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Internal Regulatory Practices: Understanding the Cyclical Effects within the Organisation

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**INTERNAL REGULATORY PRACTICES:
UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLICAL EFFECTS
WITHIN THE ORGANISATION**

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ABSTRACT

This paper traces significant changes in the 'New Economy' and considers the emerging changes to the organisational form. It presents a review of the strategic approaches taken by management to cope with increasing industrial complexities. It also aims to discuss what value management currently place on the role of the people within the new organisation. Internal regulatory practices are discussed in this paper according to their voluntary and involuntary nature. These are divided into two sets; work critical and safety critical practices. Evidence from empirical research is presented through a review of the current literature and the initial qualitative based case study. This is guided by a conceptual and later populated framework that enables the paper to explore the 'tensions' that internal regulatory practices may create. It discusses the 'Cyclical Process of Effect' that such practices may have on human behaviour and how these may contribute to the success or failure of an internal change programme.

Keywords: Organisational change, regulatory practices, behaviour, individual and effect

INTRODUCTION

"In managing change, the critical task is understanding how pieces balance one another, how changing one element changes the rest, how sequencing and pace affect the whole structure", Duck (1993).

Organisations failing to achieve their objectives of an internal change programme have been widely discussed (Burnes, 1996, McAdam and Bannister, 2001, Davis, 1997, Grant, 1994, Garvin, 1987, Eskildson, 1994, Brown, 1993, Brown, et al., 1994). Previous research suggests that organisational change programmes are "often met with cynicism and mistrust" (Morgan and Zeffane, 2000, Reichers, et al., 1997). Even organisations that may have spent a great deal of time, money and effort in exploratory research or even on consultants to improve working practices such as Total Quality Management (TQM) programmes may "drop their initiatives within the first two years" (Brown, et al., 1994). Others have raised alarming failure rates of 80% or more in the UK and Europe with and up to 90% in the USA (Burnes, 1996, Zairi, 1994, Zairi, et al., 1994).

Internal regulatory practices provide the primary focus of this research. These are discussed according to their voluntary and involuntary nature and are consequently divided into two sets described as *work critical* and *safety critical practices*. This paper looks at internal regulatory practices adopted within organisations as one possible area for understanding why an organisation may succeed or fail in achieving competitive advantage through its internal resources. It aims to take the understanding of internal regulatory practices one stage further and seeks to identify the effect these may have on the individual within the organisation and ultimately its competitive advantage.

In the literature section of the paper some of the key issues facing organisations in today's globally competitive environment are raised. This section expands the terms initially discussed and opens up a wider focus on the research. A conceptual framework is then presented. This is further strengthened by commenting on various pieces of literature found on the World Wide Web and academic books and journals, in the fields of strategy, operations management, organisational behaviour and human resource management.

The methodology section provides an outline of the research design, which is further illustrated when commenting on the initial case study. By

reflecting on the previous sections of the paper a discussion on the research and case study is raised before any final conclusions and recommendations for future studies are suggested.

EFFECT OF INTERNAL REGULATORY PRACTICES

The term effect is "a result or consequence from a cause" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1995). As stated in the title the cause under question in this study are the internal regulatory practices adopted by organisations. To further explain, the effect under investigation is the direct and indirect effects of internal regulatory practices on the human behaviour of the individual and therefore the influence this behaviour may have on organisational culture as a consequence on the organisations competitive advantage.

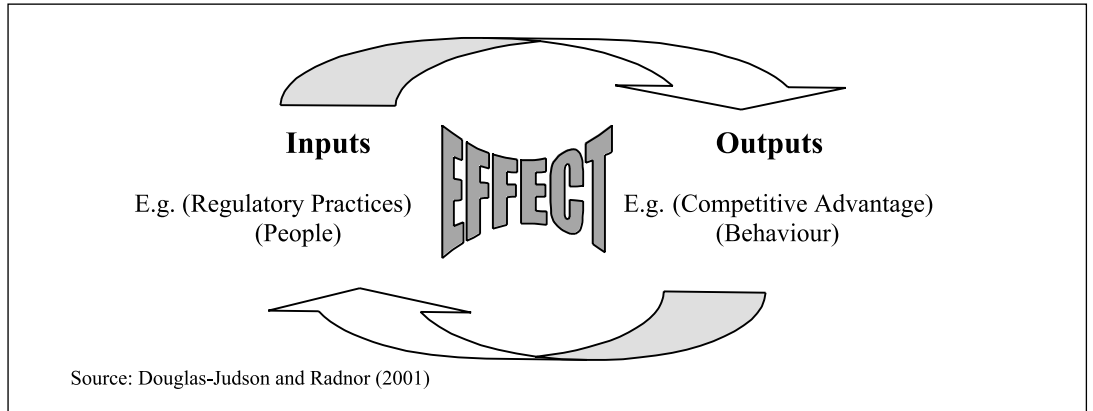
Change as a source of competitiveness is discussed by Senge (1990) who believes that the ability of organisations to be more competitive requires "people that operate them to break old habits and develop new behaviours". Cao (2000) claims that "most modern organisations are presently engaged in a myriad of organisational change aimed at improving performance" and states that "the name of the new game is change in search of competitive advantage". Change has been discussed as a "dynamic process", (Denton, 1996) and affirms the thought that "sometimes we implement something and intuitively know they ought to work - but they don't". So what is it about organisations that enable them to succeed or fail in implementing a change program?

In a recent article by (Hanna, et al., 2000) they raised a valid comment based on the work of (Duerr, 1974) "if large numbers of people behave in ways that are undesirable, you may have to look at the managers' actions and the organisation to determine the reasons". To strengthen the argument it may be worth considering Burnes (1996) who comments on the behaviour of the groups and individuals, which requires co-operation and consent for organisations to move from " abstract concepts to concrete realities" when implementing change.

This research attempts to identify possible causes of undesirable behaviour by looking at the actions of the organisation and the approaches taken to affect change within the organisation.

Figure 1 illustrates that an outcome is the result of an input thus creating a cyclical process throughout the organisation. In other words it suggests that for an organisation to achieve

FIGURE 1 – CYCLICAL PROCESS OF EFFECT



positive organisational results or perceived competitive advantage the inputs or causes should be positive in terms of regulatory practices and resulting human behaviour to enable it to feedback positively through the process.

To expand on the internal regulatory practices previously mentioned, safety critical practices in the first set could be practices that have been involuntarily imposed by external organisations according to their industry type. As the term suggests these practices have a high safety element attached to them, and are often legally imposed for the welfare and safety of others. Without such practices the organisation may not be able to legally conduct business within the sector to which the regulations relate. Examples of such practices include 'Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulation' (COSHH), 'The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulation' (RIDDOR), 'The Provision and Use Of Work Equipment Regulation (PUWER) and 'The Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points' (HACCP).

It is worth noting that whilst these regulations are externally imposed, recent changes in legislation have now moved to reduce the amount of rigidity of such regulations and enable organisations to "decide what is right for their own circumstances, rather than imposing inflexible rules" (Services, 2001). By empowering organisations, such types of legislation are enabling organisations to monitor themselves and implement appropriate practices to meet these regulations as they see fit.

Work critical practices provide the second set of regulations introduced by organisations. The term work critical is attempting to propose those practices that organisations seek to implement in order to improve their overall quality or competitiveness e.g. EFQM or liP, through their operations by following an evaluated framework or guideline (EFQM, 2001, liP, 2001). Syrett and

Lammiman (1997) suggest that such practices are aimed at "facilitating the effectiveness of the organisation through lower costs, increased efficiency and promotion of growth and innovation".

To contrast work critical practices against safety critical practices, these practices could be considered to have a high survival ingredient. That is work critical practices attempt to ensure that the organisation maintains its effectiveness within its industry in order to achieve the organisations objectives. Examples of such practices would be 'Investors in People' (IIP), European Foundation for Quality Management' (EFQM), 'Total Quality Management' (TQM), 'International Organisations for Standardization, Quality Management Systems' (ISO 9001) and 'Business Process Re-engineering' (BPR).

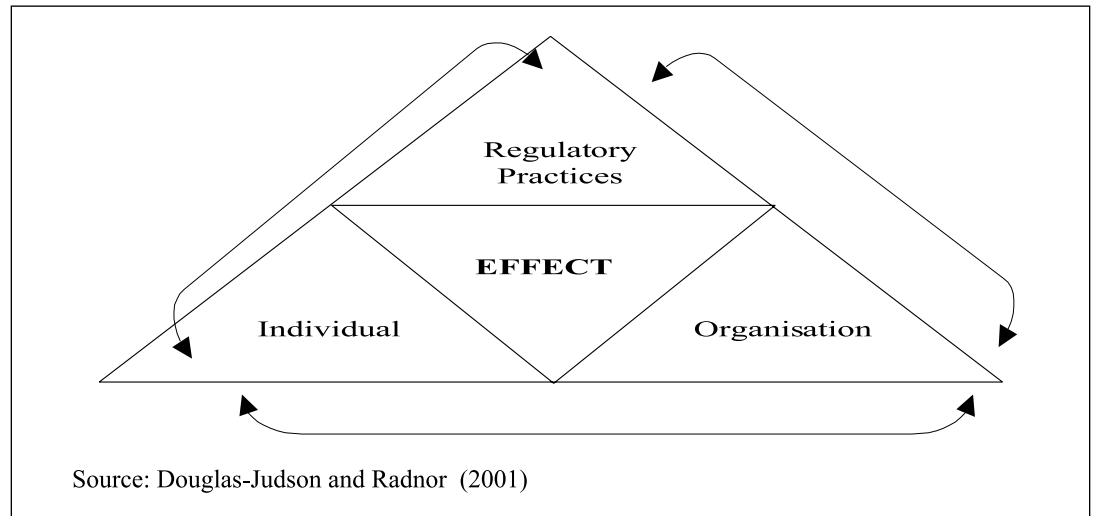
An interesting point to note is that initially work critical practices provide a framework or guideline to organisations that offer a degree of flexibility (liP, 2001) and are non-prescriptive (EFQM, 2001) which allows them to be transferable across organisation types. What makes it interesting is that this degree of flexibility appears to simultaneously impose rigidity by implication of following such practices. In other words, to accept such a practice implies a degree of control and commitment against which the complying organisation will be measured or evaluated. So how flexible are these types of work critical practices really?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical review offered by this section provides a wider focus and further depth to the concepts already raised.

Figure 2 provides a conceptual model that has been used to guide the literature search. Figure 2 expands the causes of the cyclical process of effect demonstrated in figure 1. Within the conceptual

FIGURE 2 – CONCEPTUAL MODEL



framework three factors are assimilated to cause and effect for the organisation; regulatory practices, individual and organisation. Regulatory practices were discussed in the previous section therefore this section will review the issues relating to the individual and organisation.

As the "emerging competitive landscape" (Prahalad and Oosterveld, 1999) intensifies and globalisation through technology and e-commerce reduces barriers to entry, organisations are being challenged to "change their strategies" to provide competitive advantage (Davies and Kochhar, 2000) or to "winning the race" (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990). For some this challenge may be to stay ahead of their competitors or to just simply survive, a view backed by Burnes (1996). But how and what are organisations doing to meet this challenge?

The term competitive advantage has been purposely used within this study to reflect upon the strategy of organisations that provide "significant advantages" over its competitors, allowing the organisation to "add more value" than others in the same market (Francis, 1999, Lynch, 1997).

Developing an organisational strategy to achieve competitive advantage may be approached by one of two strategic options; market-based or resource-based, though often it is found that these are often "inter-linked" (Lynch, 1997). The traditional market-based or external approach is one option to achieving competitive advantage where organisations adopt strategies that reflect their competitive environment, for example through pricing policies or increased advertising expenditure (Lynch, 1997). The second option is to adopt a resource-based or internal approach to achieving competitive advantage, which are those

that "arise from the analysis of the organisations resources" by looking at the organisations "value-chain" and "core competencies and resources" (Lynch, 1997). Examples of such strategies may include empowerment measures or materials resource planning (Lynch, 1997, Klemm, 2000, Francis, 1999).

As a resource-based approach, organisations have frequently adopted guiding frameworks and tools to improve their internal efficiency and overall business success for example TQM and EFQM (Zairi, et al., 1994, Oakland, et al., 1994, Davies and Kochhar, 2000, Taylor, 1995).

The EFQM is a business excellence model that follows the TQM philosophy and has in excess of 600 members. Similar to EFQM is IIP, which claims over 22,000 accredited members, equating to nearly 25% of the UK workforce (IIP, 2001). As with EFQM a quality philosophy is followed that claims "flexibility" through a guiding framework but with a primary focus on the individual within the organisation.

"Regulation allows for distinguishable benefits for management and employees such as improved procedures and communication flows (Investors in People) but assumes a restrictive environment" (James, et al., 1992). In a British Standards Institute on-line document (2000) this view is backed claiming, "Every business seeking to maximise competitive advantage can benefit from standards".

Restructuring of organisations has been commonplace throughout the 1980's and 1990's, as organisations concentrate their efforts on "shifting the bureaucratic *rule-based* structure and ways of working of the organization to a more *flexible* and *responsive* one" (Hayes and Walsham,

1999). This has highlighted the importance of information technologies in supporting more autonomous ways of working. Backing some of these points (Manz, 1992) comments on self-managing teams claim that it's objective is to "improve the effectiveness of the organisation and the quality of working life for employees". But does the introduction of greater autonomy, flexibility, empowerment and information technology into the working environment require trust, control and commitment?

In a recent survey carried out by the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), found that 50% of senior executives from leading businesses around the world stated that "quality people" was there "key critical success factor". This was ranked above the impact of information technology or speed of change, which both ranked at 8% (www.emerald-libr).

Considering the individuals within the workplace, (Cooper, 2000) claims that "workplace stress" is one of the largest causes of sickness with an annual cost of about £5-6bn in UK plc's and is "set to continue", identifying that "increasing EU regulation and organisations that place too much emphasis on the bottom line" along with other factors contribute to this outcome. Thus can there be an optimal balance between organisational objectives and individual needs?

In the literature there are two guiding approaches to the areas of trust, psychological (Gurtman and Lion, 1982, Hochrieich and Rotter, 1970) and contextual (Wellins, et al., 1991), for the purposes of this research the comments provided will be based on the latter.

Given that trust is a "social phenomenon" (Sydow, 1998) and reflecting on the comments raised by (Cooper, 2000) earlier, the research has explored the area of trust due to the participation and involvement of people within the workplace when change occurs and as a key resource to the organisation. (Morgan and Zeffane, 2000) in their studies found that "developing trust in the workplace is critical to organisational performance". This study seeks to identify if there are any significant factors of trust in organisational and human behaviour that may affect the success or failure of internal regulatory practices?

(Wellins, et al., 1991) discuss trust in the context of empowered teams and team development and acknowledge that the "team concept is growing with employee involvement activities being spread

more rapidly in some countries e.g. Sweden and Japan due to national support". This is acknowledged by (Langfred, 2000) in a recent paper commenting on Lawlers' *et al* (1995) research that shows a rise of 40% of Fortune 1000 firms using self-managed work teams to 68%, compared to 1987. In the United States (Wellins, et al., 1991) reflect on this growing trend and state that "The Baldrige Award has aided team development" with organisations "pursuing it like the holy grail" with the winners implementing "empowered teams as part of their total quality effort". Dunby et al (1996) argue, "work groups and teams are critical to organisational effectiveness.

From (Wellins, et al., 1991) research they found six key factors of team development:

"Commitment-trust - purpose - communication - involvement - process orientation"

(Wellins, et al., 1991) identified that there are four stages of the development of trust within each factor. Their research confirmed that a "highly competitive global economy and changing work values helps predict that self-directed teams will become a unique and highly effective strategy". In contrast to this growth Wellins et al comment that self-direction is "culturally bound to some extent" and where organisations are "highly autocratic" the development of teams and move towards an empowered culture or style of working may be hindered. (Blau, 1964) and (Granovetter, 1985) provide frameworks to discuss the relationship between trust and affective commitment. In a recent Harvard Business Review Article, conducted by (Wetlaufer, 1999) with AES's Sant and Bakke found that "free and frequent information flow" is required as a managerial practice to make empowerment work.

The following sections aim to conceptualise some of the issues raised above by examining the recent case studies.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach to the research design and acknowledges the benefits of providing rich data results through interpretive means. It will encompass four case studies completed over three years and is anticipated to provide an in depth analysis and understanding of complex human behaviour within an organisational context.

The data collections methods employed are ethnographic research combining participant observation and discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews allowing for open discourse, observation and literature obtained on-site at each case study.

The key research questions raised in this paper are:

- What is it about organisations that enable them to succeed or fail in some kind of internal change programme?
- Does the introduction of greater autonomy, flexibility, and team working into the working environment require trust, control and/or commitment?
- What are the effects of work critical practices on the individual?

The initial study was completed with a national bakery retailer that will be referred to in the paper as Bakers plc. Bakers plc is the largest organisation within its industry with over £300 million turnover in 1999. It trades through two primary divisions with the largest division operating through 9 autonomous sub-divisions based on their geographical location throughout the UK. Bakers plc retails from over 1000 outlets and employs 14,000 staff. The group is organised on a decentralised basis with a flat management structure.

The completion of this data has provided the basis for analysis and interpretation by following Radnor's (2001) six-stage technique.

CASE STUDY ONE DISCUSSION

This section provides a discussion based on the initial case study and the conceptual model

presented earlier as figure 2. By reflecting upon the conceptual model a populated model, figure 3 for Bakers plc has been simulated.

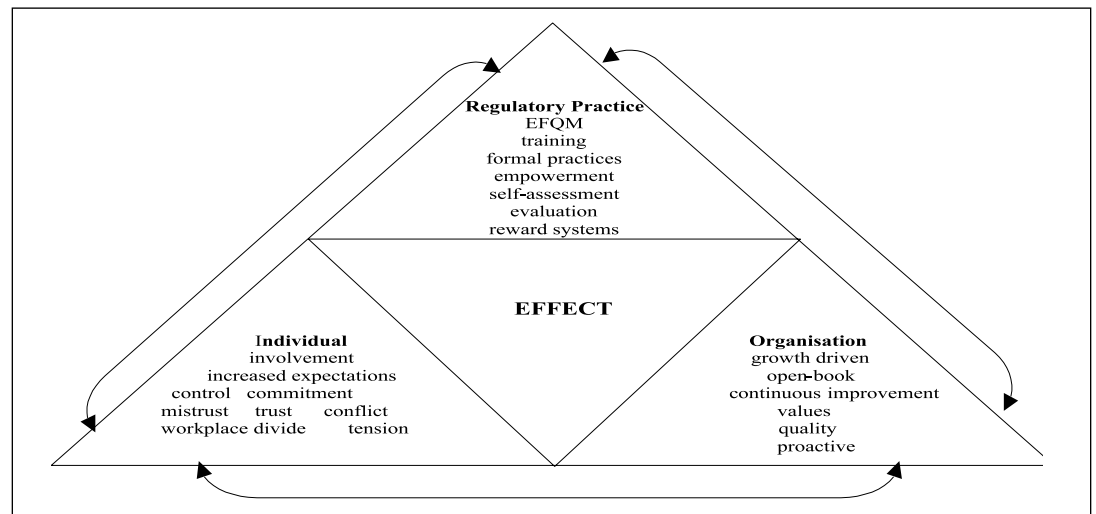
ORGANISATION

The main driver for change at Bakers plc has been to achieve growth in its industry, through national branding and quality through its internal resources. Bakers plc are still in the early processes of change, which began at the latter part of 1998. An "open-book" approach to communicate the internal change programme had been adopted by senior managers. This enabled the communication of "top-level commitment" and for them to share the "companies values" and "long-term goals and vision" with its employees from the start.

After receiving external advice the organisation adopted the Business Excellence Model EFQM to guide the organisations success. One senior manager commented that they were not interested in a "badge collecting" exercise that some frameworks provide. Instead they were interested in the flexibility that the EFQM provided and claimed it suited the organisations future vision by enabling a "self-assessment approach to understand the entire activities within the business".

The change strategy was "was backed by 35 mangers" and deemed "proactive" by one senior manager within the organisation. This initial proactive approach has been considered the start of a trend within the organisation. This reflects the organisations commitment to internal investment, which had not previously existed in a "continual improvement" environment. The importance of this has been to enable the organisation to realise its full growth potential and quality within the market through its internal resources.

FIGURE 3 – BAKERS PLC



As a result of the observations at Bakers plc it was clear that there was a constant visual reminder of the organisations commitment to its long-term vision and values. This view was backed by some of the interviews with senior personnel. It was also clear that the approach taken by the senior managers to communicate the organisations commitment to change involved the entire organisation.

REGULATORY PRACTICES

As identified earlier in the paper organisations that follow frameworks such as EFQM are likely to show evidence of safety and work critical practices. From the initial case study it was clear that Bakers plc have, and are still implementing internal change programmes guided by the EFQM framework. The result has been the formalisation of existing practices and implementation of new ones.

Evidence of safety and work critical practices at Bakers plc has included restructuring management, improving and formalising health and safety issues, reorganising working practices, structuring training plans, evaluation and reward systems and developing employee involvement and commitment through formal feedback systems.

Through the participant observations and interviews there was evidence that the beyond the communications by the management team a number of internal changes had been witnessed.

Empirical results include, the implementation of an induction and training plan within the production plant, which can be classified as both safety and work critical practice. These practices have received a positive response by line managers within the manufacturing plant.

Within the production plant an evaluation programme had been set up through a focus group meeting. This was organised by senior managers for selected first level operatives and can be considered as a work critical practice to tackling production plant issues. Initially senior managers and operatives had viewed the meeting as a "proactive approach". Though proactive the result of the meeting has witnessed a number of conflicting effects, this will be commented on further in the next section.

Evidence of safety and work critical practices has been demonstrated organisation wide. In the administration office the move to delegate part of the ordering system to the retail shops had been sought. Empowering the retail shops is considered to be a gradual move, which aims to improve

stock levels and reduce waste. This system has been in place for some time and is still to achieve fully its desired objective.

In the retail shops a number of standardised procedures were present, which provided confirmation of safety and work critical practices. The majority of the safety critical practices were bright visual documents that provided working guidelines e.g. stock rotation, flowcharts etc On the work critical side a vast number of practices existed. These could be split into two categories. The first set is practices that are for each individual shop only such as, a structured personal development plans (PDP) and success guidelines. The PDP enables the shop manager to track and rank the development of a new starter through a two-way process and "lets everyone know the rules of the company". The success guidelines however, were simply guidelines to improve sales and customer retention. The second set of practices demonstrates a benchmarking practice between all of Bakers plc shops. Such practices included shops plans and shop performance monitors. The shop plans are plans devised between the shop and area manager that ultimately produce guidelines for workload, procedures and prioritisation of duties to be completed within the shop e.g. allocated cleaning times and duration. The shop performance monitors on the other hand are completed by the shop manager and distributed throughout the organisation to evaluate past and current performance of each shop. This provides a tight control measure through set targets and constant evaluation by area managers.

In addition all the retail shops are subject to "mystery shoppers" to evaluate the efficiency of shop members by ranking each shop on a point structure. The aims of the mystery shops are to benchmark working practices and reward those that gain the highest points. This is a controlling feature that encourages a competitive environment between the retail shops.

INDIVIDUAL

This study attempts to understand the effect of regulatory practices on individuals in organisations that seek to achieve competitive advantage. From the empirical results presented in the previous two sections this sections looks at the recorded effects that these regulatory practices have had as a result of Bakers plc internal change programme.

It is fair to state that Bakers plc has attempted to obtain commitment and motivation to change by involving each individual employee within the organisation.

One of the most positive changes has been through the induction and structured training plans evident in various departments. These were commented as being "more structured" and "helped" the role of line-managers. They were also noted as "instinctive to the job" and "common sense" as apposed to strict control measures.

The evaluation programme, mentioned earlier, at the production plant demonstrated conflicting effects on both the individual and the organisations ability to achieve its objectives. The consequential mixed reactions showed that ultimately it provided a general "divide" between operatives and the senior operatives/ supervisors.

Comments noted from the operatives confirmed a general lack of commitment to the department due to tensions between them and their supervisors. This was due to a number of issues surfaced at the meeting. These included departmental inconsistencies with "one rule for one and one for another" and general dissatisfaction for the day-to-day running of the department. In contrast to these reactions the supervisors/managers provided claims that "we've got to be careful when making unpopular decisions... because it's a morale issue" and "we're not allowed to manage anymore". The points raised here demonstrate strong evidence of conflict not only between operatives and their seniors, but also between the needs of employees and the objectives of the organisation.

Empowerment and work delegation measures have been taken by Bakers plc. The example raised earlier of the ordering system can be commented as one that has not been successfully implemented. From the interviews it was noted that this was due to a lack of "trust" caused by continual "inaccuracies" by the retail shops. The result is duplicated work practices by the administration office, as they continue to check and amend the retail shops. This is to ensure that each shop remains effectiveness.

The previous example reflected the problems with the flow of interdepartmental communication throughout the organisation and was as a result of the retail shops "not understanding the process of ordering", which referred to the changes in the process for example during holiday periods or marketing campaigns.

Beyond the day-to-day implementation of the internal change programme it was evident that the initial enthusiasm and communication of change had reduced greatly. As one senior manager claimed the programme "raises expectations" of employees. It could be argued that the employees had not yet met these expectations. In contrast it appeared that everything had died down or "seems to have disappeared" where terms such as *empowerment* "is just a word...and a waste of our time". The visual representation of the programme reminded others only that it was the extrinsic "£40million that we hear about, never mind the people".

The above sections have been discussed in isolation only for the purposes of this paper. This is not to suggest that they should be considered in the same manner. The final section of this paper places some of these comments back into context to enable a fuller understanding and appreciation for their importance to future research.

CONCLUSION

As a result of this study a number of concluded comments can be considered these are guided by the research questions raised earlier.

What is it about organisations that enable them to succeed or fail in some kind of internal change programme?

At Bakers plc the main driver for change was growth in the market and quality through its resources, guided by the EFQM framework. It is apparent that one of the key success factors to succeeding in change for Bakers plc was the approach and level of communication taken by senior managers at the first stage. This approach enabled managers to create organisation wide awareness and commitment to its long-term values and objectives. This started the development of a continuous improvement and open-book environment. What needs to be questioned though is if Bakers plc have driven partial failure by not maintaining this level of communication after the initial launch of the change programme? The result of this reduced communication flow has left many employees questioning the continued existence of the programme and therefore their commitment to it.

Does the introduction of greater autonomy, flexibility, and team working into the working environment require trust, control and/or commitment?

There was evidence at Bakers plc of a proactive approach of senior managers to improve working procedures through autonomy within the organisation. But there was little evidence to show an increase in team working. From the study a number of work critical practices was found, which demonstrated both rigid and flexible attributes. This demonstrates a clear contradiction to flexible working practices. For instance the evaluation process taken by Bakers plc highlights a control feature that goes beyond the concept of flexibility and autonomy.

It is apparent from the initial case study that the effect on individuals of work critical practices produces mixed results of which the latter contradiction may be a cause. Mixed reactions to work critical practices seems obvious when considering that no two individuals are the same. Through the case study though it appears that there are other factors beyond flexibility that create this result. These include the role and length of service of the individual within the organisation. This is noted due to the contradictory levels of acceptance and understanding of regulatory practices from those interviewed and should be considered further in future research.

What are the effects of work critical practices on the individual?

At Bakers plc it was identified that the internal changes implemented by Bakers plc have clearly provided both negative and positive effects on the individuals employed by the organisation. Issues of interdepartmental trust and trust in colleagues has been highlighted in this paper. In the absence of trust it was identified that tension can exist providing a reduced level of efficiency and work place commitment.

Considering the culture within Bakers plc a "much more open book" approach has been adopted by senior managers with "continuous improvement driven from the top" the effect on culture noted a reduction in the social side of organisation life. The case study revealed issues on culture that reflected a general feeling that "there used to be a bit more of a social side" and "you just don't seem to know anyone anymore".

This research contributes to the current literature on organisational change. It looks specifically at regulatory practices implemented by organisations instigating change through a resource-based approach. It confirms that a number of tensions and conflicts may exist as a

result of change. As a result future research should consider how these tensions and conflicts could be harmonised to enable organisations to achieve the objectives of a change programme and ultimately competitive advantage.

What may be worth investigating in the future research is the lifecycle of the organisation (Daft, 1997) and the affects this may have on organisations implementing change. For example, is there an appropriate stage of the organisations lifecycle that change or an increase in regulatory practices is most accepted? In addition future research should aim to understand if similar trends exist in other organisations, and if a model or guiding framework can be developed. The objective of this framework would be to aid organisations at the strategic level to implement and evaluate a change programme that reflects their own culture and organisational structure.

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