



The changing nature of work and stress

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Marc J. Schabracq

University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and

Cary L. Cooper

*University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology,
Manchester, UK*

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Abstract *Considers the architecture and production of everyday life and its positive outcomes, as well as ways of disrupting it, resulting in the loss of these outcomes. Indirectly, such disruption might be brought about by the possible effects of the huge, interacting global changes (in the fields of macro-economics, technology, culture and politics) on our organisations. These changes force organisations to change themselves too, in order to survive. Some of these forms of adaptation are discussed. Looking at their consequences on the everyday life of their employees, the article roughly distinguishes two kinds of consequences. The article indicates a number of possible sources of stress, and some approaches and interventions that may mitigate their possible harmful effects. Moreover, it concludes that such interventions can have more general positive effects for the organisation, because stress-related complaints can be indicators of underlying factors that may negatively affect other organisational goals as well.*

Introduction

During the last two decades, the development of new technologies all over the world and the growing globalisation of the economy have together produced the fastest and biggest technological changes ever. An avalanche of new products and production processes have inundated us and although these developments are, at least in essence, deeply engrained in our culture, we are confronted with an unprecedented acceleration of change[1] (Carrithers, 1992; Smit and Schabracq, 1998).

This process has taken the form of quickly escalating global competition. The competitive stakes have become higher and higher, because the situation is influenced by positive feedback loops only. The major difference with symmetrical escalation, as described by Watzlawick *et al.* (1968), is that there are far more than two competing players. This competition is bound to have undesired outcomes for all parties involved, because it may lead to exhaustion, and even total breakdown of the conflicting parties, as well as depletion of natural resources used in the production process. Though some parties (Levi, 1998) appear to be aware of the deadly nature of this process, there are as yet no signs that de-escalation is imminent on a global scale. So, survival of the fittest or, as Morgan (1986) suggests, "the best fitting" ("the one most apt in adapting to a certain environmental niche") still appears to be the name of the game. Only the game is no longer about strong or clever specific adaptations to certain more or less stable environmental demands (Cummings and Cooper, 1979). What counts now is the pace at which players (individual entrepreneurs,

organisations, industries, nations) are able to adapt to a continuously changing environment that demands a highly flexible approach, based upon a developmental process that matches the environmental one.

It is obvious that this process cannot go on forever, but at the moment, it is not at all obvious where and how it will end. Though it is rather easy to evoke all kinds of apocalyptic visions of ever faster whirlpools of change, taking down everything of value in an orgy of destruction – after all, we are on the verge of a new millennium – I prefer a more modest scenario here.

In this article, we will attempt to provide a rough sketch of ways in which organisations adapt to these changes and the consequences of these adaptations for the employees' everyday life and its outcomes. We shall conclude by indicating some approaches to cope with the undesired effects of these adaptations. However, we shall start out with a short description of the architecture, upbringings and disruption of everyday life.

Everyday life

Work life, like the rest of human existence, is shaped by our strong tendency to bring about stability and repetition. We choose a job and a place to work, try to shape these according to our own preferences, and then adapt to them by developing fixed ways of behaving, thinking and feeling that fit nicely in it (Schabracq, 1991). Or put differently, we develop a relatively stable and small niche to live and work in, to do our familiar things. As such, our everyday life is comparable to an animal territory[2].

For example, most of us work in highly familiar places, at more or less fixed times of the day, alone or together with a small number of highly familiar other people. When working, we also have our invariable daily, weekly and yearly routines. We interact in more or less fixed ways with a limited number of people, and we have our predictable habits when it comes to lunch time and coffee breaks. Though there are considerable individual differences in this respect, the normal everyday working life of most of us tends to be surprisingly small and limited, at least compared to the endless possibilities that reality offers (at least in principle).

In short, when we look with an open mind at a typical working day, we cannot but be amazed by the huge amount of sheer repetition we display. Think of all those utterly familiar thoughts, feelings, tastes, smells and other sensations, which we evoke by just going through our familiar routines, procedures and social interactions. Are these not precisely the experiences that tell us that we are our own familiar selves?

The shaping of our everyday work reality is, of course, not a purely individual matter. We do it together with others and we use the standard solutions that organisational culture offers us to overcome recurrent, familiar problems. So, in the process of shaping our own everyday working life, we reinforce and even enlarge organisational culture by using its forms, templates, thoughts, stories and so on.

The same thing holds for dealing with the unexpected. Obviously, unexpected things do happen. However, the way we usually pay attention, which is also culturally determined, protects us from coming across many unexpected things; and when they do occur, we have our ways of not getting lost in them.

All this is foremost a matter of self-discipline: we mind only what “matters” and “concerns us”, while more or less ignoring the rest. We hardly pay attention to most of what and whom can be seen or experienced at our work. In elevators and the restaurant, we mostly ignore other employees whom we do not know personally, even though their faces look familiar to us (Goffman, 1963, 1971). As long as everything goes well, we tend to lose ourselves in our usual working activities, not minding anything or anyone else.

For issues or persons still intruding on our everyday working life, notwithstanding our attentional discipline, we have our standardised approaches. Is this threatening, important, urgent? Do we have to do something about it? What routine does apply best? Usually, an item from our standard behaviour repertory will do, but in some rare cases, we think of something new, to store it (with some pleasant feeling of pride) in our repertory afterwards.

So, we have disciplined ourselves into living a normal working life. But what do we gain by living a life so full of repetition in such a limited environment, while reality appears to offer all kinds of unlimited possibilities?

The most important outcome is that repetition enables us to develop skills to deal with recurrent situations and their inherent problems at a more or less automatic level. In this way, we can keep our attention free for what we feel really matters. This may be setting goals and pursuing rewarding enterprises, doing things in the best way possible, finding new solutions and, in this way, developing our skills and talents. In short, such a way of working gives us an opportunity to be more effective, do more rewarding things, and develop ourselves. So, a good fit with our self-shaped niches allows us to work in a more or less healthy way, by providing us with control over our everyday working life, as well as sufficient opportunities to engage in promising challenges.

However, control over our own everyday working life is far from absolute. Generally speaking, there are two ways in which such control can be jeopardised. Actually, stress reactions resulting from these two kinds of insufficient control over one’s working-life usually diminish control even further. In this way, the stress process becomes a cyclical and self-enhancing one (Schabracq *et al.*, 1996).

First, everyday working life can just have been underdeveloped or impoverished, resulting in a poor everyday working life that does not offer much when it comes to challenges, opportunities and rewards. In such circumstances, it is very difficult to keep up control, as it is hard to mobilise sufficient mental resources to concentrate on the task at hand. Such a way of working usually results in poor effectiveness, motivation and personal development. At the same time, everything else that comes along becomes an attractive diversion. This can be described as a state of qualitative “underload”,

which can give rise to serious stress and health complaints (Cooper and Quick, 1999). There is a real risk that, as a consequence of the organisational adaptation to the rapid global changes, the number of people working under such circumstances may increase substantially (Cooper and Jackson, 1997).

Second, some events or persons do disrupt control over our everyday working life, and though some of these disturbances can be repaired with a simple, quick fix, some cannot. Examples of events that interfere in varying degrees with our daily routines, and even our self-image, are:

- a new working place which cannot be reached by our usual means of transportation;
- nasty rumours about our future;
- changes in one's job;
- new organisational demands about employee education that makes our own education obsolete;
- warm and cold conflicts with colleagues;
- being surrounded by one or more new, obviously uninformed people who think completely differently about several key issues;
- lack of attention and approval from our manager;
- the implementation of a new computer program or a new team structure.

All these events interfere with our work routines and the goals we want to accomplish by them. We experience this as a loss of control. As such, these events can be serious sources of stress with cumulative effects. These can have highly detrimental effects upon individual well-being and health, as well as on the organisational processes (Cartwright and Cooper, 1997).

Though these events often appear to occur in a random way, they may have systemic causal backgrounds. For example, some people are, for different reasons, very prone to them (because they habitually do not pay enough attention to their surroundings, have poor health, procrastinate endlessly, habitually take on a too heavy workload, are unable or unwilling to organise their life, etc.). Some organisations, also for different reasons, are so chaotic that fighting all kinds of daily hassles appears to be their main business. At the same time, such organisations (and persons) often are not willing to spend the necessary time and effort to deal with the underlying causes. Furthermore, some of these disturbances can be a consequence of not wanting to deal (both at the individual and organisational level) with serious changes that have occurred and demand serious reorientation and adaptation at both personal and organisational levels.

Examples of the latter (Cooper, 1999) are:

- changes in technology, production and products;
- mergers, outsourcing;
- fundamental changes in the organisation of production and work;

- changes in the relationship between an organisation and its employees, etc.

As a consequence of the necessary adaptation to the quickly changing global scene, a great and fast increase in the occurrence of the latter events is taking place at the moment, while it is not at all clear where and how this development will stop. It is clear that paying no attention to the consequences of such changes at the everyday life level will cause a significant increase in stress-related complaints and other negative effects. In the next section, we go somewhat deeper into some of these adaptations.

Adaptations

Changes in technology, production and products

As the wages in the countries with the most up-to-date industries are relatively high, industrial organisations in these countries try to develop new technologies, production processes and products, that add maximal value to the raw materials they use, while minimising labour costs. This implies a major role for automatizing, and a massive reduction of the number of employees. Some of the remaining employees have to be retrained completely in order to master the new skills to operate and maintain the new technologies. Other employees are needed to do impoverished jobs resulting from incomplete automation.

Flexibility of labour

Also, it is of crucial importance that production and its human factor become as flexible as possible. Essentially (see Schabracq and Cooper, 1998), there are two kinds of flexibility of labour (as well as all kinds of combinations of both).

First, there is “qualitative” flexibility: the degree to which employees can and do perform different tasks. Sufficient qualitative flexibility enables an organisation to cope better with changes, bottlenecks and unexpected events. Qualitative flexibility is a logical outcome of consistent human resource management (HRM), which invests in training their (most talented) employees in order to broaden their skill base. Though qualitative flexibility can have great outcomes for the employees involved, it may easily lead to all kinds of work overload.

Second, there is quantitative flexibility: varying the quantity of personnel and their working hours. Its aim is the presence of sufficient, but not too many, temporary employees at each hour of the day. Many of these have to perform relatively simple tasks, which do not demand too much training and can be done by unskilled workers. In offices and factories, this work often consists of remnants of tasks left over by the above-mentioned incomplete automation.

Other tasks that are often performed in a quantitatively flexible way are the repetitive forms of human interaction needed at call centres, switchboards, counters, shops, etc., and in all kinds of menial services such as cleaning,

delivery and security. In these kinds of jobs, we can also witness new forms of Taylorisation, including very strict task descriptions and supervision, and even time studies.

From the perspective of the organisation, the main advantages of quantitative flexible employment are efficiency and cost reduction: there are always enough employees to do the job and those for whom there is no work do not have to be paid.

The main disadvantages for the organisation are that these employees may show a lack of commitment and loyalty to the organisation (Cooper, 1998). There also may be some trouble with co-ordination, communication and quality control (Dale *et al.*, 1997).

Studies are appearing that identify a group of temporary employees who actually prefer this kind of working arrangement. Also, some advantages can be discerned (Schabracq and Cooper, 1998). However, most temporary involved employees, given the choice, probably would still prefer a steady job with fixed hours (Van Geuns *et al.*, 1988).

Third, there is a mixed group of employees, who perform both qualitatively and quantitatively flexible tasks in variable proportions. In this group, we are witnessing another trend, namely towards more sophisticated temporary work for all kinds of professionals, for instance in IT, organisation consultancy, financial services, etc.

Employees from the second and, to a lesser degree, the third group are often hired through special employment agencies. An interesting development here is the changing role of these agencies. As it is important to employment agencies to invest in the employability of their employees, some agencies actually provide their employees with training programmes.

Moreover, EC legislation has made employment agencies responsible for improving the social security of quantitatively flexible workers, which has resulted in some regulations about sick pay, holidays and pension plans to be paid for by the agencies.

A last point to be made here, which can also be called a variant of growing quantitative flexibility, is the gradual replacement of life-long employment in the same organisation, by employment based on more short-term and temping contracts, which also may imply more flexibility of both kinds.

Lean and mean organisations

One way to cope with the above-mentioned global competition is to reduce the number of hierarchical levels and the total number of employees. More responsibilities are pushed down to the actual work groups and people work more often in autonomous task teams. These teams have full responsibility for accomplishing certain goals and each member can perform different tasks. This may help to maintain higher product quality and a better organizational climate, and may also prevent bottlenecks. As such, it is in consonance with the above-mentioned HRM approach characterised by greater qualitative flexibility of labour.

Keywords are:

- mission, vision and strategy;
- autonomous task groups and quality circles;
- better co-ordination of research and development, production and marketing;
- just-in-time management and other kind of logistically oriented approaches;
- being client-oriented, “intrapreneurial” and minding the bottom line.

A problem with some of such organizations occurs when they have a history of massive lay-offs of personnel. Apart from the direct undesired consequences for the persons directly involved, a lot of knowledge and experience is lost for the organisation, while the remaining employees stay behind with vague feelings of guilt and the idea that they may be next (with due consequences for commitment and loyalty). Another problem with this kind of organisation is that it prefers overwork to hiring more regular employees, which may lead to overload for individual employees, and ultimately, burnout.

Outsourcing

Another way of organisational coping, in line with the principle of leaner organisations, consists of outsourcing: concentrating on what is seen as the core business and making other departments or divisions into independent businesses. A staff service, such as a training department or even a complete P&O department, can be outsourced into an independent consultancy or service firm. The services of such a firm can still be hired by the “mother company”, but now it can sell also to other companies, so that its full capacity can be used better. As such, this solution can be profitable for all parties involved.

The link with the mother company can be kept by holding shares or by contract, for instance in the case of a management buy-out or selling it to an existing consultancy company. For those directly concerned, the outsourcing probably implies an increase in quantitative (working in different places at different times) as well as qualitative flexibility.

Networks

When an outsourced consultancy or service unit is (very) small, it makes sense to become part of a more or less formalised network of likewise engaged units. The same is, of course, true for all independent consultants and small consulting groups. The network paradigm, working in changing constellations of independent individuals and small groups who all belong to a rather loose professional network, is becoming increasingly popular. The main reason is that it enables its members to take on large projects without the overhead of maintaining a real organisation. As such, it allows its members to work in a highly flexible way, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Multinationals

One of the ways of coping, especially for big organisations, is trying to become (part of) a multinational corporation. Such an organisation is no longer based in one particular country, but has plants in those countries that offer the most favourable conditions for its specific lines of business, making the best of local markets and/or resources as well. With the possibilities of Internet and other methods of electronic communication, we now are witness to the disappearance of the factual headquarters of such multinationals (Handy, 1994). The different organisational functions are performed in the local settlements, wherever they can be handled best. One of the consequences of this development is the increasingly multicultural character of many of these organisations. Another is the increased quantity of travelling, by which planes and trains become flexible workplaces, with all inherent difficulties of different time zones, languages and cultures, which demand some additional qualitative as well as quantitative flexibility.

The waning of fixed business hours and places

An increasing number of companies strive to use their “means” of production (factories, offices, shops) more hours a week, in order to maximise their productivity. In addition, there is the necessity of internal communication in the multinationals whose plants are based in totally different time zones. As a consequence, an increasing number of people are working shifts, or at least odd hours. Moreover, shops and personal services have also chosen to be opened longer, which results in even more people working complex shifts and odd or long hours. This development implies, almost by definition, an increase of quantitative flexibility. Also, the developments in communication technology lead naturally to concepts such as tele-working (performing work tasks at home or in other places with the help of a PC and a modem) and variable work stations (“hot desking”) within an office without fixed desk space. This also means an extra increase of quantitative flexibility.

Reorganisations and mergers in general

As reorganisations are necessary to adapt to a changing environment, they have become a normal part of our organisational realities. We have grown used to constant change and restructurings. However, it is as if reorganisations have become a goal in themselves: each new manager who wants to make a good impression seems to feel obliged to initiate his or her own reorganisation. This implies a lot of senseless change for the employees involved, which demands a great deal of qualitative and sometimes also quantitative flexibility. Essentially, such a course of events reflects the absence of clear goals, vision and strategy at the top of those organisations.

A similar story can be told about mergers. Though potentially useful for purposes of scale enlargement, non-organisational growth or organisational synergy, these as well can be based mainly on personal ambitions, rather than on commercial reality. Actually, many mergers end up in failure. They usually

do bring about many changes and demand a lot of qualitative flexibility from those involved. They have to cope with an unpredictable group of new and suspicious colleagues with an unknown agenda and a different background, as well as with new working circumstances, tasks, procedures and working locations (Cartwright and Cooper, 1996).

More training and new forms of organisation and product development

In order to keep up with all new developments, organisations pay much more attention (and money) to further education and training of their employees. In addition to all kinds of “traditional”, individually oriented courses and training programmes in some special training centre or resort, there is a growing tendency to use the development of (new) products and working processes at the workplace as training material in its own right. Besides learning from the technical sides of developing the intended goal, the group learns how to improve their co-operation skills and make better use of their individual differences (synergy). Learning, therefore, becomes “team learning”. A keyword in this respect is “learning organisation” (Senge, 1990; Senge *et al.*, 1994). More training and the learning organisation approach both imply a substantial increase in qualitative flexibility.

Consequences

From the former section, it can be concluded that, in the beginning of the new century, there probably will be different developments for two different groups of personnel. The first applies to regular employees and well-educated professionals hired on a temporary basis, the second to temporary personnel hired to perform relatively simple tasks.

Full-time employees and professionals

Generally speaking, the full-time employees, as well as the temporary consulting professionals, will encounter many changes, perform different tasks in varying combinations, be better educated, go through a lot of additional training, probably work longer and unsocial hours and change organisations more rapidly than in the past. Though most of these developments are not at all bad developments *per se*, they may become so when they are forced on the employees. Moreover, various forms of quantitative and qualitative task overload may pose a very serious threat to employees’ control over their everyday working life. The following factors, which can all be regarded as serious stressors, can play a role here in different combinations:

- too many working hours, unsocial hours, and too much inter-continental travelling (frequently through different time zones);
- inadequately co-ordinated tasks (within jobs and between employees), leading to task interruptions, territorial conflicts and role conflicts;
- ambiguous and unclear goals, priorities, procedures and (also slow) feedback (role ambiguity);

- too variable and too loosely connected tasks;
- too difficult and complex tasks, demanding instant creativity (also when one is tired);
- taking many decisions, often with serious consequences for all parties involved, often based on insufficient information;
- risks of making mistakes, with serious consequences;
- working in different and changing configurations of very diverse people, frequently from different cultures;
- exposure to “contagiously” stressful colleagues;
- exposure to frequent changes in tasks, technical equipment, managers, colleagues, working arrangements, production processes and jobs, as well as changes stemming from mergers, outsourcing, lay-off and job mobility between organisations;
- spill-over to the other life domains (private, social and public) and the risk of the adverse effects (love, friendship, support, recuperation, general knowledge, contributions to one’s health and well-being, spiritual life etc.).

Grim as this all may sound, there is the other side of the equation. Many of those employees are relatively well paid; can be in control of their own life; are very motivated by their work and find much pleasure and meaning in it. Moreover, they have the opportunity to develop themselves and actualise their personal motives in their work.

Temporary employees with relatively simple tasks

Though not everything about the future of work is negative here, the situation for this group of people probably is considerably worse than for the group in the former section. The following stress-inducing factors play a role for these employees.

- relatively low income and uncertainty about its continuity, making it difficult to get mortgages etc.;
- little certainty about one’s immediate and medium-term future, no basis for mid- and long term planning;
- short work cycles, often consisting of monotonous and simple activities, allowing for little skill variety;
- fragmented activities, not resulting in a meaningful product or service, keeping one away from more meaningful activities;
- under-utilisation of skills and no further development;
- low autonomy, little decision latitude about pauses and the sequence of activities, low positional status, no territorial claims, no control over their own accessibility, strict supervision;

- no synchronisation with the private, social and public domains by working shifts and odd hours, with all inherent consequences for the positive outcomes from these domains;
- relatively little social support, no stable personal relations, little informal power from being well-connected;
- little room to realise personal motives;
- always much to do, time pressured (high task demands).

Many of these factors lead to some form of qualitative task underload. Apart from being a serious source of stress in its own right, these future stressors have the potential for “real” human burnout. Moreover, the combination of high task demands with little decision latitude (low autonomy, low skill-variety, under-utilisation of skills, little intrinsic meaning) is reported to be very detrimental to health and well-being, and may even contribute to premature death (Karasek and Theorell, 1990).

Possible interventions

In this section we highlight some possible solutions to the problems that appeared in the former section. First we go into solutions specific to the latter group of temporary employees, next we pay attention to approaches that, at least in principle, can be used to solve problems for both groups.

Interventions for temporary employees with relatively simple tasks

Solutions for the problems of this group are often far from easy and often necessitate radical alterations of the production process and the organisation of work.

- (1) For several kinds of work, mostly the remnants that were left over when the rest of the more encompassing task was automated, automatizing is the most feasible solution.
- (2) For tasks that cannot be automated and tasks that centre around human interaction, we advocate some form of job redesign, preferably in an individualised way. Possibilities here are:
 - some forms of task enrichment and enlargement, maybe even in the form of (temporary) autonomous task teams;
 - more decision latitude (about breaks and the sequence of activities), focusing on outcomes, less supervision over the work process itself;
 - optimal possibilities for social contact on the job, as that turns out to be the main determinant of job satisfaction for more unskilled and semi-skilled jobs (Krijnen-Stelling, 1996);
 - better selection procedures to establish better person-job fit and a more systematic introduction into the role of the job in the whole production process.

- (3) Providing some training and coaching to the regular supervisors and managers, aimed at their leadership and stress prevention skills, to improve working conditions, tasks and well-being of the temporary staff.

As stated before, employment agencies can also play an important role here (training programs to improve employability, social security provisions, holidays, pension plans, social occasions, a personnel club, sports facilities, a corporate magazine).

Interventions for both groups

Though a number of the following interventions will appear less feasible for the group of temporary employees with relatively simple tasks, they do, at least in principle, apply also to them.

As life-long employment is turning into a historical peculiarity, seeing after one's own employability is becoming necessary for all people who want to work. This means, for instance, that one has to spend time, attention and money to learn the vocational and professional skills and knowledge needed for keeping up with the developments in one's line of work (whether or not the organisation for which one works is willing to contribute to the costs). Also, this implies that it will be necessary to constantly explore the labour market and to be willing to change jobs when opportune (Gaspersz and Ott, 1996).

In addition, however, there are some more general abilities and skills that are useful to develop. Here are a few.

- (1) Social skills, or more specifically:
 - listening skills;
 - interpersonal and marketing skills;
 - social skills for working in (temporary) teams, projects with very diverse members and learning organisations (win-win solutions, synergy, dealing with group-think, recognising and dealing with stereotyping and bullying, conducting work conferences, bringing up "unspeakable", etc.);
 - social skills for assertiveness and personal effectiveness.
- (2) Skills to deal with or implement change as if it were the normal condition, including strategic thinking.
- (3) Skills and attitudes needed for determining one's real motives, strengths and goals, designing new pathways, planning and living a healthy and harmonious life (self- and time-management).
- (4) Creativity- and intuition-enhancing techniques and learning to be attuned to emotional processes (focusing).
- (5) Stress management skills (to prevent and deal with one's own and other people's stress complaints).

Generally speaking, this is about the process of (re)inventing and (re)designing one's own identity, similar to the processes of coming of age in adolescence and of gaining wisdom later in life (De Bono, 1996; Schabracq, 1996). More specifically, we talk here about accomplishing what Handy (1994) has coined a "portfolio approach" to one's career and future life, that is, a way of working and living in which one explicitly realises one's different goals in different organisations and life domains.

Conclusion

A difficulty with all these interventions is that they are expensive and cost much time, attention and effort. The short-term costs are great, but the longer-term costs greater! Inadequate use of human potential is probably the most expensive form of human waste. Moreover, stress-related complaints do not only cause individual misery. The potential costs of stress to organisations are numerous in terms of:

- poor morale;
- low quality products and services;
- poor internal communication and conflicts;
- losing angry and indignant customers;
- bad publicity;
- missed opportunities;
- high turnover and sick-leave;
- high costs for (working in temporary) replacements; and
- permanent vacancies.

As such, the occurrence of frequent stress-related complaints can be an indicator of underlying factors that may negatively affect vital organisational goals. So, investing in human potential may well be the most profitable and wise approach in order to survive as an organisation.

One last word about the degree and pace of change. Though the interventions mentioned above can mitigate or even prevent some of the undesired effects of change, changing too much and too quick can provide the foundation stones for ill-health and lower productivity. In terms of issues such as personal identity and relationships at work, creativity and development, prestige and pride, motivation and pleasure, and, last but not least, effectiveness and efficiency. What will become of these as everything keeps on changing at an ever increasing pace? And what about the reality that most of the highly developed, competing countries are confronted by a quickly ageing population, who are not entirely receptive to constant change? Certainly for them, it will not be pleasant to live in a world where doing materially better today means being obsolete tomorrow.

Notes

1. The essence of a culture consists of providing standard solutions to standard problems, in order to set us free for activities that really matter to us (Carrithers, 1992; Smit and Schabracq, 1998). In this way, culture can be considered as a collectively shared strategy to prevent stress, or put differently: as a collective coping pattern. The present, most dominant cultures in our world, and most of their organizations, however, appear to have declared change as an important, independent principle or even goal. As the essential function of a culture consists of bringing about a stable environment, this emphasis on change leaves us in a paradoxical situation. Though I am aware of the risk of being regarded as another silly prophet of doom, I think this may have as severe a consequence for productivity as well-being (Schabracq, 1992), and even for the survival of these cultures, if this development will not be moderated sufficiently.
2. In ethology, a territory is a certain space which the animal takes care of and, if necessary, defends (Emlen, 1958; Kaufman, 1971). Intrusions on and (partial) loss of the territory can give rise to strong emotions (Rowell, 1972) and serious stress phenomena, that may – sometimes – bring about death. Though important differences between human and the animal territories exist, intrusions on, and partial losses of, these niches lead to comparable stress reactions in humans (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1970). Moreover, we as human beings tend to stick with our routines, claims and rights, and to defend these if called for, as well. As such, this niche is highly comparable to the niche mentioned before in the citation of Morgan in the introduction, though the one here is of an individual nature, and not of an organizational one. However, both kinds of niches are not just found as ready-made places to live in, but are activity shaped and designed by the individual or organization involved.

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