

*The team dream: the meaning
and experience of
teamworking for employees
in an automobile
manufacturing company*

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This chapter explores the meaning and experience of teamworking for employees in an automobile manufacturing company. It questions the managerialist discourse of teamworking which assumes that it will simply be welcomed by, and is beneficial for, employees. It also offers a ray of hope to those critics who warn of the normalising effects of teamworking. It is argued that just as there is no single form of teamworking, likewise there is no single experience of teamworking. Thus, while the discourse of teamworking is seductive, presenting as it does an improved work experience for all, as with earlier management interventions there will continue to be spaces and opportunities for resistance. It is illustrated how the meanings management seek to shape through teamworking may meet with employee intransigence born of their earlier life experiences and how the discourse of teamworking is open to interpretation and manipulation, and may be reconstituted and re-represented so as to secure ends other than those intended by management.

Introduction

A concept that is at the heart of recent innovations such as just-in-time (JIT), total quality management (TQM) and business process re-engineering (BPR) is teamworking (McCabe and Black, 1997). There is, of course, no single model of teamworking that is applicable in every environment (Mueller, 1994; Thompson and Wallace, 1996) and the concept has been described as 'notoriously ambiguous' (Pollert, 1996, p. 185). Here, teamworking is understood to refer to a range of practices including flexible working patterns, delayering – especially by replacing supervisors or foremen with team-leaders – good housekeeping, quality self-inspection and continuous improvement through problem solving. Thompson and Wallace distinguish between the technical, governance and normative dimensions of teamworking. The first of these refers to the reintegration of the 'technical' division of labour; 'governance' refers to the amount of control afforded to employees; and the 'normative' dimension covers the way in which management promote 'changes in attitudes and behaviour necessary to make teamworking operate effectively' (1996, p. 107). In this chapter the concern is to explore this more 'normative' dimension or how management are concerned 'to develop a different-type of worker' (Thompson and Wallace, 1996, p. 109) through teamworking.

Mueller argues that teamworking 'can be regarded as a modern attempt to re-align individual motivation with organisational rationality' (1994, p. 386). This chapter is not concerned with how this might best be achieved but instead will critically scrutinise what such an objective might mean for employees and consider the bearing it has upon their working lives. Accordingly, the concern is to move away from accounts that focus upon teamworking either theoretically from a managerialist perspective (that is how to make it work more effectively) or empirically upon management's voice. Thus, the concern is to offer a platform for those voices that have so far been neglected in accounts of teamworking.

Teamworking is often presented as being innately good for employees: an approach that 'is more satisfying to team members and boosts morale' (Oakland, 1996, p. 12). This is the 'dream' of teamworking and it is frequently contrasted with work that is atomised, Tayloristic, or Fordist (Womack *et al.*, 1990; Wickens, 1992). One might expect, therefore, that teamworking will be unequivocally welcomed by all the parties to the employment relationship. For as Oakland points out, teamwork 'builds up trust, improves communication and develops interdependence' (1996, p. 12). These taken-for-granted assumptions of teamworking will be questioned in this chapter, not least because, as Harrison and Storey have recently noted, 'employee perspectives and behavioural reactions to the various dimensions of the new manufacturing management initiatives have so far gone largely unrecorded' (1996, p. 72).

Critics of teamworking programmes – often described as 'lean production' (Womack *et al.*, 1990) – have argued that they lead to work intensification and enhanced management control (Turnbull, 1986; Parker and Slaughter, 1988; Delbridge *et al.*, 1992; Garrahan and Stewart, 1992; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Sinclair, 1992; Barker, 1993; Berggren, 1993; Delbridge, 1995). Indeed, Parker and Slaughter (1988) describe working conditions under teamworking as 'management-by-stress'. The findings presented here only partly support this conclusion, perhaps because teamworking in the case study to follow was not nearly as advanced as has been found elsewhere (Barker, 1993; Delbridge, 1995). Consequently, where stress existed, it tended to stem more from the way in which teamworking was imposed than from the condition of working in teams. Teamworking sought to avoid 'power and conflict by the imposition of an artificial consensus' (Sinclair, 1992, p. 621) and, as we shall see, for many employees this created some considerable strain.

Some critics have begun to question the extent to which new management techniques associated with teamworking can attain control over labour (McCabe, 1996; McKinlay and Taylor, 1996; McCabe and Black, 1997; Knights and McCabe, 1997, 1998). Teamworking was certainly contested by a number of employees in the case study to follow, but it is difficult to speak in terms of a universal employee response because there were a variety of experiences and reactions. Teamworking does not refer to any single set of practices and therefore it is necessary to tease out different employee responses to its different dimensions. One has to recognise that the way in which individuals respond to the discourse of teamworking will be bound up with their earlier work/life experiences and identity; such conditions may render employees more or less susceptible to teamworking. One cannot assume, therefore, that management can 'produce' team players without considering how individuals interpret, respond to and make sense of teamworking (Marks *et al.*, 1997). To do otherwise is to ascribe to management an omnipotence and to employees a passivity and malleability that are simply untenable.

The experiences of three types of employee are identified in the case as a heuristic device for understanding responses to teamworking. Of course, this necessitates generalisation because individual experiences cannot simply be slotted into one category or another. Hence, employees appeared on occasions to be ambivalent, supporting the 'technical' while rejecting the 'normative' dimension of teamworking. Nonetheless, it is thought that grouping employee experiences together according to the intensity of their support for the 'normative' dimension of teamworking, provides a useful way to present a complex set of research findings. First, there are those (by far the minority of those interviewed) who seem to have been 'bewitched' by the discourse of teamworking and broadly supported it. Ostensibly, they appeared to be the unquestioning team players or the 'perfect people' (Marks *et al.*, 1997) that management aspired to produce, but in-depth interviews revealed a more complex picture. Second, there are those who are 'bothered' by teamworking

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in the sense that they are disturbed by its incessant intrusion into their 'private' lives and by the reactions of colleagues who seem to be enthralled by the 'team dream'. These employees are particularly alarmed by, and are opposed to, the psychological warfare that management are waging through the 'normative' dimension of teamworking. It is these employees who seemed to be capable of taking up the teamworking discourse and turning it back on management by:

subverting its meaning and re-articulating its logic... opening up new positions for themselves to occupy. (Fournier, 1998, p. 75)

Finally, there are employees who were 'bewildered', especially by the 'normative' dimension of teamworking, which appeared to simply wash over them, and in this sense they were indifferent to it. These employees tended to see nothing especially 'new' about teamworking.

The chapter is organised as follows. The next section discusses the context in which teamworking arose in the case study company as well as its content. This is followed by an account of the corporate approach towards the 'normative' dimension of teamworking. Then, in the main body of the chapter, the experiences and meaning of teamworking for employees will be considered. Finally, some overall insights are drawn out in a summary and conclusion section.

The case study

A variety of methods were deployed during the conduct of the case study, including formal and informal interviewing techniques and documentary investigation. Strategy statements, corporate memos and briefs, training materials and union-management documents were particularly useful. The research involved an extensive period of interviewing over a six-month period from July to December 1996. The work presented here is part of a larger case study on innovation that included interviews with 30 middle managers from a variety of functions including quality, personnel, engineering and production, 10 team leaders and 20 shopfloor employees. Each individual was interviewed for a minimum of 45 minutes. The interviews generally explored the experience of change and innovation during the 1990s. It is important to note that management selected the interviewees and so one might expect that the results would favour the corporate line. That in practice this was far from the case reveals much about the general support for teamworking within the factory.

Intermotors (pseudonym) is a large UK-based automobile manufacturing company which has undergone a period of substantial change during the

1990s. Following the worldwide recession of the 1990s sales collapsed by two-thirds, plunging the company into a loss-making situation. A period of rapid and extensive change commenced which saw the introduction of flexible working practices, teamworking, outsourcing, downsizing and delayering. Increased work flexibility threatened existing demarcations between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled groups, and the identity of trades such as turners, fitters and coach builders. In theory, all of these divisions were replaced when management introduced a 'New Labour Agreement' (NLA) in the early 1990s which demanded complete flexibility. In practice, however, many divisions on the basis of skill still apply. Nonetheless, employees are now bound to move around the factory at management's behest. The workforce was reduced by a half following a series of large-scale redundancies, and in view of this many employees continued to express resentment towards management even in late 1996. Employees resented not only the redundancies but also the autocratic approach that management have adopted. This is apparent in the imposition of pay awards during the 1990s.

The factory has traditionally been organised around machinery, assembly, trim shop and paint shop areas, and strict demarcations applied in terms of the movement of labour between them. There was no flexibility between trades, and semi- and unskilled groups were excluded from work that was deemed to be 'skilled'. Only individuals who had gone through a formal apprenticeship were classed as skilled. Following the large-scale redundancies in the early 1990s, management endeavoured to tighten control over production. Work was reorganised into zones, each with 10 teams of 10 members. These zones corresponded more clearly with the production flow but retained the traditional divisions between the trim shop, paint shop, manufacturing and assembly areas. The roles of foremen, charge hands and leading hands were replaced with that of a team leader. Skill demarcations have begun to be broken down and formerly unskilled individuals can now be trained up to do work that was hitherto deemed to be 'skilled'. In each team, according to the commitment and ability of the team leader and zone manager, employees have been increasingly involved in planning and reviewing work schedules, which previously was a managerial role. Engineering expertise has been devolved to the shopfloor and employees have been given the technical support to solve their own problems rather than simply passing them on to an engineering department. Currently, management are 'outsourcing' major areas of the factory, especially in the machine shop, which will be closed in the near future. Substantial investment is being made into a new assembly line and this will require greater flexibility between the trim shop and assembly areas.

The normative dimension of teamworking

This subsection will consider the meaning of the 'normative' dimension of teamworking as management seek to convey it to employees. Teamwork is heavily promoted during corporate quality training sessions and it is presented as being beneficial for all:

Teamworking is a guiding principle for the Company that allows individuals to increase the scope of their skills and experience and provides a foundation for continuous improvement. (training document)

Teamworking is conveyed in an entirely positive way whereby employees can enhance both their skills and work experience. Corporate training materials suggest that teamworking promotes 'ownership', 'involvement', 'quicker decision making' and 'being competitive', while at the same time improving 'communication', 'motivation' and 'information sharing'. Such gains are difficult to argue against, for who would wish for poor communication or to be uncompetitive? It is here then that we can begin to identify the seductive nature of the teamworking discourse.

Internotors has introduced a mission statement, corporate goals, a corporate vision and values such as trust, respect and commitment, which everyone in the organisation is expected to share and support; a company uniform; an in-house employee learning centre where employees can attend courses ranging from languages to computing; and management have begun to address all employees, irrespective of rank or position, as 'associates'. In doing so, management are concerned to deny that any divisions exist within the company. These are the means through which management are concerned to promote the 'normative' dimension of teamworking. Underpinning these changes is a concern to promote a unitary culture where everyone works together towards a single shared corporate goal. This is apparent in the following extract:

The people vision and values are about *our* relationships, *our* drive to seek out every opportunity, *our* commitment to achieve business goals; they are about *our* associates' freedom to act to benefit *themselves*, *their* teams and *the* Company. (Key Goals Statement, 1996; my emphasis)

The use of the word 'our' is important because it endeavours to splice together individual, team and corporate interests. Management are concerned that employees take responsibility not only for their own individual performance but, through teamworking, for meeting business goals. The discourse of teamworking is that everyone is working together towards the same goal from which everyone will benefit. Overall, there is an underlying concern with changing the way in which individuals think about the organisation:

above all we've been working with people. We've been working on the minds of people because we needed a new attitude, old attitudes don't work in this new creative environment (quality director)

The new attitude requires employees to embrace change and to forget earlier divisors along the lines of management versus workers or blue versus white collar staff. Employment is no longer to be seen as an economic exchange but rather, through 'teamworking', it is a means to 'unlock all of our potential' (Quality Document, 1995). The section to follow explores the meaning and experience of teamworking for employees, considering the ways in which individuals respond to, but also manipulate, the discourse of teamworking.

The meaning and experience of teamworking for employees

Bewitched

Bewitched is a term that is applied to employees who largely supported teamworking and adopted the corporate line. Employees who most clearly supported teamworking had often been promoted to team leader positions or onto special projects and so 'buying in' was seen by many employees as a means of 'getting on' (see Pollert, 1996) in the company. Such individuals tended to be wheeled out by management to talk to customers and outsiders. They were often bitterly resented by their colleagues, who considered that they 'swan about' and leave them to do the 'work'. One individual in particular (who will be called Jonah) was vilified. He has gone from being a 'skilled man' to a setter, from a setter to a team leader, and from a team leader to being a member of the 'quality team'. He can be regarded as an ambassador for the new teamworking approach. Jonah is a charismatic character who has worked for the company for 23 years. He went through an 'enlightenment' following the introduction of teamworking. It was apparent from the personal experiences he recalled that he was an intelligent, although uneducated, man who had spent many frustrated years working in a job that did not utilise, or provide any opportunity for him to express, his abilities. The following extract is indicative of his support for teamworking:

we were treated like shit in 'ere. You were treated like a piece of shit... when we come into teamworking, the finest bastard thing that's ever happened to this company I became the team leader. I thought I'm having a bit of this... they took the piss and they were always putting people down. The union dominated us, the management and the foremen treated you like a piece of shit, and even most of the

blokes got like that... Setters were Gods, man. They made the lame walk and the blind see. Everything about your life was dictated... We did all this in four years. It took me 17 years to learn how to do all these jobs. I taught them (team members) how to set, how to operate, how to inspect and a multitude of other skills, because we are a team and we're working together. This is our bay. The fucking shit is that side of it. Not here, cos we're human beings here. We will treat other people with respect, and all you have to do is to treat people with respect, and they will come your way.

The bitterness in Jonah's account needs to be located and understood in the context of his personal circumstances. Here is a passionate, talented individual, who until recently considered himself to be illiterate. The frustration of a lifetime was channelled into teamworking and, therefore, it was viewed as his saviour. Nonetheless, he noted that some individuals 'have not moved an inch', which he attributed to poor team leaders and management. Here we can see that for this individual and others teamworking holds out a number of potential benefits and therefore it would be foolish to simply dismiss it out of hand.

Although the teamworking discourse is seductive, even for those who supported it, it proved, on occasions, to be inconsistent with their lived experiences. John B., for instance, has worked at Interiors since 1984 and began his career as 'a machinist' within the 'machine shop'. John then became a team leader and is currently working on 'special projects'. He is concerned to 'get on' and it became apparent that he was 'trying' (although often unsuccessfully) to sing the corporate teamworking song. It seems that individuals must engage with a discourse so as to reconstitute themselves rather than being simply on the receiving end of a 'totalising' discourse as some suggest (Barker, 1993). Hence, in initially talking about his earlier work experiences he explained:

that was the... er... the old organisation, as we seem to put it here now, where we had foremen and leading hands. I grew up in that environment and all your decisions where made for you. (emphasis added)

John articulated and expressed his views through the corporate teamworking discourse. Hence, he talked of the 'old' environment in a derogatory way where 'all your decisions were made for you'. The thought process, in the above extract, provides an intriguing revelation. The 'er' that preceded his assertion regarding the 'old organisation' did not seem to roll off his tongue. It was as if he was trying not only to convince the researcher but also himself that the organisation is different than it has been in the past. The phrase 'as we seem to put it' reveals that there 'is' a 'corporate line' which is something the company 'says' it is rather than necessarily what it is. Support for the 'corporate line' was also apparent when he discussed his change in position:

I've gone from working on the tools to more of a staff-type position, but we don't like to call it staff anymore. (emphasis added)

Management have recently begun to refer to all employees as 'associates' rather than management, staff or shopfloor workers. Employees are no longer, in the words of John, a 'stuffy' or a 'shedy'. Yet despite being aware of this 'change', John is not entirely in tune with the corporate song. Hence, rather than talking of associates in a seamless way, he revealed in a peculiar fashion that 'we don't like to call it staff anymore' and of course this 'we' is the corporate 'we'. As John relaxed he began almost to confess that teamworking is not really the new reality. Hence, he highlighted inconsistencies in the corporate speak:

We say we're having a new culture and a new teamworking process and everyone will be empowered... and so people are feeling more free to do different things and get involved in more things. I mean people wouldn't even have answered the phone years ago and so the trust thing comes out then... but then you will get a management decision that's like 'you are going to do this and this is the way you are going to do it'. Real old fashioned sort of stuff and it all falls down again then, and then morale goes back to where it started. (emphasis added)

It is interesting that John, even within a single conceptual thought, is capable of switching back and forth between discourses (see Watson, 1994). Hence, initially he stated that 'we' (the organisation) are 'having a new culture'. Then he explained that 'management' may act in a way that contradicts the 'new culture' and in doing so he disassociated himself from management and their autocratic stance. He also stated that an autocratic approach is 'old fashioned', and as such, it is inconsistent with teamworking. It was apparent, however, that management still tended to adopt an 'old fashioned' approach despite his earlier suggestion that the 'old organisation' has gone away.

Some employees, although welcoming teamworking, questioned the consistency of management's approach. Alan has been a fitter within the machine shop for 23 years and argued that he 'liked the teamworking, the quality, it seems to work'. It was noted that some 'demarcation' lines have disappeared, the organisation is less bureaucratic and 'problems' are resolved quicker. Yet, he qualified his support by arguing that:

management are trying to portray a good relationship with the workforce, but honestly, from off the shopfloor, I don't think there is.

Interestingly, it was felt that the workforce is 'still being dictated to' while the company presents a far rosier 'teamworking' picture to the media or to the wider public. Thus, despite offering his support, Alan noted a gap between the rhetoric and the reality of teamworking. Other employees also offered

the possibilities of teamworking, and yet was called back from the brink by colleagues who warned of 'brain purification'. Here we can see the effects of employees deploying an alternative discourse of 'brain purification' against the official corporate teamworking discourse. Nonetheless, Damian was wary of, rather than opposed to, the unitary understanding that teamworking seeks to promote. He embraced its potential, saw the flaws in eliminating debate but also questioned whether that was management's intention.

Bothered

A number of individuals were bothered by teamworking in the sense that they resented its continual intrusion into their private lives and were worried by colleagues who had imbibed the teamworking discourse. These individuals were vehemently opposed to the 'normative' dimension of teamworking and wielded an alternative interpretation of the unitary teamworking discourse, which they described as 'brainwashing' or 'brain purification'. Indeed, these were individuals who would have sought to enlighten Damian and decry Jonah. Nonetheless, many welcomed the 'technical' dimension of teamworking.

I think it was brainwashing basically, you know, to be honest... 'Right first time' things like that, to get you to... well, I mean, we're all conscientious workers anyway, you know... cutting down on waste. They must have a low opinion of the workforce.

Ian has worked in the 'trim' shop for 17 years and in 1996 he became a shop steward. As the above comments reveal, he viewed the new approach towards teamworking as 'brainwashing basically' (Pollert, 1996). The thrust of concepts such as 'right first time' was deemed to be insulting, implying that people lacked commitment and pride in their work, whereas for Ian the situation is quite the opposite. To ask workers to cut down on waste or to do their job correctly the first time, implied to Ian that management did not trust the workforce to do a good job. It was considered that management are trying to work on the minds of employees and Ian was very suspicious and sceptical of management:

They are all being trained by psychologists now aren't they? You know, how to work people and things. People know this and they don't trust them.

That management are trying to change the way in which people think was a considerable source of distrust. James, an employee of 12 years within the

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their reserved support for teamworking. For instance, Andy, also a fitter, and an employee of some 17 years, considered that 'the company has come to appreciate the workforce more' whereas before 'you were just a number'. It was argued that employees have 'more of a say', 'you are given more scope to do your own thing', employees are more 'involved', and 'consultation' and 'communication' have improved. More generally, Andy felt that the 'younger' people have welcomed the move towards teamworking, whereas many 'older' ones think that it is 'hogwash'. Notwithstanding Andy's apparently unequivocal support for teamworking, it was considered that there is still a 'them and us' situation, and that there is still some way to go with regard to building 'trust'.

It was interesting that some employees, while committed to teamworking, were aware that it required from them a 'psychological' change. Damian, for instance, has been an employee within the machine shop for 11 years and has recently taken on the position of a team leader. He viewed himself as a 'shopfloor' worker with extra responsibilities, although team leaders also receive 7 per cent more pay than team members. Teamworking was not viewed as fundamentally different, although it was recognised that employees are more involved now and are more informed about work flows than before. For Damian, a crucial turning point in his understanding of work was attending a BTEC course, which the company finances. He explained that 'it woke me up, it turned the key' and he felt that it had prepared him for change: 'it's adjusted me'. Education has made him more susceptible to new ideas and he is aware, although not critically, that teamworking necessitates a change in the way people think. So with regard to the use of the term 'associates' he remarked:

I think everything is to make things sound better. Everything's like psychological [pointing to his temple], things are done psychologically and everything is done to promote things.

These remarks suggest that the teamworking discourse is being used to promote a particularly positive picture of factory life. Appearing to distance himself from employees who unquestioningly support this 'psychological' shift and the managerial line it embodies, Damian argued that 'they' have 'bought into the way of thinking of Internotors'.

some people say that they have had their brain purified by Internotors and all they think about is Internotors. Internotors. I don't know if that is what they try to get you to do. (emphasis added)

Although committed to teamworking, Damian avoided offering it his unflinching support. Indeed, he felt that if management eradicated 'debate' then it would be detrimental to the company's progress. He seemed to be seduced by

trim shop, was also critical of the normative dimension of teamworking and he suggested:

management are trying to replace money. I think, right you hear brainwashing. But it's just trying to replace monetary values with other means like the word 'associate' it doesn't mean anything really... people scoff at it... You should be this, you should be that. I mean they won't leave us alone. I can't define it properly... the whole corporate way, you know, the way they want you to think.

James is concerned that management want to 'own your mind basically'. Teamworking is seen as an attempt to realign employees' minds with the corporate world view which is considered an alternative means of motivating employees to that of offering cash incentives. Clearly, James's observations share much with Mueller's view that teamworking is 'a modern attempt to realign individual motivation with organisational rationality' (1994, p. 386). The 'scary bit of it' for James is that so many employees seem to have bought into the corporate ideology. The corporate intrusion into the private lives of employees is all too apparent in James's lament that 'they won't leave you alone'. Nonetheless, wielding this alternative interpretation of teamworking as brainwashing can be understood as a form of resistance.

Many employees, who were disturbed by the teamworking discourse, nonetheless felt that some of the developments associated with it are worthwhile. A number of improvements were noted such as better parts supply, greater employee involvement, and efficiency. One cannot argue, therefore, that these employees were entirely opposed to teamworking.

Although it was felt that some employees have adopted the corporate line, many 'bothered' employees questioned their commitment. It was thought that only ambitious individuals, those who aspire to become team leaders or who want to get involved in special projects, adopt the corporate line. Questioning or dismissing the credibility of those who support teamworking could be interpreted as a further means of resistance. Roger, a team member of 12 years, who works within the machine shop, remarked of Jonah (discussed above as being bewitched):

he's so full of shit it's unreal.

Some employees expressed that they felt 'embarrassed' by Jonah's unpromising support for teamworking because it was so out of touch with feelings on the shopfloor. Many thought that management tended to listen to individuals who 'tell them what they want to hear'. Clearly these sentiments question the legitimacy of teamworking and the power structures that support it. James remarked that with the introduction of teamworking everything 'totally changed you couldn't believe what a change it was'. The team leaders:

who were appointed from the shopfloor were considered to have 'really bought into' the new approach and their response was seen as 'scary':

a total change in somebody... of course, they did get buttered up and I don't like using the word brainwashed... they just ran away with it... they believed that they were the people that were changing the company... terrible.

The organisation is considered to be full of people 'trying to get noticed' rather than actually doing things 'for the company'. Thus a distinction was drawn between employees who genuinely work hard for the company but go unrecognised, and those who support the corporate line, talk the company-speak and are promoted. Overall then, those employees identified as 'bothered' are sceptical of their careerist colleagues who appear to be 'bewitched' by teamworking. By contrast, the 'bothered' are intensely aware of the 'normative' dimension of teamworking and the intrusion it represents into their private lives, and they are concerned to resist it, especially by expounding an alternative interpretation of teamworking as brainwashing. They questioned the legitimacy of those who supported the unitary model of teamworking and sought to warn others of the dangers of 'brain purification'.

Bewildered

Some employees were bewildered by the new teamworking approach less because of its ideological or normative implications than its attack upon established ways of doing things. The 'normative' implications of teamworking appeared to them to be background noise. During in-depth discussions they seemed neither to be supportive nor passionately opposed to the 'normative' dimension of teamworking. Indeed, it was frequently seen as nothing new. John, an employee of 43 years, lamented the changes since 1990, especially the move towards outsourcing. In his lifetime he had seen 'nothing as drastic as this'. The sense of identification with the company was intense and he complained bitterly that 'they are doing away with our engine and fetching another from outside. To me that's wrong'. It was the imminent closure of the machine shop that preoccupied John, but following repeated questions about the new corporate approach, he dismissively pointed to his company uniform and explained what, for him, teamworking is about:

they try to make out, they are trying to get across to us, that they are no different than us. But I know that they are.

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Continuing in this vein he suggested that the word associates is 'being to be the same isn't it? Or supposed to be... it's still "us" and "them" to me'. Here, John made it clear that nothing much had changed for him but he neither supported nor lambasted teamworking:

it doesn't affect anything on my job. We were already doing the job. We're still doing the same job. Nothing's been altered for us. The only thing that's altering now is they're taking it off us. We're seeing machines disappearing all round us.

Teamworking for him was insignificant, but what was important was the threat that outsourcing posed to his way of life. Thus teamworking and employee experiences of it cannot be divorced from a consideration of context. Other employees seemed to be bewildered by the teamworking approach because it is something that they considered they have always done - a finding that research elsewhere (Pollert, 1996) has recorded. Mark, a team member of 10 years within the trim shop, remarked:

really it's all common sense with a nice bow on it. Really we've been doing it for years in the trim shop. We've worked in teams, we've always done that since 1987 when I've been in the factory.

Similarly, Roger, a team member of 12 years from the machine shop explained that although teamworking is one of the biggest changes the company has gone through, it is:

not a new concept to me, it's been going on for years, probably you weren't doing it under the title of teamwork, but you were doing it. For instance, the CNC section had 11 CNC machines and we worked on a pool bonus system so you're actually working as a team then.

The new emphasis on quality and teamworking was seen as irrelevant for some employees who argued that they have always worked to the best of the abilities:

I'm an Internoters' fitter. Any problems, I've always tried to do it... it's for those people who say 'sod that'. I've always cared what I've tried to do, always do a good job. (Ray)

Interestingly, teamworking for these employees seems to be nothing new and indeed reflects what they have always done. For, in everyday work situations, teamworking is little more than pride, commitment and a concern with quality that is second nature to longstanding shopfloor workers. Ray already derives considerable meaning from his work. Hence, he identified himself as an 'Internoters' fitter' and, as such, works to the best of his abilities. In this sense, he has not been 'bewitched' by the teamworking discourse because he

has always identified with his work and the company. Moreover, he is not 'bothered' by teamworking because he is not trying to oppose the official line through stating that teamworking is nothing new.

Colin, an employee of 18 years within the stores support function, remarked of the quality training: 'I don't know, I suppose that it emphasised talking to people... the second session was old hat, totally boring, it was just somewhere to go in the afternoon'. Frank, an employee of 24 years and a former inspector, commented:

I'm not really impressed with that because it's common sense any way. In my point of view every thing you've been told is common sense. You don't have to be told that, maybe the younger generation do but I don't... If you are going to build an engine you've got to build it properly.

Similarly, according to John:

Well we've always been told that you've got to get the job right. You've got to get the job right, to drawing limits, to what they tell yer, and that's it.

Here again we can see that for employees who consider themselves to be skilled, the notion of 'right first time' or 'zero defects' seem obvious and entirely consistent with the way in which they have traditionally worked. Colin's overall disinterestedness in the new management philosophy was abundantly apparent:

I've heard about it, just doesn't sink in. I just take no notice of it to be honest. I find it unnecessary from my point of view... I don't involve myself in it.

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has explored the experiences of teamworking for employees in an automobile manufacturing company under the headings 'bewitched', 'bothered' and 'bewildered'. 'Bewitched' employees were broadly supportive of teamworking, although the intensity of their support varied sharply. Although a number of employees noted that the 'normative' rhetoric of teamworking did not live up to the reality, this did not detract from their overall support. Instead it reflected that further change was needed and/or that management on occasions acted inconsistently. One employee commented that 'people' say that teamworking is 'brain purification'. He was not certain whether this was the case, but he was concerned to distance himself from those who offered teamworking their unquestioning support.

Employees who were 'bothered' by teamworking were alarmed by the 'normative' bombardment that accompanied its introduction. It was this that they opposed rather than the 'technical' dimension of teamworking. These 'bothered' employees presented an alternative 'brainwashing' discourse to that of the official unitary teamworking discourse. This counter-discourse can be understood as an act of resistance that aimed to question the imposition of 'an artificial consensus' (Sinclair, 1992, p. 621) upon the organisation. It reflects a concern to question whether teamworking is simply beneficial for everyone, and we can see that it has clearly influenced Damian's thinking.

By contrast to those 'bewitched' or 'bothered' employees, those who were 'bewildered' by teamworking saw it as nothing new. They neither welcomed nor opposed it and indeed the normative dimension seemed to be background noise for them. These employees tended to be older individuals who lamented the past and regarded the present in strictly parochial terms. Although they questioned whether teamworking was new they did not go so far as to engage in the alternative interpretation that teamworking is a form of corporate brainwashing.

Although the case study supports the view that working in teams generates new meanings (Peters and Waterman, 1982), it is a double-edge sword, for while it introduces new meanings, it also threatens existing ways of understanding the world. We saw that employees who were 'bothered' by teamworking felt that their very sense of self was under attack by the normative onslaught of the teamworking discourse. The understanding that teamworking requires the subsumption of individual identities beneath a corporate world view led to considerable resistance. Indeed, the 'normative' dimension for these employees promoted distrust in management and cynicism towards teamworking. It was generally felt that management were trying to change their way of thinking in order to secure more output from employees for less return. Nonetheless, one could argue that teamworking has also generated or consolidated a sense of 'militancy' in these employees and as such it has also generated new or more intense meanings for them (Fournier, 1998). One cannot conflate management strategies with outcomes because, as Fournier, following Foucault, has argued, 'subjectivities, meanings and positions created from above are likely to be re-appropriated and transformed' (1996, p. 74). It seems that many employees already feel the pressures of normalisation and, as such, are already resisting the standardising pressures to conform.

A number of the 'bothered' employees treated the normative aspects of teamworking as a 'joke'. Overall, management seemed to be building up a normative bombardment that left these employees lamenting that management 'won't leave you alone'. Those who took the discourse 'on board' were seen as 'scary'. All of this suggests that the excessive usage of normative forms of control may undermine teamworking. Thus, in contrast to Barker's (1993) case, where workers were described as being 'in the eye of the norm', many employees at Internotors, far from seeing teamworking as natural, resented and balked at this form of discipline.

Of course, many employees who already tended to share management's world view reaffirmed their sense of self by embracing the teamworking discourse. The conflation of individual and corporate world views was an easier transition for some than for others. Often, 'bewitched' employees considered that the older ways of working underutilised their abilities and, in view of this, saw teamworking as allowing them to acquire far greater meaning from their work. Quite often the unitary world view of teamworking corresponded with their own personal philosophies and, indeed, these individuals were often hostile towards trade-unions. Some generally wanted to 'get on' and, as such, teamworking was a vehicle to attain promotion. The discourse of teamworking more closely corresponded with the identity and aspirations of these 'bewitched' workers and therefore they more readily embraced it. Nonetheless, the bulk of employees who were interviewed welcomed aspects of teamworking such as flexibility, enhanced involvement and improved communication.

Employees who were 'bewildered' did not see teamworking as particularly new. The meanings conveyed through quality principles and concepts, such as 'right first time' and 'zero defects', were often considered to be what they had practised for years. It could not be said that these employees utilised the counter-discourse of brainwashing that was common currency among workers who were 'bothered' by teamworking, instead they appeared to be in an organisational limbo. They neither embraced the new teamworking discourse so as to be 'bewitched' by it nor openly opposed it; for them it was background noise. Those employees in the machine shop who were 'bewildered' were simply preoccupied with the threat that outsourcing posed. Teamworking, to them, seemed immaterial.

Perhaps the most intriguing insight from the case study is that an alternative to the official teamworking discourse was beginning to emerge. Fournier (1998) has described this as a 'counter-discourse of militancy'. We saw this alternative discourse wielded by workers described as 'bothered' but it was also apparent in Damian's (bewitched) comments. Here we can see an alternative discourse competing with the official one. The discourse of teamworking is thus becoming 'a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy' (Foucault, 1979, p. 101). On occasions it seemed that the discourses were in competition with each other and employees switched, often mid-sentence, from one discourse to another (see Watson, 1994). Those employees who seemed 'bewildered' by the teamworking discourse did not 'fit' in with either the pro or anti-teamworking camp but nonetheless it was possible to identify aspects of the alternative discourse in the language they used. Hence, John explained that the word 'associates' is 'being to be the same isn't it. Or supposed to be... it's still them and us to me'. Nonetheless, the defining feature of these 'bewildered' employees was that they neither sought nor actively dissented from the teamworking discourse. Hence, we can see a 'multiplicity of discourses' emerging from the official teamworking line.

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To conclude, an understanding of context is essential to comprehending how employees might respond to teamworking. It is unlikely that individuals will react in the same way and their interpretations will be bound up with their earlier life experiences and sense of self. We can identify workers who are far from passive receptors of teamworking and, indeed, many responded by deploying either a 'militant' or an 'indifferent' discourse in their defence. Having said that, it is difficult to simply lump people into one category, as individuals responded to the different aspects of teamworking in different ways. Even those employees here identified as 'bewitched' seemed on occasions to struggle to convince themselves of the reality of the new discourse, while those employees who were 'bothered' welcomed some aspects of teamworking. In view of the above, it seems that it is far more problematic to transform individuals into teamworking subjects than is often assumed or feared to be the case.

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