

**INDUCTION PROGRAMMES**  
**IN THE AGE OF ‘CORPORATE CULTURE’:**  
**THE ‘SOPHISTICATED SUBJECT’**

**Maria Daskalaki**

**Royal Holloway, University of London**

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## **Abstract**

*Though still viewed as the missing link between recruitment and retention, organisational induction programmes have recently acquired a new function: they can mould the new employee by inducing a positive 'first impression' about the organisation and presenting a 'caring' company image. Up to now, however, the majority of the induction literature has failed to refer to the political and ethical aspects of this process and analyse the embedded ideological structures and cultural practices through which induction trainers and newcomers construct, reconstruct and deconstruct induction discourses and 'management language'. This paper argues that induction should be treated as a part of an organisational cosmos that is constantly created and re-created, defined and re-defined based on the discursive interactions of its increasingly 'sophisticated' subjects.*

## **1. Introduction**

The 'new' workplace is under pressure to 'continuously improve' efficiency and productivity; organisations have to invent the 'one best way' and 'search for excellence' (Peters & Waterman, 1982). The employees' contributions, therefore, become very crucial and their cooperation essential. Contemporary organisations increasingly become more dependent on the construction of new forms of 'hegemonic' interactions based on the reproduction and manipulation of cultural events (du Gay, 1996). Within this context, the rhetorics of 'empowerment', 'self-actualisation' and 'teamworking' represent a 'corporate culture' which attempts not only to socialise workers into work tasks and habits but also 'affect one's emotional and psychic process, sense of well-being and identity' (Casey, 1995:86). Management styles based on 'cultural change' programmes are employed in order to control the ways in which people think, feel and act in organisations. These programmes incorporate human resource practices or 'specific measures' (Hunter, 1987, cited in du Gay, 1996: 61), - induction programmes being one of them - in order to 'operationalise' enterprise culture, 'delineate, normalize, and instrumentalize the conduct of persons ...[and] achieve the ends they postulate as desirable' (du Gay, 1996:61).

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to remind organisational practitioners and organisational theorists that induction programmes were initially employed in order to improve the experience of organisational entry for new starters. In the 1950's the new employee was treated as another 'pair of hands' joining the factory or the office environment. About forty years later, the newcomers are 'internal customers' who are

welcomed to the corporate communities as lifelong ‘learners’. Induction programmes of the last four decades have, however, remained the same: they demonstrate that the first step of this learning process assumes a passive employee who does not seem to influence the induction event either during the design or the administration phase. In other words, the ‘subject’ of induction and its role within the same and/or different organisational settings are not taken into consideration when organisational specialists are on the quest for the ‘best induction practice’. This paper argues that induction programmes should be analysed or assessed in relation to a) the occupational and cultural background of those engaged with them; b) the embedded historical, socio-political and institutional features of the organisational settings in which they emerge and evolve, and c) the interactive effects of the two.

After a brief description of the research project that informs this paper and its methodology, I explain how ‘corporate culturalism’ (Willmott, 1993) that dominates contemporary organisational environments is connected with the organisational socialisation programmes and the ‘evolved’ forms of induction. I will then provide an historical account of the representations of induction in the literature and briefly refer to some of the factors that have contributed to their ‘evolution’ but have left unaffected their purpose and objectives. A historical account of organisational induction practices demonstrates that induction has been employed to provide another form of disciplinary action within contemporary organisations that attempts to ‘normalise’ the subject depriving it from moral agency and individuality. In the last part of the paper, I address the Durkheimian notion of morality and utilise Bauman’s (anti-)postmodern ethics in order to ‘locate’ and defend the ‘missing subject’ during

organisational induction. I will argue that newcomers seem to resist being ‘treated as moral beginners’ (Gilbert, 1991:116) and, through accumulation of induction experiences, distancing or cynicism, imperil induction rhetorics and their corporate ideologies. The paper concludes with a discussion of the constitution of the ‘sophisticated subject’ and the transcendence of the ‘unethical’ elements of induction techniques.

## **2. Establishing a Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Duality, Non-duality and Postmodernism**

Traditional or positivistic accounts of social events are mainly characterised by a persistence to discover an observable ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ that exists ‘out there’. As a consequence, the attempts to represent reality are substituted by the necessity of describing it, as human beings are believed to be capable of fully understanding and explaining the qualities of both natural and social phenomena. Before the Frankfurt thinkers – who focused on the study of the cultural processes within capitalist societies and on their relation with the domain of production - totalistic and technocratic rationality was dominating modern thought. This positivistic stance can be associated with traditional economic and management theories as these were employed to describe work practices and address conflict within organisational settings.

The Frankfurt School's quest of connecting capitalist modes of production with cultural phenomena was followed by the rejection of the Enlightenment's notion of truth and Modernity's pursuit of reason. This is emphasised in the French writings of Foucault, Barthes, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida and others, who by adapting terms from literary theory and criticism, attempt to provide a postmodern account of the classical Marxist concept of 'superstructure'<sup>1</sup> (Casey, 1995). Postmodernism supports 'the replacement of the factual by the representational' (Hassard, 1993: 127), that is, it describes the substitution of the modern search for objective order in the world - through language improvements and language's correspondence with nature - with an emphasis upon deconstruction (Derrida, 1978) and exposition of "the inherent contradictions which reside in any text" (Hassard, 1993: 125, 126). Yet, it just reminds us how complex social interactions can be, failing to provide an alternative to the totalising approaches that it criticises. As a result, postmodern analysis can lead to pessimistic and futile descriptions of human interactions especially when it focuses on issues of subjectivity, identity and de-subjection<sup>2</sup>.

This paper analyses organisational induction programmes in an attempt to address some of the postmodern themes –like 'duality' and 'non-duality' (rather than 'post-duality')<sup>3</sup> issue- and subject/object dichotomy but by employing a different analytical framework. Particularly, the micro- and the macro-analysis of the induction events -

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1 Superstructure can be defined as 'the cultural sphere, where language, knowledge, meanings and identities are formed' (Casey, 1995:13).

2 For a discussion of these themes, see Foucault, 1977; Cooper, 1989; Aldrich, 1992; Gergen, 1992; Willmott, 1994.

3 Post-duality, on the one hand, refers to the state of experiencing 'human agency as a complex, contradictory and shifting process that is open to many possible modes of being (Willmott, 1994:117). Non-duality and its implications, on the other hand, introduce radical alternative readings according to which disembodiment and de-subjectification or de-subjection (derived from

in which this paper is based- demonstrates the dynamic nature of induction and therefore suggests that both interactional and institutional factors frame and define the nature of every induction programme.

Moreover, induction is treated as another manifestation of the 'corporate culture' ideology which, according to its proponents, has the power to produce subjects of a certain form via moulding, shaping and fabricating employees with particular characteristics and aspirations. The conditions of modernity present the subject as an agonising sovereign entity who, in its effort to prevent 'anomic terror' (a Durkheimian term), becomes subject to a 'powerful authority' (Bauman, 1976, cited in Willmott, 1994:123). This 'authority' within organisational settings, according to Willmott (1993), is provided by 'corporate culture' which, as another disciplinary practice, aims towards exploitation, domination and 'normalisation' (Foucault, 1977). However, as this paper will demonstrate, induction programmes are not top-down communication events but rather arenas for negotiation of meanings facilitated by the discursive interactions of those who engage with them.

### **3. The Study: Methodological Concerns and Decisions**

The present paper is informed by a research project that started in November 1998. Its qualitative research design<sup>4</sup> was based on induction observations (the researcher sits-in through the entire programme), semi-structured and unstructured interviews

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Foucauldian terms) dissolve the 'habitual separation of subject and object' through undisturbed participation in the 'immediacy of the moment' (Willmott, 1994:121).



with managerial staff, trainers and newcomers and other organisational representatives that take place before, during and after the induction. The information obtained from observations and interviews was constantly cross-analysed with the data obtained from company documents and induction films (including company videos).

The study incorporates a series of case studies approached in a cross-sectional manner. Several case studies were chosen instead of an in depth one as this seemed necessary for revealing any patterns that induction processes and newcomers' responses to them follow. A cross-sectional design was chosen in favour of a longitudinal one. The examination of the induction effects after organisational entry would not have indicated the influence of the induction programme itself in isolation from the impact that subsequent workplace events have on newcomers' perception about the company and arguably, their behaviours. Thus, the present study focuses on the event of induction per se and therefore the analyses offered can solely be based on newcomers' 'immediate responses' rather than 'elaborate' or 'delayed' descriptions of induction experiences.

Therefore, this study neither assesses employees' beliefs and attitudes towards induction programmes nor describes the effectiveness of companies' induction practices. Instead, it directly assesses newcomers' 'first impressions' or reactions to organisational induction practices which, according to the induction literature, can

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4 A detailed examination of the newcomers' responses to induction programmes, not through the study of company 'induction evaluation forms' but via a qualitative analysis of interactions and events that take place during induction programmes, contributes a more critical and complete view to the induction literature.

attract and retain labour as well as promote corporate ideologies and 'good employment relations'.

Finally, this research focuses on companies operating within a common labour market<sup>5</sup> and analyses employee' responses to induction processes encountered within a specific geographical location, namely, Telford. In particular, I believe that, as both induction trainers and newcomers move from one company to another, they receive a plethora of induction messages followed by a series of work experiences<sup>6</sup>. As a result, when they enter a new working environment, they 'transfer' with them their conceptualisations and interpretations of induction programmes experienced in the past. High labour mobility<sup>7</sup> equates multiple induction experiences and therefore enhances the accumulation and circulation of induction knowledge dispersed within the same labour market<sup>8</sup>. Thus, studying induction within Telford provides the opportunity to uncover the ways in which the historical, contextual and institutional characteristics of this particular labour market frame both the experience of an induction programme and the newcomers' responses to this event.

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5 All previous comparative studies have examined induction phenomena as they unfold within diverse labour markets (i.e., diverse labour force and labour market characteristics). Thus, focusing on the induction programmes employed within a particular labour market appeared an original and interesting avenue of investigation.

6 In addition to that, management and training consultants, training handbooks and managerialist literature celebrate and indoctrinate people and firms into the same 'induction culture' (for an analysis of the role of popular discourse in the formulation of organisational practice/policies, see Furusten, 1999). Moreover, literature on the topic suggests that induction programmes - when established within an organisation- constitute a standardised organisational procedure whose attributes do not considerably vary within dissimilar organisational settings (for example, The Industrial Society Survey, 1995).

7 This environment can be viewed as paradigmatic as it is characterised by high labour mobility: recent trends in the labour markets permit the prediction that future employees will be quite 'mobile' without hesitating to change not only their work settings but also their careers.

Moreover, most of the prior research assumes a 'green' employee who arrives at the new work environment feeling insecure, stressed and isolated (Gomersall & Myers, 1966; Horner, et al., 1979, cited in Wanous, 1993; Wanous, 1993). This paper suggests that organisational newcomers gradually become 'experienced' or 'sophisticated', and in effect, capable of questioning the rhetorical statements (if any) of any induction programme, due to the induction knowledge they acquire by changing working environments. Therefore, instead of a 'green' newcomer, organisations register in their induction programmes employees whose prior experiences (or the accumulation of them) can influence or frame the induction event.

For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on a summary of the findings from the cases involved in the study: conclusions drawn from it will be utilised throughout the paper in order to illustrate the processes and the interactions between induction programmes' sophisticated groups and their trainers. Before discussing the ways through which 'sophisticated' newcomers and trainers seize the opportunity to challenge, deconstruct and redefine induction events, let me first refer to induction and the descriptions of its inexperienced and vulnerable newcomers represented in the literature throughout the years.

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8 In this context 'knowledge 'cannot be defined without understanding what gaining knowledge means..... is not something that could be described itself or by opposition to "ignorance" or to "belief", but only by considering a whole cycle of accumulation...?' (Latour, 1987: 220).

## **4. ‘Evolved’ Induction Programmes (1940’s-1990’s): In Form but not in Essence**

### **4.1 The ‘evolution’ of induction**

Induction programmes were initially introduced in factory environments around the 1930’s-1950’s, a period that followed the emergence of the ‘personnel-management movement’<sup>9</sup> (for example, Ordway & Tead, 1933; Yeomans, 1942; Hurley, 1950; National Industrial Conference Board, 1958; Heron, 1959[1948]). They emerged in an effort to control labour turnover and its costly consequences within the industrial environment. From these early years personnel practitioners stressed the necessity of binding workers more closely to the firm (Frairris, 1997). Further, health and safety also became a more prominent issue for organisations around this period (Frairris, 1997). As Clark and Sloan (1958) discussed in a comprehensive study, known as *‘Classroom in the Factories’*, before the establishment of orientation programmes (the U.S. term for induction), employees were sent directly to work on their assigned task. Yet, labour turnover among new starters ‘was found to be high, sometimes nearly five times as high for those with less than 1 month’s standing as for those who remained 1 to 3 months’ (Maier, 1952, cited in Clark & Sloan, 1958: 40). Thus, ‘...there [were] a few establishments of any size without an orientation program [sic] of some kind’ (Clark & Sloan, 1958: 40).

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<sup>9</sup> Personnel Management emerged around 1910’s-1920’s. For a relevant discussion, see Montgomery (1987) and Smith et al. (1990)

It appears, therefore that, induction programmes were initially employed to deal with high labour turnover rates. In the sixties the objective of the induction programmes remained the same (McGregor, 1960; Bureau of National Affairs, 1961; Gomersall & Myers, 1966; Pigors & Myers, 1966; van Gelder, 1967; Chancey, 1968; Marion & Trico, 1969). The enhanced familiarity with the work task, the heightened awareness of the company health and safety regulations and the additional knowledge of the company rules and procedures were considered to be the outcomes of an effective induction programme capable of reducing employee dissatisfaction, company accident rates and 'exit' behaviours.

The late 1970's-early 1980's signalled the appearance of personnel management/human resources journals and practitioners' magazines which did not neglect to include induction articles in their publications (for example, Marks, 1974; Hollmann, 1976; Shea, 1981; Fowler, 1983; Davidson, 1986; Reinhardt, 1988). These were 'recipes' about how to design, implement and monitor effective induction programmes. According to the authors – most of whom were specialists in Human Resources departments –, employees' 'first impressions' influence their attitudes towards the company and their behaviour regarding job-hopping and management control. To illustrate, Lubliner (1978) offered specific directions for the development of an 'excellent' induction programme. For example, he detailed the guidelines on how to prepare the presentations, choose the appropriate physical setting and the 'right' trainers, and gave directions about the content of an effective programme. Two years later, another management guru, John (1980), offered his 'recipe' in an article titled '*Complete Employee Orientation Program*'. For him, orientation is 'one of the

best methods for deterring new employees' errors and strengthening their morale'. Therefore, induction's scope, stages, duration, planning, accountability issues, trainers and methods should be carefully managed (John, 1980: 373)<sup>10</sup>.

In the 1990's, a plethora of, in the main, prescriptive or descriptive studies is characterised by anecdotal approaches to designing and running induction sessions for increasing employee commitment and reducing employee dissatisfaction and turnover (Meighan, 1991; Federico, 1991; Industrial Relations Services, 1994; Flynn, 1994; France & Jarvis, 1996; George & Miller, 1996; Industrial Relations Services, 1998; Institute of Personnel and Development, 1998). According to Sathe (1985), the early stages of organisational entry are crucial as employers have their biggest chance to make real changes in people's values. Furthermore, according to a survey of 1,003 personnel and HR professionals in the UK conducted by the Industrial Society (1995), organisations use induction in order to reinforce employees' sense of 'fitting in' and belonging in the company, make them feel special, boost their morale and improve their motivation. 'As the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression' (Body Shop's Induction Co-ordinator, 1995, cited in Industrial Society, 1995:20).

Additionally, studies in the area of socialisation focused on the importance of induction programmes without, however, providing a clear account of their institutional objectives (Wanous, 1993). Whereas socialisation is generally viewed as an 'encompassing and enduring process', induction programmes should be thought as

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the induction programmes attended had been following these particular guidelines, described in both articles; in

formalised and structured sessions that take place at the threshold of organisational entry and have a long-term objective: the improvement of ‘both performance and retention-related attitudes-behavior’ of new organisational members (Wanous, 1993). However, according to Saks and Ashforth (1997), ‘[r]esearch on socialisation training has found that most organisations use induction training as part of their socialisation procedures. Although the content of these training programmes is general in nature, entry training has been found to be related to socialisation outcomes’ (Saks & Ashforth, 1997: 255; see also Holton, 1996).

The same long-term induction objectives are identified within Japanese companies (particularly the automobile industry). Below I summarise some of the evidence provided by studies within Japanese companies. I chose to refer to Japanese firms (in Japan or abroad – Japanese ‘transplants’) since they have been historically considered to provide extensive induction-socialisation programmes for their new employees. These cases are seen ‘as paradigmatic’ of the positivistic approaches and universal models which associate extensive induction/socialisation processes with high productivity, high performance and long tenures (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Womack et al., 1990). Within Japanese companies, induction procedures are integrated with recruitment, selection, training and socialisation programmes. For example, ‘[a]t Honda Motors in Japan, new recruits, receive concentrated orientation sessions in safety and corporate culture (*fudo*) followed by intensive training in technical skills’ (Hashimoto, 1994:123). The main recruitment and selection criteria are based on ‘candidate’s personality and his or her general attitude to work’

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some cases, the structure of the programme was shocking: all the steps prescribed in the article were accurately followed.

(Sachwald, 1995: 249). This is a way in which Japanese companies try to 'match' individuals and organisations. The plan of integration continues with the designing and administration of extensive and intensive induction or, as Sachwald (1995: 250) calls them, 'integration' programmes.

Back in 1973, Kamata in his book *'Japan in the Passing Lane'* describes his experience of being a Toyota worker during this pre-oil-crisis growth period. Joining Toyota as a seasonal worker was much like joining the army. Kondo (1990) provides a similar description of factory life which, in this case, resembles more life within a large, traditional Japanese family. 'From the recruitment process through death, then, the Sato company touches the lives of its members' (Kondo, 1990:181). Both, Kamata's and Kondo's experiences indicate corporate attempts to control employees' attitudes and behaviour, not only within but also outside the factory. In this context, a formal induction programme is the first demonstration of these attempts.

Moreover, Japanese companies outside Japan, automobile industries in the U.S., for example, offer similar initial assimilation training to their newcomers (Hashimoto, 1994). Both Graham (1995) and Delbridge (1998) describe induction as an inseparable part of a unified training programme that the new starters go through straight after hiring. The components of the programmes that aim at manipulating employees' attitudes towards the company occupy more than fifty per cent of the instructional time and stress the fact that the *'company ...really cares about its employees'* (Graham, 1995:45). Induction within transplants, therefore, constitutes another corporate rhetorical procedure employed as an ideological control that



promotes 'good employment relations' (Delbridge, 1998:119-125). After a few months, Graham, Delbridge and the newcomers found out that 'the messages presented [to them] during "*Orientation and Training*" often were quite different from the reality of working in the plant' (Graham, 1995:58).

Although an examination of previous induction studies can provide an understanding of the ways that the induction programmes evolved, the processes that underlie induction interactions and the dynamics of the induction experience still remain unexplored. These aspects of the event are explored in this paper, as both induction and its actors are placed within an historical and institutional context and the effects of a 'localised', situated experience are acknowledged.

#### **4.2 Contributing factors to the evolution of induction**

The strengthening of the service sector, the technological and 'cultural'<sup>11</sup> development, the increased competition as an outcome of globalisation<sup>12</sup> and the establishment of the human resource management and 'corporate culture' signalled the 'evolution' of organisational induction techniques. The concept of '*evolution*' here suggests that, though induction procedures have gradually acquired a different form, style and structure within organisations, their essence and purpose/objectives has remained the same. By administering well-thought induction programmes, contemporary organisations are still expecting to reduce labour turnover and facilitate new employee integration with the organisation (the objective of organisational

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11 The term 'cultural', here, refers to the emergence of cultural management.

12 Market pressures for efficiency, quality, and productivity can be associated with induction programmes as a means to achieve fully productive employees from the first days at work.

induction four decades ago) and its corporate values. The ideology of ‘corporate culture’, therefore, and the reasons and ways through which it has included induction in its rhetorics are addressed below.

Specifically, the proponents of corporate culture and ‘evolved’ induction programmes assume and proclaim the end of conflict between management and workers, capital and labour: Owners, labour, management and customers all belong to the same community whose mutual growth depends on their cooperation. According to Jacques<sup>13</sup> (1999), the dated ‘Henry Ford’s River Rouge assembly plant’ should not be considered the symbol of organisational relationships. This is a valuable observation. At the same time, however, organisational theorists should not ignore the contested interests inherent within the employment relationship. The claim that the majority of contemporary organisational environments should be viewed as

‘work sites where discretionary activity, fluid task interdependence and flexibility are the key structuring factors of work and key determinants of power and voice’ (Jacques, 1999:210).

ought to be critically assessed. Conflict is not an abstract theme that academics of industrial relations in the UK find difficult to discharge (as suggested by Jacques, 1999) but a condition still demonstrated, experienced and observed within both industrial and non-industrial environments. The images promoted by companies’ induction programmes, - for example, those of empowered ‘knowledge-assemblers’-,

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13 Jacques (1999) suggests that these writings that divide management and labour –applicable in the traditional forms of organising industrial settings- may be slowly becoming irrelevant for the service sector/knowledge-intensive working environments in which HRM may be becoming a key actor.

especially within industrial settings, reveal corporate attempts to ‘*intellectualise*’ and ‘*assetise*’<sup>14</sup> industrial labour:

In the beginning, it is very difficult to send them back to school. Once they go though you can’t stop them. They love it. Knowledge and skills are important for our company. Training means high quality and customer satisfaction. And you can only achieve this through a satisfied, well-trained workforce (PRINTCO, Interview with Human Resource Manager, October 1998).

The management attempts to convince induction members that they are offered a unique opportunity to participate in this programme and that this initiative is the proof that they will be treated well by the company (*PARTSCO, Induction observation, November 1998*). Following an induction specialist’s view, ‘*the new starters feel empowered through their participation in these programmes*’ (*PARTSCO, interview with the Training and Development Officer, November 1998*). In other words, ‘[n]ewcomers who perceive that time, effort and resources have been spent to help them adjust should become more committed in an effort to repay the organisation’ (Meglino et al, 1988, cited in Waung, 1995: 637; see also Schein, 1968). Therefore, the mere existence of an institutionalised organisational process (i.e., induction) as such is employed to support the assertion of a ‘caring company culture’. The new employees are expected to feel grateful and develop stronger ties with an organisation that ‘cares’ for them and their development. The provision of induction training verifies these organisational qualities:

During induction we will pick up newcomers with problems with the English language or dyslexia; they can come here whenever they like and ask for help...we want to make them feel part of ...[pause]... of the company, I suppose. Just because you may have a difficulty it does not

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<sup>14</sup> From assets: ‘Our employees are our company’s most valuable assets’: This slogan is probably one of the management principles of numerous companies. Many firms promote this statement in their annual reports and other publications, advertisements for products/services, job advertisements etc. regardless of the sector or the product category they belong to.

mean you'll be left behind – the same stands for people at the other end. We have both low-achievers and high-achiever. When we first joined the company there were no training schemes, no induction and no special courses. Today we even have a stress-recognition course. Training is the key for a highly motivated workforce (PRINTCO, Interview with the Human Resources Advisor, February 1999).

Nevertheless, induction is chronically positioned at the threshold of organisational entry that leads to the collapse of the boundaries between newcomers' identity and 'corporate culture'. It, furthermore, constitutes a procedure during which, on the one hand, organisations can promote their discourses and invite new starters to become assimilated to the 'corporate culture' and, on the other hand, newcomers and trainers transmit, analyse, receive and respond to these messages according to their own volition. Induction experience, therefore, seems to be pregnant with most of the sin(g)s of the post-modern times: myths and images, fragmentation and distancing, consumption and consumerism, ambivalence and negotiation.

An examination of the embedded ideological structures and cultural practices through which trainers and newcomers construct, reconstruct and deconstruct corporate discourses will reveal the importance of the role that the new starters play during induction. In order to achieve this, the paper discusses the ways through which a pre-perceived and pre-defined pool of 'alternatives' shape, dictate and 'restrain' human experience and vice versa. In other words, by adopting an interactionist/institutional approach, the rest of the paper discusses the following: a) the ways through which the 'universal rhetorics' of corporate culture try to dictate particular induction experiences of new organisational members and, according to Meyer and Rowan (1977), 'institutionalise' them; b) the ways in which newcomers respond to these attempts and

c) the relation between the two. Through this, I employ a framework that takes into account both large-scale structures without overestimating their effects and personal, local practices without forgetting their wider contexts.

## **5. ‘Corporate Culture’, Organisational Cultures and Induction**

Regardless of its various definitions and the problematic that arises from them, culture can be ‘sliced’, re-conceptualised and re-defined so as to represent different ‘realities’ within diverse contexts. Trying, therefore, to avoid the trap of conceptual dualisms that have ‘the tendency to reduce global forces to the act of “borrowing” or “emulating” best practice’ (Smith & Meiksins, 1995: 252) and restrain the meanings of culture to one ‘convenient’ approach, I will focus on how ‘organisational actors are involved in cognitive processes of reality construction, processes which are embedded within taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life, whereby its facticity and objectivity are accomplished’ (Clegg, 1990: 83).

Although it is not one of the objectives of this study to investigate early or late organisational culture debates as they appear in the literature, a brief account of these writings and how they relate to organisational induction processes and the rhetorics of corporate culture will be given. This will offer an insight of the codes of communication and rules of contact that govern various forms of interaction within organisational environments.

To begin with, if organisational culture is something that the organisation ‘has’, then it can be observed, planned and implemented as any other organisational constitutive

component. As a result, it can be manipulated and utilised as a form of ideological control (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982). However, within a pluralistic framework of analysis by quoting the words of Schudson (1989) as cited in H. C. White (1992):

Culture is not a set of ideas imposed but a set of ideas and symbols available for use. Individuals select the meanings they need for particular purposes and occasion from the limited but nevertheless varied cultural menus a given society provides. In this view, culture is a resource for social use more than a structure to limit social action. It serves a variety of purposes because symbols are 'polysemic' and can be variously interpreted; because communication is inherently ambiguous (White, 1992: 140).

Consequently, the institutional elements that contribute to this 'resource' should *not* become institutionalised (or taken for granted) reducing individual action into a rational myth (Clegg, 1990). Along these lines, the 'social emergent' approach of culture treats organisational culture as a symbolic construction, i.e., as something that an organisation 'is' (Legge, 1995). Therefore, an organisation is conceptualised as

a continuous process of social construction through symbols, values, beliefs, and patterns of intentional action which people in organisations learn, produce and recreate; simultaneously subjective and objective, nonmaterial and material, ephemeral and enduring; a subject of study which is observable but also evocative; an open text (Barthes, 1970:32-35; Eco, 1962) constituted by a mesh of personal cultures, occupational and professional cultures, corporate cultures, cultures dominant in the productive sectors to which the organisation belongs, cultures of the communities of practices to which the individuals feel that they belong, and cultures of the agencies and institutions operating within society, *locally nationally and internationally* (emphasis added) (Strati, 1992: 578).

The ideology of the 'corporate culture' stresses the importance of employee involvement and empowerment as well as the role of flexible, team-based working patterns. Further, it tends to approach the 'new industrial relations' as an arena for potential agreement and mutuality of interests suggesting the resolution of the long-

term conflict and opposition between different organisational groups. Accordingly, an important element of corporate communities, apart from personal (empowerment) and organisational growth ('excellence' and quality), is employee socialisation, i.e., corporate membership. Induction programmes, within this context, will provide the necessary initiation rituals for all corporate entities:

They are not the workers, nor are they the white-collar people in the usual, clerk sense of the word. These people only work for The Organisation. The ones I am talking about *belong* to it as well (Whyte, 1957:3, emphasis added).

However, following the 'social emergent' approach, 'corporate culture' and its rhetorics are one of the organisational subcultures which are defined and redefined through the discursive recreation of symbolic and material structures as well as the personalised expressions of resistance of organisational members. In contrast to this interpretation that takes into account the important role that the individual employee can play in the construction and re-construction of social and cultural events within organisational contexts, induction studies portray a passive employee without a voice and choice, a helpless subject becoming the object of managerial behavioural and attitudinal manipulation. One of the main reasons for this is that most of the writings in this field have over-emphasised the 'features of control and subordination in new management regimes' (Durand & Stewart, 1998: 156) and considered their authority unchallenged.

Some studies (Durand & Stewart, 1998; Hodson, 1996; Jermier, et al. 1994; Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995), yet, focus on forms of shopfloor resistance that exhibit not only attitudinal but also behavioural subversion. This means that they not only

attitudinally resist managerial rhetorics - display 'behavioural compliance' but not 'attitudinal commitment' (Legge, 1995) - but exhibit behavioural opposition as well.

Moreover, because these acts of disagreement occur within concrete settings,

[...] resisters organise their actions by using the interpretative and interactional resources available to them in the setting. Thus, resistance cannot be separated from the discursive contexts within which it is produced, and others may respond to in ways that sustain organisationally preferred positions, relationships and realities' (Miller, 1994: 158).

Following this, the ways in which employee resistance becomes manifest during induction will greatly depend on the situational/contextual conditions characterising this induction event. Furthermore, prototypical representations of induction programmes, which assume a vulnerable new employee subjected to the employers' unmediated exercise of authority, are challenged. Newcomers are expected to discursively decode corporate rhetorical statements and challenge trainers' interpretations of events whenever and in whatever ways the structure and constitution of the induction programmes allow it. The next section therefore should be treated as an attempt to address these discursive interactions and their outcomes.

## **6. Discursive Interactions of the Induction Programmes: Trainers and Newcomers**

### **6.1 Interactional Asymmetries: The Induction Trainers**

A normal conversation is characterised by equal participation and symmetrical relationships. Yet, an asymmetry will arise temporarily in conversational contexts when one of the participating groups assumes a more active role. This is what supports and reinforces human communication. Nevertheless, it is necessary to



distinguish the conversational asymmetries from the ones that arise in institutional environments (Drew & Heritage, 1992). It is clear that the differences arising during an ordinary conversation do not denote social status and they do not include statements of power and social hierarchy. In contrast,

institutional interactions may be characterised by role-structured, institutionalised, and omnirelevant asymmetries between participants in terms of such matters as differential distribution of knowledge, rights to knowledge, access to conversational resources and to participation in the interaction (Drew & Heritage, 1992: 49).

In other words, interactional asymmetries may arise due to either endogenous or exogenous factors to the context of interaction or due to the contribution of both of them. Thus, it appears necessary to investigate both factors in order to gain deeper understanding of the interrelation between knowledge, interaction, dominance and power (Drew & Heritage, 1992). The last two concepts, though most of the time appear together in order to signal a differential access to resources (in this case, discourse tools), should not be used interchangeably. Power, is described by Linell & Luckman (1991) 'as having to do with latent resources or potentialities, while dominance concerns manifest action properties or actualities or, if you will, some sort of resources put to actual use' (Linell & Luckman, 1991: 10). Thus, identifying dominant dialogue behaviours does not necessarily mean naming of the group in power during social encounters.

There are two more situations that may give rise and reinforce interactional asymmetries (Drew & Heritage, 1992). The first involves the different kinds of

knowledge that various organisational groups master. In some cases, the trainers of each induction session are specialists in their field (for example, the Health & Safety session is delivered by the Health and Safety Officer). In other words, they have considerably more knowledge than the new starters about the topic of discussion that can be manipulated in order to determine the flow of events throughout induction.

Our induction involves many trainers holding different posts within the company. Each one of them delivered a session that they feel comfortable with, as it is their field of work. They produce their own teaching material and guide the discussions during the induction sessions (PARTSCO, Interview with Training and Development Officer, November 1998).

According to this, induction trainers have the option/power of strategically direct the content and structure of talk during the administration of the programmes. They can, in other words, determine the topics and the ways in which to address them as well as the kind of answers to give to particular questions in order to prevent 'unpleasant' topics becoming an issue and maintain control over the range of work situations discussed.

However, this is not always the case. Some of the trainers' answers are not convincing and some topics discussed during some of the sessions offer newcomers the opportunity for disagreement and resistance. For example, in one of the cases, a recent accident on the shopfloor is thus described:

It was her fault; she tried to unblock the machine without switching it off first. This caused an accident. So, remember what we said before' (PARTSCO, Induction Observation, November 1998).

An early newcomer though has a different story to tell which he did not hesitate to share with the rest of the group during and after the programme:

It did not happen like this. The machine had no safety button. We had complained before but they didn't do anything about it. They want the work done as quickly as possible...it was not her fault" (PARTSCO, Interviews with Newcomers, June 1999).

Therefore, it is the newcomers' personal experiences from the shopfloor -and the knowledge of the event- that contradicts trainers' versions of events. They further reacted to a simplistic visual representation of a fire event. I quote from my field notes:

The Health and Safety video portrays an office environment (suggesting that office and factory workers are equally vulnerable to a fire event) where unexpectedly a dustbin is set on fire by of a cigarette end. The employee dealt with the small fire effectively using a fire extinguisher. A series of ironic comments and jokes followed the screening...'

(ELECTROCO, field notes from Induction Observation, February 1999).

Additionally, induction programmes, in the main, involve trainers from different parts of the organisation. As a result, 'management language' is fused with shopfloor workers' jargon and technical language transcending the complexity and variations of human communicative behaviours and acts and their contradictions and abolishing their signification. In particular, management, by employing the notions of 'employee participation' and 'autonomy' attempts to legitimise managerial ideologies by asking the employees themselves to become the messengers. In other words, shopfloor employees are required to act as induction trainers and, through the employment of prescribed methods and linguistic schemas, construct corporate 'mythologies' (Barthes, 1972) and promote the 'corporate culture'. It is not just a presentation by the general manager that stresses the quality of work on the shopfloor and the benefits that the company provides. The employees who work on the shopfloor 'become' trainers and represent the company philosophy and the management principles.

According to the findings, however, the trainers/shopfloor employees respond to this role in various ways. Particularly, the trainers may a) conform to the induction norms and attempt to transmit the managerial ideology; b) distance themselves from the content of their presentation exposing the rhetorical nature of their messages or c) resist the role of the messenger by omitting the managerial discourses from their induction sessions. To illustrate that, I quote from my field notes:

A shopfloor supervisor is delivering this particular induction session. He believes that people need induction but on the job and he is not satisfied with the induction format or his participation in the programmes: 'I've told them that I don't like it'. To prove this, he asked the newcomers to grade his session (plant tour) as dull and useless in their evaluation sheets.. This behavioural pattern during the programme but also at the cafeteria permitted newcomers to express and share their feelings about induction' (PARTSCO, Induction Observation and Interview with Trainer, November 1998).

In another case,

[t]he TPM [Total Preventive Maintenance] trainer commented: 'Look, you *have* to do it because if an accident happens, the maintenance department is going to accuse you... the next day you will be out of here'. Through that, TPM metamorphoses from a company initiative, which benefits both the employee and the work process, into an area of potential disagreement and conflict. Through this the gap between managerial rhetoric and shopfloor practice is unveiled (PARTSCO, Induction Observation and Interview with Trainer, February, 1999).

Therefore, the trainers' contributions to the induction process demonstrate one of the ways through which induction rhetorics are unveiled during fruitless corporate attempts to 'democratise' the administration of the programmes.

## **6.2 Interactional Asymmetries: The 'Sophisticated' Newcomer**

The second asymmetrical aspect of institutional communication relates to differential degrees of familiarity with the particular situation experienced (Drew & Heritage,

1992). On the one hand, for organisational representatives (managers, trainers, designers and other members of the personnel/training department), induction is another 'routine' procedure. Newcomers, on the other hand, are expected (or supposed) to encounter a personal and rather 'original' experience.

Nevertheless, the interpretation of the findings did not feature an induction newcomer with the expected attributes. In detail, although the organisation and structure of the programmes did not encourage newcomer interaction, communication and exchange of information and ideas during the days of induction was inevitable. Newcomers managed to form a united front that shared common interests and sometimes, common shopfloor experiences. In particular, both 'early' (employees who have been working for the company for some time before induction) and 'sophisticated' (employees who have been through a series of induction sessions) newcomers questioned corporate representations of organisational life and, in consequence, messages of 'good employment relations' and 'good employment conditions'. This is because they had either encountered the realities of work and found them quite different from the rhetorics of the induction or had participated in other induction programmes and become familiar with the induction rhetorics and work realities in the past. In addition, their knowledge of shopfloor realities and their previous induction encounters did not only frame their interpretation of induction messages, but also defined the experience of the induction programme for each of its members<sup>15</sup>. I quote from my notes:

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<sup>15</sup> Apart from the 'early' and 'sophisticated' newcomers, induction groups consist of their trainers (for an analysis of their role see previous section) and the 'untrained' newcomers. The ways that an induction programme is experienced is influenced, in the main, by the contributions of the first three actors but the programmes' lessons are communicated to and are shared by all groups.

The same example -as in November's Induction programme (1998)- from the shopfloor is employed by the trainer to address a Health & Safety issue: An accident has happened on the line a few months ago which resulted in the amputation of a female operator's hand. During my second observation, however, there are not "early" newcomers in the room (who have been present to the event) to disagree with the messages of the trainer [see extract from field notes above]. Thus, the initial conclusion is that the machines are absolutely safe to use and all major accidents have been and are caused due to human error. However, a question by an assistant manager threatens the truthfulness of the trainer's argument: The machine that was used during the accident was expected, according to the British Health and Safety Standards, to prevent the accident through safety switches/valves. The trainer then admitted that this machine had been imported from Japan and authorised by the Japanese management. Through this, he tried to justify the event by redirecting the blame on the conflict between British and Japanese management: "They want the work done as quickly as possible with sometimes neglecting warnings coming from the British side". This particular equipment was authorised under different standards ... employees should know that. He concluded: "it was a mistake of both sides [...]" (PARTSCO, Induction Observations, November 1998, June 1999).

Therefore, induction groups can rarely be a uniform inexperienced entity consisting of enthusiastic graduates with no recollections of previous working environments and possibly, less critical attitudes towards the trainers' rhetorical devices. Most of them have been exposed to similar situations before or have already encountered the job realities. Consequently, their perception of the induction events and their interpretation of the induction 'communicative acts' (Habermas, 1979) differ significantly from the expected 'original' experience. Most importantly, however, newcomers have not only developed a familiarity with induction procedures but also with the ideology of 'corporate culture'. After the end of an induction event, one of the newcomers commented on the company video:

It [induction] is a form of propaganda, isn't it? The truth is that I expected this induction to have more propagandistic content. Watching all these athletics on the video was a bit surprising [pause] I have to admit...but I do not feel ready to go out there and for [BANKCO] after that [...]

(BANKCO, Newcomer, Interviews, December 1999).

The induction trainer of the same programme had previously pointed out:

I don't know about you but I did not feel particularly motivated after watching this video. I understand why they decided to include it in the programme but [...] [stopped] (BANKCO, Induction Observation, Induction Trainer, December 1999).

All in all, the induction groups challenged the legitimacy of induction messages and considered the programmes as early demonstrations of corporate authoritarianism and hegemony as well as managerial paternalism.

Hence, the degree of the asymmetry of induction interactions varies according to the trainers' '(in)ability' or (un)willingness to translate their power to dominance during the sessions and the extent of newcomers' familiarity with induction situations and work realities as well as the interactive effects of the two. These factors, in turn, contribute to the constitution of an induction experience which questions 'corporate culturalism' (Willmott, 1993) and reinforces the disparity between managerial rhetorics and employment realities. The last section focuses on the ethical aspects of this disparity and identifies the implications of this project for both the theory and practice of induction programmes.

## **7. Ethical Implications: Recovering the 'Missing Subject'**

As the analysis above suggests, corporate elites attempt to utilise a partial interpretation of Durkheimian 'morality' (a 'behavioural guideline' that, within a unitary and collective system, integrates individuals into the organisational context) in order to promote the 'corporate culture' ideology (Dahler-Larsen, 1994). According to Dahler-Larsen (1994), however, they neglect to account for one of the most important

elements of moral behaviour, namely autonomy. Accordingly, the induction rhetorics claim that rules, production designs and ‘acculturation’ techniques are all employed to create a community for the employee in which his/her commitment will not only advance organisational interests but also contribute to his/her own personal development as a human being. Within this community, the employee is given objective and rational answers to any moral dilemma. Both ‘the customer is always right’ and ‘quality comes always first’ overlook ‘the elements of autonomous thought in morality and the capacities of organisational members to reflect on, or distance themselves from, “shared” corporate imagery’ (Dahler-Larsen, 1994:14). Therefore, following ‘corporate culturalism’ (Willmott, 1993), induction provides new organisational members the security that enables them ‘to confirm a modern (humanistic) sense of self, as a self-determining individual, without the burden of responsibility -the angst- that accompanies the making of (existential) choices between ultimate, conflicting values’ (Willmott, 1993:527).

According to the ‘paradox of modernity’, the state and the market progressively become more important in our lives determining our moral codes and moral decisions (Wolfe, 1989, cited in Bauman, 1993:182). Following Wolfe (1989), the state and the market view the subject as an incapacitated ‘rule-follower’, or in Bauman’s terms, ‘de-modernized’ moral agent since both take responsibility for making moral decisions and evicting individuals from moral agony. At the same time, however, they dispossess them of moral competence, and gradually of moral conscience (Bauman, 1993). For example, the concept of ‘customer first’ releases the subject from any moral choice as the market and its ‘invisible hand’ provide the moral



decision: the demands of product, capital and labour markets ought to be the subjects' choices.

The reality of induction practice, however, is different: The ambiguity and ambivalence intertwined with the moral condition are regained when the subject enters in interaction and negotiation with the other (Bauman, 1993). According to Bauman (1993), moral subjects' struggle towards moral 'objectivity' could only be equated with and substituted by the endeavour of indeterminacy and ambiguity. 'The moral act itself is endemically ambivalent, forever threading precariously the thin links dividing care from domination and tolerance from indifference' (Bauman, 1993:181). The awareness of sociality, the experience of 'being with' the other within a 'complex network of mutual dependencies' (Bauman, 1993:181), leads to the realisation of the dubious qualities of morality. These qualities secure its existence and their removal would release the moral subject not only from any form of moral responsibility but also from the experience of an autonomous existence. 'Effective' induction programmes – which are elements of 'excellent' corporate cultures - are designed and administered as top-down, one-way communicative events that hardly approve of and account for alternative discourses and individual diversity. Therefore, the 'architects' of induction (such as, induction consultants) produce rigid organisational structures that marginalise what they were initially employed to care for: the subject of the induction programmes, the new organisational member. To suggest that organisations are not willing to invest the financial resources and the time required for producing 'moral' induction programmes would be probably misleading. Organisations spend time, effort and financial resources 'in search of excellent'

induction techniques. Yet, despite the claims for uniqueness, induction programmes appear similar - as corporate cultures do - across a wide range of organisational settings. An inductee commented:

I have been to many induction programmes... they are all the same. I know exactly what is going to be like even before entering the room (ELECTROCO, Interview with Newcomer, February 1999).

This is probably the price that the proponents of unitary cultural models have to pay for substituting employee autonomy with 'package' values and meanings. The same induction rhetorics are repeated across dissimilar organisational settings gradually constituting a 'sophisticated subject'; unofficial practices, direct disagreement, distancing and cynicism increasingly jeopardise managerial 'recipes' of success and signal the importance of the immediate separation of induction procedures from the web of corporatism, managerialism and consumerism.

## **8. Conclusion**

Induction programmes are designed and administered within contemporary organisational environments as one-way, top-down events that aim to promote corporate ideologies and establish managerial control. Highly standardised induction designs, therefore, through the appropriation of induction interactions, endeavour to constitute marginalised 'subjects' deprived of any form of autonomy and individuality throughout the programmes. Yet, as the practice of the induction programmes suggests, the induction experience constitutes –for both trainers and newcomers- an arena for negotiation, exchange, resistance and 'voice'.

The increased employee sophistication, that has come as a result of the accumulation of induction experiences (due to job mobility, career changes), threatened the effectiveness of induction 'recipes' by bringing individual judgement and choice within the induction settings. At the same time, management remained obsessed with the construction of a universal claim that would not only be persuasive but, at the same time, also provide an answer to the issue of corporate social and moral responsibility.

By referring to a project that has (I would like to believe sufficiently) informed this paper, this paper attempted to explain how through sophisticated employee participation and discursive interaction and resistance, the subject regains autonomy and individuality during the administration of organisational induction. It suggested that a highly mobile, increasingly knowledgeable and cynical pool of newcomers does not hesitate to question managerial rhetorics, endanger 'best practices' and reframe the induction experience.

The paper initially provided a review of induction studies focusing on the relationship between 'corporate culture' and induction and assessed the 'evolution' of the latter as experienced within contemporary organisational settings. After that, it explained how both trainers and newcomers translate the induction messages and how their interaction leads to the negotiation and indeterminacy of the induction experience. Finally, by employing a 'late' Durkheimian analytical framework, the paper discussed the ethical dimensions of organisational induction and proposed that

[o]ne abandons here the universal claim that some practices which are applicable in other companies can become isolated. The alternative is one of local knowledge, where stories give access to the local context, and its own “peculiar” way of creating and continuing things. ... In a narrative, the storyteller tries to capture the sequence of events and the processes of how “things” are evolving, the different actors get a place on the scenery whenever their perspective is seen as adding to the dramatic course, and the story gets its unique character as the context emerges in the line of narrating (Steyaert & Janssens, 1999: 194).

To conclude, according to the findings of this project, management as well as policy makers should be looking for a theoretical and practical framework of ongoing and future induction practices that does not underestimate its constituent parts and the social, political and institutional configurations embedded in the various working environments in which induction processes emerge and evolve.



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