IT EXPERTS AND TEAMWORK, THE ROLE OF MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY FOR NAIVE MANAGERS IN UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS.

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Introduction

While it has been argued that information technologies have been used to deskill workers, little empirical evidence has been gathered on the impact of IT on managers. This paper examines how IT workers can use their skills and position to displace managers, a process we refer to as disintermediation. To be successful in this process of disintermediation, workers need to be both skilled and politically aware. They are helped, we argue, by the naivety of managers who in attempting to engender a team-based culture lose sight of the real activities of team members. This paper argues that while managers may be working in the best interest of the business team, members are working in their own interest. The implications for managers are that they must understand the political and social nature, and context of teams if they are to manage them effectively. Managers also need to be aware that to exercise prerogatives as managers they need to be able to exert control over team members and act as political gatekeepers when members circumvent the manager's position. This paper will examine some of the literature on deskilling and then describe a case study in a large public utility. The paper will explain how the manager was marginalised, failing to recognise the actions of team members. Finally we explain how managers can recognise the process of disintermediation and take steps to counteract it.

Body

As information technology has developed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there has been resurgence in interest in the debate on the labour process and how these technologies may be used to alter the labour process. While much of the debate has centred on Braverman's (1974) work Labor and Monopoly Capital, others such as Friedman (1977), Edwards (1979) and Burawoy (1979) have made significant contributions. At the same time the works of Gorz (1976), Zimbaliast (1979), Berg (1979), Nichols (1980) and Noble (1979) have added to the debate. Thompson (1986: 72) lists three aspects of Marx's work that Braverman emphasised. The first is capital transforming and controlling labour to realise fully the potential of purchased labour power. The second is the production process and the third is the classic technical division of labour, subdividing work into simple routine tasks leading to deskilling and cheaper, unskilled labour replacing skilled labour.

Braverman saw technology in the service of capital providing increased possibilities for deskilling. Technology provides management with improved
tools and techniques of control, the technical control of Edwards (1979). This need by management to have precise control over each component of the production process has as its basis the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor. Braverman argues that Taylorism is a qualitative change in that it separates the conception of a task from its execution. It is the subdivision of labour that enables capital to exercise greater control over the labour process. However, Braverman (1974: 136) points out that Taylorism was opposed strongly by the trade union movement and was not capable of transforming the whole labour process. It has been claimed that what management had been unable to achieve through discipline and organisational change they have succeeded in doing by the introduction of specific technologies. As Child (1987: 253) suggests, management can choose whether to introduce technology that builds on existing skills or it can select a technology that is a means of degrading skills. This is also supported by Noble (1979: 323). Noble found in visits to twenty four plants that in almost every case management had tried but not necessarily succeeded in deskilling the shop floor by transferring control to a programming office. However he did not investigate the role of workers in the programming office. Thompson (1986: 80) claims that regardless of the type of technology different theorists examined, there is a general theme of deskilling.

While there is some agreement between labour process theorists that new technologies are introduced to deskill the workers, others including Blauner (1964), Cosgrove (1972), Goldthorpe, Lockwood et al (1968), and more recently Adler (1988), argue that the reverse may also be true. This argument maintains that as some workers experience a decrease in skills others experience an increase in skills. In the early stages of the introduction of new technologies a small group of workers enhance their skills as they learn to operate the new technologies. However Nichols and Beynon (1977) found that once the system is on line and running smoothly the work becomes less skilled. What appears to occur (Thompson, 1986: 81) is a cyclical effect where the group which gains skills initially are subjected to sub-specialisation as the technology becomes more complex and they then lose some of their skills.

Thompson (1986: 103) argues that the growth of new industries, technologies and products does create new skills. In the short term these new skills may hide the real effect of the changes in work organisation, the erosion of skills. This erosion of skills has weakened the position of many skilled workers. In this weakened position workers no longer compete against management, rather they compete with fellow workers and even their bosses for the few remaining secure jobs. As Rubery (1980) points out, to differentiate themselves from competitors, workers must attempt to control aspects of the internal labour markets in order to maximise their positions.

The Case Study

The case study examines the work organisation and structure of a work team that was perceived to be disadvantaged by the way in which its work was organised. Management's view was that work could be better scheduled and the team better
employed if the structure of the work system was varied and some types of clients could be convinced that the variation was necessary. It was the behaviour of some clients that was perceived to be disadvantaging the team. The disadvantages manifested themselves as extra stress on the team members, requirements for longer, paid hours of work, and a detrimental effect on the quality of the team's outputs. Local management this equated to extra productive time lost, extra expense in overtime, and increased complaints from clients.

In middle management's view, these problem issues arose from the policy conflicts generated by the combined formal and informal use of operational resources in the name of supporting corporate strategies. At the same time, it was acknowledged by local management that the dichotomy created by these conflicts happened frequently enough, although not regularly, to be considered a standard, rational part of organisational life. The situation apparent to local management was an organisational persistence in a practice that produced an extra level of stress for some participants, at the same time as forcing those participants to disregard formal organisational policy and practice.

**Policy Conflicts (Apparent Chaos)**

Since its inception the work team must sometimes disregard formal service levels and, consequently, its job assignment policies because informal requests for service, sourced with particular clients, can carry their own priorities and service level requirements, based on the status of the client or the status of the need for the information. These informal requirements can conflict with formal service levels. The informal requirements become demands to pre-empt work already in the job stream. Formal service levels are affected as informal priorities compete for and win the team's resources. These situations produce levels of conflict related to several criteria. Primarily they are:

- The status of the informal client.
- The status of the formal client/s.
- The amount of leeway in the current jobstream, in terms of whether or not current jobs are leading or lagging their schedule.
- The experience of the formal client/s, in terms of whether or not they have been exposed to this type of situation before.
- Where the formal client/s are positioned in their work/reporting cycle.
- This bears on how much of a delay they can accommodate if delay is necessary.
- The formal client/s understanding of the pre-emptive qualities of the informal client's request for service.

Policy conflicts occur on two levels. The first is, as discussed above, the work team's job assignment policies. The second is the implicit corporate policy that proposes that any work team or individual is expected to contribute to the achievement of organisational goals through the accomplishment of work plans at the operational level. Conflict at the second level arises where the work team is instructed to ignore current work in order to achieve the priority placed on
informal service requests by the informal client. To be able to make such a demand, to exercise an appropriate influence to cause the work team to risk its ability to achieve planned, formal, outputs through the use of approved inputs, the informal client must be of senior rank. Regardless of any annual planning process, project management practices, organisational commitment of resources to achieve planned and approved outcomes, or the needs of formal clients, what the informal client wants the informal client gets if the informal client is of appropriate rank.

Interestingly, corporate policy regarding customer service makes no apparent distinction between formal or informal customers. Within its state-controlled environment the corporation serves a political market. In this market strategic considerations, analysis and choice may be heavily and explicitly influenced by political dogma and political horizons. (Johnson and Scholes, 1997: 31-32) Within this state controlled political market, the corporation responds to informal political clients in the same fashion as it expects the work team to respond to informal senior corporate clients.

There is, seemingly, a corporate policy of "dropping everything" when a political, informal client calls. There is little question that resourcing conflicts arise and are resolved by the removal of resources from formal clients. There is also little question that conflicts arise regarding planned output and can be resolved by quoting the status of the informal client and, perhaps, the nature and status of the work performed. Conflicts can also be resolved by demonstrating that the work performed for the informal client leads to the achievement of corporate goals.

Results of Research

James Gleick, in describing the evolution of chaos theory, made the point that the simplest systems are now seen to create extraordinarily difficult problems of predictability. Yet order arises spontaneously in those systems—chaos and order together. (Gleick, 1991: 7-8) The original assumption of the research was that policy and technology would be both the source and solution to the problem. What has emerged is that the interaction of the human systems, readily described in the literature, produced organisational practices which apparently led to chaos, but which, it turns out, lead to order. Rather than reflecting the original assumptions of the problems or probable solutions, a picture of a corporation in difficult transition emerged. Different groups within the corporation sought to survive and profit from the transition, and eventually an ambiguous and uncertain strategic climate removed the need for the work team to exist in its original form, and completely disenfranchised the team's manager.

Context

The organisation that is the subject of this report is a geographically based Region (business unit) of a large (5,000 plus employees) public sector corporation, Sydney Water Corporation, that combines manufacturing and service provision for a customer base of some 4 million. The customer base of the business unit in
question is some 250,000. The corporation is well established and has a long history of high profile existence within its state controlled monopoly market. Its primary discipline is engineering and it has a very high requirement for good quality face to face customer service. Within the general community the corporation is perceived as expert in its field. The corporation perceives itself as expert in its field. The corporation's market is the largest of its type in Australia.

The Work System and Team

The work-system comprises a work team resourced to deliver a set of defined services, a set of clients to receive the services and the services themselves. There are four team members, all with long experience within various parts of the Corporation. The work team involved is a section of an information technology group within the business unit. It produces information which is used to judge corporate, business unit and operational performance on several levels. As such, the work team attains a status which is directly related to its ability to inform the corporation and shareholders. This status adds a political impetus to the work system and its operations and this, at times, provides a multiplier effect to the system's complexity. At the time of reporting they have been together as a team for some three years. In their individual fields they are considered the corporate experts, that is to say that they are considered the people within the corporation with the greatest level of knowledge about their relevant systems. The services they provide comprise:

- Manipulation of corporate data to generate standard and non-standard reporting for business unit and corporate use.
- Authoring or editing of data extraction routines which business unit and corporate clients use for themselves.

The importance and status of the work team are both products of the team's collective experience and its reputation for being able to access and manipulate data better, quicker, more reliably and more discretely than others. The team is also credited with an ability to find "hidden" data. These traits make the team both a desirable resource and, concurrently, a perceived threat to other interest groups whose purpose is to inform the corporation.

Levels of Service

The work team has formal service levels agreed with clients which are based on the type of service required, its complexity, the amount of work involved and the source of the request. These levels can differ with clients and do vary at different times of the reporting cycles. Formal service requirements are those that are resourced in the team's work plan and have a priority negotiated and agreed by the client and the team at the time of planning.

Informal service requirements are those that are not resourced in the team's work plan and have a priority which is set by the client. An informal client can require services on a regular basis, and can even propose a schedule, just as easily as a
formal client. Informal does not necessarily equal ad-hoc, irregular or non-standard demand.

**Clients**

The majority of the work team's clients are based within the business unit. However, there are a number of clients within other corporate business units and within corporate headquarters. The team has also, from time to time, clients that are not a part of the pool of formal clientele. Formal clients are those who are included in the work team's work plan and for whom resources and outputs are scheduled and agreed. To meet the needs of these clients, resources are committed and approved by the business unit after establishing and approving the relationship between the team's operational work plan and the business unit strategy. Priorities for these clients are related to the role of the team's outputs in the work plans of the clients. Priorities are agreed at the time of planning. The relationship with formal clients can be described as a contracted relationship. The relationship brings with it the opportunity for the team to formally justify its existence and its resourcing. This approach is described by Frith and Fulop as a Unitary approach, where authority and influence are situated with senior management, titles, rules and policies all support the authority of management and authority prevails. (Fulop et al, 1995: 213-235) In this framework routinisation is sought and promoted by the work team.

Informal clients are generally individual senior managers or senior management groups. These clients demand a level of service directly linked to their status within the organisation, and to their priority for the use to which resulting information will be put. These informal clients arrive with varying needs, and because of their ability to command or pre-empt resources, their arrivals are accommodated in the work team's planning process as contingencies. The relationship with informal clients can be described as a dependency relationship. This relationship brings with it the opportunity to create and/or maintain a level of strategic importance that may exceed that normally expected of an operational work team, even one somewhat central to a business unit's information management effort. The dependency relationship is described by Frith and Fulop as a component of a Pluralist approach to organisation and power within organisations. (Fulop et al, 1995: 213-235) As Heyward states, wherever dependence exists in organisations, the potential exists for the less dependent unit to influence the more dependent. Dependency also arises because of job specialisation. When skills and knowledge become concentrated in particular jobs, job holders may become endowed with expert power. However, this would only be significant if the particular job holder were difficult to replace. (Fulop et al, 1995: 178)

**Standard Operational Practice**

The fact that the work team plans a response to informal clients as a contingency is the first hint that the situation that the work team's management is concerned about is a normal and standard part of operational practice. The indication is that
the work team is well enough aware of the problem to plan their response to it, even if they do not know just when informal clients will arrive and with what priority on their service requests. To extend this thought, if the practice is standard then it is also standard practice for formal clients to have their resources, the work team, pre-empted and their own outputs adversely affected at times, and they may also plan for this as a contingency. The work team also knows that, in some circumstances, informal clients will provide resourcing to accompany informal requests for service.

Managing the Relationships with Clients (Order)

Bearing in mind both Hayward's and Frith and Fulop's warnings, the danger to the work team from its standard operational environment is twofold; 1) the thing which can drastically reduce the team's ability to trade in dependencies is routinisation. As soon as its unique skills and abilities begin to become routine, its special nature and its ability to bargain are reduced; 2) If the team becomes known as "significantly" powerful it may be viewed as a problem and slated for break up or replacement. This skill, combined with the informal clients' skill in moving into and out of the Unitarian framework, explains how informal clients can regularly pre-empt work team resources committed to formal clients, (some of equal organisational rank), without generating open and ongoing hostilities between the two groups of clients. As long as the work team successfully manages its response to informal clients, it cannot become too routine. And as long as the work team continues to be acknowledged as striving to meet the needs of its formal clients, the team cannot become "significantly" powerful. This fine balance requires conscious application of organisational and political skills on the part of the work team and its informal clients. The work team's skill in managing this balance, combined with the informal clients' skill in moving into and out of the Unitarian framework, explains how informal clients can regularly pre-empt work team resources committed to formal clients, (some of equal organisational rank), without generating open and ongoing hostilities between the two groups of clients.

The work team operates within what March refers to as a "system of voluntary exchange" (March, 1994: 148). March's context for this description is his concept of exchange models of power, where the focus is on "a small number of factors that provide a trading advantage" within the exchange system. For the work team to survive in its environment, it must enter voluntarily into the trading that is a part of its dependency relationships. The team must volunteer to accommodate the informal clients. That this happens is evidenced by the contingency planning which the work team undertakes formally. This is reinforced by the fact that the business unit regularly approves and resources the contingency planning.

The type of trading that is occurring between the work team and the informal clients is described by March as an exchange model. The objective of trading is to improve position. Within this system, power is dependent on three things; 1) control of the rules; 2) control of resources; 3) control of preferences and identities (March, 1994: 148-149).
Whatever exchanges happen, they take place inside a set of rules. The power in this interaction is with whoever controls the constraints determined by the rules. Constraints may be things like decision rules, alternatives, justifications for the rules, information made available about the exchange or the exchange timeframe (March, 1994, 149). In the situation in question in this report, the Unitarian framework would mandate that control of the rules sits with the informal client because of that frameworks' view of authority. In the Pluralist framework, though, control may sit with the work team. The work team in this report controls access to and manipulation of at least two desirables; 1) their own experience and competence; 2) information that informs about corporate performance. The ability of the work team to quickly lay hands on information and massage it into the form required by the informal client or to offer credible alternative sources and forms should the original request be difficult/impossible to fulfil, means that, at times, the team may control the rules of the exchange. It appears, therefore, that while the original request from the informal client arrives within the Unitarian framework, the team may decide to invoke the Pluralist framework, within which it can sometimes control the rules of exchange (Fulop et al, 1995: 224-226).

Power in the exchange process comes from the control of resources desired by others. As mentioned previously, the work team controls resources deemed desirable to informal clients. Whenever possible, or perhaps only when advisable, the team extracts a premium for access to its resources. Another method for gaining power in an exchange relationship is to change the wants of others so that they desire what you can provide. Trading advantage can also be gained from wanting things that others don't want, from being "deviant". Voluntary trading favours the deviant (March, 1994: 150).

Responses to Changing Market Characteristics

It appears that the second component of organisational strategic intent is replaced by a strategic intent based in individual senior managers or senior corporate groups. It is also appears that the reason for this is a combination of Argyris' description of the individual's need to control the environment so as to reduce insecurity, with attempts to use the confusion of the transition period to improve positioning within the corporation. (Argyris, 1989: 82-85) The work team's informal role is tied directly to the pursuit of power, through the control of important information and its sources, among corporate stakeholders. In terms of strategy and corporate direction, power is taken to mean the "extent to which individuals or groups are able to persuade, induce or coerce others into following certain courses of action." (Johnson and Scholes, 1997: 203)

The period of transition from monopoly to competitive markets will be a period of political instability within the corporation and, as is natural, groups and individuals will seek an advantage or leverage from the situation. As the reality of the shift in market type takes hold in the corporation it is realised that the transition between political and competitive markets began some years ago.
Astute senior managers, and those who took part in the planning and implementation of the transition, understood the level of instability and insecurity that the corporation would be subjected to.

Dealing with Instability and Insecurity

To gain control, people develop their own theories about how to get what they want. People in organisations will work to limit the information gaps they take into a situation so they can lower their level of insecurity and more easily fit their general theory to the situation. People's theories about how to get what they want fall into two types; theories-in-use, those actually used, and espoused theories, those which are written or spoken about. (Argyris, 1989: 82-85) In unstructured, unfamiliar or threatening situations people can abandon their espoused theories, and they can be unaware of this action. People's behaviour in organisations generally represents the best they can do, consistent with their governing values. They display behaviours that agree with the values. To gain control over their environment they will seek to influence others. One of the most effective ways to influence others is to control the definition of valid information. (Argyris, 1989: 82-85)

The work team has a reputation relating to the expertise and experience of its members and therefore, a level of credibility that vouches for the validity of the information it produces. The team's informal clients are senior enough that, in the Unitarian framework, their association with the information ascribes an appropriate level of validity. Both groups use the same principle. These types of organisational behaviours are referred to by Argyris as Model I Theories. Groups working in systems where Model I theories are evident create defensive group dynamics and less valid information. Many of the propositions that people form and generate will become self-sealing and self-fulfilling. "People programmed with Model I theories of action produce Model I group and organisational dynamics that include quasi-resolution of conflict, uncertainty, avoidance, mistrust, conformity, face saving, intergroup rivalry, invalid information for important problems, valid information for unimportant ones, misperception, miscommunication and parochial interests. Under such conditions top administrators become frustrated and react by striving to increase control, by increasing secrecy about their own tactics and strategies, and by demanding a degree of loyalty that borders on complete acquiescence." (Argyris, 1989: 88)

Given the descriptions of the organisation's situation and actions under research, Argyris' model begins to offer a human explanation of the behaviours of the work team's informal clients and of the team itself. In spite of the fact that both parties espouse a formal plan and context for resource usage, their espoused theories, the increasingly confusing and uncertain environment lead them to apply their theories-in-use as a matter of advantage.
The Value of the Work Team in an Uncertain Environment

It is not surprising that the outcomes which the corporation seeks during this time of uncertain transition are the maintenance of unilateral control, the camouflaging of errors and proof of the correctness of the process. As a result, the organisation maintains its own picture of professionalism and, interestingly, its perception of doing everything necessary for the political stakeholders it serves. Senior participants in the transition will seek the same outcomes as the organisation because they generally have the same preferences. As the participants must maintain unilateral control over their individual environments to maximise winning, there is potential for conflict, leading to bargaining and negotiation. A common currency in this is information which thus becomes a threat or a useful commodity depending on the type of goals sought. (O’Reilly, 1983: 108-109)

The work team is valuable in this environment because formal and informal clients use it to produce information to alleviate the feeling of uncertainty current in the corporation at any time.

The Value of the Work Team in an Ambiguous Environment

In ambiguous circumstances, the accessibility of information and the credibility of its sources can become important issues. The issue of credibility can lead to expert sources being ignored because they are not seen as trustworthy. (O’Reilly, 1983: 119) Into this internally politicised climate come many different types of information for different purposes. In the main though, they can be said to fall into two broad organisational contexts; licence compliance and business. Licence compliance problems affect the whole of the organisation, but, in the case of the behavioural system described above, personally affect senior managers. The personal sanctions allowed by the licensing legislation are quite severe fines or gaol. Because they need to protect themselves from being hurt and to protect others in the same way the participants rarely display conflict over the resolution of problems in this context. The work team is valuable here because it can rapidly and expertly extract information directly useful to the protection process.

Problems related to business, on the other hand, are rarely so cut and dried. In these cases the ambiguous environment can produce, among the participants, a high level of indifference to each other’s circumstances because the focus is on maximising personal success. From outside the senior group it can appear that decisions result in no action or actions that are not obviously related to the decision. (March, 1994, 140) The work team is valuable here, once again, because of its expertise. However, the informal client's focus on personal success, the changing of preferences from decision to decision, mean that the team is more valuable to some informal clients than to others at different times. Because the focus is business and the corporation has a diverse business focus, individual team members with specific backgrounds and experiences become valuable as individuals.

In Argyris’ Model I system, and in the corporation discussed here, the existence of ambiguity is evidenced by a combination of factors. The first is control,
followed by the lack of willingness to challenge the underlying values or variables, defensive relationships and little public testing of theories. Add to these factors people's ability to change from their stated ways of behaving to different theories-in-use when situations become unstructured, difficult or threatening. (Argyris, 1989: 82-85) This generates the type of system that will produce situations not easily categorised, confused cause/effect relationships, contradictory rules for different situations and outcomes without clear implications (March, 1994: 178). Here the work team is in danger because the credibility of output inherent in the team's work can pose a danger to the camouflage process. Indeed some informal clients may use the team's credibility to validate the camouflage process. This practice will have a direct effect on the team's credibility and, therefore, value, as the practice becomes evident to a wider audience over time, leading to expert sources being ignored. At that point the work team's value becomes practically zero.

Decision makers who are successful in this ambiguous environment get that way because they are good at guessing the future consequences of their decisions. Successful experiences lead them to develop a set of inferences to support their activities in different situations. These inferences, or beliefs, do not necessarily reflect the truth. They are validated by their usefulness in maintaining a successful position, and sometimes by their widespread use among the decision making participants. History is called as an ally and as a verification of the present. At times it becomes as politicised as information for the decisions because it provides some of that information, it supports their role in the organisation and it reinforces the view that everything happens by design, their design. (March, 1994: 178-184) Here the work team is less valuable again to its informal clients. Successful decision makers among the informal clients rely less and less on the team to supply business information as other sources, inference, beliefs and history, are called on to ratify chosen positions and decisions.

One other important characteristic of the ambiguous environment is the apparent discrepancies between talk and action. They are one of the most criticised results of the confusion and insecurity of the ambiguous environment. Within the organisation observers of the decision making process and its results increasingly see only a loose connection between talk and action. Argyris has an explanation of this observation when he discusses the camouflage of errors. Camouflage may resort to espoused theory in which everyone makes an open secret of the incongruity. Or the uncorrectable error may be attributed to external factors over which members of the organisation have no control. Members of the organisation may make a public show of attacking the problem while covertly sharing an understanding of the ritual nature of the attack. (Argyris, 1989: 93) March also observes the connection and summarises it as; Talk and action are loosely coupled, because talk tends to deal with principles one at a time and action tends to deal with many principles simultaneously but only in a specific limited situation. Talk achieves clarity by ignoring the complications of specific contexts. It reminds decision participants of their beliefs. Action achieves clarity by
ignoring its implications for contradictory beliefs. It sustains the beliefs but bends them to meet the exigencies of action. As a result, some things that are easily said are not easily done. Other things can be easily done but not easily said. (March, 1994: 198) Once again, the work team's value is reduced as its outputs become less necessary to the informal clients as a means of validating positions or decisions. The work team faces more dangers in the ambiguous environment than in the uncertain environment.

The need for the work team to exist as a team in a particular location comes to an end at some point in the evolution of the ambiguous environment. Individual work team members who have experience and/or special skills in particular segments of the corporate business become more valuable as individuals, in the eyes of senior managers seeking to further their interests in these segments or to defend I chosen position against these segments. The picture painted by the descriptions above is one where pressure will be brought to bear on individual team members to leave the team to work as individuals, or to form teams of their own, reporting to individual senior managers.

Implications

As far as the organisation is concerned, the situation described in this case study produces a sub-optimisation of the work team's efforts in the Unitarian framework. This is noticeable in the impacts on formal service levels. Occurring at the right time of year or month this could produce a flow-on of sub-optimisation as formal clients or client groups are held up in their own timetables because the work team can't provide outputs as agreed. While the informal request from an organisationally powerful source will be met through the application of an impromptu level of service for that particular client, other clients will suffer. This leads to the whole of the organisation suffering somewhere along the line.

For the work team, the situation produces unplanned, although sometimes contingent, workloads. Due to the apparent normality of this situation, some formal clients are not indisposed by the pre-emption of team resources by informal clients. The fact that the informal requests will occur and are planned as contingencies based on the work teams past experiences does not necessarily relieve the accompanying stresses. The situation provides periods of stress for the work team in several areas. The team loses credibility with formal and informal clients, it works extra hours to complete tasks, it chooses to invoke a trading relationship with powerful corporate interests and it cannot avoid sub-optimal results for some of those interests. Additionally it must continually maintain an ability to operate in the Unitarian and Pluralist frameworks, sometimes simultaneously.

For the individuals within the work team, there is a combination of stress and opportunity. Two opportunities present themselves to team members; 1) Team members must take on work they do not normally specialise in. This provides an opportunity to learn at the same time as providing a level of stress commensurate
with the learning curve; and 2) As attempts are made to break up the team, members will be presented with attractive incentives to move away. These opportunities cannot and will not be ignored.

Conclusions

The impacts of the policy conflicts are as observed by local management during problem definition. Some clients behaviour was disadvantaging the work team in the work organisation structure of the time. This was manifested as extra stress on team members, productive time lost, extra operational expenses and sub-optimal delivery of output. Management's original view was that these problems arose from the policy conflicts generated by the combined formal and informal use of the team's resources causing delays and dissatisfaction among formal clients. Neither the simulation model, nor the research, refute this opinion.

Management's original question was: "Why does an organisation persist in a practice that produces an extra level of stress for some participants at the same time as forcing those participants to disregard formal organisational policy and practice?" It is proposed the literature describes, through several respected authors, how an organisation in transition can suffer a confusion in strategy and how this confusion can lead to an uncertain and ambiguous decision making environment. Within this environment people will work to protect and advantage themselves while reflecting the values of the organisation. In doing so they will shift from behaving as they say they will to behaving in a manner that is expedient to the situation.

Here a small, talented, service provision work team successfully understood and exploited the strategy environment and subsequent organisational politics by consciously deciding to establish and manage a trading relationship with those clients who were providing problems. This relationship was encouraged by the team's informal clients. Rather than being deskilled and disenfranchised the workers were able to acquire and develop information systems skills. These skills combined with an innate political ability enabled individual workers to secure jobs and positions within the corporation. The difficulty for managers at all levels is information technology and team structures that are currently favoured enable team members to exercise control over the information system. This control empowers the information workers unless management understands and negotiates the position they run the risk of becoming a surplus commodity. It is through the political process that middle managers in particular will suffer disintermediation as they are no longer needed by their work teams or their senior managers.
References

Selected references only have been supplied. A full reference list is available on request from the authors.


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