

# **The Growing Insecurity of Work**

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Eva McLaren

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## INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the transformation of work in the rapidly changing world of globalization. This is especially the case regarding the restructuring and reorganization of work that is required to accommodate flexibility in an environment of increasing competition. Work has been intrinsic in the lives of most human beings in industrial societies. Marx (Abercrombie et al., 1994), for example, held that human labour was the basis of social activity. From early on, children are asked what they want to be when they grow up. Concern has been expressed (Wallulis 1998) that the former bases upon which security in life-planning were built are fast disappearing.

Two assumptions are made in this paper about work and work-related foundations: namely that the world of work as we know it has changed, and that this change is irreversible. Given these assumptions, this paper sets out to explore how these changes have affected perceptions of job security or insecurity and importantly, what strategies, characteristics or traits individuals in the workplace require in order to preserve some security of future employability. Furthermore, the new millennium will offer challenges to children who need to be prepared for a very different employment scenario to that of their parents. Wallulis (1998) actually dedicated his book to his daughters and all other adolescents who are having to be 'contemporary planning offices' and he hopes that they will have at least some of the security in life-planning that he managed to have and took for granted.

In spite of the numerous studies that have been conducted into aspects of job insecurity in the last 20 years, many have examined the narrow confines of insecurity in the workplace through the quantitative, positivistic paradigm. Focus has often been on the micro aspects of organizations undergoing change in terms of restructuring, mergers or rationalization where the threat of insecurity was seen as immediate. In the 1980s, despite the increasing importance of job insecurity, many such as Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) and Ashford, Lee and Bobko (1989), suggested that no adequate theoretical or empirical attention had been paid to job insecurity by organizational researchers. Other researchers have made similar comments. Klandermans, Van Vuuren, Hartley and Jacobson (1991) and more recently, Ranscombe (1998) suggest that a rigorous attempt to encompass the underlying question of what job insecurity tells us about work and employment is missing. Currently, little research exists on the phenomenon of job insecurity as it pertains to ongoing employability. Although Roskies and Louis-Guerin (1990) talk about job insecurity as a '*chronic, ambiguous threat*', they do not examine individual experiences of the employment environment and the capacity of individuals to ensure long-term employability. Dominitz and Manski (1997:262) found that although job insecurity was very much part of the American public discourse, and many studies described the outcomes that individuals actually *experience*, little about the outcomes that individuals actually *expect* has been documented.

This study attempted to provide a framework for understanding uncertainty in the New Zealand employment environment as articulated by managers and supervisors.

They outlined strategies that might be important in their endeavours to ensure ongoing employability. Focus is on the long-term security of employability, not necessarily in the same organization, but rather in terms of enabling sustained economic security.

An ethnographic methodology was employed to describe the phenomenon of security or insecurity as lived experience. The study was *restricted* in scope to the attitudes, perceptions and opinions of Pakeha male managers and supervisors aged between their late 40s and early 50s, who had been part of the work force when full-time employment was still relatively secure and who have lived through some of the enormous changes in the world of work. As this was a qualitative study with a small sample, no generalizations could be made. Rather, the aim was to produce meaningful results from within a particular context and findings might be seen in terms of the '*translatability*' (Le Compte and Preissle, 1993) of results in different contexts or among different groups. The sample of men were selected from a range of companies that were not government-owned. The aim of this exploratory study was to establish some knowledge of the extent of insecurity amongst the informants, how they viewed security or insecurity in their subordinates and what measures could be taken, or would be desirable, to ensure ongoing employability, not necessarily in the same job or organisation.

This study is not the definitive story on workplace insecurity. Instead, it provides a framework for understanding some of the dynamics of insecurity and uncertainty in the ongoing quest for some form of economic security.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW: Indicators of 'Capacity for Action' in the Workplace**

Some of the most pervasive aspects of employment are job insecurity (Cappelli, 1997:6) and uncertainty. Considerable efforts have been made to conceptualize job insecurity and its effects on workers (Hallier, 1997:46). Hudson and Wilkinson (1998:50) suggest that in the 1990s, debate has changed the emphasis from concerns on how to achieve a flexible labour market to concerns about the downside of employment flexibility - namely *job insecurity*. The analysis of job insecurity has been apparent in a range of disciplines but tends to be partial in scope. Economists generally concentrate on 'objective', quantitative measures of insecurity such as job-tenure or layoffs and psychologists are more concerned with the so-called 'subjective' measures of insecurity, concentrating on the impact it has on an individual's sense of well-being (Heery et al., 1998:7). Some of the studies have focused on the reduced commitment to the organization (Ashford et al., 1989), reduced trust in the workplace (McCune, 1998), risk to psychological well-being (Burchell, 1994:188) and the experience of general dissatisfaction with life (Lim, 1996). Some psychological studies on job insecurity tend, also, to be dominated by positivistic methodologies (Collin, 1998:10) and are therefore unable to attribute significance to, and conceptualize the experiences apparent in career narratives and the stories individuals relate of their working lives. They do, however, provide useful indications of the adverse outcomes of insecurity on individuals and help guide an investigation of

individual differences in the perception of security or insecurity. For that reason, I wish to canvas them here.

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) were amongst the early researchers who sought to broaden the scope of studies on job insecurity and they have been influential in widening the debate within social psychology. They constructed and formulated a model of the nature, causes and consequences of job insecurity. Primarily, they see job insecurity as a source of stress involving fear, potential loss and anxiety (Ashford et al., 1989). They have based their proposed model on a review of the literature and their own research on declining organizations. Despite the increasing importance of job insecurity, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt felt that insufficient attention has been paid to this insecurity by organizational researchers<sup>1</sup>.

They have identified four structural phenomena that have made job insecurity an important variable<sup>2</sup>. These were the prolonged economic downturn which began in the mid-1970s in the USA and resulted in the highest rate of job loss since the 1930s; the upsurge of mergers, acquisitions and restructuring; the rapidly changing industrial structure from manufacturing to service industries and with it the rise of high technology industries; and finally, the decline in union representation which meant that workers became increasingly vulnerable to unilateral management decisions (Greenhalgh et al., 1984:438). This is exacerbated by the changing relationship between employers and employees to one of a contractual nature and the increase of non-standard forms of employment.

These changes contributed to feelings of insecurity which Greenhalgh et al. (1984:438) define as the

...perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation.

This potential loss of continuity in a job situation can range from permanent loss to the loss of various aspects of the job, but only refers to *involuntary loss*. Aside from this feeling of *powerlessness*, the other important dimension of job insecurity is the *severity of the threat*. This severity, however, will vary according to different labour markets as the risk of the job loss will be far more threatening in an environment of high unemployment. Greenhalgh et al. (1984) firstly see the '*subjective*' threat as derived from the '*objective*' threat in terms of what the individual perceives, based on the environment around him/her, constituting what they call the 'threat perception'. The severity of this threat depends on the importance of the potential loss to the individual and also on the powerlessness the individual may feel. This can be related to individual differences such as the *locus of control*<sup>3</sup> and *dependence on the job*.

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1. In 1989 Ashford, Bobko and Lee (1989:804) also suggested that no adequate theoretical or empirical attention had been paid to job insecurity. This is a common comment made by researchers. Klandermans, Van Vuuren, Hartley and Jacobson (1991:44) and more recently, Ranscombe (1998:47) among others, suggest that a rigorous attempt to encompass the underlying question of what job insecurity tells us about work and employment is missing.

2. These researchers are working within the capitalist paradigm, taking the machinations of the capitalist mode of production as something akin to naturally occurring phenomena (Tie, 1999).

3. The locus of control is a personal factor related to the perceived powerlessness of job insecurity. Those with an internal locus of control generally see environmental events as having less impact and

According to Greenhalgh et al. the two dimensions leading to insecurity, namely powerlessness and severity of the threat, have a multiplicative effect as follows:

felt job insecurity = perceived severity of the threat x perceived powerless to resist the threat.

Individuals feel insecure if they feel the threat to be severe *and* they are powerless to counteract it. 'Social support' is seen as a significant aspect to the individual feeling insecure and may affect the way in which he/she reacts to the insecurity - that is, whether the individual leaves or stays, resists change, reduces effort, reduces productivity - all of which adversely affect the organization's effectiveness.

Although the definition of job insecurity refers only to an immediate short-term threat, it has been an influential departure from the narrower studies on job insecurity and has influenced many social psychologists writing about the subject. Greenhalgh et al. (1984) identify four elements that contribute to the potential feelings of powerlessness and these are the *lack of protection* (due to the decline in trade unionism), *unclear expectations*, the *culture of the organization* and finally, *policies of dismissals*. They highlight five personality traits which moderate and influence job security or insecurity experienced and individual reactions to it. Firstly, where the locus of control is internal rather than external, the feelings of powerlessness will be reduced; secondly, conservative individuals will be more likely to see discontinuity as a threat rather than a challenge; thirdly, it will be worse for those that rank work values high in their life interests; fourthly, individuals differ in attribution tendencies, that is, those who place blame external to themselves will cope better than those who blame themselves; and finally, some have a high need for security.

Notwithstanding the insights which this model generates, it is limited as many of its key terms are ambiguous. The concept of the 'locus of control', for example, conceptualizes human agency in essentialist and diachronic terms. Some such as Rose (1999:95) suggest that perceptions of personal power are always socially constructed. Rose maintains that we do not live in the same 'consensual universe', rather that power acts through practices that make up subjects as free persons. Power differs from domination in that it presupposes the capacity of the subject of power to act. History produces individuals with the capacity to act so they have come to relate to themselves as individuals of self-responsibility and self-mastery with the capacity to effect transformation.

Jacobson (1991), on the other hand, suggests that the apprehension about jobs that exists, requires investigation to understand it as a *clear and distinct experience*. He talks about a three stage sequence, namely: anticipation; the period of impact (ie. termination) and the post-impact period of unemployment or underemployment. *Social role theory* is used to elucidate the distinction between job insecurity and job loss as Jacobson finds this congruent with an essentially psychological perspective. The passage from relative job security into perceived insecurity is seen as a *role transition* which is the period during which the individual is either changing roles or changing the orientation to a role already held. Jacobson sees job loss as an *inter-role* transition whereas job security to relative insecurity is seen as an *intra-role* transition.

have the potential power to counteract threats their own environment might possess (Ashford et al.;1989:807).

This shift occurs because of changes in the individual's assumptions concerning him/herself, the surrounding internal and external organizational environment, or the relation between the self and the environment. Given the changing expectations of self-reliance and individuals having to conduct their lives as a kind of enterprise, they are continuously assessing the assumptions upon which they base their conduct. The environment in which the individual operates is constantly changing and becoming more ambiguous, unpredictable and less standardized and consequently, many experience inter-role transition.

One of the main problems associated with job insecurity (as opposed to job loss) is the lack of *social visibility* and role clarity. Job loss or inter-role transition is more likely to be buffered by institutional or organizational support (Jacobson, 1991:26). As job insecurity is an internal 'event', the repercussions of feelings of insecurity can be subtle. It has been suggested in the literature on stress (Burchell, 1994 and Orpen, 1993, for example) that '*event uncertainty*', i.e. the subjective probability of an event's occurrence, may be an even greater source of anxiety and tension than the event itself. Consequently, it is not an event that has a clear onset or termination in terms of time. On the face of it, the formal relationship between the individual and the organization remains structurally unaffected (Jacobson, 1991:27-29). Jacobson (1991:30), however, is still committed to examining job insecurity as an 'intermediate level of experience between full security and job loss', rather than a 'chronic, ambiguous threat' (Roskies et al., 1990). This is a central tenet of neo-liberalism and the construction of self 'as project' independent of the person's position within the labour market.

Klandermans et al. (1991:42) suggest that such studies permit us to develop a systematic treatment of the factors affecting perceived probability of job insecurity. They define causal attributions not as personality traits like Greenhalgh et al. (1984), but as socially constructed meanings that employees give to their situation (Klandermans et al., 1991:51). Although they do not deny personality traits, they are more interested in those *influences* that develop in interaction with the organization and wider society. Their causal explanations of job insecurity, largely based on Jacobson's earlier model, classify six sources of difference in causal attribution divided into *controllable* and *uncontrollable* circumstances depending on whether individuals blame themselves, or their conditions, for their feelings of insecurity. Responses to job insecurity differ according to the causal attributions individuals make and those coping strategies chosen which correspond to the explanations given for the situations they are in. For them, three factors exist that may affect perceptions of insecurity. These include: the level of the *organization* in terms of the characteristics of the industrial relations climate; the *individual or positional characteristics* such as health, age, ethnicity, work experience etc.; and *personality characteristics* such as the internal and external locus of control and optimism or pessimism of individuals.

From the perspective of the individual, job insecurity can result from *internal* and/or *external* factors where internal factors are characteristics particular to the individual such as health, age, education etc., some of which are controllable and others which are beyond the control of the individual. The external factors can be within the

organization such as management policy, technology etc. or external to it, such as recession, government policy or product demand. Generally, factors external to the organization are beyond the individual's control - even collective action is not necessarily an option as the influence of collective bargaining organizations such as unions is declining.

There are limitations in this genre of psychological literature, primarily because research has been undertaken in a positivistic tradition within narrowly defined parameters. Firstly, job insecurity is seen as an intermediate level of experience between fully secure employment and job loss and most findings have been based on declining organizations. This suggests that the focus is short-term. Feelings of job insecurity are not exclusively linked to organizations undergoing change or restructuring. Rather, it is a 'chronic, ambiguous threat' (Roskies et al., 1990) in the environment of flexibility brought about by the decline in collectivities so that organizations can remain competitive. By way of example, in a study on job insecurity among managers, Roskies et al. (1990) examine the perceptions of reactions to insecurity as a persistent, uncertain threat amongst 1291 managers who were not working in declining organization. Only a small minority of respondents were anxious about imminent job loss, with the substantial number being more concerned about a deterioration in working conditions and long-term security. In another study on the correlation between job insecurity and psychological well-being among white and black employees in a South African manufacturing company (Orpen, 1993:885), 54 white managers in relatively 'safe' jobs and 78 black production workers in relatively 'unsafe' jobs were interviewed. Orpen found that the former felt more secure in their jobs, but were not less anxious or depressed than the black employees. Job insecurity was positively related to anxiety and depression in both groups.

Secondly, assumptions made in these psychological studies are debatable, for example that individuals can control certain aspects of their lives. In the working environment of the twentieth century, flexibility and constant change are increasingly becoming the norm as organizations need to adapt quickly to an ever-changing global environment. These models generally refer to standardised work practices based on modernist organizational features and procedures as well as modernist conceptions of self-hood. They do not use a broader theoretical framework to identify and determine the significance of changing forms of social structures.

As the social psychological findings have indicated, insecurity and uncertainty is subjective in nature depending on perceptions of the severity of the threat and locus of control, but influenced by external characteristics that the individual does not always have control over. Rose (1999), however, points out that under neo-liberal political regimes, individuals are being constructed as self-reliant, having to constantly adapt to the changing environment around them and 'manage the self'. This rather critical commentary qualifies, rather than dismisses, the social psychological literature.

## CHANGES IN THE NATURE OF WORK

Given the move to neo-liberal forms of governance and the resultant growth in flexibility in the working environment, the world of work has been transformed. Individual expectations and desires have changed, organizations themselves are being transformed and the environment within which business functions has undergone dramatic shifts (More,1998:xii). As elsewhere, the post-1984 period in New Zealand has seen transformations such as deindustrialization and the decline of the state as a source of employment, the rise of employment in small scale private sector service industry companies, a growth in part-time (and involuntary part-time) work<sup>4</sup> and persistent levels of unemployment (P.E.Harris, 1998:2). At the start of 1999, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 7.2 percent (*Statistics New Zealand*, 1999).

Reflecting these trends, Harris (1998) suggests that the relationship with the paid labour market is one of intermittence and insecurity for an increasing number of New Zealanders. He cites the example of 17.4 percent of those unemployed at the end of 1997 who gave their reason for unemployment as redundancy or dismissal whereas for 28 percent, the job had ended due to its seasonal nature or the expiry of a contract.

One of the consequences of globalization and decentralized bargaining (and the decline of unionization) has been the growth in *flexible work practises*. For example, this was demonstrated in a survey undertaken by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (Savage,1996) which found that in over 58 percent of the 1300 companies surveyed<sup>5</sup>, flexible practises had increased. Furthermore, flexible work practises had increased by 71 percent in companies that reported a decline in unionization. In addition, 32 percent of companies reported an increase in the number of part-time staff and a net increase of 29 percent in casual employment. Three-quarters of the companies reported that the Employment Contracts Act (1991) (ECA) had a positive influence on the performance of their organization (Savage,1996:18).

Easton (1997:173-174) quotes the OECD which has defined five types of 'flexibility':  
*external numerical flexibility* - where the number of employees is adjusted to needs;  
*externalisation* - part of the work is subcontracted out;  
*internal numerical flexibility* - working hours are adjusted to the needs of the company but the number of employees stays the same;  
*functional flexibility* - workers' jobs are modified according to needs; and  
*wage flexibility* - labour costs, and thus wages are adjusted.

He asserts that as unemployment became more persistent, particularly in the late 1980s, the importance of these forms of flexibility changed and externalisation or outsourcing has become more common as employers lay off workers as depressed demand continues.

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4. According to the Department of Statistics, New Zealand (1995), the percentage of people in part-time work and who were looking for full-time work rose from 5.5 % in 1985 to 24.1 % in 1994 (Harris;1998).

5. The sample was divided into four categories: Architects, Manufacturers and Builders, Merchants and Services. The survey excluded any enterprises owned by local or central government.

However, Brosnan and Walsh (1996:165) in two studies (1991 and 1995) found that a pronounced shift to non-standard employment should be viewed with some scepticism. They found that the bulk of employees remained in permanent full-time employment and employers expected this to continue. Kelsey (1997:376) counters this by suggesting that the *quality of jobs* has deteriorated as the shift from full-time employment in the tradable sector to part-time work in the services sector continued. It seems inevitable that the number of part-time workers is growing. An article in the *NZ Herald* (20th May,1999:A13) suggests that part-time workers now account for almost one in every four members of the permanent work force. At the end of 1998, an average of 1,327,100 New Zealanders were employed full-time and 397,900 part-time (*Statistics NZ*, 1999). Compared with five years ago, full-time employment has grown by 11.2 percent and part-time work by 24.5 percent. Whereas, over the last decade, full-time employment has grown by 7.9 percent, part-time employment grew by a massive 42.8 percent (*Statistics NZ*, 1999).

In New Zealand, the rise of *permanent part-timers* has been significant - the proportion of permanent part-timers in the total work force has risen steadily from 10.8 percent in 1973 to 16.8 percent in 1986 to 24.08 percent in March, 1998 (*NZ Herald*, 20th May, 1999, A13). Part-timers tend to be predominantly female, young and more mobile. Carol Beaumont, National Retail Secretary of the National Distribution Union, believes that the growth in part-time work disguises significant underemployment. The Household Labour Force Survey figures seem to support this claim. Between March 1987 and March 1999, the proportion of part-time workers wanting increased hours of employment increased from 11.6 percent to 29.8 percent (*NZ Herald*, 20th May, 1999, A:13). The significance of these issues increases as we come to look at the changes in the employment relationship, or as Rose would put it, the techniques of work place governance.

## **CHANGES IN WORKPLACE GOVERNANCE**

Given the changes in the structure of working arrangements, management policy choice and practise have important implications for managing 'human resources'. How the workforce is governed can vary from an *authoritarian* style on one hand, to a highly *participative* one on the other hand. Very broadly and simply, Geare (1994:120) outlines three management styles that appear in the management, human resources and industrial relations literature. Firstly, the *unitarist* or *team* approach (also called 'hard' human resource management, Stanworth et al., 1991:222) considers the organization as a team with common objectives. There is a general acceptance of managerial authority and conflict is seen as pathological. Secondly, the *pluralist* approach sees organizations comprising various groups with objectives that can either coincide or conflict. Conflict is seen as inevitable and unions achieve more equal bargaining power and finally, the *radical* ideology which sees class conflict as paramount and capital as the superior power. Williams (1992:127) argues that what currently passes for the rise of human resources management in New Zealand is a 'unitarist renaissance' at the expense of the pluralism of conjoint regulation that was

evident in the past.

In the radical tradition of management theory, Hyman (1975) suggests that there has always been an *unequal distribution of power* in the workplace as this is an inevitable feature of capitalism. Together with the industrial legislation, sustained unemployment, increasing non-standard work and flexibility of employment (for employers), it seems that management has become the *dominant party* in the employment relationship. Furthermore, Hyman says that a more subtle, and perhaps more significant form of power, is the ability to prevent any form of opposition from arising. Individuals seem to have less power than a collectivity. According to Cowen (1993:78), the Labour Relations Act and its predecessors were based on the view that workplace relationships centred on the inequality of bargaining power, exploitation of employees and the inevitable, albeit necessary, industrial conflict. The philosophy underlying the ECA, however, rejected this view and workplace relationships were treated as essentially co-operative, relying primarily on the so-called freedom of the contract.

In contrast to the radical tradition, Walsh (1990:105) asserts that a key aspect of today's employment environment is the move to a *unitary management style* as management appeals to workers as individuals with the promise of individual satisfaction. This, it should be noted, is the effect of neo-liberal logic, as outlined by Rose. Underpinning 'unitary' human resource management is the belief that ..getting the deployment of correct numbers and skills at the right price is more important than a patronizing involvement with people's personal affairs (Stanworth et al., 1991:222).

Employees are treated in a similar way to financial resources and are encouraged to believe that their interests coincide with those of the organization and any form of collective organization is undermined. Lerner (1998:273) gives a good example of what she calls 'a neo-liberal approach to employment' when she quotes Newton (CEO of Clear Communications) who said;

...in order to compete against that giant corporation [Telecom] we needed to be more flexible in our approach to staffing and create a structure which encourages an entrepreneurial spirit, tempered with teamwork, commitment and affinity with the company.

In the same vein, Ryan (1996:167), in a study on the impact of the ECA on labour relations in hotels and restaurants, concludes that the prevailing pattern of labour relations in the industry should not be characterised as exploitative, but rather as 'benevolent paternalism'.

Changes in the employment relationship, as a result of strategies and discourses whose origins lie beyond the labour market, will influence the way in which managers are able to manage. Given the unitary renaissance identified, management has emerged as a strategic site of governance in the employment relationship. This influences management styles which in turn impact significantly on feelings of security or insecurity as well as perceptions of the capacity to act as individuals endeavour to

ensure ongoing employability (albeit not always in the same organization). What appears to be emerging is a scenario where managers handle change, make decisions and the rest simply 'do their jobs' around management agendas.

## **FROM MANAGEMENT TO LEADERSHIP?**

Changes in the management strategy outlined above have significantly impacted on the employment relationship. The move from pluralism to unitarism has promoted an array of employment practises which restructure employment relations around management agendas (Haworth et al., 1996:194). Theorists (for example Gebhardt et al., 1996) suggest that managing organizations today bears little resemblance to management twenty years ago. The world of work is not neatly organized according to principles, but is full of contradictions, uncertainties and ambiguities. Gebhardt et al. (1996:363) continue that, whereas modernist organizational theory sought a single or 'best model' of effectiveness based in positivism<sup>6</sup>, organizations today seek ways to be effective that incorporate the ability to be adaptable in an ever-changing competitive market. Moreover, the survival of organizations requires a deconstruction of the modernist organizational features (such as management by objectives), and a reconceptualization to incorporate a perspective more suited to late capitalism. Consequently, a large amount of restructuring has occurred to eliminate so called modernist structures that were unable to adapt quickly enough to the ever-changing environment.

At the same time, there appears to be a change in labelling practice underway with the increasing reference to 'leaders' of organizations. Shtogren (1999:2-3) suggests that the function of 'leadership' did not have any real meaning in the marketplace until recently when radical change became the norm. He differentiates between 'management' and 'leadership' and suggests that the function of 'management' is to cope with complexity and to keep things under control, to plan, budget and organize staff. 'Leaders', however, need to develop and proactively change 'products, systems, and people'. In a similar vein, White et al. (1996) have connected the role of 'leadership' to the state of change which has been exacerbated by globalization. More (1998) too suggests that reference ought to be made to the 'leadership', rather than the 'management' of, organizations as they are no longer seen as static structures but as complex, ongoing processes. The definitions of 'leadership' suggest that it might be increasingly equated with unitary management styles thus leaving little scope for more plural management/employee relationships based on consultation. Moreover, the imbalance of power, brought about partly by the introduction of the ECA and the resultant increased flexibility, has ensured that the rights of management or 'leadership'<sup>7</sup> are entrenched.

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6. An example of this is 'scientific management' introduced by Frederick Taylor which was based on the assumption that there was a 'single best way'. This was followed by Management by Objectives in the 1950s and 1960s.

7. The definition of the game 'follow the leader' is apt 'a game in which each player must do what the leader does, or pay forfeit' (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, 1978).

White et al. (1996) identify key skills that are essential to this so-called 'leadership' and these reflect some of the methodologies used in management recruitment in New Zealand. Amongst others, they include: the ability to handle ambiguity<sup>8</sup> which requires energy as 'the masters of uncertainty seem to have energy to spare' (White et al., 1996:6); the ability to channel their own and the energy of others effectively; creativity without which organizations would grind to a halt (White et al., 1996:94); absorbing stimuli which is the ability to move from one activity to another (White et al., 1996:95); adaptability and the ability to take risks in order to learn and achieve; to trust instinct and to ensure simplicity in the technological age where clear and effective communication is vital given continuous change (White et al., 1996:175).

To gain some understanding of the leadership and management traits that were sought by companies in New Zealand, I interviewed a recruitment consultant specializing in management recruitment. The skills essential to 'leadership' as identified by White et al. (1996) were similar to those seen to be important to the management of New Zealand companies. These include traits requiring *high learning agility* such as the ability to deal with ambiguity and ambivalence, creativity, compassion, integrity, honesty and entrepreneurship. All these are seen as contributing to successful team building and the ability to manage diversity and change. Technical learning skills, for example, require *lower levels of learning agility*. This provides challenges for individuals who are continuously reinventing themselves as fixed traditions and established habits are being eroded. The requirement is to move from 'habit' to 'reflexivity' (Rose, 1996a:304) across all domains of experience. The traits mentioned above require constant redefinition.

Consequently, individuals can no longer solely rely on their 'own experiences' to plan a future in the working environment. Other skills and attributes become important. What has emerged, according to Bauman (1995) and Rose (1996), is that individuals are socially constructed, decentred, multiple and nomadic, created at particular moments and places depending on the requirements of the situation. This suggests that there is the clear need for managers and 'leaders' (as well as all other employees) in New Zealand to have a strong 'capacity for action' which includes the ability to embrace uncertainty and ambivalence as neo-liberalism, and increasing globalism, requires the construction of this type of subjectivity. In addition, to maintain career continuity, the 'self' has constantly to be redefined to ensure effectiveness and for this, creativity is crucial. Sowerby (*NZ Herald*, 24th August, 1999:A9) agrees that economic success does not only depend on knowledge but on the ability to apply it creatively. She agrees with White et al. that 'soft assets are more important than hard assets' as ideas, energy and feelings among people count. The more formal 'hard assets' such as technical knowledge are no longer enough to ensure long-term employability. Flexibility and the changing environment defined in terms of uncertainty and ambiguity, means that for employees, the old strategy of investing time and effort in specialist skills to obtain a life of employment security can no longer provide guarantees or certainty (Bauman, 1999:189).

This might make for greater job insecurity for many. Uncertainty must now be overcome by a capacity for adaptation in the never-ending battle of self-(re)formation

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8. 'Ambiguity' in this context means to effectively cope with change, to act without having the total picture and to comfortably handle risk and uncertainty.

(Bauman, 1995:113). Indications are that individuals in management, supervisory or any other roles in organizations will have to increase their capacities for adaptation in order to fit with the ever-changing requirements in the world of work. This signals the significance of neo-liberal governance within globalization processes as they impact on the world of work. It would also highlight them as being important sites of resistance and contestation.

## **WINDOWS ON THE WORLD OF WORK: ‘A TAPESTRY OF FEELINGS’**

### *1. INTRODUCTION*

According to Simpson et al. (1995), sociologists have paid particular attention to some of the changes in the employment environment such as gender roles, but they have been less attentive to the broad nature of the transformations which have made today’s world of work very different to that a generation ago. Simpson et al. (1995) suggest that we know too little about how employees experience work under the fast changing conditions evident today. Consequently, this section explores some of the concerns raised by the managers and supervisors interviewed about their experiences in organizations at the end of the millennium. Their own employment experiences were discussed as well as feelings about job security, or insecurity, and the way in which workplace governance styles could affect perceptions of insecurity. The men spoke about the need, or otherwise, for continuous learning which included education and training<sup>9</sup> and the advice they were likely to give their children, in terms of work choices to ensure that they could take responsibility for their own conduct to maximize their quality of life.

To keep the focus narrow, eight men in management or supervisory roles were interviewed. Some were known to me and others were referred by friends. The key informants were chosen because they worked for a range of medium to large companies that were not owned by government. To keep the sample reasonably homogenous, Pakeha men in their mid-forties to early-fifties were interviewed.

Four of the men were in senior management roles which included managing organizations or special functions within those organizations. Those in lower management or supervisory roles included men with some departmental responsibility and who were engaged in supervising other employees. They were employed in the ‘core’ segment of the labour market and, except for one participant, were full-time, permanent employees. One informant was on a fixed-term employment contract but this made no difference to him as he claimed any form of employment was as precarious as the next. This was borne out when two of the senior managers were no longer employed shortly after the interviews were conducted. Retrenchment affected one informant and another resigned following restructuring. What started out as an

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9. Education is a learning experience that is person rather than job orientated and *training* refers to learning activities specific to the job (Elkin et al.,1995:154).

assumption on my part that the informants were in stable, full-time employment, was proved incorrect. These 'secure', 'core' senior management jobs are, perhaps, as insecure as any others and the lack of distinct categories in a segmented labour market might be more relevant. It underlines the comment made by Simpson (1998) that many managers may have a 'dual status' in that they could be on permanent contracts and have access to promotional opportunities, yet at the same time face redundancy. Indications are that the 'core' of employees in the primary labour market is reducing.

The following précis of informants' work history is, of necessity, vague and brief to ensure anonymity. The names are all pseudonyms. Reich (1992), outlining new patterns of employment, would categorize the four senior managers interviewed as *symbolic analysts* as they are involved in problem-identifying, problem-solving and strategic brokering activities which could be traded world-wide and compete with foreign providers.

*Gary* is employed as Managing Director of a contracting company that has over 1000 employees in New Zealand. The organization, as part of a multinational enterprise (MNE), has its headquarters in Europe. Gary qualified with a degree in engineering and subsequently gained his Master's Degree in England.

*Mark's* career began in selling and merchandising and progressed through the traditional route of sales and marketing to general management. Mark has no formal qualifications. At the time of the interview, he was employed by a large manufacturer in a national management role. The company was Australian-owned and various departments were merging with those in Australia. As a result of restructuring and job reorganization, Mark decided to leave the company shortly after the interview was conducted. Rather than seeking re-employment, he has bought his own business.

*Alan* started his career in accountancy whilst studying part-time. Thereafter he worked overseas for a while before returning to New Zealand when he began employment as a cost accountant. He spent time in sales and production planning functions and Alan joined the current enterprise where he moved from production to general management. The organization has subsequently been sold and it has merged with an Australian enterprise that is part of a MNE. Alan stayed on as Managing Director.

*James* has always worked in human resources management. He began his career in South Africa but emigrated to New Zealand a few years ago when he joined a large manufacturing company as Human Resources Manager. The manufacturing company has many smaller enterprises affiliated to it. James has since been retrenched and is currently lecturing part-time whilst seeking full-time- or self-employment. He has an MBA.

Two of the informants in lower management or supervisory roles (*Dan* and *Grant*) fulfil the criteria for *routine production services* as defined by Reich (1992), as their supervisory tasks involve repetitive checks on the work of subordinates and they enforce standard operating procedures. *Dan* is a technical supervisor employed by a MNE based in Switzerland. He started his career as an aircraft fitter in the airforce and, like Gary and Alan, spent time working in England. He has many technical

qualifications including a Trade Certificate as Fitter and Turner, an Advanced Trade Certificate and Electrician's Service Certificate as well as 'lots of other bits and pieces'. He has been in his current job for nine years.

*Grant* has worked for the same organization since the early 1970s and went through the ranks until he became supervisor and then manager.

*Peter* provides *in-person-services* (Reich,1992) which also entail simple repetitive tasks but as they are provided person-to-person, they cannot be sold world-wide. He has worked in retail all his life and is currently a departmental manager. Peter left school at the age of 16 and has no other training.

*Tom*, as construction foreman, works for a wholly New Zealand-owned company, He fulfils dual functions of *routine production services* as well as elements of *symbolic analytic* functions as his job includes problem-identifying and solving. Tom almost got his NZCE but never completed it. He is currently gaining his unit standards for civil construction.

The following sections contain some of the subjects discussed by informants.

## 2. *PERSONAL EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES*

We live with insecurity....we live with choice (Grant)

All the men interviewed had stories to tell about restructuring, either as a personal experience, as the experience of friends or colleagues or as those instigating and managing rationalization. During the interview, Mark commented that friends had been retrenched and that he was working for a company that was restructuring. Mark has been involved in two take-overs which were 'well-communicated, well-organized' reallocation of operations where every endeavour was made to re-employ staff. Those that were not re-employed were given redundancy payments and counselling. At the time of the interview, Mark indicated that his employment might be uncertain as reporting lines had changed and the suggestion was made that sales and marketing be managed from Australia. He continued that the whole issue was surrounded by conjecture and had not been 'honestly' approached. There were conflicts in personality and management style. A few weeks after the interview, Mark's perceptions of insecurity were realized. His job content had changed as a result of restructuring and he had chosen to leave the company with a financial package. Rather than seek re-employment, Mark bought a business.

James too was working for a company that had been restructuring for a while and he lost his job unexpectedly. In his interview, James indicated that one always tried to 'achieve control of one's own life' but reality was different. His retrenchment felt like a bereavement and he was trying to regain control of his life. Bauman's comment (1999:172) is apt.

The message is simple: everyone is *potentially* redundant or replaceable, so everyone

is vulnerable and any social position, however elevated and powerful it may seem now, is in the longer run precarious; even the privileges are fragile and under threat.

For James, the 'severity' of the loss, or *inter-role transition* (Jacobson, 1991) was, perhaps, more evident than for Mark who had an established network and reputation in the industry and had been 'head-hunted' for his previous two jobs. The field of human resources that James was seeking employment in was shrinking as companies were increasingly outsourcing their human resource functions. The enterprise that Gary was managing was an example of this as all legal, human resource and industrial relations functions were contracted out.

Restructuring started in the organization that Grant works for about eight years ago when employees were told that they could no longer expect long-term career prospects. Staff numbers in the organizations had almost halved. Rationalization was primarily undertaken to save costs. Senior management were employed on short-term contracts and were often not New Zealanders. Their mandate was to cut costs and they 'don't care how it is done'. If targets are achieved, they receive bonuses and move on.

As with Mark and Grant, the companies that James and Dan work/ed for have been affected by the rationalization of functions and consequent amalgamations with companies in Australia. Grant and Dan felt fairly secure in the medium term but were aware that they could lose their jobs at any time. Alan and Gary, on the other hand, perceived no threat to career continuity and both had autonomy to manage their companies as they saw fit. Alan, however, submitted that the company in Australia, could be a 'case study in insecurity' and about 30 managers had been fired. The political infighting together with a lack of strong leadership made the organization dysfunctional. Alan was offered a senior management role in Australia but turned it down - 'why change when you live in paradise'. Alan and Gary, given autonomy to manage their organizations, seemed to have strong perceptions of personal 'freedom' or 'capacity to act' as they could influence their employment futures and both men seemed to have management skills that were desirable in New Zealand. Consequently, both might see discontinuity as a challenge rather than as a threat although involuntary discontinuity seemed unlikely.

James, on the other hand, indicated that although he would like to see discontinuity as a challenge and had hoped to prepare himself for the job after his current one, the reality was different. James was lecturing part-time whilst seeking employment. When Mark told me about his 'sabbatical', he seemed very positive and was looking at all sorts of options. He has subsequently decided to go into self-employment and has bought a manufacturing business.

Dan and Grant were resigned to the fact that they were powerless to maintain desired job continuity but did not see the severity of that threat as significant in the medium term. In the span of their working lives, most informants had moved from relative job security to insecurity which Jacobson (1991) has identified as *intra-role transition*. They were required to assess the assumptions upon which they based their conduct and had to accept the ambiguous and unpredictable nature of work. Dan, however, commented that he was fairly optimistic about the stability of his job in the next five

years, but in saying so, observed that

...some company gnome in a suit in Switzerland could decide that I should go.

Grant, who was happy in his job and 'wouldn't trade it', suggested that the general feeling of insecurity was often based on a 'whisper' which resulted in feelings of 'doom and gloom'. Although he had found this stressful initially, he was no longer concerned and observed that he would be lucky if he still had a job in the next three years. If he lost his job, he would start his own business. When asked what would make him feel secure, he said a 10-year contract but that was unrealistic. 'We live with insecurity'.

As a construction foreman, Tom was resigned to the fact that his job might terminate at the end of the contract yet he was confident of immediate re-employment.

Peter enjoyed his job and felt secure about long-term employment. There was no restructuring or rationalization in the pipeline as staff numbers had already been reduced.

The men interviewed had various employment experiences and two were no longer in their jobs because of restructuring and rationalization. This underscores the assertion that those in the 'core', more 'secure' labour market might no longer have long-term career prospects. Managers and supervisors might be experiencing levels of insecurity traditionally associated with the periphery and may indeed, as Simpson et al. (1998) suggest, have dual status in that they have permanent contracts and access to promotional opportunities yet at the same time face redundancy. Only two of the key informants seemed to have security of employment, three were not necessarily secure in the short to medium-term but, because of their skills, were confident of long-term employability and one felt secure provided that he did not question any of his employment conditions. The following section examines aspects of security or insecurity of long-term employability as envisaged by informants.

### 3. *ON SECURITY*

We have to manage life to get as much control as we can (James)

Change, and the uncertainty, ambiguity and loss of security that accompany it, is all-pervasive. The German word *Sicherheit* describes the condition well, and incorporates three terms that convey its meaning (Bauman, 1999:17-18). Firstly, *security* refers to whatever has been gained and will stay in our possession, and retain its value, as a source of pride. Secondly, *certainty* which, according to Bauman, is knowing the symptoms, omens and the warning signs which indicate what to expect and to tell a 'good move from a bad one'. And finally, there is *safety* where no dangers threaten 'one's body and its extensions'. These are conditions that affect self-confidence and self-reliance upon which the ability to think and act rationally depends.

The absence or diminution of any of these dissipates self-assurance and the reduced

trust in one's own ability. This impacts on the capacity to act, resulting in feelings of powerless. To many, the job provides the 'source of pride' and value in life and loss thereof produces symptoms of 'existential mistrust' (Bauman, 1999:18) in the new daily routines that have been disrupted and learned responses can lose their validity. The three elements of *Sicherheit* suffer 'continuous blows' as the twentieth century draws to a close. As the informants intimated above, 'existential orientation-points' are elusive and living with uncertainty has become a way of life.

Mark acknowledged that it was important that employees felt secure as any business counted on people. If two companies were selling the same product, the 'powerful company' with good people skills would be the successful one. He suggested that

...the one with the right people attitude will win. Fifty machines can replace one ordinary person, but 50 machines cannot replace one creative person.

Two senior managers and two supervisors mentioned *age*, which is a *positional* characteristic as outlined by Klandermans et al. (1991), as pertinent to their own employment situation. Mark and James suggested that age was a factor in increasing their insecurity of ongoing employability but in Mark's case, he did not perceive the threat as being particularly severe as he had built up a reputation in the industry. Tom too felt that age might be an issue but he was not disadvantaged as the construction industry had not trained anyone for the last 20 years and was now realizing it. There had been what he referred to as 'psuedo-training' but nothing else. 'Older men' like himself were in demand. The nature of the industry was such that employees were

...recruited, badly paid, half-trained and when the wet season [winter] started, were laid off until summer.

He continued that, in the meantime, they found other jobs and were lost to the construction industry. Consequently, he felt that the company should target people and make plans to keep them. Age as a criteria for recruitment at senior levels in his organization was not really an issue for Gary, but he preferred his supervisory positions to be filled by younger people as he was building a company and younger people had longer periods of work ahead. In saying that, however, *attitude* remained the most important criteria.

He continued that security was often dependent on certain *personality traits*.

To be successful in many pursuits, [is to] be well presented, confident, present ideas well and be able to socialize comfortably. The socially confident person, who has some charm, will be more successful than those with years of slog behind them.

As Managing Director of a contracting business, Gary submitted that there were no 'redundancies' - only 'layoffs' and the business was expanding and shrinking at any time and employees knew this from the outset.

Gary, Peter and Alan observed that employment security for employees meant a *thriving company* with new work and the assurance that there would be more jobs the following month. In addition, Peter suggested that a *well-established* company

provided security. Gary amplified this suggesting that

...the worst crime against staff is a company that fails to make a profit - cutting costs and cutting staff.

Profit was reinvested into the company he was managing. Although he acknowledged that there were some who felt insecure i.e. about 20 percent (because 80 percent of their business was in maintenance), he made the assumption that the other 80 percent did not feel insecure because it was 'easier to get work than to retrench staff', consequently, the company was continuously seeking to expand its business. Most important though, is the business. If a manager is not performing, we fix him or get rid of him as he is putting other jobs at risk.

Where individuals *lived* and worked, and the *skills* that they possessed, also influenced job insecurity according to informants. Gary asserted that there was full-employment for skilled labour in New Zealand which implied security for these employees. Tom and Dan agreed. Although these skills did not ensure job continuity in the same organization, the severity of the threat was not as apparent for them. They both indicated that, previously, when they had been made redundant, it took them no more than two days to find other employment. According to Dan, '*skills ensure security*' and there is a lack of skills in New Zealand which is increasing all the time as the 'old ones retire'. He continued that the apprenticeship laws had changed and companies were no longer offered incentives to run apprenticeship programmes.

James submitted that the insecurity of workers manifested itself in terms of the consultation and personal grievance processes, particularly in unfair dismissals. He continued that

...the concept of lifetime security has changed and, whereas in the past, employees could decide when to move on, today it is often the decision of management. Overall, there is a sense of individuals feeling really challenged, pushed hard without support and recognition being given easily. This applies to every level from management down. It is like being on a treadmill running flat out because of the pace of change.

According to James, worker insecurity was a big consideration in the change management process and management attempted to communicate continuously and tried to anticipate problems by making sure the whole process was well-planned but there were no guarantees of security. Grant thought that the younger staff members might perhaps feel more insecure because they did not have as many qualifications but that

...everyone in the organization was hoping to stay as long as they can from the Managing Director down.

All the informants acknowledged that job insecurity existed but the senior managers commented that the threat could be minimized if communication to employees was open, honest and ongoing. Both Gary and Alan suggested that *management communication* provided security, but as discussed later, communication merely asserts the prerogative of management to disseminate selective information. It seems

that managers have come to terms with managing these uncertain employees by doing little except 'communicate', the degree of openness varying from organization to organization. Management's assertion of good communication was a subjective observation. Their submission that information about the company, and how it was succeeding, was one of the few things that could make employees feel secure, accentuated the significance that management attributed to so-called 'good communication'.

Employees in this research seemed to be resigned to the inevitability of insecurity as ongoing employment could not be relied on. Even the certainty of warning signs could no longer be assumed as the job loss experienced by James indicated. The loss of this security and certainty can lead to a dissipation of self-assurance as existential orientation points become increasingly elusive (Bauman, 1999). The longer insecurity is experienced, the greater existential uncertainty can become. James was experiencing the dissipation of self-assurance as his search for re-employment was unsuccessful. The severity of the potential loss was less threatening to some of the more skilled informants than it was to others, like Grant, who stated that 'we live with uncertainty'. They did not expect, yet hoped for, security. Rose's assertion that the individual is being constructed to remain active by 'enterprizing' him/herself was acknowledged by informants who were trying to come to terms with increasing powerlessness to maintain continuity in their current employment. Yet, having the capacity to act did not always guarantee desired outcomes.

In terms of the three factors that might affect perceptions of insecurity identified by Klandermans et al. (1991), *individual* or *positional* characteristics such as age were not seen to be as important as *personality characteristics* which influence the 'internal locus of control' of individuals. In addition, *organizational characteristics* like a well-established, thriving company or workplace governance styles significantly impacted on the feelings of security or insecurity of employees.

#### 4. WORKPLACE GOVERNANCE

I put effort into showing the way, in leadership you have to (Gary)

'Governance' as outlined by Rose (1999:15) refers to any strategy, tactic, procedure or programme for controlling, regulating or shaping command in an organization. Given the changes in working arrangements, it became evident when talking to senior managers that they did not prescribe to any one governance plan. Rather, a range of strategies, tactics and procedures are in place at any one time. Handy (1995:193) corroborates this and expressed his surprise that he ever thought that there could be a universal management theory. He suggests that everyone needs a starter kit of knowledge and skills but that after that we have to work on solutions to 'our own predicaments'. Bauman (1996:52) agrees that there is no such thing as a 'good organization' which is good for all conditions and eventualities. This becomes a liability in a rapidly changing environment and 'in the face of untried challenges'. Businesses today are typically 'relativized' as each company tailors its requirements

to local conditions whilst trying to remain competitive in the global economy. What appears to have emerged, however, is a style of governance based largely on *management prerogative*.

Williams (1992:127) suggests that there is a 'unitarist renaissance' in New Zealand at the expense of the pluralism of conjoint regulation that was evident prior to the introduction of the ECA. Underpinning human 'resources' management today, however, is the belief that getting the correct number of employees and skills, at the right price is of primary importance and employees are often treated in a similar way to financial resources (Stanworth et al., 1991:222). External numerical flexibility, where the number of employees is adjusted to needs, is an indication of this. Most of the informants worked for companies that subscribed to flexibility and it seems that a unitary management approach is becoming increasingly prevalent in New Zealand as managers feel that they can assert their 'right to manage' - particularly in an environment of relatively weak trade unions. Three of the managers spoke about the way in which they managed their organizations whilst the remainder of the informants commented on management styles.

Gary, as Managing Director of a growing and increasingly successful enterprise employing over 1000 people, acknowledged that he managed his company in an *authoritarian* way. He suggested that he used to think that he was 'non-authoritarian' until he spent time on a school's PTA and realized that he could not spend hours debating what colour a wall should be painted. He was used to taking decisions and could only operate in an 'authoritarian' way. Gary submitted that he spent a lot of time showing his employees the way which, as 'leader', was required<sup>10</sup>

It is not to issue directives in terms of ordering people to do things, but rather to get them engaged in the process so that they do what they want to do. If they don't fit - they leave. It's not consensus but engaging senior managers in the direction you want to take business. Co-operation.

To ensure ongoing co-operation and commitment to the same objective which was to become the best service company in his field, the managers of his business units went on a three-day seminar. They indicated that they felt 'strongly' that they were part of a team and identified with the company's direction. Of concern to Gary, however, was that other staff felt less included in the company. His frustration was getting managers to understand the importance of the 'leadership of their staff' and the importance of ongoing communication. Each manager was required to hold a certain number of meetings with staff and there was a bonus if these meetings were held, but some managers refused thus forfeiting their bonuses. Gary believed that these problems stemmed from the introduction of the ECA (although he was strongly in favour of the Act). Whereas previously, much of the communication with staff was through the union, management now communicated directly and there were still 'old school supervisors' who believed that 'knowledge is power' and refused to communicate with their subordinates.

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10. 'Leadership' was defined by Bennis (1997) as the ability to develop a sense of the mission of the organization and take action to influence others to work towards the accomplishment of the mission.

Alan too seemed to subscribe to a unitary style of workplace governance as he saw that his task as manager required the 'driving and co-ordinating of strategic direction'. He had a 'stable, experienced' management team working for him and believed in ensuring a 'happy working environment' as staff who enjoyed working, worked better.

Mark was recruited into a management role to change the culture of the organization from an autocratic one. The company was made up of individual units with no national cohesion. Whereas before, Head Office had 'ruled by fear', Mark worked at improving communication by encouraging Head Office staff to become more visible and approachable. Staff were kept better informed about what was going on in the company. He felt that he had achieved his objective, but recently, the reporting structure had changed and his new boss, with a production background, had no people skills. Consequently, Mark was disillusioned with the structure.

The management style in the manufacturing company James worked for ...

...varies according to the last change made. In one business unit, a third of the staff were reduced and the technical modernization was not successful. There was an overwhelming sense of individual responsibility to solve problems but no management support. There are, however, good climates....[but] there is a move towards a more unitary management style...The style is one of not fully understanding the dynamics of 'gain, gain' leadership.

James continued that the management style was purely *performance-focused* and, in doing so, was ignoring the importance of personal relationships. Furthermore, management seemed to have a bad name because, on the one hand, they claimed that they believed in people, yet on the other, they were retrenching them. This was in line with Stanworth et al.'s (1991) assertion that the deployment of the correct number of employees and skills are more important than personal relationships in many organizations.

When the supervisors who were interviewed were asked about management style, they commented on the ability and willingness of the company to *communicate* with its employees. They seemed to equate 'good' or 'bad' management style with a concomitant commitment to communication. The use of communication is one way in which management reasserts its authority over the work force. Management prerogative has increased since flexible work structures have emerged and union bargaining structures undermined, the aim being to inculcate employee loyalty, commitment and dependency (Rasmussen et al., 1995:56). In general, communication can be a one-way process used to convey management discourse to employees and not vice versa. Dan, however, suggested that the management style in his organization was fairly open and communication meetings were held once a month. Senior managers were present at the meetings and Dan felt that, for a large company, discussion was fairly frank. The meetings were site-based as each site stood alone.

Grant found the organizational climate poor with no consultation as management were autocratic and employees were told what to do. Moreover, he suggested that the

organization worked on the premise that 'if they don't like it, they can leave'. A similar comment was made by Peter who suggested that the mentality of management was 'there's a job - do it, if you don't like it, leave'. Grant found that

...whereas before it was more friendly, it is now business driven. All goals are to meet targets and if not, employees are dragged over the coals and are lucky to have a job. A lot of people fall by the wayside and their jobs are suddenly restructured away from them. The jobs are often split up and parts given to someone else. Today employees expect change whereas before no-one had heard of it [insecurity].

Insecurity was not only about losing the job but also having job content changed. Grant observed that there were executives who moved from organization to organization restructuring and rationalizing. This was not always successful as they were not New Zealanders and had no perception of how things were done 'down under'. 'Axe-men hack what they can'. He recognised the use of communication as one-way and issued as directives.

In the case of the construction company that Tom works for, there was no discernible management style. Many decisions were made 'at the top' about things that they knew little about, and on other issues, they were undecided. It was a large company being run as if it were a small one. Management at Head Office were constantly interfering and he had more contact with them than with his immediate boss.

All of the informants expressed the view that there was a distinct change in attitude towards so-called 'human resources' or employees. Some of the management styles suggested that the 'unitary renaissance' in New Zealand, specifically after the introduction of the ECA in 1991, was evident. Two managers commented that few employees were able to deal with the extent of ambiguity required to lead a business. Furthermore, big business initiatives were undertaken by a small number of people and New Zealand required more people who were able to create opportunities for companies and to find additional ways to provide services to customers. These assertions suggest that 'management' and 'leadership' can no longer be used interchangeably as 'leadership' seems to be synonymous with autocracy and aims to achieve change in 'systems and people'. Flexibility appears to be well suited to this pursuit. As informants indicated, if they were not satisfied, or 'did not fit in', they were expected to leave the organization. The focus on performance ignores the importance of interpersonal relationships. Individuality is seen as advantageous to the so-called 'leaders' as the contract model of the labour market has allowed employers to parcel up bits of labour time as commodities making the words 'human resources' aptly descriptive of the emerging workplace scenario.

As part of the endeavour to be an effective manager, supervisor or any other employee, continuous learning was essential to enhance feelings of job security or ongoing employability by ensuring that skills were up-to-date and transferable as flexibility became the norm.

## 5. CONTINUOUS LEARNING

[The other great change] is the ongoing acquisition of skills and reflecting on the knowledge you have (James)

Given the accelerating obsolescence of skills, continuous learning is being seen as essential to career continuity. In an OECD study (1993 in Elkin et al, 1995:151), it was suggested that as technological change accelerates, the nature of skills required changes more and more quickly. The difficulty is that the 'useful half-life' of the knowledge people have is contracting so fast that it increasingly tends to equal the time taken to acquire it. The report cites the example of engineers training for five years who will find that in five years, 50 percent of their knowledge would be obsolete. The eight informants had various experiences and views on development. Gary and James suggested that employees were increasingly responsible for 'developing' themselves. For Dan and Tom, in technical roles, continuous upskilling was expected, yet for Mark, Alan, Grant and Peter, it was not a requirement and was left to the individual's discretion.

Gary, quoting Tiger Woods, asserted that it was important to 'keep working at your game', and that managers had to remain current and be an asset to employers. Skills required 'refreshment and new ones gained'. Employees in his enterprise did not use company time to pursue qualifications as using their own time showed *commitment to learning*. The company might pay them for their studies on successful completion. In-house training was ongoing and the company spent \$1.5 million on company-related training. James too, was of the view that adapting through life, by continuous learning, was a personal responsibility and suggested that one great change was the...

...ongoing acquisition of skills and reflecting on the knowledge you have - understand and develop that...Often employees have to align their career interests with the company interests.

The company James worked for regarded upskilling as ongoing and if it was company-related, the company paid. Furthermore, as employees entering the organization were more educated than before and the shop-floor was more skilled, upskilling for those in the organization becomes imperative as new incumbents could be more educated than longer serving employees.

This applied most specifically to employees involved in technical roles. Tom and Dan were expected to learn continuously. Tom did some learning himself and was gaining his unit standards for civil construction. In addition, some upskilling was enforced by the company. 'You only get what you put in'. In Dan's line of work, continuous learning is essential and encouraged. If he refused to upskill, incoming apprentices would be more qualified than he was. Employees had to pay for their own courses, but they were reimbursed by the company on successful completion. Dan's biggest challenge was to keep up with technology.

Upskilling was not a requirement in Mark's field of marketing provided that he was up-to-date on computer technology and was computer literate. It was expected of

entrants into the field of marketing to have good qualifications but there was no need to take ongoing courses. In his experience, Alan found that qualifications were not as important as a positive attitude. He did not run a government department with self improvement programmes.

His company had in-house training courses and if employees wanted to go on 'self-help or do-it-yourself courses', the company might consider reimbursement. Grant suggested that courses were no longer emphasized as much as they used to be by the organization. There were in-house training courses but staff could choose whether they wanted to do them or not. Obviously the person with more qualifications would be given preference for promotion. 'We live with choice'. In Peter's job in retail, upskilling was not required but the company was introducing in-house refresher courses for staff although these were not compulsory.

All eight informants had some form of in-house training in the companies they worked for in order to improve the performance of individuals on a particular job. This was a *specific* rather than general form of learning. Most companies, although not overtly encouraging education leading to an individual's overall competence, did reimburse some employees on successful completion of courses. These courses were individual, rather than job-orientated. Gary and James outlined the importance of the acquisition of *multiple* and *transferable* skills and *personal flexibility* as the onus was on the individual to take responsibility for him/herself in an endeavour to remain employable.

Rose (1999:161) too emphasizes that:

The new citizen is required to engage in a ceaseless work of training and retraining, skilling and reskilling, enhancement of credentials and preparation for a life of incessant job seeking: life is to become a continuous economic capitalization of the self.

Given the rapid obsolescence of skills, continuous learning was identified by some informants as essential to ensure ongoing employability. This has further exacerbated insecurity as even vocational training, which used to provide a strong base from which to proceed, no longer has the same legitimacy and guarantee of career continuity, suggesting that one of the basic elements of security has been eroded. This scenario does not only apply to those in employment, but to children making choices about future work opportunities.

## 6. ON THE FUTURE AND ADVICE TO CHILDREN

There are endless possibilities but not too many of the traditional ones (Gary)

The world of work has altered irrevocably as individual expectations and desires have changed, organizations are transforming and the environment within which businesses function has undergone dramatic shifts given trends of globalization and the move to

neo-liberalism in New Zealand. As permanence the of employment can no longer be assumed, life-planning is affected. Employment criteria are changing constantly. Given this scenario, the informants spoke about the future of employment and the advice they would, or have given their children in an endeavour to prepare them for the world of work.

The informants suggested that changes in employment would continue and, according to Gary, there would still be people managing businesses but outsourcing would increase. 'Portfolio workers' (Handy, 1995) would become more common as people are hired in the *short-term* for their expertise. He continued that this has been especially useful for the 'older' worker who could tailor his/her working hours around lifestyle. As *continuous education* is essential in terms of future security, James suggested that skills should always be up-to-date and educational requirements understood. Well-managed *functional* and *business* skills, together with *good service*, were essential to re-employment or self-employment. James felt ambivalent about the future and did not know where all the hype would end and he thought that contracting out might be more expensive than managing internally and that the theories of leading management thinkers were untested. As work was a social institution that required social interaction, outsourcing contributed to an increase in *alienation*. James observed that not everything could be done by e-mail and it had to end somewhere. Alan too felt that, although a skills shortage existed in the technical fields, part of the problem with these jobs was that they lacked social interaction.

As many of the so-called 'existential orientation-points' (Bauman, 1999) were fast disappearing, not only in the working environment but also in other areas of life, and given the uncertainty and lack of predictability identified by the informants, they were asked what advice they would give their children so that they could maximize their ability to adjust to the future. The informants had lived through a period of stability and long-term career opportunity and were having to come to terms with fundamental insecurity, or increased freedom, depending on their perception.

Mark advised his daughters, who were both at secondary school, to...

...try and target what are going to be the futuristic industries such as tourism and hospitality.....A and T should target and anticipate growth industries that might have some longevity.

He continued that roles in these industries were growing as more people had time on their hands and wanted to be entertained at both ends of the spectrum. This could be a chocolate and video on the one hand, to overseas travel, on the other. Furthermore, Accountants would always be in demand and logically, technology was gaining ground at a frightening rate. He felt that the young had to strive to ensure that they did well in terms of education but they had to do it themselves and acquiesce to a self-motivational ethos.

For Gary, possibilities were endless although not many were the traditional ones

...kids have a more exciting future than we had and we must make them start to

understand what the possibilities are.

His son wanted to become involved in the fitness industry, 'that's fine, but he must get a degree first'. The type of degree was irrelevant, but 'he is learning to think and present ideas'. The best education too was important to maximize the possibilities ahead and both his children attend/ed private schools. Gary was certain that those with a Bachelor of Arts degree, for example, would do a better job. Jobs that had, in the past, been 'looked down on' such as hospitality, tourism or horticulture were the growth areas

...people with confidence and ability will have fantastic opportunities.

James too, focused on *traits*, rather than on specific career options, and he encouraged his children to use technology and be aware of the 'coming trends'. Ideally, this should be followed by management qualifications so that they could be *self-employed* if required. The movement today was 'in and out of companies and the setting up of one's own business'. *Selling* in combination with *management* was important. Gary agreed that as most companies were involved in selling ideas, products or image, *selling skills* were vital. These skills required a good *attitude*, *personality* and *presentation*. As every job required these traits, he hoped that his children would have acquired them.

Like Gary, Alan was not concerned about specific career choices as much as the skills that his sons acquired, provided that they were *marketable*. According to Alan, one of the essential criteria a company looks for in people is a positive attitude with the desire to learn - qualifications were not that important, '*you can always mould people*'. It was, however, advisable to do an assessment of the job market to ascertain what was in short supply. That is why Alan studied accountancy. He also felt that *blue collar jobs*, such as fitters and turners would probably be marketable in the future. Moreover, as children required the 'nouse' for potential self-employment *adaptability* was important.

Peter advised his children to get tertiary training and to strive to fulfil their potential. His daughter was studying to enter the hospitality industry and his son was still at school. He was concerned about the future for his children and questioned whether they would have jobs and be able to maintain a reasonable standard of living. We had it easy, mortgage and home and although we weren't paid a lot, money went further. Now it is a constant battle.

Dan's children were told that '*pieces of paper*' were as important as *experience* and that the '*best education*' was essential. His older daughter was studying to become a nurse and the younger wanted to become a doctor so she would be going to a private school for years 12 and 13. Dan was confident that the future for his daughters was secure if they followed their chosen careers providing *service*. He believed that New Zealand's top industries were tourism and farming and as long as his daughters looked after people, they would be secure.

Tom ensured that his children went to the best schools in the area, and after that '*life*

*is what you make of it*'. He was not concerned about the future job market for his children. There were opportunities as long as personality and attitude were right.

The New Zealand environment, characterized by rapid change, unemployment, underemployment and instability significantly affects the future scenario of children at school and in tertiary education. Generally, the informants were of the opinion that the 'best' education available was essential and two of the informants felt that private school education would give their children the edge. Four of the men interviewed suggested that *hospitality* and *tourism* were the growing areas of employment in New Zealand. Only one informant spoke about the so-called 'traditional' careers, namely nursing and medicine, although he suggested that these occupations would be secure as they provided a *service* to people in a country where tourism is growing. Most informants emphasized the need to look at the industries of the future and those roles that would be marketable, before making career choices. Furthermore, certain *personality traits* would ensure work continuity and success. These included adaptability, self-motivation, confidence, personality and the 'right attitude'.

## SUMMARY

The sole equality which the market promotes is an equal or near-equal plight of existential uncertainty, shared by the victors (always, by definition, the 'until-further-notice' victors) and the defeated alike...The insecure life is lived in the company of insecure people (Bauman, 1999:31,23)

This particular sample was chosen because these men started their working lives in a stable employment environment where there were 'more jobs than people' and, in some cases such as the airforce, employment contracts could be for life. They have since been confronted by the changing world of work and have had to cope with these changes whilst trying to remain economically secure. According to Rose (1996:169), what has emerged is a new self which is socially constructed, decentred, multiple, nomadic and 'created in episodic recognition-seeking practises of self-display in particular times and places'. The so-called 'selves' of two of the informants had to be recreated on termination of their jobs (irrespective of the reasons for this termination). From one day to the next, they had moved from the status of relatively high income earners to the ranks of the unemployed and had to cope sufficiently and confidently to ensure that chances of employability (or self-employment) remained good. Rose (1996:197) sums it up well when he suggests that, although we are

...neither at the dawn of a new age, nor at the ending of the old one, we can, perhaps, begin to discern the cracking of this once secure space of interiority, the disconnecting of some of the lines that have made up this diagram, the possibility that, if we cannot disinvent ourselves, we might at least enhance the contestability of the forms of being that have been invented for us, and begin to invent ourselves differently.

The organizational world is no longer neatly ordered according to easily identifiable principles, but rather, is full of contradictions and uncertainties that all employees, irrespective of their level within the organization, have to come to terms with.

Informants suggested that the ability to be reflexive and critical of the assumptions made regarding the world of employment are important - as those foundations upon which assumptions may have been based - are changing continuously. This made for increased feelings of existential insecurity and, more specifically, job insecurity.

The individual must plan smarter in changing circumstances of discontinuous change, uncertain future employability, and diminished organizational support (Wallulis, 1998:115).

Social theorists such as Beck (1992), Bauman (1999), Lash and Urry (1987) have sought to understand and conceptualize the *insecurities of the 'contemporary spirit'* and they are in agreement that these insecurities are largely a result of the current rationalization of work in advanced capitalist societies. The functions of employment are not only to provide economic security, but also existential certainty without which neither freedom nor the will of self-assertion is imaginable as this is the starting point of 'autonomy' (Bauman, 1999), as the 'capacity of action' as Rose calls it, or as the 'locus of control', as conceptualized by social psychologists.

What is indisputable is that individuals are increasingly left to exercise *personal discretion and choice* without much guidance. Rose (1999) suggests that this has been because of the fundamental *change in the technologies of government* as governments have shifted from welfarism to neo-liberalism and citizens have had to become entrepreneurial, moving from 'habit' to 'reflexivity'. Subjects are now ruled in a way that assumes that they are active individuals seeking to enterprize themselves to maximize their own quality of life.

This form of governance has had far reaching implications. As much as individuals have had to come to terms with the degree of choice that they are now confronted with, so too have organizations changed to remain viable in the market economy. This has significantly impacted on security or insecurity in the workplace and the factors that have contributed to this were outlined by the informants. *Globalization* has provided challenges to management and organizations as the mobility of capital and competitive conditions have led to the changing nature of jobs, both in terms of the number, and the content, of those jobs. Organizations have sought to *reduce regulation* in industrial relations as well as to *destandardize* organizational procedures to ensure maximum *flexibility*. In turn, however, this flexibility has exacerbated the *precariousness of employment* and ensured that these patterns of insecurity remain or become an even more important feature in employment. Globalization has further reduced job security by the ever-present threat to relocate plants or organizational functions offshore, even if this threat remains unspoken. '*Event uncertainty*' could be as unsettling as the knowledge of rationalization itself.

Occupying a supervisory or management role in an organization, and a permanent contract, were no longer guarantees for ongoing employability. Tom's observation that whether jobs were fixed-term or permanent made no difference to the degree of security, is emblematic of this. Furthermore, managers are now experiencing levels of job insecurity and job loss traditionally associated with those in peripheral, non-standard jobs. According to Rifkin (1996 :170), managers are the latest victims of re-

engineering.

*Structural changes* have altered the basic features of industry and will have lasting effects. Most significantly, rationalization, which aimed at eliminating modernist structures so that organizations could adapt quickly to ever-changing market conditions, has brought about an industrial relations environment based on the *assumption* of an *equal power relationship* where individuals are responsible for negotiating their own conditions. As the ethos of collectivity was removed from the employment environment, for example the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act, so too has the influence of trade unions.

All social relations have a *power dimension* and under current conditions in New Zealand indications are that power has shifted decisively to the employer (in all but selected skilled roles). This *reassertion of management power* appears to have undermined any attempts at addressing job insecurity in the workplace as the focus has moved towards the customer and profitability. As Beck (1992), amongst others has observed, *risk* is now transferred to employees in an environment of flexibility. This has many implications and has exacerbated perceptions of economic impermanence as many 'career' changes are unplanned when management make decisions on behalf of their employees. This was the situation confronting James when he was unexpectedly retrenched. As a result of that retrenchment, he indicated that employees at all levels have to ensure that they possess multiple skills to enhance future employability. The acquisition of skills at the start of a 'career' was no longer sufficient. As technical skills inevitably become obsolescent, a lifetime of learning is essential. This is particularly relevant in the skilled occupations. Dan typified this by saying that unless he upskilled on an ongoing basis, apprentices would be more skilled than he was.

Responsibility for this *lifetime of learning* is passed on to the individual. This has partly been attributed to the new employment environment which is characterized by '*short-termism*' as employment relations are no longer based on long-term interdependence. *Individual contracts* are one manifestation of this and another is the *low-level of investment* in the education and training of 'human capital' which has largely been left to employees (Stanworth et al., 1991:238). Some informants, however, observed that, in certain circumstances, organizations were prepared to reimburse employees on the successful completion of courses. The lack of, or reluctance to invest in human capital, however, suggests a potential short-term work tenure. Organizations in the survey did, however, invest in their staff in terms of *in-house training* that was *job* and *workplace* specific.

According to some of the informants and the management consultant I interviewed, *non-job specific* variables might take a high priority in selection decisions. Qualities to ensure employability in workplaces of the new millennium identified were: *adaptability, creativity, dealing with ambiguity* and *confidence*. They also highlighted the *shift in emphasis* from criteria based largely on *qualifications* to do the job to the importance of *personal attributes* - often related to personality and self-confidence. This adds another dimension to the possible *increased polarization and exclusion* in the labour market. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine these, suffice to say

that differences between Pakeha and Maori, men and women, for example, could create difficulties (Dakin et al., 1995:137) when conventional selection criteria are used in recruitment practices. The recognition of the importance of these personal characteristics might create the feeling of powerlessness to attain these traits and enhance the fear of irrelevance amongst many in the employment environment, irrespective of their position in an organization.

Behind the expanding insecurity of many 'dependent on selling their labour', there lurks the absence of a potent and effective agency which could with will and resolve, make their plight less insecure' (Bauman, 1999:20).

From the above, it is evident that: given increasing globalization; employment flexibility; the decentralization and decollectivization of labour law and decreased influence of unions - the *deliberate construction of agency* in employees is becoming more and more central to issues of governance. Individuals are encouraged to become self-reliant as the relationship between the structure and agency changes in an increasingly neo-liberal environment. As forms of governance change, so too are structures required to adequately adapt in line with the ideologies or discourses of government. Mark and Gary suggested that *education*, which Bauman (1999) identifies as an institutional effort aimed at encouraging individuals to internalize norms to guide their practice, was one of the key structures that ought to change in response to the escalation of technological requirements as well as the competitiveness evidenced in business. They intimated that most schools were not responding flexibly enough to the labour market and so-called 'choosers' were not being supplied with those reference points that were required - not only to be successful but, on a basic level, to ensure ongoing employability either within an organization or in self-employment.

The informants identified various *strategies* to ensure employability and thus reduce feelings of insecurity. These emerged both in discussions on their own security or insecurity as well as when talking about the *future* for their children. It was generally acknowledged that displaying the '*right attitude*' together with certain *personality traits* were important for a successful working life. Confidence, adaptability, creativity, self-motivation, self-presentation, and being 'positive' were some of these mentioned. In addition, as most companies (irrespective of their business) were involved with selling, appropriate *selling skills* were essential. Well-managed *functional* and *business skills* together with good *service* were seen as vital in ongoing employment. Some informants advised their children to target the '*futuristic*' industries such as hospitality and tourism. From the interviews, it seems that employment choices are considered to be highly significant as the world of work is changing and contingent work is fast becoming the norm. It is more difficult to prepare children for a future of uncertainty than it was when jobs were standardized.

This study has only explored changing workplace relationships, insecurity and ongoing employability in a preliminary manner. It suggests a number of *avenues for future research* to complete the fuller picture. These areas of research could include an investigation into the way in which secondary schools, for example, are preparing pupils for a future of potential employment insecurity and uncertainty and what

*strategies*, if any, are being provided for the acquisition of skills required in preparation for the inevitability of new ways of working. Furthermore, an investigation could be undertaken into the *recruitment criteria* used in New Zealand and how these could reconcile the differences between, for example, Maori and Pakeha and between males and females, as it seems that current criteria are tailored to groups with a 'capacity to act' in the current labour market that is already well developed (relative to others) and that might exclude large sections of the population.

What needs to be addressed, however, at all levels in society, is preparation for new ways of working and a shift of awareness that acknowledges the hardships associated with contingent work and that advocates supportive norms and life strategies that aid the transformation of the inner self of all those currently involved in the hazards of working life, of those excluded from it, and those who will join it (Pascale, 1996).

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