An ethics of managing organisational commitment: Problematising psychological contract discourse

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Abstract

One way to investigate the subjectivity of organizational commitment is to examine how the individual and the employing organisation negotiate a psychological contract. This concept describes employee commitment to an organisation as one of a number of investments an individual makes in an organisation within a subjective economy of direct exchange, with the understanding they will receive something in return, such as material reward, job security and/or career progression. In this paper we report on a work in progress that aims to describe organisational commitment in terms of the power relations of subjectivity. We critically review the major ways that the psychological contract concept has been constructed, describing it as a means of problematising and managing employee relations during organisational change. We do not use the concept to make judgements about whether or not psychological contracts and their naturalised constituents 'really' occur. Rather, we use data collected from a case study to examine the concept as one possibility for inducing individuals to act on themselves in ways that include becoming committed to the organisation in which they work (Foucault 1992: 25-28; 2000).

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Action is indeed the sole medium of expression for ethics (Jane Addams (1902) 'Political Reform' *Democracy and Social Ethics*)

**INTRODUCTION**

Commitment is commonly defined in terms of both human action (the ‘act of committing’) and subjectivity (the ‘state of being committed’), and trust is a central component of such definitions (‘to give in trust or charge’) (Macquarie Dictionary 3rd edition). Commitment can thus be defined as an expression of subjectivity—an attitudinal act in which a person feels entrusted to act in an ethical mode of being. Trust is a key component of the concept of the psychological contract to explain the production of organisational commitment as it has been developed by the social psychologist Guest (1998: 661). However, its importance has depended on how the concept has been differently developed according to a writer’s disciplinary analytical framework (eg, psychology, sociology, or management), notions of agency (whether agreements are between individuals, or individuals and organizations) and type of agreement (the level of tacit understanding, and whether it is seen as only likely to happen or as a duty to act). The psychological contract is a concept that has become popular since the 1980s, especially in human resource management. Experts in organisational behaviour have stated that 'Everyone agrees that it exists and most employees appear able to describe the content of their contract,' although 'there is no consensus about what the psychological contract is' (Anderson and Schalk 1998: 639)

We argue that the success of its existence is due to how the concept problematises the government of organisational change and its effects on employment relations in ways that experts and managers can claim the concept offers explanations and a hope for controlling effective solutions. Corporate downsizing, globalisation of markets, increasing flexibility of labour contracts and work organization, outsourcing and sub-contracting of work, and associated technological changes in the 1980s were claimed to have eroded a traditional psychological contract that exchanges employee commitment, and hard and high quality work in return for job security, fair wages and/or a career within an organization. Increasingly in its place is one in which employees exchange low-trust commitment for simply obtaining a job, with some also receiving high pay and other rewards (Anderson
In this paper we review and critique the concept of the psychological contract, in order to develop a different understanding of organisational commitment. We reject the concept's assumption of some sort of static (though open to renegotiation) agreement between an individual and the organisation in which they work that can be prescriptively managed by adjusting particular inputs and outputs. Drawing on a case study, we re-examine elements of the psychological contract concept in order to describe commitment in terms of subjectivity and power relations—how individuals work on themselves as ethical subjects. We use theoretical tools provided by Foucault (1992; 2000) and Thévenot (2000) to develop a sociological understanding of organisational commitment. Whilst Foucault was interested in painting large-scale historical pictures, his work has proved highly relevant to sociological research, especially as a means for circumventing the individual/social dualisms played out in inter-disciplinary theoretical rivalries and within sociological theory itself (Knights and Vurdubakis 1994).

We use empirical evidence collected from a longitudinal sociological study carried out within Cokemaking Oz, a department of Steelmaking Oz. In 1999, the manager of Cokemaking Oz—Eddy—introduced an innovative and major cultural change program within his department that was based on work by Whiteley (1995) (we shall call this the Culture Change program, for the remainder of this paper). It was a normative change program that used an indulgency pattern of social relations (Gouldner 1954: 53-56), in which manual workers and management negotiated commitment to a negotiated commonly understood set of values, beliefs and work practices produced by employees from across the plant, and explicitly laid out in a 100-page document—*The Coke Guide*. According to the psychological contract concept, we might predict the Culture Change program used a cooperative contract based on a high level of trust between all participants that would be likely to elicit employee commitment to corporate goals of profits in return for improved working conditions and pay. Within a few short years Eddy's cultural engineering efforts were challenged by a major restructuring of the entire company, when Steelmaking Oz de-merged from its parent company—an international company with an increasingly broader interest and role in the resources industry. Steelmaking Oz's new independent identity brought with it a seemingly more vulnerable role within a strongly competitive international market, where other steelmaking works were closing in response

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1 Guest (1998: 655) has provided empirical evidence from UK studies to support his claim that the problematized organisational changes have been less significant than most believe.
to extremely low steel prices internationally. As a result, its management instituted a company-wide organizational change program to create a 'high performance business', which we call the Requisite Organisation program. That goal was based on a model constructed by Jaques (1998). He claimed managers had a 'moral leadership duty' to implement his model of a bureaucratic, top down, low trust system of command and control, which could yield 'gains of 100% to 200% in the organizational effectiveness' (Jaques 1998: 6, 132). According to a psychological contract model, we might predict the Requisite Organisation program used low level trust relations in a coercive contract that would elicit employee conformity, rather than commitment, to corporate profit goals in return for job security. In the next section, we explain the psychological concept in more depth before examining its relevance in understanding the production of commitment in our case study.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Argyris (1960) introduced the concept of a psychological contract into organizational theory in the early 1960s, when he analysed relations between supervisors and workers in two factories in terms of implicit deals based on mutual trust. He described a 'psychological work contract' as a tacit agreement in which the workers acted according to certain management goals and, in return, received what they perceived to be adequate income, and a greater sense of autonomy and security. Levinson (1962), who separately invented the term ‘psychological contract’ at around the same time, defined it as the unwritten agreement of mutual expectations (of various levels of implicit understanding) between organization and employee. Etzioni (1971) used the concept to categorise organisations according to three types of contracts they might use—coercive, calculative, and co-operative. Later in the US, Rousseau (1989) defined it from the employee perspective and more narrowly, in terms of perceived individual obligations, rather than the less strongly held and less easily defined moral duty understood in expectations. Locating the concept within the disciplinary confines of psychology, she restricted the psychological contract to implicit, internally-driven, and individual perceptions of more easily measurable obligations more amenable to scientific explanation. Expectations, as informal externally-driven roles, would thus be left for sociological study. More recently, Guest (1998: 660-661), in the UK, has refused some of this boundary work, developing the concept within the disciplinary boundaries of social psychology towards a more complex model of social and psychological causes and effects. He has constructed a model in which
organizational commitment is one outcome of the particular state of the psychological contract, as a deal\(^2\) that comprises perceptions of trust, fairness and its ‘delivery’, which is caused by factors such as an organizational culture/climate of ‘high involvement and partnership’, ‘progressive’ HRM policy and practice, past experiences, future expectations and choices (Guest 1998: 661). However, although bringing in more of the ‘social’ to his psychology of the individual, Guest retains a positivist psychological model of measurable variables in linear cause and effect relations. Thus his model has been criticised as 'biased' towards linking HR practices and organizational performance outcomes (Legge 2001: 30-32), and thus enrolling HR knowledge in the service of organisational regimes of government.

Watson, on the other hand, has constructed a sociological interpretation (Watson 2000; 2002). Re-naming the calculative process an ‘implicit contract’, he has brought a more sociopolitical understanding of relations between members of an organization in which, although ‘unequal as the two parties typically are in terms of power and resources, is essentially one of exchange within the negotiated order that is the work organization’ (Watson 2003: 18—emphasis in original). He linked the implicit contract to a range of factors in the employee-employer relationship, including not only trust, commitment and discretion but also type of effort (mental/physical), contribution of tasks done (conception/execution), type of control experienced (responsible autonomy/direct), and relationship to technology (distant/close) (Watson 2000: 142). For Watson, the type of implicit contract can be described along a continuum between the extremes of these dichotomies. On the one hand, there are those involving people with a distant relationship to technology, a diffuse employment contract and contractual commitment, a high trust employer-employee relationship, who perform with responsible autonomy high discretion conceptual tasks that require mental effort, and who enjoy high material rewards, prestige, job satisfaction and career advancement. On the other hand, employees who have a close relationship with technology, a restricted employment contract and specific contractual commitment work within a low trust employer-employee relationship, execute tasks prescriptively under direct controls that require physical effort and return low levels of material reward, prestige, job satisfaction and career advancement.

Watson drew on an earlier socio-cultural interpretation of the psychological contract by Fox (1974: 66-68), who described it in terms of ‘institutionalized trust’ embodied in

\(^2\) Guest borrowed the term ‘delivery of a deal’ from Herriot & Pemberton (1995, 1997)
organizational rules, roles and social relations. For Fox (1974: 365), economically determined relations and their bureaucratic controls within industrialised societies have increasingly fragmented and specialized work processes that, in turn, have undermined high-trust relations within organizations. Fox used the concept of the psychological contract to explain differences in mutual expectations or obligations between employee and organization, with respect to the amount of trust in their social relations and the amount of ‘discretion’ found in an individual’s role. Using a distinction made by Jaques (1956; 1967) between discretionary and prescribed work, Fox (1974: 26-27) described high discretion work as based on ‘wisdom, judgement, expertise’ that requires ‘self-control’, while low discretion work is based on management’s lack of trust in the employee’s commitment to organizational goals that requires close control through supervision and bureaucratic rules. For Fox (1974: 14), the psychological contract can be defined anywhere along an expectation-obligation and social-economic spectrum. Changes in the psychological contract that move it away from an expectation and towards a more rule-bound obligation place the individual in a lower-discretion role and/or within lower-trust power relations. Those in low-discretion and low-trust positions (situated generally at the bottom of an organizational hierarchy) operate within a psychological contract of minimal mutual expectations beyond economic exchange of labour: their work is highly directed and there is little prospect of progression through a career. On the other hand, those in high-discretion and high-trust positions at higher levels of the organizational hierarchy engage in a psychological contract that entails a more strongly ‘social’ contract of exchange: they enjoy less direct controls over their work and more rewards (pay, status, career prospects) and give greater commitment to the organization’s goals and values (Fox 1974: 76-77).

In sum, various authors have described how an implicit contract comprises an economy of exchange under conditions defined by calculative participants, their subjectivity (trust, commitment, expectations and obligations), subjection to various types of control (discretionary and prescribed, responsible autonomy and direct) and other mutually exclusive investments offered by the individual (amount and type of effort, skills, knowledge, experience, and career capital) or the organisation (money as income; material

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3 Parker (2000: 52) includes Fox among those sociologists of organisations working in the 1960s and 1970s who had begun to use and develop concepts of culture without using the term itself.

4 More recently, Jaques (1998: 134) has emphasised trust as a primary component of relations within an organization. It is interesting to note that Jaques is important to this research project in Steelmaking Oz’s use of Proudfoot Consulting to manage their organizational change, which relies heavily on Jaques’ (1998) concept of the ‘requisite organization.’
recognition of length of service; corporate capital for technology, work spaces, training programs, etc; power and status; career advancement; job security and satisfaction). In the remainder of the paper we use data collected from a case study to examine some of the elements of the psychological contract concept, in order to provide what we hope is a richer understanding of social relations in terms of four ways that individuals can act on themselves to produce organisational commitment (Foucault 1992: 26-28; 2001: 17).

Firstly, we examine ontological questions of what aspect of the self is acted upon to produce commitment in our case study, using our observations of two organisational change programs. Trust is a key requisite for the formation of a calculative subject in the psychological contract concept, and we examine its role in producing calculative and other forms of the self to be governed. Secondly, we examine deontological questions of who the individuals are that are acting upon themselves—how individuals are constructed as being obliged to act on themselves in order to be committed to an organisation. For example, the psychological contract concept assumes an exchange between self-interested individuals (where an organisation is a group of such individuals). Thirdly, we examine elements claimed to be components of a psychological contract (discretionary tasks, type of effort) as examples of how individuals can ethically act on themselves to produce organisational commitment. Finally, we examine the teleological question of why individuals would commit themselves to an organisation. The psychological contract concept assumes individuals act with a goal of specific work-focussed material and subjective goals. Here we examine how an individual's organisational commitment is directed towards broader moral codes that may encompass some of these.

**FORMATION OF A CALCULATIVE SUBJECT**

We use the term 'calculative subject' to indicate a way of being in which individuals weigh up an economy of exchange comprising costs and benefits that might (or might not) produce, for example, commitment to the organisation in which they work. In this section we use empirical data to investigate what different aspects of the self might have been discursively constructed for individuals to act upon during programs of change. We argue that the two major organizational change programs we observed within Cokemaking Oz—the 'Culture Change' and the 'Requisite Organization' programs—each offered different conditions of trust for the formation of a knowing and a performing subject respectively. It is possible to also interpret them as constructing a calculative subject for the employees to act upon themselves to produce commitment. For example, in the Culture Change
program an employee could be seen to provide commitment by accepting management's demand for organizational change, better production (from less time lost due to injury and industrial unrest) and possible workforce reductions in exchange for receiving higher salaries and better working hours. One employee who attended a meeting early in the Culture Change program clearly used such a strategy (commonly found in oppositional industrial negotiations) when he said: 'Why don't we cut down to the chase? You tell us what you want. We will tell you what we want. Then we decide, and go back to work.' However, closer analysis of the implementation of the two program produces a more complex understanding, in which different subjects were mobilised in different pragmatic regimes of engagement (Thévenot 2000; Garrety et al 2003).

In contrast to the long-standing low-trust hierarchical relations and highly regulated work conditions that had traditionally existed throughout Steelmaking Oz, Eddy's Culture Change program within his department of Cokemaking Oz sought to develop high trust relations in order to better form self-disciplined committed employees and bring about change 'from below'. The program borrowed a relativist model of managing organisational change that sought instrumental cultural change through a negotiated reality according to agreed core values (Whiteley 1995). The consultant mobilised this reality schematically in the 'onion model' (The Coke Guide 2001: 29)—a variation of Whitely (1995: 82) that he mobilised in what Thévenot (2000) has described as the public regime of justification. This regime constructed a knowing, rather than calculative, subject—a 'self aware' 'self-regulating mechanism' enabled to work best in high trust relations of open and honest communication. Individuals use 'critical thinking' to challenge their 'internal images of reality', communicate with others in the organisation according to a pluralist model of power, negotiating explicitly stated shared values to produce a 'harmonised' organisational culture in which 'members agree and share one code of behaviour' (Whiteley 1995: 14, 16, 19, 27, 29). This is far different from the psychological contract concept of implicit deals formed by calculative subjects.

For the first phase of the program, a committee was formed that drew members from all different parts of the coke works and from all levels of the hierarchy. Their discursive practices can be located within Thévenot’s pragmatic regime of regular planned action. The committee's first task was to address the 'heart of the redesign' by mutually defining their mission, vision, values and strategic objectives as defined in the Whitely (1995: 42-65). Management's vision—"World class people working together to make world
class coke’—was accepted as a 'summary' of 28 different statements of the vision given by employees at 'communication sessions'. 'Trustworthy, respectful people' was one of them. In accordance with Whiteley (1995: 42), the working party allowed each work team to determine its 'own set of values by which they agree to work with each other' (The Coke Guide 19.3.01: 145-46). At a staff training workshop for one of the Battery crews held over three and a half years after the start of the Culture Change program, four work teams produced 59 values that were later reduced to 31 commonly agreed values, including some ironic ones such as 'expect less from management' and 'eat Vic's chilli so as not to offend him'. They had become very skilled at producing explicit statements, and practised them in their observed day-to-day work. For example, many of the members of this crew (known generally as being highly committed) took pride in being willing to help each other out without being asked when there were problems. This conformed with their stated value that 'all teams work together and assist each other in breakdowns.'

At the beginning of the program, Eddy described how he had brought in an outside consultant to initiate the change in order to overcome existing 'mistrust between management and the workforce'. He likened the consultant's role to that of a 'marriage counsellor, who helps us to build up our relationship' to one where 'we have enough trust built up between us so that we have open and honest communication'. An employee at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy exhibited the existing low level of trust in management at another meeting shortly after when he commented:

Trust! What we see as trust and what management see as trust is different, I don't know if we operate with two different dictionaries or what. ... Let's talk about communications—you only go and hear how fucked you are going, and when you are going well you hear fuck all.

How did Cokemaking Oz perform trust during the Culture Change program? Trust was implied in the diversity of membership in the Coke Guide working party that produced the negotiated recommendations for change (The Coke Guide. Phase 1 19.3.01:27), in that management expressed willingness to negotiate equally with employees at the lower levels of the hierarchy. For example, the six operators, two supervisors, and an almost equal number of other types of workers on the Batteries (a total of nine from electrical and mechanical maintenance, heating, and utilities) heavily
outnumbered the three managers. Membership of the working party had been sought from individuals performing different functions with 'a spread of experience and knowledge ... (and) opinions', and 'committed to achieve the task' of change (The Coke Guide. Phase 1 19.3.01:26). Mike's commitment to organizational change had been high when he first joined the working party that produced The Coke Guide, as shown in his comment at an early meeting of that committee that 'he had been pushing for change for years'. However, he went from being 'very heavily involved' to resigning after only a few months because, he believed, he was 'probably too open and honest'. In contrast, he expressed a lack of trust in some of the operators and others on the committee:

I knew many people on the Working Party and what their working capabilities were and what they actually did. Because I've worked on all Batteries. And I wasn't very happy with a lot of the actual bullshit that was said there.

Moreover, he described how the prescriptive elements in The Coke Guide had been exploited unfairly by some of the operators, who were using 'work to rule' strategies of resistance to managerial control:

they're livin' from exactly what's printed in there and not willin' to have any leeway. So, if they say 'You want to push two blocks and stop,' disregard what's happened between those two blocks, they're still gonna stop. If you ask them to be a little more committed, they don't want to be committed. If you ask 'em to take a shovel, they don't want to take a shovel. Because they keep relyin' back on what Eddy's words was, that we're not here to be cleaners and shovellers.

Mike's lack of trust in some of the operators was shared by another supervisor on his crew—Jim—who also expressed an implicit contract model of exchange:

Some of the guys, I think, that were actually in there weren't really genuine. They were in there to try and get as much as they can and give away as little

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5 It should be noted that for Phase 2 of the Culture Change program a new committee was formed, comprising four managers who did consult others but they were mainly drawn from management. Yet the document they produced contained highly prescriptive and detailed work roles, competencies and career paths for operators and supervisors located at the bottom of the organizational power structure (The Coke Guide. Phase 2. Stage 2 19.2.01).
as they could. Whereas I thought it was supposed to be a process where we actually improved the place, so, both people, both sides, or we all got something out of it.

Antonio was an operator who chose to not get involved with the working party that produced *The Coke Guide* because of a lack of organisational trust—like many others, he 'had a feeling' one of its aims was to institute twelve-hour shifts. He 'was never one for twelve-hour shifts ... I enjoyed doing my overtime. I was probably the second highest earner in the coke ovens for about three years in a row'. Antonio had calculated that he would lose twenty to thirty thousand dollars a year in overtime as a result, but did not fight against the change in working hours because he was in the minority—as most operators did little overtime, they stood to gain an increase of about $10,000 in income by moving to twelve-hour shifts. People like him were classed as 'whingers' and not picked to participate in the working party, anyway, as they wouldn't 'fit in'. Antonio said that his drop in pay had reduced his commitment to the organization:

I was more energetic ... I used to do a lot more before. But that's when we were on eight hour shifts. So I had more machines to control and had more work to do ... We're now on twelve-hour shifts. You've got this block pushing and you, we're sitting around for two and a half hours doing nothing.

Thus, in interviews, Mike and Antonio both mobilised both the calculative subject of a psychological contract model and the thinking subject of the Cultural Change program, as well as the performing subject of the Requisite Change program (described below).

At a meeting of the Coke Guide working party towards the end of its work members were negotiating some 'sticking points ... (about) money, annual leave coverage, contingencies' in the presence of a union official. Operators expressed distrust of management—both organizationally and personally—in the following exchange:

George (operator): It is important more than ever that you guys (unions) are here, because we are getting to the nitty gritty, and we put in one word and management may use it. ... (we) don't trust you, just want it written down, but it is you management who don’t want to have it written down.
Joe (superintendent): ... My view is that writing things down is not based on trust.

Craig (operator): It is not you, it is management in general. ... This is all very well, Joe, when you go on to greener pastures. The same happened when Mark moved, you came in and had a totally different view. Mark gave a lot of people the idea that he was happy to have more people on crew as trainers, and when Joe came in he said not, and everything changed after a lot of discussion.

Joe: Mark and I are both in this group ...

Craig: You were not out there as much as Mark was, listening to the crews.

It is possible to interpret the above conversation about trust in terms of implementing the Culture Change program by engaging in all three of Thévenot's pragmatic regimes: at a familiarity level, in terms of localised and individualised forms of communication; a regime of regular planned action, in terms of negotiations among members of a committee that had met for a year to discuss planning of the organisational restructure; and a regime of justification, that codified trust within the onion model of a core values approach to culture change.

After two and a half years the Phase 2 recommendations had been only partially implemented as the Requisite Organization program overtook the Culture Change program. The shifting current in overall organizational design towards a requisite organization forced Eddy to withdraw recently from his position as manager of Cokemaking Oz. Organizational trust by that time had plummeted, as evidenced by an electrician's passing comment about organizational change: 'Yeah, that's where management tries to screw the blokes at the bottom'. At around that time, Joe specifically identified trust as a problem, insofar as worker distrust of management had threatened management's ability to control worker safety when there was a bomb hoax. This was at a time when public trust in the ability of social institutions to protect their safety had been undermined by terrorist attacks in the US experiences the year before, perceived threats of the same during the Olympics in Sydney, followed by a large number of Australians being killed in the Bali bombings. Management's response to a telephone call threatening that a bomb had been placed on the Batteries was to obey police directions to ignore the...
established safety practice of sounding an alarm to summon employees to the assembly areas. Police saw a greater threat from a bomb that may have been planted where such large numbers of people would be gathered. However, when some men working on the Batteries saw police vehicles arriving on site they responded by using their telecommunications equipment to listen in to police radio communications, immediately calling on their workmates to walk off the Batteries and gather at the assembly points as they had been trained. Management, on the other hand, justified their actions in terms of competing knowledge claims from outside security forces that worker safety demanded that they inform security forces before the workers, and that they change established safety procedures. Thus Joe’s criticism of lack of employee trust contradicted the thinking subject formed with the Culture Change program—and exhibited by the men working on the Batteries—instead articulating a docile body amenable to managerial control.

In contrast to the Culture Change program, the more recent Requisite Organization program worked ‘from above’ and from outside Cokemaking Oz. Jaques’ model had been used previously in Australia in the 1990s to engineer organizational changes that benefited CRA (later Rio Tinto and then RTZ), a large mining corporation in Australia. Timo (Timo 2001: 113) has concluded that the Jaques’ organizational model was ‘opportunistically’ used by CRA, both in New Zealand and then Australia, to exploit a decline in union membership and new individualised industrial legislation introduced by a conservative federal government in the 1990s. He has described how Jaques’ model attempts to restructure the psychological contract, in terms of maximising individual trust in order to more strongly align employee expectations and commitment to organizational goals (Timo 2001: 110). Jaques’ model—and its implementation in the organizational change program in Steelmaking Oz—worked on enhancing individualised trust relations. Its implementation at Steelmaking Oz not only worked to enhance individual trust relations but also actively undermined organizational trust. For example, participation in the program was compulsory for workshops and in ‘coaching and support’ sessions aimed at educating employees about new behaviours expected of them. Jaques (1998: 15) believed that ‘trust between people is the basic social glue’ and was a key to forming a requisite organization:

7 Like CRA, Steelmaking Oz has been engaged in bitter disputes with unionized employees within the mining sector.
8 Timo (1997) (2001) has described how an organization that builds employee trust can undermine job security traditionally offered by trade unions ‘such as craft consciousness, collective voice, membership organising and union wages strategies’. He has thus argued that Jaques’ model has been opportunistically used by organizations to individualize employment relations and de-unionize the workforce.
in the sense, on the one hand, of being decidedly efficient from the point-of-view of getting the desired work done, and on the other hand, of providing a secure feeling of satisfaction and of trust for each and every one employed, from CEO and senior executives to the office and the shop floor.

Jaques mobilised a capable subject in his model of organisational change, which should not aim to change the people within it but, instead, focus on changing its structure to promote trust and thereby enable people to act upon themselves to maximally enhance the performance of their natural capabilities (Jaques 1998: 1). Thus, an ideal requisite organization is made up of about seven strata that are defined by job discretion in an increasing complexity of tasks, ranked according to time (‘the scale of your ability to work in the future’ (italics in original) and measured by 'the maximum target-completion time of the longest tasks assigned in the role') and individual responsibility ('managerial accountability' in which the manager 'is held accountable (to the manager once removed above them,) not only for his/her own personal effectiveness but also for the outputs of ... immediate subordinates') (Jaques 1998: 34-35).

Steelmaking Oz did not explicitly address trust in its program but did aim to train employees to perform Jaques' eight trust-based requisite behaviours, for their supervisor on the next level above them and for those they supervised immediately below. The eight requisite behaviours were: making assignment, giving direction, following up, positive feedback, negative feedback, coaching and support, problem solving, and reporting.

One of the stated aims of the program was to engineer employee commitment to new organizational goals by 'setting clear business direction and engaging the workforce in that direction'. It demanded that employees accept:

a significantly higher focus on performance and outcomes—a greater performance culture—requiring everyone to review how they can deliver the greatest value in their job role and to work together differently to achieve higher levels of performance.

The company offered those who were lucky enough to retain a job after the restructuring the following 'expectations':

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9 The eight requisite behaviours were: making assignment, giving direction, following up, positive feedback, negative feedback, coaching and support, problem solving, and reporting.
The benefits being generated from this initiative include greater job clarity and accountability with appropriate discretion to be innovative – these benefits lead to individuals being able to better set and achieve meaningful Key Performance Indicators, which can lead to greater rewards and recognition. The reduced complexity from better and simpler systems helps people to focus on what’s important and achieve more from their daily work. All these factors support greater efficiency, productivity, effectiveness and job satisfaction. The initiative involves a comprehensive skills training and development module which helps people to become familiar with any new requirements of their job role. The prospect of increasing skills is usually viewed by employees as positive, as personal development can lead to increased enthusiasm and motivation as well as greater career options.

Thus, it is possible to differently interpret the Requisite Organisation program as producing a calculative subject negotiating a psychological contract. The organisation offered employees 'discretion to be innovative', 'job satisfaction', 'increased enthusiasm and motivation', 'increasing skills' and 'greater career options'. In return, the organisation expected individuals to give 'high performance ...'greater efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness'.

Aimed at middle to bottom management, the Requisite Organization program included Battery supervisors but not operators at the bottom of the hierarchy. The program appeared to require Cokemaking Oz to embrace the entrenched 'authoritarian and disciplinarian approach' it had only recently rejected. The new program required them to attend a series of five three-hour workshops. Reflecting Jaques' past work with the military and large-scale government and corporate bureaucracies, Asterix cartoons shown in the presentations used humour to reinforce a top-down and linear organizational form of us vs them, in which military forces manage civilians who may be heroic or foolish. Mike is a Battery supervisor who reluctantly attended the workshops and initially resisted the required 'coaching' and carrying out 'assignments'. In an interview, he mobilised a calculative subject of the psychological contract model when he described his organisational commitment:

I've still got commitment to the organisation. But I don't know whether I've got commitment to the people who are running it. The overall organisation,
yes. I believe they pay me a fair day's wages and expect a fair day's doing work.
... Like, what am I gonna do if I don't work in the coke ovens? Where am I
going to earn the money like I earn here? I'm not going to. So I would expect
the company expects of me to perform at my peak.

He and other supervisors on his crew complained about an increasingly unfair workload
since the Culture Change program had been introduced—the number of supervisors on a
shift had been reduced in mid-2002—and the Requisite Organisation program had
brought in increased expectations of the amount and type of work they had to do—provide
more data on work performance and do less 'firefighting' work on technological problems
of production. In reaction, Mike was considering resigning because:

I think it's very unfair in what's goin' on in this organization at the moment. I
think we're bendin' over too much for the operator and we're not lookin' after
our own staff. We're not lookin' after his needs, and our needs. Probably
mine are probably a little less needs than some of the other supervisors
because of their inexperience, but their needs are that they need help. And
the organization is not goin' out of its way to help 'em. All they're doin' is
givin' 'em more work.

Thus we have shown how exploring the 'what' question of governing the self describes
a more complex understanding of how individuals produce commitment to organisational
change. We have described how individuals and groups of individuals articulate different
knowledge claims and practices of the self—in theoretical texts, in conversations enacting
organisational change and in day-to-day routine activities. These discursive practices may
differ among three pragmatic regimes of engagement, which problematise relations
between human agency and matter within organisational programs of change. In the
remainder of this paper, we shall briefly investigate the three remaining ways that we
propose can produce a new understanding of an ethics of managing organisational
commitment. As this is a work in progress, our analysis at this stage is necessarily
restricted to discussing preliminary examples drawn from our extensive ethnographic
database.

WAYS OF ESTABLISHING ONESELF AS COMMITTED
In this section we investigate the 'who' question of the identities individuals construct that oblige them to act upon themselves in an ethics of commitment. Some possible forms of this practice include identifying by word and action as a loyal employee who prioritises the good of the organisation irrespective of others' attitudes, a member of a committed work group within the organisation, an individual seeking career success, a leader who acts as an exemplar for others to follow, or an heir to a familial or corporate tradition. For example, Eddy stated passionately at a committee meeting planning the Culture Change program that he was 'an absolute optimist' as well as:

> a bit of a historian, I like reading history. And the parts of history I like reading is when man overcomes something that seems insurmountable, especially when groups of people put their minds to do something, then it is ... difficult but not impossible. I have a belief that if the people who work here have the same commitment and will to make things different that I do, then we will be different.

Timo (2001: 110-112) has used psychological contract theory to argue that Jaques' model of the requisite organization builds organisational trust that displaces the 'security' that a trade union offers such as 'craft consciousness, collective voice, membership organising and union wages strategies'. His allusion to the role of 'craft consciousness' is relevant to this section, in that he describes a subjective way of identifying the self that could oblige an individual to practise commitment to the employing organisation more strongly than to a union (or professional) collectivity. According to Timo (2001), Jaques sought to produce high trust relations in two ways: individualised pay scales and organisational structure of managerial leadership. Steelmaking Oz has a long history as a highly unionised workplace. At Cokemaking Oz during the Cultural Change program, operators working on the batteries had negotiated a salary package specific for their workplace that gave them a higher pay than for many manual labourers in other parts of Steelmaking Oz and outside. Pay was according to a union-mediated skills-based matrix that included a loading for overtime automatically built in to cover occasional on-call overtime.\(^{10}\) Antonio mobilised a concept of the self as a team leader when he explained his ethics for being committed to learning how to do his work. He had voluntarily sought to

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\(^{10}\) However, some managers complained that individuals were refusing to come in when called for extra duties. Paul, a crew supervisor, complained about how the Culture Change program 'became a total rort, from the point of view that the guys had totally washed it over the management as to how they were going to perform their job. And got away with it!'
train himself on the different machines and to train others as soon as he could, stating that' I see myself on this shift as, like a, a team leader. And I can help a lot of these blokes drive the machines.' Others acknowledged him as an unofficial leader of his work crew. Another incentive was that the organisation paid operators a one-off bonus if they met deadlines for completing their training during the first phase of the Culture Change program. Antonio's crew was widely acknowledged as having high organisational commitment. In an interview he described how, as a group, they had a low allegiance to their union although maintaining strong identification as individuals. For example, he described how his crew had 'always been called the arse licking crew because ... if we've got a problem as a crew, we've never called the union in ... If we have issues ... we try and solve them with us.' He explained his crew's commitment in terms of having worked together for a long time and having a good supervisors. On the other hand, there remained a union identity in that 'if an individual has a problem and he goes by himself to the union then that's a different matter'.

The organisation paid supervisors and managers above them according to individualised assessments of performance and a bonus system. Thus, for example, a newly appointed supervisor might receive higher annual increments than one who had worked there for longer. An incident early this year, during implementation of the Organisational Change program, provides an example of the complexities of pragmatic regimes of engagement of this change program. In February, the CEO of Steelmaking Oz announced a bonus was to be paid across the whole organisation. Eddy arrived breathlessly from his early morning briefing to inform his management team:

The announcement was that in line with the excellent business performance of the company and ... its best safety performance ever, they wanted to have some celebration. The Board has approved $1,000 to be given to each employee for that good performance. My role is to give $1,000 to you and your role is to give it to the supervisors and for them to the employees.

The management team meeting that Eddy had addressed was their last meeting of the second round of the Requisite Organisation program's workshops. Their response was one of indignation when they learned that their payment would be only an early payment of an existing bonus scheme that they would have received later in the year. The payment would be an additional bonus only for those at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy, who
worked with short-term incentive schemes. Joe, for example, complained 'this doesn't seem fair ... it's smoke and mirrors' and Greg asked why Eddy hadn't made it clear 'before he raised their expectations by saying that the company was giving everyone $1,000'. Another claimed that payment would 'drive a wedge' between the supervisors and operators, and could have a 'negative effect' on the supervisors. Thus at this planning meeting the localised pay structure worked against the requisite organisation model's ideal of reward for performance, bringing together a confusion of all three regimes of familiarity, regular planned action and justification for implementing the Requisite Organisation program.

The organisation exhibited its continuing hostility towards the unions at this time. When Eddy's manager arrived at the meeting shortly after, he explained that the announcement had been deliberately planned as a surprise in order to avoid negotiations with the unions. Just over a week later, however, the CEO decided that the company would withdraw its bonus offer, because of strike action taken 'so soon after the announcement of the payment' by some employees involved in a protracted industrial dispute. After about another week of controversy that spilled over into the local press, and rumours within the organisation that some employees had been already paid the bonus, the CEO retracted his initial punitive reaction. He applauded employees who chose to support our business' whilst noting 'many of our employees who were confused as to why the unions had directed them to take industrial action', making it clear that 'a critical few who clearly breached their obligations as employees ... are being managed using our usual disciplinary processes'. Thus he sought to reward those who identified as good corporate citizens. This addition to the organisation's history of oppositional relations with unions is a second example of an overlapping of all three regimes of engagement for the Requisite Organisation program.

In addition to identification with collectivities such as a union, a battery crew or the organisation as a whole, we found evidence of family tradition and the role of family provider as other ways external to the organisation that individuals could use to establish themselves as committed to the organisation. For example, Mike described his high commitment to the organization ('My wife would say that I'm over-committed ... my missus reckons I'm a workaholic') in terms of his marital commitments, which required him to have job 'security' and maximise his earning capacity. Married at the young age of 19 years and having completed his low-paid training as a butcher, he applied for work at
Steelmaking Oz and went to work in its cokemaking department after he was told that was where he had to work 'if you want to earn the money' (for working rotating shifts in a dirty and dangerous environment). Two years later when he was moved to lower-paying day shift work, he left Cokemaking Oz to returned to butchering. Shortly after, however, the lack of job security he then experienced brought him back to work at Cokemaking Oz. Similarly, Antonio—an operator on the coke ovens for ten years—sought a job in Steelmaking Oz after he was married in his early twenties because 'a secure company' was more important than the 'easy job' he'd previously held working in a Club. Recently, however, he lost his marital commitment as a way for constructing his organisational commitment. Antonio described how his wife had complained about his 'always being under her feet' at home, since the change to twelve-hour shifts and his loss of access to overtime. This was a personal life crisis for Antonio. He had developed stress-related problems with health alarms about his heart, weight and diet-related diabetes. In an interview, his bitter remarks about the destruction of his commitment to any future marriage were matched by a general air of depression and negativity about his workplace and his career prospects. Mike described a second way that he was obliged to express his organisational commitment. Irrespective of where he worked—in the butchering trade or at Cokemaking Oz—he explained in an interview how his identity as a hard worker was an expression of a family tradition:

I've always loved work. Because it was born and built into me. My father was a butcher. And I was a butcher. And we used to always work long hours together. And I don't think I've ever changed.

Thus, we have provided some evidence towards developing an argument that the consultation process used in the Culture Change program articulated ways of establishing oneself as committed in terms of being a highly paid worker, that generally complemented a (male) identity of being a good family provider. This was accompanied by weak collective identification with unions for not only management but also crews working on the batteries.

WAYS OF DOING THE ETHICAL WORK OF COMMITMENT

In this section we examine 'how' questions of ways of performing the self in order to constitute oneself as committed to the organisation. For example, the calculative subject
described by the psychological contract model could be articulated by individuals seeking and finding evidence of exchanges that lead them to trust that they could receive 'benefits' (that serve others and/or themselves) in return for giving certain 'costs'. The knowing self of the Culture Change program could elaborate an ethical work of commitment by individuals participating (or otherwise) in the open communication process that negotiated organisational change. Those who participated would have to work on themselves both in the public display of the committees words and actions as well as transforming themselves as an ethical subject of their behaviour. Others could enact their ethical work of commitment by not participating in the communication process. The performing self of the Requisite Organisation program could submit to or resist the rigorous surveillance demanded in the eight 'requisite behaviours'.

A calculative subject was widely articulated in statements critical of those who broke a tacitly understood agreement about exchanging individual labour for good pay. At Cokemaking Oz managers, supervisors and operators all reported that they were being paid well as a result of the Culture Change program. According to one manager—Mario—operators were being paid 'very, very, very good money'. Many were professionally qualified (eg, there were engineers, accountants, and even an ex-bank manager) but willing to do manual labour on the batteries because of the high rates of pay. However, he complained that operators generally were not showing the commitment he expected in that they 'tend to view their lifestyle as being more important than their work'. In particular, Mario was critical of those he thought abused the new deal that was negotiated in the Culture Change program:

... they pocket that overtime money. That's good. But if the shit hits the fan they have to be available to come in, 'cause they're getting paid for it.

Greg, a member of the Cokemaking Management Team, expressed similar concerns about abuse of the overtime component built into the new pay deal when he stated his agreement with the following observation, made by a senior member of the team he was responsible for:

... we do less work now ... you remember when we used to get paid for overtime and it was budget time we would all sit back here all hours of the night to get it right and do this and do that? No one does that anymore.
Paul, another supervisor of the crew that was widely recognised as being highly committed, stated that his interest in earning high pay had waned since he had begun work at Cokemaking Oz over fifteen years before: 'I'm no longer money hungry. ... It's like gold miners. They strike it rich and then they sit back and take it easy after that.' However, from the high number of hours he reported he spent working at home on his computer outside his official working hours, he did not appear to mean his input of effort had declined. Rather, using a psychological contract model, job satisfaction from acting out his responsibility for crew training had taken over from money as an important perceived input to his production of commitment.11

Mike was an example of an individual who performed a thinking self that prioritised the common good by not acting, as well as in his actions. As described earlier, despite his criticisms of the ethics of dishonest crew members he withdrew from the committee that planned implementation of the Culture Change program because:

... for it to progress so they could proceed to get twelve-hour shifts and everything, I thought for the company-wise it would be better if I didn't stay on. So I resigned.

He also articulated a performing self, even (or, perhaps, especially) in his resistance to the performing self demanded by the Requisite Organisation program. As mentioned above, he had participated minimally in the general training workshops and individualised coaching sessions to check he was performing the requisite behaviours. His resistance was expressed most strongly when he angrily confronted the person who came to give him his first coaching session. However, soon after he then capitulated and completed his first coaching session another day, when he discussed his strengths and weaknesses as a supervisor and conceded he performed more as an 'action person', being 'hopeless' at the managerial paper work that was increasingly being demanded of those doing his type of work.12 Mike claimed that neither the Culture Change nor Requisite Organisation programs had changed his ways of working, which was 'common sense'. He was critical of what he perceived as the low expectation of physical effort in the Requisite Organisation program,
in that seventy five percent of his workload should involve ‘walking the floor’ (ie, getting out of the office to supervise work directly); he claimed (and observations confirmed this) that he performed this for about ninety percent of the time. However, this was another expression of his resistance to new demands for more ‘thinking’ and less ‘doing’—or ‘fire fighting’—work.

INTEGRATING ONE'S COMMITMENT TO A BROADER MORAL CODE

Finally, ambition and career progression are goals that answer ‘why’ questions about the subjectivity of organisational commitment and how it is integrated into an individual's broader moral codes. Ethics and morals were rarely discussed explicitly in observed meetings and interviews and further work is required to explore the data to answer this question. However, Eddy, the manager of Cokemaking Oz, was himself a lay minister of a church and, in an interview during the Culture Change program, expressed a strong commitment to the broader moral code of improving the self for the greater good, whether in becoming a 'better husband or person or father' or a better member of the management team. In an interview he passionately compared his management team to parents who say 'if the kids were different then I could be a different parent,' criticising them for having 'a million reasons why not (to act)... saying 'look at those shitheads, no time,' and getting upset when I say that those 'shitheads' are a reflection of you.'

Sean, a young and relatively new addition to the management team, articulated extremely high ambitions when he described in an interview how he was struggling to achieve his career goal of managing an organisation himself. After tertiary education training as a mechanical engineer, he sought employment in various departments of Steelmaking Oz where he worked at least fifty to sixty hours per week, including episodes of sleeping overnight under his desk in a sleeping bag. He had recently transferred from his management position to that of a crew supervisor on the batteries, to satisfy his goals of financial security and to build up a diversity of work experience to enhance his career prospects. Thus he strongly expressed a broader moral code of maximising satisfaction of his own needs and wants. On the other hand, we have described already how Mike articulated a broader moral code aimed at the common good that was integrated into his organisational commitment. He was committed not only to Cokemaking Oz but to his church—actively involved in voluntary work—and, as President of a community group, to
helping people with disabilities. Using the widely accepted Australian code of 'give a person a fair go', he referred in an interview to his religious-based belief when he qualified his statement that 'trust has to be earned' by adding 'don't put your trust in man, but God alone.' He described his community work (coming out of his personal experiences as a father of a teenager with cerebral palsy) as:

very fulfilling—to see their happy smiling faces. Because nobody else wants 'em. And nobody else really understands how a person with a disability feels. They are human beings. They have love and desires just like you and I have 'em. So, I'm very committed to 'em.

SUMMARY

In this paper—a work in progress—we have sought to examine the subjectivity of commitment by problematising the psychological contract concept. We have developed that critique by, firstly, identifying the formation of a number of aspects of the self that can be acted upon in an ethics of organisational commitment. Individuals can mobilise these in three different pragmatic regimes of engagement with reality, and we have described these complexities with respect to three different models of organisational change—the psychological contract concept and two organisational change programs implemented at Cokemaking Oz. Commitment can further be articulated by way of how people construct themselves as being obliged to act on themselves in this way. We provided examples of how individuals in Cokemaking Oz mobilised identities as individuals and members of groups—whether in small localised work teams or more generally as a corporate citizen, as leaders, or according to naturalised familial or corporate traditions. Some examples of how individuals can ethically act on themselves to produce organizational commitment included mobilising a calculative self that exchanged individual labour for monetary reward or job satisfaction, and a thinking and performing self that could act by withdrawing from a committee in order to contribute better to the common good. Finally, we gave examples of why individuals would commit themselves to an organisation by means of integrating that commitment within a broader moral code.

We have sought to guide our analysis using Foucault and Thévenot to develop a framework for a sociologically rich understanding of an ethics of organisational commitment. The psychological contract concept, in a number of its variant forms, gave us
some signposts. We have sought, however, to move more deeply into the messy contradictions of discursive practices articulated in textbook theory and in organisational change programs. The latter are further clouded by their expression in official organisational documents, in management meetings, and in the daily routine work practices of individuals at different levels of the organisational hierarchy. Gratefully, we can report that some patterns of commitment are emerging that, however, need further exploration.
References


