickly moved beyond responding to questions to telling their stories. The interviewees were able to elucidate on their unique, self-defined decisive career moments and the relative importance for them of features such as satisfaction in the job, coping with conflicts, and relationships with executives, peers, team members and significant others. Plummer (1983) identified that people did not tend to describe their experiences or their sensemaking processes in terms of succinct, abstract generalisables, and that people constructed narrative accounts as part of the sensemaking process. This was evident in these life history interviews as participants described issues and situations that were ascribed importance and relevance by them.

The researcher was charged with listening to their stories and with being flexible in approach to allow for different circumstances affecting the research subjects. The skill of the interviewer was the most crucial instrument, offering good investigative skills, the ability to put individuals at ease and the skill of knowing when to terminate the interview. I found, as Coffey (1999:22) points out, that maintaining a critical distance during fieldwork (the ‘ethnographic stranger’) is unrealistic and fails to reflect what researchers actually do, and the “ethnographic self actually engages in complex and delicate processes of investigation, exploration and negotiation”.

In practice, the length of the interview and the numbers of people involved proved very time-consuming. I also considered that I needed to follow up with some participants to explore certain aspects of their experience in more detail. The second interview involved only fourteen of the original interviewees, partly due to time constraints and partly because I had specific follow-on questions I wanted to explore further with the fourteen interviewees whom I judged might provide more reflective answers. I wanted to explore more specifically how participants saw:

1. The nature of their role now, their priorities and how they measure their success
2. Their view about how much agency, influence and power they believe they have
3. Their view about employee relations
4. How they develop their own teams and their view about how future HR professionals should be developed

In one case I was unable to carry out a second face-to-face interview as the interviewee was working overseas. He responded to the written questions I intended to ask him at the interview and his written responses were added to my data.
The interviews thus explored the values and discourses shaping and being shaped by these individuals; in particular the discourse themes relating to managerialism and participant perceptions of how HR priorities are changing. As Pollitt (1993: 111) notes ‘...social theorists commonly seek to understand bodies of thought and practice by relating them to the motives and interests of their proponents.’ At the same time, as Coffey (1999:26), points out, the accomplishment of fieldwork is not a passive thing: ‘We actively engage in identity construction and recasting’.

4.8.7 Data recording

Notes were taken during the first interviews. These were then read back to each interviewee to ensure that the understanding taken from the statements and description of events was that of the participant. This was deemed necessary so that each participant had the opportunity for correction or further elaboration in order to maximise the credibility and validity to the data. The second interviews lasted approximately three hours. These were tape recorded and transcribed. The accounts were agreed by participants post-interview.

4.8.8 Data analysis

In analysing the data, I focused on the discourse of these HR practitioners to understand their values, motivations and priorities within their roles. Groenewald (2004) refers to Hycner who cautions that ‘analysis’ has dangerous connotations for phenomenology. Instead the term ‘explicitation’ is appropriate because the “term [analysis] usually means a ‘breaking into parts’ and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon...whereas ‘explicitation’ implies an...investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (Hycner 1999:161). In this thesis I refer to both ‘analysis’ and ‘explicitation’.

As discussed in Chapter Three, discourse involves language, but language is not neutral: it has power. By saying, you are doing. Thus the talk of HRM is not just words, it is also action. Before describing in more detail how I analysed and interpreted the data, I will outline the role of discourse in shaping subjectivities.
In analysing the data, I followed the seven basic rules suggested by Robson (1993) i.e.

- Start the analysis as soon as some of the data has been collected, avoiding a build up of data.
- Make a record of what has been collected.
- Thematise and categorise the data.
- Think and reflect on the data at each stage of the process; use analytical notes to move the data to a conceptual stage.
- Use a filing system to organise the data and constantly resort it.
- Systematise the organisation of the data.
- Compare different aspects of the data to create a coherent picture.

The issues which stimulated my research also guided the sorting of my data as follows:

1. Their early career values and motivations
2. Their greatest learning experiences/critical incidents/ turning points
3. The nature of their role now, their priorities and how they measure their success
4. Their view about how much agency, influence and power they believe they have
5. Their view about employee relations
6. How they develop their own teams and their view about how future HR professionals should be developed.

By using these issues as my sorting categories, I gained a coherent and logical sense of where I was going with my data.

I also broadly followed the overall approach described by Knight (2002:185) (Figure 4.1). The first stage is to explore the data. This involves regular reading of what was said during the interviews. The aim is to pattern match aspects of the talk and detect the simple patterns which emerged.
I prepared a summary sheet according to each of the issues and recorded each person's relevant response to the research questions. The aim was to discover genuine categories. The headings were certainly helpful and were not a tool to manufacture evidence. What emerged was a voice of the HR practitioners reflecting on the important issues I had presented to them to consider.

4.8.9 Interpretation of Data

I was able to subdivide data from these areas into similar and disparate views. I was looking for patterns, to see whether the responses were similar in terms of age, gender, relational situations, HR and Non-HR backgrounds. The issue of age appears to have significance in terms of career attitudes and career opportunities. Senior HR practitioners under 40 years of age were typically more likely to be early adopters of the business partner model, to present
themselves as operating first and foremost as business executives rather than as functional specialists and to use more ‘business’ discourse than older practitioners.

After the initial interview I referred to the interim summary sheets. What became clear to me was that some important areas regarding shared beliefs of HR practitioners had been mentioned but not explored in detail. Robson (1993:388) approves of the summary sheet method as it can “highlight what still needs to be found out...(and) the summary should cover not only what is known but also the confidence you have in that knowledge, so that gaps and deficiencies can be spotted and remedied.” This is the advantage of the case study design which offers flexibility to the researcher.

I then related the practitioners’ responses according to their life history accounts of their pre- and early career values and motivations. Most of the practitioners described having a strong desire to work with people, in a number of cases in order to fulfil a personal social mission, for instance to improve society. I was keen to see the difference between the way practitioners reflected on the historical influences in their lives and the way they described their contemporary priorities to see if there was any continuity of values and motivations. I also wanted to look at the development of individuals over a period of time. I felt that this was a very important area I had omitted in my own thinking.

A simple matrix was used to list illustrative phrases from the interviews placed under the separate issue heading. This enabled me to see what the data was saying. This was created by hand on paper and when quotes were used in the empirical chapter, I ticked off each one to register its inclusion. The summary sheets were a useful strategy for making sense of qualitative data. The patterning of themes and clustering of responses to questions, and by counting the data to measure the frequency of occurrence, enabled me to discover the relationship between the responses. In this way I was attempting to look for findings to theoretical frameworks.

In order to make sense of the data, I returned to the research questions and I spent time absorbing what had been said by the interviewees. After a period of several weeks of perusal of the data, the responses given at the interviews started to tell their own story. Their experiences were individual, but what was becoming very clear was the story of the HR professional ‘careerist’. This collective voice was my driving force in the empirical chapter (Chapter 6).
The findings from this research were then considered with respect to the overall research questions, in particular Question 6: How did HRM practitioners view their role with respect to the new work culture?

4.8.10 Limitations of method
The use of life history approach, whereby the researcher is asking participants to use his or her memory to answer questions, must be defended in terms of both validity and credibility. Thompson (2004) stated that the general perception in relation to retrospective interviewing, and the nature of memory, has changed considerably, noting that the search for the individual understanding of certain situations was the most compelling feature of retrospective interviewing. He concluded that the majority of research interviews were designed such that the interviewee was asked about historical events or activities, and it was how individuals remembered what had occurred that was of interest. Accounts are themselves social phenomena that are shaped by social contexts. Atkinson (2005:5) argues that a degree of scepticism is required with regard to life history interviews:

"We need to regard such activities as social performances, or forms of social action, embedded within organisational contexts, and socially shared understandings".

4.8.11 Strengths of method
The life-history approach in this study made use of autobiographical accounts using in-depth interviews. It allowed participants the opportunity to describe their careers in order to consider the interplay between life and career activities. As such, life history prioritises individual explanations and subjective interpretations of actions and events, viewing them as lenses through which to access the meaning that people attribute to their experience. Moreover, as Musson (2004:34) stated,

'The life history method does recognise the collusion of the researcher in the research process. Allowing people to explain for themselves the experiences of contradictions and confusions, moments of indecision and turning points can illuminate our understanding of how individuals and organisations function more than methods which reduce experience to abstracted definition and moribund descriptions.'

The interviewees were able to elucidate on the relative importance of features such as satisfaction in the job, coping with conflicts, and relationships with co-workers and significant
others. The advantage of this approach was that the data had the ability to illuminate career reality because it emphasised the interpretations of everyday experiences as explanation of behaviours. These interviews therefore constitute a source of data regarding the range of value systems and work-based identities existing within these HRM roles within industry.

4.9 Meaning at work

Another sub-theme of research I carried out for the purposes of my PhD was a study of people’s perceptions of a loss of meaning at work. The choice of topic arose from a number of sources, including ‘classroom’ conversations with participants in management development sessions and action learning groups. Most particularly, this sub-theme emerged from a growing volume of open-ended responses to a variety of apparently unrelated questions in the UKES since 2000. I initially assumed that these difficult to categorise comments reflected the zeitgeist at the turn of the millennium. However, the theme persisted in open-ended responses to the UKES over the next two years and I decided to investigate the question of meaning more specifically in 2003-4.

In inviting people to participate in the study I made it clear that this was for my doctoral studies but that I would also produce material for a work publication. So I carried out the research in the work context and wrote up some of it for a work publication to justify time spent on it. My CEO was happy for me to do this since she was keen to derive benefit for Organisation B from my PhD studies. It is possible that people might have been influenced by that, but on the whole I gained the impression that participants were genuinely interested in exploring a topic which mattered to them and which at the time was rarely addressed in any formal setting other than perhaps a religious one.

The aim in this enquiry was to ‘ground’ the meaning of ‘meaning’ in the workplace, and to explore if, and why, people experienced a sense of loss of meaning at work in the early years of the twenty-first century. These issues are not well-grounded in much of the literature and existing research.

4.9.1 Methodology

The initial research method involved a literature review and analysis of specific multiple choice response and open-ended questions included in the UKES surveys in 2003 and 2004. In 2003, 46% of respondents reported that they were looking for more meaning in life generally, while 70% were looking for more meaning at work.
It was felt that qualitative methods were most likely to lead to deeper insights into people’s perceptions and experiences. As Hall (1996) points out, when we look at career and occupational experiences later in the individual’s life, we need to see these experiences in the context of that individual’s total life, encompassing all the other important current roles and sub-identities as well as hopes and dreams for the future:

We need to look at the individual’s overall quest for meaning and purpose as she or he pursues what Shephard (1984) calls the ‘path with a heart’. This requires the use of concepts and research methods that will let us probe individuals’ sense of direction in the search for work that has personal meaning... relational influences are powerful methods for the task (Hall, 1996:7).

I held a series of three focus group meetings to define and explore the topic. These meetings reflected the difficulty of defining the nature of the issues. In addition, the project involved analysis of a number of questions (19, 104-111) specifically inserted into the 2004 UKES survey (Appendix 4) to explore the topic with a different and larger sample.

### 4.9.2 Locating the sample

There were two main samples in researching the theme of meaning:

a) Respondents to the UKES in 2004

As discussed in section 4.5.1, the UKES surveys are completed by white collar employees, including managers, from organisations in different sectors of the UK economy and include many international and multi-national/global companies.

b) Focus groups

Members of focus groups were self-selecting, but since the invitation to participate was posted on Organisation B’s website, as discussed in section 4.5, it is again possible that participants had already experienced Organisation B’s services and approach, or were interested in doing so. It is also possible that some focus groups responded to the invitation because they were interested in other research I had been carrying out for Organisation B. In that sense, it is possible that the sample was not representative of UK white collar workers as a whole, but given that there was a strong response to the advertisement to participate, I assume that the topic had wider resonance than solely amongst the people who did have
chance to participate in the research. Due to resource constraints, I restricted the numbers of focus group sessions to three, comprising 30 participants in total.

**Participants comprised:**
Women – 18; men- 12  
Aged 21-30 – Women 2; men 1  
Aged 31-50 – Women 15; men 8  
Aged 51+ - Women 1; men 3  

Sectors: Private – 13; public sector – 8, not for profit – 6, self-employed – 3

The project was advertised on the Organisation B website as an inquiry into 'Meaning at Work' and participants were invited to notify me of their interest in participating. Potential participants of focus group were advised that the information shared in groups and with the researcher would be treated in confidence, that no organisation or individual would be named, and that anything they had gleaned from other focus group participants should be used for their own development purposes only. People were asked to sign an agreement to this effect.

**4.9.3 Data collection process**
Initially the open-ended responses from the UKES 2000-2003 were grouped into discourse themes. The emerging discourse themes were compared with the literature on spirituality and meaning. These themes were then used to construct specific questions which featured in the UK Employee Survey (2004), using both prescribed response and open-ended questions. These questions can be found in Appendix 4, questions 19, 104-110). The UKES that year was completed by 735 respondents, a response rate of 14%.

Three focus groups each met for four hours over a two week period to explore people’s perceptions of ‘meaning’, especially with regard to meaning at work, and what constitutes meaningful and meaning-less experiences. These meetings reflected the difficulty of defining the nature of the issues. The focus group explored participants’ own definitions of meaning, together with their experiences of heightened meaning in the workplace and elsewhere.

The specific methodology used in this part of this process was appreciative inquiry (AI), one the ‘strengths-based’ approaches to inquiry. AI methodology was considered appropriate to exploring such a theme since it is increasingly used as a research and organisation
development tool in addressing sensitive situations, such as change, conflicts and racial tensions. The core assumptions of AI are as follows:

1. Human systems evolve in the direction of the things they ask questions about.
2. Change begins at the moment we ask the question.
3. We can learn anything from our organisation’s stories.
4. Where you believe you are going is where you will end up.
5. The more positive the question, the greater and longer lasting the change.

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), originators of the AI approach, argue that true engagement in ‘human’ issues, such as change, is an emotional experience – we cannot have real adult engagement without also experiencing excitement, joy, pain, anxiety amongst many other emotions. How we work through these emotions, and the extent to which they are allowed to be expressed can have a major impact on whether, ultimately, a change is experienced as positive.

Thus AI is a social constructionist method/instrument. It is also an instrument which powerfully influences the kinds of stories which emerge. In contrast to problem solving methods which tend to start with a felt need, identify the problem and analyse its causes, appreciative inquiry begins by appreciating the best of what is, envisaging what might be, dialoguing about what could be and co-creating what will be. I believed this to be a useful approach to grounding abstract and potentially sensitive and highly subjective topics such as ‘meaning’ since, unlike ‘deficit’ approaches, AI tends to evoke a non-defensive approach to inquiry from participants.

The use of AI for exploring meaning was my choice because I thought it would provide a ‘safe’ climate for exploring a potentially sensitive topic. It was an approach I had found helpful in consulting around mergers so I thought it could be illuminating and enriching for people, and that they would also get some benefit from participating. This was one of the first times that AI had been used in Organisation B since there were only two of us who had started to use it with our clients, and it became much more regularly used later, partly because of its use in the Meaning study and because Organisation B later developed an Organisation Development practice, with Appreciative Inquiry becoming one of several ‘core’ methodologies.

I developed a conversation guide and information sheet which was distributed to participants at the start of the focus group discussion and used by me to structure the process (Appendix
7). Participants were assured that their own contribution would be treated anonymously and in such a way that they could not be recognised by specific kinds of company data or other distinguishing characteristics. They were also required to agree to maintain confidentiality about their own and other participants’ contributions to the process.

The first part of the process explored participants’ personal experiences and definitions of ‘meaning’. Participants were asked to think of a situation in which they had experienced intense meaning. Key themes emerging from their accounts were initially content analysed within the groups. Then, using the same method, I asked participants to describe when they had experienced meaning at/in work. As the researcher undertaking this research project I engaged as a participating observer in focus group discussions and followed up my observations with reflexive interviews with the participants to elicit their views on what had occurred and the meaning they ascribed to it.

4.9.4 Data recording

Focus group meetings were tape recorded, transcribed and anonymised. The transcripts were then sent to the group members for their review/further comments.

4.9.5 Data analysis

In summary, analysis took the form of content and theme analysis against emerging theory. Responses to the UKES forced choice questions about meaning/loss of meaning were correlated with other elements of the survey to understand what circumstances appeared to link with individual and collective experiences of meaning (e.g. size or sector of organisation, volumes of change, growth, downsizing and so on). Ken Wilbur’s ‘Four Dimensions of Phenomena’ framework (2001) (see Chapter 7) was used as a means of presenting the correlated data to better understand what circumstances, and consequences appeared linked to individual and collective loss of meaning. Open-ended UKES questions were content and theme analysed and compared with the focus group data and the literature themes to achieve internal triangulation within this project.

In analysing the discourses of the focus group participants in my study, the focus group transcriptions were content analysed to discover constructs relating to ‘meaning’, ‘meaning at work’, meaningful’ and meaningless’. These categories were checked against the core research questions. The quantitative and qualitative data were synthesised within an
emerging model suggesting linkages between macro and micro context, the search for meaning, and individual and organisational outcomes. A diagram showing the categories used and their relationships is found in Chapter 7. These offer scope for potential future research. The findings from this research are outlined and discussed in Chapter 7.

4.9.6 Strengths of method

My choice of appreciative inquiry for the focus group sessions linked with my pragmatist aim of helping practitioners through the process of research – in this case to gain understanding of how they may be able to gain a greater sense of meaning at work. It also appeared a 'safe' and conducive route into conversations of a highly personal and subjective nature. The use of specific questions about meaning in the UKES allowed for some interesting correlations to emerge. Thus qualitative and quantitative research allowed for greater insight into a potentially elusive theme.

4.9.7 Limitations of method

It might be argued that a theme such as 'meaning' would lend itself only to a qualitative research method. It should also be highlighted that the data reflected the individual and subjective perceptions of participants prompted by interview questions and discussion prompts, consequently should in no way be construed as definitive or absolute. However, research on the psychological contract, which is informal and dynamic in nature, will always be fraught with methodological limitations and results will always be tentative in nature and should be interpreted accordingly.

4.10 The overall study - analytical perspectives

Data analysis issues

Earlier, I noted that my attempts at theory development resonated with the 'pragmatic style of thinking' which is 'intellectually pluralistic' advocated by Watson (2010). This study is therefore informed by a number of different analytical perspectives; as Ball (1994: 2) puts it, "bringing to bear those concepts and interpretive devices which offer the best possibilities of insight and understanding." In exploring the links between the structural expansion performative managerialism and HRM, and the institutional and cultural restructuring of the state presided over by the New Right, this thesis applies a number of levels of analysis.
My starting point for this research was to consider the current debates pertaining to factors shaping the employment relationship and the emergence of the new work culture. Watson (2010) argues that the practice of management can only be understood in the context of the wider social-economic, political and cultural factors in particular capitalist economic relations) which shape - if not determine - those practices. Similarly, Paauwe (2009:134) calls for a 'contextually based theory of human resources' which explicitly acknowledges the significance of cultural, institutional and organizational contexts.

In chapters two and three I have outlined the influence of particular ideological assumptions and policies upon the workings of the UK political economy since the 1980s, which have been the subject of substantial economic, political and sociological analysis (see Marquand, 2008; Gamble, 2009). The political emphasis upon neo-liberalism and the need to expose all parts of the UK economy to the values of business throughout the 1980s and 1990s has been reflected in the development of a political discourse of business and management and the development and expansion of Human Resource Management (HRM) at the expense of Personnel Management and Industrial Relations. Alongside concurrent reviews of the relevant literature, through these various methods, data are gathered, deconstructed, analyzed and synthesized.

While the analytical level does broadly move from the political and economic to the cultural, the organisational and then the individual, there is a certain degree of overlap between these areas. Although these analytical areas are interconnected, Clarke and Newman (1997: xii) point out that "each level of theory, on its own, tends to bracket off other levels." These different methods and sources of data should allow for a degree of triangulation but comparing differing data sets is problematic. The challenge is to draw on these interconnected but distinct data sets to allow for 'plural' voices, involving macro and micro perspectives, to create a coherent narrative of the impact of change and the new work culture on the psychological contract of white collar workers over the period studied so that the voices are plural, but they contribute to a singular and coherent narrative. This is a considerable discursive achievement, which is the work of the researcher.

Despite the apparent theoretical compartmentalisation, there is an attempt throughout to acknowledge the influence of these various arenas upon each other. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that qualitative researchers are often hesitant to admit that causal relationships are within the scope of qualitative research. These authors argue that the comparative method is the basis for causal explanations and that experiments are only one
form of this method. They argue that ethnographic and qualitative analysis should be concerned with causal relationships, which this thesis attempts to identify through considering the consequences of human actions in their local contexts. In line with what Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:3) define as 'what ethnographers do'.

"(...) what are produced, for the most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories: quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most".

To address the question of cross comparison of differing data sets, I have adopted the following tactics suggested by Huberman and Miles (1994, in Knight, 2002):

- Look for patterns and themes
- Begin sense-making early, trying to develop stories that draw themes together, offer explanations, give you a feeling of understanding. Good quality literature reviews should help here.
- Early on, try imagining clusters of themes, concepts and cases
- Check whether your analysis can be put together in a story that holds together, that is plausible to you, and that can be related to the picture you drew in the literature review.

The categories used for interpreting what people said were generated out of the process of data analysis. The coding of different themes reflects my reflections on what I had gleaned from combining quantitative and qualitative research. Moreover, each data set is examined through the lens of reflective practice (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000), informed by critical theory (Habermas, 1986). Reflexive interpretation takes into account various levels of reflection. As Knight (2002:186) points out, interpretation of a wide range of qualitative data has involved:

"(...) a continuing, sensemaking, toing and froing between the data, the categories, the emerging stories or theories, and the literature."

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000:270) argue that a reflexive metatheory is needed to provide a comprehensive frame of reference for inspiring and structuring reflection. For them, this is more a framework for drawing attention to, and mediating between various core dimensions of reflection, for initiating acts of reflection and maintaining movement between reflective themes. Such a holistic research approach is based on the idea that a system's properties cannot necessarily be accurately understood independently of each
other. As Watson (2010:916) suggests: "Pragmatism invites us to assess knowledge, not in terms of how closely it 'mirrors' or represents objectively existing realities, but in terms of how effectively it informs the projects of the human beings who are informed by it".

Thus this thesis enables me to both process the personal nature of the observations, and to identify some of the interconnected patterns within the social system undergoing radical change and some of the factors which conspire to disrupt and reconfigure those patterns. I focus particularly on the interplay between the research questions examined at different periods in this study. Do the patterns, similarities and difference identified appear in all three data sets and if so, to what extent and why? Do historical patterns reflect contemporary observations or is a different pattern emerging? To what extent is people's experience of change in their day-to-day work reflect the assumed shift in psychological contract towards the 'new deal' discussed in this thesis.

4.10.1 Pitfalls and methodological issues

As with the majority of studies, the design of the current study is subject to limitations. The requirement for the in-depth description of social meaning within a historical analysis of the new work culture through the experiences of participants resulted in an approach being constructed that the author believed at the time would allow for the research questions to be comprehensively explored. However, it became evident in hindsight that this was not the case and, upon reflection, a number of decisions taken in relation to the methodological approach were deemed to be inappropriate.

Although this thesis constitutes an attempt to bring together elements of these different approaches, there are theoretical spaces or explanatory gaps where analysis shifts from one level to another. The different layers of analysis are treated similarly in terms of levels of importance. A possible disadvantage of attempting to analyse the political, cultural, organisational and individual significance of an entire social shift is that depth may be sacrificed.

While I was aiming to build up a longitudinal picture of how the new work culture was affecting employees, developing this into several sub-strands of research has proved complex to process and to write up. It might therefore have been more straightforward to focus in depth on only one aspect of how employees were impacted by the new work culture. Yet, despite the difficulties of the multi-dimensional nature of my study, I consider
that one of this study's strengths is that it provides multiple perspectives on a complex and
dynamic theme.

I am aware that the UKES meta-study is correlational in nature and consequently the results
cannot indicate causality. The sample groups and the survey content varied slightly each
year, although some items remained the same throughout. However, it can certainly be used
as a basis for inferences about causal relations, as can the qualitative data I have collected.
The choice of where to 'dig deeper' has been based on a combination of researcher intuition
and some indications from open-ended responses to survey questions of an issue worth
exploring. The danger of this methodology are the usual ones of both lack of generalisability,
and the temptations of over-generalisation, both of which risks I have attempted to avoid.

With respect to the qualitative studies, it is entirely possible that there were other areas
worthy of deeper investigation which were not pursued, but that question cannot be resolved
at this distance in time. Moreover my own role as a management developer and consultant
may have produced bias in my selection of issues to investigate, and in what ways, and also
in my interpretation of the data. As a senior manager I have certainly been under pressure to
adopt more managerial stances on issues to do with organisational change involving
redundancies, and I have no doubt absorbed unitarist approaches despite myself which may
be reflected in my assumptions about what is happening.

The sheer volume of different forms of research data which I have attempted to distil runs
the risk that I have been unable to see the 'wood' for the 'trees', causing me to omit relevant
matter and include or even duplicate less relevant material. I also find it difficult to both
reflect on the volumes of data I have gathered through the process of research and also
about my own experience and perspectives on these issues, and produce insightful
conclusions in a condensed form. In this study, the topic area and range of methods may be
so broad as to make it impossible to draw definitive conclusions. As a result I may have
made too many generalisations and assumptions which may prevent me from drawing
insights more specifically from the body of research.

4.10.2 Strengths
The study, despite its limitations has some key strengths. In the context of the psychological
contract, my contribution lies in the inclusion of both the employer and the employee
perspective, as a means of getting inside labour processes and seeing work in capitalism
through actors' eyes. My intention was to understand how my research samples construct
their own sense of work reality: how people respond to the complexities of the new work
culture and the nature of the psychological shift people have to make in order to construe something that is potentially negative into something positive for them.

In terms of generalisability, I propose that this research is plausible as an impression of the wider world. The meta-study findings of the UKES are broadly in line with previous psychological contract research (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Guest et al, 1996) suggesting that different employees react similarly to contract violations. By combining a variety of strands of research, the study allows for a diversity of views, combining participants and researcher perspectives. It also allows for some triangulation, with some consistency revealed between the different strands of research.

The areas which were investigated more deeply (e.g. meaning, the role of HRM) appeared to have face validity with the groups who took part in the research process, and subsequently with conference audiences of mainly HR practitioners. Whilst such a response from audiences could be construed as corroboration and passivity on their part, on the whole I have gained the impression that they mostly genuinely endorsed my perception of what the key issues were.

This study investigates the consequences of the new work culture for the psychological contract using an experienced and occupationally diverse sample of employees in a variety of sectors. In doing so, the researcher has brought together a more comprehensive account of the area of inquiry by using both quantitative and qualitative methods whose blend should ensure rigour. The study highlights individualised responses of an experienced sample of employees to unbalanced exchanges with the employer. Future research could explore the potential moderating effects of the saliency employees attach to particular obligations in how they respond to contract breach.

4.11 Conclusion

The chapter has aimed to explain the exploratory, descriptive and explanatory purposes of my enquiry. I have considered the research process in nine distinct sections to lead the reader through the process. The ‘Autobiographical Approach to the Research Question’ allowed me to start from where I was, and explains my interest in my research. I wanted to openly acknowledge my interests in helping people to exercise agency and to historicise my interest, therefore the research question influenced my chosen strategy. An introduction of the multi-method approach was necessary and an explanation of why a combination of
insights from existing data to identify areas worthy of deeper exploration, using qualitative and quantitative data, was the appropriate strategy.

Background reading acted as a valuable resource in developing the research questions and the conceptual structure for the research and explains the fluid design of the research. Methodological and ethical issues were discussed in detail and issues essential to me as the insider researcher were highlighted. The sequential formation of my research questions was traced from a general research focus through to relatively specific questions and I discussed the range of empirical techniques. The final section discussed the analysis of the data, the 'Gathering and Interpreting' process.

The degree of influence over the process I have had as an interviewer was discussed and the advantage I have had as an insider-researcher is expressed through my access to a wide range of potential research participants. I hope that my research participants trusted me to interpret their data accurately and fairly, particularly as I share with them the responsibility of being one of the research subjects involved in the study. I, like them, have presented aspects of my own life and career for public scrutiny. I believe that if I repeated these interviews now, some at least of the findings would be similar, especially those relating to the voice of HR practitioners. The conversations I have had since the original interviews confirm that opinions offered at the time are still relevant. I feel that my research process could be imitated and developed by other researchers looking at aspects of the lives of HR practitioners.

I move from the process to the people in Chapter 5 where I discuss key themes from the meta-analysis of the UK Employee Survey, looking at the reported trends between 2000-2003 in particular with respect to the employer-driven development of the new work culture characterised by work intensification, flexibilisation and performativity, and its impact on employees.

In Chapter 6 I consider the impact of HRM practices, in particular with respect to performativity, on my own psychological contract with my employer at Organisation B through a reflexive case study. I also examine the discourse of senior HR professionals, many of whom are leading the transformation of their own function into variations on the 'Ulrich model' i.e. business partners, shared services etc. I consider the extent to which they see the discourse of business applied to their HR priorities as 'natural and self-evident' and the extent to which this may create cognitive dissonance for some of them, given their reported personal values.
In Chapter 7 I consider employees' reported loss of meaning at work, what they ascribe this to and what they consider meaningful. I discuss these findings with respect to the 'New Deal' framework.

Watson (2010) argues that a coherent CHRM theorization requires a clear acknowledgement of the sociological, socio-psychological, economic, political and ethical aspects of working, managing and organizing. I acknowledge these aspects in my thesis and, as Watson suggests, pragmatism is not about pursing absolute or final truths about reality. It is about attempting to make theoretical generalisations which might inform human practices and help us better appreciate the relationships between individuals' predicaments and institutional and historical patterns better than others. In answering my research questions I intend to open up new areas of dialogue about some of the pressing social and technical issues facing organisations, employees and communities today. I believe that, potentially, this approach offers a grounded, intellectually coherent and explanatory framework for understanding the changing employment relationship which can both make a contribution to the body of knowledge and be useful to employees and to organisations.
Chapter 5

The new work culture and its impact on employees

Introduction

In this, the first of three chapters in which I review my research findings, I examine evidence for what Sennett describes as 'the culture of the new capitalism' and for Braverman's (1974) predictions that Taylorism would spread to all types of white collar work, including highly skilled and professional work. A large part of Braverman's argument centred on the systematic effort in a capitalist economy to "deskill" jobs in order for capital and its representatives to be able to more efficiently control and coordinate the labour force to maximize profit. By applying Taylorist methods, managements could organise, measure and control white collar work. As a result work could be degraded and workers commodified. Thus, with less labour bargaining power, employees would have less employment security and lower wages. Brown et al (2010b) argue that in today's era of Knowledge Capitalism, 'Digital Taylorism' is being used to produce similar effects in high skill work to those Braverman had seen with routine office work.

In the decades since Braverman's book appeared, both the US and the UK have embraced neo-liberal economic policies based on the principles of free markets, global competition and flexible labour markets. As discussed in earlier chapters, the form of employment relationship which equated to the 'old psychological contract' (i.e. a bureaucratic, paternalistic, seemingly mutual employment relationship) was deliberately dismantled in the UK from the 1980s onward as part of a political, economic and cultural transformation project driven by the policies of the Thatcher government and later ones, since 'inflexible' employment arrangements were considered an obstacle to the pursuit of market freedom and labour flexibility, and therefore to increased productivity. This chapter and the next address some of the mechanisms used to destabilise the 'old deal' (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995).

As I outlined in Chapter Four, I draw on a summary meta-analysis of annual UK Employee Surveys (UKES), designed and conducted by me over ten years (1997-2006) when I was Director of Research and Strategy at Organisation B. This annual survey material was circulated internally and included mainly quantitative trend data. In this thesis I have focused on a selective re-presentation of this material (2000-2003), and have also included additional
material derived from interviews and focus groups with survey respondents during this period. It is from within this material that I found research questions that I wanted to examine in more detail, to obtain a more nuanced view of the issues. These strands of research will be addressed in Chapters Six and Seven.

My focus in this chapter is on the nature of the new work culture as experienced by UK white collar workers, mainly between 2000 and 2003, although I also make reference to data from the surveys conducted between 1997 and 2006. I shall consider how respondents in this study reported the nature of changes within the work culture at the time and how they responded to pressures put upon them within the new work culture, to which they were required to adapt. In particular, I examine ways in which employees appear to have experienced the dismantling of the conventional assumptions of the 'old' psychological contract i.e. job security and career progression. The core research and empirical questions I examine are:

- What are the salient features of the emerging new work culture?
  - What evidence exists of work intensification?
  - What evidence exists of increasing flexibilisation of work?
- To what extent does work appear to be degraded in the new work culture?
  - What evidence exists of the commodification of white collar work?
- How were employees affected by the new work culture?
  - How well did employees appear able to cope with the increasing demands made of them?
  - To what extent is there evidence of what Sennett (2006:5) calls 'the cultural ideal of new capitalism' i.e. "self oriented to the short term, focused on potential ability, willing to abandon past experience"?
  - What coping strategies did employees deploy?
- What was the impact on the (collective) psychological and social contract?
  - What evidence exists of employees experiencing increasing job insecurity?
  - To what extent was the 'employability thesis' working?
  - What support did employees expect/hope for from their employers?
  - What evidence exists that employees no longer trust their employers?
- How much were employees able to exercise agency in the new work culture?
  - What evidence exists that employees were, and remained, willing to comply with managerial demands for increasing workloads?
Given that this thesis offers a historical perspective on the psychological contract of white collar workers (1997-2006), and given that critical management studies (CMS) assumes that the practice of management can only be understood in the context of the wider social-economic, political and cultural factors which shape - if not determine - those practices (Wong et al, 2009), I intend to interweave findings from the summary meta-analysis of the UK Employee Survey (UKES) throughout the chapter with background trends which were reported in the business and management press, and in the media more generally, during the period of study. I shall discuss the interplay of external factors and organisational trends as reported by employees through the lenses of psychological and social contracts.

Given the volume of data available to me, I have restricted my selection to those items which give the clearest demonstration of employer trends and employee responses, and so test out the evidence for Braverman’s predictions and Sennett’s observations about the nature, and effects on employees of the ‘new work culture’. The summary meta-analysis of the UKES remains at a level of broad generality rather than examining a specific sector, gender or age group. There were some differences in response between different sectors, but these appeared rather to reflect the pace at which various developments were taking place in any given sector rather than other substantive differences. For example, public sector bodies on the whole appeared to undertake major restructurings and implement practices such as performance management slightly later than comparably large private sector organisations. However, there was sufficient generality of response across sectors that I will refer to broad trends since it was these that provided my jumping off point for obtaining a more nuanced view of issues arising which I investigated using qualitative research methods and findings from these strands of research are discussed in the next two chapters.

Many respondents of the UKES 2000-2003 were managers, but were asked to respond as employees unless there were specific questions probing particular aspects of people management where it was appropriate to answer from a management perspective. The majority of UKES respondents were not members of unions. For the purposes of understanding the shifting nature of the ‘old psychological contract’ I have also included more detail of the 2000 UKES sample since the majority of respondents (54%) had worked for their organisation for more than 8 years, with 38% reporting that they had been with their organisation for 11 years or more. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that most respondents had expectations of continuous employment in line with the ‘old’ psychological contract.
The data is organised in three sections in which I consider:

- Developments in the employment context during the period of this study and how employees construed the changing work culture.
- How employees reacted to the impact on them of the new work culture.
- The extent to which the 'New Deal' (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995) was becoming a reality during this period.

Section 1: Developments in the UK employment context (1997-2006) and examining evidence for a new work culture

In this section I outline some of the key features of the UK employment landscape around the turn of the century, combining background context and UK Employee Survey material. The overall picture of the UK economy during this period was one of growth, with generally tight labour markets and high levels of employment.

Throughout the period of this study the management of change remained the dominant discourse. When the first UK Employee Survey (UKES) was published in January 1998, shortly after the coming into power of 'New Labour,' it presented a picture of organisations 'gradually returning to economic growth' after a period of economic turbulence.

5.0 Changing structures

The first UKES in 1998 followed a lengthy period of organisational restructurings including 're-engineering', downsizing and 'delayering' (or flattening of organisational structures), in which swathes of middle managers lost their jobs. The first UKES survey indicated that organisational restructurings were still very much the order of the day, with 86% of respondents reporting that their organisation was downsizing, outsourcing or delayering its structures. Globalisation at that stage was reported by most respondents as 'a future trend'.

The scale of organisational change reported appeared reminiscent of the morphogenesis referred to by Archer (1995), since many respondents described a sense of being in a 'new game' for which they did not know the rules. UKES respondents frequently reported being required to continually adjust to new requirements. In 1999 the survey highlighted the ongoing consolidation of mature industries such as construction through merger and acquisition. By 2005 92% of UKES respondents reported that their organisation had
undergone change over the previous two years, with medium-large organisations reporting the highest levels of change. Managing change and poor communication were reported to be the biggest challenges facing organisations (63%).

Many companies were expanding through strategic alliances such as joint ventures, or partnership with other providers. Across the UK’s public sector, targeting and ‘partnership working’ in cross-sector service delivery in areas like health and social services, were leading to rationalisation. Local government employees were experiencing the early thrusts of purchaser/provider splits which were later extended under a ‘Best Value’ rubric. Central government services were starting to be amalgamated, such as the merger of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. Such arrangements brought into sharp relief for many employees issues relating to job security, career progression, cultural differences and complexity.

5.0.1 Growing industrial relations tensions
The government drive to modernise public services continued throughout the period. The Schools, Further and Higher Education Sectors were undergoing 'reform'. In 2005 a worsening industrial relations climate was becoming evident in the hardening of attitudes among some union leaders towards government actions and strikes. The increasing assertiveness of the unions was reflected in industrial action, such as that of the Fire Brigades' Union, on a scale not seen for a number of years.

By 2006 the New Labour government admitted that too many targets had been imposed on public bodies and that a culture of managerialism may not be the answer to improving standards of public service. In the 2006 UKES, the state of company pensions and the closure of final salary pension schemes to new recruits were causing concern to employees. Employees expressed concern about the prospect of having to work for longer, both to compensate for poorer pensions and the likely later age at which they would be able to access pensions.

5.1 Technology
The period of study saw technology being used as Schumacher and Braverman had envisaged i.e. to both intensify work, since with the advent of email and the Internet more work could be carried out at speed and remotely, and to commodify white collar work and increase flexibility and efficiency. For instance, thanks to the development of call centre
technology, routine work could be ‘parcelled up’, outsourced and/or ‘off-shored’ to less expensive centres of production or of customer service.

5.1.1 Flexibilisation
Flexibilisation was especially evident in the UKES between 1998 and 2003 as the outsourcing of ‘non-core’ routine work areas got under way in commercial sectors. Call centres were increasingly described in the popular press as latter-day ‘dark, satanic mills’ for their heavy use of technical monitoring and controls imposed on employees. UK call centre jobs were being lost as employers exported operations overseas. The number of part-time workers reached record highs, reflecting the seemingly inexorable shift away from secure, full-time employment to less secure flexible patterns and casualization.

By 2002 almost half of respondents’ organisations were outsourcing processes and third party contract management became a new challenge for managers. The increasing casualization of the workforce was posing challenges to many managers who found themselves managing a flexible workforce, including contractors and temporary staff, who, managers feared, had no loyalty to the organisation and 40% of manager respondents indicated that they were increasingly expected to manage people not directly employed by the organisation. Over half of the 2002 sample reported being increasingly required to work in a variety of forms of team. More ‘flexible’ matrix structures, with complex reporting lines, seemed to be especially challenging to work in, as illustrated by this comment by a technical specialist then working in a matrix:

“There are too many senior managers. Consensus cannot be reached, therefore delay in making decisions. Managers are not secure in their own positions”.

5.1.2 Intensification of work through technology
The speed with which work practices and workloads were transformed through technology is evident in the UKES. The use of electronic means of communication in 1998 was still in its infancy and less than 50% of UKES respondents regularly used computers at work and only 73% of respondents reported using or having occasional access to e-mails. Many managers still employed secretaries to do their typing. By 1999 company use of information and communications technology had grown so significantly that there were real concerns about the risks (which proved unfounded) posed to company systems by the ‘Millennium Bug’.
Some respondents lamented the advent of electronic communications. They were already noticing how email was replacing face-to-face communication, and remarked on the increased workloads and speed of response expected. One email user complained about “the added pressure when all those who wish to talk to me do so by e-mail, currently 50-100 messages a day at peak; could multiply by 3 or 4.” There were calls for a new form of etiquette around emails, in particular how to avoid causing offence with the inadvertent use of capital letters, and HR teams reported drafting new policies or protocols relating to appropriate use of email. By 2000 information and communication technology was an accepted feature of the workplace, and e-mail in particular was used more extensively. Its main reported drawbacks included the increase in or overload of communication, with people continuing to copy in large numbers of people on messages just to ‘cover their backs’.

Digital Taylorism (Brown et al, 2010a, 2010b) was proceeding apace throughout the study period. This was evident in UKES respondent complaints in 2002-3 about the growing use of integrated information systems such as SAP, partly about the expense and slow progress of implementation, but also because people were reluctant to place on the system valuable information which might once have been their own preserve, thus potentially making them expendable. In 2005 knowledge management was reported by many as a high business priority (83%), compared with just 32% in 2001; however, 90% of 2005 respondents reported having little inclination to make their own knowledge available to others via information systems.

With internet access, new global niche providers were able to compete with major suppliers. As every desk gained its PC, and workers were equipped with laptops and mobile phones, new forms of flexibility were enabled, including remote and home working. As a result the boundaries between work and home life started to fragment. One of the companies participating in the survey sold off its main office and required all workers to work from home, thus transferring the related financial overhead and social costs of work to employees.

Moreover, since technology enabled faster communications, employees were expected to respond quickly. UKES respondents increasingly talked about taking their laptops on holiday and ‘just keeping on top of their emails’ for a couple of hours each day. As employees rose to the challenge of increased workloads, what might have been previously thought to be an exceptional effort, now became accepted as the norm for performance, with consequences for the individual. As Guest (1995) pointed out, the idea of being out of balance is tolerable, as long as the illusion is retained that this is a temporary phenomenon. Similarly, Brown et al comment (2010b, p.141):
'The problem many confront today is that doing one's best may not be good enough. Even extraordinary efforts to improve performance will count for little if everyone else does the same thing. But whatever the outcome, the constant striving for perfection also comes at a personal price'.

Aronowitz and DiFazio (1999) suggest that the scientific-technological revolution of our time, which is not confined to new electronic processes but also affects organizational changes in the structure of corporations, has fundamentally altered the forms of work, skill and occupation. They argue that the redistribution of skilled work due to technological advances has destabilized the employment relationship, polarising work opportunities between people who are 'work-rich', overloaded and in full-time employment, whose working hours know few boundaries thanks to instant access via laptops and mobile phones; and those who are 'work-poor', whose jobs may have been de-skilled or who may have few, if any, prospects of paid employment. Reich (1992) too envisaged growing disparities of opportunity between American 'symbolic' workers who are able to compete in the global skills market and routine workers, who cannot compete. Reich in particular argued that social cohesion and a sense of national community would dissipate as a result.

For Aronowitz & DiFazio (1999) the whole notion of tradition, and the identification of persons with their work, has been radically altered. They argue that there is increasing proletarianization of work at every level below top management and a few scientific and technical occupations. They suggest that Western societies may have reached a historical watershed in which the link between 'work', as the Western cultural ideal, and 'self' is in crisis, since both qualified and mass labour is increasingly considered redundant. I agree with them that, as a result of these profoundly altered circumstances, expectations of both employers and employees have changed, creating new social contracts within which new psychological contracts emerge.

5.2 The new work climate

Throughout the first few years of the survey, the increasingly competitive nature of organisational cultures was reflected in the reported increase in political behaviour as people sought to protect themselves or gain personal advantage in these more complex workplaces. Respondents commented on some of the many forms this took: "power struggles; attacks on my credibility; blame culture by immediate manager; different powerful players pursuing incompatible agendas and making demands of me that cannot be
reconciled". 'Tribalism' in organisation cultures, where information is power and therefore not shared, was considered one of the main barriers to knowledge management in 2000. One comment, typical of many, from a manager in 2002 highlights one the reasons for his growing sense of insecurity:

"People manoeuvring for power. Change has created opportunities for new networks to form, creating increased political activity".

Such comments suggest that, while it might be argued that work environments have always been sites of struggle, what we are seeing here are significant changes to the terrain in which these struggles take place and the opening of new fronts, for example those enabled by technologies, on which hostilities can be conducted.

5.2.1 HRM/ High performance rhetoric

Almost every organisation in the 1999 UKES had 'high commitment' HRM practices, such as a mission or vision statement and a set of organisational values. Scott (1990:72) argues that organisational values are a manifestation of the 'thick' version of Marx's 'false consciousness' theory:

'The thick version claims that a dominant ideology works its magic by persuading subordinate groups to believe actively in the values that explain and justify their own subordination. The thick theory claims consent.'

However, organisational values were mostly perceived by employees as more of a public relations exercise than a reflection of reality and the lack of congruence between espoused and practised values was a consistent source of low trust and growing cynicism. Many different forms of culture clash were reported between 2000 and 2003, not least caused by the gap between the espoused HRM-high performance rhetoric of team work and empowerment versus the reality of authoritarian management styles, traditional budgeting and planning processes and rewards. Aggressive, inconsistent and occasionally threatening and bullying behaviour by managers (and colleagues) was frequently reported. The main mismatch was over stereotypical claims that 'people are our greatest asset', whereas in reality, people believed they were seen as resources. As one middle manager reflected in 2002, there was a gap between what was said and what was done:
"We say that people are our most valuable asset yet we don't invest in them. We say we want people to innovate yet our first instinct is to criticise any new ideas rather than nurture them. We say we want our first line leaders to lead the organisation yet we constantly measure them against top-down compliance".

Far from feeling valued, employees were working excessive hours and were expected to shoulder ever-increasing workloads. The UKES survey findings suggest that this had direct consequences for employee commitment. Many of the UKES 2003 response themes related to the negatives of the ‘new work culture’ for employees. These included lack of appreciation, poor management, and no promotion prospects. Along with pressure, employees generally reported a more aggressively-paced work climate. Many comments referred to the “cold, unfriendly environment” and the “reducing quality of the work environment”.

The 2006 survey highlighted the differences between perspectives and interests of senior management and those of other employees with respect to values. Amongst board directors, 73% believed that executive/senior manager behaviour was in line with the espoused values, whereas only 26% of middle managers and 20% of junior managers believed this to be the case. This reflected the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (Kersley et al, 2005) finding that managers considered that employment relations had improved since 1998, but this was not reflected in the views of employees, which had changed little (Brown et al, 2008). In 2007 85% of UKES respondents said that managers did not ‘walk the talk’. As one person reported, it was senior managers’ inability to be honest about bad news, and lack of ‘emotional intelligence’ that “messed it up”.

5.2.2 Loss of trust

In particular trust appears to evaporate when there is a large, and apparently growing, gap between rhetoric and reality (Legge, 1995). Public trust in institutions and their leaders was shaken in the wake of the WorldCom and Enron scandals, and the director ‘fat-cat’ pay debacle in 2001-2. Governance issues were in the spotlight, Sarbanes-Oxley was implemented and a variety of reports such as those by Higgs and Tyson recommended guidelines to improve board performance and accountability. A study on trust in Britain and around the world (Elliott and Quaintance, 2003) showed that the proportion of the population believing that other people “could generally be trusted” had dropped from 60% in the late 1950s to 29% in 2003. Experts variously blamed the demise of the job-for-life culture,
greater social mobility, the rising divorce rate, greater immigration, changes in the way we work, more short-term contracts and a more aggressive dog-eat-dog commercial ethic.

Not surprisingly, the growing public scepticism about leaders and institutions was reflected within organisations and evident in the UKES data. Throughout the period of study there was a continuous drop in reported levels of employee trust in senior managers from 60% in 1998 to only 24% in 2004. Many respondents reported that the breakdown of trust and collaboration between colleagues was a major source of job dissatisfaction and was one of the main causes of employee cynicism, as this comment from 1999 reflects: "Senior management are completely unaccountable: they have a chief concern with their organisational status above all else". By 2007 the main issues reported to affect trust at work were uncertainty during change and lack of communication. As a result, as one manager put it, there was "a lot of pressure and responsibility without adequate information or tools to do the job". Since trust is considered a cornerstone of a healthy psychological contract,

5.3 'War for talent'/volatile labour market

Highly skilled knowledge-intensive work was becoming a major generator of GDP from the mid-1990s. By the end of the 1990s, the major consultancy and other professional service firms were experiencing a shortage of skilled employees and competed with each other in what McKinsey (2001) dubbed the 'War for Talent' to attract highly skilled recruits on the basis of individualised pay and benefits packages tailored to the individual's lifestyle.

However 2001 was a year of economic turbulence and political shock, as events of September 11 reverberated throughout the developed economies. In UK manufacturing alone, 150,000 jobs were lost and even organisations which depended on high calibre specialist labour, such as the telecoms, investment banking and IT sectors, were badly affected by the potential global recession. In the UK, company pension schemes, endowment mortgages and personal share-based savings schemes were badly affected and house prices were predicted to fall.

In practice it seemed that, rather than resorting to lay-offs, some employers did recognise the importance of retaining skilled staff. In 2002 UKES, a small majority (56%) of companies were reported to be slowing down the downsizing process, some because they feared 'corporate anorexia', a condition in which a corporation does not have enough employees to meet its goals or needs, while others were reversing 'delayering', or flattening of management hierarchies, because they were concerned about being able to retain talent
given the lack of career opportunities. Indeed some 29% of UKES respondents in 2002 reported 'relayering' in their organisations to address these problems.

In 2004 various economic reports suggested that consumer spending in the UK would continue to rise and accounted for the strength of the UK economy, in many cases fuelled by the easily available credit and the remortgaging of properties. Economic growth slowed towards the end of 2004. Rises in interest rates, gloomy and disturbing news from events in Iraq and elsewhere, and other factors appeared to be having an impact on slowing down consumer spending.

By 2005 the management press was reporting that another, new 'War for Talent' had broken out. With a tight labour market, more jobs overall, and an ageing workforce in many cases, skills shortages were reported to exist. The demand for unskilled and semi-skilled workers exceeded supply and by the mid-2000s was largely being met by migrant workers from the new EU accession states who made up the shortfall of British workers able and willing to service the burgeoning consumer markets. More generally, organisations were reported to be competing for the best talent by offering attractive 'employment value propositions' and targeted 'employer brands'. The emphasis appeared to be mainly on improving reward packages. Indeed, some employers were already attempting to differentiate themselves in the labour market by developing a 'high benefits strategy' to strengthen recruitment and retention, incorporating both significant fringe benefits and family-friendly practices. A notable exception was the proposal to cut large numbers of jobs from government departments, a proposal which was fought by the Civil Service unions.

5.4 The 'long hours' culture

British workplaces became known for their 'Long Hours' Culture' from the late 1990s onward. Government policy effectively endorsed this by exercising its right to 'opt out' of the European Working Time Directive (June 2000). This directive was intended to protect people's health and safety by restricting work to no more than 48 hours per week on the basis that excessive working time is a major cause of stress, depression and illness. In contrast, France passed stricter legislation, limiting the maximum working week to 35 hours. Longitudinal comparison of data from a 1992 and a 2001 survey designed by the Policy Studies Institute and a team from the London School of Economics suggested that British workers were becoming more dissatisfied with longer working hours and growing work pressures, and that this was having serious repercussions on their motivation at work. The
most dissatisfied workers were those who were highly qualified or formed the elite part of the workforce.

These findings were echoed in the UKES which started to examine the working hours of managers in 2000 when the majority of UKES respondents reported that their workload had increased over the previous two years. Between 2000 and 2002, the vast majority of respondents reported that they consistently worked longer than their contracted working week. Whilst there was a slight decrease in 2003 in the proportion of people reporting they consistently work extra hours (from 87.4% in 2000 to 83.2% in 2003).

Between 2000 and 2003 UK workers were reported to have the longest working week of European countries, with official figures suggesting that three million people regularly worked longer than 48 hours a week. At the same time bureaucracy was seen as adding to the pressure since it slowed down the speed at which work could progress.

During the early 2000s being (seen to be) working long hours was one way some employees attempted to protect their career interests in demanding work cultures. City firms reinforced the importance of being seen to be capable of working long hours by providing a wide range of human resource 'benefits'—such as concierge services, childcare vouchers, Indian head massages at employees' desks— to ensure that workers could work long hours. A report by insurer Royal and Sun Alliance suggested that one in three men and one in six women were too busy to go on holiday, leaving £4 billion worth of work going unpaid in Britain each year. Bunting (2004) argued that employees were becoming 'willing slaves' of the system at the expense of their health and well-being and without guaranteed employment security.

In the 2001 UKES managers reported difficulties keeping staff motivated. Employees reported that the things that motivated them as employees—such as enjoyment of the job, personal drive and achievement, challenge, helping others and recognition—were difficult to achieve in the new work climate. Financial rewards were mentioned by only a tiny minority. In particular people reported feeling under pressure to deliver, especially bottom-line results. This meant that other valuable activities were relegated to the 'nice to have' category.

5.5 New roles and skills

Structural changes were leading to new roles and forcing the need for new skills. For instance, in 2000 UKES 73% respondents reported that, irrespective of the type of structure in which they worked, they were expected to develop new skills, in particular management,
performance management, communication, IT and interpersonal skills. These reflected the
customer-facing shifts taking place in organisations, where it seemed no longer sufficient for
people in non-managerial roles to be technical specialists alone, they needed also to be able
to work effectively in teams and to demonstrate a swathe of 'soft' skills that would enable
them to work well with other people. In 2000, 94% of respondents felt confident that they had
the new skills required to work in changing organisations. The concept of leadership in
particular had widespread appeal for the practitioner community as idealised management
types were promoted by management 'gurus'. One example was the influential book *Good to
Great* by Jim Collins (2001), as a result of which managers were exhorted to become 'level
five'-type leaders, and 'humility', one of the attributes of such leaders, was widely
incorporated into organisational competency frameworks for assessment and development
purposes.

The cultural ideal of the 'enterprising worker' was becoming widespread. Respondents were
expected to be innovative and creative but many pointed out cultural mismatches with the
rhetoric of 'enterprising', such as no specific rewards for creativity and reward systems which
reinforced sticking to procedures and maintaining the status quo. People felt under pressure
to be creative, yet they also reported having no time to be creative and limited processes to
'capture' creativity in a way that benefited both themselves and the organisation. They also
feared the consequences of making mistakes in the increasingly performative work cultures.

Increasingly HRM assessment processes defined employees' performance and 'potential' in
terms of the skills, attributes and behaviours required of them, such as 'emotional
intelligence' (Goleman, 1996). With its components of self-awareness, awareness of other
people's emotions and self-control, emotional intelligence was reported in the UKES to be
widely integrated into assessment processes for recruitment and performance appraisal
purposes. This was thus a technology of control since it encouraged 'work on self', in order
to self-regulate and comply with the template of 'ideal' employee or manager. As Sennett
(2008) points out, the value placed on such skills has replaced that placed on craftsmanship,
with its possibilities for deep learning and real achievement, in modern organisations.
Section 2: Impact of the new work culture on employees

The previous section has outlined some of the features of the new work culture as reported by UKES respondents and featured in the management press of the period. This section considers how employees reported their reactions to the new work culture.

5.6 Responses to change

It would appear that many organisations entered the 21st century with a workforce still struggling to adjust to some of the ‘realities’ of the new world of work, and the new work culture. UKES respondents in both contracting and expanding organisations reported higher workloads and half of respondents in 1998 reported feeling they had lost direction as a result of change (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: The top three challenges arising from restructurings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trajectory of organisation</th>
<th>Growing</th>
<th>Shrinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced loss of direction</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in motivating team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For ‘survivors’ one of the consequences of the sheer volume of change initiatives was a lack of clarity: “too many changes being introduced at one time”, “directionless leadership”, authoritarian management” and “too much politics”. One of the main management challenges at the time was motivating teams. As one respondent put it in 2002, the sheer volume of change was producing sink or swim responses:

“Frequent restructuring within the organisation results in either ‘change fatigue’ or an acceptance of constant change as the norm.”
In practice, individuals may experience not just one, but many organisational changes during the course of a working lifetime. Research into mergers and acquisitions carried out by the author and colleagues between 1998-2003 found that even in one merger, an individual will experience not just one transition but many ‘waves of change’ as different phases of the merger impact hit home in cognitive, affective and material ways (Hirsh et al, 1999). Managers who have already experienced their own transitions may not be aware of the effects of change on employees who are only later experiencing the impact of change and they may not provide the support individuals may need to make the transition successfully.

In 2000, 90% of UKES respondents reported that their workplaces were undergoing a variety of changes, including business process reengineering, restructurings and internationalisation, and in many cases all of these change processes were under way at the same time. The impact of change was being keenly felt. A financial services manager talked about the effects of change in his organisation:

"Morale in affected areas is very low. There’s a high rate of attrition, services delivered from these areas have deteriorated due to lack of knowledge and lack of resources".

People reported that there was too much focus on the ‘hard technical issues’ of change and too little staff involvement. The impact on employee relations was becoming evident, with the majority of respondents reporting a decline in morale of ‘survivors’ of downsizing, loss of trust, poor communication, lack of clarity of direction (and role) following restructurings. This comment by a manager in 2002 highlights the implications for individuals of lack of clarity:

"Less people have the overall view to fight their corner, whereas before people knew more of what went on and could balance matters off”.

5.6.1 Redundancies
At the start of the study in 1997, the overall impression was of turbulent workplaces and confusion, with redundancies becoming increasingly commonplace. Most respondent comments were about the generally inept way redundancy processes were handled rather than questioning whether redundancies should be happening at all. Interestingly, respondents on the whole seemed to accept that redundancies were inevitable. This might be explained as a manifestation of what Scott (1990:72) describes as the ‘thin’ version of Marx’s ‘false consciousness’ theory:
'The thin theory on the other hand maintains only that the dominant ideology achieves compliance by convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable'.

As Scott points out, “the thin theory settles for resignation”. Typically respondents instead expressed deep scepticism about the fairness of the process by which people were selected for redundancy:

“There is a naive belief that staying with the business is an end in itself, so we have no compulsory redundancy programme to assuage the vanity of the union and Personnel Director, which means that those who want to stay get pushed out; those who want to go, can’t”. (A senior manager who had opted for voluntary redundancy but been refused)

There were many criticisms of the HR function's role, perceived 'resource' focus and lack of respect for people: “Treated like a number”; “The time Personnel has to assist is reduced”.

The ways in which the redundancy process was handled appeared to have a marked effect on 'survivor' employees. Respondents were asked if their organisation had handled redundancies compassionately (yes/no). If respondents chose the 'no' answer (92%), they were also most likely to choose a response which suggests that employees then focus on their own needs, rather than those of the organisation. This perhaps suggests that the more traditional 'relational' psychological contracts, which implicitly depend on trust, loyalty and a degree of job security as the basis of employees' willingness to expend their discretionary effort for their employer, were being replaced by 'transactional' contracts in some contexts, where the employment relationship becomes a calculated negotiation, with employees providing for example, long hours and extra work in exchange for high pay.

### 5.6.2 Loss of control and satisfaction

The majority of respondents between 2000 and 2003 described the impact on them of working in such organisational climates as stressful, unproductive, time-consuming and destructive of enjoyment of work. As one manager in 2002 put it, “I like to do things well, and in the current context I feel it's quantity and politics over quality”. Others pragmatically accepted that conflict was now a feature of working life: "not pleasant but inevitable" and some people saw conflict as a source of energy. In these contexts, the main reported sources of demotivation included poor management, bureaucracy, lack of recognition and
demands always to do more. As one senior manager in a pharmaceuticals company put it, "Unfortunately I believe that demotivation – especially for lower ranks of the organisation - is easier than motivation in a British working culture – not overseas!"

By 2002 the overriding impression was that employees were overworked, spending long hours both at the office and at home on business issues. Many companies during the early 2000s developed work-life balance policies, yet many of the flexible working options available were not taken up, sometimes because they were poorly communicated and therefore little known about; in many cases (reflected in verbatim responses to the employee surveys) employees did not take up these options because they feared being perceived as unable to ‘cut it’ in the increasingly ‘dog-eat-dog’ work climates. In the 2003 survey respondents reported that they were not empowered to do their jobs and that the main barriers to empowerment included lack of trust; organisational politics; cynicism; risk-averse senior management; abdication by managers; individualism and having no parameters within which to be empowered.

**Figure 5.1 The Law of Self-Defeating Consequences**

So commonly were the negative effects of employee motivation reported via the UKES that, to prompt debate among management audiences at conferences, I presented various UKES correlations in process form under the title of ‘The Law of Self-Defeating Consequences’ (Figure 5.1). By presenting these elements in this form I am conscious that this could imply causality rather than relationship between behaviours and organisational outcomes, such as
productivity losses. However, there was generally strong recognition by audiences of the interplay of factors which gave face validity to the extensiveness of such behaviours and their consequences in many working people's experience. For me this was additional evidence that, for many people, work was being degraded.

Over this period (2000-2003), an increasing volume of responses to open-ended questions in the UKES used terms relating to 'lack', 'loss' or 'missing'. This phenomenon was followed up in the strand of research 'Meaning at Work' which is examined in Chapter Seven.

**Section three: Impact on the psychological contract**

This section addresses the question of how employees responded to the apparent ending of the 'old' psychological contract.

Guest (1998) argued that the psychological contract is operationalized in the minds of employees by the extent to which an organisation (through its management) has kept its promises/commitments with respect to job security, careers and the demands of the job. Perceived fairness of treatment in general, and more specifically with respect to reward allocation (the effort-reward bargain) was crucial. When such conditions were satisfied, Guest argued, the consequences would be attitudinal, in terms of organisational commitment, life satisfaction, employment relations, feelings of security; and behavioural, in terms of motivation, effort, innovation, organizational citizenship, intention to stay/quit and performance.

Guest contended that the ending of the old psychological contract would be evident in the 'end of career', the end of job security, the increase in workload and working hours, the ending of collective industrial relations and the currency of individualised employee relations, together with growth of the contract culture. Guest proposed that what explain the variations in psychological contracts most strongly are HRM practices, such as appraisal, interesting and challenging work, care over selection, development, guarantees of no compulsory redundancies. The UKES data presented in this chapter suggest that employer commitments to a collective social contract akin to the 'old' psychological contract of white collar work were gradually undermined or abandoned over the period of this study.
5.7 Job insecurity

Hartley et al (1991:10) define job insecurity as 'a discrepancy between the security employees would like their jobs to provide and the level they perceive to exist.' The expectation of job continuity is a major component of the old psychological contract. The threatened disruption of that continuity therefore constitutes a major breach of the psychological contract, causing in some cases a serious personal crisis. Victor and Stephens (1994) note how the security of a role anchored in an organization and codified in a job description is being supplanted by stress-ridden, 'hyper-flexible workplaces' where roles are defined by the task of the moment, and where rights become ephemeral as everything is driven by the demand to be adaptive and innovative. These 'high velocity' workplaces, Victor and Stephens (1994:481) contend, 'offer no ongoing relationships, no safe haven, no personal space.' Everything is negotiable and disposable.

There is however debate about the extent of job insecurity and about its impact on employees. Herriot and Pemberton (1995b) argue that job security for white collar workers was reduced from the 1980s onwards but was further undermined by the extent of downsizing from the mid-1990s. They argue that downsizing has fundamentally transformed the employment relationship. Similarly, longitudinal data (OECD) suggests that between 1985 and 1995 British workers registered the sharpest decline of confidence in employment security in Europe. Similarly an ISR (1995) survey of 400 companies in 17 countries employing over 8 million workers throughout Europe, the employment security of workers was shown to have significantly declined in the previous ten years, with the UK figures revealing the sharpest drop in security levels from 70% in 1985 to 48% in 1995.

On the other hand, Guest (1998) argues that the extent of job insecurity has been exaggerated and limited to certain groups of more vulnerable employees who may fear being unable to find other jobs. There is also debate about the impact insecurity has on individual employees and on important organisational outcomes. Many theorists agree that in terms of individual well-being, job insecurity is linked with 'stress.' Some argue that, with respect to organisational outcomes, job insecurity may actually cause employees to increase their work effort; others suggest that this then becomes a source of employee 'burnout' and leads to a drop in productivity (Maslach and Leiter, 2008).

The damage that workforce reductions cause to 'old' psychological contracts has been examined in a number of studies (Rousseau & Anton, 1991; Rousseau & Aquino, 1993). A study carried out for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Gordon, 1999) found that
professional workers went from being the most secure group in the mid-1980s to the most insecure group in the mid-1990s. The study examined the multidimensional character of job insecurity. If job security was part of what employees hoped for, and expected from their employer, then job insecurity would arise as a consequence of psychological contract breach or violation.

In the Gordon study (1999), even people who did not fear losing their jobs experienced increased uncertainty in their career due to the changed nature not just of their career, but of their working conditions and the way they were treated in general. Many employees were very concerned about losing valued job features such as their control over the pace of work and their opportunities for promotion. Whilst some employees reported an increase in their responsibilities, more than a quarter of respondents reported that their promotion prospects had decreased over the previous five years. The study also found that employees were unable to maintain a 'sense of security' if they did not trust their employer to look after their best interests.

Hartley (1999:136) argues that the extent to which changes in the work environment lead to a stressful perception of job insecurity hinges on three major factors:

1. The beliefs about what is happening in the environment, or the appraisal of the threat posed by change;
2. The resources available to the person, as perceived by him or her, to counteract the threat; and
3. The perceived seriousness of the consequences if the threat is realised and the employee loses his or her job.

In the UKES between 1999 and 2001, 88% of respondents reported that their organisation was undergoing a change programme involving job losses, with predictable consequences for employee insecurity. When asked what was driving this sense of insecurity, the majority of respondents referred to the experience of having witnessed job losses in the previous decade and the climate of continuous change in which the implications for individuals were not yet clear, or where future changes were anticipated. Poor communication was also a key factor. Respondents stated that they neither knew what was going on, nor what the future might hold for the organisation and their role in it. Moreover, many respondents reported that they did not believe what they were being told, largely because they did not trust management, nor did they feel their needs were heard or considered important.
In 2000 people reported insecurity as having a negative effect on their motivation (52%), loyalty to the organisation (68%) and on their personal lives (56%). Figures 5.2 and 5.3 highlight correlations between job security and a) loyalty to the organisation b) individual motivation.

**Figure 5.2: The effect of insecurity on loyalty (2000-2003)**

![Graph showing the effect of insecurity on loyalty](image)

**Figure 5.3: The effect of insecurity on motivation (2000-2003)**

![Graph showing the effect of insecurity on motivation](image)

Yet despite uncertain employment prospects, unclear expectations and the reportedly heavy demands made of them, most 2000 respondents stated that they were still very loyal to their organisation. By 2004 regular restructurings and related job losses and job insecurity appeared to be taking their toll on occupational commitment, with 44% of respondents reporting that they were no longer committed. Of these, 19% reported that they were looking to leave at the first opportunity. Since employees base their psychological contract in part on implied contracts, even when an employee is not directly affected, workforce reductions can do serious damage to the psychological contract. Far from notions of 'a job for life' or even of 'employability' as one ‘survivor’ commented, “Security now depends on sponsorship rather than skills and competencies.”
Sutton (1990) discussed both short- and long-term effects of workforce reduction in the context of organizational decline processes. He suggested that employees at all levels will experience anxiety and stress; lower level employees because they fear loss of jobs, higher level employees (managers) because they make the decisions about layoffs, transfers, and demotions. Similarly, in the CIPD Employee Outlook survey (2009), 58% respondents reported feeling anxious about the future, even though very few of them felt their own job to be at risk of redundancy. Doherty (1996) argues that downsizing has a significant effect not only on people who lose their jobs but also on the 'survivors' who face a number of unsettling changes such as the loss of peers, extra work, different progression opportunities and so on. In Doherty's studies, people who survived layoffs in 1990 commonly experienced guilt, lack of commitment and fear since within organisations, decision-making and planning became more short-term, and work climates typically became more politicised.

I argue that the context of change has had a significant impact on employees' perceptions of the psychological contract since it creates a new social contract. Martin et al (1998) found that the changing demand conditions, redundancies, different types of jobs, prospects of alternative employment and types of work undertaken by employees influenced employee perceptions and feelings of powerlessness to shape their expectations of training and careers. Moreover Herriot (1996) argues that if, as a result of restructuring, people end up in jobs which are at a lower level than before (i.e. when the new job is a step down/lower quality), individuals will be under-employed, which is as stressful as having too much to do, because it generates feelings of relative deprivation. As one financial services manager whose job had been 'delayered' from a more strategic role and now found himself a front-line 'team leader' put it, "it's bad enough having to do work you moved on from years ago. The worst thing is explaining to my mother-in-law what being a 'team-leader' is all about".

The nature of perceived contract breach reported in the UKES extends beyond 'old' psychological contract expectations about job security and career progression to the quality of working life as a whole. Not only were career paths and continuity of employment affected by the restructurings and flexibilisation of organisational forms, but the pressures people were under meant that concerns about work-life balance started to take precedence over careers for many employees. Changes to work patterns, increasing levels of management control and reduced worker autonomy were increasingly reported to be problematic for employees (2000-2005).
5.8 Effects of work intensification

A decade of change, 24/7 working, faster-paced communications and rapid developments in technology meant that, for many respondents over this period, work was intensified. Throughout this period of study, employees were subject to growing workloads, increased demands and uncertainty as organisations pursued growth through flexibility and cost containment. There were higher expectations of employees, including being required to learn new skills, produce higher quality output, increase the quantity of output and do 'more with less' as reflected in this comment by a manager in the 2002 UKES:

"I'm increasingly expected to do less with more and better for no more reward or recognition".

5.8.1 Heavy workloads and pressure

The concentration on cost-cutting and redundancies had an inevitable knock-on effect on the workloads of those who remain employed as they struggled to do more with less. Respondents reported that they consistently worked extra hours regardless of their gender or age or the sector they worked in. The size of the organisation only appeared to have an impact in 2003 when 72% of people in organisations of 1-250 people reported consistently working longer hours compared to 84% of those in organisations of 251-5000 people and 90% of those in organisations of over 5000 people.

With greater competition for reduced promotion opportunities inherent in downsizing organisations and flatter structures, some employees appeared to accept long hours as the price to be paid for success and as a means of demonstrating visible commitment to the organisation in order to gain an advantage over others (Clark, 1997).

5.8.2 Stress

To manage their workloads, individuals were putting in longer hours at work, which then lead to feelings of stress and loss of control. Stress was a common part of working life for the majority of the managers surveyed in the UKES (there were no significant differences by age, gender, or sector). The major sources of stress in 1998 were reported as increased workload and lack of time to cope. Mostly the reasons are summarised in the phrase "when the demands placed upon me exceed my ability to deliver"
In the 1999 survey the word 'anxiety' featured over 600 times in open-ended statements. People reported anxiety over deadlines; about work issues "that keep me awake at night"; "pressure from family to work shorter hours"; "I'm exhausted at the end of the day so I need to sleep before I can even eat"; "tightness across the chest/palpitations"; "affects mood with family and friends" and inability to relax. Symptoms of the stress reported included feeling out of control; "upset stomach", uncharacteristic emotional outbursts; "never feeling I've done enough despite an 80 hour week"; tiredness and even bad handwriting! One person reported having taken an overdose due to pressure. The situation appeared to be compounded by command and control management styles, lack of recognition from the manager or any real opportunity for 'empowerment'. One person reflected Sennett's 'spectre of uselessness' in the phrase "If only I was younger!"

In 1999 the reported personal costs of heavy workloads included loss of social life, lack of time for family, interests/hobbies, postponed holidays, "some disturbance to marriage": "having to relocate family": "moving home constantly": "smaller circle of friends". The majority of people making these sacrifices believed they were required in order to perform well. The ways in which employees were responding to the uncertainties and pressures of the workplace seemed to polarise into two camps: those who viewed the additional demands made of them as stressful, in some cases causing their health to suffer ('the strugglers' - the majority, of all ages), and those who did not ('the survivor-thrivers').

In 2000, 87% of UKES respondents reported that they consistently worked longer than their contracted working week, with 46% working between 5 and 10 extra hours, a quarter worked an extra 11-15 hours and 20% worked on average more than 15 hours extra hours per week (Table 5.2). Half the sample stated that, in addition to coping with longer working hours and heavy workloads, they were now expected to focus on innovation within their role.

Table 5.2: 2000 UKES:
How many hours extra do you work (% of those who consistently work longer than contracted week)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5 and 10</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 11 and 15</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 15</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2000, as UKES respondents struggled with organisations' excessive demands, the boundaries between home and work had become blurred for many people. Given the growing importance of the topic I ran a series of focus groups in 2000 with UKES respondents who were asked to define what they meant by 'stress'. The main themes were 'anxiety, overload, loss of control and pressure'. The main source of stress was the growing gulf they perceived between the demands organisations made of them and their personal ability to deliver, and reported that this led to sleeplessness, the feeling that nothing is done well, a sense of being overwhelmed by the volume and complexity of work and an inability to balance home and work life. As Figure 5.4 suggests, the number of employees who perceived that their organisation made excessive demands of them rose steadily between 2000 and 2003.

Figure 5.4: How does your organisation make excessive demands of you?

Unsurprisingly, those who reported their organisation makes excessive demands of them were more likely to report that they experienced stress at work (Figure 5.5).

Typical comments included, “Screaming by Tuesday” and “Never feeling I have done enough despite an 80 hour week”. “I am burning out! Can I maintain my position, and is it
worth it?" In the 2002 UKES there were over a hundred mentions of insomnia and poor quality sleep in the open-ended responses to the question of how stress affects people.

Figure 5.5: Percentage who experience stress as a result of work

Only a small number of people appeared to fit Bunting’s (2004) ‘willing slave’ description by describing themselves as having willingly chosen to make these shifts to meet these new requirements. Some of their reasons for doing so included “Because by then I was a workaholic”, “I push myself hard”, “to meet the quality standards I aspire to”, “desire to be seen as an effective manager”. Other comments fell into the category of “I’m not sure why I did this”. Respondents reported having only a small number of coping strategies such as: “allowing some things to drop off the end”; “by dropping ‘would like to do’ type work”; “job-sharing to maintain my energy”; “fighting back when I think the workload is totally unreasonable”.

By 2003, stress was reported to be the biggest single health and safety problem facing the UK workforce, according to a TUC report (2003) which estimated 13.5 million working days lost each year to stress-related illness. The Health and Safety Executive introduced new standards on stress in 2003 which employers were expected to meet. Sources of stress were reported in the UKES in 2003 included bullying at work, the long hours’ culture, having to work at high speed, uncertainty about job roles, lack of control, redundancies, increasing workloads on those left behind, ‘glass’ and ethnic ‘ceilings’, and poor management of change.
By 2005, with a tight labour market, there was evidence that the number of fulltime hours worked in the UK was beginning to fall, and the overall number of people in the UKES reporting that they worked more than 48 hours per week declined between 1998 and 2005 by 7.5 per cent. By 2006, the UKES reported that, while stress levels remained high (67%), there was some improvement over the previous year (78% in 2005), since some people seemed to be developing ‘coping’ strategies - which included looking for other jobs.

5.8.3. Coping strategies

In 2002 UKES respondents were asked what coping strategies they used to deal with stress. The many strategies could be clustered as follows:

- Defensive/denial – examples include cynicism, block it out
- Seeking consolation – alcohol, lots of chocolate, music,
- Looking after health/relaxation – gym, prayer, meditation, calm breathing, reflexology
- Talking with others – talking things through with friends and family, socialize,
- Perspective - take a balanced view, switch off when I leave office, grin and bear it, rationalisation, try to prioritize and manage time, moved to 4 day week, move laterally to less stressful job,

One comment from a young marketing executive sums up many similar remarks:

“A large scotch and a rant to my understanding fiancée helps with letting off steam at the end of the day. The rest is probably denial.” A few comments such as the following suggested that some people were coping with pressure by assertively managing other people’s expectations: “I just ignore some work and prioritize the key issues. Also by making it quite clear that dates won’t be met”.

5.8.4 Work-life balance

Throughout the UKES study, ‘work-life balance’ became an increasingly prominent theme although this only became categorised in this way in 2004 having been earlier described as an ‘Equal Opportunities’, then a ‘working families’, then a ‘diversity’ issue to reflect changing policy fashions and initiatives. In 1998, with no real job security, people were expected to work harder and smarter. In 1999, 85% felt it necessary to make sacrifices in other areas of their lives to achieve career success while 63% of respondents reported that their organisational culture expected them to make sacrifices which included missing out on time with children (64%), suffering health problems (32%) and broken relationships (20%).
In 2003, 98% of respondents said that balance was personally important to them but only 52% believed they had a satisfactory work-life balance. By 2005 there was a wider disparity in the importance perceived to be attached to the subject of work-life balance by employees and employers. For employees, work-life balance was increasing in importance (68% versus 49% in 2004) while 66% reported that their senior managers did not ‘buy-in’ to the idea of work-life balance. Slightly fewer respondents in 2005 (51% versus 59% in 2004) believed that they had satisfactory balance (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Work-life balance-related questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you currently have a satisfactory balance between your work and personal life?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you considering leaving your organisation to achieve a better balance?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you as a manager actively support your staff in relation to home/work balance?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you experience any difficulties in trying to enable your team to achieve a balance between their work and personal lives?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you made sacrifices for your career in the past?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In more recent years, there was a drop in the number of respondents reporting that they consistently worked longer hours (1998:96%; 2005:85%; 2007:76%), perhaps because they were better able to manage workloads, and/or because there was organisational support available. ‘Truly flexible working’ was seen as the main enabler of work-life balance, i.e. where career advancement is not sacrificed for taking up flexible working. The take-up rate of flexible working the year after the Employment Act of 2004 came into force, offering parents of children under six the ‘right to request’ to work flexibly, was low and appeared to be highest in small organisations. By 2006, 67% of respondents said they would refuse a promotion if it affected their work-life balance.
There may be several reasons for this. Firstly, over this period, ‘work-life balance’ gradually ceased to be considered as solely a ‘women’s issue’. Furthermore, the UKES in 2005 suggested that there was no financial benefit to organisations from expecting their managers to work longer hours. In other words, long hours did not equate to better financial performance, so managers in some organisations were perhaps seeking to change the long hours’ culture. Moreover, employees were perhaps using more ‘leverage’ when negotiating their psychological contract with their organisation.

Table 5.4: How important is work-life balance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To you</td>
<td>To your organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasingly important</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yet, work-life balance was perceived by employees to remain more important to them, than to their organisations (Table 5.4).

The 2006 UKES highlighted that recruitment and retention were key challenges for organisations and employees were certainly in a better negotiating position in 2006 than in 1998. Employees generally were growing in confidence with regard to their own employability and, mirroring the lack of loyalty shown to them by organisations, seemed prepared to leave their employer if a better offer arose. As employees asserted their employability, organisations had to reassess the demands they were making of their workforce in order to emerge as an employer of choice. In such circumstances employees were better able to exercise agency.

Thirdly, technology was enabling more flexible ways to manage workloads so that, although the number of hours worked remained the same, employees had more options around when and where they work, thus enabling them to prioritise home and work issues differently. In other words, employees may no longer have believed they needed to sacrifice their personal life for their career.
Section three: The ‘new deal’

It is perhaps in the theme of careers that the changes to the ‘old’ psychological contract are most evident. The downsizings of the 1990s appeared for the first time to significantly affect professional and managerial workers as well as those in blue collar jobs. The former were people who were more likely than the latter to envisage their working lives as being about ‘career’. Pervasive definitions of organisational or managerial careers have long encompassed notions of hierarchical progression. For many professionals and managers, delayering resulted in fewer opportunities for career progression in the form of upwards promotion. However, traditional definitions of career no longer seem appropriate to contemporary organisational career systems (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) and some theorists argue that the fundamental changes in the forms of organisations since the mid-1990s have led to the ‘death of the career’ (Hall, 1996; Cappelli, 1999). While this may be an exaggerated notion, the inherent short-termism of business within Anglo-American forms of capitalism means that the nature of ‘careers’ and ‘employment’ have been dynamically redefined. This section examines the extent to which white collar employees appeared to be adjusting to the ‘new deal’.

5.9 Careers and employability

The UKES reflects the embedding of the new ‘psychological contract’ or ‘new deal’ (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995a) for employees and the recognition by individuals of the need to manage their own careers. In 1998, 53% of UKES respondents reported feeling the need to take responsibility for managing their own career. In 1999 respondents (especially those aged 35 and over) commented on the lack of opportunities for career progression and ‘glass ceilings’. Some, especially senior managers, went so far as to state that their organisations no longer offered careers at all.

One of the constants that the UKES revealed over the period of study is the importance of careers to the people who respond. In all years except 2002, over 80% of respondents reported that careers are important or very important and less than 5% reported that they were unimportant. In the 2002 UKES the figure was slightly reduced, with 75% reporting that career issues were important or very important. Whilst there were no significant gender differences in how important career issues were to individuals in any year of the survey, age was a relevant factor, with younger people more frequently reporting career issues were important or very important. This relationship was found to be small but significant each year from the 2000 UKES.
Figure 5.6: What impact has the change had on your role?

By 2004, 91% of respondents reported that it was important for them to manage their own careers. In contrast, the importance ascribed to careers by organisations throughout that time, as perceived by respondents, averaged 12-14% until 2003 when this figure rose to 26% and has continued to rise slightly as organisations returned to career management and 'talent management' in the light of challenges with respect to recruitment, retention, succession planning and skill shortages noted in the 2005-2007 surveys.

5.9.1 Was the employability thesis working?

The 'employability thesis' (Rajan, 1997) suggests that 'enlightened' employers have been offering a 'new deal' to employees since they can no longer offer job security. The other main thesis is that the new deal will drive an increase in demand for training which will be less employer-driven and more employee-driven. Certainly the development message at least was getting through and in the 2001 UKES, 94% of respondents claimed to have done something to actively develop themselves the previous year, 65% were reflecting on how to develop their own career and 76% were actively developing their skill-sets for the future. In 2001 just 50% of respondents reported feeling secure in their job but the survey findings suggested that 98% of respondents considered that they had the skills needed to be employable and, with a buoyant job market, many felt confident about finding other work.

Sparrow and Cooper (2003) argue that, since old-style career structures have been replaced by short life-cycle jobs and tasks, flexible competence is key to employability. This echoes
the research of Pascale (1995) who concluded that only around one-tenth of the US workforce possessed the entrepreneurial traits and initiative deemed necessary to be able to implement the new free-agent relationships characterised by the employability-based psychological contract. Only 9% of UKES respondents in 2001 (mainly aged 55 and over) were contemplating self-employment.

UKES respondents (2001) considered that the skills required to be successful in the new work culture were networking, flexibility, political acumen, ability to forge alliances, cultural awareness and ‘extreme competitiveness’. Moreover, career self-management would require relationship management. People recognised the need to learn new skills but wanted more time to develop themselves, as well as more resources and organisational signposts to the development opportunities available. The majority of 2002 UKES respondents still expected their organisation to act as their ‘partner’ with respect to careers.

The 2002 UKES suggests that the organisational side of the new deal was slow to materialise. The main organisational support employees wanted was for leaders to communicate the direction of the organisation, secondments and mentors. They wanted their organisation to make clear what the possibilities for career development were within the organisation, preferring to remain if possible. In 2003, less than a third of organisations in the UKES offered lateral career development opportunities (i.e. sideways moves at the same hierarchical level). Many argued that the new psychological contract must be accompanied by a change in management style, away from the old ‘command and control’ approach to one of ‘empowerment’, involving being given more responsibility and learning new skills.

While UKES respondents in general appeared to be adjusting to the new deal in the period 2000-2003, for many the violation of their ‘old’ psychological contract remained significant. The new culture of capitalism demands, according to Sennett (2006), a “self oriented to the short term, focused on potential ability, willing to abandon past experience.” Yet few people come close to this definition, and even fewer can live by it for long.

Hartley (1999) argues that, where the organisation deliberately or unwittingly breaks psychological contracts, employees may behave in a variety of ways, depending on the size of the gap between expectation and reality. Withdrawal and exit are examples of such responses. In addition, employees can experience anxiety and stress. For many UKES respondents, the violation of psychological contract appeared to have occurred less over career development and more arising from workload issues, other disenchantment with their employer, or a desire for better balance, in line with Herriot’s (1997) findings. As a result,
over half the sample group in 2001 were planning to leave their employers in the near future. A few people lamented being 'stuck' with their current employers as they were 'trapped' by pension. In 2002 UKES respondents said they were thinking more short-term with respect to their current jobs and career planning and it seemed that loyalty had been firmly replaced by 'me plc'.

Of those who were optimistic about job opportunities within their profession or sector, about half each year were considering moving jobs in the near future. From 2000 people who were considering leaving their organisation were asked why they might move. Some people were contemplating 'downshifting' i.e. moving to a less demanding and less well-paid job, because of "sheer overwork: I want a break"; "less stress and more time with the family".

The responses shown in the graph below show some interesting similarities and differences across the years. Compared to the previous years, respondents in 2003 were more likely to report they would leave due to no opportunities to broaden skills, no challenges and lack of responsibility, but proportionately fewer reported they would leave due to no promotion prospects. Thus the 2003 respondents wanted stimulating work but not necessarily promotion. Poor money and incompatible ethical aims were also reported proportionately more in 2003 compared to previous years. As one professional put it, when asked what would attract him to another job, "Money is not the issue, neither is promotion. Challenge and ethics are important". Poor management and lack of appreciation and long hours were reported to be key reasons each year.

**Figure 5.7: Why are you considering leaving your organisation?**

![Graph showing reasons for considering leaving organisation with data points for 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003]
Compared to the previous years, UKES respondents in 2003 were more likely to report they would leave due to no opportunities to broaden skills, no challenges and lack of responsibility, but proportionately fewer reported they would leave due to no promotion. Thus the 2003 respondents wanted stimulating work but not necessarily promotion. Poor money and incompatible ethical aims were also reported proportionately more in 2003 compared to previous years. Poor management and lack of appreciation and long hours were reported to be key reasons each year.

People who felt secure in their jobs were less likely to report that they were likely to move jobs than those who did not feel not secure. This was observed each year and corresponds with respondents reporting that insecurity has a negative effect on loyalty and motivation. Whilst this was observed each year, figures 5.8 and 5.9 suggest this negative effect on loyalty and motivation increased slightly during this period.

**Figure 5.8:** People who feel secure in their jobs

![Figure 5.8](image)

**Figure 5.9:** People who do not feel secure in their jobs

![Figure 5.9](image)
5.9.2 Responses to contract breach

How people reacted to changes and perceived violations of their psychological contract may depend on a variety of factors. For instance, various studies report evidence that older workers lose trust in their organisations when their psychological contract is perceived to be violated (Herriot et al., 1997), while younger workers may have different reactions (Turnley and Feldman, 2000; Smithson & Lewis, 2000), reflecting a more 'realistic' understanding of the modern labour market (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002).

Moreover, a person's identity is now seen as an emergent, contingent process (Trevor-Roberts, 2006) rather than as a static connection to an organization or job. Identity is created and shaped through action (Rose, 1999). Changing careers, therefore, also involves changing one's identity. Evidence of this is most apparent during periods of unemployment when a rapid "renegotiation" of identity occurs. Amundson (1994) argued that the more closely a person's identity is linked to work, the greater will be the individual's difficulty in coping with the unemployment period.

In addition, people differ with respect to how much agency or self-efficacy they can exercise in such contexts. Bandura's (2001) theory of self-efficacy refers essentially to what you are actually capable of doing in specific contexts or, more generally, who you may become as a person. This stands in contrast to perceived self-efficacy—that is, what you think you can do or become. For Bandura, your set of beliefs about what you can do and the extent to which you see yourself as having control over your life, are by far the most central and persuasive aspects of personality. As a consequence rather than by design, employees who are able to adapt and who have the behavioural and cognitive competencies associated with flexibility, find themselves, rather than their roles, taking on the characteristics of permanent or core employees (Sennett, 2003:630). These are the 'employable' employees, whereas those without such competency face the prospect of downgraded or outsourced roles.

But I would also argue that agency is to a large extent tempered by structures. The extent to which people feel self-efficacy may be related to the specific nature of the context, such as the scope it offers for individual discretion, as well as to personal differences, such as ambition and actual employability. For instance, while the numbers of UKES respondents reporting confidence in their ability to maintain their effectiveness through change had dropped to 79% in 2001 from 93% in 1998, a minority of respondents (mainly between 25-35 years of age) in the years 1998-2003 felt the increased demands made of them were a positive thing, giving them a developmental 'stretch', especially if their roles had grown
broader (86% of respondents had changed job roles in the previous two years as a result of restructurings). The main motivator for these younger respondents was a challenging job and most admitted that ambition was their key driver. As one middle manager reflected in 2002, "I didn't know how else to behave". Such employees risked becoming the 'willing slaves' described by Bunting. Hall (1996:22) argued that, if employees are ambitious and driven to succeed, organisations can exploit them by making them work ever harder and longer since:

'We too are prime candidates to be exploited to serve someone else's ends if we are talented, have the ability to learn...and are greedy. Ironically, these are precisely the qualities that our schools, professions and employers strive to instil in us.'

UKES respondents were divided about whether their employer expected more of them than they were prepared to offer. The majority of those who had no complaints about what their organisation required of them were people who had set up their own businesses and were prepared to do what was necessary to succeed. In these cases the individuals had a considerable degree of autonomy and were able to exercise agency, even though they were under personal pressure to succeed.

Over time respondents generally appeared to be coping better with their heavy workloads (Figure 5.10). This is supported by findings from the UKES (1999) where 30% of respondents reported having sacrificed their physical health for career success, and 18% had sacrificed their mental health.

While in 2005, 85% of UKES respondents still reported working longer than their contracted working week (96% in 1998), less than a quarter said they needed to do so in order to be successful. After workload, the commonest reason for working longer hours was 'enjoyment of the job' suggesting that some managers at least had a choice. As Hall points out (1996:30) many people have deep intrinsic satisfaction from their work which for them has many of the qualities we associate with play. These people choose to be over-involved.
There were however, significant differences between the sacrifices reported by men and women. Men were particularly likely to report they missed out on time with their children for their career, whereas women were more likely to report their physical health suffered (Figures 5.11 and 5.12).
People who had not made sacrifices for their career were asked if they had sacrificed their career for their personal life (Figure 5.12). In previous years women had always been more likely to respond that they had sacrificed their careers for their personal life but data from 2003 revealed an increase in men reporting they had also sacrificed their careers for their personal life. While until 2002 most employees reported that they were willing to make sacrifices in the form of working long hours for the sake of their careers, by 2003 there was the beginning of a small reversing of this tide, with a small increase in the numbers of people no longer prepared to put work ahead of everything else, as suggested in Figure 5.13. There were no significant age or sector differences.

As one forty-year old manager explained it, “Work is less enjoyable and satisfying than home and social activity”, while another respondent commented “there’s more to life than being what you do”. Getting older was a key factor for a number of respondents, causing them to change priorities. Others talked of ‘re-evaluating priorities’ and needing to establish balance after ‘seeing others burn out’.
For many people, this re-evaluation has led people to consciously take charge of their own life, as in this example:

"I am not going to sell my soul to an organisation again. Family life is more important and I need to have more balance."

Sadly, a number of respondents, some of whom were also facing the prospect of redundancy, were motivated negatively to focus on things other than work, as in this comment from one manufacturing manager:

"I no longer feel secure. One day I will be made redundant and I have no outside interests."

5.9.3 Alienation and cynicism

Yet any job, no matter how exciting, that spills over into one's personal life and takes up to 70-80 hours per week can drive out other fulfilling aspects of life such as family, friends or community. The mutuality implied by HRM approaches is put to the test through the issue of careers which in the UKES remains important to most employees who perceive it to be less important to employers. This mismatch is reflected in the lack of initiatives and management attention given to career issues and the increasing cynicism of employees towards the notion of 'career partnership' between themselves and their employer.

The 2004 UKES reported high levels of employee cynicism viii, accompanied by a lack of trust, particularly in senior managers, with only 24% of respondents trusting their senior managers to a great extent. Typical reasons given for lack of trust at that time included: unclear vision;
an overload of, and poor communication; a lack of consultation; unprofessional behaviour; lack of honesty; broken promises; poor performance management; political behaviour and poor leadership. Given that loss of trust is commonly recognised as a symptom of psychological contract breach, it would be reasonable to assume that people would be seeking to balance out an unbalanced psychological contract in some way, perhaps by withdrawing their goodwill, sabotage or even exit, with potentially damaging consequences for employers. Some people appeared to cope through accepting a reduction in job satisfaction: "I was rather blown off course. I have now a survival approach in an area that holds less intrinsic interest for me".

Of course the extent of employee alienation may be exaggerated. Gallie et al (2001) explored employee commitment factors in a comparison of employee surveys between 1992 and 1997, finding stable levels of employee commitment over that time. On the other hand they also commented that 'while there is little evidence that British employees are hostile to their organisations, there is little sign of strong positive commitment.' Johnson and O'Leary's study (2003) suggests that employees may suffer more than their employers from the combined effects of psychological breach and cynicism. They studied the different effects of two types of social exchange violation: those that generate perceptions of psychological contract breach and of organizational cynicism. They found that only psychological contract breach (not cynicism) predicted employees' behavioural responses (low performance, absenteeism). Further, affective cynicism fully mediated the relationship between psychological contract breach and emotional exhaustion, suggesting that cynical attitudes have negative consequences for the attitude holder.

5.10 Discussion

This historical review of the changing workplace (1998-2007) suggests that, throughout the period of study, the changed nature of production, and the radically altered work environment in which careers are constructed, shifted the balance of power in the employment relationship towards employers and, as a result, psychological and social contracts were significantly revised in their favour.

With respect to the research questions examined in this chapter, the UKES findings suggest that features of the new work culture became increasingly evident from the late 1990s. Hartley (1999) has argued that, when the balance of exchange between the individual and organisation is altered, in the context of insecurity, the individual may perceive the
organisation as implicitly demanding more from him or her, while offering either the same or reduced rewards. As reported in the UKES, employers did expect employees to work long hours and do more with less. The bond of trust between employee and employer, which underpinned the old psychological contract, became strained during this period.

Among the salient features of the new work culture, many people experienced progressively degraded work conditions resulting from work intensification, reduced job insecurity, declining job quality, and loss of autonomy. The findings presented in this chapter suggest that the majority of respondents experienced the new work culture as stressful and demanding. It would therefore seem that, for many employees, the effort-reward ratio became unbalanced.

The emerging social contract was characterized by instability, uncertainty, and indeterminacy. "Obedience for security" was replaced by "initiative for opportunity" (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995). The onus was on individuals to acquire knowledge and skills that could be adapted and applied across different settings and jobs in order to be successful in their career (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). With the advent of the knowledge economy, knowing what to learn and having access to learning opportunities became problematic.

How well people were able to cope appeared to vary considerably. Some people undoubtedly chose to meet these heavy work demands, perhaps through love of the job and/or because they were ambitious and were willing, wittingly or unwittingly, to forego other rewards they wanted – time and balance. Some younger workers especially appeared to regard responding to the challenges of the new workplace as both a developmental opportunity, and as necessary to fulfil their ambitions. For the struggling majority, the demands of structure appeared to have driven out agency and many were complying with increased demands and reduced 'rewards' because they felt they had no option. However, the differences in the way employees responded to the growing demands made of them perhaps reflected individuals' confidence in their employability in the buoyant labour market of the time.

With respect to the emerging 'New Deal', in line with Sennett’s observations, employees generally seemed aware of the need to develop new skills and were keen to actualise their potential, but mostly they wanted to remain with their employer. Herriot and Pemberton (1995) contend that the 'new deal' is mitigated by perceptions of unfairness in terms of workloads, equal opportunities, bullying in the workplace, pay and performance and working conditions. They argue that, from an employee perspective, the 'new deal' is violated mainly
in these areas rather than by changes in career practice. This seemed to be the case for the majority of UKES respondents.

Moreover, with respect to the employability thesis, even though most employees accepted that they must manage their own careers, most also wanted organisational support for development. These findings suggest that organisational support was generally not very forthcoming. Herriot and Pemberton (1997) concluded that employees would be perfectly happy to receive pay above the going rate and that organisations may be in danger of underestimating the fundamentally transactional nature of the employment relationship for many of their employees. In contrast, many UKES respondents, representing a more general white collar population, still appeared to aspire to a long-term employment relationship with their employer and job security.

Schein (1965) argued that agreement between the parties, which includes a process of negotiation and renegotiation, is necessary for the psychological contract to exist. Human Resources professionals in this study, as organisational agents involved in delivering the 'new deal', were aware that the employer side of the deal was not really an organisational priority. Many HR functions were described as too fragmented in focus and distribution to really deliver perceived organisational support and career 'partnership'. If anything, the gap appeared to be widening between what employees perceived their organisation to offer, and what they wanted. I agree with Herriot and Pemberton (1997) who argue that the damaging effects of change on the white collar psychological contract call for a more reciprocal employment relationship which recognises and permits pluralism of interests. The role of HRM in contributing to the new work culture became another strand of research within this thesis and the findings from this study are discussed in Chapter Six.

Herriot and Pemberton (1997) suggested that, while the content of the psychological contract may vary, the process of contracting is a social process and is likely to be similar wherever contracts are made. The ability to renegotiate career contracts will therefore vary according to the relative power balances in the employment relationship. If people are genuinely employable and are valued by their employer they will have more power in the employment relationship with employers than people who are less employable and who crave job security. If the labour market conditions change, the nature of psychological contracting may change again.

With respect to how much agency employees were able to exercise, for many employees in this study, it seemed that the negotiated relationship was becoming a more informed
transaction as time went on, rather than a passive exchange. As reflected in the UKES, work-life balance grew to be a significant element of what employees aspired to achieve in their careers, in the light of eroding control over workloads. So important did these issues appear to become, that many employees reported being increasingly unwilling to sacrifice other parts of their lives for the sake of career development.

In a sense, these employees came to exercise agency in response to these structural pressures, even if this involved having to re-evaluate their own career aspirations. For many, achieving work-life balance appeared to become more important than achieving conventional career success in the form of promotion up a hierarchy. Some were contemplating or actually ‘downshifting’ in the way that Bunting (2004) advocated, reducing their working days, taking less demanding jobs, working from home or taking time out from their working life to study, travel or in other ways regain a sense of time sovereignty in their lives. Whether these choices represented employees’ pragmatic accommodation to the demanding working conditions they experienced within the new work culture, or reflected individual employees’ life stages, it is not possible to tell from this study. In this evolving social contract, definitions of work-life balance were also extending beyond the balance between work and the family unit, to considerations about the wider impact of business on society and community life.

In presenting these findings I am aware of a number of limitations, both in the data and in the generalisations I am making from these. I have aimed for breadth and overview, rather than depth and specificity. As discussed in Chapter Four, limitations could be placed on the inferences that can be drawn from this study since, in this necessarily selective, representation of the original material, I may have tended to select data that supported my thesis and may have downplayed counter-evidence. I may therefore have overlooked and failed to report some of the positive responses to the new work culture. I have been aware of this risk, and have attempted to achieve some balance in the reporting.

Moreover, I am not relying solely on the UKES data to explore the nature and impact of the new work culture on the white collar psychological contract. The UKES provided the spur to the qualitative research, through which I explore aspects of the nature and impact of the new work culture in more in-depth. These include the themes of performativity, which I examine in the next chapter and meaning (Chapter Seven). In addition, I explore the perspectives of HR practitioners on the role of HRM in embedding the new work culture in the next Chapter. I believe that, taken together, these research strands build up a rich picture of the changing work-world during the first decade of the twenty-first century.
Conclusion and future research

I have argued that the individualised nature of the employment relationship appears to leave British employees very exposed to the vicissitudes of the market and at the mercy of employers in the new work culture. Employees whose skills are in significant demand may find negotiating an individualised deal (Rousseau's i-deal) is not so difficult. However the extent to which we will see the renegotiation of psychological contracts between organisations and their managerial populations remains debatable (Doherty et al, 1997). It seems unlikely that individual employees who are not elite 'symbolic workers' (Reich, 1992) really have sufficient power in the employment relationship to bring about a psychological contract truly based on the principle of mutual benefit. More research will be needed to understand the differentiated contracts for 'talented' employees and the relative benefits for employee and employer.

It is possible that future workforce generations will be better equipped to cope with the demands of working in the new work culture and less prepared than their predecessors to put up indefinitely with a lack of work/life balance or with an unbalanced social contract. Given the significant changes in the composition of today's labour market, more research is also needed to explore whether today's more mobile, diverse, global and increasingly multi-generational workforces are looking for different psychological contracts from their forebears. And given the variety of organisational forms and working arrangements which are emerging, there are likely to be a multitude of psychological contract types. There are already a number of studies looking at the psychological contracts of contract workers, of workers in call centre environments, of people working in cross-boundary partnership arrangements (Marchington et al, 2005). Within 'boundaried' organisations, more research may be needed to explore whether it is possible for the majority of employees who become 'plateaued' to not only remain productive but also 'psychologically satisfied'.

In the next chapter I consider the role played by Human Resource Management practices in shaping the performative 'new work culture'. I shall consider how HRM practices such as performance management work to secure worker compliance. The findings call into question the accuracy of mainstream research which has argued that HRM may win over workers' 'hearts and minds', provide better employment relations and secure for management the heightened commitment and obligations of workers. I shall argue that HRM practices are the site where the seemingly one-sided balance of power in the employment relationship is at its most obvious.
The annual surveys were written in January of each year and featured data gathered between July and November of the previous year. Therefore the data gathered in 1997 features in the 1998 survey.

The 'Employability Thesis' (Rajan, 1997). Suggests that 'enlightened' employers have been offering a 'new deal' to employees since they can no longer offer job security. This assumes that employees will be willing to be flexible, self-manage their career, actively learn and accumulate new skills as a result of which they become 'employable'.

As I pointed out in chapter 4, the demographic characteristics of the UKES samples 2000-2003 are found in Appendix 5.

The Sarbanes–Oxley Act of 2002, also known as the 'Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act' and the 'Corporate and Auditing Accountability and Responsibility Act' is a United States federal law which set new or enhanced standards for all U.S public company boards, management and public accounting firms.

The 'Higgs Report' (2003) reviewed the role and effectiveness of UK non-executive directors.

The Tyson Report' (2003) reviewed the processes for the recruitment and development of UK Non-Executive Directors.

Cynicism represents an attitude composed of negative beliefs and feelings that influences individuals' perceptions of events and behaviour, which in turn affects their trust (Whitener et al, 1998:513). Cynicism has both cognitive and affective elements (Dean et al, 1998). In the UKES there were many instances of employee cynicism reflected in the increasing numbers of comments relating to gaps between management rhetoric around values, and actual practice, such as:

"The restructure has given senior management the chance to do yet more Empire building"

"Decisions driven by personal agenda of Director and his peers"
Chapter 6
The shaping of subjectivities

6.0 Introduction

In the last chapter I examined the evidence, arising from the annual UK Employee Surveys (UKES) between 2000 and 2003, for how far the kinds of trend that Braverman had identified were taking place in relation to white collar workers. My findings are broadly in line with Braverman's analysis. I also found some evidence in employee accounts of their experience of what Sennett describes as the 'new work culture', both the characteristics of this culture and its consequences for employee satisfaction and wellbeing. As I reported in the last chapter, while for a small minority of employees the remodelling of work through restructurings and technology appeared to present opportunities, for most employees the effects of job insecurity and work intensification appeared to them largely negative and to represent a significant breach in their psychological and social contracts with respect to careers and work-life balance.

In this chapter I consider another of Braverman's (1974) contentions, that, given the dictates of capital accumulation, managements are constantly driven to renovate the productive process and the principal means for achieving this in the twentieth century was the battery of techniques associated with scientific management and the scientific/technical revolution. Braverman argued that the capitalist labour process sought to subsume the skills and knowledge of highly skilled workers within managerial control systems, depriving them of their skills and reducing them to the status of routine production workers.

It could be argued that a latter day manifestation of Taylorism takes the form of performativity, a key characteristic of the 'new work culture'. With its HRM practices relating to performance management, performativity has, I shall argue, contributed to the degradation of white collar work since it reduces individual autonomy while exposing individuals to subtle forms of control. It has also exposed as a myth the assumptions of mutuality of interest in the employment relationship that are implicit in high-commitment 'soft' HRM.

Braverman (1974:415) considered Personnel/HRM as 'unproductive' labour at the core of the labour process, extracting surplus value on behalf of capitalists by 'riding on the backs of
productive labour', who experience the personal consequences of de-skilling, rationalization, and hierarchy.

In this chapter I examine two research strands related to the core research question: How do HRM practices contribute to the development and perpetuation of the new work culture? The first strand concerns the role played by HRM, as on offshoot of managerialism, in embedding the new work culture by providing the means to achieve compliance of employees to the regime's requirements. In particular I consider how performativity serves as a key managerial tool in producing the outcomes described above since it is "a policy technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition and change" (Ball, 2003:216). Moreover, in the current era of knowledge capitalism, companies are attempting to increase surplus by reducing the cost of knowledge work through a technologically assisted process of knowledge capture that Brown et al (2010a) call 'Digital Taylorism'. I examine how this process appears to operate more specifically I consider the nature and impact on employees of performativity within the new work culture.

In addition, a key thread running through my arguments relates to inherent tensions between employee agency (individual autonomy) and structures (social, political, cultural and economic forces) shaping the new work culture. I argue that the increasingly performative new work culture is a harsh regime which has potentially damaging effects on human social relationships at work and employee wellbeing. Madeleine Bunting (2004) queries why employees appear to have acquiesced to these working conditions, becoming 'willing slaves' to the demands made by employers. This raises questions about how employees are controlled to meet the ends of neo-liberalism. Are they merely passive objects moulded by, and complicit with, performative practices or are they able to exercise agency, if only in the form of overt or subtle resistance? Is mutuality within the employment relationship achievable only when labour has equal or greater power than capital in the employment relationship? To what extent were employees able to exercise agency in the past?

Thus I continue to examine aspects of the new work culture, through white collar employees' accounts; in this case through the medium of a case study exploring one individual's experience of the introduction of performativity into a work context.

The second strand of research considered in this chapter concerns the role played by senior HRM practitioners, as agents of managerialism, in delivering a compliant, hard working, cost-effective and ultimately expendable workforce. I explore how HRM appears to exercise
governamentality within organisations by perpetuating and advancing the performativity by which employees are controlled; and in culturally consolidating the primacy of business interests as the dominant rationale for the way people and work are organised and managed, irrespective of the consequences for employee well-being. In particular I consider how HRM discourse and HRM mechanisms of performativity, such as performance management, produce subjectivity. Finally, given that HR practitioners and line managers are the organisational agents with whom the process of psychological contracting with employees generally takes place, I consider the extent to which HR practitioners manage the inherent duality of their role, i.e. balancing the interests of both the organisation and its employees.

6.0.1 The study

In this chapter I begin by addressing the core research question: How do HRM professionals view their role with respect to the new work culture? In detailing the first strand of research relating to this question, I will again draw on the UKES survey and will interweave analysis of the nature and effects of performativity with the literature. Much of this literature focuses on changes within the higher and further education sectors which were implemented under the 'modernization' and 'reform' agendas of the UK’s Labour governments (1997-2010). I will draw selectively from this literature to illustrate aspects of the 'new work culture' which may have wider relevance in highlighting some of the key challenges for employees working in performative cultures. As outlined in Chapter Four, I shall use myself as a reflexive case study to illustrate the impact on one individual of the introduction of performativity within a previously collegial work culture.

In the second strand of research carried out for my PHD relating to this question, I examine the perceptions of senior HRM practitioners about the role of the HR function. I use a selection of discourse themes from semi-structured life history interviews carried out with twenty-four ‘HR Leaders’ over the period 2004-2009. I opted to interview these HR leaders since they were considered ‘discourse shapers’ in their own context and more widely within the HR profession, since some were quite well-known within management circles. I was explicit with potential interviewees when I invited them to participate that this research was for my PhD, and they were all willing to respond to my invitation to participate. I interviewed them wherever and whenever I could (i.e. not necessarily in work time, and in some cases when they were back in the UK between travels).

Details of the sample and methodology can be found in Chapter Four and in Appendix XXX. I examine how these HR practitioners discursively constituted their own role, and how they
ascribed particular positions to themselves and others within the changing employment relationship. The empirical questions examined were as follows:

1. The nature of their role now, their priorities and how they measure their success
2. Their view about how much agency, influence and power they believe they have
3. Their view about employee relations
4. How they develop their own teams and their view about how future HR professionals should be developed.

I explore the extent to which HR professionals themselves appeared willing to embrace their roles as agents of managerialism, pursuing the needs of business which is itself operating according to short-termist, neo-liberal agendas in pursuit of competitive advantage.

6.1 The role of HRM in shaping employee subjectivity

As discussed in Chapter Three, the emphasis in HRM is on creating coherence between organisational strategy and the management of employees, on the assumption that employees can make a major contribution to an organisation’s efficiency and performance if organized, developed and trained in line with organisational goals (Esland et al, 1999:168). Within mainstream theory, the human resource function aims to both deliver and develop ‘human capital’ considered to be the source of competitive advantage by increasing organisational commitment to, and identification with, organisational goals (Alvarez, 1997).

I argue that the HR function has a wide array of mechanisms through which it can exercise governance. I shall address some of these in turn. I shall consider the grand discourse of high commitment HRM and contrast this with actual practice (what Legge, 1995, refers to as the gap between rhetoric and reality), as reported in the UKES. I shall then examine how HRM mechanisms of performativity, such as performance management, render employees as subjects and contribute to embedding the new work culture of competitive individualism. Then I will examine the discourse of HR practitioners themselves, the nature of their discourse and the extent to which they appear to be discourse shapers themselves, advancing the agendas to deliver a neo-liberal mandate.

6.1.1 Potential conflicts within grand discourse

Mainstream HR practices - variously described as ‘high performance’, ‘high commitment’, ‘high involvement’ or ‘soft’ HRM - assume that if employees identify with the organisation they will produce ‘high’ performance. The underlying premise of such approaches is that
employees are passive objects to be moulded into appropriate attitudes and behaviours and
'soft' HRM theorists argue that high performance-high commitment practices will apply in most
contexts. The language of mutuality ('people are our greatest asset') implicitly encourages
employees to commit to the organisation and to furthering its aims. As discussed in Chapter
Three, theorists take different positions with respect to how HR practices actually impact on
organisational performance, and there is a dearth of longitudinal studies to establish whether
and how HR practices lead to high performance outcomes.

The trend towards 'high commitment' HR was one of the top 'trends your organisation is
embracing for the future' in the UKES 1999. These included HRM-Performance elements
such as self-managed learning; reorganising; 'winning team' philosophy; European
Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM); flexible working/annualised hours; call centres;
internationalisation and top-line growth. However, the practice of HRM reported in the UKES
appeared implicit and unsystematized and what HR functions were actually focusing on in 1999
was mainly transactional and operational in nature.

In contrast to the rhetorically dominant high performance/high commitment or 'soft' models of
HRM, the 'hard' version of HRM focuses on cost reduction and containment, links with
strategy and the role of HRM in furthering competitive advantage. 'Hard' theorists argue that
HR practices will be contingent on context. Based on the UKES surveys I argue that the hard
approach to HRM as resource control was dominant throughout the first decade of the
twenty-first century, since many HR practitioners commonly reported introducing
performance management and performance-related pay, running assessment processes,
handling redundancies, dealing with grievances and employment tribunals and transfers of
undertakings. In contrast to Walton's (1985) argument that HRM must move away from
control to commitment styles, in practice reported HRM practices seemed to be more about
control, resource and cost management. In other words, echoing Keenoy (1999), HRM has
something of a 'wolf in sheep's clothing' about it.

The real intent was reflected in HR functional priorities. In their analysis of HRM's
contribution to the flexibilisation of Further Education (FE) in the 1990s, Esland et al (1999)
describe the agenda pursued by HRM as follows:
'Our central contention is that, in spite of its emphasis on employee development and the importance of skill enhancement through training, HRM is often perceived by both managers and those 'managed' as a means of reducing an organisation's human resource costs and of increasing 'flexibility' in staffing' (Blyton and Morris, 1992 in Esland *et al.*, 1999).

Esland *et al* point out that, in FE, HRM achieves these aims in two ways: first by enabling teaching inputs to the learning process to be redefined as a variable cost, so that greater output can be achieved for less. Secondly HRM is capable of being deployed as a disciplinary instrument for the identification of 'underperformance' or inadequate commitment among employees, if necessary as a basis for downsizing, redundancy or casualization (Cunningham, 1997). Braverman (1974) argued that, under capitalism, workers became 'habituated' to comply with the mode of production by repeated detailed operations and various petty manipulations, rather than by coercion. HRM is thus both a means of proletarianising professional skills and judgement, and also of achieving greater compliance and cost reduction. Furthermore, Ball argues that, in teaching contexts, conflicting aims are achieved through high commitment HRM: both an increasing individualisation, including the destruction of solidarities based upon a common professional identity and Trade Union affiliation, and the construction of new forms of institutional affiliation and 'community' based upon corporate culture.

These conflicting HRM priorities - of organisational identification and control/cost-reduction - are reflected in the 2000 UKES survey. HR practitioner respondents reported that the key issues for their organisations were the retention of key employees and work/life balance, and also the need to change culture and drive performance improvements. There was a growing recognition of the need to address inappropriate leadership and management styles, to build succession and develop team working. However, in practice the top priorities for most HR functions in that year's survey were to develop processes relating to training and development, performance management and reward and recognition. As Guest (1987:505) notes, "there is a danger of confusing 'management thinkers' with management practitioners and assuming that because human resource management is being discussed, it is also being practised".
6.1.2 The tyranny of team work

The greater managerial control and employee behavioural shifts required by performativity within professional/bureaucratic cultures have profound implications for organisational culture. In particular, use of 'soft' HRM concepts, such as teamwork, is a means of shaping subjectivities.

When I worked for Organisation A (1989-94), a major financial services organisation, the culture was competitive and performative. The business challenge over the five years I worked there was to strengthen the commercial brand and company culture in the light of competitive pressures at the time. Various kinds of training and 'soft'-HRM culture change 'values-based' management processes were imposed by the US centre on regional offices. 'Leadership' and 'team working' became mantras and HR tools such as competencies were developed as a template by which organisation/person 'fit' could be judged.

There was very little overt resistance to the dominant ideology that I was aware of; instead, employees were encouraged to feel proud to work for Organisation A, to advocate its interests with external parties, and to feel a sense of personal failure or shame if an individual could not, or would not, fit in with the company culture. Employees were encouraged to give feedback to each other, and also about each other to HR. If an employee was branded 'not a team player' that was a signal to the employee to move on since they would be shunned by colleagues and passed over for promotion.

The power play involved was usually akin to that deployed by bullying playground gangs, with groups conspiring against individuals. In essence 'team work' required conformity and compliance to group norms and subsumption of individual agency to the dominant rhetoric. Thus both the 'thick' and 'thin' versions of false consciousness (Scott, 1990) were perpetuated by encouraging employees to feel a sense of failure for not being part of what was purported to be not only 'natural and inevitable' but also the 'right thing'. As Ball (2003) argues, 'the policy technologies of market, management and performativity leave no space for an autonomous or collective ethical self'.

6.1.3 Performance management

Managerial controls are at their most obvious in the processes of target setting, performance appraisal and performance-related pay. HRM practitioners design the control mechanisms and processes, such as performance management, through which people are encouraged to 'work on self' to comply with organisational requirements. Consequently,
HRM practices make it ever more difficult for individual workers to exercise agency, despite the appearance of joint interest between the organisation and the employee, unless employees themselves exercise considerable power in the employment relationship because of their specific market value. In contrast, workers who lack such power, such as teachers who are situated within the nexus of education production as pedagogical workers, have found their very capacity to work defined exclusively by the conceptual structures of commodity production (Boxley, 2003):

'Thus through a system of staff appraisal, the employee is invited to collude in a process in which he or she accepts the attribution of specific 'deficiencies' in respect of skills and qualities thought to be functional to the organisation's success, and takes responsibility for 'correcting' them. This is particularly challenging for employees when the organisation's culture is perceived as threatening to employee security, and where hidden personnel agendas are seen to be operating amongst its senior management. Then HRM - under its legitimizing guise of 'staff development' - can become a major resource in the operation of organizational power politics' (Esland et al., p.163)

The performance regime imposed upon teachers, or (in Stephen Ball's phrase, inherited from Lyotard) the new 'terror' of performativity, makes it ever clearer that they are part of a productive process that feeds the global market (Ball, 1999:2). Within these shifts, teachers are required to 'work on self' to comply with the demands of the market.

Foucault used the imagery of Bentham's Panopticon (1787) to illustrate how these ends are achieved. The panopticon was a design for a prison, at the centre of which is a tower that allows the inspector to observe all the prisoners in the surrounding cells, without the prisoners knowing whether or not they are being observed. According to Foucault (1980:201):

'The major effect of the Panopticon (is) to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power...surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary'.

Townley (1993, 1994, 1998), drawing on Foucault, has argued that HRM practices such as appraisal and selection have an important shaping effect on employee subjectivities, discursively re-constituting them in line with local organisational objectives. This analysis of the discursive shaping of the individual project emphasises the relational and constructed nature of the self, embedded in social (power) relations.
In Foucauldian terms performance management and other HR practices serve to control employees through ‘self-esteem’. Self-esteem is a technology of self, similar to other psychological technologies borrowed from technologies of the market, for “evaluating and acting upon ourselves so that the police, the guards and the doctors do not have to do so” (Cruikshank, 1996:234). This has more to do with self-assessment than with self-respect, as the self continuously has to be measured, judged and disciplined in order to gear personal ‘empowerment’ to collective yardsticks determined by performative norms. As Foucault points out:

‘He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power, he makes them spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection’ (1980: 202-3).

As a result, according to Lemke, “By taking up the goal of self-esteem, we allow ourselves to be governable from a distance” (2001:p.202).

6.1.4 Digital Taylorism

Technology’s ‘panoptic’ potential is assisting the creation of employee subjectivities. The possibility of control over the labour process through technology had been discussed in the 1980s. With the growing use of personal computers in the office from the 1990s more attention was focused upon how to attain total knowledge in ‘real time’ of how every employee’s time was being deployed by electronic monitoring (Bain et al, 2002). Through ‘Digital Taylorism’, scientific management practices can be applied to skilled and graduate jobs (Brown et al, 2010). There is a paradox in that the apparent move away from ‘low trust’ methods of managerial control via high commitment HRM, in which management responsibilities are delegated and initiative valued, has been simultaneously matched by the installation of very immediate surveillance and self-monitoring, for instance in the form of appraisals, making employees subject to greater control and potential manipulation and itself implying low trust. (Inkson, 2008; Overell, 2005).

Communications technology plays a major part in enabling work intensification, since thanks to emails, laptops and continuous connectivity, work can extend beyond time and spatial boundaries. However, work intensification appears less harmful to worker well-being than the lack of autonomy afforded by a job. The 2006 UK Skills survey (Felstead et al, 2007) found that
the design of a job as a high-strain job (high-effort, low-discretion) makes a large difference to the well-being of the job-holder, relative to the existing distribution of well-being. This effect is much larger than the difference in well-being that would be associated with a reduction in work hours from 50 to 40 hours a week.

6.1.5 Measurements against ‘ideal’ templates

Performance management and measurement are variations on scientific management and are key HRM tools to increase managerial control over professional work. Kallinikos (1996, 37) argues that:

‘Management implies and reproduces compartmentalization and fragmentation as a means of mastery and control. For, in order to be managed, the totality of physical and social processes, whether within limited instrumental contexts or in society as a whole, needs to be broken down into narrow domains that can be inspected, measured and handled’.

One form of compartmentalization involves the use of competencies, which prescribe the desired skills, attitudes and behaviours, against which employee performances are assessed, and with which employees are expected to comply. In the 2000 UKES many HR functions in large organisations were organising assessment centres as a means of ‘objectively’ assessing performance and potential as well as for graduate recruitment purposes. In such processes individuals submit themselves to processes of observation and assessment against competency-based criteria. The discourse relating to this process of atomistic assessment against ‘ideal’ templates was that of ‘fit’ with the company; employees were encouraged to view invitations to participate as a mark of favour, almost a rite of passage to senior management.

Employee opinion about these processes was polarised in the 2000 survey. Many people raised concerns about competencies and the use of assessment centres, about their objectivity, consistency and fairness. The skills and impartiality of assessors, and the relevance of the competencies on which assessment was based, were called into question. Indeed employees generally regarded competencies with scepticism and respondents working in international organisations reported cultural resistance to their use. On the other hand, many UK workers recognised such assessment processes as gateways to promotion and thus ambitious individuals sought to be selected to participate.
In their study of the labour process in call centre environments Bain et al. (2002) argue that the use of both ‘hard’ (quantitative) and ‘soft’ measures represents ‘new developments in the Taylorisation of white-collar work’. Similarly, Boxley (2003) reflects on teacher appraisal processes which require the evidencing of teachers’ capability and performance against a list of sixteen ‘Professional Characteristics’ drawn up after extensive analysis by Hay/McBer (2000):

‘The data required of teachers in this area is of a qualitatively different order. Evidencing capability in this regard rests upon claiming personal qualities compatible with ... such immeasurable descriptors as ‘respect for others’, ‘conceptual thinking’, ‘initiative’, ‘holding people accountable’ and ‘understanding others’. In this, the fifth of the five categories, there is clearly a difficulty of accounting for the assessor. This situation has necessitated the construction of a relationship between ‘personal characteristics’ and performativity’.

Performance is thus judged on the ‘what’ as well as the ‘how’ and a strong degree of conformity with these normative descriptors is required if an individual’s performance is to be judged acceptable. Since such descriptors are also used in recruitment and promotion processes, there is a strong incentive for teachers to behaviourally comply, or at least appear to do so, at the risk of potentially undermining others’ and their own view of themselves as professionals. Moreover, the processes of evaluating performance are often perceived by employees as being far from neutral or fair since selecting who gets to set the standards and judge performances is more often the outcome of political processes of domination that present themselves as rational decision-making. As Scott (1994) suggests, where standards of performance and discipline have been set in new and different ways, the scope for workers legitimately to challenge these processes may also have been restricted.

Performance-related pay is intended to focus employees’ attention and efforts on achieving desired organisational outcomes, yet it has a number of unintended consequences, especially when applied to roles in which there is not a clear link between individual/team efforts and measurable results, as for instance in sales. Employees may focus mainly on those (few) tasks which deliver the variable pay, whereas the ‘core role’ may be neglected. The broader contribution of employees towards longer-term goals may be ignored in the allocation of rewards since these typically focus on short-term achievements. Individual rewards may drive individualistic behaviours, with the possibility of employees hoarding information or ‘leads’ which will enhance their own results but not those of others. On the whole, such systems are perceived to be unfair and ineffective at stimulating employee motivation or performance (Rose, 2011).
6.1.6 Employee perspectives on effects of performance management (UKES)

Though performance management had become relatively common in large private sector organisations by the end of the twentieth century, it was still relatively rare in professional service firms and in parts of the public sector. In 1999 55% of UKES private sector respondents reported the introduction of performance related pay in the previous two years. In particular it was felt that only ‘hard’ results (outputs) were really taken into account in decisions about bonus payments or about who came to be promoted and that inputs (i.e. extra effort, complying with values and behavioural standards) were taken for granted. In 1999 I reported that the performance management process was becoming more complex, with the annual review of performance (appraisals) now being generally supplemented by an integrated objective-setting and development planning processes. The use of 360 degree feedback was increasing but many respondents expressed distrust of this in assessing performance. Most respondents wanted more regular feedback from their manager and from the ‘end-user’ of their work, such as the customer.

Incentive schemes were reported as being extended to a wider employee population than to those traditionally so rewarded, such as sales people, and as favouring short-term performance only, regardless of other consequences. Therefore by implication those issues which might yield longer-term benefits would not be treated as priorities. Many respondents also reported that incentive schemes tended to set colleagues against one another and favoured individual or departmental performance as opposed to corporate/collective targets. In 2000 only a third of respondents reported that their organisation offered flexible benefits packages.

Perceived lack of fairness in the way performance management schemes worked was increasingly reported between 2001 and 2003. Many employees reported a lack of confidence in their organisation’s appraisal system and the link with reward. While some felt recognised through the performance appraisal process, they did not feel equitably rewarded. In many cases people remarked on the lack of clear goals which meant that their performance could never be fairly judged as in one junior manager’s remark “the manager is unprepared to provide parameters for performance, therefore you are always wrong”. A public sector (central government) senior manager was blunt about performance management per se: “I do not believe that performance appraisal is necessary – rather it is fundamentally damaging”. As he explained, the appraisal process undermined faith in professional standards and judgement and resulted in loss of trust between colleagues and managers.
6.2 Embedding performativity in work cultures

Marx's alienation theory has long played a marginal role in labour process analysis as a means of understanding labour power subjectivities. Marx conceptualises alienation under capitalism as a somewhat contradictory phenomenon. Capitalism minimises human alienation vis-à-vis nature, but maximises other kinds of alienation. While commodity relations are alienating, workers are not blind to the realities of capitalist labour process (Lukacs, 1974). They strive to ameliorate their alienation through a mix of informal shop floor cultures, misbehaviour and even overt resistance (Linstead et al, 1996).

In 1998 I carried out a brief retrospective study of a merger between two pharmaceutical companies which had taken place in 1991, in which Company X had effectively taken over Company Y. The HR Director was one of the few members of senior management from Company Y to survive the merger. After several months the rate of productivity amongst the research scientists formerly of Company Y had dropped significantly. None of these employees was at risk of losing their job, but many did not yet know exactly where they would be assigned. The HR Director was asked by the Board what was going on. He used the term "they're burying their babies" to describe the way employees were keeping their best ideas to themselves in case they wanted to leave the company. Without trust, there was little basis for rebuilding a psychological contract with a new organisation. Moreover, individual psychological contracts in this case were influenced by group perceptions about whether there was the basis of a social contract with their new employer.

In today's new work cultures and uncertain employment markets, genuine social relations are increasingly replaced by information structures and peer pressure: 'The sociality of postmodern community does not require sociability' (Bauman, 1992:198). It is more likely that people's individual psychological contracts are then re-formed within a broader social contract of competitive performativity. Since performativity effectively silences alternative voices, employee compliance may not be genuine. Ball points out how 'judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance'. People have to fabricate accounts of themselves to create the impression of compliance and these accounts become embedded in systems of recording and reporting on practice. As a result, ironically performativity may produce opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organizations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications. Moreover, without a basis for trust employees may keep their best work to serve their own interests.
6.2.1 Case study: Employee experience of the development of a performative work culture

I have personally experienced the onset of performativity in one organisation and worked within four organisations with performative cultures, both as an employee and as a senior manager. I joined Organisation B in 1994 following five years working for Organisation A and before that, thirteen years as a secondary school teacher in West London. At Organisation A I became familiar with performance appraisals for the first time. In my management development role I enjoyed high degrees of autonomy and willingly worked long hours to achieve on a variety of fronts. I disliked the appraisal process since it focused largely on achievement of set targets, to the exclusion of what I felt was my broader contribution. However, as a former teacher, I accepted that these processes were a part of working life in commercial organisations. Moreover, Organisation A as an employer seemed to take development seriously and I had the opportunity, as a learning and development professional, to put together guidelines to help make the development discussions between managers and employees (which, within the performance management process, were separated out from the review of performance) more fruitful, productive and helpful to both parties.

When I joined Organisation B in 1994 I was delighted with my role, my colleagues and working conditions. I had previously been on a course at Organisation B and had sent several colleagues from Organisation A on Organisation B courses and I was very attracted to the style of development if offered. Organisation B was a management college, originally a wartime psychiatric rehabilitation hospital with a legacy of humanistic and innovative approaches to helping people recover and flourish. The legacy lived on strongly, and as the then CEO told me when I arrived, “tutors may come, tutors may go, but Organisation B goes on forever - it’s in the walls”.

For all employees, without exception, the underpinning values (which were never articulated) appeared intensely meaningful, and there was both general collegiality and willingness to provide clients and course participants with the best possible experience. Organisation B had a reputation for innovative and experimental learning processes, some of which derived from the principles of action learning (Revans, 1980). This method stands in contrast with the traditional teaching methods that focus on the presentation of knowledge and skills; instead its focus is on turning research and self-insight into action and knowledge. Organisation B was essentially a niche market provider of excellent personal effectiveness programmes.
I was also pleased to have left behind the performative culture of Organisation A and felt very at home in the Organisation B culture, which, though it operated as a business, was an educational charity geared to improving people’s ‘health and welfare’. I basked in the pleasure of working amongst pleasant colleagues doing interesting work and for a worthwhile purpose. The only challenge was that, at the time I joined, Organisation B was not doing very well financially, plus the then Chairman (a former sales director of an electrical components firm) had ambitious plans for its growth. He struggled to understand why Organisation B did not make more money and assumed that employees must not be working hard enough. At the time Organisation B did not have to work hard to generate sales leads as there was a regular flow of enquiries. However, the business development process was very ad hoc and essentially involved any ‘tutor’ who was not teaching at the time picking up the phone and responding to the client as best they could. If they felt the query was beyond their own capability, they generally let the inquiry lapse rather than bother colleagues who were all busy. Clearly something had to change.

Within a couple of years of my joining Organisation B, the CEO introduced an elaborate performance management process involving targets of various sorts (all geared to individual performance), appraisal and reward processes. A bonus scheme was introduced for the first time, which offered to reward income generation which significantly exceeded the threshold level for what was deemed acceptable performance. Certain types of work carried more ‘points’ towards the bonus, and only individual, rather than team, sales performance was recognised. During the meeting at which the CEO ‘consulted’ with staff I raised objections to the scheme, and suggested that there could be other ways in which we could generate more income by simply improving our allocation of leads process. My objection caused the CEO to go back on her implied offer to me of a place on the management team.

The new system came in, with predictable results. Colleagues struggled to remain collegiate in approach and the hoarding of leads, favouritism over lead allocation, bullying and other negative aspects of culture crept in. Several colleagues became disillusioned and left and were replaced by new people who ‘got’ the system. A blame culture came into being. By and large tutors ended up feeling insecure, seeing feedback on their classroom performance not as helpful but potentially affecting how much they were paid. Given that some aspects of the previous culture lived on, colleagues were initially open with each other in discussing what they thought about the system, how it made them feel and what they feared would happen as a result of the new behaviours the system encouraged and which the Chief Executive required from tutors. While tutors (now called ‘consultants’) who were familiar with Organisation B’s old
culture still reminisced about the values and practices of yesteryear, in practice what had previously been authentic and distinctive about the Organisation B’s approach had been commodified, with consultants having to ‘play the game’, very often at their own expense in terms of feeling ill at ease over their own authenticity, as well as suffering from burn-out. Not surprisingly staff turnover accelerated in subsequent years.

Simultaneously I was carrying out surveys into how the UK’s white collar population was experiencing the changing workplace (see Chapter 4) and was aware that Organisation B was far from unique in experiencing these kinds of cultural transformation through performativity. Sennett (1998) argues that emphasis on these performative concepts is affecting character, as expressed by loyalty and commitment, and ultimately leads to the decline of values that are desirable in society. On the evidence I have seen I find it hard to disagree with that statement. In many ways the individualised approaches of recent years may have gone too far. As a member of senior management myself at three different institutions, I have experienced the challenges of managing a variety of people deemed to be especially ‘talented’. For much of the time this has been a privilege but over the last five years I have also experienced managing four different employees who have attempted to manipulate their work situation and use power relations to undermine me as their manager.

In two cases these were men who had expected to be offered the job which I was offered through external recruitment. In each case their resentment and determination to sabotage my efforts took various forms but all were extremely unpleasant to deal with. In the other cases both employees appeared to have a huge sense of entitlement. It seemed the more they received in terms of privilege (such as sponsorship to do an MBA etc), the less they were willing to contribute to the overall effort of the business unit and the more they wanted to blame others for their relatively poor results. These employees knew how to manipulate impressions, manage power networks and play ‘subject/victim’, when it seemed to me that they were exercising agency and actively advancing their own interests at other people’s expense.

As a senior manager I felt vulnerable to the demands of performativity and the politics of power which seem implicit in performative cultures, both as an employer’s ‘agent’ and as a subject. On the one hand I felt obliged to ensure that the business unit was achieving good results, as the line between overall business profitability and loss was thinly drawn and largely depended on the output of that unit. On the other hand, while I disliked the requirement for targets, I also resented what I saw as an unfair burden being placed on other employees as a result of the special treatment that these individuals felt was due to them.
I therefore felt obliged to address the situation with each of these individuals through performance management, which was both a messy and painful process for me and no doubt for them. As Sennett suggests, it is arguable that employees experiencing alienation of self linked to the requirements of performativity are paying a heavy price in terms of their personal and psychological well-being. Given that I was in a relatively privileged management position and still felt vulnerable within performative contexts, those less fortunate may well be paying a still heavier price.

The effects of performative climates on employees were also evident in UKES surveys over the period studied. Many respondents between 2000 and 2003 reported that a culture change would be necessary if empowerment was to become a reality in their organisations. A culture conducive to empowerment was characterised as being ‘no-blame’; with clear accountability levels; an acceptance of risk-taking; managers who were willing to let go of power; good systems and deliberate trust-building. It was only in such a culture that people believed they were likely to be fully motivated and accountable for their performance.

While the increasingly performative nature of the ‘new workplace’ may be challenging for people in mid-career, it is possible that young people entering the workplace now would have less trouble adjusting to workplace demands. Various studies have examined stereotypical age groupings in today’s multi-generational workforces in terms of the experiences which have shaped them, their attitudes, values and expectations. Cannon (1999) for instance studied the attitudes to work of ‘Generation X’. On the one hand they are well-equipped to deal with the technological demands of work - they are heavy users of technology, including the internet and are able to see some of the potential applications of transformational technology. On the other hand, Cannon’s research suggests that Generation X value freedom: they want money, greater control of their time and the chance to use some of their intellectual potential. Stereotypically they expect honesty from employers, especially with regard to career opportunities and dislike feeling manipulated. Cannon found that Generation X employees reacted with cynicism to performative work cultures. They did not trust their employers since they did not provide secure employment and employees were wary about commitment to anything long term since loyalty to an employer was no longer an appropriate concept for them.

There is therefore a potential irony in that performativity can produce the opposite of what is intended i.e. a compliant labour force who can be exploited to produce high profits. As Sparrow and Cooper (2003:85) suggest, ‘The risk then is that new technologies continue to create the conditions in which positive gains in the employment relationship are masked by ill-considered HR strategies.’

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6.3 HR Leader discourse

In this section my interest is in localized senior practitioner discourses, and in whether these reflect broader academic discursive trends towards business partnership (Harley and Hardy 2004; Watson 2004). Given the shaping effect of HRM discourse, I wanted to explore from their discourse where senior practitioners placed their priority emphasis, and the extent to which that reflected a mutual employment relationship implicit in 'soft' HRM, or treated employees as 'subjects'. To that end, the core of this study is a qualitative theme analysis of 24 interview-based texts, treated here as a form of social practice (Bazely 2009; Aronson, 1994; Constas, 1992).

The interviews were carried out between 2004 and 2009. Most of the practitioners were known to me personally or by reputation as people considered to be exemplars of professional HRM. The organisations for which they worked included a national charity, a central government department, two local government authorities, a large police authority and a professional body. Private sector respondents worked for companies involved in electronic communications, publishing, retail, fast food, banking, utilities, telecommunications, and manufacturing. Two of the respondents were CEOs, having previously been HR Directors; ten were Group HR Directors or equivalent; all had been HR directors. Finally, nine of the respondents are female and fifteen are male; five respondents were aged 28-35; four were aged 36-45; fifteen were over 46 years of age.

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows: I first examine HR business partnership literature themes and use these as background to my analysis of HR practitioner talk. I then outline three main discursive themes in these interview texts. These are the dominance of business in HR practitioner discourse; the ways in which HR practitioners exercise power; the extent to which these 'HR leaders' are agents and discourse-shapers or are themselves subjects of performativity.

6.3.1 Business Partner literature themes

Much discussion has taken place earlier addressing academic HR discourse. Within the discursive space of HRM (Francis and Keegan 2006; Francis and Sinclair 2003; Keenoy 1999; Legge, 1995), the greater focus is placed on the role HR plays in supporting business goals by 'partnering with the business'. Similarly, within the 'practitioner paradigm' genre, Ulrich’s (1997) business partner modelling of HR has been promoted as the one to which the profession should aspire (Caldwell 2003: 988).
Though since revised (2005), the Ulrich 1997 model has formed the basis of extensive restructurings within HR functions which are seen as an essential part of HR transformation. Talk of HR transformation is typically advanced and defended by 'experts' focusing on ends such as 'improved efficiency' and 'greater strategic focus'. Large scale structural transformations in HR service delivery to reduce costs, increase firm competitiveness and achieve a tighter alignment between HR practices and business strategy are presented as urgent, inevitable and politically neutral. Technology is presented simply as a means to an end - typically the streamlining of HR services in order to free up high-end HR practitioners to engage in strategic HR activities, while line managers and employees are trained to be responsible for an ever-widening array of basically administrative HR activities. The transformation of ordinary HR practitioners into HR business partners is framed as a necessity and presented as a natural step in the evolution of HR work in a globally competitive environment (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005).

HR professionals are exhorted to identify closely with line management through enactment of a strategy not unlike that of the 'conformist innovator' described by Legge (1978), where dominant business values are treated as a 'given' by HR professionals. Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) remark on the prominence and attractiveness of the 'strategic partner' role amongst HR professionals, noting that it is sometimes used as a synonym for the business partner, consistent with CIPD research which shows that the strategic partner role is proving the most attractive of Ulrich's original four roles for most HR people (Brown et al. 2004).

Unitarist HRM models like HR business partnership work on the assumption that what is good for the business is good for employees. These downplay the inherent duality of HR work raised in more critical accounts of HRM. In particular, the model developed by Ulrich (1997) specifically works to downplay the responsibilities of HR practitioners in securing and protecting the interests of employees (Francis and Keegan, 2006; Hope-Hailey et al, 2005) while also failing to adequately consider the difficulties and tensions faced by HR practitioners as they are urged to adopt strategic roles (Caldwell 2003). Indeed, I wrote a book for HR practitioners Aligning HR and Business Strategy (1999), which provided pointers as to how such alignment could be achieved. When I wrote the second edition of this book in 2009, I argued that the pursuit of such strong unitarist and inherently short-term alignment was mistaken, since I now believe that pursuing business agendas derived from a neo-liberal mandate is fundamentally counter-productive. Not only does the development of people require a longer-term perspective but also the mechanisms used to extract performance from employees raise ethical concerns for me.
A key issue for practitioner-focused research is the extent of influence HR can exercise, often described as 'a seat at the (board) table'. However, the position HR occupies in terms of its power and influence within organisations is highly contested both within and without organisations. Even though people issues have now become a key business driver in knowledge and service intensive firms in particular, HR is still fighting to exert influence at the highest level. Given the history of HR practitioners' struggles for acceptance as key organizational players (Guest and King, 2004; Legge, 1978), it is hardly surprising that a way of discursively modelling the concept of HR as 'hard' and relating it to other concepts such as 'business-driven agendas' and 'strategic management', has become so popular. It offers perhaps some hope of escaping the 'perpetual marginality' (Watson, 1996) of HR practitioners by offering a way out of the dualism when they seek to claim a share of strategic decision-making, while at the same time attending to the kinds of employee-centred and administrative aspects of the role.

### 6.4 Analysis of discourse themes

I shall variously refer to these respondents as 'HR leaders' and 'HRDs' (HR Directors). As discussed in chapter four, I used a semi-structured life history interview template which covered areas such as respondents' early career and why they had pursued an HR career (Appendix 6). With fourteen of these respondents I also interviewed them about what they considered the key challenges of their roles and what they saw as their key priorities and why.

#### 6.4.1 HR leader careers

The importance of business/market knowledge to HR career success is reflected in the career experiences of most interviewees, many of whom had not started off their own careers in HR. Early career routes included other 'people'-related disciplines such as teaching (4), becoming a qualified solicitor (1), marketing (3), sales (4), priest (2), acting (1), general management (1), recruitment (2). Two started out in Finance or as economic analyst; one as research scientist. Most interviewees argued that business understanding is a crucial foundation for HR’s credibility and several respondents commented that, unless HR practitioners demonstrate a real understanding of the business, non-HR people tend to be brought into HR leadership roles.
6.4.2 What attracted them to HR?

Many respondents described their early career choices deriving from strong, people-oriented personal missions. The desire to develop people was a common theme, although several people saw this as a means to a unitarist end i.e. developing people in order to better the business. One person, who was initially attracted to a career in the Church, saw some similarities between that and HR: “Both are rooted in helping people to achieve their full potential. And both have a welfare aspect – supporting people through difficult times”.

Several wanted work of social value; for instance, one person’s early career involved working part-time as an HR professional, doing social change in his spare time. His personal politics were about social change:

“You see things in HR which at least demonstrate the impact of what HR does. In the 1990s I saw a site of engineering/manufacturing go from a headcount of 5000 to 2500 in 2 years flat. I saw the social impact – shops in the High St became Charity shops, the level of violence in the town centre went up, you can see the link clearly. If you live in the locality, you can see the impact. It was a defining experience”.

So for many respondents their personal value-set was altruistic, about doing something ‘worthwhile’ to help people, business and for some, the community also.

Many of these HR leaders are high flyers by any standards and most have learned significantly through early exposure to challenging situations. Interestingly, many of these involved making people redundant, and despite their early motivations most appeared to have adopted a ‘macho’ approach to the task. One person relished the early opportunity to restructure a large business, working as part of a small team setting up a wholly-owned subsidiary. Another person left teaching to work for a big pharmaceutical company, in sales and then marketing. As the highest performing person in the company, she was plucked out of the “oblivion” of the marketing department and put to work for the MD running a major change programme:

“I remember day two, my boss called me into the room and said, ‘Look (X), we’ve got to shed about five thousand people’, and I went, ‘mm...okay. When?’ It was November, and he said ‘December’, and I said, ‘Oh that’s fine - we’ve got thirteen months.’ And he said ‘No - this December!’ So I was thrown into massive reorganisation, losing five thousand people in about four or five weeks, and then taking the company through
chapter eleven. Huge, huge learning; fantastic learning, because no-one else could tell me what to do. So that was a hideous set of circumstances, having to let people go and refinance the business and stuff, but hugely developmental.

This example illustrates the apparent degree of autonomy this person was able to exercise in carrying out major downsizings and the credibility and influence she gained as a result.

6.4.3 HR’s core role

In what Legge (1995) calls the twin discourses of the ‘market’ and the ‘community’ it is the market and business interests which dominate HR leaders’ discourse. Without exception, the HR leaders in this study believed the purpose of their role was to be a business partner, supporting business success by recruiting capable, flexible and committed people, managing and rewarding their performance and developing key competencies. Most were working to very short-term agendas. All respondents emphasized that they considered their role to be about ‘business first, people second’. One HRD described the mark of a great HR leader as being ‘as un-HR like as possible’.

Alignment with business strategy was considered crucial and for one group HR director, the HR functional structure across her complex business needed to reflect this: “So it certainly is absolutely integrated and is not seen as some odd separated group that does its own thing”. A number of respondents referred to the opportunities to increase HR’s influence afforded by the economic crisis:

“If you are emerging from the downturn and you aren’t a strategic partner with your CEO, I think you have lost your way. Yes, do the basics and the operational piece brilliantly, but be seen as that go-to person and true strategic partner. There’s never a better time to raise the profile of HR in the organisation.”

6.4.4 HR transformation

Every HR leader appeared to view the transformation of the HR function as urgent and inevitable, ostensibly to enable more cost-effective operational delivery and to free up HR capacity for more strategic roles. However cost reduction appeared the main driver. While the pace of transformation was slow, the seeming inevitability of such transformations was accepted by all the respondents, especially in public sector organisations as spending cuts started to bite. All appeared to be adopting structures akin to those associated with the ‘Ulrich model’, i.e. some form of devolution to the line accompanied by e-enabled self-service,
centres of expertise/excellence, business partners and a small corporate centre focused on
corporate strategies such as executive compensation. HR leaders considered it crucial that
they were seen to lead this transformation before they were forced to do so. Many expressed
doubt as to whether the new structures would prove successful in practice, but there were no
accepted alternatives:

"Many of us have developed, or are developing, service centre-type structures. It is the
only model in town and we have to make it work. What I have seen so far impresses
me, but the longevity of this approach will be the real test. I don't know another model
that is affordable".

For many respondents, without this transformation, the HR function was on the road to
obsolescence. As one senior public sector organisation HR Director commented:

"Put simply, there are cheaper - and probably more effective - ways of handling
personnel matters. It is called clerking and doesn't, in all cases, require qualified HR
professionals. That is, unless we refocus. And we need to do so pretty darn quickly. Far
too long, we have navel-gazed about what HR is, and worried far too much about
processing".

None of the HR Leaders was satisfied that the process of functional transformation was
complete or entirely effective in their institutions and in many cases was proving all-
consuming, becoming the end in itself rather than the means to greater effectiveness and
value creation. While most appeared to consider the task of restructuring HR as bowing to the
inevitable, some presented HR transformation in a more dynamic light, as enabling them to
better support the business and keep pace with the company's changing needs. One
pharmaceutical company HRD describes his motivation for transforming HR: "I found the
clutter of the day job getting in the way of the real value". In his company for instance, HR
was positioning itself as organisational change agent was perceived to be of value:

"There is now a very concerted effort to better re-align HR to what the business really
needs and that coincides with the business itself changing very dramatically in the
pharmaceutical industry and (this company) is at the forefront of making that change.
We, as an HR function, are definitely integral to not only making that change ourselves,
but supporting that change in the organisation. We are strategically positioned to help in
that".
For all the HRDs interviewed, the 'people as resource' metaphor was dominant. For example, one senior HRD described the devolution of HR responsibilities to the line as entirely appropriate and what HR should be doing anyway, arguing that HR has perhaps inappropriately taken over many aspects of the role of managers in the past:

"A manager must manage and be accountable for their people, just as they are accountable for the goods and services that go out from their businesses or the provision of goods and services from their business. I think we are getting managers now to respond to both of those dimensions in the business".

However, HR leaders were aware their own proposed change of role would be politically contested by other influential players in their own contexts. Many recognised that the 'Achilles Heel' of HR credibility was accusations of poor quality service delivery. So crucial was getting operational delivery right, that many respondents found themselves spending considerable time on improving the quality of the service outcomes, ironically leaving little time to attend to more strategic agendas:

"...at times I probably have to rein back a little bit. I have been very concerned by the quality of our service from our (outsourced) partners so I've kind of got in there and rolled up my sleeves as well, to make sure that the quality of service we are delivering is meeting our KPIs and that people feel the service is at least as good as it was when it was provided internally - and hopefully is better because that is the whole point of outsourcing it".

### 6.4.5 HR leaders' power and influence

So on the one hand these are powerful individuals who are perceived as influential players in their organisations and within HR professional circles, yet they recognise their essential subordination to the business interests and vulnerability to the perceptions of others. Only five of the 24 HR leaders interviewed for this study were members of their executive board, although all were, or had been, members of their organisation's management team. Most argued that the 'seat at the table' question is irrelevant to HR leaders' ability to deliver, with some dismissing this as a '90s issue'. One respondent puts the point more forcefully:

"I suppose in terms of the balance of power it's time the profession generally got off its bottom and began to make a difference rather than just talking about how life could be so much better if they had a seat around the table".
One HRD argued that the emerging, more strategic contribution from HR was starting to be valued in his company:

“I also think that the business leaders want, and have recognised the power and the usefulness of having an HR business partner, or the HR leader work alongside them, who really understands their business and can work with them on an equal footing in the context of people issues. I don’t mean just be a supporting function, but actually work strategically alongside them in a more consultancy kind of relationship”.

But the same HRD points out that the success of this more strategic role depends on the ‘HR basics’ being delivered effectively:

“They also recognise they want that foundational, day-to-day, operational stuff that HR does carried out more efficiently, whether it be paying people on time, delivering bonuses on time, having good employee relations, environment support, problem-solving and all the other lifetime career management aspects that HR can support”.

The extent of HR leaders’ power and influence appears to a very large extent determined by their credibility and relationship with executives at the highest level and his/her skill as a critical influencer. According to Hesketh and Hird (2009), executives use personal strategies which involve them in power struggles over limited resources and the deployment of material, symbolic and ideological power to secure distributional advantages for themselves and the functions they represent. The importance of these (power) networks in constructing, shaping and ultimately determining the outcome of material resources is generally under-estimated.

Most of the respondents recognised the crucial importance of a close working relationship with the CEO. One HRD, for instance, would not go to work in an organisation if she didn’t think that she could build a good relationship with the CEO:

“If at interview I’ve not felt that I could work with this guy, and this guy would be totally open with me and I’d be his confidante and part of his kitchen cabinet, I wouldn’t want to work at the company”.

The nature of the HR leader’s relationship with the CEO is variously reported as ‘ally’, ‘confidante’, ‘counsellor’, ‘conscience’, but in all cases the HR Director appears to act as subject, the ‘power behind the throne’. As one HRD comments:
“The most important job I do is supporting the most senior person that I work with; no question. And one thing that I’ve learnt over time is you have to be a very different sort of person to be able to do that. You have to be willing to get a kick out of hearing a CEO using your words, and not tell anyone they’re yours. You have to genially think that’s really cool, and I do. Of the time I spend with the senior team, I would say the vast majority of it I spend with the very CEO and that’s where I get my kicks and that’s what I love doing. And I would just leave my job if I didn’t have that relationship with the CEO - I just wouldn’t stay”.

So on the one hand, this HR director appears subject in relative power terms, yet also appears in a position to manipulate and control agendas as a ‘power behind the throne’ metaphorically speaking. Another (Group) HRD of an international corporation talked of her influence over colleagues:

“I probably am the main confidante of not just the Chief Executive, but also with my colleagues on the executive. That is an extremely important role for an HRD to do well. It’s probably the most important part of the role and one which I personally take very seriously. I will often be the conduit between colleagues and between colleagues and the Chief Executive. That’s a role that, if you play it well, is extremely valuable for the organisation”.

Indeed all of the HR leaders interviewed for this study recognised that, for their role to grow in scope and influence, they needed close working relationships at the top, particularly with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Chief Financial Officer (CFO). This they all felt was when HR’s power and influence is at its highest. I term this ‘the charmed circle’ which can also act as a ‘closet cabinet’. One HRD meets with the Group Executive informally. The focus is on reflection, ‘temperature’ assessment, counsel, discussing linkages to the corporate centre, business performance ‘hot spots’, and acting as a mini think-tank for the organisation on the micro and strategic people issues, including some conflict resolution and development of the senior team itself.

This close relationship has also been termed ‘the Golden Triangle’ by Hesketh and Hird (2009) to describe the informal, tacit or intangible network of executive relationships and conversations – typically but not exclusively operating between the CEO, finance director and their director or vice president of human resources. As Hesketh and Hird point out, the lack of a formal boardroom place makes membership of the golden triangle all the more important for
achieving strategic voice for HR. But however valuable this role, it is not without its risks, not least to the HRD’s integrity. The HR leader has to be willing to find themselves in the middle of the political power games of executive networks, whether or not these are to their taste. If not, they can be forced out of the charmed circle. As the Group HRD quoted earlier points out:

"Play it incorrectly and your trust and ethics just go down the tubes. So you have to be quite clever to play it because you also have to be able to articulate on issues which may have been brought to your attention or require resolution and try and come up with some ideas on how you can problem-solve those to avoid conflict for example, or to ensure that everybody’s voice is heard, including your own, around the table”

For those who are able to ‘play it correctly’, HR’s performance tends to be judged less on hard, quantifiable measures and more on qualitative measures of success which reflect their growing influence: “It’s whether the senior team are coming to my room all the time to talk to me, before they do anything organisationally. That’s how I know if I’m being successful of not”.

Hesketh and Hird (2009) argue that a number of structural influences determine the potential power of the HR leader. These include size - large, complex organisations with high labour costs- or scientific and technical contexts, where managers have little preparation for managing people. HR then becomes powerful as a source of support on labour relations and development. The presence of powerful trades unions – which tend to make CEOs nervous - and industrial relations tensions, where HR becomes the ultimate management negotiator, provide a strong power base for HR Directors. Ironically, when employee relationships are less adversarial, this can reduce HR’s power base.

These conditions are reflected in the comments from respondents in this study whose accounts confirmed that HR’s power and influence is highest when HRDs are seen to be protecting the organisation against industrial action, acting as a counter-weight to poor line management, and reducing labour costs. Some drew power and influence from their growing role in managing risk and reputation, both in terms of preventing large numbers of industrial tribunals and ‘doing deals’ where necessary to silence ‘the awkward squad’. Managing tough change involving restructurings and redundancies is also a time when HR’s power appears high.
6.4.6 HR as ‘employee champion’

When these HR leaders discussed employees it was mostly in the context of change – such as handling exits well or re-engaging ‘survivors’. Making the case for greater investment in people for its own sake was considered likely to diminish HR’s credibility. Consequently talent management was discussed entirely with respect to what business needed from talent, rather than the other way round. Only a few showed empathy with employees. One HRD acknowledged the potentially alienating effects of the pace of change within large organisations:

“I think that staff can feel increasingly anonymous and isolated, a cog in the wheel, in these large fast-moving companies where people come and go from jobs much more quickly than they used to. You don’t necessarily know your colleagues for very long; then you’ve got another colleague, another report, another boss. It’s far more turbulent, and I think the word is turbulent rather than changing, than it used to be”.

6.4.7 Ethics?

Another HRD argues that the employee champion role will inevitably become more prominent since the future workforce will make different demands of employers:

“If you think about Generation Y, and certainly Generation Z when it comes along, people’s expectations will be enormous in terms of what a working career and job and occupation will provide for them, whereas the Baby Boomer generation was much more content to do what they were told, and be much more loyal naturally. Now I think people are more disloyal naturally and they want to know what your ethical policy is and what you are doing about saving the planet. I think the future of business is much more around people understanding and being comfortable with your ethics behind the scenes than ever it used to be. And that’s a good thing but it’s also something you have to think about for the future”.

Arguably then, ‘ethics’ is here seen more as an important aspect of brand, than as important for its own sake.

Various HRDs argued that we must learn lessons from the banking crisis and transform HR leadership by so doing. One person commented, “never be paid too much you can’t afford to leave – the table stakes can be high and provide real tests for personal integrity”.

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Moreover HR's role as a tool of the market has proved a contributory factor to the kinds of performative cultures in which irresponsible behaviour is rewarded:

"You have to pay what you have to pay' has proved counter-productive, especially when the behaviour that has been encouraged by such payments causes the business to go broke. HR leaders need to ask themselves if there are other things that make working for an organisation more motivating than just money".

Encouraging though such comments are, the extent to which such reward systems are being currently revised remains in doubt.

6.4.8 Discourse-shapers

The emerging 'regime of truth' is that HRM is about business, first and foremost. While most HR leaders were initially attracted to a career in HR because of their strongly people-centred values, few of the respondents seemed to be looking for their successors to have a similar passion for people. Instead they were looking for high calibre individuals with good business understanding and relationship skills. As one HRD put it, "you can learn to 'do' people". Although I surmise that, for those HR leaders who retain a strong 'people' orientation, the essential duality of the HR role must produce cognitive dissonance, these HR leaders seem mostly to have accommodated to the market discourse and the related rewards of power, prestige and influence that go with this.

It would appear that most HR leaders have been normalised to see the process of HR transformation as inevitable and necessary. As careerists and 'thrivers' they secure their own position of power and influence by executing managerial directives. They promote the discourse of business by inculcating norms of conduct into their teams which reflect the primacy of business interests over employee interests. These norms are enforced through the fear of HR being seen as irrelevant and a costly overhead. Some appear to be driving this transformation because they genuinely believe it will make HR more effective, while others believe there is no choice but to be seen to be reducing costs and improving quality of HR delivery. All are finding the process of transformation difficult. In a sense the old dictum 'damned if you do and damned if you don't' seems to apply. HR leaders feel obliged to make the transformation but if it proves problematic, more energy goes into improving the new arrangements. Consequently internal stakeholders may see little value from the transformation.
6.5 Conclusion

So the extent to which these powerful individuals are agents or subjects is unclear. As managerial agents they actively drive through the neo-liberal business agenda, reshaping structures and creating performative organisational cultures which reflect business goals, and in which employees have to 'fit'. Their mechanisms and discourses shape the subjectivities of others. Yet they recognise their own vulnerability to the perceptions and political manoeuvrings of others and seek to maintain and grow their own power and influence through senior stakeholder relationships and credibility based on working back from a business-driven agenda. Even though HR leaders who are members of the 'charmed circle' appear to be highly influential, membership is fragile, and how much room there is for genuine challenge is not clear.

Given the largely short-term focus of many organisations, it is perhaps fair to say that, following the recent global shocks to our financial system, there has never been a clearer need to question this dominant discourse about business being the ultimate end in itself. However, the HR discourse discussed here suggests that, in today's politicised, short-termist and self-interested new work cultures (Sennett, 2006), HR leaders are unlikely to seriously 'rock the boat' and promote an ethical agenda which disturbs vested interests. It also suggests that the 'employee champion' role will wax and wane in relation to the relative power of labour and capital at any given time.

In the next chapter I shall consider further the effects of the new work culture on the changing social and psychological contracts of employees, examining in particular the reported effects of loss of existential meaning in work.
Chapter 7
The Search for Meaning

7.0 Introduction

In previous chapters I have argued that, as part of the neo-liberal drive for organisations to increase profit through labour flexibility, the seemingly mutual employment exchange between employers and employees, as reflected in the 'old' psychological contract, appeared to have become unbalanced in favour of employers. I have argued that labour flexibility was being achieved at the expense of employees' job security. I have also argued that the new work culture, with its work-intensive and performative managerial practices and both the commodification and the commoditisation of white collar work, appears to have generally resulted in reduced employee autonomy and wellbeing. Employee relations based on individualised HRM approaches have generally resulted in UK employees having relatively less employment protection compared with that enjoyed by their counterparts in many parts of mainland Europe. Nevertheless HRM approaches to employee relations seek to secure employee commitment and performance by perpetuating the illusion of mutuality of interest between employers and employees.

In this chapter my focus returns again to an exploration of the impact of the new work culture on the psychological contracts of white collar workers and the extent to which employees felt able to exercise agency in the new work culture. Here I examine the findings from a strand of research carried out in 2004 arising from the UKES 2000-2003, namely an exploration of how employees construed the nature of 'meaning' in the workplace and why many were reporting a loss of meaning at work.

7.0.1 How this chapter is organised

I begin by explaining my interest in this topic and provide a brief overview of the methods of data collection and analysis used. I then outline some key literature themes and go on to interweave selected themes with summary findings from the study throughout this chapter. In particular I consider how people define 'meaning'; why people feel the need for greater meaning at work; how meaning is destroyed; what people find meaningful in work and how meaning at work is enabled. I also consider the role of corporate purpose in enabling
meaning at work. I conclude by evaluating the strengths and limitations of the research, and by outlining an emerging model suggesting possible future research possibilities.

7.0.2 Why did I research this topic?

I initially became interested in the issue of meaning and work in 2001. The choice of topic arose from a number of sources including ‘classroom’ conversations with participants in personal effectiveness programmes, and notably a sub-theme emerging from a rising number of apparently unrelated open-ended responses in the UKES since 1999. These were thematically analysed into clusters relating to a ‘lack’ or a ‘loss’. These themes included a lack of purpose, trust and commitment; a general loosening of emotional and other ties relating to colleagues and the workplace; a loss of motivation and of personal direction; a feeling that the nature and purpose of the organisation and/or respondents’ work was not worthwhile.

At the time I carried out this research in 2003-4, the British economy was enjoying a period of relatively unbroken growth, despite occasional downturns. The labour market was relatively buoyant, the consumer economy was booming, and to paraphrase Harold Macmillan it might be argued that people ‘had never had it so good’. And yet there were increasing numbers of people each year in the UKES (70% in 2002; 76% in 2003) reporting that they lacked meaning at work.

I initially assumed that this sub-theme, which I termed ‘Quest for meaning at work’, was symptomatic of the zeitgeist and temporary economic downturn at the turn of the millennium but I was curious to understand whether, given the persistence and volumes of ‘lack/loss’ comments in the UKES, these comments reflected a deeper, longer-term phenomenon. I decided to investigate the question of meaning more specifically in 2003. Another characteristic of the macro context backdrop at the time was the widespread socio-economic and political turbulence on a global scale, not least the aftermath of ‘9/11, the ‘War on Terror’ and home-grown terrorism, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have unsettled and disturbed large sections of the UK population. I was conscious that in such a context, as Overell (2008:6) comments:

“It seems impossible to imagine that in times of deep hardship, industrial strife, hunger and war, ideas so superficially fey as meaningful work might have some appeal”.

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The aim of the research was to investigate people's understandings of 'meaning' especially with regard to the workplace, and to explore what constitutes 'meaning-full' and 'meaning-less' experiences. I wanted to find out what conditions were present when people experienced a sense of meaning, or a lack of this, in the workplace. My empirical research questions included:

- What did employees mean by 'meaningful' work?
- To what extent were employees experiencing existential loss of meaning in the new work culture?
- How did meaning/loss of meaning manifest itself?
- If people were searching for more meaning at work, why was this?

These issues are not well-grounded in empirical data in much of the literature and research and my aim in this enquiry was to 'ground' the definition of 'meaning' at work. In particular, I wanted to discover if there were links between people's experience of the new work culture, changes to their psychological contract and their loss of/search for meaning at work.

7.0.3 Methodology

In terms of conceptual framework, Giddens's 'structuration theory' (1986) is very useful in synthesizing micro and macro issues, seeing connections between the most 'micro' aspects of society - individuals' internal sense of self and identity - and the big 'macro' picture of the state, multinational capitalist corporations, and globalisation. In this strand of research I focus on the micro, but also on the interaction between the two. On a micro scale, Giddens argues, an individual's internal sense of self and identity becomes a reflexive project that has to be interpreted and maintained.

Yet this micro-level change cannot be explained only by looking at the individual level, as people do not spontaneously change their minds about how to live; nor can it be assumed that they are directed to do so by social institutions and the state. On a macro scale, globalisation offers vast new opportunities for business, but crises such as '9/11' can affect the entire world, spreading far outside the local setting in which they first developed, and directly influence individuals. A serious explanation of such issues must lie somewhere within the network of macro and micro forces. These levels should not be treated as unconnected; in fact, Giddens argues, they have significant relation to one another.

So while interest in meaning at work is almost certainly not a new phenomenon, my starting point was to argue that the rising interest in meaningful work may be explained as a
consequence of organisational changes that derive from a neo-liberal agenda and which have become more pronounced in the recent past. I see this as Thatcherism working its way ever more profoundly through the system, at an accelerating pace, with consequences for employees and society as a whole. The banking crisis of 2008 represents just one manifestation of the practices and values which derive from the unbridled pursuit of a neo-liberal agenda.

The initial research method involved a literature review and analysis of specific multiple choice response and open-ended questions included in the UKES surveys in 2003 and 2004. A copy of the UKES 2004, with questions 19, 104-110 relating to Meaning is to be found in Appendix 4. For further details of the sample, please see Chapter Four, section 4.8.2.

I believed that qualitative methods were most likely to lead to deeper insights into people's perceptions and experiences and decided to use focus groups as means of exploring the topic. Accordingly, a series of three focus group meetings, involving a total of thirty people, explored the topic using appreciative inquiry methodology (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). As researcher I facilitated these focus group sessions and was thus both an insider and an outsider simultaneously. These meetings reflected the difficulty of defining the nature of the issues. More details of the data collection and analysis methodology used can be found in Chapter Four. I wrote up the management implications of the study for my work purposes in a report In Search of Meaning at Work (2005).

In the next section I provide an overview of key literature themes relating to Meaning, and how these informed my research questions.

7.1 Literature on meaning

At the time I carried out this strand of research (2004), much of the literature considering the perennial nature of mankind's existential search for meaning was reflected in several literatures, focusing on leadership, spirituality, psychology and philosophy (e.g. Jung and Victor Frankl).
7.1.1 *Meaning - a perennial quest?*

When I started to examine literature relating to the concept of ‘meaning’, much of it related to the notion of spirituality. Indeed, the notion of spirituality has been employed to explain and understand a deeper, more defining sense of meaning at work since the new spiritual movements of the 1960s (Lonergan, 1957). ‘Spirituality’ however is a problematic word in the literature, meaning different things to different people. The complexity is demonstrated by the many labels given to the topic such as ‘spirituality at work’, ‘management spirituality’ and so on. Each of these refers to a particular discourse of leadership or management or social practice at work. One of the major differences is about whether spirituality in the workplace is given a religious meaning.

Emotion in general and spirituality more specifically, represent core concepts within the organisational transformation literature (Cooper, 1997; Argyris, 1964). Spirituality, particularly in American management texts, is generally used to describe numerous organisational phenomena, including organisational change, value systems, identity, managing, leadership, executive development and empowerment (Conger, 1994). The expected benefits of spirituality are supposed to include a better work environment, ethical business practice and a satisfied workforce. And the structurally short-termist perspectives of management are thought to constrain consideration of the larger picture.

Mitroff and Denton (2000), proponents of the ‘spiritual paradigm’ for management, argue that renewal – both individual and organisational – affects the essence or core and is associated with spirituality. Characteristics of renewal in the workplace are entrepreneurship, courage, passion, creativity and innovation. In particular they associate spirituality at work with self-fulfilment:

‘...the workplace is one of the most important settings in which people come together daily to accomplish what they cannot do on their own, that is, to realize their full potential as human beings’ (2000:7).

There is also an extensive popular literature consisting of self-development texts. The latter mainly consists of an extensive focused on improving self-effectiveness, for instance through mindfulness and variations on meditative practices (Harris, 2008; Hayes, 2004).

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7.1.2 Search for meaning: a post-modern phenomenon?

Since 2004 there has been a steady rise in the number of research studies, mostly American, exploring the theme of meaning in the workplace. Within the literature, several themes suggest that there is a growing ‘search for meaning’ arising from:

1. The intensifying search for individual self-fulfilment, which reflects the stage of development of society
2. Crises of late capitalism and contemporary harsh working conditions
3. Psychological contract breach and violation.

I shall now explore these themes in more detail.

1. Stage of development of society

The function of work as a means of self-actualisation (in Maslowian terms), and through which people experience a sense of personal identity and purpose, is explored by many writers. Marx (1844) argued that work is central to humanity, since:

"In creating an objective world by his practical activity, in working-up inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being, i.e. a being that treats the species as its own essential being." (Marx and Engels, 1988:76-77)

It is from this belief that self-directed work is the essential quality of being human that Marx exalted work itself as a 'liberating activity', 'the first premise of all human co-existence'; at one point, he wrote of 'attractive work, the individual's self-realisation' (1973:611). Marx further argued that work under capitalism was both alienating and destructive. He considered that the commodification of work causes alienation—the loss of humanness experienced when workers lack control over work and are forced to sell an inherent part of themselves. Marx viewed alienation as embedded in work under capitalism.

Sociologist Ronald Inglehart (1997) claims that his 'World Values' survey, which he has carried out since 1970, is now representative of 70 per cent of the world's population. This provides empirical evidence of a shift in people's values and motivations around work, particularly among the most developed nations, away from an emphasis on instrumental rationality, economic growth and physical and material security above all, towards "post-material values" emphasising quality of life, self-expression, and personal and cultural growth - an echo, perhaps, of the psychological need theories of Maslow and
Herzberg. Maslow's (1987) hierarchy of needs theory suggested that there are five basic levels of need: physical or survival needs, security needs, social needs, achievement needs and self-actualisation needs. Inglehart (1997) argues that, for a growing proportion of people, once their physical and material security has been achieved, new priorities emerge:

'The disciplined, self-denying and achievement-oriented norms of industrial society are giving way to an increasingly broad latitude for individual choice of lifestyles and individual self-expression' (1997:44).

This has meant "a growing insistence on interesting and meaningful work". Thus, as workers decreasingly look to outer situations, people and their structures to motivate their behaviour and impact their feeling and thinking, they look increasingly inward for direction, esteem and the creation of their own happiness. The increasing focus on individual fulfilment means, inevitably, less deference to tradition and organizations. Inglehart argues:

'A major component of the postmodern shift is a shift away from both religious and bureaucratic authority, bringing declining emphasis on all kinds of authority, for deference to authority has high costs: the individual's personal goals must be subordinated to those of a broader entity' (1997:39).

Tischler (1999) explains the growing interest in meaning and spirituality as a theory of social consciousness and motivation. He also argues that the search for meaning at work is a natural reflection of the evolution of society over the past 200 years, from an agrarian society of little change for the majority of people through an industrial society that, through a machine orientation, created:

- Comparatively enormous wealth for most people in developed countries;
- A mass society with attendant changes in social structure and social consciousness and;
- An unimaginably faster and increasing pace of change.

Changing values, he argues, are related to the experience of fragmentation in a highly organised society since we are now in a post-industrial society that focuses on individual achievement and self-actualisation growth for as many people as possible in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and responsible manner. Weick et al (2005) note that people in organisations invest their settings with meaning and then come to understand them.
2. Arising from contemporary harsh working conditions

Under this heading, many authors argue that, with fewer of the certainties of earlier societies, people are increasingly looking for something meaningful to frame their existence. For instance, Overell (2008) argues that, rather than an evolutionary development, the search for meaning at work is historically new and arises from unprecedented changes that have occurred recently in advanced Western societies which threaten individual identity. Work has become an important factor in how people define themselves, as well as a source of personal growth:

'Self-realisation is about identity, of expressing ourselves in our own way and of being recognised by others for that identity; self-realisation is finding a way of life that makes sense as a whole, with work and relationships and all our activities somehow blending into a coherent unity'. (Overell, 2008:10)

Budd (2010) agrees that today work is increasingly conceptualized as being about self-fulfilment, and seen as a source of psychological well-being because it can satisfy human needs for achievement, mastery, self-esteem, and self-worth. But Budd (2010:5) also adds that:

'lousy work—work with mindless repetition, abusive co-workers or bosses, excessive physical or mental demands, or other factors—can have negative psychological consequences'.

Meaningful work may depend on the achievement of economic and physical security, on the belief that there is no realistic alternative to contemporary market capitalism, yet while risk is in the air, this is of a more personal, more inward nature than in previous ages.

The seeming mismatch between individuals' desires for self-actualisation and the realities of work within the new work culture is reminiscent of Braverman's proposition that the tendency under capitalism for work to be degraded inevitably leads to worker alienation (1974:4). Braverman argued that, as a result of the Taylorisation of white collar clerical work in the US in the 1960s, work had become increasingly subdivided into petty operations that demanded even less skill and training and failed to sustain the interest or engage the capacities of humans. Braverman claimed that the modern trend of work by its 'mindlessness' and 'bureaucratisation' is 'alienating' ever large sections of the working population' (1974:36). It could therefore be argued that the degeneration of meaning and purpose for many workers...
is a reflection of worker alienation arising from the degradation of work within the new work culture. Dean et al (1998) point out that rising levels of employee cynicism are symptomatic of the modern workplace, typical components of which include a belief that their organisation lacks integrity, negative affective attitudes and emotions towards the organisation and a tendency for employees, consistent with their beliefs and emotions, towards disparaging and critical behaviours of their organisation. The apparent growth of interest in meaning at work by employees may be prompted by the personal consequences for them of their deteriorating social and psychological contracts within the new work culture.

For his part, Sennett (1998, 2006 and 2008) has been concerned with exploring why people lack the cultural anchor of a more secure and coherent work existence. He argues that the large bureaucratic institutions of the Fordist era (what he calls the period of “social capitalism”) created a sense of time and enabled people to think about their lives as narratives. It became possible, for instance, to define what the stages of a career ought to be like, even though few ever managed to climb to the top of the career 'ladder'. Sennett argues that this sense of time and narrative was important because it allowed workers to construct themselves as having some agency, albeit in a highly constrained, institutionalized form. But the new world of flexible organizations and casualized labour undermines any sense of linear time or narrative.

Moreover, Sennett (2006) argues that new capitalism takes away the worker’s sense of being useful. Institutional knowledge is neglected or destroyed, and new communications technology allows for organisational orders to be sent out without workers mediating them or moderating them in accordance to their experience. In the past, Sennett (2008) argues, one of the traditional defences against uselessness was skill, or the cultivation of craftsmanship, "doing something well for its own sake." But craftsmanship seems obsolete in the institutions of flexible capitalism. “Instead, the flexible organization puts a premium on portable human skills, on being able to work on several problems with a shifting cast of characters, cutting loose action from context" (2008:142). Sennett claims that, “those judged without inner resources are left in limbo. They can be judged no longer useful or valuable, despite what they have accomplished.” (2008:130). Sennett argues that three abilities are the basis of craftsmanship: the ability to localize, the ability to question, and the ability to open up (2008:42). In his conclusion, Sennett holds out “narrative, usefulness, and craftsmanship” as potential “anchors” for a new, healthier culture of capitalism.

So is the ‘lack of life narrative’ described by Sennett reflected in research participants’ attitudes towards their own careers? Is there is evidence that the effects on employees of
prolarianisation and commodification of white collar work are reflected in loss of meaning at work? Is there evidence that research participants fear the 'spectre of uselessness' in due course?

3. Psychological contract

In previous chapters I have argued that, as part of the neo-liberal drive for organisations to increase profit through labour flexibility, the seemingly mutual employment exchange between employers and employees, as reflected in the 'old' psychological contract, has become unbalanced in favour of employers. As a consequence, Sennett (2006:5) argues, individuals find themselves caught in "unstable, fragmentary social conditions" that generate "ontological insecurity."

The psychological contract is inherently subjective. It is based on perceptions by the employee about mutuality. Yet the cultural ideal of today's organisations, Sennett contends, is short term and "damages many of the people who inhabit them." (2006:6). For instance, Hartley (1999) argues that while job loss is often very damaging to individuals, job insecurity is potentially more damaging since it represents a chronic condition. This loss of job security is progressive, occurs within the familiar workplace setting and represents a subjective change to the job and the organisation. This reduces the visibility of the events and the social support for those involved. As Hartley (1999:132) points out,

"Whatever the repercussions of job insecurity, they tend to develop subtly, not necessarily with any observable or formal role changes."

Hartley argues that this chronic job insecurity is much more a "socially and psychologically constructed phenomenon" (1999:133). Since job insecurity exists within a person as a result of his or her perceptions and cognitions, it is not open to direct observation: rather it is a construct that is inferred from the employees' verbal report or observed behaviour" (1999:134).

How much is the search for meaning a consequence of the sense of job insecurity arising from today's new work culture? Since the effect of job insecurity is subtle and not visible, could this explain why so many UKES respondents reported experiencing variations on a sense of loss, without being able to name what was missing?
I shall now consider the findings from the study of meaning to examine the extent to which the vicissitudes of working life - the ending of a job for life, ongoing change, work-life imbalance, work intensification, performative work cultures and a commodity approach to work and workers - have 'alienated' many employees and to assess whether the quest for meaning at work represents a retreat from the conditions in which 'work has enslaved us' (Bunting, 2004).

7.2 Findings - the meaning of 'meaning'

The initial topic of focus group discussions was what people meant by the words 'meaning' and 'meaningful'. To explore this topic, participants were invited to recall and describe moments in their lives where they had experienced 'elevated meaning'. From the themes which emerged the experience of 'meaning' appears to have an existential and 'mind-full' quality for many people. People's stories were about connection to (special) people and memories, having a sense of personal purpose, a heightened understanding of what is really important, of what it is to be human. Meaningful moments appeared to elevate people's focus and desire to give to others and to fulfil themselves.

Many of these stories suggested that this existential sense of 'meaning' is central to mental and physical health and well-being. Some of the story elements were about balance - becoming more 'centred', 'finding out what's important to me', 'making new'. Others were about autonomy - more meaningful choices, gaining a different perspective on life in general, being free to achieve. For almost all the focus group participants, the experience of heightened meaning took place at defining moments which enabled the individual to glimpse life's journey, looking deeper than the demands of daily life would normally permit.

Participants told stories which held strong emotional depth for them, such as finding one's life partner, helping someone in difficulties, holding one's baby for the first time, about being authentic in testing circumstances, achieving something special against the odds. For several participants, the experience of childbirth had enabled them to touch something transcendental. As one person put it,

"It's a feeling of 'I am'. A feeling of being part of someone or something else that's unreachable by any other conscious effort - uniqueness yet universality (since time immemorial) - basic yet powerful. You see things from a completely different place - it was nothing to do with what I had done - something had shifted. Gosh! - it could have
been 2000 years ago – a bigger sense of connection, a shared meaning and sense of community”.

For some people meaning arose from ‘dark night of the soul’ experiences, which heightened their awareness of something fundamental and made them determined to live life to the full. Two focus group participants described how, having been seriously ill, they now had different priorities and deeper, more important motivations. One participant learned that she had a medical condition for which medical science currently has no known cure. She said of her reaction after being told the news:

“The moment stays with me and has impacted/changed the course of how I’ve lived since. It is the ‘embracing of life’ rather than postponing it. I promised myself that I would live every day to the full - to step out of the safety of my then world, explore and live those dreams that had been on hold - waiting for tomorrow”.

She had been true to this intention, setting herself up as an independent consultant and starting to write her first book.

One participant remembered her grandmother who had been her primary carer as a child. She recalled her last conversation with her grandmother before the latter’s death, in which her grandmother had given her some loving messages to help her through her life. The participant could recall the place where the conversation had taken place in fine detail, right down to the perfume of the flowers in the garden. This experience had given the participant a sense of being part of something of a more universal order. Death was not death per se, but provided a sense of continuity. The participant told us that if she ever felt low, just recalling this experience helped her to cope.

Another participant had a son who had lost three years of schooling due to serious illness. This had taught the participant what it is to be a parent, at a deeper level, compared with the person’s habit of ‘breezing along’. Similarly, another person recalled meeting an old friend whom he had not seen for a very long time. He found this experience a sort of recognition/validation that he exists beyond the present moment – being with someone who can testify to his existence and to the journey travelled. This sense of continuity and connection was a common thread to several stories.
7.3 ‘Meaning at work’

When asked to describe times when they had experienced intense meaning at work, the underlying themes from group conversations suggested that the experience of ‘meaning’ was about feelings, identity and a sense of purpose. ‘Meaning-full’ moments involved feelings of:

- belonging and connection;
- harmony and balance;
- everything being in order;
- having the freedom to be genuine and fully oneself;
- giving selflessly;
- release, and being at ease with oneself.

It is in these states that people appeared to feel most able and eager to give of their best – to be in what Csikszentmihályi, (1998) describes as ‘flow’, or the optimal state of intrinsic motivation, where the person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing. Flow is characterized by a feeling of great absorption, engagement, fulfilment, and skill, during which temporal concerns (e.g. time, food, ego-self) are typically ignored. In short, flow is described as a state where attention, motivation and the situation meet, resulting in a kind of productive harmony or feedback.

What participants aspired to was akin to this statement by American author and historian Studs Terkel (1974: xiii):

“Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread; for recognition as well as cash; for astonishment rather than torpor, in short, for a sort of life, rather than a Monday to Friday sort of dying”.

Some participants felt that meaning at work was really about making their mark on the world and finding answers to questions such as: ‘What contribution am I making? Why am I doing what I’m doing? What difference do I make?’ Achieving something exceptional against the odds, and proving something to themselves, was a common theme, such as setting themselves major challenges at different stages of their lives in order to heighten the intensity of their life experience.
Given the length of time most people spend 'at work', having a role and work context which offer the chance to achieve something significant, to make a difference, appeared vital to the possibility of work being 'meaning-full'. For many participants, 'meaning' appeared strongly linked to their strongest source of motivation, with the possibility of achieving satisfaction and contentment at both work and at home being very important. As one woman personnel manager put it, "I want to have a happy and fulfilling personal life, nicely balanced with achieving success at work". For several participants, meaning at work was linked to their faith, and being able to 'live' their spiritual values through their work.

'Meaning at work' seemed to be closely linked to how people defined themselves, and also to the kinds of organisations they wanted to work for, or had previously enjoyed working for. These included stories of bygone days in their current organisations, typically before aspects of the 'new work culture' produced a shift in practice or in what was valued. One person spoke fondly of a former colleague who represented to her what had been lost with a shift towards a more commercial and competitive culture:

"I used to have a colleague, XXX, who used to really irritate me in some ways, but I was fond of him in other ways. He was a consultant too and worked very hard for his clients but he also drove the admin team mad because he was always in the main office, organising things in detail, because they were pretty amateur and sloppy. Whenever you went in to the main office, there he was, making lists and plans – and he was not even in charge of that team. And he was always there so he was always someone you could talk to and knew what was going on. When he was forced to retire at sixty (and he did not want to go), we all soon realised how much we missed him, not just because he'd kept the wheels on the wagon but also because he sort of stood for getting things right for clients. He was the last of the old guard in that respect. Clients loved him too, because although he was a fuss-pot, they knew he had their best interests at heart. Not as commercial as you're supposed to be of course, but actually his figures were pretty good because people always asked for him. He'd not have survived now though, not commercial enough".

7.3.1 Search for meaning and link with life cycle

In discussing the nature of 'meaning', focus group participants debated whether the quest for meaning was an ongoing process, part of human nature, or whether the 2003 UKES findings, which suggested that high numbers of people (76%) looking for more meaning at work was a 'blip', given particular impetus by turbulence on the world scene. Views varied,
with most people agreeing that the search for meaning is a perennial aspect of the human condition, with some suggesting that the intensity and salience of the quest for meaning was linked to age, and brought into sharp focus through the various transitions at different stages of life. The concept of the ‘seven ages of mankind’ was used to explore this perspective on the search for meaning. This was helpful since participants could share their perspectives and experiences relating to the different phases of life which produced not only physical changes but characteristically also involved different activities, feelings and aspirations.

In infancy and childhood, children develop a sense of who they are, though their life options may be limited by many factors, including their social context and their own abilities. Beyond early childhood and schooling comes the quest to develop an adult identity, partly defined in the west through work, gender identity, financial and social status. As young adults grapple with decisions about relationships and parenthood they are also usually making other lifestyle choices, exercising financial freedoms or working within financial constraints. These early phases of life suggest an active and busy pursuit of self-definition and claiming one’s place in the world.

Focus group participants commented that many young people were leaving organisations early, having not made sense of why they were there. There was a view that young people have high expectations of work and of their careers and are not willing to make the compromises for career progression which their predecessors may have been prepared to make. What is not clear is whether this is explainable as the typical radical stance of the young, or whether they really are less interested and engaged in the workplace than previous generations.

Period of transition
In the middle years, many of the earlier uncertainties give way to a more settled period which gradually becomes defined by more challenging issues which need to be adjusted to at identity level. Typical challenges include becoming reconciled to career options growing more limited, with earlier decisions having largely determined later lifestyle choices. Children leave home, creating both a sense of loss for some parents and (usually) greater financial freedom and choice for themselves. In the middle years, people typically start to experience the loss of their parents and other loved ones. For many people, the prospect of freedom to pursue personal choice through a comfortable retirement is an attractive prospect while for others whose identities are closely tied to the work they do, the prospect of ceasing work is
terrifying. In either case, the choice about how time will be spent becomes more conscious as retirement age beckons.

Participants considered, that in addition to these typical life transitions, current workplace uncertainties, with the closure of final salary pension schemes to new entrants, volatility in endowments and other financial 'cushions', mean that many people feel under duress to carry on working, under different terms from what they had expected at the start of their careers.

**Period of adjustment**

In later life, people typically develop a growing awareness of their own mortality. Some people appear to develop their religious faith as they grow older. Some people desire to make a difference by 'putting something back' and/or by creating a lasting legacy/contribution through humanitarian, artistic and other endeavours.

These focus group discussions about the possibility of a significant relationship between age and the quest for meaning were reflected in UKES findings. It was the younger people in the 2004 UKES sample (82 percent of 20-30 year old respondents) who were most likely to report that they wanted a greater sense of meaning at work, followed by people aged between 41 and 50 (76 percent) and those over 60 (70 percent) and 31- 40 year olds (59 percent). Those aged between 51 and 60 appeared least likely to report a search for meaning at work (33 percent). Participants discussed these findings and speculated about whether the high turnover among young people, who tend to be idealistic and radical in their views, arose if they feel no connection with the organisation's higher purpose. Managers in particular, it was felt, did not have a clear understanding of the transitions people experience in life, especially mid-life.

**7.4 ‘Loss of meaning’ as a result of changing context**

On the whole, participants believed that their search for meaning at work had been heightened by the vicissitudes of working life and disenchantment with work. The backdrop of uncertainty and wider economic and political instability was causing people concerns about the future. They were conscious of 'overspill' into the workplace of the changing nature of UK society and other macro issues discussed earlier.
7.4.1 Market-driven social transformation

One macro discussion theme affecting the ‘micro’ was the fast changing nature of contemporary UK society. People commented disparagingly about the decline in moral values and standards of behaviour reflected in popular culture over recent years, exemplified in the market-driven transformation ‘dumbing down’ of television output in the UK. ‘Reality TV’ was then gaining ground, in which participants willingly exposed themselves to a public panopticon in pursuit of ‘celebrity’ and popular TV programmes such as ‘The Weakest Link’ appeared to celebrate cruelty, bullying and what would previously have been considered ‘underhand’ and dishonourable behaviour and was now normalised as ‘smart’ tactics. Participants felt that such graphic demonstrations of ‘dog-eat-dog’ behaviour were also reflective of competitive workplace practice and micropolitics, and the tendency for people not to trust each other.

The reasons for increasing mistrust in Britain are complex. For focus group members, lack of trust in the workplace echoed this phenomenon in wider society, with politicians, the media and other institutions under the spotlight of public suspicion. Participants remarked on their general scepticism towards authority, reflecting the Halpern study’s findings (Elliott and Quaintance, 2003) about falling public trust levels. Similarly, ethical standards among business leaders were a cause for dismay. The Enron, Worldcom and other accountancy scandals, the Maxwell pension scandal of years before, and ‘Fat Cat’ pay issues made people feel that business leaders were not to be trusted and could be expected to ‘feather their own nests,’ regardless of whether their actions caused problems for their business and its employees.

7.4.2 Individualistic society

The seeming tidal wave of materialism and consumerism that had engulfed daily life in the UK was commented on, with many participants admitting that they were very much part of the credit-based consumer revolution. At the same time some remarked on the lack of satisfaction spending alone provides. Today’s more secular Western societies, the discrediting of institutions such as the Catholic Church, scandals affecting even parliamentary democracy itself, the trivialising of contemporary popular culture, appear to offer little of substance on which people can rely, or moral compass by which to steer one’s life, what one respondent referred to as a ‘God-shaped hole’.

Participants made reference to the increasing secularisation of UK society as a whole, as reflected in the decline of organised religion, leaving people with few outlets for organised
faith-based spirituality. Instead, as one participant suggested, religion had not in fact disappeared - it had just translated into 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' or was reflected in people's affiliations to football clubs. In contrast, it was felt that some faith-based communities within multi-cultural Britain retain some of the cohesiveness which might once have characterised indigenous communities in the past.

Many participants felt that contemporary UK society was becoming reflective of Margaret Thatcher's dictum that "There is no such thing as society". People talked of the growth of a 'me first' attitude embodied in an ethic of individual entitlement without individual responsibility, encouraged by companies providing 'ambulance-chasing' claims pursuit services. People recognised that the combined effects of an individualistic and uncaring society and people's busier, more fractured lives meant that people were much less likely to live near relatives, to contribute to community activities or to know their neighbours than 20 years before. In 2004, UKES respondents were working long hours, with 83 percent of respondents consistently working longer than their contracted week. 57 percent maintained that their workload has increased over the previous year. Boundaries between work and non-work were blurred. Changing technology has allowed a tenth of the working population to telework. Work becomes the focus around which the rest of life revolves.

People also perceived a loss of community. With small shops, pubs and post offices in villages and town centres closing down because they were unable to compete with out-of-town supermarkets, supermarkets had become community focal points. Increasing fear of crime was reinforced by the construction of 'gated' upmarket housing developments and the prevalence of CCTV. Andrew Solomon (2001) talks of the climbing rates of depression which are a consequence of post-modern fragmentation and the breakdown of systems of belief. It is in this layer that matters relating to the importance of human relations, of personal identity and of the meaning and purpose of life reside. Marquand (2008:408) in contrast argues that during the same period as this study:

'Despite marketisation, consumerism, unstable relationships, family breakdown, job insecurity, gross inequality, brutish media and other forces threatening the public realm, there was no significant decline in 'social capital' – in the membership of social networks outside the family such as tenants' or residents' associations, profession groups, sports groups, churches, amenity groups and the like".

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More recently a report for the Mental Health Foundation (MHF), *The Lonely Society*, 2011 found that while Britain has never been so crowded, we are spending more time alone (12 per cent of households in 2008). As Marquand (2008:48) concedes:

'The extraordinary growth of the internet, from 16 million users worldwide in December 1995 to 1.2 billion in June 2007... Virtual communities of lone individuals, glued to their computer screens are poor substitutes for real people talking to each other'.

There was general consensus that participants were interested in a 'wider experience' linked to a more ethical, responsible, values-based approach to life which would help them answer questions such as:

- Why am I doing what I am doing?
- What difference do I make?

### 7.5 Loss of meaning at work

In the focus groups people discussed the ways in which 'loss of meaning' at work manifested itself. The extent of the spread of what Budd (2010) calls 'lousy' work was evident in participants' comments. Not surprisingly, there were different views on this topic and symptoms of loss of meaning at work were grouped initially into the following themes:

- Anxiety about the future
- Loss of control
  - Lack of influence
  - A feeling of not having control over one's life and events that impact on it
- Loss of important things
  - Loss of interest in life
  - Lack of enjoyment
  - Lower self-confidence
- A feeling of inability to cope
  - Knock-on effects on motivation, personal life and psychological health
  - Panic attacks
  - Losing sleep over wrestling with issues
- Feelings of injustice
- Lack of meaningful work that makes a difference
  - Unsatisfying work
  - Feeling unfulfilled in the work I do
  - Inability to achieve meaningfully
• Ethical problems with work/superior/company practices
  o Political behaviour
  o Mismatch between own values and company values
  o Actual management behaviour and espoused company values out of sync

• Feeling pulled out of balance
  o A feeling there is not time for own life
  o Becoming less patient at home, tired and reclusive towards family
  o Ill-health

The overall picture was one of a growing disenchantment and some resignation towards working conditions within the competitive new work culture. As one middle manager in a Building Society which had recently become a bank put it, he was re-evaluating his commitment to his organisation because,

"I'm tired of the politics and seeing poor managers progress because they are good at 'playing the game'."

In his book, Alienation and Freedom, Robert Blauner (1964) argues that alienation is not solely an objective state and that work has different meanings for different people. His perspective was sociological, or 'social psychological'. He began from the proposition that 'alienation is a general syndrome made up of a number of different objective conditions and subjective feeling states (p.15).’ "...alienation is viewed as a quality of personal experience which results from specific kinds of social arrangements'.

I argue that the search for more meaning and disenchantment with work evident in many of the UKES (2004) findings and the focus group discussions are expressions of worker alienation as described by Blauner (1964).

7.5.1 Loss of autonomy

In the focus groups, the process of de-professionalisation-through-performativity was a common theme. There were frequent mentions of jobs structured to provide the most control for management and the least for those who actually perform the work. For instance one local government worker now found her job effectively dissected by the 'purchaser/provider' splits then commonplace. She resented the loss of autonomy, control and job satisfaction,
and the changes in work relationships which this had forced upon her. Blauner (1964:15) argues that:

'Alienation exists where workers are unable to control their immediate work processes, to develop a sense of purpose and function which connects their jobs to the overall organisation or production...and when they fail to become involved in the activity of work as a mode of personal self-expression.'

People discussed the personal consequences of new ‘social arrangements’ which resulted in debased new roles, with some describing work as drudgery. Some people argued that the more an individual’s sense of identity becomes subsumed by their work role, the more they experience loss of meaning when external forces, such as government targets and inspections, interfere with their own view of their role. For example, one person’s partner was a very experienced primary school teacher. A variety of child protection measures which had been put in place - from quality assurance measures to prohibitions on physical contact, including cuddling a distressed child – had undermined her professional autonomy, sense of what her job was about, and confidence in her own judgement, with corresponding loss of meaning and job satisfaction.

7.5.2 Demise of the ‘old’ career deal

With respect to careers, most participants seemed to accept the ‘employability thesis’ - perhaps having been normalised to recognize that they would need to look out for their own interests, continue to learn and develop throughout their lives and to be responsible for managing their own careers. And yet, whilst some people appeared to welcome the more transactional nature of the employment relationship, others felt betrayed by their employer over the one-sided ending of the ‘old deal’. Mostly people said they were too busy to think about their career and, while most said they wanted to carry on working for their then employer, this was mostly because they were not sure what other employment possibilities they had.

The growing need to take control of one’s life is reflected in the fact that, for 89 percent of UKES 2004 respondents, work-life balance was of increasing importance, with only 3 percent suggesting that balance was unimportant to them. On the other hand, 29 percent claimed that their organisation was dismissive of the issue. Similarly, 73 percent had made sacrifices for their careers in the past, while 46 percent would not be willing to do so in the future, as discussed in Chapter Five.
7.5.3 Loss of community and trust at work

Many people commented about the impact of restructurings and redundancies of recent years on workplace relations. This appeared to have reduced people's expectations about the extent to which they could rely on, or trust others, especially their employer, to protect their interests, as well as a loss of social relations in the workplace which in many cases had become more 'dog-eat-dog' and political. One focus group participant described social relations at one of the organisations he had worked for:

"The other organisation that I have worked for, for about six years, was a biomedical company. It was a small company with about thirty or forty people and a lot of the emotional concern seemed to go into putting other people down. It was quite negative, inward looking, that was not trying to look outside, so, it is difficult even to put into words - it is more of a feeling and the politics is a reflection of the culture, but yeah I have had experiences where it is not possible to work well."

Another manager described his personal strategy of denial for dealing with competitive and political behaviour from others:

"Well, I think there is probably a element of never really wanting to believe that somebody is out to get you, or that somebody could really be that nasty about someone, so it is always trying to turning a negative into a positive, maybe somewhere shutting it out in that if it is that nasty don't go there sort of thing. I can cope with that kind of thing because I do have the ability to turn that sort of thing out. I pretend to be able to block that out, and not really believe that they mean that and it has to be really in front of me to think that is what they are like. So I go on daily as if it is not happening I suppose and deal with it because I am ignoring it. But also being positive in what I want to achieve can help. Does that make sense?"

People reported feeling increasingly 'disconnected' from fellow humans by the increasingly impersonal nature of work. In contrast, one participant described how, when he was visiting a relative in hospital, an elderly person in the same ward had died. The curtains were drawn while staff prepared to move the body of the dead person. Despite the curtains, the participant was able to see one nurse gently put her hand on the hand of the dead person, as if to communicate and reassure them. While such behaviour would not form part of any government target, it meant a lot to the participant to see that this nurse clearly considered it
important to treat the dead person with respect and dignity, whether or not she was measured on this behaviour.

Waddock (1999) argues that work organisations are replacing other types of communities in many people's lives. Pressure to do more substitutes for teamwork. Layoffs, downsizings, re-engineering and restructurings of all sorts combine in the devaluing of local communities, not to mention community among employees. In addition, there are numerous virtual organisations where people interact less frequently than in traditional organisations. Trust in particular is a casualty, as one respondent noted:

"This used to be a great place to work - nice colleagues, interesting work, a real 'buzz'. Then with the new CEO we lost half our section, the new director is a cold fish and you can never do things right for her. Everyone's on edge and watching their own backs. You find people whispering about who's 'in' or 'out' with the boss, and before you know it, that person's got rid of".

The pressure to be busy, to perform and produce results prevented people from feeling able to reflect and make personal choices. Participants reported sensing a void, wanting some 'space' where they could 'be' rather than 'do' all the time:

"The lack of meaning is mainly in 'human terms', such as an appreciation by management that staff are more important than targets, paperwork etc – that staff should have a 'quiet' staff area, that breaks are important and should be taken, that a 37 hour week means just that – all too often missing!"

These comments echo remarks by Alison Webster (2003) who describes how lives are becoming textured by technology. She argues that the increasingly fluid boundary between people and machines – through the use of mobile phones, texting, voicemail and internet chat-rooms - creates an illusion of community. Webster points out the paradox that, despite the wider range of contacts made possible by the internet and e-mail, there a heightened sense of loneliness (when the computer is turned off). Making time to reflect, and (re)discovering the capacity to reflect has to be sanctioned and aided officially – through organised 'Awaydays'. Webster questions what is happening to relationships - whether they are becoming many-layered or whether the negatives are coming more into focus.
7.5.4 Loss of identity

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) focuses on how individuals construct their identities by categorizing themselves into various groups. This might include one's occupation, employer, and other work-related group constructs. The interactionist approach suggests that individuals create identities through social interactions with others. From this perspective, the social roles attached to occupations and careers are a major source of our self-presentation and identity during adulthood.

One focus group participant, a professional coach, argued that lack of self-awareness with respect to one's own values restricts people's sense of who they are, their choice of occupation and freedom to act:

"I do wonder whether people even think about what their values are. They go into a career or a job because that is what they have been good at, or that is what they have studied and it just happens. Then they are there and they know, well careers are now a lot more flexible now days, but people get into that and they think 'well I cannot do anything else so I have to stick with this' then it just gets self-perpetuating and you are there and you think that is what work is about. They think that they have got to be like that as it becomes part of nurture and not part nature. They are not then able to move out or that or even think about, 'well what are my values? What is it that I value? What is it that I really need from the job and your life? And what are the values that are important to me?"

'Balance' was frequently used to refer to being happy at work and, as in this example: "A need to feel fulfilled and at one with the world – for me it is about being in balance". As reported in the UKES 2004 survey, the short-term focus of many organisations appeared to leave little time for reflection and affiliation. Typical comments include: 'Disquiet and the overriding temporal issues and relentless pursuit of (short-term) goals, each at the expense of the 'inner person'. The effect of this short-termism, according to one respondent was "Greater resistance to change than I have experienced/witnessed during 33 years, coupled with a desire to 'touch' the present and its meaning to self and organisational unit".

Many focus group participants also felt that their values and sense of identity were under attack in the new work culture. Many felt that they were being forced to suppress fundamental parts of themselves at work, being asked to give more, without being valued in return. Some participants reported that their personal values were tested regularly by working with other people whose values were very different. One senior partner from a
professional services firm described some of the challenges of working with his managing partner:

"He is a very powerful character and I suspect that part of his power is due to the fact that he's very self-centred and will step on people to get where he wants to be. I'm afraid I just don't have the stomach for that. You asked me about my own particular staff - I'm trying to be honest and fair in my dealings with people, I try to be truthful, I try to provide facts, I try not to skip things, I'm also a bit of a perfectionist so obviously there's a bit of a streak there in terms of quality".

Another participant, a senior manager from a large international organisation, described how he frequently stood out against some of the less than ethical practices among his peer group and sometimes had to suffer the penalty of being ostracised:

"I do get frustrated but I've got to live with myself first. And I can't believe that some of the senior managers in my company behave the same way at home, they can't possibly"

However, he also talked about being pragmatic, and compromising his values because,

"All of a sudden, you don't because the chairman's secretary says 'Are you free for lunch?' and that's always a bad sign"

Sennett (2006) argues that work pursuits require individuals to manage short-term relationships, to do without institutions that give them a long-term frame of reference, and to 'improvise' life narratives without a sense of self sustained by lasting relationships to work, colleagues and social environments. In the next section I raise the possibility that it is by aligning to corporate purposes which employees find meaningful that some employees can develop a life narrative.

7.6 Corporate purpose

Having a cause or important purpose as a source of cohesion and high performance within organisations is evident in much of the literature (Ellsworth, 2002). Sandelands (2003:170) suggests that:
'Employees perform most energetically, creatively and enthusiastically when they believe they are contributing to a purpose that is bigger than themselves'.

In his study of long-lived or 'living' companies, De Geus (1997) argues that cohesion and a strong sense of identity are key to organisational survival amid change. Purpose can excite and mobilise the members of an organisation to work in greater alignment to each other. Similarly, Deal and Kennedy (2000:203) argue that purpose is at the heart of social cohesion and point out:

'People still want to belong. They yearn for something that elevates their work from routine drudgery to a higher purpose. They will listen to what seems thoughtful, authentic, and comes from the heart'.

Waddock (1999) argues that people need and want to belong to communities where they can make meaningful contributions that build a better world. Many people discover that, from a certain point, money is not going to make their lives better. Turned off by work that is, at its roots, meaningless and in some cases even unethical, many people opt out of their organisations psychically, turning their productive energy and attention to family, civic matters or self-development. Community, where it can be found or created, can be a countervailing force to stress, isolation and anomie that characterises organisations that have cut out too much of what was community in their efforts to become competitive.

The importance of purpose is reflected in the UKES (2005), where the quest for (lost) meaning was inversely related to the extent to which individuals considered their organisation's purpose uplifting, especially with respect to environmental and social responsibility. But not just any purpose – Anderson. (1997:34) suggests that:

'By itself, shareholder wealth provides an incomplete sense of identity and uniqueness, and does not motivate long-term creativity the same way community does'.

Commercial organisations with a strong client- or customer focus may be tapping into similar motivations (Ellsworth, 2002). Konz and Ryan (1999) also suggest that individuals are searching for meaning in their work; a meaning that transcends mere economic gain. Even the authors of a book which attempted to puncture the rhetoric about 'de-alienated knowledge work' noted that, among their often resigned and pressurised interviewees, the economic meaning was overlain by many others:
'Wherever possible people at work look for something beyond that, a sense of purpose or redemption, a source of challenge or enjoyment, or the ability of the work to confer or reinforce social identity or identities'. (Baldry et al., 2007:40).

In focus groups there was general consensus that people felt more connected if their work served, and made a positive difference to, an identifiable group of stakeholders. One participant had left his corporate role to become self-employed, having become disenchanted with the relentless pursuit of shareholder value. He argued that organisations will have to do more to connect with people if they are to attract and retain them. Another participant who had previously worked for British Rail and now, since privatisation, worked for a franchise holder, suggested that his colleagues were not motivated by shareholder value; instead their affiliations tended to be with their colleagues and trades unions.

Another participant, a senior manager within a subsidiary service to the National Health Service, described how having a patient-centred purpose united people working in the service, despite poor working conditions:

"I think there's a common feeling that at the end of all this there's the patient who.... we can do things that can make a difference to a patient by improving their lives or saving their lives. So I think there is a common feeling. I think it's different from the feeling of, oh it's just made money. I also think it's different from people in politics where a lot of those people believe that they can make a difference and they went into politics to make a difference. I think perhaps what gets in the way, is all the different ways of doing it. I think that, with the XXX Service, you've got a common purpose, it isn't just money and you've got a fairly common way of actually achieving that. I think that helps; there are still things that go terribly wrong and people then pick up the pieces"

Other NHS participants described their disenchantment with the contrast between the original noble aims of the National Health Service and the growing business orientation of the NHS. They also considered that the greater degree of managerialism, with its targets and weightings, had left people feeling 'I'm not trusted any more'. Similar views were expressed by a participant working for a major charity, who saw conflicts of values between the charitable aims and the commercial side of the work leading to ongoing clashes in the workplace.
One participant, a CEO of a newly formed social enterprise that had previously been an NHS mental health trust, described how she persuaded most NHS staff at the Trust to join the new enterprise by engaging them around the original purpose of the NHS:

“Well, it would be an organisation outside of the NHS. A lot of the (management) discussion we’ve had was around what is it that makes us what we are? I did a range of workshops last year and that brought us to around 1500 staff - over 800 of them with me personally - and one of the key messages that was coming through was ... what they wanted was to remain as part of the NHS. But actually when you questioned that, what they wanted was to maintain the beliefs they had in what the NHS was. My argument to that, or my discussion with them then was, well what makes up the NHS in this part of the world? It’s the people who are within in it, not some magical thing that makes you an NHS person/employee.

And once we started to debate that, their view was that this was what they went into the NHS for. Those beliefs around putting people first, caring for them; for most clinicians not actually having to consider what it costs at that point in time, so doing it because of what the needs were. So the argument was, well, if we believed that and we were the people who made that up, we could then move that to any organisation and what we might find is that the stuff we have been unable to do on the edges - and I could give some examples of that - with the freedoms we might have as part of any social enterprise or social enterprises, we could plough back our profit and that would allow us to do those things. So that is some of the discussion with staff”.

The CEO also described how re-engageing staff with the core NHS purpose appeared to have a galvanising effect on people’s behaviour and focus:

“Once that thinking happened, what we all agreed was, if every single person in each of those groups walked around, we would see waste. It wasn’t about getting people to admit to be part of causing that waste, it didn’t go that far, but people talked for example about the waste when we were ordering things. So the discussion then went along the lines of, ‘well if we all owned a part of this new organisation, if we felt valued within it and we believed in it and we wanted it to be successful, what we could do away with would be waste? Because if we were doing that at home, we would try not to waste money, we’d watch the heating, and we’d watch what we spent in the supermarkets, you know those sorts of things. If we applied that to owning part of this organisation then the feeling was that people would feel more responsible for it and to
it. And actually we talked about how what we saved on the waste would be invested to
do what we wanted to do. So I know it is quite a simplistic view but there were enough
people that bought into that and really felt that there would actually be a way for us to
do that."

These discussions suggested that people wanted their work to have a higher (uplifting)
purpose and workplace behaviour characterised by congruence, respect, integrity,
authenticity and honesty. However idealistic, they wanted the chance to achieve something
worthwhile and to be part of a community they could be proud of.

7.7 Grounding ‘search for meaning at work’

These findings suggest that, despite the challenges of economic and political instability in
the broader environment, it was mainly in the workplace that many employees experienced
erosion of meaning. While people’s definitions of ‘meaning’ and ‘lack of meaning’ varied, the
common elements were values, connectivity, trust and identity, autonomy, growth and
worthwhile achievement.

To ground definitions further, data from the UKES 2003 and 2004 were analysed to identify
correlations with a ‘loss’ or ‘search for’ meaning at work. For Blauner (1964), the different
objective conditions and subjective feeling states relating to alienation emerge from certain
relationships between workers and the socio-technical settings of employment. Alienation is
multi-dimensional and can be broken down into four dimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, self-estrangement. Different employees will be affected
differently by these dimensions and will therefore have different alienation profiles and will
experience alienation differently. But Blauner was less concerned with looking at the
differences between individuals than the differences that existed between entire
occupational groups.

Given that my samples were from a wide range of sectoral and occupational backgrounds, I
chose instead to use Ken Wilber’s (2001) model - ‘Four Dimensions of Phenomena’ - to
develop a multi-dimensional perspective on the interplay between structure and agency.
Wilber discusses intersubjectivity, which conventionally refers to relationships between
human beings, and particularly those that result from our use of language, and argues that
intersubjectivity is also manifested in non-linguistic forms, seeing intersubjectivity as a
universal principle of which we humans experience just one particular example. Though
Wilber, in his desire to make his four-quadrant model as comprehensive and inclusive as possible, is criticised for applying the notion of intersubjectivity in a very sweeping manner, this model lent itself well to organising correlations without seeking to establish causality.

7.7.1 Search for meaning correlates

Figure 7.1: Search for meaning correlates

In the 2003 UKES people who said that they wanted more meaning tended to work for large organisations which had flattened their management layers and gone global. People ended up having large spans of control, many responsibilities and pressures. Conflict within organisations had increased in recent years (45 percent) and relationships at work had become more transactional, characterised by mutual suspicion and lack of trust. Respondents were least trusting of senior managers (only 24 percent trusted to a great extent), while subordinates (59 percent) and peers (49 percent) were the most trusted groups. High stress levels were reported, with 74 percent of respondents experiencing stress as a direct result of work (2003: 70 percent). Respondents from the Public sector appeared most likely to suffer from stress (77 percent), while respondents from the Charity sector were least likely to report suffering from stress (36 percent).

Those wanting more meaning were typically looking for a more flexible working pattern (82 percent). Eighty-eight percent of respondents reported a growing demand for more flexible
working patterns and 68 percent said they would like a more flexible working pattern. 35 percent suggested that their organisation was going beyond the minimum requirements of the Employment Act and extending the right to request flexible working beyond parents of young children.

**Inner collective (culture and shared meanings)**
Similarly, lack of meaning correlated to competitive and demanding organisational climates in which top managers did not act like leaders. People had neither the time nor the encouragement to be creative and they reported having low morale. They typically wanted a:
- More ethical organisation
- Better match between own values and those of the organisation
- Self-employed situation.

**Outer individual (behaviours)**
People who were looking for more meaning in the workplace tended to report low levels of involvement in organisational decision-making and felt their views were not heard (UKES 2004). The search for meaning correlated with work demands being too high or too low, together with a lack of control over workload (33 percent) or the length of the working day (30 percent). They also experienced lack of work-life balance. These people were generally considering leaving their jobs. Typically they were looking for roles with the same or less responsibility (47 percent) and many (25 percent) were considering going self-employed. People working in small organisations (up to 50 employees) fared best and reported experiencing the highest levels of commitment and meaning.

The potentially negative effect of routine work was evident in comments such as: “There are winds of change but much of the work continues to be routine and repetitive so probably not very meaningful for some.” Others factors included having to stay motivated through periods of uncertainty, with little support, excessive travel and unspoken expectations adding to the pressure.

**Inner individual (search for meaning)**
In UKES (2003), people looking for more meaning tended to report tensions between the spiritual side of their values and their work (65 percent). Women (44 percent) were more likely to report that they experienced these tensions than men (35 percent). They were also more likely to value the opportunity of discussing spirituality in the workplace with colleagues.
and were interested in learning meditation and mindfulness practices. Such employees took their own development - in the broadest sense – seriously.

They tended to be worried about the future and to experience more job insecurity than people who were not looking for more meaning (36 percent versus 25 percent). They also tended to report experiencing stress as a result of work (79 percent) more frequently than those who were not looking for meaning (63 percent), especially if they felt they had to conform and play politics just to survive.

In practice, disenchantment with the workplace was evident in this research, especially since many people worked long hours and felt under heavy workload pressure. On the whole, in both the 2003 and 2004 UKES, people working in larger organisations appeared to experience less meaning than those in small organisations. I would speculate at this stage that people working in small organisations (fifty or fewer employees) are more likely to identify with their organisation, have more control over their work, more rounded jobs, a shared sense of responsibility, closer working relationships with managers and colleagues and a clearer line of sight to organisational purpose than people working for large organisations.

In attempting to synthesize different forms of data, I have developed an emergent model of how the search for meaning appears to link with both the changing macro and micro contexts.

Figure 7.2: Meaning at Work – the emerging model
This would suggest that a combination of an insecure macro context, a loss of purpose and identification with organisation and a longing for, and insight into, something better are characteristic of a ‘search for meaning’. Many participants developed coping strategies to help them deal with these less than ideal circumstances but still remained dissatisfied. Some people preferred to remain true to their values in order to achieve a more meaningful balance in their lives, even if this cost them in terms of career development.

‘Meaning’ equates for the people in this study with a sense of belonging and connection, a chance to be fully oneself, to be free to be altruistic and to obtain deeper levels of self-fulfilment. Applied to work, ‘meaning’ appears linked with having an uplifting sense of purpose, a harmonious working environment, worthwhile jobs through which people can grow, control over one’s own destiny, ethical practice, trust among colleagues and the opportunity to achieve work-life balance. When people have meaning, they appear to believe that they can fulfil themselves and make a contribution to society.

This study highlights the difficulty of attempting to ‘ground’ ill-defined concepts such as meaning. In attempting to explore the search for meaning by using a combination of quantitative methods (I specifically inserted questions about meaning into the 2004 UKES) and qualitative methodology, such as using appreciative inquiry in focus group meetings, it was difficult to achieve any cross-comparison of data. There is also the risk that, given Organisation B’s known ethical stance, and the invitation to participate having initially gone only to people who were on Organisation B’s database, this research strand attracted a sample of people who were perhaps unrepresentative of the UK white collar working population as a whole at the time. I acknowledge that I was very interested in the theme and was actively reflecting on my own experience before and during the focus group sessions. There is therefore the possibility that, since I facilitated the focus group sessions and was feeding back themes as they emerged, I may have created a stronger consensus around the issues than might have been the case had I fed back what I was hearing more ‘dispassionately’.

On the other hand, there are some strengths in this strand of research. Given the difficulties of grounding these concepts, I believe the combination of methods and the use of appreciative inquiry helped create a ‘safe’ space in which participants could openly explore matters of a highly personal and subjective matter and also reflect on data emerging from the UKES findings. Indeed, many focus group participants thanked me and their fellow participants after the sessions since they appeared to value the conversation, in some cases
perhaps as a form of 'therapy'. In particular, many commented that the sessions had helped them to reflect on their own needs, attitudes towards work, their own roles, towards others and also about their own choices. Whilst not intending to be prescriptive, I believe that the emerging model offers scope for future research. For instance linkages between these components could be tested, exploring differences by age, gender and nationality. In particular, future research could also consider the differential effects of different types of corporate purpose on employees' sense of meaning and on psychological contract outcomes, such as organisational commitment.

7.8 Discussion

Reverting to psychological contract theory, I argue that the search for 'meaning' is a 'weather-gauge' of quality of the exchange relationship between employers and employees at a profound level, and that this has implications for both employees and employers.

According to identification theory, people tend to identify with their organisations when they perceive synergy between their own goals and values and those of the organisation. For Edwards (2005:209) the notion of identification involves a 'significant psychological linkage between the individual and the organisation whereby the individual feels a deep, self-defining affective and cognitive bond with the organisation as a social identity'. This bond produces organisational commitment, a broad and all-encompassing notion consisting of a feeling of membership and belonging, and a self-categorisation into the organisation. Organisational commitment also involves more behaviourally-oriented aspects as well, or at least intentions to act or behave in a certain way, such as involvement or motivation to do things not just for oneself but for the good of the organisation and loyalty or intention to stay in the organisation.

These findings suggest that many people do want to identify with their organisation, but in order to do so they must perceive a strong values connection. They appear to aspire to work as a means of self-actualisation, and want more control over their own work, but many have experienced reduced job quality, insecurity and work intensification, have resulted in job insecurity and loss of job satisfaction. From these various data, 'meaning' is associated with a sense of community and having a higher sense of purpose, especially a customer-focused purpose, and above all with autonomy and balance; these are mostly perceived to be missing.
Although some authors differentiate between the emotional side of identification and affective commitment (e.g. Johnson and Morgeson, 2005), it seems sensible to assume a close relationship between them. When people experience greater meaning, they appear to be ‘in flow’, able to give of their best. If they want to belong and feel uncertainty and anxiety about the future, they are more likely to tolerate shifts which reduce meaning for them. The driver of ‘social categorisations’ is also a very emotional driver, that of reduction of anxiety by making sense of the confusing social world around us (Tajfel, 1987). Rousseau (1998) argues that both parties gain from such an exchange: a) individuals have a strong drive to believe that they are part of, or belong to the social settings in which they work, and b) member identification enhances the success of firms based upon co-ordinated corporate action. When one combines both a) and b) there is an exchange. Employees get to feel a sense of belonging when identifying, and the organisation benefits (ultimately financially from employees’ increased effort and motivation. In other words there is a mutual benefit for both employees and employers.

What motivates the individual to build identification with the organisation? Is it merely that the organisation provides the employee with a ‘resource’ and as such the individual suddenly accepts the organisation into their own identity? Research participants in my study wanted to feel involved, to be treated like adults, and to be able to balance work with other aspects of their lives. They wanted the opportunity to be a ‘whole person’ at work, able to reflect on deeper matters with colleagues. They wanted challenging jobs through which they could experience personal growth and the chance to achieve something worthwhile. People wanted to work for ethical organisations where leaders ‘walk the talk’ on values, as reflected in this comment by Collins (2001:210):

‘Perhaps, then, you might gain that rare tranquillity that comes from knowing that you’ve had a hand in creating something of intrinsic excellence that makes a contribution. Indeed, you might even gain that deepest of all satisfactions: knowing that your short time here on this earth has been well spent and that it mattered’.

However, in practice, work is seldom like this utopian dream, as Overell (2008) points out, arguing that employees who seek to fulfil themselves through work are doomed to disappointment. Overell (2008) argues that the pursuit of self-actualisation through realising one’s potential in work (which is partly the rationale behind ideas of employee engagement) is a self-delusion or heterotopias in which work is part of the ‘project of the self’, and the organisation is a ‘blank canvas’ onto which worthwhile lives can be drawn in co-operation.

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with sympathetically-minded managers and colleagues, the interests of employees and employers reconciled at last.

The drive for self-fulfilment through work therefore risks producing 'willing slaves' who must progressively face the 'spectre of uselessness' if they can no longer keep up with the pace or the working conditions. Karasek (2002) found that ill-health is more frequent when employees face high levels of psychological demand whilst enduring low levels of autonomy. In such a context, as Brown et al (2010b:141) point out, it is employees who pay the price of a one-sided employment relationship:

'The personal costs of the trap continue to mount as individuals and families are forced to redouble their efforts to secure an advantage. Rather than opportunities extending individual freedom and fulfilling our dreams, they are making people increasingly self-centred, stressed, and unfulfilled as more and more effort, money and time is spent doing what is necessary, rather than for any intrinsic purpose. These unintended consequences of securing success reflect a lack of freedom for people to express their social worth or contribution to society other than through the job market'.

Disidentification theory (Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) suggests a negative association with organisational reputation (Dutton et al, 1994) and positive association with negative affectivity, cynicism, and psychological contract breach (Rousseau, 1998). Guest (1998) argues that the psychological contract concept has shown resilience despite the breaches of psychological contract which have arisen from changes in the business environment such as the disappearance of the concept of lifetime employment; the declining importance of the unions which has resulted in a shift from industrial relations to employment relations; the reductions in the number employed as subcontracting has grown; the fragmentation of the workforce through flexible working and virtual teaming; the greater diversity in the workplace both in terms of gender and race.

By implication, within organisations, the social contract of the new work culture has been normalised, with its short-termism, performativity, more aggressive and conflicted work climates, declining job quality, heavy pressures on individuals from work intensification, the continuous exposure to measurement and control, the absence of trust and loss of autonomy. Thus employees recognise that they bear the risks in the employment relationship and expect to look after their own interests rather than trust employers to do so.
Participants in my study found that many factors had contributed to a loss of meaning. These included the relationships and behaviours characteristic of the new work culture such as the more politicised and transactional relationships, lack of congruence by leaders, or failure to 'walk the talk' on values, workplace pressure and employee stress, anxiety and loss of well-being, loss of control, autonomy and balance. This loss of meaning, I argue, is synonymous with violation of psychological contract and worker alienation. Cavanagh (1999) argues that business people working 50-70 hours a week, separating them from family life and faith, they are thus unable to lead an integrated life. As Anderson and Schalk (1998) note, once these changes which cause fluctuation in the overall perception exceed certain boundaries, the psychological contract will either be revised or abandoned.

Central to the concept of psychological contract is the notion of trust. Trust is assumed to be the casualty of organisational change efforts and related breaches of psychological contract. In this study, trust in senior management was at a low ebb (only 24% of employees in the 2004 UKES trusted their organisational leaders to any extent). Much of the literature suggests that contract breach has more intense emotional implications than contract fulfilment. Atkinson (2007) finds that trust is low in purely transactional contracts and only becomes important in relational ones: transactional components relying on cognitive trust and relational components on affective trust. Breach of a transactional component leads to lower perceived obligations for the employee or higher obligations for the employer. Breach in a relational component however is more severe as this has an emotional impact; this may change the nature of the relationship and result in loss of trust.

Breach of a relational contract is therefore likely to have the proportionally greater impact on employee emotions, attitudes and behaviours such as job satisfaction, citizenship behaviours, organizational commitment, turnover intentions and actual turnover, perceived job security and motivation and performance. These findings suggest that when work and the workplace lack meaning, people are alienated, morale suffers and people dis-identify from the organisation, start to look for other jobs or consider self-employment. Change also becomes more difficult to manage. Equally, many people appeared to feel obliged to continue to work for their organisation and comply with the behavioural norm of the new work culture, even though this may cut across their personal values and cause them discomfort. The consequences of alienation for their own health and well-being are reflected in this comment by Jim Collins (2001:210):

'It is impossible to have a great life unless it is a meaningful life. And it is very difficult to have a meaningful life, without meaningful work'.
Conclusion

Given the expected benefits of meaning for organisational performance, it is not surprising that high-commitment models of HRM (Storey, 1992; Guest, 1999) play an important role in organisational meaning-making, specifically in the enabling of 'meaningful work' (Varney 2009), where people actively engage in a discourse that helps them construct their identities, or sense of "self" in an age where there is increasing orientation for self-expression, and self-realisation (Overell, 2008). From a critical standpoint, the ethics and practicalities of employers' drawing on the language of commitment and engagement (e.g. Keenoy, 1997, 1999; Storey, 1992; Townley 1998; Legge 2005), to increase productivity by eliciting employees' discretionary effort can appear less as a concern for mutuality between employers and employees and 'more like straightforward corporate take-over of psychological space' (Overell, 2008:14). Overell also points out the risks to employees of these approaches:

'Has a fresh page in the nature of work really been turned? Have fundamental antagonisms been dressed up in emollient, perhaps manipulative language? The goal of self-realisation seems to lend itself all too easily to being padded out with company logic.' (2008:15)

I share Overell's scepticism. Sennett too is convinced that the New Economy cannot last and concludes that:

'(…) a regime that provides human beings no deep reasons to care about one another cannot long preserve its legitimacy' (1998:148).

It would seem that their message is not yet being heard.

In the next chapter I draw conclusions, highlight overall strengths and limitations from this multi-strand study, and indicate possible future research questions.
Chapter 8
Conclusion

8.0 Introduction

This thesis has examined evidence for the existence of a 'new work culture' of capitalism in UK organisations at the turn of the 21st century and what that means for white collar workers' satisfaction. I have set out to provide an historical analysis of the nature and impact of the neo-liberal 'new work culture' on 'white collar' workers in the UK during the period 1997-2010, focusing more particularly on the period 2000-2009. I have drawn on literature and a variety of research data, including reflections on my own experience of performativity as an employee and as a manager, to examine evidence for the claims made by Harry Braverman in his book *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974), which was in a sense a cry of protest against the degradation of work in late Modernity. I have considered the contribution of HRM to the installation of a new work culture of capitalism. I have also examined evidence for the disorienting effects and personal consequences for white collar workers of working conditions within the 'new work culture', as described by Sennett (2006), using the lens of the psychological contract through which to view these effects.

In this final chapter I consider the extent to which I have been able to evidence Braverman's and Sennett's propositions, draw conclusions from my study, and highlight possible areas for future research.

The core research questions I have examined under the title of this thesis are:

1. What were the macro political, economic and technological changes which have led to the emergence of a 'new work culture'?
2. How do HRM practices contribute to the development and perpetuation of the new work culture?
3. What are the characteristics of the new work culture, as perceived by employees?
4. How did employees experience the 'new work culture'?
5. To what extent were employees able to exercise agency?
6. How did HRM professionals view their role with respect to the new work culture?

I have also considered the extent to which within the new work culture employees appear to feel they are subjects, having no choice but to comply with the requirements of the new work...
culture. In addition, I have reflected on HR practitioner discourse to assess the extent to which these people appear to be complicit with, and willingly act as agents, or are themselves subjects of managerialism.

8.0.1 A timely analysis?

Throughout the period of this study (1997-2010), the work world has been in flux. I have attempted to chart elements of the rapid advance of the new work culture of capitalism and set this alongside social and political shifts. As the focus of this historical analysis, this period represents one of interesting transitions in its own right; firstly perhaps between the late phase of neo-liberal monopoly capitalism and a yet unknown new form of capitalism; it reflects the increasing confluence of capital and knowledge as the basis of economic growth; and it represents the emergence of post-modernity from the late stages of modernity. Moreover this period is relatively clearly bounded; firstly because it marks a period of relative growth leading to a period of economic crisis and downturn; then because it largely shadows the period of ‘New Labour’ in office.

This has, on the whole, been a period of economic growth in the UK and Gamble (2009) terms this period, in which capitalists have reaped high rewards, ‘the feast’. Since the main phase of data-gathering was completed in 2005, there has been a significant global economic trauma in the form of the banking crisis which began in 2007 and subsequent recessions in many developed economies, including the UK’s. Gamble (2009:4) argues that since the last ‘crisis of capitalism’ in the 1970s, we now face the ‘spectre at the feast’ of a significant crisis of capitalism which would:

‘Signal a much more far-reaching political and economic impasse, manifested in unpredictable and sometimes uncontrollable events, and which at the extreme threatens slump, depression, polarization, political unrest, even war, affecting all parts of the global economy and the international state system’.

I believe that Gamble’s observations are entirely pertinent to current conditions. In such circumstances the working practices of the new work culture, of which I have charted elements in this thesis, will themselves need to be revised again in the light of the failings of the current system, in particular with respect to their impact on white collar workers. In the rest of this chapter I will discuss how I have addressed all the core research questions, though not in this order. Given the historical nature of my analysis, I shall
permit myself some speculation about possible future trends. I shall conclude this chapter with two scenarios about possible shifts in the employment relationship based on inferences I draw from my thesis.

8.1 Reviewing evidence for Braverman’s and Sennett’s contentions

Braverman’s argument was closely linked to that of Marx. In *Capital* Marx argued that under capitalism, the goals of workers and capital are fundamentally different. Management itself only existed because capitalism was a system of property relations, in which a large majority worked, while a tiny minority owned or administered capital. Workers, according to Marx, ought to live to work, but under capitalism they work to live, and this is because the exclusive goal of the capitalist is to maximise profit.

Marx argued that, under capitalism, workers would inevitably be alienated. In his early writings, like Hegel, he sees alienation as a necessary feature of human life prior to the final realisation of true human nature, so that there has been alienation under all modes of production; though he does see this as being brought to an extreme, in all respects except alienation from nature, under capitalism. In *Grundrisse*, he describes the capitalist mode of production as so inhuman as to make the worker ‘a mere appurtenance’ of the machine and whose work would be ‘such a torment that its essential meaning is destroyed’ (1973:376). Secondly, alienation involves a loss of self as the worker is subsumed in the process of productive activity; moreover the worker’s labour does not belong to him or herself. Marx argued that alienation has profound consequences for humanity since it is through work that people express creativity, produce the means of their own existence and become themselves. Under capitalism, work becomes not a form of creative freedom but a form of compulsion. For Marx therefore employee alienation was structural since it is that the structures of capitalism that determine the objective state of alienation.

Braverman described capitalism as a system ‘dominated and shaped’ by the needs of capital. Managerialism is a technology of domination and because of the pressure of competition, so management has continually been forced to renew and extend its control over the employed workforce. In this way, capital has constantly renegotiated its dominance over labour through managerial control over the labour process. While Braverman agreed with Marx that it was primarily the relations of production which distinguish capitalism and
that work in a capitalist society is alienating, he regarded work in the twentieth century under monopoly capitalism as particularly alienating. Braverman's contribution was to re-examine the productive process in a precise and detailed way, updating Marx's theory, showing that alienation (or, in his phrase, the 'degradation of labour') was a process which was constantly being created and recreated by capitalist management.

Braverman advanced the argument that, in the twentieth century, this dominance was achieved through scientific management or 'Taylorism' which prescribes the separation of conception from execution, with only managers allowed to control the labour process, while workers become the 'doers', forced to comply to the will of management. In a context where production is based upon the purchase and sale of labour, it is in the interest of managers, acting on behalf of capital, to break down the labour process into smaller and smaller parts making the individual parts cheaper to obtain. Since Taylorism prescribes conditions of work, the length of the working day and the process of work, these are not only beyond the control of workers, they are in the control of forces hostile to workers because capitalists and their managers are driven to make them work harder, faster and for longer stints.

Braverman recognised the potential of technology, in particular automation, to commoditise and commodify work and deskill the workforce. The resulting rigidly repetitive process buries the individual talents or skills of the worker. Braverman (in Davies, 1986: 37) claimed that under modern capitalism "labour power has become a commodity", which was one of the distinctive features of capitalism for Marx. With reduced labour power, workers are rendered subject to meaningless work and become ultimately expendable. However, Braverman was fiercely critical of the idea that the uses and consequences of technology are neutral; that if machinery cuts jobs, or reduces skills, this is an inevitable price of progress. In his view capitalism drives technology, and it was not the machinery of production but management that was to blame – and the class divisions which shaped how the machinery was used.

Braverman argued that while science and technology skills have increased, this has only increased the gap or 'polarization' between the lower and higher ends of the labour scale. However, Brown et al (2010b) argue that while Digital Taylorism continues the degradation of the labour process today, the polarisation in earning potential between the low skilled and people described in current political jargon as the 'squeezed middle', seems to be lessening as the earning power of high skilled workers declines in the face of global competition for knowledge work. Moreover there are increasing gulfs opening up between the new capitalist class divisions – the super-rich elite employees who are 'winners' in the 'global auction' and
everyone else. For those not in the super-league, the degradation of work is reflected in reduced quality of jobs and of working life.

According to the data I have presented in this thesis, Braverman’s predictions have largely been realized. Thus, with respect to the first core research question, the macro political, economic and technological changes which have led to the emergence of a ‘new work culture’ include the ascendancy of neo-liberalism within a globalized economy. A few years after Braverman wrote his book in 1974 neo-liberalism became the dominant hegemonic economic ideology of the US and UK. The market fundamentalism of neo-liberalism was actively championed in the UK by Margaret Thatcher and subsequent governments, and advanced throughout the period of monopoly capitalism, becoming, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dominant global economic order. Neo-liberalism gives capital an advantage in its struggle with labour as it pursues greater capital accumulation through competitive strategies on a global scale enhanced by labour flexibilisation.

Moreover Braverman predicted that the commodification of white collar work would be progressively and systematically applied beyond clerical to high skilled work. Since his day, as a consequence of Thatcherism and neo-liberal economic policies, UK professional white collar work has been progressively proletarianised as governments have sought to reduce the labour power of professional workers in public institutions such as education, the BBC and the civil service. The technologies used to achieve these ends include wide-scale restructurings and the installation of new work cultures characterised by performativity.

With respect to research question two and three i.e. what are the characteristics of the new work culture, as perceived by employees, and how did employees experience the ‘new work culture’, the data I have presented suggests that the new work culture of neo-liberalism has consolidated into a harsh and uncompromising regime. Within organisations the neo-liberal new work culture is short-term in focus, highly utilitarian and controlling with respect to employees. With the ending of employment practices based on assumptions of job security, many white collar workers have had to accept the imposition of short-termist and performative new work cultures, in which they are subject to work intensification and at risk of casualisation, outsourcing or redundancy.

Among the effects on them reported by respondents in my study were long working hours, lack of work-life balance, pressure, anxiety and ever-increasing demands. Developments such as the internet and advanced communications technology have enabled work intensification by accelerating the flow and increasing the volume of work still further. As
reported in their accounts, for many workers, the boundaries between work and other aspects of life became blurred and work came to dominate life. Many workers appeared to accept their subjectivity to this regime as inevitable, due to their apparent lack of viable alternatives. And while they used ‘coping’ strategies, the resignation and anomie felt by many people was reflected in my study of ‘meaning’ which found that, on the whole, people were experiencing work as meaningless.

8.1.1 HRM practices: management by consent or coercion?

Braverman argued that management rules by coercion but prefers to appear to manage by consent, using tactics of encouragement and consensus. He regarded Human Relations management as an element of scientific management which was used as a means of habituating workers to oppressive conditions. In practice workers would be treated as machines, with the aim of transforming the subjective element of labour into objective, measurable, controlled processes. Sennett (1998) argues that emphasis on these performative concepts, as reflected in HRM’s performance management systems, is affecting character as expressed by loyalty and commitment and ultimately leads to the decline of values that are desirable in society.

With respect to research question two - how do HRM practices contribute to the development and perpetuation of the new work culture? - I have charted the shifting emphasis in the role of Human Relations Management and noted that, during the period addressed in this study, HRM has become embedded as the dominant form of Human Relations practice in organisations, largely replacing ‘Personnel’. According to HRM theory, human relations practice must be closely aligned to the needs of the business. Moreover, with the decline of trades unions and the lack of a collective approach to employee relations, individualised HRM approaches to employee relations have left employees on their own in dealing with any grievance against their employer.

HR practitioners are generally involved in the process of psychological contracting since they are usually involved in recruitment and selection activities; they devise reward and other policies, as well as induction and performance management processes; they play a crucial role in shaping employees’ expectations about the employment relationship. I have argued that Human Resource Management (HRM) high-commitment theory represents a strong, persuasive ideology that can manufacture consent, just as neo-liberalism in the political and economic sphere can have the same effect. I have reported the scepticism expressed by many respondents about human resource practices, and in particular drawn attention to the
ethics of ‘management of meaning’ through the use of HRM discourse of high performance and high commitment, such as contemporary concerns about ‘employee engagement’, in the context of highly utilitarian performative approaches to people management, and the underlying drivers of HRM to manage and reduce the costs of people as a resource.

With respect to research question six - how did HRM professionals view their role with respect to the new work culture? - I have examined the extent to which the mutuality implied by high-commitment HRM is reflected in the language and priorities of senior HR practitioners who I consider to be influential discourse-shapers. On the whole, for these HR leaders, business concerns take complete priority over employee concerns. Indeed even apparently employee-focused initiatives, such as those concerned with employee engagement or talent management, appear to reflect a more instrumental ‘hard’ approach to managing humans as resources, rather than as people. Such initiatives derive from what they perceive as their organisations’ needs for higher performance output and/or to meet current and future skills shortages. Moreover, many of these HR practitioners do not appear to question their own roles in large scale layoffs which they have organised and indeed have derived power from these activities. As discourse-shapers and HR careerists these practitioners they are keen to be seen to be shaping the future of the HR profession. They are concerned to ensure that such business-centric approaches to HRM are embedded in their own teams and beyond.

By and large I have reported that the positive rhetoric of HRM appears to be very much at odds with employee accounts of their experience of HRM practices. If anything, I would agree with a UKES respondent who considered that performance management is actually damaging to individuals. Ironically then, HRM practices which purport to lead to increased productivity may actually reduce it because of employees’ cynicism and loss of autonomy in their own jobs. Moreover, the extent to which HR practice can in any case really be mutual is questionable given that, according to mainstream theory, HRM is unambiguously an intrinsic part of the management structure and in practice represents the employer in cases of dispute. It is therefore not really surprising that, throughout the ten years’ of UKES surveys, the HR function was generally reported by employees as being reactive, counter-productive and not to be trusted.

8.1.2 Can employees exercise agency?

I have considered research question six - to what extent were employees able to exercise agency? – in each of the empirical chapters. For Marx and Braverman workers were seemingly powerless to resist the structural forces – the social machinery, bureaucracies...
and states - which reduced their autonomy and quality of their working lives. Marx had argued that human beings are social beings who have the ability to act collectively to further our interests. However, under capitalism that ability is reversed by the anarcho drive for profits, submerged under private ownership and the class divisions it produces. Marx believed, of course, that as capitalism experiences ever more severe crises of overproduction, if the working class act collectively in economic and political terms, then capitalism can be overthrown.

Some Marxists disagree with Braverman that scientific management is the predominant method of control in the latter part of the twentieth century, or that management control is necessarily complete. Edwards (1978) for instance sees the workplace as a contested domain, where worker resistance and other situational factors can influence the outcome. Burawoy (1979) argues that consensual negotiation tactics often succeed. Friedman (1977) argues that, at all stages of capitalism, direct control, where every aspect of the worker's labour is rigidly controlled, co-exists with responsible autonomy, where workers are invited to identify with the objectives of the business as a whole. Friedman also comments on the distinction between central and peripheral workers, with central workers being essential to the long-term prospects of the company and therefore more powerful.

However both Burawoy and Friedman appear to accept the argument that capitalism is a process through which workers have increasingly been denied real control over their work. Furthermore, Paul Sweezy saw the structures of monopoly capitalism wreaking havoc on people's working lives and he described the consequences for employees in his "Foreword" to Labor and Monopoly Capital:

The sad, horrible, heartbreaking way the vast majority of my fellow countrymen and women, as well as their counterparts in most of the rest of the world, are obliged to spend their working lives is seared into my consciousness in an excruciating and unforgettable way. And when I think of the talent and energy which daily go into devising ways and means of making their torment worse, all in the name of efficiency and productivity but really for the greater glory of the great god Capital, my wonder at humanity's ability to create such a monstrous system is surpassed only by amazement at its willingness to tolerate the continuance of an arrangement so obviously destructive of the well-being and happiness of human beings (Sweezy, 1974:ii).

Similarly, Sennett (1998, 2006) proposes that, within the new work culture, 'character' is 'corroded', that is to say that employees, with high levels of job insecurity, adjust to thinking
short term, lack the opportunity for real achievement and struggle to sustain a life narrative that comes out of one's work.

I have reported the impact on employees of the new work culture of neo-liberal capitalism in chapters 5-7. This thesis presents evidence of the widespread employer-driven dismantling of the 'old' psychological contract; and of work intensification and performativity. I have reported characteristic aspects of the new work culture such as the constant change, short-termism, growth of internal competitiveness and loss of collegiality, conflict, micro-politics, lack of leadership and insecurity experienced by people working in the new work culture. I have argued that these growing demands and the reduction of the quality of working life represented a breach or violation of the psychological contract of many employees. Indeed it could be argued that these effects on individuals were symptomatic of a more widespread shift in the social contract with respect to white collar work.

This raises the question of how far consensus at work can go, and how far workers may be participating in their own subordination at work. Where I might take issue with Braverman is over the extent to which he assumes that workers will be powerless to resist capitalist managements. In this thesis I have considered the question of how much agency workers can exercise in the face of significant structural change. For a long period (2000-2003), people seemed by and large to adjust to the new work conditions and accept that they would never be able to meet the growing demands of management and that, in order to 'survive', they needed to work hard, for long hours. Moreover, for many people, technology brought some freedom in that with laptops, the internet and mobile phones work could be carried out anywhere, thus in theory aiding better work-life balance, but in practice it was carried out everywhere, thus undermining work-life balance.

In the UKES surveys since 1998 I detected a small but perceptible trend for increasing numbers of employees to take control of their own situation in order to improve it. Initially (approximately 1989-2000) people seemed to accept that they had no alternative but to work hard and 'get on with it'. Between approximately 2000 and 2003, the majority of respondents were increasingly questioning and resenting the long working hours, ever-increasing demands and loss of work-life balance.

A small minority of respondents seemed to thrive in the new environment, choosing to embrace ever more demanding work. Mostly these were employees aged between 25-35 years of age, for whom career ambition was a strong motive. However, it seemed that most employees were learning to adjust to the demands of the new work culture, in many cases
finding ways how to work round the system, or becoming more assertive and no longer being prepared to sacrifice their health or personal lives for the sake of job security or career advancement. Throughout this period many people lamented a perceived loss of meaning at work. From about 2004 onwards, some employees at least appeared to more assertively be exercising their choice not to put up with work conditions which they found to be personally unsustainable, perhaps by 'opting out', 'downshifting' or moving to less stressful jobs. Some people chose to set up their own businesses rather than endure employment in the new work culture.

Throughout my main period of study the economic backdrop in the UK was one of economic growth and abundant employment opportunities. It is possible that employees today may be experiencing even greater job insecurity and downgraded earning potential as a result of the current weakness of the UK economy and record levels of unemployment. More research is needed to understand whether employees will persist in seeking to exercise greater agency in the face of employer demands in a challenging and insecure global labour market.

8.2 Psychological and social contracts

This thesis has examined the impact on employees of work degradation in the new work culture, through the lens of the psychological and social contract. Unlike many traditional theories of management and behaviour, the psychological contract and its surrounding ideas are still quite fluid; they are yet to be fully defined and understood, and are far from widely recognised and used in organizations. In examining the extent to which the employment relationship between employers and employees appears mutual or one-sided I have referred to two forms of exchange relationship. Social contracts represent a commonly held view of the obligations that define appropriate employment relationships, while the psychological contract describes the specific expectations an employee has of their employer that defines their actual employment relationship.

I have argued that a major reason for the increasing significance of, and challenges posed by, the psychological contract is the rapid acceleration and deepening severity of change in business and organised work which began probably in the 1980s. In particular I have considered how the macro thrusts of neo-liberalism, including labour flexibility, and resulting regimes of significant workplace restructuring and performativity, have impacted on the stereotypical 'old' psychological contract of white collar workers. The employer/employee relationship - reflected in the psychological contract - has progressively grown in complexity, especially since globalization and technology in the late 20th century shifted organized work
onto a different level - in terms of rate of change, connectivity and the mobility of people and activities.

I have argued that the pursuit of labour flexibility since the 1990s has led to the deliberate undermining by employers of the 'old' psychological contract, or 'deal'. Like Guest (2004), I argue that the breakdown of the traditional 'deal' of a career in return for loyalty, a fair day's work for a fair day's pay and the individualisation of the employment relationship, together with considerable amounts of organizational change, have resulted in widespread violation of the 'old' white collar psychological contract, manifest for instance in the loss of professional autonomy, job security and the possibility of career progression, as evidenced in this study.

At the heart of the psychological contract is a philosophy of mutuality which reflects its deeply significant, changing and dynamic nature. Based on the evidence I have presented, I have argued that the employment relationship has become one-sided in favour of employers as a result. While the 'old' psychological contract might only have become widespread in white collar work since the 1960s, and never really applied to blue collar or contract workers, nevertheless the career and employment expectations of many respondents at the start of my study had been forged within this stereotype. I have therefore been interested to consider new ways of managing employment relations to meet the interests and concerns of both white collar employees and their employers.

8.2.1 Work as self-fulfilment

Work needs are increasingly impacted by factors outside of work, as well as those that arise inside work. During the period of this study, as a result of globalisation, technology and knowledge capitalism, the "knowledge content" of much of white collar work has increased. Social change has also facilitated the rise of identity as a preoccupation for many employees, especially people with creative and professional jobs. People are aware of more, they have more, and want more from life - and this outlook naturally expands their view of how work can help them achieve greater fulfilment. That may be perhaps because, as Sennett (2006) argues, in large modern businesses, the majority of workers face uncertainty and find it difficult to conceive of a life narrative. In a 2006 survey for the Work Foundation, 69 per cent of respondents said work was a "source of personal fulfilment". A 2008 Roffey Park survey (Sinclair et al, 2008) found that 90% of employees were looking for happiness and fulfilment at work.
While there is a danger in extrapolating trends based on this variety of samples of white collar populations, the general trend in my study is for employees to want to pursue self-actualisation through work. In the UKES the main motivators in 1999 were personal drive and achievement, challenge and enjoyment of the job. These remained exactly the same in 2007, along with the ‘desire to make a difference’. Financial rewards remained well down the list.

Yet I argue that over the period of this study the social contract within which people struggle to negotiate individual psychological contracts has become skewed to one in which individuals must watch out for their own interests. Since trust between the two parties is crucial to building a relational psychological contract, the lack of job security inherent in the new work culture would make it difficult to build this trust. In today’s harsher work environments, individuals’ ability to renegotiate their individual psychological contracts will be determined by their perceived market value.

Thus, as De Meuse et al (2001) suggest, the loss of job security has made the employee focus on developing transferable skills and contacts, resulting in a transactional contract being formed. In my study, respondents appear well aware of the need to develop their skills and to have been actively developing their employability, in line with the ‘employability thesis’ (Rajan, 1997). For many people in my study, rather than providing a means of self-fulfilment, work appears to have become increasingly bound up by questions of ‘survival’ in the workplace. Indeed, recent newspaper reports have suggested that some UK employees will not even take their annual holidays for fear of losing ground in their absence.

I argue that people who pursue self-fulfilment or seek to advance their careers within the new work culture are likely, in a context of performativity and ever-growing workloads, to suffer significant frustration and/or may try even harder, thus risking becoming ‘willing slaves’ and ultimately ‘burnt out’. Due to automation and technical advances and the need for up-skilling, employees are likely to experience different fortunes akin to a Darwinian ‘survival of the fittest’. While perhaps some younger and ambitious employees may be able to absorb the increasing pace for a long time, other employees, less able to sustain the pace, face the possibility of obsolescence, and the ‘spectre of uselessness’ Sennett (2006) described.

The reported loss of ‘meaning’ at work over this period perhaps reflects the degree of potential mismatch between what employees aspired to, and what they actually experienced. My study suggests that, while the career implications of the ending of the ‘old deal’ remained important to many employees, most appeared to be more concerned about their loss of
autonomy, as reflected in the increasing concerns about lack of work-life balance, and loss of job quality in these pressurised and challenging work contexts. And people also appeared increasingly as concerned and uncertain about what is happening in society at large as they were about what was happening to them personally in the work context. Thus it could be argued that the macro context changes, including the market-driven, individualistic and secular values of contemporary society and the turbulent political and economic scene, together with performative and insecure work contexts, were resulting in a challenging new social contract emerging within which individuals were attempting to maintain or improve their own psychological contract at work.

As the evidence presented in this thesis suggests, the situation of many workers in the first few years of the twenty-first century appeared to be worsening and workers were increasingly feeling trapped in harsh working conditions. There were signs that large amounts of organisational change, and related sense of loss of direction, were having a negative effect on employee attitudes, weakening employees' belief that their management knew what they were doing. HRM practices in particular appeared to result in a significant reduction in employee trust, reflecting the tensions and dualities of HRM i.e. the rhetoric of mutuality implicit in high-commitment HRM concealing a machine metaphor view of labour. While many organisations were reported to have high commitment HRM practices, such as organisational values, there was a degree of cynicism expressed about the gaps between 'rhetoric' and 'reality'. HRM practices which appeared to reduce employee trust included changes in policies relating to security, performance management, training, communication and redundancy programmes in particular.

Thus many participants in this study appear to have experienced a deteriorating employment relationship. While there was no new 'deal', over time, some people at least were no longer prepared to passively tolerate excessive employer demands or to make the sacrifices required, including potential loss of authenticity, in order to make career progress. In one way then, this could be viewed as employees getting back in control of their own destinies and looking for more work-life balance. Moreover, there is an argument that, if breaches of relational psychological contract are so damaging to individuals, ironically they might perhaps be less vulnerable to exploitation by employers, and be better able to secure a 'good deal', including meaningful work, if they embraced a transactional approach to renegotiating their psychological contract: "Because if I can't have meaning, I'm goddamn-well going to have money." (Barber, Financial Times online, 5 November, 2008). For employers, the cost of negotiating transactional psychological contracts is likely to be
considerably higher than enticing employees into an implied promise of a mutual exchange relationship.

Nevertheless, despite the vicissitudes of work in the new work culture, many people in this study appeared to prefer to remain in 'permanent' employment with their employer, and by implication, perhaps continued to aspire to a relational contract with their employer. The free-wheeling protean career was not what many people aspired to. In that sense, the 'employability thesis' (Rajan, 1997) did not seem to be working in full.

My study of 'Meaning at Work' perhaps suggests what many people aspired to with respect to their employment relationship. People's definitions of 'meaning' were complex. These reflected emotions as well as cognition; they related to individual and social identity; they combined existential elements with longings for connection and purpose. By and large these definitions did not reflect materialistic values and no-one defined 'success' in financial terms. These definitions might be said to reflect both people's desire for self-actualisation and fulfilment, and also their desire to belong. People wanted the chance to achieve and to feel part of a community doing worthwhile work that makes a difference. An uplifting purpose appears to provide meaning for some people and to act as a 'bonding' mechanism with their organisation, thus becoming an inherently relational psychological contract which provides individuals with a means for self-actualisation and fulfils the desire to belong.

As a concept, the psychological contract will continue to evolve and change, in both its effects and its definitions. It has been argued that the psychological contract needs extending to give greater weight to context and to what is described as the state of the psychological contract, incorporating issues of fairness and trust that lie at the heart of employment relations (Guest, 2004). For instance, in terms of context, there are significant changes under way specifically involving attitudes to traditional corporations, markets and governance. Examples of extremely potent 'community' driven enterprises are emerging. Social connectivity and technological empowerment pose a real threat to old-style corporate models of organisation. Moreover, each new generation of workforce will have its own social contract expectations. Younger generations have seen the free market model and traditional capitalism fail, and fail young people particularly.

The significance and complexity of the psychological contract has grown in response to all of these effects, and given that the world of work will continue change, so the significance and complexity of the contract will grow even more. Like Sparrow (2003), I recognise its dynamic quality, and the social and emotional factors. Clarity of mutual expectations will be vital for a
healthy employment relationship. The basic principle - that people seek fair treatment at work - is simple. Complexities and dynamics come to life as soon as the principle is seen in a practical context. Essentially the psychological contract is driven by people's feelings which cannot be measured or defined in fixed terms. I propose that 'meaning' is a barometer of the health of the psychological contract which reflects core issues in the employment relationship of trust, exchange and control. More research would be needed to explore the links between meaning, purpose and organisational outcomes such as commitment and performance.

In the following sections I consider the implications of the current macro context for the emerging psychological and social contract.

8.3 The developing crisis of capitalism

So while Braverman began the debate, many of the issues he raised remained unanswered or with incomplete responses. Are these modes of control - the separation of craft and professional work and the de-skilling of professionals happening now? Arguably yes.

Unlike in the first period of this study (1998-2006), the UK economy since 2007 has experienced recession and ongoing downturn as well as a change of government. On the world scene, political and economic turbulence continues unabated. Gamble (2009) argues that, as the creaking mechanisms of neo-liberal monopoly capitalism become more destabilised, we will experience another crisis of capitalism. This will typically be triggered when super-exploitation proves counterproductive, when workers do not have the wealth to purchase goods, consumption declines and hence investment slows down. Prior to this happening, he argues, there is no role for workers in the short-term other than as victims. Arguably, we have seen the effects of this in the collapse of the financial system (including the 'credit crunch') following the banking crisis of 2007-8.

Zuboff (2010:5) argues that we are currently experiencing a historic transition of capitalism:

'\text{The pattern of change is one of overlapping and interwoven fields of transition rather than clean, uni-directional breaks. For those of us living through these transitions they can be confusing and frustrating}.'
The nature of the new form of capitalism which may emerge is unclear. Marx had argued that, under capitalism, workers are alienated from fellow human beings, especially from those who exploit their labour and control the things they produce, and are unlikely to come together spontaneously in collective action. Oilman (1996) argued that human beings are social beings who have the ability to act collectively to further their interests, given political organisation. Under capitalism though, that ability is submerged under private ownership and the class divisions it produces:

'We have the ability to consciously plan our production, to match what we produce with the developing needs of society, but under capitalism, that ability is reversed by the anarchic drive for profits. Thus, rather than consciously shaping nature, we cannot control, or even foresee, the consequences of our actions' Oilman (1996:143).

Reflecting on the banking crisis, Sennett (interviewed by Barber, Financial Times online, 5 Nov 2008) argues that the inherent short-termism of neo-liberalism has driven highly individualistic behaviours, particularly from those who 'control' capital:

"One of the striking things about this is that the people who are involved in trading these financial instruments had almost no sense that they could do an injury to large numbers of other people. I do not think that is just greed. I think it is the way that the search for very short-term profit and the organisation of work in a very short-term time frame gradually begins to eclipse other people. You do not think socially under those conditions."

Perhaps Sennett is being charitable. At the time of writing, the UK economy is weak, with significant public sector 'cuts' under way, including changes to public sector pensions, the highest rate of unemployment in 17 years and record levels of youth unemployment. Instability applies to workplaces right across the economy. It is not surprising that employees are reported to be anxious and uncertain about the future, even though their own jobs may not be at risk of redundancy (McCartney & Willmott, 2010). As my study has found, work can be undignified and damaging to worker wellbeing, owing to pressure, the demand to do more with less, the seemingly never-ending flow of work and less individual autonomy. This level of uncertainty could encourage employers to make ever greater demands and also induce employees to comply even more. In such a situation, will employees continue to seek identity and self-actualisation through work (in Maslowian terms) or will more basic concerns such as safety and security take precedence? If the latter, the notion of 'meaningful work' would simply be a 'fey' issue (Overell, 2008:6), a luxury residue of the times of growth?
However, Pink (2009) suggests that, despite successive economic downturns in the past 60 years, the broad trend in western societies has been towards "less materialist values". Zuboff argues that potential clashes inherent in this transition include those between the interests of worker and organisation; between the shared duties of professional ethics and the personal values of individuals; between down-to-earth industrial relations issues and a more psychological emphasis on self-realisation. If Zuboff and Pink are correct, this does mean that the employment relationship must, by definition, have multiple objectives since, as Budd (2004) points out, organisations cannot be run with efficiency as the only goal, and it is incumbent upon individuals to look further than their own direct personal interests. Will a new form of capitalism need to embrace a new form of collectivism, one that takes into account the needs of different stakeholders and has a longer-term perspective?

Moreover, the apparent widespread public revulsion at the causes and ongoing consequences of the banking crisis, and at the disparity between the 'rewards for failure', by which bankers continue to award themselves huge bonuses, and the ways in which the rest of society are left to pay the price for their actions, suggests that continuing with the neo-liberal status quo is likely to lead to growing protest. At the very least, there are likely to be growing demands for genuine accountability and a new form of social justice, as outlined by Brown et al, (2010b:160).

'Social justice is also about giving people a sense of dignity and recognition for their contribution to society regardless of whether they are an all-out winner in the global auction. This part of a new bargain challenges the winner-takes-all society based on neo-liberal assumptions about talent, contribution, and rewards. It challenges an economic world of empty suits that knows nothing other than bottom-line numbers and return on investment (ROI). It also questions the perverse social priorities that lead talented professionals to dedicate themselves to finding novel ways of making bigger profits or personal bonuses even if it threatens the viability of the financial system if not the whole economy'.

If social justice is not seen to be done, it could be envisaged that, at least over the medium term, social protest will grow, as we have already seen with student protests over the rise in university tuition fees and proposed changes to public sector pensions.
8.4 Future scenarios?

Gamble (2009:166-7) argues that the economic crisis perhaps provides some temporary breathing space before 'enormous and unsustainable pressure' builds up. Moreover he argues that:

'We face the daunting task of learning from this present crisis, and trying in the future to attempt something more different than we have ever attempted before'.

In this final section I would like to present a couple of speculative future scenarios, one perhaps utopian, the other pessimistic.

8.4.1 Scenario A: Pessimistic

Of course, things may go on much as before. If so, we are likely to see increasing polarisation between the few, super-rich elite workers and the majority of white collar and other workers whose earning power, job quality and wellbeing are reduced. Braverman, in the absence of any extended discussion of resistance by workers against management control, gives the impression that managers have all the initiative; that workers are inert and resistance cannot succeed. This is my main criticism of Braverman's book. For while I broadly agree with his thesis, nevertheless I think that he underestimated the potential for individuals to exercise agency in the face of seemingly inevitable workplace change. And, as other Marxists (e.g. Friedman, 1977; Edwards, 1978; Burawoy, 1979) have argued, structures are the products of people, and people have the power to change the structures.

Ironically, as we perhaps start to emerge from the 'Age of Individualism' (Scase, 2006), people are finding new means of gaining collective support in ways trades unions have not been able to muster for three decades. I believe there are signs of such action by individuals, acting as collectives, to change structures today, not least in the 'Arab Spring' uprisings of 2011, and the growing use of social media as a means of spurring individuals to take part in collective action, as was seen in the London student protests against proposed rises in university tuition fees. Arguably the publication by Wikileaks of US classified information and the dogged journalism which resulted in the revelations about MPs' expenses scandal, are examples of how the power of monopolies to control can be challenged by individuals acting in concert.
I suspect that, unless there is genuine movement towards a more inclusive form of stakeholder capitalism, perhaps along the lines of the 'good work' thesis (see below), the interests of workers and those of capital are likely ultimately to be on a collision course once again. Marx considered that, since alienation is rooted in capitalist society, only the collective struggle against that society carries the potential to eradicate alienation, to bring our vast, developing powers under our conscious control and reinstitute work as the central aspect of life. I agree with Cox (2006) that capital can be endured, or it can be resisted, but the greatest hope comes when people fight back.

8.4.2 Scenario B: Utopia

The more optimistic scenario assumes that a confluence of thinking and aspiration may converge to creating a 'tipping point' towards 'Good work'. In the nineteenth century, in a lecture *Useless work versus useless toil*, William Morris (1884; available online) distinguished 'good' from 'bad' work as follows:

'Here you see are two kinds of work – one good, the other bad; one not far removed from a blessing, a lightening of life; the other a mere curse, a burden to life. What is the difference between them then? This one has hope in it, the other not... hope of rest, hope of product, hope of pleasure in the work itself ... pleasure enough for all of us to be conscious of it while we are at work; not a mere habit, the loss of which we shall feel as a fidgety man feels the loss of the bit of string he fidgets with.'

It could be argued that there are detectable signs of a growing trend towards demands for a new form of industrial democracy, not least in the increasing flow of writing and conferences on the theme of 'good work'. Good work is defined as being about 'employment with a human face' (Budd, 2004). Schumacher (1974) described 'good work' as involving:

- Providing useful goods and services
- Cooperation with others
- Exercising stewardship

Schumacher's philosophy was one of "enoughness," appreciating both human needs, limitations and the appropriate use of technology.

For Gardner (2007:3) 'good work' is work that is of excellent technical quality, ethically pursued and socially responsible. Gardner argues that most people aspire to something more in return for their work than the pay cheque. In particular most people want to do 'good
work’ – to accomplish something significant in their work, and to take pride in doing their jobs well. People who achieve financial success without satisfying these other aspirations, he argues, may end up feeling barren and dispirited, especially when they feel obliged to compromise their own professional standards. The ‘Meaning at Work’ study suggests that many employees are experiencing these dispiriting feelings, and are seeking a more meaningful work life. Some are exercising choices which reduce their financial success but provide more satisfaction of what matters more to them, such as work-life balance. By so doing, employees are no longer rendered subject to conditions which might previously have ‘enslaved’ them.

How might ‘good work’ become more widespread? Braverman (1974:445-6) argued that the antidote to the capitalist labour process is granting workers democratic control over their workplace and society. This involves taking labour process control away from experts and committees, demystifying pseudo-science claims and privileged ideologies (e.g. managers are the experts), and returning technical and system knowledge back to the workers. It is skilling-up instead of skilling-down. It is broadening the unitary goal of maximizing profit to include worker-control of work, social accountability, and environmentally sustainable designs. It means an education system that educates wage-earners in self-governance, science, technology, ecology, and democracy. Sennett (2008) too points to the dynamic of craftsmanship and longer term skill development as an antidote to the commoditisation of work and to the utilitarian short-termism of the new work culture.

My study of what people found meaningful at work points strongly in this direction. People wanted for do work that was fundamentally worthwhile, that felt authentic and served a higher purpose, and therefore gave them chance to achieve something that mattered. They wanted to be part of, and identify with, something they could be proud of, rather than serving shareholder interests alone. To enjoy good work, Gardner (2007) argues, employees must experience engagement. This is underpinned by employment security and has the following features:

- Autonomy
- Workplace relations
- Sense of fairness
- Balance – what you put in you might expect to get out in some form.

Again my study of meaning suggests that autonomy was crucial to employees’ experiencing meaning. Most also appeared to have strong affiliation drives and wanted to be part of a
community embarked on achieving a common purpose. Trust was a vital ingredient to a meaningful work experience – not naive, blind trust by which one is easily manipulated, but a relationship based on mutual respect and authenticity, where words were matched by deeds.

8.4.3 A context for meaningful work?

Like Coats, Esland, Gardner, Gordon, Hutton, Isles, Overell, Schumacher and Sennett, I consider the creation of a ‘good work’ context to be not only an economic but also a moral issue. Gardner argues that there needs to be a thriving industrial democracy in place for good work to flourish. Gordon (1996) concluded Fat and Mean, published shortly after his untimely death, with a chapter devoted to policy recommendations designed to ensure fairer business practices and promote more democratic and cooperative ‘high-road’ approaches to labour management. Schumacher (1974) established the vision ‘small is beautiful’ in which he advocated the restoration of community and control, seeking low-tech solutions and implicitly a rejection of modern industrial society. He emphasized a restoration of our relationship with nature and was a prime mover in the development of the new environmentalism which supports the idea that nature is equal to, or more important than humanity.

For Sennett (2006), meaningful work has concrete characteristics. First, people must feel there is procedural justice in work; that is, when they do something right that they are rewarded and if they are maltreated that there is some way in which they can find redress. The second has to do with autonomy. What gives workers a sense of meaningful work is when they are recognised for doing something distinctive and are not treated just as a commodity. The third has to do with craftsmanship; when people feel they can build a skill in the course of a working life they take real satisfaction out of their work. However, Sennett argues, with short-term work in unstable institutions, it is hard for people to get better at something. If people feel their skills get stalled, that their jobs don’t build up their capacity to work well – they become very unhappy. Sennett (in a Guardian newspaper interview by Barber, Financial Times online, 5 November, 2008) points out that, in the past two decades, management has not paid enough attention to these three requisites of meaningful work:

“They have assumed that all workers are kind of entrepreneurial – they are just there for the money. That the content of work is not something employers really have to focus on. The idea is to get a task done.”
Isles (2010) suggests that employers will have to rethink their mode of operation to ensure that workers have ownership of what they do — both financial and intellectual — in the craft tradition. In practice this is about ensuring that workers enjoy the inter-dependent and inter-related sovereignties of task, time and place. By so doing, Isles argues, people will feel they own their own destiny and will want to give of their best. Then employers should identify what reduces employee motivation within the organisation system and design; simplify, reduce or remove processes such as performance management systems which appear geared to reducing poor performance rather than recognising and celebrating good performance:

‘Then we need to work towards an adult-adult employment relationship, one that is relational but underpinned by lifelong learning so that employees have the means to move on when no longer needed and where the relationship needs to be actively worked at on both sides’ (Isles, 2010:48).

Trust will be the enabling factor of such relationships. Behaviour and standards will be values-driven and rhetoric must match practice. Equity will be more widely interpreted within such a context, allowing for personalised contracts within an ethical base, where people are united in pursuit of a shared purpose.

Is this scenario realistic? That is debatable but it seems likely that the pressure on businesses to behave ethically and to be more humane institutions will grow, just as the pressure on various authoritarian heads of state has grown in recent times. Corporate reputation can no longer be just about public relations; it has to be grounded in people's lived experience. I believe that this study highlights the desire by employees for an employment relationship which is more mutual and authentic than what they have experienced in recent years. As the workforce becomes increasingly diverse and multi-generational, as long as employers require particular sorts of skills and ‘talent’, labour power may force improvements in the employment relationship.

The extent to which labour can exercise power in these contexts will reflect the relative strength of the market for employees' skills at any given time. It is possible that in the aftermath of recession, the market for high level skills has become saturated and that the demand for it has peaked. This seems unlikely, especially given underlying demographic and longer-term economic trends, but the current economic downturn presents possibilities for further degradation of work and commodification of workers. For instance some
employers may seek to exploit their advantage in the labour market while labour power is relatively low.

Alternatively, labour may seek to remobilise its collective power by connecting with wider social protests about the consequences of unbridled market freedoms and the protracted recession for people’s livelihoods and lives. As Braverman (1974:151) points out, underlying hegemonic struggles mean that worker acceptance of the new modus operandi should not be taken for granted:

‘The apparent acclimatization of the worker to the new modes of production grows out of the destruction of all other ways of living, the striking of wage bargains that permit a certain enlargement of the customary bounds of subsistence for the working class, the weaving of the net of modern capitalist life that finally makes all other modes of living impossible. But beneath this apparent habituation, the hostility of workers to the degenerated forms of work which are forced upon them continues as a subterranean stream that makes its way to the surface when employment conditions permit, or when the capitalist drive for a greater intensity of labor oversteps the bounds of physical and mental capacity. It renews itself in new generations, expresses itself in the unbounded cynicism and revulsion which large numbers of workers feel about their work, and comes to the fore repeatedly as a social issue demanding solution.’

8.5 Conclusion

So on balance I believe that I have found evidence for Sennett’s ‘new work culture’ and for Braverman’s predictions being realised with respect to the proletarianisation of white collar work in UK workplaces (1998-2010). On the whole my study suggests that the new work culture of capitalism spawned by neo-liberalism has largely proved damaging to the working lives of employees and been corrosive of character in the ways Sennett has described. Its practices have led to the degradation and commoditisation of much white collar work and workers. Performativity, technology and HRM practices which have resulted in the dismantling of the ‘old’ psychological contract, have been used by managements, in ways that F.W. Taylor might have dreamed of, to secure control over, and produce greater output from, insecure, proletarianised, over-worked, over-managed and alienated employees. HRM and performativity in particular appear to have been used for their panoptic effects to secure worker compliance under the rhetoric of consensus and mutuality.
Given that simultaneously many white collar workers appear to want to achieve greater fulfilment from work, since it now occupies so much space in their lives, employer and employee interests may be on a collision course. To date, it seems that it has been employees who have largely borne the brunt of market fundamentalism. How long this situation will continue in the face of growing disparities of wealth and opportunity between the elite workers of capitalism and everyone else remains to be seen.

In carrying out this study I have used a multi-method approach within an emergent research design. In addition to re-examining longitudinal survey data, and carrying out a thematic analysis to investigate employees’ experience of the new work culture, I have also used qualitative methods to explore emerging issues. I have considered HRM within historical and theoretical contexts and used critical discourse analysis to dissect the power dimensions implicit in HRM/performativity. I have reflected on practitioner accounts and critiqued these from a critical theorist standpoint. I have made connections between the lived reality of the new work culture and broader society to provide more unified analysis.

Of course I recognise that there is the danger of over-generalising from what were various sources of data and samples gathered over a ten-year period. It is possible that many of these issues may have been specific to the period in which I was carrying out the study. It is possible that my interest in the ‘good work’ agenda may have caused me to overlook factors which were important but which did not fit within this agenda’s paradigm. Moreover I am aware that, in my desire for breadth, I may have sacrificed depth by considering the changes by sector, firm size, age or gender grouping. My focus has been on UK-based employees, on ‘permanent’ rather than on contingent workers.

However I believe that this generality is also one of the strengths of this study. Several of the strands of research within my thesis have arisen from the ‘ground-up’, and I have explored some elements in more depth, such as careers, meaning and HRM discourse which emerged as potentially important issues from within the survey data, using interpretative methods in response to issues. By analysing and, in some cases, re-analysing data over this period I have been able to detect potential connections between the micro and the shifting macro context which I was not aware of at the time. I have attempted to ask the right questions to connect organisational phenomena such as careers, work-life balance and meaning to the psychological contract. I have attempted to find logical connections between these and other organisational outcomes such as
learning, performance and profits. The skill has been to identify and articulate key issues, 
gather and use appropriate data within and outside the HR function, setting an 
appropriate balance between statistical rigour and practical relevance.

I have included within the analysis elements of my own career journey over this period. 
This has given me chance to reflect on the ‘plural selves’ (Harré and Van Langenhove, 
1999) which I have brought to this study. When I started research for this thesis my work 
identity and interests in this study were those of a practitioner – as employee, manager, 
management developer and adviser to human resources professionals - and also as 
researcher and writer about people management. On the whole I have embraced a 
mainstream interest in high performance but I have always considered that, for this to be 
sustainable, it would be essential that the employment relationship was genuinely mutual.

As my research journey has progressed I have taken a more critical stance, though I 
hope not a pessimistic one, about the possibilities of this being achievable in neo-liberal 
work contexts. I have empathised with practitioners who may be enduring cognitive 
dissonance between what they are required to do at work and their personal values and 
aspirations because I too have felt increasingly less comfortable continuing to focus on 
helping people to comply with the demands of the system, for instance by running 
performance management training courses for managers.

In recent times the rapprochement between critical and mainstream HRM theory offers me 
personally some hope of being able to reconcile these tensions and dualities. Watson (2010) 
argues that a coherent critical HRM theorization requires a clear acknowledgement of the 
sociological, socio-psychological, economic, political and ethical aspects of working, 
managing and organizing. As Watson suggests, pragmatism is not about pursing absolute or 
final truths about reality. It is about attempting to make theoretical generalisations which 
might inform human practices and help us better appreciate the relationships between 
individual’s predicaments and institutional and historical patterns better than others. I agree 
with Spicer et al (2009), that the task of scholars should be to encourage progressive forms 
of management.

Of course there is considerable scope for further research to investigate, for instance, 
whether white collar employees will continue to seek self-fulfilment and meaning through 
work, given the current economic challenges and less buoyant labour markets. Other 
research could explore the nature of ‘mutuality’ in the employment relationship from the 
perspectives of different stakeholder. It could also seek examples of where mutuality within
the employment relationship has been achieved and what difference this makes in terms of different stakeholder outcomes. Future research could also examine the nature of leadership required for a more mutual employment relationship to exist.

This thesis represents an attempt to bridge the stereotypical 'knowing-doing' gap described by Pfeffer and Sutton (1999). I believe that I have presented a rich and valuable historical picture of what it is like to be an employee working in the new work culture and drawn attention to a number of important issues and complexities through this 'real world' enquiry. I have attempted to reveal the reality of the daily lived experience by employees of the new work culture, in particular of HRM policy and practice, within which the state of the psychological contract acts as the weather gauge of the employment relationship. I have also combined my own knowledge of management, including executive management, 'from the inside' with a theoretical view of labour process. I have attempted to both acknowledge these aspects and also contribute to the development of more ethical aspects of working and managing.

As such I believe I have made a contribution to new knowledge at what may prove to be a critical juncture for neo-liberal capitalism and I agree with Hutton (2010:395) when he says:

'We are starting to understand the link between fairness, prosperity and the good life. Now we just have to deliver it. After all, we deserve better'.
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Appendix 1

Timeline: Key research phases and research strands

- First UKES carried out
- Strand 1: UKES meta-study Broad trends
- Strand 2: Meaning at Work study
- Strand 3: HR Leader Interviews – Stage 1
- Strand 3: HR Leader Stage 2 Interviews completed

1997
PhD studies began (2001)

2000-2003
Joined Organisation C -suspended studies 1 year

2004-5

2006
Joined Organisation D -suspended studies 1 year

2007

2009
Left Organisation D

Literature review
Appendix 2

Relevant publications by Linda Holbeche


### Appendix 3

**Core research questions, empirical research questions and research strands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Research Questions</th>
<th>Empirical Questions</th>
<th>Research Strand</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. What were the macro political, economic and technological changes which have led to the emergence of a 'new work culture'?</strong></td>
<td>How is the 'new work culture' defined in the literature?</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>Two and Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the key macro-economic and political drivers for a new work culture?</td>
<td>Literature Review UKES</td>
<td>Two and Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is technology used within the new work culture?</td>
<td>Literature Review UKES</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well is the role of HRM in the new work culture represented in the mainstream and critical HRM literatures?</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do HRM practices contribute to the development and perpetuation of the new work culture?</td>
<td>How does HRM impact on white collar career development and career management practice?</td>
<td>Literature Review, UKES, HR leader interviews</td>
<td>Three, Five, Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is performance management used to develop the new work culture?</td>
<td>Literature Review, Reflexive case study</td>
<td>Three, Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To what extent do HR policies relating to work-life balance mitigate the effects of the long hours' culture on employee wellbeing?</td>
<td>Literature Review, UKES</td>
<td>Three, Five</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3. What were the characteristics of the new work culture, as perceived by employees? | What evidence exists of increasing work intensification? | UKES | Five  
Meaning at Work study | Seven  

| | What evidence exists of increasing flexibilisation of work? | UKES | Five  
Meaning at Work study | Seven  

| | What evidence exists of the commodification of white collar work? | UKES | Five  
Meaning at Work study | Seven  

| 4. How did employees experience a 'new work culture'? | How are employees reacting to increasing workloads and long working hours? | UKES | Five  
Meaning at Work study | Seven  

| | What evidence exists of employees experiencing increasing job insecurity? | UKES | Five  
Meaning at Work study | Seven  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent is the 'employability thesis' working?</td>
<td>UKES</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What support do employees expect/hope for from their employers?</td>
<td>UKES</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What evidence exists that employees no longer trust their employers?</td>
<td>Meaning at Work study</td>
<td>Seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent are employees experiencing existential loss of meaning in the new work culture?</td>
<td>Meaning at Work study</td>
<td>Seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the evidence for Sennett describes as the cultural ideal of new capitalism i.e. people developing their potential, getting rich by thinking short term, and regretting nothing since they no longer hang on to the past?</td>
<td>Meaning at Work study</td>
<td>Seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To what extent were employees able to exercise agency?</td>
<td>What evidence exists of employees complying with managerial demands for increasing workloads?</td>
<td>UKES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How well do employees appear able to cope with the increasing demands made of them?</td>
<td>UKES, Meaning at Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What evidence exists that employees are willing to continue to make personal sacrifices in order to progress their careers?</td>
<td>UKES, Meaning at Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How willing are employees to manage their own careers?</td>
<td>UKES, Meaning at Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>How did HRM professionals view their role with respect to the new work culture?</td>
<td>UKES HR Leader interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does the discourse of senior HR practitioners reveal about their focus and priorities?</td>
<td>HR Leader interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does this discourse reveal about the nature of the 'partnership' between employees and employers within the employment relationship?</td>
<td>HR Leader interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To what extent do these HR practitioners appear to act as subjects, or agents of the new work culture?</td>
<td>HR Leader interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do these practitioners seek to develop the next generation of HR practitioners?</td>
<td>HR Leader interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If contact details on the address label are incorrect, please amend in the space provided below:

Name

Position

Organisation

Address
Survey Guidelines

The aim of the UKES is to find out about the issues and challenges that you are facing in the workplace, and your ability to adapt to the changing nature of organisations and organisational life.

The UKES is split into five sections:
- Organisational Change
- Organisational Life
- Organisational Culture
- The Employee Deal
- Working Across Boundaries

Under each section there are a set of questions on a number of different issues (detailed in the index above). The majority of questions are closed and offer tick box options; you might be asked to tick just one box, for others you might be asked to tick as many as apply. There are also a limited number of open questions where we invite you to add additional comments and ideas about elements of your organisational life and learning points. When answering the survey always go to the next question unless instructed otherwise.

All the answers you give will be totally confidential but will be collated with other completed surveys to provide a report, available for sale at Organisation B in January 2004.

Please check that you have completed each of the five sections to the best of your ability. Sign off and return the whole document:
- In the reply paid envelope provided (Freepost No. ...)
- If you have any queries about completing the questionnaire, help can be obtained from X
- Closing date for return of questionnaires is 3rd October – and we would greatly appreciate an early return.

For each completed survey we will send a full executive summary of the research findings.
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### Demographic Information

1. **What sex are you? Please tick:**
   - Male □
   - Female □

2. **What is your age? Please tick:**
   - 20-30 □
   - 31-40 □
   - 41-50 □
   - 51-60 □
   - 60+ □

3. **What type of company do you work for? Please tick:**
   - Aerospace / Defence □
   - Catering / Leisure □
   - Building / Construction □
   - Central Government □
   - Charity / Not for profit □
   - Local Government □
   - Distribution / Transport □
   - Media / Publishing □
   - Education □
   - National Health Service □
   - Energy / Water □
   - Private Health Services □
   - Financial Services □
   - Other services □
   - Heavy Manufacturing □
   - Retail / Wholesale □
   - IT □
   - Telecommunications □
   - Legal Services □
   - Light Manufacturing □
   - Consultancy □
   - Other (please specify below) □

4. **Where is the market for your organisation’s products and services? Please tick:**
   - UK only □
   - Europe □
   - International □
   - Global □

5. **How long has your organisation been established? Please tick:**
   - 0 - 5 yrs □
   - 6 - 10 yrs □
   - 11 - 20 yrs □
   - 21 - 30 yrs □
   - 31 - 50 years □
   - 51 - 70 yrs □
   - 71 - 90 yrs □
   - 91 + yrs □

6. **How many people does your organisation employ? Please tick:**
   - Up to 50 □
   - 51 - 250 □
   - 251 - 1,000 □
   - 1,001 - 5,000 □
   - 5,001 + □

7. **How long have you been with the organisation (O) and in your current job (J)? Please tick:**
   - Less than 2 years □
   - 2 - 4 years □
   - 5 - 7 years □
8. How would you describe your main role? Please tick:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>8 - 10 years</th>
<th>11+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>□ 4</td>
<td>□ 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>□ 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Management</td>
<td>□ 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales / Marketing</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>□ 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify below)</td>
<td>□ 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. What level is your role? Please tick:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>8 - 10 years</th>
<th>11+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board Director</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Director / Senior Manager</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
<td>□ 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Manager</td>
<td>□ 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify below)</td>
<td>□ 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organisational Change

10. Has your organisation undergone any structure and system changes in the last 2 years? Please tick:

Yes □₁  No □₂ (If no, go to Q20)

11. Has the change resulted in a higher level of organisational performance? Please tick:

Yes □₁  No □₂  Too early to say □₃

12. What is the focus of the change? Please tick all that apply:

Restructuring □₁  IT □₉
Product development □₂  Production in the developing world □₁₀
Marketing □₃  Downsizing □₁₁
Supply chain management □₄  E-business operations □₁₂
Quality □₅  Risk management □₁₃
Team processes □₆  Other (please specify below) □₁₄
Relocation □₇
Outsourcing □₈

13. Has the change resulted in any of the following within the organisation? Please tick all that apply:

Global teams □₁  Flexible working □₉
Home-working □₂  Move away from final salary pensions □₁₀
Virtual teams □₃  Matrix structure □₁₁
Use of Call Centres □₄  Reintroduced layers of management □₁₂
Use of contractors □₅  Flatter structure □₁₃
Shared services □₆  Mergers & Acquisitions □₁₄
24-hour operations □₇  Culture change □₁₅
Strategic Alliances □₈  Other (please specify below) □₁₆

14. What support does the organisation provide to help you through the changes? Please tick all that apply:

Training in transition skills □₁  Effective performance management systems □₄
Adequate resources to do the job □₂  Other (please specify below) □₅
Training in coaching skills to do the job □₃
15. **What impact has the change had on your role?** Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I am working longer hours</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I am managing remotely</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I am managing 3rd party relationships of teams (e.g. suppliers / contractors)</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. I am working smarter not harder</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. I need to manage conflict</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. I need to acquire IT skills</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. I need to integrate teams</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. I need to manage my own career</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. I am focusing on innovation</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. **If your organisation has undergone structure change, do you feel that the changed structure is working effectively?** Please tick:

- Yes □ 1
- No □ 2
- Too early to say □ 3

17. **Who is mainly responsible for managing the change process within your organisation?** Please tick one:

- Board □ 1
- HR □ 2
- Line Managers □ 3
- Internal Consultant □ 4
- External Consultants □ 5
- Other (please specify below) □ 6

18. **How is your organisation responding to challenges in the political and economic environment?** Please tick as many as apply:

- Downsizing / redundancies □ 1
- Focusing on core business □ 2
- Cost spending restrictions □ 3
- Will look for new markets □ 4
- Will reduce or suspend recruiting □ 5
- Will look for new products and services □ 6
- Less investment in employees □ 7
- More investment in employees □ 8
- Will acquire other businesses □ 9
- Will work in partnership arrangements □ 10
- Other (please specify below) □ 11

19. **How are political and economic environmental factors affecting you as an employee?** Please tick as many as apply:

- I feel secure in my job □ 1
- I feel worried about the future □ 2
- I feel optimistic about the future □ 3
- I feel more loyal to my organisation □ 4
- I feel less loyal to my □ 5
- I am looking for more meaning in my life □ 7
- I have deferred plans for retirement □ 8
- I expect not to be able to retire until 65 at least □ 9
- I am developing new skills □ 10
- I feel confident of finding work □ 11
The UKES Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>organisation</th>
<th>□ 5</th>
<th>elsewhere</th>
<th>□ 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have (re)joined a union</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other (please specify below)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Page 10
**Conflict resolution in times of change**

20. In recent years has conflict within your organisation: Please tick:
   - Increased □₁
   - Decreased □₂
   - Stayed the same □₃

21. What do you believe are the main factors causing conflict within your organisation? Please tick all that apply:
   - Power / status □₁
   - Unwillingness to compromise □₂
   - Low self-esteem, limiting beliefs □₃
   - Resources □₄
   - Ways of doing things □₅
   - Clash of values □₆
   - Different goals, purpose, agenda □₇
   - Differences in personalities □₈
   - Other (please specify) □₉

22. What are the main methods of conflict resolution within your organisation? Please tick all that apply:
   - Mediation □₁
   - Facilitation □₂
   - Bullying □₃
   - Avoiding it/pretending it's not there □₄

23. To what extent do you trust your:
   - To a great extent
   - To some extent
   - To a limited extent
   - Leader □₁ □₂ □₃
   - Senior managers □₁ □₂ □₃
   - Peers □₁ □₂ □₃
   - Subordinates □₁ □₂ □₃

24. What do you perceive to be the biggest issues that affect trust at work?

   __________________________________________________________

   __________________________________________________________

   __________________________________________________________

**Risk management**

25. Is risk management a key issue for your organisation at present? Please tick:
   - Yes □₁
   - No □₂

26. Does your organisation have a risk management strategy? Please tick:
   - Yes □₁
   - No □₂

27. What does that strategy mean in practice?

   __________________________________________________________

   __________________________________________________________

   __________________________________________________________
Strategy

28. Who is involved in developing strategy within your organisation? Please tick all that apply:

- Top managers only □ 1
- Top managers and middle managers □ 2
- Designated teams □ 3
- People at all levels □ 4
- Other (please specify below) □ 5

29. How are people involved in the strategy-making processes? Please tick all that apply:

- Large Scale Interventions □ 1
- Surveys □ 2
- Direct involvement in planning processes □ 3
- Ideas □ 4
- Other (please specify below) □ 5
Organisational Life

Demands

30. Please indicate which of the following statements relates most closely to your experience: Please tick:
   - I feel the organisation does not make enough demands of me □ 1 (go to Q33)
   - I feel that the organisation makes reasonable demands of me □ 2
   - I feel that the organisation make excessive demands of me □ 3

31. If you feel the organisation makes excessive demands of you, in what way? Please tick all that apply:
   - Through demands to constantly develop new skills / get more qualifications □ 1
   - Through demands to work longer hours □ 2
   - Through demanding increased quality of output □ 3
   - Through demanding increased quantity of output □ 4
   - Other (please specify below) □ 5

32. Do you perceive these experiences as: Please tick:
   - Positive □ 1  
   - Negative □ 2  
   - Both positive and negative □ 3

33. Do you experience stress as a result of work? Please tick:
   - Yes □ 1 
   - No □ 2 (If no, go to Q36)

34. What do you perceive to be the major stressors experienced in your working life? Please tick all that apply:
   - Increased workload □ 1 
   - Lack of time □ 2 
   - Increased responsibility □ 3 
   - None □ 4 
   - Lack of control over workload □ 5 
   - Insecurity □ 6 
   - Length of working day □ 7 
   - Lack of support □ 8 
   - Relationships □ 9 
   - Other (please specify below) □ 10

35. What can the organisation do to help alleviate some of the pressure put upon you at work? Please tick all that apply:
   - Review workloads regularly □ 1 
   - Open up communication channels □ 2 
   - Provide family friendly policies □ 3 
   - Increase human resources □ 4 
   - Increase financial resources □ 5 
   - Train managers to coach □ 6 
   - Increase flexible working options □ 7 
   - Maintain or improve current pension arrangements □ 8 
   - Other (please specify below) □ 9 

36. Please describe any coping strategies that you may have for dealing with work pressure:
**Harassment at work**

37. To what extent is there harassment in your workplace? Please tick:

- To a great extent □ 1
- To a limited extent □ 3
- To some extent □ 2
- I have seen no evidence of harassment in my workplace □ 4 (Go to Q40)

38. Please indicate what form this harassment takes (Please tick all that apply)

- Being excluded/sidelined □ 1
- Physical attacks □ 5
- Sexual harassment □ 2
- Long hours culture □ 6
- Verbal harassment □ 3
- Bullying □ 7
- Physical threats □ 4
- Other (Please specify below) □ 8

39. If you have experienced harassment at work, who perpetrates it? Please tick all that apply:

- Your boss □ 1
- Your subordinates □ 4
- Senior managers within the organisation □ 2
- Your customers □ 5
- Your colleagues □ 3
- Other (Please specify below) □ 6

40. Do you belief that whilst at work you have ever been discriminated against on the grounds of your: (Please tick all that apply)

- Age □ 1
- Disability □ 2
- Gender □ 3
- Sexuality □ 4
- Ethnicity □ 5
- Religion □ 8
- Class/social background □ 7
- I have not been discriminated against □ 8
- Other (Please specify below) □ 9

**Political Behaviour**

41. Has political behaviour increased in your organisation in recent years? Please tick:

- Yes □ 1
- No □ 2

42. Do you engage in political behaviour? Please tick:

- Yes □ 1
- No □ 2 (If no, go to Q45)
43. **If yes, why? Please tick one:**
   - I have to - survival is at stake
   - It's the norm in my organisation
   - I consider it essential to getting things done
   - I enjoy it
   - I have gained power and influence as a result
   - Other (Please specify below)
44. What are your strategies for being successful in a political environment? Please tick:

45. To what extent do you think that team working is important within your organisation? Please tick:
- Very important □ 1
- Unimportant □ 3
- Important □ 2
- Very unimportant □ 4

46. Do you perceive team working to be on the increase or decrease within your organisation? Please tick:
- Increase □ 1
- Decrease □ 2

47. Do you perceive team working to be generally effective? Please tick:
- Yes □ 1 (If yes, go to Q49)
- No □ 2

48. If you feel that team working within your organisation is suffering, why is this? Please tick all that apply:
- Individual priorities for own career and development □ 1
- Complexity of matrix structures □ 4
- Poor team leadership □ 2
- Poor team processes □ 5
- Team working is not rewarded □ 3
- Other (Please specify below) □ 6

Communication
49. What communication processes do you find most useful/effective within your organisation? Please tick all that apply:
- One to one’s □ 1
- Memos □ 2
- Reports □ 3
- Team briefings □ 4
- Meetings □ 5
- Intranet communications □ 8
- E-mails □ 7
- Other (please specify) □ 8
Leadership

'Distant' or strategic leadership concerns responsibility for the organisation's vision and mission, culture, strategy, and understanding the environment in which the organisation operates, to achieve organisation aims.

50. In this area of 'distant' leadership, how would you rate leadership generally in your organisation? Please tick:
   Very poor □ 1, Poor □ 2, Good □ 3, Excellent □ 4

'Near-by' leadership is about having a positive effect on the performance, productivity, job-satisfaction, and self-esteem of the people you work alongside.

51. In this area of 'near-by' leadership, how would you rate leadership generally in your organisation? Please tick:
   Very poor □ 1, Poor □ 2, Good □ 3, Excellent □ 4

52. Do you think that being a leader is part of being a good manager? Please tick:
   Yes □ 1, No □ 2

53. Do you think that top managers in your organisation act as leaders? Please tick:
   Yes □ 1, No □ 2, Some □ 3

54. Is leadership actively being developed at all levels within your organisation? Please tick:
   Yes □ 1, No □ 2

55. What do you want/expect from leaders within your organisation?

Middle Managers

56. How would you define the ideal (I) role of the middle manager within your organisation and the actual (A) role? Please tick all that apply:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning orientated</td>
<td>□1</td>
<td>□1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control and monitoring orientated</td>
<td>□2</td>
<td>□2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking strategy and operations</td>
<td>□3</td>
<td>□3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing contracts</td>
<td>□4</td>
<td>□4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing team-working</td>
<td>□5</td>
<td>□5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant to the business</td>
<td>□6</td>
<td>□6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive to change</td>
<td>□7</td>
<td>□7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling others</td>
<td>□8</td>
<td>□8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
57. In the last 5 years, within your organisation has this role:
   - Increased in importance: □
   - Decreased in importance: □
   - Stayed the same: □

Performance Management

58. In your organisation, what is the average span of control of a line manager? Please tick:
   - 1-6 people: □
   - 7-12 people: □
   - 12+ people: □

59. Do you feel that your contribution to the organisation is recognised by:
   - Greatly: □
   - To some extent: □
   - Not at all: □
   - Your manager: □
   - Your peers: □
   - Your subordinates: □

60. Would you say that feedback regarding your performance:
   (Please tick all that apply)
   - Is given often: □
   - Is given too infrequently: □
   - Is helpful: □
   - Is unhelpful: □
   - Motivates you: □
   - Boosts performance: □
   - Other (please specify): □

61. Are you encouraged to review what you have done and how you have done it? Please tick:
   - Yes: □
   - No: □

62. Do you feel that you are rewarded appropriately for your contribution to the organisation? Please tick:
   - Yes: □
   - No: □

63. Has there been a shift towards flexible reward packages within your organisation? Please tick:
   - Yes: □
   - No: □ (If no, go to Q65)

64. If Yes, do you welcome this change? Please tick:
65. Does your reward system include performance related pay? Please tick:
   Yes □₁   No □₂   (If no, go to Q67)

66. **If yes**, what is singled out for bonuses? Please tick:
   - Teamwork □₁
   - Outstanding individual results □₄
   - Bottom-line results □₂
   - Other (Please specify below) □₃
   - Leadership behaviour □₃

67. How would you like to be rewarded?

68. How would you rate the level of morale within the organisation at present?
   Please tick:
   - High □₁
   - Average □₂
   - Low □₃

69. Are there clear lines of accountability within your organisation? Please tick:
   Yes □₁   No □₂

70. Are you given the appropriate level of authority to do your job? Please tick:
   Yes □₁   No □₂

**Internal Consultancy**

We define an internal consultant as someone working within the organisation supporting managers and the business to achieve its goals across a broad range of activities.

71. Does your organisation have an internal consultant team? Please tick:
   Yes □₁   No □₂   (If yes, go to Q73)

72. **If no**, do you think your organisation would benefit from an internal consultancy team? Please tick:
   Yes □₁   No □₂   (Go to Q75)

73. What are the biggest challenges faced by internal consultants? Please tick all that apply:
   - Lack of understanding of role within the business □₁
   - Lack of senior support □₂
   - Budgets / funding to complete project □₃
   - Lack of power to action projects / proposals □₄
   - Lack of skills / knowledge □₅
   - Lack of trust □₆
   - Other (Please specify below) □₇

74. What services do the consultancy team provide? Please tick all that apply:
Facilitators
75. Do you use facilitators within your organisation? Please tick:
   Yes □ 1  No □ 2  (If no, go to Q78)

76. If yes, who do you use as facilitators? Please tick:
   Internal facilitators □ 1
   External facilitators □ 2
   Both internal and external facilitators □ 3

77. What do you use facilitators for? Please tick as many as apply:
   Total Quality Management □ 1  Top management □ 5
   Meetings □ 2  Conflict situations □ 6
   Focus groups □ 3  Other (Please specify below) □ 7
   Training away days □ 4

Perception of HR
78. How would you describe the HR function in your organisation? Please tick as many as apply:
   Reactive □ 1  Out of touch □ 7
   Proactive □ 2  Producing too many initiatives □ 8
   Too powerful □ 3  Producing relevant and timely initiatives □ 9
   Lacking in credibility □ 4  Not influential □ 10
   Adding value to the business □ 5  Other (Please specify below) □ 11
   Customer focused □ 6

79. What do you perceive to be the main challenges for HR as a function? Please tick as many as apply:
   Transitioning to new roles □ 1  Becoming more strategic □ 5
   Influencing senior managers □ 2  Managing change □ 6
   Aligning the business □ 3  Keeping abreast of developments □ 7
   Being customer focused □ 4  Other (Please specify below) □ 8

e-Learning
80. Does your organisation (O) and do you personally (P) use e-learning as a development tool? Please tick:
   O □  P
The UKES Questionnaire

81. Do you see this becoming a popular medium for development in the future? Please tick:
   Yes □ 1, No □ 2 (If no, go to Q83)

82. If Yes, in what area? Please tick:
   Health & Safety □ 1, Management Development □ 4,
   Inductions □ 2, Operational Training □ 3,
   Qualifications □ 3, Other (Please specify below) □ 6

83. How would you rate its success? Please tick:
   Very successful □ 1, Unsuccessful □ 3,
   Successful □ 2, Very unsuccessful □ 4

84. In your experience which of the following works best? Please tick:
   E-learning □ 1, Face-to-face □ 2, A combination of the two □ 3

Knowledge Management

85. Please indicate to what extent knowledge management is an important business priority in your organisation? Please tick:
   Very important □ 1 (Go to Q87), Unimportant □ 3 (Go to Q86),
   Important □ 2, Very unimportant □ 4

86. If knowledge management is a low business priority in your organisation please indicate why? Please tick:
   Already have effective knowledge management processes in place □ 1,
   Seen as IT or HR Department's responsibility □ 4,
   Lack of understanding of the benefits of knowledge management □ 2,
   Other (Please specify below) □ 5

87. What was the main driver for introducing knowledge management into the organisation? Please tick one:
   Enhanced profitability □ 1, Speed up the development of new products □ 5,
   Improved internal efficiency □ 2, Minimise wastage through sharing good practice □ 6,
   Improved market share □ 3, Other (Please specify below) □ 7,
   Enhanced customer service □ 4

88. How are knowledge management activities rewarded? Please tick one:
   Pay increase □ 1, Additional development opportunities □ 4,
   Career enhancement □ 2, No specific rewards apply □ 5
Enhanced responsibilities \( \Box_3 \) Other (Please specify below) \( \Box_6 \)
Organisational Culture

Creativity

89. To what extent are employees encouraged to be creative in your organisation? Please tick one:

Greatly □ 1
To a limited extent □ 3
To some extent □ 2
Not at all □ 4

90. How successful do you think the organisation is at fostering creativity? Please tick:

Very successful □ 1
Quite successful □ 3
Successful □ 2
Not at all unsuccessful □ 4

(Go to Q92)

91. If the organisation is successful, what do you think enables this creativity? Please tick as many as apply:

- The Reward System □ 1
- The culture supports creativity □ 2
- The leaders of the organisation act creatively □ 3
- The competency framework encourages creativity □ 4
- There is limited bureaucracy within the organisation □ 5
- Employees have the time to be creative □ 6
- Working practices within teams/departments encourage creativity □ 7
- People are given the freedom to make mistakes □ 8
- There are training programmes on creativity available to employees □ 9
- We have away days which focus on thinking creatively □ 10
- The creativity room/area □ 11
- Imaginative use of space □ 12
- Other (Please specify below) □ 13

(Go to Q93)

92. If the organisation is unsuccessful, what do you think blocks creativity? Please tick as many as apply:

- The reward system □ 1
- The impact it would have on the rest of my job □ 2
- The culture does not support creativity □ 3
- The leaders of the organisation do not act creatively □ 4
- The amount of bureaucracy □ 5
- Employees don’t have the time to be creative □ 6
- Working practices within teams/departments discourage creativity □ 7
- People are not given the freedom to make mistakes □ 8
- Employees are primarily rewarded on delivering bottom line results □ 9
- Other (Please specify below) □ 10

Values

93. Does your organisation say it espouses particular values to be practised? Please tick:

Yes □ 1
No □ 2
94. Do you think these values reflect the actual values of management within the organisation? Please tick:
Yes ☐ (If yes, go to Q97) No ☐
The UKES Questionnaire

95. If no, what are the discrepancies? Please tick all that apply:

Managers don't walk the talk □ 1
The reward systems contradict the values □ 2
There is no incentive to practice the values □ 3
Making money comes before organisational values □ 4
Shareholder needs count for more than those of customers/employees □ 5
Other (please specify below) □ 6

96. What would need to change to remove these discrepancies? Please tick all that apply:

All managers model values □ 1
Managers penalised for not walking the talk □ 2
Cultural change □ 3
Reward systems need to be linked to values □ 4
Leaders ensure customer and employee needs are taken as seriously as shareholder needs □ 5
Other (please specify) □ 6

97. Are your organisational values:
(Please tick as many as apply)

Written down Yes □ 1 No □ 2
Implicit Yes □ 1 No □ 2
Regularly revised Yes □ 1 No □ 2
Newly developed Yes □ 1 No □ 2
Effectively communicated Yes □ 1 No □ 2

Corporate Social Responsibility

98. Does your organisation have a Corporate Social Responsibility statement? Please tick:

Yes □ 1 No □ 2 (If no, go to Q100)

99. If so, who drives the agenda? Please tick:

Board □ 1 Senior Management □ 2 Employee group □ 3

100. To what extent is your organisation environmentally and socially responsible:
Please tick:

Greatly □ 1 To a lesser extent □ 3
To some extent □ 2 Not at all □ 4 (If not at all, go to Q102)

101. If so, in what ways? Please tick:

Recycling □ 1 Ethical and fair treatment of developing countries □ 5
Help in the community □ 2 Producing safe products □ 6
Fundraising for charity □ 3 Strong implementation of diversity and equal opportunities □ 7
Vigorous auditing procedures □ 4 Other (please specify) □ 8
102. Is Corporate Social Responsibility of personal importance to you? Please tick:

Yes ☐  No ☐
103. What impact have recent events such as the ‘Enron scandal’ and ‘fat cat payouts’ had upon you? Please tick all that apply:
- I ignore them; they don’t affect me □1
- I accept them - they are a fact of life □2
- Increased cynicism □3
- It has made me lose trust in corporate leaders □4
- It has made me lose commitment to my organisation □5
- Other (please specify below) □6

Meaning and purpose at work

104. Would you say that you are looking for more sense of meaning in your working life? Please tick:
- Yes □1
- No □2

105. Would you say that your personal values have a spiritual aspect to them? Please tick:
- Yes □1
- No □2 (If no, go to Q107)

106. Do you ever find tensions between the spiritual side of your values and your work? Please tick:
- Yes □1
- No □2

107. How strong is the collective sense of purpose in your organisation? Please tick:
- High □1
- Medium □2
- Low □3

108. How much do you stretch yourself and go the extra mile to get things done? Please tick:
- Often □1
- Sometimes □2
- Rarely □3

109. The stated fundamental purpose of the organisation I work for is:
(Please tick as many as apply)
- Maximising shareholder value □1
- Delivering customer value □2
- Balancing stakeholder interests □3
- Providing employment and development for its people □4
- Other (Please specify below) □5

110. In practice, the actual fundamental purpose the organisation lives by is:
(Please tick as many as apply)
- Maximising shareholder value □1
- Delivering customer value □2
- Balancing stakeholder interests □3
- Providing employment and development for its people □4
111. From a purely financial perspective, I would describe my organisation over the long-term as being? Please tick:

- Highly successful □ 1
- Not particularly successful □ 3
- Moderately successful □ 2
- Other (please specify below) □ 4

**Diversity**

112. Which of the following does your organisation address as part of its diversity activities? Please tick all that apply:

- Institutional racism □ 1
- Bullying/harassment □ 6
- Institutional sexism □ 2
- Disability □ 7
- Religion □ 3
- Class/social background □ 8
- Sex orientation □ 4
- Cross-cultural awareness □ 9
- Age □ 5
- Other (Please specify below) □ 10

113. How does your organisation attempt to maximise diversity? Please tick all that apply:

- Work-life balance □ 1
- Differing learning styles □ 2
- Team creation / team building □ 3
- Recruitment and selection □ 4
- Promotion decisions □ 5
- Training opportunities □ 6
- Social activities □ 7
- Other (please specify) □ 8

114. How actively is diversity managed within your organisation? Please tick:

- Not at all □ 1
- Actively □ 3
- To a limited extent □ 2
- Very actively □ 4

115. Do you think barriers exist to inhibit women’s progress into senior management? Please tick:

- Yes □ 1
- No □ 2

116. Do you think barriers exist to inhibit ethnic minority’s progress into senior management? Please tick:

- Yes □ 1
- No □ 2
The UKES Questionnaire

**The Employee Deal**

**Careers**

117. How important are career issues for you (Y) and your organisation (O) at present? Please tick:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Y</th>
<th>O</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

118. How committed do you feel towards your organisation? Please tick:

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>□</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

119. How committed do you think your organisation is to you? Please tick:

<table>
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<th>□</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

120. Are there opportunities to move jobs within your profession at present? Please tick:

Yes □, No □ (If no, go to Q122)

121. If yes, are you considering a move in the near future? Please tick:

Yes □, No □

122. Who do you feel is responsible for the development of your career? Please tick:

Myself □, The organisation □, Myself and the organisation □

123. Do you feel secure in your job at the moment? Please tick:

Yes □, No □

124. Do you feel fully equipped to manage your own career? Please tick:

Yes □, No □

125. What is the probable direction your career development will take? Please tick as many as apply:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>□</th>
<th>□</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same job, same organisation</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar job, different organisation</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different job, same organisation</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal move</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical promotion</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio career</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self employment</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work as contractor</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time permanent employment</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time permanent employment</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Page 30
Other (Please specify below) □
126. What are the biggest de-motivators you experience at work? Please tick as many as apply:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of recognition</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands to always do more</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No new challenges</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of development opportunities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of promotion opportunities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

127. What motivates you at work? Please tick as many as apply:

| Personal drive | 1 |
| Recognition by others | 2 |
| Financial rewards and perks | 3 |
| Helping others succeed | 4 |
| Opportunity for promotion | 5 |
| Personal achievement | 6 |
| Being part of a successful team | 7 |
| Enjoyment of job | 8 |
| Challenges       | 9 |
| The nature of the job | 10 |
| Power/influence  | 11 |
| Learning new skills | 12 |
| Fun               | 13 |
| Other (Please specify below) | 14 |

**Grades**

128. In your opinion, what do you think are the key factors that attract graduates to organisations? Please tick all that apply:

| Work-life balance | 1 |
| Development opportunities | 2 |
| Flexible working options | 3 |
| Challenge          | 4 |
| Home-based working | 5 |
| Money              | 6 |
| Fun                | 7 |
| Other (please specify below) | 8 |

**Mature applicants**

129. Is your organisation doing any of the following to attract and retain mature applicants? Please tick all that apply:

| Offering flexible retirement | 1 |
| Offering the opportunity to receive pension while working part-time | 2 |
| Target recruitment          | 3 |
| Providing skills update (or back to work training) | 4 |
| Removing age-related policies and practices | 5 |
| Extending retirement age    | 6 |
| More flexible hours of work | 7 |
| Improving work-life balance | 8 |
| Other (please specify)      | 9 |

**Motivating in tough times**

130. How does your organisation attempt to motivate people in tough times? Please tick all that apply:

| Training and development | 1 |
| Career coaching          | 2 |
| Match assignments to employee motivational needs | 7 |
| Employee involvement and | 8 |
131. Who do you think has the most important role to play in this? Please tick one:

- HR □
- Line managers □
- Senior managers □
- Leaders □
- Other □

132. Do you consistently work longer than your contracted working week? Please tick:

- Yes □
- No □ (If no, go to Q136)

133. If yes, how many extra hours do you work on average each week? Please tick:

- Less than 5 □
- Between 11 and 15 □
- Between 5 and 10 □
- More than 15 □

134. How does this compare to last year? Please tick:

- More □
- Same □
- Less □

135. Why do you work extra hours? Please tick all that apply:

- Increasing workload □
- My manager expects it □
- Most other people do so I feel I need to □
- I enjoy my work and want to succeed □
- To be successful in my organisation you need to work long hours □
- Commitment is measured by hours spent at work □
- I would worry about my security within the organisation if I didn’t work long hours □
- Other (please specify below) □
139. Does your organisation have an established business case for work-life balance? Please tick:
    Yes □₁  No □₂

140. Do you currently have a satisfactory balance between your work and personal life? Please tick:
    Yes □₁  (If yes, go to Q142)  No □₂

141. If no, are you considering leaving your current organisation to achieve a better balance? Please tick:
    Yes □₁  No □₂

142. Do you as a manager actively support your staff in relation to home/work balance? Please tick:
    Yes □₁  No □₂ (If no, go to Q144)

143. Do you experience any difficulties in trying to enable your team to achieve a balance between their work and personal lives? Please tick:
    Yes □₁  No □₂

144. Have you made sacrifices for your career in the past? Please tick:
    Yes □₁  No □₂ (If no go to Q147)

145. If yes, what were these sacrifices? Please tick all that apply:
    Missed out on time with children □₁  My physical health suffered □₄
    Broken relationship □₂  Other (please specify below) □₅
    My mental health suffered □₃

146. Why did you feel it was necessary to make these sacrifices? Please tick all that apply:
    To keep my job □₁  ‘The culture expected it’ □₃
    To attain a desired promotion □₂  Other (please specify below) □₄

147. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement, 'I would be willing to make personal sacrifices for my career now if required':
    Strongly agree □₁  Disagree □₄
    Agree □₂  Strongly disagree □₅
    Neither agree nor disagree □₃

148. Over the last year has your workload: Please tick:
    Increased □₁
    Decreased □₂  (Go to Q. 150)
    Stayed the same □₃

149. If it has increased, how do you manage the increased workload? Please tick all that apply:
    Through working longer hours □₁  Sacrificing my health □₆
The UKES Questionnaire

150. What policies and other enablers would make a real difference to work-life balance? Please tick all that apply:

- Crèche and child-care facilities
- Eldercare support
- Home working genuinely supported
- Reduced workloads
- More time

Flexible working

151. Which of the following working patterns are available in your organisation? Please tick all that apply:

- Part-time working
- Job share
- Term-time working
- Tele-working
- Compressed work week

152. Do you think there is a growing demand for different work patterns within your organisation? Please tick:

- Yes □ 1
- No □ 2

153. Would you like to have a more flexible work pattern? Please tick:

- Yes □ 1
- No □ 2

154. Is there support for flexible working from the top of your organisation? Please tick:

- Yes □ 1
- No □ 2

155. How prepared was your organisation for the new legislation on flexible working introduced in April 2003 (affording parents of children under the age of 6 and disabled children the right to apply for flexible working)? Please tick:

- Very little □ 1
- To a greater extent □ 3
- To some extent □ 2
- Very well □ 4

156. Is your organisation considering going beyond compliance and offering the new right to all staff? Please tick:

- Yes □ 1
- No □ 2
157. What is your organisation doing to support managers and employees around the new flexible working options?


158. What do you believe are the key challenges of managing flexible workers?


**Working across boundaries**

*If you do not work for an international / global organisation please go to Q 170*

**Global Management**

159. How does your organisation operate? Please tick one:

- As a mainly domestic, UK business □ 1
- As a multi-domestic business □ 2
- As a multi-national business □ 3
- As a global business □ 4
- Through international Joint Ventures □ 5

160. How does your organisation leverage its ability to operate internationally? Please tick as many as apply:

- Shifts production / customer service to cheaper labour markets □ 1
- Actively develop a pool of international talent □ 2
- Centralises decision-making □ 3
- De-centralises decision-making □ 4
- Crack teams of experts dealing with problems □ 7
- Multi-cultural development focus □ 8
- Uses global/international teams □ 9
- Consciously builds a cross-cultural workforce □ 10
- Other (please specify below) □ 11
- Shared service centre □ 5
- 24 hour operations □ 6

161. Does your organisation provide the opportunity for international careers? Please tick:

- Yes □ 1
- No □ 2

162. If *yes*, what type of international careers are available? Please tick all that apply:

- Expatriate assignments □ 1
- Local assignments managing a cross-cultural team □ 2
- Short-term international projects □ 3
- Other (please specify below) □ 4
163. Which of the following international roles appeals to you the most? Please tick one:

- A home based international role involving some travel
- None - I do not want an international role
- Other (please specify below)

Global Leadership
By global leader we mean a leader who currently has responsibility for guiding parts of or a whole organisation beyond national boundaries. Your leadership role will therefore include having accountabilities / leading teams spanning diverse countries, customers, cultures or time zones. If you do not consider yourself to be a global leader, please go to Q170.

164. How is your global leadership role carried out? Please tick:

- Based overseas on long term basis i.e. 6 months – 2 years or more
- Other (please specify below)

165. How long have you been operating in a global leadership capacity? Please tick:

- Under 12mths
- 1-2 yrs
- 2-5 yrs
- 5 yrs +

166. Which of the following locations are included in your leadership span of operation? Please tick:

- North America (USA / Canada)
- South America (Brazil)
- South Asia (Hong Kong, Singapore, India)
- North Africa & Middle East
- Other, please specify below

167. What contextual challenges do you face in your role? Please tick those that have the most impact on your global leadership role:

- Global Environment Changes (risk of global terrorism, greater tensions in locations operated, greater travel risks, reality and threats of war, natural disasters)
- Downturn in global economy (tougher to do business - pressure on price, market contraction/ tight margins, increased global competition, huge and rapid change)
- Organisation experienced /experiencing trauma (large scale staff)
cutbacks and pressure on resources, major strategy rethink, pressure on margins, takeover/merger potential, suffering impact from terrorism, dealing with large scale talent and skill losses)

Cross Cultural relations (greater need to engage effectively with cross cultural teams, surface and resolve dilemmas/conflict within teams, customers, markets; pressures of communicating effectively across political, ethnic and religious divides)

Global Access (strengthening 'joined up thinking', ability to draw on talent and knowledge across worldwide teams, rethinking what needs to be lead globally vs. locally)

Responsible Corporate Citizenship (ethical and social responsibility issues in diverse locations, greater customer demand for evidence of environmental responsibility)

Other (please specify below)

168. How important are the following Capabilities (i.e. skills, behaviours, attitudes) for you to be effective now and in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capability</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural competence (bridges &amp; reconciles difference, creates inclusive environments)</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Mindset (understands &amp; scans world markets, balances global vs. local needs, unbridled inquisitiveness, open to the unfamiliar)</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic thinking (vision takes account of needs across boundaries, develops and shares knowledge worldwide)</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Astuteness and Savvy (networks effectively with key local &amp; global stakeholder, displays ethical and social responsibility in locations of operation, effective ambassador)</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Character (displays integrity and personal courage, generates local/global goodwill, displays high levels of emotional intelligence)</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation (at ease with ambiguity &amp; uncertainty, develops a taste for surprise, adaptable, thinks quickly and creatively 'outside the box')</td>
<td>□ 1</td>
<td>□ 2</td>
<td>□ 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

169. What other key questions are you grappling with regarding your effectiveness as a global leader?
e-business

If your organisation is not involved in e-business initiatives please go to Q.179

170. What is the purpose behind your organisation’s e-business initiative? Please tick all that apply:

- Increase market share [ ]
- Improve services [ ]
- Increase client base/markets [ ]
- Stay in line with competition [ ]
- Increase profits and/or reduce costs [ ]
- Develop new products and services [ ]
- Modernise the business [ ]
- Other (Please specify below) [ ]

171. What ways do you have of measuring e-business success? Please tick all that apply:

- Customer feedback [ ]
- Usability of system [ ]
- Employee feedback [ ]
- Increased system usage [ ]
- Benchmarking against other organisations [ ]
- Recruitment and retention [ ]
- Regular reviews and assessment [ ]
- Fulfilling planning cycles [ ]
- Adding value to the business financially [ ]
- Other (please specify) [ ]

172. How is employee support / buy in gained? Please tick all that apply:

- Knowledge sharing [ ]
- e-business seen as only option for the future [ ]
- Shares in profits [ ]
- Joint project working [ ]
- Regular communication [ ]
- Supportive management [ ]
- Focus groups [ ]
- Staff input to ideas [ ]
- Internal seminars [ ]
- Testing products and services [ ]
- Training [ ]
- Other (please specify) [ ]

173. What qualities are looked for in e-business leaders/executives? Please tick all that apply:

- Dynamism [ ]
- Vision [ ]
- Flexibility [ ]
- Innovation [ ]
- Lateral thinking [ ]
- Counsellor through e-business upheavals [ ]
- Constantly challenging practices [ ]
- Other (please specify) [ ]

174. What do you see as the biggest issues involved in enabling e-business? Please tick all that apply:

- Mindset [ ]
- Adapting to constant change [ ]
- Employee buy-in [ ]
- Knowledge management [ ]
- Culture change [ ]
- Senior-level support [ ]
- Management guidance and support [ ]
- Developing the right skill-sets [ ]
- Recruiting the right people [ ]
- New business structure and processes [ ]
The UKES Questionnaire

Developing a holistic approach □ 6
Effective communications □ 7
Skills transitioning □ 8
Internet speed □ 9
Appropriate risk-taking □ 15
Boosting employee morale □ 16
Other (please specify below) □ 17

e-HR

If your organisation has implemented e-HR to what extent do you agree with the following statements (if your organisation has not implemented e-HR go to Q179)

175. The e-HR tools reduce my people management workload:
   Strongly agree □ 1
   Agree □ 2
   Neither agree nor disagree □ 3
   Disagree □ 4
   Strongly disagree □ 5

176. The e-HR tools provide fast and accurate data relevant to my business needs:
   Strongly agree □ 1
   Agree □ 2
   Neither agree nor disagree □ 3
   Disagree □ 4
   Strongly disagree □ 5

177. The e-HR tools improve the total quality of HR support available to me:
   Strongly agree □ 1
   Agree □ 2
   Neither agree nor disagree □ 3
   Disagree □ 4
   Strongly disagree □ 5

178. The e-HR tools provide a significant cost saving to the business:
   Strongly agree □ 1
   Agree □ 2
   Neither agree nor disagree □ 3
   Disagree □ 4
   Strongly disagree □ 5
**Strategic Alliances**

**Definition:** We say two organisations have an alliance if they co-operate in activities to their mutual benefit and with shared resources, people, or knowledge. (If you are not involved in strategic alliances go to Q.189)

179. To what extent is your organisation involved in alliances with other organisations? Please tick:
- To a great extent □ 1
- To some extent □ 2

180. How many significant alliances does your organisation have? Please tick:
- One main partner □ 1
- 2-10 □ 2
- More than 10 □ 3

181. Which forms of alliances does your organisation have? Please tick all that apply:
- Informal alliances with key suppliers □ 1
- Alliances with community or voluntary groups □ 2
- Formalised alliances with suppliers e.g. key outsourced services □ 3
- Public-private partnerships □ 4
- Joint ventures □ 5
- Other (please specify below) □ 6

182. Are these alliances?
- UK based □ 1
- Overseas □ 2
- Both in the UK and overseas □ 3

183. What are the key challenges faced whilst working in international alliances? Please tick:
- Legislation □ 1
- Cultural differences □ 2
- Different time zones □ 3
- Other (please specify below) □ 4

184. What do you perceive to be the purpose of your organisation’s alliances? Please tick all that apply:
- Access to new knowledge / technology □ 1
- Protecting existing markets □ 2
- Access to new markets □ 3
- Globalisation □ 4
- Government policies (e.g. ‘joined up’ working, Private Finance Initiatives) □ 5
- Other (please specify) □ 6

185. What proportion of employees would deal with staff of alliance partners in their daily work? Please tick:
- Over half the employees □ 1
- 10-50% of employees □ 2
- Less than 10% □ 3

186. To what extent has alliance working affected your own work over the past three years? Please tick:
- To a great extent □ 1
- To some extent □ 2
- Not at all □ 3

187. If you have been involved in an alliance, what skills have you needed more of to be an effective alliance-worker? Tick all those that apply and to what extent:
- To some degree
- To a great extent
The UKES Questionnaire

a. Business understanding □ 1 □ 2
b. Cultural agility □ 1 □ 2
c. Ability to form relationships □ 1 □ 2
d. Negotiating skills □ 1 □ 2
e. Managing complexity □ 1 □ 2
f. Tolerating ambiguity □ 1 □ 2
g. Emotional intelligence □ 1 □ 2

188. To what extent has your organisation (O) and you personally (P) been involved in Public / Private Partnerships? Please tick:

O   P
To great extent □ 1 □ 1
To some extent □ 2 □ 2
Not at all □ 3 □ 3

Mergers and Acquisitions

Please answer this section if you have experienced a merger, de-merger or acquisition, in your current organisation, during the past 5 years (If not go to Q.198)

189. Were you involved in: Please tick:

A merger □ 1
An acquisition (as the acquired) □ 3
An acquisition (as acquirer) □ 2
De-merger □ 4

190. Was the merger or acquisition: Please tick:

Hostile □ 1  Friendly □ 2

191. Would you consider the merger or acquisition: Please tick:

Successfully □ 1 □ 1
Unsuccessfully □ 2 □ 2

192. Was it an international merger or acquisition? Please tick:

Yes □ 1  No □ 2 (If no, go to Q.194)

193. Is your organisation developing expertise in this kind of working? Please tick:

Yes □ 1  No □ 2

194. Were the stated strategic reasons for the merger or acquisition made clear to you? Please tick:

Yes □ 1  No □ 2 (If no, go to Q.196) Partially □ 3

195. If yes, what was the stated reason? Please tick:

To increase market share □ 1  To acquire customers □ 6
To eliminate competition □ 2  To acquire premises □ 7
Part of a globalisation strategy □ 3  To protect supply □ 8
To utilise surplus cash □ 4  Other (please specify) □ 9
To acquire expertise □ 5
196. Has the merger changed your attitude to work? Please tick:
    Yes □₁, No □₂

197. Please tick which of the following describe your current attitude to your organisation:

- More enthusiastic □₁
- Less committed □₂
- Less loyal □₃
- See new opportunities □₄
- Prepared to do your job but no more □₅
- Pleased to be part of a successful organisation □₆
- Pay more attention to being fairly rewarded □₇
- Resentful □₈
- Angry □₉
- Betrayed □₁₀
- Other (please specify) □₁₁
Organisational Trends

198. What are the trends that your organisation is embracing for the future? Please tick all that apply:

- Centralisation
- Decentralisation
- De-merging
- Merging
- Acquisitions
- Strategic alliances
- Diversification
- Sticking to core business
- Delaying
- Relayering
- Globalisation
- Tele-working
- Hot desking
- Short-term contracts
- Zero hours contracts
- Knowledge management
- 360° feedback
- Line manager as coach
- Outsourcing
- Relationship management
- Total quality management
- E-business
- Organisational renewal
- Public/private partnerships
- More flexible work processes
- Leadership
- Other (please specify below)

199. What are the biggest issues and challenges for your organisation at the moment? Please tick:

- Recruitment
- Retention of key people
- Increasing margins
- Dealing with unstable economic climate
- Developing new products
- Increased competition
- A 'harder' industrial relations climate
- Managing change
- Merger & Acquisition activity
- Increasing speed
- Closing access to final salary pensions for new employees
- Increased regulation and legislation
- Performance management
- Talent Management
- Increasing market share
- Other (please specify below)

Thank you for your time and effort in completing this questionnaire. Please turn over and complete your personal details to receive a free copy of the executive summary.
If there are any areas covered in the questionnaire in which your organisation is doing innovative things and that you would be happy to share your experiences, please can you indicate below:

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Please return the questionnaire in the reply paid envelope no later than Friday 3rd October.
Appendix 5
UKES sample demographics
1999-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Age

Figure 2: Sector
Figure 3: Number of Employees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1,001-5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>251-1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51-250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>up to 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Number of years employed by current employer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of years in organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>11+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>8-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>5-7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>less than 2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Respondent role types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>general management (only 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sales/marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Correlations Age/Level and Years in organisation/Level
There is a significant relationship between how long people have been in organisation and their age and between age and level, but not between years in organisation and level. The data suggests a significant relationship between gender and work role ($\chi^2 = 21.228 p < .05$) and level of role ($\chi^2 = 27.502 p < .01$).
Looking at how these relationships have changed over time there is no clear pattern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kendall’s tau_b</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>organisation</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>239**</td>
<td>.259**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1471</td>
<td>1467</td>
<td>1471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organisation</td>
<td>.239**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.990</td>
<td>.990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1467</td>
<td>1504</td>
<td>1504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>.259**</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.990</td>
<td>.990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1471</td>
<td>1504</td>
<td>1504</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman's rho</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>organisation</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>282**</td>
<td>.282**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1471</td>
<td>1467</td>
<td>1471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organisation</td>
<td>.282**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.983</td>
<td>.983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1467</td>
<td>1504</td>
<td>1504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>.282**</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.983</td>
<td>.983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1471</td>
<td>1504</td>
<td>1508</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**: Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
Appendix 6

HR Leader Interview Questions

Career background

• Could you take me through a potted career history, from any qualifications to your current role?
• What drew you into HR? Did you always know what you wanted to do? Was it a conscious choice or did you get into it by accident?
• In your first HR job, what sort of work were you doing day to day?
• Was there a lesson or skill learned from your first job that has been invaluable on your career path?
• What are the formative events early on in your career?
• What did you learn most in the early stages, what did you learn was important in HR?
• Have you followed a strict HR route?
• How did you acquire business knowledge if you took a solely HR route?
• What were the high/low points of your early career?
• Might you have been equally happy working in some other function (e.g. marketing, finance)?

The role

• Where does HR sit in your organisation?
• What now do you do day to day?
• Where do the instructions or procedures that you’re work with come from?
• What constraints/enablers are present to making decisions?
• What are the greatest challenges you’re currently facing, in your role?
• What is your approach to those challenges?
• What challenges do you see coming up in the future?
• What will your approach to those challenges be?
• What do organisations need to do to survive and thrive? How is HR going to help?
• What initiatives do you have initiatives in place to help the organisation succeed?
• Where have these initiatives come from?
• How do you measure your own success?
• How does your job impact on the business aims of the company?
• Does your job give you an overview of the key management decisions affecting the business?
• If you left the company and were to be replaced internally where would your replacement come from?
• If you had to recruit someone externally what knowledge, skills and experience would you be looking for? What sector would they come from?
• What would be looking for now that you might not have been looking for five years ago? What’s the new skill set of HR?
• What key factors influence employee relations? What’s the worst thing about working in HR/employee relations and the best?
Direct reports

- What skills do you require of your HR teams?
- How are you helping people to develop these skills?
- Talk a little about what it is your direct reports do month to month.
- How good bad or indifferent are they? And when you inherited them?
- Compared with other functions in this organisation, does HR attract its fair share of talent?

General

- What's the mark of a great HR leader? And do you think you measure up to your ideal?
- Do you have an HR mentor?
- Future – What's the role of HR in the organisation?
- How do you see the future or HR in general? Will it disappear?
- Do you think HR will become part of all senior managers' rotation of experience?
- How do you keep up with your sector knowledge?
- What are you currently reading?
- How do you network?
- What's kept you in HR?
- What are the logical next steps, career wise, for you?
- What are your greatest achievements?
- What are your greatest failures?
- Can you give me examples of times when your job is particularly exciting or rewarding?
Appendix 7

Appreciative Inquiry Conversation Guide

The focus of our conversation is the inquiry and learning about “meaning at work.”

Q1 General high-point question

Before we go into “meaning at work” as a specific topic, to start us off, I would like to get a feel for a time when you have felt you have been at your best in your work.

We have all had ups and downs in organisations – some days nothing seems to go right and yet at other times everything just falls into place. I would like you to focus on a moment when things were going really well for you. In particular, I’m interested to know –

What has been a real highpoint for you, an experience (moment, or period of time) that you remember as being exceptional? When have you felt that you have been at your best? It might be a small incident, or something that left a lasting impression; it might be sometime in the very recent past in your current role, or some time ago....

It would be great if you could tell me the story, “paint a vivid picture” of what happened, so please feel free to go into plenty of detail.

- What happened?
- Describe what came next?
- Who was involved?
- How did events unfold?
- What circumstances played a part in making this a memorable experience for you?
- What role did you play in that?
- How were others around you making a difference?
- Etc....

Q2 – Meaning

I would now like you to turn your mind to an experience related directly to when you have had an intense experience of meaning.

I would like you to remember a particular incident, an experience which you felt was particularly successful, that engaged you in a very energised, wholesome and human way....a way which was ultimately “positive” for you.

Tell me as much as you can about this “incident”, describing in rich detail what you and others were doing that you believe contributed directly to its success.
- Describe what came next.
- How did events unfold?
- What role did you play in that?
- How were others around you making a difference?
- What emotions did you notice in yourself and others?
- How did you and others work with these emotions that contributed to the end result of positive change?
- In what way did it encourage people to feel adult, accountable, powerful and free?

Q3 – Think of your own history and experience in organisations

Now think of a time when you have experienced intense meaning at work. Tell me as much as you can about the incident.

(Support questions as above).

Q4 - Creating the future you want

It has been said that one of the most powerful tools for changing our organisation and ourselves is our imagination. This question is a chance for your imagination to have its say.

Imagine that you’ve arrived back at your work to find that a miracle has happened ….. Everyone is now experiencing work and the workplace as very meaningful. What do you notice? What is different?

- What are people doing and not doing that tells you things have really changed?
- What is no longer happening that was previously considered to be routine?
- How did it get here?
- How does it feel?