

"I SOMETIMES QUESTION MYSELF"

THE LEARNING TRAJECTORIES OF FOUR SENIOR MANAGERS AS THEY
CONFRONTED CHANGING DEMANDS AT WORK

Tatiana Rodríguez Leal

Supervisors:
Dr Susan James Relly
Dr Nigel Fancourt
Prof Anne Edwards

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

St. Hilda's College
University of Oxford
Hilary 2016

“we take as basic that the human agent exists in a space of questions” (Taylor, 1989: 29)

“the question ‘Why should I do this rather than that?’ becomes from an early age inescapable and it is characteristic of human beings” (MacIntyre, 1999: 67)

ABSTRACT

This study explores the learning trajectories of four senior managers at the Royal Mail as they confronted new demands at work. The four managers worked at the Royal Mail during the years prior to, and during its privatisation, when it was also undergoing an intense modernisation.

Theoretically, I took a sociocultural approach, drawing on Vygotsky (1998), Edwards (2010), Holland et al. (1998), and Sfard and Prusak (2005), among others. I was also provoked by Alasdair MacIntyre's characterisation of the manager and his understanding of practice, which emphasises human flourishing.

Data was collected through iterative unstructured and semi-structured interviews, and by work shadowing the managers. Methodologically, I developed a useful interview protocol to capture stories about work and a more nuanced understanding of what mattered to participants. I also built a conceptual framework that draws theoretically from a sociocultural understanding of learning and development, as well as from MacIntyre (2013) and Taylor (1989). The model emerged from the dialectics of theory and empirical data.

The research shows that as the Royal Mail underwent organisational change, the managers had to navigate situations of misalignment between what mattered to them and what mattered to other members of the organisation. Such situations of misalignment brought about new demands. As they confronted the demands, the managers realised the need to close a gap between who they were and who they were expected to become. Gap-closing efforts were characterised as a process of learning and development that involved intense identity work. In the process, the managers had to work through a series of contradictions, which can be expressed in the form of questions: Who am I really? Who should I no longer be? Who do I resist becoming? And, who do I struggle to become? Gap-closing was given by a dialectic between the managers' commitments and identifications, and the stories of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail.

Contrary to some of MacIntyre's suggestions, I found that the four managers in the study, Linda, Eric, Margaret and Julian did question themselves about some of the ends they pursued. They also exhibited varying degrees of agency, and did establish a distance with the impositions of their institutional realities. In the field, I found instances of moral debate, the exercising of virtues and the managers' very human efforts to live a worthy life and to flourish. Yet, I also found empirical grounds for some of MacIntyre's claims. As the managers navigated misalignment, they used an array of strategies intended to persuade others in a manipulative way, sometimes treating ends as given, and sometimes eluding moral debate.

The study contributes to the literature of learning and development through its original theoretical approach that draws from both sociocultural and MacIntyrean ideas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In this thesis I will talk about the learning trajectories of senior managers. I will discuss the demands that they faced, the ways in which their deeply held commitments and identifications were challenged, and how they went about trying to close a gap between who they were and who they were expected to become. My journey towards writing this thesis had its fair share of all of these. It involved facing demands that at times I considered impossible to meet, gaps that looked too large to close, and challenges to my self-understandings that seemed too deep to overcome. I am too, as some managers in my study, approaching the resolution of this particular transition. Reaching this point is entirely indebted to the support of others. So my heartfelt thank you to those of you who have sustained me along the way.

Susan James Relly and Anne Edwards were far more than academic advisors. I cannot thank them enough for their warmth, their impeccable work ethic and their determination to see me through. Nigel Fancourt very generously agreed to join my supervision team during the final year. His expertise and sharp thoughts made a deep impression on my thinking. I hope my work does some justice to their efforts.

I will never be able to thank them as they deserve: Linda, Eric, Margaret and Julian. The learning they fostered changed me. I am indebted for their generosity, for their willingness to open up the doors of their workplaces and for sharing their victories, puzzles, headaches and dilemmas with me. Also a genuine thank you to all those at the Royal Mail who facilitated access, were patient with my 'fly on the wall' presence and agreed to have a chat with me.

Special thanks to Ian Thompson and Ron Beadle for their enriching feedback and for a great Viva experience. Viv Ellis challenged my thinking at an early stage of my DPhil. I am also indebted to Harry Daniels and Marc Thompson for their valuable critique during Transfer of Status. I am very grateful to Marc for facilitating access to the Royal Mail and for opening the doors of Said Business School. At the International Society of MacIntyrean Enquiry (ISME) I found quite a special academic community, a genuine display of virtue in academia. Thanks to Greg Beabout, Ruth Groff, Geoff Moore, Jeffrey Nicholas, Chris Lutz, and Kelvin Knight for their feedback and support during the 2015 annual meeting.

I am forever grateful to all who have taught me throughout my schooling years. Especially to Martín Ardila, Joe Blatt, Howard Gardner, Bog Kegan and Karen Mapp for the tools that they taught me, and for the ideas that they inspired.

Too many friends made the journey possible, memorable, and reminded me why was it that I was doing this in the many occasions when I needed reminding. I am grateful to Elad Carmel, G.J. Meléndez-Torres, Sandra Perdomo, Mauricio Aguilar, Diana Dajer, Juan David Gutiérrez, Camila Mella and Barbara Spence. Also to Desmond Tan, Prabhat Rai, Minjeong Song, Félix Castellanos, Carolina Osorio, Adriana Salgado, Christian Granados, Ricardo Pachón, Ricardo Silva, Mylène

Dumas, Yasmine Van Bellingen, Brecht De Man, Larissa Boratti, Juan José Mendoza, Ana Mújica, Laura Bernal, Julián López, Jennifer Allen, Lorena Ortega Ferrand, Gianna Hessel, Hem Borker, Fatima Ahsan, Yasmine El Masri, Julian Nowag, Mariet Mezők, Giuliano Marimoto and Izabela Rakar. Thanks as well to those friends from home who remained loyal in my absence and offered a hand when was needed. Particularly so, Diana Sarmiento, Alejandra Pazos, Catalina Zorro, Camila Gonzáles, Alejandra Merino, Lina Pérez, María Figueroa, Mariana Tafur, Luz Adriana Osorio, María Teresa Gómez. Special thanks go to Sonia Castro, María Cristina Bejarano, Felipe Tibabuzo, Catherine Arias, Jessica Chan and Santiago Mejía.

St. Hilda's College has left me with the most wonderful impression of Oxford's college system. I never anticipated that an academic institution would have such a role in my welfare. Thanks to all the porters, particularly Peter, Mike and Marcus. Also thanks to Nicky Charles, Geri Cane, Hemlata Bountra, Chris Cowley, Hannah Smith and Suzie Hancock. I am particularly grateful with Reverend Brian Mountford who was an excellent college adviser and with whom I had great conversations.

I am grateful to Colciencias, Colfuturo, the Department of Education and St. Hilda's College. All these institutions provided generous funding making my DPhil viable.

My greatest source of strength is my family. It gives me purpose. Thanks to Hugo and María Mercedes. I am deeply grateful to Juan and Mime; one of the greatest gifts of this DPhil was the opportunity to share some time with them in British Columbia. Their generosity will be always cherished. I thank my dad for fostering my intellectual curiosity from an early age. Diana Paola and Natalia keep me grounded and brighten up my days. Andres is my team. Every day spent with him a gift and a blessing. He deserves much credit, as his support and patience are unmatched. Finally I dedicate this thesis to my mom. All the tenacity required to complete this challenge stems from my efforts to imitate her. She is the strongest and wisest and I can only dream of following her steps.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	8
1.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS	8
1.2. WHY A FOCUS ON SENIOR MANAGERS?	8
1.3. A CASE STUDY APPROACH	10
1.4. NEW DEMANDS	10
1.4.1. Organisational change and new demands	10
1.4.2. New demands and 'what matters' to an individual	11
1.5. NAVIGATING MISALIGNMENT AND CONTRADICTIONS	12
1.5.1. Misalignment in organisations	12
1.5.2. Contradictions as key to learning and development	14
1.6. THE ROYAL MAIL: ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE INQUIRY	15
1.7. CHAPTER PLAN	17
1.8. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS AND INTENDED AUDIENCE	19
2. LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT AND FLOURISHMENT	22
2.1. PRACTICES	23
2.1.1. A sociocultural understanding of practices	24
2.1.2. MacIntyre's understanding of practices	25
2.1.3. Standards of excellence, internal and external goods at the Royal Mail	27
2.1.4. Practices and figured worlds	31
2.2. HUMAN FLOURISHING AND AGENCY	32
2.2.1. Flourishing at the workplace	34
2.2.2. The flourishing of managers	36
2.2.3. Human flourishing and learning and development	39
2.3. CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE	40
3. METHODOLOGY	43
3.1. THREE METHODOLOGICAL PILLARS	43
3.1.1. Pillar 1- Multiple Case-Study	43
3.1.2. Pillar 2- Considering Managers' Trajectories	43
3.1.3. Pillar 3 - An ethnographic mindset	44
3.2. RESEARCH CONTEXT	45
3.3. ACCESS	47
3.4. PARTICIPANTS	47
3.5. RESEARCH SITE	50
3.5.1. Mail Centre	50
3.5.2. Administration Offices	51

3.6. DATA GATHERING	54
3.6.1. Work Shadowing	54
3.6.2. Interviews	56
3.6.3. The Courier and Other Documents	59
3.7. MAKING SENSE OF THE DATA	60
3.7.1. Progressive Focusing	61
3.7.2. Block 1: Thematic Coding	61
3.7.3. Block 2 - Narratives	62
3.7.4. Block 3 - Theoretical Coding	64
3.7.5. Analytical Framework for Cross Case Analysis	67
3.7.6. Considering time in the analysis	68
3.8. VALIDITY	69
3.8.1. External Validity	69
3.8.2. Internal Validity	69
3.9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	71
3.10. MY ROLE AS A RESEARCHER	72
3.10.1. Epistemology	72
3.10.2. Positionality	72
<u>4. MISALIGNMENTS</u>	<u>75</u>
4.1. BOUNDARY SPACE AS A TOOL TO CONCEPTUALISE MISALIGNMENTS	75
4.2. THE BOUNDARY SPACES	76
4.2.1. Linda and Eric	76
4.2.2. Julian's boundary space	79
4.2.3. Margaret's boundary space	80
4.3. COMMITMENTS AND IDENTIFICATIONS AT STAKE	81
4.3.1. What mattered to Linda and Eric	82
4.3.2. What mattered to Julian	83
4.3.3. What mattered to Margaret	83
4.4. DIFFERENT MISALIGNMENTS	84
4.4.1. Alignment between the manager and central business concerns	84
4.4.2. Kinds of misalignment taking place	86
4.4.3. Positionality map in the boundary space	87
4.4.4. Emotional Significance	89
4.5. CONCLUSIONS	89
<u>5. DEMANDS</u>	<u>93</u>
5.1. DEMANDS AND THE SOCIAL SITUATION OF DEVELOPMENT	93
5.2. THE MANAGERS AND THE DEMANDS THEY RECOGNISED	95
5.2.1. Linda	96
5.2.2. Eric	98
5.2.3. Margaret	101
5.2.4. Julian	104
5.3. DEMAND RECOGNITION AND AGENCY	106

5.3.1. Demand-as-identified and demand-as-refashioned	107
5.4. CONCLUSIONS	110
6. <u>CONTRADICTIONS AND 'GAP-CLOSING'</u>	113
6.1. LEARNING, GAP-CLOSING AND PERSON-AS-IS AND PERSON-AS-COULD-BE	113
6.2. WHO AM I EXPECTED TO BECOME?	117
6.2.1. Who should I no longer be?	118
6.2.2. Who do I resist becoming?	123
6.2.3. Who do I struggle to become?	126
6.3. PERIODS OF STABILITY	127
6.4. STORIES ABOUT WHAT WAS GOOD	130
6.5. CONCLUSIONS	131
7. <u>STRATEGIES FOR NEW DEMANDS</u>	133
7.1. STRATEGIES	134
7.1.1. Linda's strategies to deal with the new demands	134
7.1.2. Eric's strategies to deal with the new demands	138
7.1.3. Margaret's strategies to deal with the new demands	142
7.1.4. Julian's strategies to deal with new demands	146
7.2. MANAGERS' STANCES: TAMING, ADAPTING, ENDURING AND ABANDONING	149
7.3. RESOURCES	153
7.4. CONCLUSIONS	154
8. <u>FINAL REFLECTIONS</u>	156
8.1. SUMMARY	156
8.2. REFLECTIONS ON THE FLOURISHING OF MANAGERS	160
8.2.1. What was good and who was it worth striving to become?	160
8.2.2. Managers and the quest for a good life	161
8.2.3. Virtues	162
8.2.4. Vices	163
8.2.5. Relational expertise as a virtue to navigate misalignment	164
8.2.6. Managing as practice	166
8.3. CONTRIBUTIONS	166
8.4. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA	169
8.5. A FINAL WORD	171
9. <u>REFERENCES</u>	172
10. <u>ANNEXES</u>	182
Annex 1 - Privatisation and Modernisation	182
Annex 2 - Industrial Action	187
Annex 3 - 55 Years and Counting	192
Annex 4 - Data analysis Examples	194
Annex 5 - Data Collection Timeline	208

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I locate the study within a broader interest of adult development at the workplace. I also introduce the two research questions that guided my research inquiry and explain briefly the four main concepts involved in the questions: demands, misalignment, contradictions and a notion of 'what matters'. In the chapter, I will justify the choice of a case study approach and explain my rationale for selecting senior managers from the Royal Mail as the protagonists of the inquiry. I also discuss the audiences to whom this research is addressed and the contributions that I intend to make. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research is about the dialectical relationship between a person and her work. In other words, how the person is shaped by her work and how she can shape it. Using a case study approach, it explores how we respond to the affordances and limitations that work poses to our development. An underlying premise is that a person is in the making, that she develops throughout her life, and that flourishing is a worthy aspiration. If we indeed move constantly towards some kind of completion, change and development necessarily take place throughout our working lives. Thus, with a working adult spending a significant proportion of her life at work, the workplace is a central holding environment for the making of oneself. As such, the workplace may foster or hinder one's development, and may bring about opportunities and constraints to our flourishing. This thesis studies how individuals develop in the specific context of work. For the inquiry, I chose to focus on the work trajectories of four employed adults, all of whom had a senior management role in an organisation that was undergoing intense change.

1.1. Research questions

Two research questions guided the exploration:

RQ1/ How do senior managers face new demands that challenge what matters to them?

RQ2/ How do senior managers navigate misalignment and contradiction at work?

I will first explain why I chose to research senior managers and state briefly the methodological approach. Next I will discuss the themes involved in the two research questions, i.e. how changing conditions at work imply new demands for managers, how such demands may be at odds with what matters to the managers, and the relevance of looking at misalignment and contradiction in the managers' work. Then I shall justify having selected the Royal Mail as the context for the study. Towards the end of this chapter I provide a description of how the thesis is structured. The chapter ends by discussing the contributions I make and the audiences that will find the study relevant.

1.2. Why a focus on senior managers?

Senior managers working in an organisational change setting are a particularly interesting case for an inquiry about the dialectical relationship between a person and her work. The virtue ethics philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, in his work *After Virtue* (2013), makes a provocative critique of those who inhabit a management

role. Although MacIntyre's critique will be further elaborated in Chapter 2, for now it can be said that MacIntyre accuses managers of having a moral handicap, limited agency and the impossibility to flourish. He argues that managers are doomed to living a compartmentalised life as the only alternative to bear the tensions and contradictions of their work. What this means is that "they live as decent people who function quite normally outside the corporation, with warm and loving relationships with family and friends, by drawing a very sharp distinction between work and home" given that at work they have to act according to different moral standards (Beabout, 2013: 5). For MacIntyre, the demands of their institutional realities rule who a manager is and leave little room for moral autonomy.

MacIntyre's statements are not essentially empirical, although he has mentioned they were "in part developed through empirical work" (Beadle and Moore, 2006: 329). Despite the questions that can be raised about their empirical grounds, the account remains provocative and unsettling, and echoes a widely embraced reservation about managers' commitment towards the common good. MacIntyre's scepticism towards managers' ability to distance themselves from organisational demands is rooted on Marx's criticism of capitalism (Lutz, 2012; Knight, 1998) and is in line with a generalised attitude towards managers and business leaders that has become more acute in the last ten years (Petriegleri and Petriegleri, forthcoming). Beabout (2013: 1) notes how the 2008 crises and the protests that followed brought "attention to CEO greed, corruption, undue influence by corporations in civic life, increasing disparities in wealth, and the lack of accountability for those who played key roles in bringing [it] about." Others have noted that managers often pursue greedy and self-serving agendas (Petriegleri and Petriegleri, forthcoming). In addition, poor management has important consequences. For organisations, it can result in the need to downsize, cause employee disengagement and even drive to bankruptcy (Tushman and O'Reilly, 2002). For society, poor management can result in costly tragedies. For the manager herself the inability to pursue her own purposes and determine the best way to go about her job may entail frustration (Conroy, 2010; Edwards, 2010; Spehar, Frich and Kjekshus, 2012), and ultimately impede flourishing.

Many scholars (e.g., Beabout 2013; Beadle and Könyöt, 2006; Conroy, 2010; Moore and Beadle, 2006; Moore, 2015; Wilcox, 2012) have taken up MacIntyre's provocations and offered theoretical, as well as some empirical responses. Yet, while some scholars have touched on learning issues (e.g., Conroy, 2011, Hall, 2011; Halliday and Johnsson, 2010; Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015), there is no empirical exploration of managers' learning and development which has considered MacIntyre's reservations using Vygotskian tools. MacIntyre's notion of the manager as essentially compartmentalised evidences quite a static understanding of what a person is, which is somewhat surprising in an account of human flourishing. MacIntyre (1999) himself acknowledges the role of learning and development on his own account of flourishing and as Hill (2004: 122) says, "[w]hat we know for sure is that managers are mostly made, not born." It is

relevant to ask therefore: how do these managers come to be? What are the learning and developmental challenges involved in both achieving the ends set by others and in challenging them? In the developmental trajectories of real human managers, which ends are challenged and which are not? This research explores how managers learn and develop at work as they respond to the demands of their work, and as they deal with the misalignment and contradiction that they encounter along the way.

1.3. A case study approach

To observe the dialectical relationship between the four senior managers and their figured world I chose a multiple case study approach as it is an outstanding method to learn about how people interact with the world in which they live (Stake, 2005; Flyvbjerg, 2006a). Cases, as discussed by Stake (2006: 1), are entities, "real things that are easy to visualize" and can be individuals, such as nurses, teachers or managers. In this thesis each case is one manager. "The advantage of the case study is that it can 'close in' on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice" (Flyvbjerg, 2006a: 235). All the senior managers in the study worked at the Royal Mail, a letters and parcels delivery company in the UK that was undergoing privatisation and modernisation at the time that data was collected. Data collection was oriented to understand what mattered to the managers, the demands they were facing as their practices changed, and the ways in which they responded to the contradictions and misalignments they encountered at work. As a consequence, I interviewed them and observed them at work in order to answer the research questions and address the main themes involved in them: new demands, the idea of *what matters*, misalignment and contradiction.

1.4. New demands

1.4.1. Organisational change and new demands

The first research question explores how senior managers face new demands as their work changes. The ability to adapt is a must for organisations today. Technological innovations transform the ways in which activities are performed and services are provided. The delivery of mail was one of the first industries to be considerably affected with the appearance of Internet. Moreover, technology challenges the types of activities in which humans need to engage, or not. Added to the disrupting effects of technology in the workplace, the market conditions of increasingly globalised economies reframe how products and services are exchanged and call into question their value. In this context, organisations and workers face the obsolescence of their role in value creation, unless they change 'how' or 'what' they do.

The overwhelming demands that organisational change brings about makes a changing organisation an ideal setting to observe the tensions between an individual and her institutional reality, and the learning and development that take place as a result. Societal demands and expectations have long been considered a driving force for human development. Hedegaard (2012: 9) argues that “children learn and develop through their orientation towards the demands in institutional practices”. As individuals recognise the demands that are placed upon them and strive to meet them, they are shaped by the practice that they are members of and in turn shape it. From a sociocultural perspective, that dialectic between person and world is the very definition of learning, and relates to Vygotsky’s understanding of internalisation and externalisation (Edwards, 2010). When the practices that we inhabit change, new demands are placed upon us. The mismatch between new demands with what we are able to do may render our current resources inadequate. This happened to senior managers in this study in similar ways to children transitioning from pre-schoolers to primary school, adolescents who are expected to act as adults rather than children, and to adults who are transitioning from student to employee, from single to married, employed to retired, or any other transition of roles and societal positions (Kegan, 1995; Hedegaard, 2012).

1.4.2. New demands and ‘what matters’ to an individual

The first research question speaks of demands that challenge what matters to the individual. The term ‘what matters’ is used by Edwards (2010: 10) to refer to our interests, motives and purposes, which “are experienced personally in terms of our commitments, standpoints and the resources available to us.” *What matters* is important because it acts as a guiding “principle for action” (Edwards, 2010: 10). The values that employees hold determine how work is done and ultimately how practices are shaped (Edwards and Daniels, 2012: 110). *What matters* to us is in close connection to who we are. Taylor’s (1989: 27) definition of identity is particularly helpful to understand this connection:

“To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.”

What matters therefore, has a bearing and is realised in the habitual decision-making of an individual. *What matters* to the individual can be challenged by the new motives and *modus operandi* that a changing organisation hopes to embrace. At the Royal Mail, for example, the organisation was striving to become more commercially oriented. The new profit motive challenged the public service ethos that mattered to some employees. The opposite may also happen. Edwards and Daniels’ (2012) study of children’s services reveals “that the organisational structures in which [practitioners of children’s services] operated were not keeping pace with the changes in the practices they should be supporting.” The findings evidenced a

mismatch between what mattered to practitioners and the organisational platform and resources that were available for them to do their job. For the purposes of this thesis when referring to *what matters* I will refer to the interests of an individual comprising the motives, purposes, and values that she holds, as well as the knowledge and expertise that she brings to her job. This can be also understood as her ‘commitments and identifications’ (Taylor, 1989).

1.5. Navigating misalignment and contradictions

Managers are expected to advance the change agendas of organisations. However, they themselves might need to come to terms with new expectations of their institutions and reconsider the purposes and values of their own work. This two-fold role of change agents and receivers of change that senior managers in organisations have adds to the complex, and very often, conflicting expectations of their roles.

Research Question 2 intends to explore how senior managers face misalignment and contradiction at work in relation to what matters to them and as the nature of their work changes. Contradictions and misalignment have a central place in the research questions for the following reasons. First, organisational change may bring misalignments of what matters for different practitioners and for the organisation. Second, misalignment is said to be an obstacle to doing work that is excellent, engaging and ethical. Third, organisations invest time and resources in trying to align their workforce. Fourth, managers have a central role in promoting alignment, but they themselves might struggle to find it. Finally, new situations of misalignment and organisational change might bring about new demands for managers that can result in contradictions. Contradictions have been considered as triggers of learning and development. Indeed, Lewis and Smith (2014: 11) insist that “embracing contradictory forces can inspire learning, discovery, and creativity. Tensions embed conflicts and inconsistencies that motivate a search for new possibilities.” To follow, I will elaborate on these two concepts.

1.5.1. Misalignment in organisations

Edwards and Daniels (2012: 41) insist that professional work implies an alignment of what matters to an individual “with the motives to be valued within the practices inhabited by the professionals”. Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon (2002) argue that alignment is foundational to engagement, excellence and ethics at work, and quantitative studies have found that “value congruence relates to job satisfaction, organizational identification, and intent to stay in the organization” (Edwards and Cable, 2009: 654). Others have insisted that alignment makes work life “viable and satisfying” (Rubino, 1998: 23). In turn, misalignment has undesired results. According to Edwards (2010: 70), “when the possibilities for

action afforded by [the practices that one inhabits] are misaligned with one's motives, frustration ensues." Likewise, Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon (2002) argue that a lack of alignment of values among stakeholders of a practice potentially hinders good work.

Thus, if what matters to individuals in organisations, has direct implications on how a practice evolves as well as on the wellbeing and engagement of employees, insistence on tackling misalignment and getting people on the same page is unsurprising. Alignment of what matters is necessary when a person joins a new practice, and it takes considerable effort. Organisational newcomers are expected "to understand the unofficial yet recognized norms associated with the actual work going on and the moral conduct expected of people in the particular organizational segment before gaining recognition and acceptance among their peers" (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979: 21).

Given its importance, organisations invest significant resources in the promotion of alignment. Initiatives towards alignment include the formulation of mission and vision statements, efforts towards building shared understandings of the values that organisations hold, communication initiatives across the organisation and education and training programmes for the workforce. But balancing institutional and individual priorities of its members can be more than an ambitious endeavour for organisations that juggle responding to societal expectations, financial agendas and to the interests of the people who work for them, among others. Achieving alignment "is never straightforward" and it becomes even more challenging when practices and individual need to respond to "changing social conditions" (Edwards and Daniels, 2012: 41).

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) recognise that achieving alignment between employers' purposes, values and resources with the organisation's norms and its forms of work is difficult for newcomers, but also for any employee throughout their careers. Even when a person has worked for the same organisation long enough, new demands brought about by organisational change imply new readjustments. Indeed, a misalignment of what matters resulting from the repositioning of an individual within an organisation (e.g., a job promotion) and/or the accelerated changes that organisations undergo (e.g., a modernisation programme), might force the member of the organisation to reframe her role, shift her skills and abandon characteristics of her work that might matter to her. As the practices of the organisation shift, and people's roles and positions change, a process of misalignment between personal and organisational values is likely to occur. Conroy (2010: 79) argues that this can take place in the form of clashes "between self-authored and top-down imposed narratives, which can create dislocating, polarising identity dualities that complicate people's sense of who they are and what they stand for". Branson (2008) insists that during times of organisational change striving for alignment can be especially relevant.

Yet, while misalignment is indeed problematic, Smith and Tushman (2005), and Smith (2009) and Hill (2004), suggest that it is also a characteristic aspect of managerial work and that it is highly unavoidable during periods of organisational change. Hill, in particular, believes that “managers must juggle diverse, often ambiguous, responsibilities and are enmeshed in a web of relationships with people who often make conflicting demands: subordinates, bosses, and others inside and outside of the organization” (Hill, 2004: loc332). Furthermore, misalignment is not entirely unwelcomed. On the contrary, it can act as a catalyst for positive change. Some consider it a key for innovation, and desirable when an organisation authentically wishes to change (Smith 2009; Smith and Tushman, 2005; Tushman and O’Reilly, 2002). Moran (2010) agrees that misalignment and creativity are closely related. Along these lines, too much alignment can be viewed as problematic. In fact, it has been found that practitioners will actually promote misalignment (for example through rule-bending) when what mattered to them as practitioners was incompatible with long-standing and difficult to change institutional expectations (Edwards and Daniels, 2012).

Engaging with misalignment of what matters as one of the focuses of the inquiry contributes to a larger conversation that is relevant both to the learning and development and to the management literatures. While the conversations address similar preoccupations, they can sometimes be found under different labels including paradox, tension, contradiction and conflict (Lewis, 2000), and congruence (e.g., Van Maanen and Schein, 1979; Meglino, 1989; Ilangovan and Durgadoss, 2009; Dolan and Bao, 2012). Also, although the words ‘misalignment’ and ‘contradiction’ are closely related and sometimes might be used interchangeably in the literature, they are not used as synonyms in this dissertation. To follow, I will explain my use of the term ‘contradiction’.

1.5.2. Contradictions as key to learning and development

In the organisational change literature, the relevance of considering contradictions has been recognised for a long time. “Abandoning the notion that change is a smooth, linear, and planned journey (...) researchers have [for years] examined how contradictions both hamper and encourage organizational development” (Lewis, 2000: 760). The relevance of looking at contradictions in organisation studies, was already announced in the ‘70s by Heydebrand (1977). Heydebrand proposed that a Marxian understanding of contradictions would enrich organisation theory and he underscores the importance of the contradiction between product and the social relations of production. One of the tensions that the contradiction between product and social relations of production entails relates to the individual needs of those inhabiting organisational practices vs. organisational needs. A collection of articles by members of the Association of Teachers of Management edited by Hacon (1968) also explored this tension. The book tackled the implications for training

and development brought about through the contradiction between individual and organisational needs.

More relevant to this study, contradictions have also been considered a “driver force of change” and a trigger for learning and development (Engeström, 2010: 133; Kegan and Lahey, 2009). The notion of contradiction originated in Aristotle, elaborated by Hegel in the notion of dialectics and taken up by Marx (Crocker, 1980; Suchting, 1985; Wilde, 1989), is at the core of Vygotsky’s notion of dialectical development. Engeström and Sannino draw on the work of Vygotsky, and see contradictions as potentially offering a learning opportunity. They “generate disturbances and conflicts, but also innovative attempts to change the activity” (2011: 137). Hedegaard, drawing from Leontiev, explains that when the motives of the activity change, the individual faces a moment of crisis (Hedegaard, 2012). As this happens, he can find himself paralysed, not knowing how to respond to the changing conditions. However, if the individual has appropriate tools, he might be successful at resolving the crisis. The new solution or understanding that takes place is a manifestation of development.

For the purpose of clarity, I agree with Engeström and Sannino (2011) in that it is helpful to make a distinction of what exactly is meant by contradiction. For Engeström and Sannino, contradictions “are not the same as problems or conflicts,” they are “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (Engeström, 2010: 137) and their “material and historical power is not reducible to situational articulations and subjective experiences” (Engeström & Sannino, 2011: 371). In this thesis, I recognise the contradictions as historically accumulating, but I am not concerned with tensions within activity systems and will use the word to refer to observable subjective experiences of the managers that take part in the study. By misalignment I will refer to the mismatches and incongruences between what matters to various members of a figured world. With *contradictions* I will refer to those situations in which managers experience “competing commitments” (Bowe, Lahey, Armstrong, and Kegan, 2003: 715) held by the individual or double-bind using Vygotskian terms.

1.6. The Royal Mail: organisational context of the inquiry

“Who knows when we’ll get an announcement to say we have privatised? I’m still suspicious it will be sooner rather than later, so in the next six months, or in the next year. On that basis, I think it’s going to be a very interesting time.” (Senior manager at the Royal Mail)

2016 marks 500 years of The Royal Mail. The historical organisation was a rich setting to observe managers dealing with new demands, misalignment of what matters and contradictions. During the time of data collection (i.e., 2012-2014) the organisation was undergoing significant changes with modernisation and privatisation (see Annex 1). As the quote above indicates, there was uncertainty and

it was “a very interesting time.” At the Royal Mail, both “public policy designed to stimulate competition, and the revolution of the electronic age” took their toll (Brydon, in Campbell Smith, 2011: xix). Technology, for example, changed the landscape of what needs to be delivered and how it is delivered. The appearance of other forms of communication, such as e-mail, dramatically lowered the amount of letters sent through post. An internal communication at the Royal Mail emphasised “our postal world is changing rapidly. We now account for a very small part of the total messaging market”. In contrast, the growth of online purchases increased the demand for parcel delivery. Delivering letters and delivering parcels are very different kinds of activities, and thus aggressive adaptations were required.

New market conditions implied other sorts of adjustments. For example, a more globalised economy and European Union regulation made it necessary for the UK to open its logistics market. The Royal Mail, which used to be the only delivery provider in the UK, for the first time in almost 500 years was forced to compete with new local and international companies. In this landscape, the efficiency and value of their services needed a reassessment. In addition, the Royal Mail had been in a critical financial situation for a number of years prior to this study (Royal Mail, internal communication). As part of the response to the complex societal demands and the coalition government political agenda, the Royal Mail was privatised in 2013¹.

Tension in the organisation was evidenced in the difficult industrial relations that the Royal Mail was coping with, which were frequently covered by UK media. Tense industrial relations, however, were not a new phenomenon in the organisation and have been subject of academic research for decades (see for example Darlington, 1993; Martinez Lucio and Kirkpatrick, 1995; Martinez Lucio and Noon, 2000). Only two years prior to my own data collection, Beirne (2013) explored the tense work in the midst of modernisation. Beirne describes this period as “turbulent (...) with lingering tensions in the aftermath of the industrial action, more rapid automation, greater clarity about changing job structures and shifting attitudes to union partnership” (2013: 119). Beirne, whose qualitative data collection focused on frontline staff, junior, and middle managers found aggressive reactions among staff towards organisational change initiatives which had resulted in “questioning, criticising and resisting behaviour” (2013: 116). Beirne also noted negative attitudes from frontline, middle and junior managers towards senior executives. Although quite different in nature and method, my study complements Beirne’s inquiry because the four managers that I selected were at the senior executive level, to which Beirne did not have access. It also contributes by covering the tensions introduced by privatisation in addition to those introduced by modernisation and which were the focus of Beirne’s inquiry.

¹ It is worth noting that the idea of privatising the Royal Mail had been discussed for years (see for example Martinez Lucio, Noon and Jenkins, 1997), yet at the time of this study it was finally realized.

While this study might provide some insights about what was happening at the Royal Mail at the time of data collection, the Royal Mail is not the focus of the thesis. The primary focus is on managers' trajectories as they deal with new demands in the practices that they navigate and on how they negotiate their way through contradictions and misalignment. While I interviewed a total of nineteen managers with the purpose of understanding the organisational setting, and of selecting four senior managers for a more in-depth inquiry, the thesis focuses on the trajectories of the latter only. These four senior managers were concentrated in only one of five regions in which the Royal Mail operated. To put this in perspective, it should be noted that in 2012 the Royal Mail had more than 150,000 employees and several hundred of those were senior managers. Also, the organisation was spread across the UK. Therefore, it would be naïve to claim any generalisable truth about the organisation as such. As one manager told me in an interview:

“...we are such a decentralised business with units that by costum and practice and geography and history have distinct personalities. (...) It's very hard to talk about a single culture. For example, I went a week visiting [a region] and all the delivery offices and mail centres there, and it was so different from visiting somewhere in [a different region](...). I don't think there is one particular culture [and] I think all the different professional functions and central functions are quite distinct (...) we forget that actually we are a tiny proportion of what makes up the culture and the number of people employed by Royal Mail because we've got at least 150,000 people employed in the front line in the operation.”

As such, I stress that the views that participants of this study have on the organisation are partial, varied and often contrasting. Therefore, they should not be taken as anything else than single perspectives.

1.7. Chapter Plan

The thesis is structured in a total of eight chapters, of which this is the first one. Chapter 2 will explore the notion of practice from the sociocultural and MacIntyrean perspectives. So far I have used the word practice in a somewhat loose fashion. In Chapter 2 I will explain the nuanced distinctions between the sociocultural and MacIntyrean understanding and will explain how the term will be used from then on. I will also introduce the idea of figured world (Holland et al. 1998) which will be quite helpful throughout the rest of the dissertation. The Chapter will also explore some of the links between learning development and the flourishing of managers. I will justify the relevance of taking a learning and development perspective to research empirically the role of managers and the affordances and limitations that work poses to their flourishing. While the chapter introduces the theoretical perspectives of the study, it is not an exhaustive description of all the theoretical concepts involved. Other concepts will be introduced as the chapters unfold. This is with the purpose of building a more nuanced understanding of the conceptual framework that unfolded from the study.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the research methodology. The three pillars guiding the methodological approach will be discussed. These are: multiple case study research (Stake, 2005; Flyvbjerg, 2006a), a focus on trajectories, and an ethnographic mindset. The chapter also expands on the Royal Mail as the research context of the study, explains how I gained access to the organisation and how I selected case study participants. In addition, data gathering, analysis and ethical considerations are discussed. A highlight of this chapter is the “demands-response cycle,” a framework that I developed through and for data analysis. The value of this framework is how it synthesises complex aspects of human development and its potential applicability beyond this research (Rodríguez-Leal, 2016).

Chapter 4 is the first of four findings chapters. Defining misalignment as clashes of what matters between different actors at the Royal Mail, I narrate work situations identified in the data in which the managers in the study were facing misalignment. Assisted by the concept of boundary space, I explore the nature of such misalignment and compare the misalignments that the four managers were facing.

In Chapter 5, using the managers’ trajectories as a departure point, I identify the demands that were laid upon them as their work and their institutional realities changed. The chapter considers those demands stemming from the misalignment situations discussed in Chapter 4, as well as other relevant demands identified in the data. A cross-case analysis indicates that managers, in the very process of recognising new demands, made provisions for what mattered to them. To better understand this phenomenon in which recognised demands sheltered –rather than challenged– commitments and identifications, I introduce the concepts of demand-as-identified and demand-as-refashioned.

Chapter 6 is about the contradictions encountered by managers in the process of recognising and responding to new demands. As demands were identified, a gap between who the managers were and who they were expected to become in order to meet new organisational expectations became evident. Closing such gaps involved working through contradictions of different sorts. The chapter explores contradictions related to self-understandings, value incongruences, and knowledge and skills.

Chapter 7 presents the strategies that the managers used to address the situations of misalignment and the demands that they were facing at work. The chapter describes an overall number of 26 strategies. A cross-case analysis suggests that managers experienced four different positions in their institutional realities: taming, adopting, enduring and leaving. The chapter will explain the four concepts.

Chapter 8 summarises the argument. The chapter argues that the four managers resorted to their commitments and identifications to decide how to proceed when dealing with misalignment and contradiction and that there was a dialectic between their commitments and identifications with the stories of what was good in the

figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. Managers were found to strive for flourishing within a specific organisational and societal narrative of 'what was good' and of 'who it was worth striving to become.' In addition, I discuss some of the virtues displayed by the managers and I reflect on the instances in which MacIntyre's notions of compartmentalisation and manipulation play out in the managers' trajectories. The chapter also proposes that relational expertise (Edward, 2010) is a non-manipulative alternative for managers, to some other manipulative influencing strategies which they used to navigate misalignment. The chapter also discusses the contribution of the study, its limitations, and a future research agenda.

1.8. Research contributions and intended audience

Research contributions will be discussed in detail in the final chapter. They are of different sorts. Theoretically, I established new links between sociocultural understandings of learning and development with virtue ethics, particularly the work of MacIntyre.

Methodologically, I designed an interview approach that proved effective to elicit rich accounts about work. This approach prompted managers to speak about the specificities of their work and helped me to identify what mattered to them, the misalignment and the contradictions that they were dealing with. This protocol is easy to replicate and might be valuable for other qualitative researchers. In addition I developed an analytical framework that I call the "demand-response cycle," which addresses of how a person's identity unfolds through time. This framework, which is presented in Chapter 4 and used throughout the rest of the chapters as a conceptual framework, helps to understand the developmental trajectories of individuals and makes visible the tensions of what matters that arise during developmental transitions. The framework was used as a tool for qualitative analysis, but also holds potential as an intervention tool for practitioners and organisations.

Empirically, I offer an account of how four senior managers developed and learnt at work with which I respond to MacIntyre's critique of the manager. The trajectories of the four senior managers studied reveal that there are grounds for flourishing in the life of a manager, that managers do engage in moral debate, and that they question the ends that they pursue. Furthermore, managers were seen practicing virtues such as courage and temperance. However, the empirical findings do resonate with MacIntyre's critique suggesting that managers can experience compartmentalisation and are faced with difficult dilemmas that sometimes they find easier to overlook. Moreover, I report that influencing skills are a crucial part of the repertoire of managers and that these often treat others as means, rather than ends.

In brief, this study adds to the understanding of how senior managers learn and develop at work, how they deal with the demands of changing practices as well as

institutional changes, and the implications of contradictions and misalignment in their learning and development.

Although the thesis focuses on the learning and development of senior managers, I hope to contribute to our understanding of how we engage with new demands in the activities and institutional realities that we navigate beyond the realm of the management role. Thus, research findings are relevant to scholars interested in how senior managers learn and develop as well as to those interested in how learning and development takes place at the workplace. Scholars who are looking at virtue and ethics in management or studying misalignment of values at work shall as well find the findings relevant to their work.

In addition, the findings and theoretical discussion of this research can offer grounds for practitioners to think about their own demands at work, and to reflect on how they deal with the misalignment situations and contradictions they encounter. The findings and tools developed in the study can foster the exercise of agency by catalysing the process of recognising and addressing demands and for moral agency by considering the role of virtues in managerial work.

CHAPTER 2

LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT AND FLOURISHING

In this chapter I build some connections between sociocultural thought and MacIntyre. I also explore human flourishing, the flourishing of managers and the relationship between learning and flourishing. I end the chapter by discussing how my research contributes to the literature. The value of my approach very much lies in furthering our understanding of human learning and development, and specifically that of managers, by considering both a sociocultural approach that insists on the dialectic between a person and its social reality with a virtue perspective that pays attention to human flourishing.

2. LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT AND FLOURISHMENT

Vygotsky (1998) and sociocultural theorists drawing from him including Edwards (2010; forthcoming), Hedegaard (2012), Holland et al. (1998) and Sford and Prusak (2005), provide useful tools to understand the learning and development of managers as they confront new demands and navigate misalignment and contradiction. MacIntyre's emphasis on the purpose of a human life and the role of virtues in achieving such purpose can extend the Vygotskian framework by adding a teleological dimension to learning and development that considers morality and virtue and that emphasises human flourishing. The sociocultural understanding of learning and development can also complement MacIntyre's understanding of flourishing, by providing powerful tools to understand and foster the learning and development that is required for it to occur. Thus, I will draw from these two theories throughout the thesis to explore my research questions.

Vygotsky (1896-1934) was born in Russia and is famous for his work in Psychology. Due to his sharpness of thought and perhaps to the political climate in which he lived, Vygotsky had a sort of "messianic" effect, generating "excitement and enthusiasm among [his] followers" (Werstch, 1985: 10). His ideas have remained fertile for generations, and picked up on a wide array of disciplines in the social sciences. Vygotsky had a game-changing impact in how learning and development are understood with his considerations on the role of social reality in the formation of the mind.

Alasdair MacIntyre is a Scottish moral philosopher born in 1929. MacIntyre poses a critique of contemporary society, particularly picking up on the bureaucratic and managerial structures that, he argues, have a manipulative character and constrain human freedom and agency (Knight, 1998, Lutz, 2012, MacIntyre, 2013). Besides the "demolition job" (Knight, 1998: 1) entailed in his critique, MacIntyre was influenced by Aristotle and Aquinas and proposes that a focus on virtues as qualities of character can counteract the destructive effects of manipulative social relations, can "enhance human freedom and human agency" (Lutz, 2012: 1), and allow for the flourishing of individuals and society (MacIntyre, 2013; MacIntyre, 1999).

There are many commonalities between Vygotsky and post-Vygotskian thought and MacIntyre, some which perhaps could be traced back to Marx's influence on both scholars. In fact, Vygotsky and his colleagues had the goal of establishing a marxist psychology (Edwards, 2010; Holland et Al., 1998; Werstch, 1985), and as a result of his commitment to Marx, one of Vygotsky's main contributions to Psychology was the acknowledgement of the role of social relations in the development of the mind (Werstch, 1985). MacIntyre as well was strongly influenced by Marx. He was a committed Marxist early on in his career and was looking for a "Marxist concept of human nature" that could inform an alternative to liberal morality (Knight, 1998:

2). Yet, there was a pivotal turn in his thought and *After Virtue* was “written in part out of a recognition of those moral inadequacies of Marxism which its twentieth-century history had disclosed” (MacIntyre, 2013: xvii). Although he now identifies himself as an Aristotelian and a Thomist, he “remains deeply indebted to Marx’s critique of the economic, social and cultural order of capitalism and to the development of that critique by later Marxists” (MacIntyre, 2013: xvii), and has remained loyal to Marx’s “concern to enable human agency” (Lutz, 2012: 16, 17). Some commonalities between Vygotskian and MacIntyrean thought include a focus on practices, a concern about human agency, the consideration of contradictions and the importance placed on historical analysis. In addition, both sociocultural and MacIntyrean inquiry pay close attention to the role of narratives in the formation of the self. Despite these commonalities, there is limited cross-referencing between the two literatures.

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows. In section 2.1 I will focus on practices by discussing the sociocultural and the MacIntyrean understanding of the concept, and explaining how I will use it throughout the thesis. In Section 2.2 I will link human flourishing and work, and argue for the need to consider human flourishing in any inquiry about learning and development, and particularly so in any inquiry about the learning and development of managers. In section 2.3 I will present my contribution to the literature. I shall emphasise that in this chapter I will not elaborate on all the theoretical concepts that will be used throughout the thesis. The chapter offers a theoretical background for the tools that will be later introduced, yet some concepts like social ‘situation of development’ (Vygotsky, 1998), relational expertise (Edwards, 2010), identities and others will be presented as they become relevant in my argument. Such an approach allows me to present the conceptual framework that results from my inquiry in a more nuanced way, and emphasises the dialectics between the theory and the empirical inquiry. I proceed now to discuss the relevance of practices and how they will be understood.

2.1. Practices

I have said that the focus of this study is on how managers deal with new demands at work that challenge what matters to them, and how they navigate contradiction and misalignment. An inquiry about work is an inquiry about practice. Common to MacIntyre and sociocultural thought is the central place held by practices. The MacIntyrean and sociocultural conceptualisation of practices is, however, quite different. This is unsurprising. Despite that many speak of a ‘practice-turn’ in social research, the relevant literature has not reached an agreement that makes clear a simple “what social practices are” (Barnes, 2001:18). Thus MacIntyre’s and the sociocultural definitions add to a wide and contested alternatives.

Sociocultural theory uses the term quite loosely in comparison to MacIntyre. MacIntyre himself recognises that his definition of practices is narrow because it

serves the specific purpose of being the “background against which the concept of a virtue” is intelligible (MacIntyre, 2013: 217), and acts as a “prior account of certain features of social and moral life in terms of which [virtue] has to be defined and explained.” The definitions, however, have some common features. First, they both acknowledge that practices and institutions are not the same but that they hold a close relationship. Second, both give a central role to purposes. Third, the history and tradition of the practice are central. Finally, both definitions consider the agency of the individual. For conceptual clarity throughout the thesis, it is important to discuss both definitions and also make some choices on how the concepts will be used in the inquiry. Before arguing for how I will use the terms, I will explore each understanding briefly.

2.1.1. A sociocultural understanding of practices

To achieve the Marxist understanding of human development that Vygotsky pursued, “one must first understand the social relations in which the individual exists” (Werstch, 1985: 58). For Vygotsky it is in those social relations that higher mental processes are originated, and thus, only by looking at practices the development of higher mental processes can be grasped:

“A profound revolution brought about by Marx in the theory of cognition is the idea that human practice is the basis for human cognition; practice is that process in the course of whose development cognitive problems arise, human perceptions and thought originate and develop, and which at the same time contains in itself criteria of the inadequacy and truth of knowledge.” (Leont’ev cited in Edwards, in Hedegaard, Edwards and Flear, 2011: 174)

The implications of a Vygotskian psychology is that to understand the person, researchers from the sociocultural tradition have focused their observations on social occurrences, or in other words, on doings. The object of inquiry for Vygotskian researchers thus has been expressed by Leont’ev as operations, actions and activities, and extended by Hedegaard (2012) with the notion of practices and traditions. The terminology that has been taken up by different authors from the sociocultural tradition (e.g., Leont’ev, and Engeström) is varied, and its distinctions may be confusing (Edwards, 2010). Hedegaard formulated some distinctions between tradition, institution, practice, situation, and so on, which are expressed in Table 2-1. Hedegaard’s distinctions were originally intended for the analyses of the ways children learn and develop. Hedegaard (2012) argued that children learnt and developed in the dynamic of responding to the demands of the settings of activity that the children navigated. According to her argument, demands are given by the particular situations in which children find themselves, which in turn are encompassed in practices located in institutional settings (Edwards, 2010). Institutional settings are part of the make-up of traditions. Therefore, traditions are embodied in practices located in institutions, and practices are concreted in situations and in activities. Activities are the make-up of a child’s routine, and

include for example family dinners. Edwards (2010) has found Hedegaard's model useful to analyse contexts of work. I shall note already that Hedegaard's association of practices as located in institutions resonates with MacIntyre's own association. However, MacIntyre emphasises the intrinsic tension among practices and institutions, and although he recognises their mutual dependency, the two are essentially distinct. But I will elaborate on this in my explanation of MacIntyre's understanding of practice.

Core to a Vygotskian understanding of practices is a dialectical relationship between the individual and the practice. If indeed, as Vygotsky argues, higher mental processes are originated in societal relationships, societal relationships do not remain intact but rather are affected as individuals participate in them. As humans "engage over time with the world and come to understand it better than we did, we act on it in more informed ways and in turn change it" (Edwards, 2010: 6). This process, which is expressed in Vygotsky's concept of internalisation and externalisation, translates into a dialectical relationship of person and world where agency is clearly manifested; we shape and are shaped by the practices that we navigate.

2.1.2. MacIntyre's understanding of practices

I have said that for MacIntyre (2013) the practice and the institution are different but mutually dependent. MacIntyre emphasises the tension between institutions and practices and he is much more specific than sociocultural theorists are about what counts as practice and what does not. In fact, his definition has sparked fierce debate about what classifies or not as a practice (Moore and Beadle, 2006; Beadle and Moore, 2006; Noddings, 2003; MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002). In MacIntyre's account, for example, there is no such thing as the practice of teaching (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2012) or the practice of managing in the way that they might be understood from a sociocultural perspective. Moore and Beadle (2006) have made a good case of why the work of managers can in fact count as practice, but I can only elaborate on that once MacIntyre's notion of practice is clarified. MacIntyre defines practices as follows:

"By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended." (2013: 218)

There are three things to note about his definition. The first one is that not every activity counts as a practice. For it to be a practice it has to be complex, coherent, social and cooperative. Up to this point the notion of practice in MacIntyre and sociocultural thought is similar. It is also in sympathy with most understandings of

ENTITY	PROCESS	DYNAMIC
Society	Tradition	Societal needs/conditions
Institution	Practice	Value motive/objectives
Activity setting	Situation	Motivation/demands
Person	Activity	Motive/intentions
Human's biology	Neurophysiological processes	Primary needs/drives

TABLE 2-1. HEDEGAARD (2012)

practice from different theoretical traditions which tend to agree in regarding practices as “materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understandings” (Schatzki, 2001: 2).

The second thing worth noting is that in addition to complexity, coherence, cooperation, and a social character, practices are only those which can achieve internal goods. For MacIntyre, internal goods are the purposes of a practice which can be achieved by that practice only. Internal goods, therefore, distinguish one practice from another. In contrast, external goods are those goods that result by engaging in the practice, but that can also be achieved through many other practices. MacIntyre uses the examples of money or prestige. External goods are important because they sustain practices. And so a violin player can actually invest himself in becoming excellent in playing the violin because he sells his music or makes money from violin performances. However, an overemphasis on external goods puts the practice at risk. Here is where the distinction between a practice and an institution becomes very stark in MacIntyre’s account. Institutions and practices are different, but intimately related, with institutions being “necessary for the organization and sustenance of practices” (Knight, 1998: 11). Moore and Beadle explain that the institution houses the practice and is primarily concerned with the external goods such as “fame, power, profit or, more generally, success” (Moore and Beadle, 2006: 371). Moore and Beadle’s diagram (Fig. 2-1) illustrates this key relationship. This distinction, according to Knight, is one of MacIntyre’s main contributions, making “his sociology of practices more rigorously analytical than that of any other theorist, and also more value-laden and political.” The role of institutions in the sustenance of practices is highly problematic, as:

“institutions constantly threaten to corrupt practices and demoralize practitioners, to subordinate pursuit of internal goods to that of external goods. MacIntyre disagrees contending that institutions ought to be organized for the sake of practices and practices for the sake of goods of excellence. For example a university should be organized for the sake of enquiry and enquiry for the sake of truth, not profit. Unfortunately, it is now the tail that wags the dog.” (Knight, 1998: 11)

MacIntyre’s understanding of ‘goods’ is inherited from Aristotle’s, and is tied to a notion of purposes. In considering ‘goods’ as the aims of a practice, MacIntyre’s definition shares a common ground with the sociocultural tradition. In sociocultural thought traditions, institutions, practices and activities are purpose-orientated. This is illustrated in the third column of Hedegaard’s planes of analysis (Table 2.1). In that sense, internal goods are, to some extent, commensurable to the notion of ‘object of activity’ introduced by Leont’ev: “The main thing that distinguished one activity from another (...) is the difference in their objects. (...) The object of activity is its true motive” (Leont’ev cited in Edwards, in Hedegaard, Edwards and Fler, 2011: 173).

The third aspect of MacIntyre’s definition of practice is that it is aimed at achieving excellence in securing of internal goods, that through that pursuit of excellence those who engage in the practice become better at it, and that as a result the “human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended” (MacIntyre, 1981, 2013: 218). These conditions that MacIntyre’s poses to the notion of practice are difficult to meet and so not any activity that is housed by an institution is a practice. As Beadle (2002: 50) underscores, “an activity can be regarded as a practice in MacIntyre’s terms only if it can be shown that the practice contributes to some notion of the human and social good”. For MacIntyre (1981, 2013), virtues are what allow for the achievement of excellence in practice. Virtues are different to skills because they have a three-layered role: a. they allow for the achievement of excellence in practices, b. they contribute to the flourishing of practitioners, and c. they contribute to the quest for the best in society. Moore and Beadle (2006) synthesise the key elements of MacIntyre’s definition of practice labelling it a “virtues-goods-practice-institution schema” (2006: 369).

2.1.3. Standards of excellence, internal and external goods at the Royal Mail

For conceptual clarity, when using the word ‘practice’ I will henceforth refer to MacIntyre’s understanding. I began the inquiry very reluctant to adhering in an orthodox manner his definition. If the sociocultural use of the word practice is too general, MacIntyre’s is too narrow (Barnes, 2005). MacIntyre (1981, 2013) himself admits this as the account of practices that he offers is tailored to a very specific theoretical case that he makes in *After Virtue*, one that questions how morality is understood, and that critiques the emotivist values of our culture as well as the social structures of capitalism. My reluctance was grounded in the aims of this

thesis. I do not intend to take part in the debate of what counts as practice and what does not, neither do I engage with the larger discussion of emotivism, morality, and capitalism and this is not a thesis on business ethics. The thesis, instead, is about the learning and development of managers as they respond to new demands. Yet, MacIntyre's emphasis on the tension between institutions and practices (illustrated in Fig. 2.1) is a relevant one in the study, as I explore the tensions between new demands and what mattered to managers. Furthermore, underlying my exploration of how managers navigated misalignment and contradiction, there is an interest in the flourishing of individuals at work. MacIntyre's definition of practice helps my argument that human flourishing and morality should not be overlooked in any discussion of learning and development. Even less so should these themes be overlooked in inquiries pertaining the learning and development of managers, who are the ones to organise the work of institutions, secure external goods and who also have their very own aspirations to flourish.

Thus, in the framework of this research, Royal Mail is the institution that houses and sustains the practice of mail and parcel collection and delivery. Speaking of a practice in MacIntyre's terms requires an effort to establish the standards of excellence, internal goods and external goods of Royal Mail's activity.

Standards of excellence

I will argue that the standards of excellence to which the Royal Mail aims are the timely, safe and successful collection and delivery of letters and parcels. In addition to this there is a very particular standard of excellence against which the Royal Mail is evaluated which makes it very different to other mail and parcels collection and delivery services (e.g. TNT, UKMail or Fedex). That is the Universal Service Obligation. Hooper (2010: 11) describes the Universal Service Obligation as follows:

"A crucial feature of the universal postal service obligation is that prices within the UK are independent of distance. The universal postal service is an essential part of the country's social and economic fabric. It, for example, connects those unable or unwilling to use electronic communication and is critical to connecting the rural and urban parts of the UK." (Hooper, 2010: 11).

Internal goods

"MacIntyre defines *internal goods* as those goods that can only be had by engagement in the particular practice" (Hager, 2012: 23). Hooper's explanation of the Universal Service Obligation taps into an essential feature of Royal Mail's practice that I argue is closely related to the internal goods attainable through engaging in such practice. MacIntyre (2013) argues that internal goods of a practice are those that can only be achieved by engaging in that specific form of human activity and by no other. Based on this argument, I will say that the Universal

Service Obligation is a platform for the achievement of an array of internal goods that are only available to those engaging in Royal Mail's activity, and goods that are renounced to when leaving to work for the competition (e.g. TNT or UK Mail). A commitment to Royal Mail's particular practice of mail delivery implies a commitment to the larger societal aims of the organisation and the idea of being 'the social glue of British society'. Thus, I argue that there are internal goods associated to the meaning derived from working in a practice of which a standard of excellence is intimately tied to a social purpose.

But internal goods of the practice of mail collection and delivery are not just those related to the Universal Service Obligation. There are others, perhaps less debatable, that can be better understood by considering those enduring aspects of the practice. Indeed MacIntyre coincides with sociocultural theorists on the attention he places on history and tradition as central to understanding practices. Speaking of the postal services back in the Victorian age, Campbell-Smith (2011) writes:

"From the start, the demands of the postal service necessarily entailed a profound attachment to the importance of routine: this was a working environment in which stability and continuity were all. (...) Since any departure of the rule book could risk having the service cut short, this was a culture that left no room for anyone to wing it on a busy day."

This emphasis on routine, stability and continuity is one that Campbell-Smith (2011) himself argues has been a constant at the Royal Mail and one that I very much witnessed during my fieldwork. Campbell-Smith (2011) suggests that the challenges entailed in trying to advance organisational change are therefore understandable. In any case, Campbell-Smith's remarks offer some hints on some internal goods of the practice of mail delivery at the Royal Mail, and also to the virtues required to achieve such goods. Virtues like discipline, organisation and punctuality are a few that come to mind and seem indispensable to achieve excellence in the practice.

While my attempt at defining internal goods might seem equivocal, this only reflects the slippery character of the concept and the difficulties for an outsider to specify them as part of the "internal" character of these goods involves they "can only be identified and recognised by the experience of participating in this practice. This means that those 'who lack the relevant experience' of the practice 'are incompetent thereby as judges of internal goods'" (Hager, 2012: 23). As an outsider of the practice I declare myself incompetent for an exhaustive specification of the internal goods involved in the practice of mail collection and delivery. Yet, as will be seen in the findings chapters a few fragments of managers' talk are sometimes good clues to what such goods were.

Internal goods are relevant because I am drawing from MacIntyre's work, but even more so because they are part of *what matters* to people as they engage with their work activities. Nevertheless, considering the difficulties involved in specifying and

identifying what the internal goods of a practice are, I will mainly use the concept of *what matters*, which includes but is not limited to, internal goods.

External goods:

While internal goods are difficult to specify what is clear from studying the Royal Mail is that an emphasis on efficiency, profit, sustainability and reputation was indeed in tension with the fulfilling experiences of taking part in the larger purpose of serving the public and communicating the Royal Mail. An example of this is the resistance found among postmen and women to deliver marketing mail. A booklet for managers, that was designed to give them answers to commonly asked questions among frontline staff addressed the following hypothetical question:

"Why are we delivering junk mail? My customers hate it and I get flack?"

The answer offered by the booklet said:

"There is a growing demand from companies for this type of mail. In a market in long term decline, areas like this will support our network and give us long term sustainability. We should also stop calling it junk mail. Our customers spend a lot of time and resources producing this mail and selecting who to send it to. It's in their interest to only send it to people who will want to see it and likely to make a purchase. So not all customers hate it."



FIG. 2.1 MOORE AND BEADLE, 2006

The quote evidences an institutional effort to shift ideas of what mattered in the business. It is also a clear example of the organisation's efforts to sustain the practice of mail collection and delivery while, at the same time, threatening it.

Although I am perhaps speculating, postmen and women might have perceived delivering junk mail as threatening to an internal good that was in some way associated to their role as public servants and to their relationship with the people whom they saw every day on their delivery routes, the mail recipients. The example also illustrates the tension between managers and frontline staff, where managers were those protecting external goods (e.g. profit) while compromising the internal.

Although in MacIntyre's discussion managers are only concerned with the external goods of a practice and thus, management is not a practice, Moore and Beadle (2006: 369) make a compelling case as to why management can be understood as the practice of "making and sustaining the institution." Departing from the question "Why do some businesses actively protect the virtues of the practices they house while others do not?" (2006: 369) they argue that good management is management that protects the internal goods of the practice, while also securing those external goods crucial to its survival:

"senior managers — those who have, in one sense, outgrown the practice and now represent the institution that houses it — also have the same opportunity to exercise the virtues in the making and sustaining of the institution (enabling them on their own narrative quest towards their own telos)." (Moore and Beadle, 2006)

The findings that I will present persuaded me that the managers in this study were at times (not always) striving to protect internal goods of the practice, and that their focus on external goods was highly driven by their interest in the viability of the institution. These efforts in themselves had internal goods of their own and there were virtues required to achieve excellence. I will point to these aspects as they become pertinent when discussing the data. Thus, based on Moore and Beadle's (2006) argument, when referring to the practice of managers I will refer to the "the practice of making and sustaining the institution" (Moore and Beadle, 2006).

2.1.4. Practices and figured worlds

The sociocultural understanding of practice –particularly its emphasis on demands, internalisation and externalisation– is indispensable to my attempt at understanding the development of managers. The concept of 'figured worlds' introduced by Holland et al. (1998) nicely captures the essence of sociocultural ideas about practice. Figured worlds also resonate with some of MacIntyre's ideas and so it may act as a bridging concept. Figured worlds encompass Vygotsky's notion of internalisation as well as externalisation, that is, the dialectic of person and world, as well as MacIntyre's emphasis on the contexts or traditions in which people act. Figured worlds are a "socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (Holland et al., 1998: 52). Holland et al. (1998) explain that the idea stems from Leontiev's

conception of activity, and that figured worlds are defined by four main characteristics. The first one is “historical phenomena, to which we are recruited or into which we enter, which themselves develop through the works of their participants” (Holland et al., 1998: 41). These phenomena have the ability to shape us. Second, they are “social encounters in which participants’ positions matter” and they have a particular context in time and space. Third, figured worlds are “socially organized and reproduced (...) They divide and relate participants (almost as roles)” (ibid.) and their existence depends on the interaction of their members. Finally, figured worlds “are characteristic of humans and society” and are “populated by familiar social types and even identifiable persons, not simply differentiated by some abstract division of labor” (ibid.).

This last characteristic is particularly important because it addresses what Holland et al. (1998) call a “seeming contradiction between humans as social producers and as social products” (1998, p.42). In figured worlds, the agency of the individual matters and can be understood as “the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live (...)” (Inden, 1990 cited in Holland et al., 1998: 42). At the same time, “people do not act only as agents” but can also be “instruments of other agents” (ibid.).

To summarise, I will only use the term ‘practice’ when referring specifically to MacIntyre’s definition. And I will use Holland’s idea of figured worlds to refer to the more general idea of practice embraced by sociocultural thought. If I find it necessary to refer to Edwards’ (2010), or Hedegaard’s (2012) notion of practice I will make my intention explicit, but generally speaking it will suffice to refer to figured worlds.

2.2. Human Flourishing and Agency

One of the key elements that makes MacIntyre’s definition of practice relevant so as to enrich a sociocultural account of learning is its consideration of human flourishing. MacIntyre’s definition of virtues, I have indicated, encompasses three conditions. His argument is that virtues: i. Secure excellence in the practice, ii. Allow those members of the practice to flourish, and iii. Concern themselves with the good for society. But what does flourishing mean precisely? MacIntyre argues that although flourishing may vary from context to context, there is always one condition and that is the exercise of practical reasoning:

“it is as someone exercises in a relevant way the capacities of an independent practical reasoner that her or his potentialities for flourishing in a specifically human way are developed. So if we want to understand how it is good for humans to live, we need to know what it is to be excellent as an independent practical reasoner” (1999: 77).

The notion of practical reasoning goes back to Aristotle. MacIntyre is in fact one of many who have revived Aristotelian ideas since the second half of the 20th century (others include Anscombe, 1958; Annas, 2011; Crisp and Slote, 1997; Foot, 2001; Kraut 1989; Nussbaum; 2010; Vogt, 2005). MacIntyre's take on Aristotle, different to some neo-Aristotelians, draws largely on Aquinas' reading of Aristotle. According to MacIntyre, "Aquinas was not just an Aristotelian, but often a keenly perceptive interpreter as well as adapter of Aristotle" (1999, xi). I now go back to Aristotle to explore briefly the origins and meaning of practical reasoning.

Aristotle was in fact the first major exponent of the idea of flourishing as an end of human growth and the one to indicate the relevance of the virtues in achieving flourishing. Aristotle refers to flourishing as *eudaemonia*, i.e. "highest of all goods attainable by action" or "the best life for human beings" (Brown in Aristotle, 2009: x, xi). Although *eudaemonia* is often translated as 'happiness', it has been suggested that perhaps a better translation is 'fulfillment' or 'flourishing' (Brown, 2009: x), and that is the sense in which I will use it throughout this thesis.

For Aristotle, "there is a way that humans ought to be and ought to live" (Aristotle, 2009: xi) and when successful, the person flourishes. In his argument, the main human capacity is rational activity and as such it is the function of a person. In other words, rational activity is to a person what cutting is to a knife. The knife is without point if it cannot cut, and a person is deprived of its humanity if it cannot exercise rational activity. Human fulfillment or flourishing (*eudaemonia*) is for Aristotle outstanding rational activity. This is referred to as the 'function argument'.

Aristotle's function argument has had its share of critique (Brown, in Aristotle, 2009) and it is perhaps due to its flaws that MacIntyre initially rejected "what [he] called Aristotle's 'metaphysical biology'" (1999: x)². Korsgaard (2008) offers an attractive interpretation of Aristotle's *ergon* (function) that is in harmony with MacIntyre's work and also relevant to the question of this thesis. To her, reason is the function of a human being, because it is "how we do what we do" and this how we do what we do is characterised by agency:

"life is not completely fixed by some sort of cultural regulation (...) a human being decides such things as how to earn her living, how to spend her afternoons, who to have for friends and how to treat them, which fields of knowledge, arts, causes, sports, and other activities she will pursue, and, in general, how she will live and what she will live for. (...)"(2008: 142)

In brief, Korsgaard (2008: 42) says, "(...) a human being has, and is capable of choosing, what we sometimes call a 'way of life' or, following John Rawls, a 'conception of the good.'" If a person flourishes, hence exercising agency as rational activity, that: "person can be said to 'have a life.' (...) it is life in this sense that we

² MacIntyre distanced himself from Aristotle's biology in *After Virtue* (1981, 2013) but re-engaged with it, although critically, in *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999).

primarily have in mind when we say of someone that he lived well or badly—whether he was *eudaimon* or not” (ibid.).

So how does this discussion of flourishing and agency connect with this thesis? I mentioned in the introduction that MacIntyre argues that managers do not question the ends of their endeavours. In this, MacIntyre is implying that managers are impaired from a full exercise of practical rationality, and therefore cannot flourish. By looking at how managers dealt with demands at work that challenged what matters to them and researching how they dealt with contradiction and misalignment, this thesis also explores the extent to which the managers in the study pursued ends of their own, instead of goals formulated by others. The thesis is therefore an attempt to observe if the managers in the study had a say as to what purposes they pursued with their lives, and to what goals they directed their activity.

2.2.1. Flourishing at the workplace

The centrality of work in human life and flourishing has long been acknowledged. Kovacs (1986: 195) believes “work is an essential part of human life as recognised by all serious reflection on the value of human activity.” Indeed, “function’ translates *ergon*, literally ‘task’ or ‘work” (Brown in Aristotle, 2009: x). In that sense, “work should be inherently meaningful because it is a characteristically human activity in which human beings can find fulfilment and completion” (Beadle and Knight, 2012: 434).

The paradox is that the figured world of work has been strongly accused of impeding the flourishing of individuals. The reason why the workplace is problematic lies in the tension between institutions and practices indicated by MacIntyre, that I discussed earlier. The workplace impedes flourishing as it is often the institutional setting in which practices occur and in being of an institutional character it focuses on external, rather than internal goods. As Knight (1998: 23) argues, practices are controlled by “capitalists, managers, politicians and bureaucrats”, and in organising practices they deprive workers, at least to some extent, from the exercise of practical rationality.

Jobs in which people cannot approach their activity in a characteristically human way (i.e., with creativity and with autonomy on how to go about them) diminish one’s opportunity to flourish. In that sense, Aristotle’s function argument, MacIntyre’s insistence on the exercise of practical rationality, and Korsgaard’s emphasis on choice and creativity can explain why Studs Terkel depicts people’s discontent with their jobs in terms of the non-human character of the work at hand:

“I’m a machine” says the spot-welder. “I’m caged”, says the bank teller and echoes the hotel clerk. “I’m a mule,” says the steelworker. “A monkey can do what I do,” says the receptionist. “I’m less than a farm implement,” says the migrant worker. “I’m an object,” says the high-fashion model.” (Terkel, 1974: xi-xii).

Adina Schwartz is quite radical in her opposition to such kinds of work in which people feel more like machines, mules or monkeys than like humans. To her, if society cares “about the free development” of all its members it must demand “that no one should be employed” in the kind of job that pays for the blind “[pursuit of] ends that others have chosen” (1982: 635). She emphasises, however, industrial employment. In the next section I will discuss to what extent this affects the work of managers.

Positive psychology has offered less radical paths than Schwartz to address the barriers to flourishing in organisations. Notably, Csikszentmihalyi (2003) promotes work environments which foster work that is fulfilling and joyful, and opposes businesses that “solely satisfy the owners’ greed at the expense of working conditions” (loc.78). For this purpose, Csikszentmihalyi (2003: loc 1024) argues that “the best way to manage people (...) is to create an environment where employees actually enjoy their work and grow in the process of doing it.”

Despite that, Csikszentmihalyi (2003) and other authors in the field of positive psychology have done an outstanding job in bringing attention to the issue of employee engagement and meaningful work. Their ideas have been challenged for serving instrumental purposes after all (Vogt, 2005), or in MacIntyre’s term, the external goods of the practice. An example of such instrumentality can be seen in statements of this sort: “From the viewpoint of the firm, (...) a workplace [where employees are happy and grow while doing their job] is ideal because it attracts the most able individuals, is likely to keep them longer, and obtains spontaneous effort from their work.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003: loc 1024).

Vogt (2005: 112), who attempts to extend Csikszentmihalyi’s approach, falls in the same trap by justifying the efforts of turning workplaces into settings where individuals can exercise rational activity based on productivity:

“From a purely pragmatic perspective, developing a rich, challenging workplace environment can provide good yields in terms of employee morale. Employees who are engaged in complex tasks that challenge them utilize their talents and develop new skills are far more likely to find their work to be enjoyable and intrinsically worthwhile, which in turn improves their productivity” (2005: 112).

Another problem with Csikszentmihalyi’s positive psychology and its insistence in the experience of ‘flow’ is that it emphasises motivation rather than motive. Postman (1999), in discussing motivation in schooling, explains why this is problematic:

“A reason, as I use the word here, is different from motivation. Within the context of schooling, motivation refers to a temporary psychic event in which curiosity is aroused and attention is focused. I do not mean to disparage it. But it must not be confused with a reason for being in a classroom, for listening to a teacher, for taking an examination, for doing homework, for putting up with school even when you are not motivated.

This kind of reason is somewhat abstract, not always present in one’s consciousness, not at all easy to describe. And yet for all that, without it schooling does not work. For school to make sense, the young, their parents, and their teachers must have a god to serve, or, even better, several gods. If they have none, school is pointless. Nietzsche’s famous aphorism is relevant here: “He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how.” This applies as much to learning as to living”. (Postman, 1999: 2)

Postman (1999) makes a distinction between motivation and having a purpose. The focus of motivation in workplaces, as in schools, confuses the promotion of employee engagement with helping the workforce to derive meaning from their work. Likewise, a motivation approach is inconsistent with a virtue approach. Aristotle recognises that the practice of virtues concerns pleasure as well as pain:

“For moral virtue is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; this is the right education”. (Aristotle, 2009: 26)

Therefore, workplaces do not necessarily become less hostile towards the flourishing of employees by only taking measures towards engagement.

2.2.2. The flourishing of managers

Schwartz’s concern (1982) with workers’ pursuit of purposes designed by others is related to factory workers. Managers might be thought as having quite a different status. Particularly those managers up in the organisational hierarchy can be thought of, contrary to factory workers, as more likely to “[formulate] aims, for deciding on means for achieving their ends, or for adjusting their goals and methods in the light of experience” (Schwartz, 1982: 634). The difference in status of managers to the factory workers for whom Schwartz advocates is reflected also in the desirability of senior management roles. Although most senior managers might not have an MBA, the fact that business schools across the globe hand-pick their students out of gigantic pools of talented candidates, and that these become the highest fee-paying students in graduate education says something about the desirability of senior management roles. There is a strong social imaginary that managers “control vast resources, (...) are rarely accountable to anyone other than their peers [and] the most famous among them acquire heroic status” (Gabriel in Jun, 2002: 25).

MacIntyre is just one of the many who have raised severe objections to any sort of heroism stemming from a managerial role (Beabout, 2013). On the contrary, in MacIntyre's depiction, the manager is rather villain-like (Beabout, 2013). According to MacIntyre, the 'character' of the manager is a moral representative of a culture in which manipulative social relations are the only kind of social relations recognised; that is, a culture driven by emotivism, a critique which is at the core of MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (2013). Emotivism is characterised by the "obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations" (2013: 27). In that framework, others are treated as no more than instruments to one's ends. MacIntyre argues that characters "are the masks worn" by the dominating moral philosophies of a time (2013: 33) and argues that managers, therapists and rich aesthetes are the three characters that embody emotivism. Managers are different to dentists, doctors or teachers in that their "type of social role (...) places a certain kind of moral constraint on the personality of those who inhabit them in a way in which many other social roles do not" (2013: 32). Consequently, MacIntyre posits that the effective manager cannot "engage in moral debate" (2013: 35) and lives a compartmentalised life:

"The bifurcation of the contemporary social world into a realm of the organizational in which ends are taken to be given and are not available for rational scrutiny and a realm of the personal in which judgment and debate about values are central factors, but in which no rational resolution of issues is available finds its internalization, its inner representation in the relation of the individual self to the roles and characters of social life" (MacIntyre, 2013: 40)."

Although managing is associated with "[redirecting] events according to one's design and will," (Bauman, 2008: 195) very much like exercising rational activity, MacIntyre also questions the extent to which a manager may flourish. In MacIntyre's account, the manager's agency is acutely constrained. For MacIntyre, managers are social products and not social producers. Although he disagrees with Goffman and other theorists in that the "self is or becomes nothing more but the social roles which it inherits" and he states that everyone is capable of standing back "from any and every situation in which one is involved" (2013: 36, 37), such distance is unlikely when it comes to the manager. Of all social roles, the manager requires the highest degree of fusion between "social type" and "psychological type." To him, "the manager treats ends as given, as outside his scope; his concern is with technique, with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investment into profits" (MacIntyre, 2013: 35). In other words, the manager's concern is only with the external goods of practices, and limited to the realm of institutional interests. Because, according to MacIntyre, managers do not formulate their own ends, managers are not so different to Schwartz' factory workers in that they also are "paid for blindly pursuing ends that others have chosen" (1982: 635). As Terkel said: "blue collar and white collar call upon the identical phrase: "I'm a robot'" (1974: xii) and therefore managers cannot flourish.

While, as Mangham explains, MacIntyre uses the character of the manager to “[emphasize] and [celebrate] the moral ideas of a particular culture” (Mangham, 1995: 181), there is no reason to believe that his critique is not concerned with actual managers. MacIntyre himself insists that “there is a good deal of evidence that actual managers do embody in their behavior (...) a conception that presupposes the truth of emotivism” (2013: 31).

Many scholars have engaged with MacIntyre’s critique, some from a theoretical and some from an empirical perspective. According to Beadle (2002: 46), “MacIntyre’s view finds support in research confirming the typical manager’s reticence in discussing moral issues.” Roberts (1984), for example, observed that managers saw themselves as morally neutral. Yet Beadle and Könyöt (2006), and Beadle (2013) have found managers to exercise virtues such as phronesis and constancy, and Conroy (2010) in his study of managers at the NHS found strong evidence that managers did engage in moral debate. Most of the inquiries, however, have been from a virtue ethics or business ethics perspective. Among them, some have considered the learning and development of managers, for example by reflecting on the role of apprenticeship (Beadle and Könyot, 2006; Hall, 2011) and coaching (Kampster et al.; Conroy, 2011; Conroy 2009).

Brewer (1997) argues against MacIntyre and notes that “roles are influenced by personal history and idiosyncratic learning processes,” a remark that is relevant to my argument. She also argues that MacIntyre’s view of the manager is flawed because it is inconsistent with MacIntyre’s “position on the nature of predictability in human interaction,” and argues that “management can constitute a practice.” Beadle (2002: 50), however, criticises Brewer’s argument saying that she, as many scholars engaging with MacIntyre, overlooks MacIntyre’s critique of capitalism. Furthermore, Beadle accuses Brewer of disregarding that “an activity can be regarded as a practice in MacIntyre’s terms only if it can be shown that the practice contributes to some notion of the human and social good” and that it “ignores MacIntyre’s understanding (and not only MacIntyre’s) of manipulative and non-manipulative forms of social activity.” In this thesis, manipulative relations will be explicitly considered, and it is precisely the relation between practices and human good that is entailed in MacIntyre’s understanding of practice that I find compelling. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, I will not engage explicitly with central concerns in the work of MacIntyre such as emotivism, liberalism and capitalism, although there is in this thesis an underlying preoccupation about the constraints that institutions can pose to human development.

The reason why a discussion of the opportunities and constraints of the flourishing of managers is relevant to this thesis, is that exploring how managers dealt with demands which challenged what mattered to them consists of an attempt to observe the ways in which managers had a say as to what purposes they pursued with their lives, and to what goals they directed their activity.

2.2.3. Human flourishing and learning and development

Considering the work of MacIntyre in an inquiry about learning can be very enriching. Lawrence (2005) notes that flourishing as an end of human development has lost terrain in the education debate. He suggests as a cause the prevalence of “psychometric and statistical tools to analyze human performance and cognition” along with their associated paradigms of human development that have rendered it difficult to use (2005: 94). His reflection resonates with other thinkers who have manifested their concern with present, less riveting ideas about the ends of learning and the conceptions of human development. Nussbaum (2010), for example, denounces how profit and economic growth have taken over as sole motives of learning in formal education settings. As a result, nations like India and the United States prioritise “the cultivation of the useful and highly applied skills suited to profit-making” (2010: 2), and parents pressure teachers to favour “testable skills that seem likely to produce financial success” (2010: 4).

A critique of education ideals in formal settings is echoed in other realms of learning and development. The instrumental purposes of learning at the workplace have had the attention of a wide portion of scholarly literature as well as in policy and governmental reports since the seventies (e.g. Belitsky, 1978). In many of these studies, the purposes of training initiatives have explicitly been to improve productivity, and although the “quality of working life” is often mentioned (e.g. Belitsky, 1978: 3), the focus is seldom on the flourishing of individuals in organisations. In relation to the training of managers, Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015) contend that Business Schools have dehumanised leadership by reducing it to a set of skills that is easily commercialised and trademarked, but which overlooks the complexity of leading and neglects the role of leaders as “stewards of public interest and role models” (2015: 9). They argue that the turn of pedagogical purposes in Business School might be a response of “economic pressures brought about by globalization and technological innovations.” Drawing from Piff et. Al, Petriglieri and Petriglieri say that educational institutions and workplaces celebrate self-interest in their leaders and “affirm independent self-images” (ibid.). Unsurprisingly, learning and development initiatives at workplaces are also typically geared towards the profit of businesses themselves, rather than towards the flourishing of their employees.

Whether or not the idea of human flourishing lost its strength at some point, it has certainly gained new life in recent literature about ethics, education, human development and business. Lawrence (2005) says that floral imagery has a hard time gaining acceptance across a multitude of disciplines, but Cherkowski and Walker (2014: 200) disagree. They argue instead that “human flourishing, once the purview of philosophy, [has] crossed disciplinary lines” and drawn interest from “social sciences such as psychology and organizational studies” who have built from

Aristotelian or post-Aristotelian ideas to offer an account of what flourishing is and how it may be achieved.

In Business Schools, considerations of virtue have also gained attention. Flyvbjerg (in Clegg, Hardy and Lawrence, 2006b) insists on the relevance of phronesis in organisations and organisational research. McKenna and Biloslavo (2011) exhort Business Schools to consider human flourishing, along with the cultivation of virtues, as the foundation for new curriculums in pro of environmental sustainability, and Rego, Pinha e Cunha and Clegg (2012) insist that leaders should strive to live a life of virtue.

2.3. Contribution to the literature

This research combines a sociocultural perspective of learning with literature stemming from MacIntyre's thought to explore how managers respond to institutional demands at work. The thesis borrows from virtue theorists to add to an understanding of learning and development that takes flourishing into account. In this sense, MacIntyre's remarks on the manager are taken as provocations, and his critique of capitalism and emotivism remains out of the scope of the inquiry. My contribution nevertheless remains pertinent to those engaged in the virtue and business ethics debates. As Morrell and Brammer (2014) note:

“Notwithstanding the progress that has been made in recent years, there remains scope to contribute through empirical work, especially research using data suited to detailed analysis of micropractices within institutional settings, or drawing on longitudinal or historical data sources. This may prove illuminating because virtues are tied to contexts, and because virtue theorists are partly interested in the development over time, of character. Here, we suggest empirical research can play a role in helping to understand important features of a context and associated practices.³”

Therefore, to virtue ethics debates, I can offer new empirical evidence pertaining the interactions of four managers with the institutional impositions they encountered, and I hope that the evidence presented can be used by virtue ethics scholars' for their own analyses. My account also puts forth a developmental perspective that strongly criticises any static understanding of who a manager is and that emphasises how managers are shaped and how they learn in their figured worlds. Drawing from Holland et al. (1998) this account highlights that managers bring to the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail sediments of their trajectories and individual histories as well as commitments and identifications (Taylor, 1989), and in so doing might distance themselves from their roles as managers. My case is that a proper appraisal of the flourishing of managers cannot disregard an exhaustive exploration of human learning and development, and that an understanding of human learning and development should not leave human

³ Morrell and Brammer's article does not contain page numbers.

flourishing out of sight. MacIntyre (1999) has acknowledged the relationship between learning, development and flourishing both in *After Virtue* and in *Dependent Rational Animals*. He has said that “without learning (...) human beings cannot flourish” (1999: 67) and that virtues have to be learned (2013). Taking a sociocultural perspective in an empirical inquiry of managers’ learning and development very much contributes to the understanding of how this may happen. An empirical outlook on the development of managers that considers both sociocultural and MacIntyrean enriches the sociocultural understanding of learning and development and advances the understanding of how virtues are acquired and how flourishing happens.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Four Senior Managers of the Royal Mail were selected as case studies. Data was collected from July 2012 to February 2014. This period comprised a pre-privatisation and a post-privatisation stage. In this chapter I describe the methodological approach of the study. I explain why the Royal Mail was a relevant research site to pursue the research questions, how the case studies were selected, and the data collection and analyses processes. Issues of generalisability, validity, researcher positionality and ethics are also considered.

3. METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study is on managers, what matters to them and their attempts at reconciling what matters with the demands that they find at work. The study aims at acquiring a thorough understanding of how managers navigate new demands and expectations that may be at odds with their commitments and identifications. In this chapter I will explain the methodological approach chosen to achieve these understandings. I will first discuss the three methodological pillars: case study, trajectories and an ethnographic mindset. Later I will present the research context of the study, I will explain how I gained access to research participants and to the Royal Mail and discuss criteria for participant selection. To follow I will describe the research sites in which my fieldwork took place and explain how I gathered the data. Next I will give some detail on how I analysed the data. I will also discuss the validity, ethical considerations and my role as a researcher.

3.1. Three methodological pillars

To observe the purposes and values that the manager held and the subtle ways in which these purposes and values could be misaligned with the demands of the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail, it was necessary to find an approach that would allow me to get as close as possible to the managers and their work. Three methodological pillars allowed this: a multi-case study approach, considering managers' trajectories, and keeping an ethnographic eye.

3.1.1. Pillar 1- Multiple Case-Study

Case studies allow an emphasis on “episodes of nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, the wholeness of the individual” (Stake, 1995:xii). Case study research acknowledges the complexity and uniqueness of each case, and values the in-depth understanding that can be achieved from looking at the particular (Stake, 1995).

I studied four managers, and so four cases. Doing a set of cases, rather than a single case, allowed me to find commonalities and differences across the four managers and their situations without compromising the depth of understanding of the single case.

3.1.2. Pillar 2- Considering Managers' Trajectories

To understand the collection of cases, Stake argues, it is necessary to study each individual case in-depth and “to learn about their self-centering, complexity, and situational uniqueness” (2006: 6). Focusing my attention on individual trajectories

allowed me to observe the learning and development that unfolded over time as the senior managers in the study faced the demands which challenged what mattered to them. Edwards draws from Kozulin to explain “[...] that the self needs to be seen as a construction that occurs over time and is not simply a phenomenon which is a mere product of its immediate culture.” (2010: 147)

The time dimension was important, and involved asking the managers about their past and about the paths that had taken them to their current positions. Inquiring about the past was a first step to establish what managers cared about and their self-understandings.

The understanding of participants’ trajectories was not limited to the exercise of looking back and reconstructing their journeys towards the position that they held at the time of the study. Keeping trajectories at the core also meant observing the unfolding of a dialectic between what mattered to the managers and what mattered in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. Therefore, a longitudinal design was called for. The data gathering section will explain in detail how this was achieved.

3.1.3. Pillar 3 - An ethnographic mindset

Ethnographic methods offer valuable tools for the case study approach as the “qualitative understanding of cases requires experiencing the activity of the case as it occurs in its contexts and in its particular situation.” (Stake, 2006: 3). The key features of ethnographic fieldwork in business organisations are that the researcher experiences the setting of the phenomenon studied through participant and non-participant observation, conversational interviewing and the reading and analysis of documents (Czarniawska, 2007; van der Waal in Ybema, Yanow, Wels and Kamsteg, 2009). While I engaged with all the ethnographic methods just mentioned, the proportion of time spent in the field was not the same with all four participants. Czarniawska (2007) explains that spending less time in the field, and an “in and out” basis for ethnographic work has become increasingly common and necessary given the conditions of organisational work. However, she observes that many traditional ethnographers are highly critical of the approach calling it a ‘jet plane ethnography’. Also, the term ethnography is problematic as it may mean different things to different researchers:

“[...] ethnography means, literally, a description of people’s way of life. However the term has been used both to describe any result of a field study and to denote the knowledge about the ways of life (...). This broad definition is misleading for many reasons. A field study does not necessarily have an ethnography as its end product: it could result in a taxonomy or a theory of a specific phenomenon. Furthermore, studies of work or professions are not studies of life, but merely of a part of it.” (Czarniawska, 2007: 17).

Therefore, I characterise my research as a case study and not as an ethnography. Although I do not claim the ethnography status for this study, there was an ethnographic component in it. I spent more than fifty days with managers at the Royal Mail, observing them in Executive Leadership classes, I participated in conference calls, large meetings, small meetings, I shared commutes, drank coffee with the managers and chit-chatted. In the process, I visited at least eight different sites and interacted with a few dozens employees and perhaps more. “Getting out into the organizational field, being there, and writing about what one observes and experiences—in short doing organizational ethnography— presents its own methodological, analytical, (re)presentational, ethical and social challenges for researchers” (Ybema et al., 2009: 2). As a fieldworker, I found the organisational ethnography literature to be most helpful to shape my interactions and observations in the field and to face the challenges to which Ybema et al. make reference. Such tools helped me to reflect upon what I was doing and seeing, and to later guide my writing. I deeply empathised with the sorts of challenges discussed by ethnographers (e.g. Czarniawska, 2007; Madden, 2010; Van Maanen, 2011; Wolcott, 2009 and others) around access, positionality, establishing rapport with participants, dealing with the balance between an etic and emic perspective, keeping fieldnotes and writing the account of what was seen.

3.2. Research context

Flyvbjerg (2006a), advises that case study research can benefit from selecting special cases, and Stake (1995:16) argues that “people and systems become more transparent during their struggles.” Selecting managers from the Royal Mail setting was clearly aligned to both Flyvbjerg’s and Stake’s remarks. The Royal Mail was quite a special setting and the managers at the Royal Mail were facing different struggles in relation to modernisation and privatisation. The transformation that the Royal Mail was going through was described by its chairman as “akin to changing a car engine at 70 mph on the motorway without stopping.” (Chairman's Statement 2012, Royal Mail Group, n.d.: 7).

An independent review by Hooper, Hutton, & Smith (2008) and an update of this review commissioned by the UK coalition government elected in 2010 (Hooper, 2010) suggested that the very existence of the Royal Mail was under serious threat. According to Hooper, Hutton, & Smith (2008), the company needed to respond quickly to new market conditions and modernise in order to survive. Speaking of the 2008 Hopper report, Campbell-Smith says:

“Hooper’s summary (...) was accorded almost universal consent. All could agree, including the CWU’s⁴ leaders that the postal marketplace might soon be altered out of all recognition; that Royal Mail had to speed up its modernization or risk

⁴ CWU stands for Communication Workers Union.

finding itself no longer equal to the demands of the [universal service obligation⁵] (...). None could deny the pension deficit was now a matter of serious alarm. The case for a break with the past in every score could not have been starker.” (2011: 695)

In 2012, when I began this research, the senior leadership of the company had responded to Hooper’s recommendations (2010) and was determinedly trying to make the organisation more attractive for potential investors. Also, the ways in which work was done were shifting dramatically with the objective to respond to a decline in the letters market, a growth of the parcels market, and the new market conditions generally.

According to the many managers with whom I had informal conversations and formal interviews, the internal newspaper of the organisation and the media, change was being particularly difficult for members of the organisation. This was unsurprising as an institution that was seen as “the social glue” of British society (Hooper, 2010) had to acquire a more commercial focus and, after over 400 years of existence, was in the process of becoming private. In this somewhat extreme change scenario, senior managers were facing important challenges in meeting the demands of change. The following quote from a senior manager that I interviewed, although quite long, is very telling about the sort of changes that the Royal Mail was facing. He was talking about a recent rise in the price of stamps:

“Some [employees] felt awkward because they were worried that we are a public service [and] they knew that perhaps some of their friends and family would start saying: “well I think Royal Mail’s getting too expensive, and I don’t think that’s right, you know you’re a government service.” [Some employees] worry about [everyone]... they talk about ‘Granny Smith’... this is a character that people keep in their mind. Granny Smith loves Royal Mail, (...) she (...) likes talking to the postman, postwoman... sees them every day, [they] check on her, make sure she’s okay (...). She only has a pension, so she can afford a few stamps, likes to keep in touch with her friends and relatives, and she buys lots of Christmas cards and sends them. So that’s kind of (...) an? image of our costumer. Now, this is an issue, because in fact, we’ve got good data to say Granny Smith (...) started shopping on ebay and (...) Amazon, (...) and [she] isn’t that worried about who is delivering those goods to her. (...). And also, Granny Smith doesn’t spend very much money. So commercially, you know, we want to make sure those people are looked after, but commercially, if we relied on Granny Smith, Royal Mail wouldn’t last very long at all. Our money comes from business, our money comes from people like you and I ordering stuff from Amazon, that’s what will really sustain us and take us forward, so we need a different attitude about what our costumer is.”

⁵ The Universal Service Obligation (USO) means that the Royal Mail has, by law, to collect and deliver mail six days a week to all homes and business addresses across the UK. and “prices within the UK are independent of distance. [The USO] is an essential part of the country’s social and economic fabric. It, for example, connects those unable or unwilling to use electronic communications and is critical to connecting the rural and urban parts of the UK.” (Hooper, 2010: 11)

The first line of this quote is a good clue to assume that there were internal goods associated with the public service character of the Royal Mail. It also shows how whatever those internal goods were, this manager did not necessarily understand them and was prioritising the external goods associated to a more commercial character. The quote also illustrates the kinds of changes the organisation was undergoing and the tensions involved in such changes.

3.3. Access

Previous to this study I had no links with the Royal Mail. Van der Waal (2009: 29) notes that in the field “[g]etting in for the first time may be the most daunting step, but in multi-sited fieldwork it may be necessary to renegotiate access several times.” Access was slowly negotiated and re-negotiated with study participants as the study unfolded.

Studying managers from the Royal Mail was an “unusual research access” opportunity (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007: 27). The Saïd Business School at Oxford delivered an Executive Leadership programme tailored for the Royal Mail. In early 2012, Dr. Marc Thompson from the Business School, who was working on the design of the programme invited me to meet with some senior managers of the organisation and discuss access. With the authorisation of senior executives in the organisation I was able to attend the training programme. It consisted of four modules, each lasting four consecutive days, in which four cohorts of fifteen to twenty managers convened at Oxford. The modules took place every six weeks approximately.

The programme was launched in June 2012, and approximately one hundred managers took part. Participants were selected from the Royal Mail’s 300 top managers. Attending the modules was an important familiarisation stage in the research study. During six months I sat in approximately twenty sessions of a full day each and met participants from the four cohorts. By taking part in classroom sessions and group discussions I got better acquainted with the Royal Mail and the kinds of challenges that its managers were facing. This first approximation to the research helped me refine my research questions. The programme was also the opportunity to meet Senior Managers, many of whom I interviewed at a later stage.

3.4. Participants

The case study and the ethnography literature coincide in that cases have to be chosen carefully to maximise what can be learnt (Stake, 1995; Ybema, Yanow, Wels and Kamsteg, 2009). Stake offers three main considerations for the selection of cases: that the cases are relevant to the phenomenon being studied, that they provide diversity across contexts and that they provide good opportunities to

understand complexity and contexts. To address these recommendations and to make the research feasible, I defined the following four selection criteria:

Relevance to the phenomenon studied: The focus of the study is on how senior managers confronted demands that challenged what mattered to them and how they navigate contradiction and misalignment. Therefore, I ensured that the senior managers selected were receivers and designers of change initiatives. With this purpose I selected participants from the top four tiers of leadership in the organisation, where the first tier consisted of members of the executive committee.

Diversity: To “maximize what we can learn” (Stake, 1995: 4) I tried to provide diversity by making sure there was a balance of gender, with two of the cases being women and two men. Gender was an important consideration because at the time of the study a new CEO had recently joined the business. Moya Greene was the first female CEO in Royal Mail’s history. Under her leadership, there was an important emphasis in promoting female leadership across the organisation. I wanted my participant selection to reflect this. I also made sure that I had a variety of roles and different longevity within the organisation.

Complexity: Variety was important as long as it did not undermine the depth of understanding that I could reach, considering that I was the only researcher in the field. Understanding participants’ activities and the figured worlds that they were navigating was very important to answer the research questions. But I soon noticed that each organisational function was quite complex and it took me time to understand what work was about in different units. Therefore, I avoided to have four cases in four different functions. Two participants, Eric and Linda were from Human Resources and worked at the same site, yet in very different units. The other two participants, Margaret and Julian worked at the same Mail Centre and Julian was Margaret’s boss.

Feasibility: For budget and time limitations all participants had to be no further than two hours by train from my own location. Also, I selected senior managers who were willing to commit to the study and to participate in the data collection processes required, which I will describe later. In addition, rapport was important. In its absence, managers would not have felt comfortable sharing the experiences that I was hoping to learn about. While this might introduce some bias, it would have been hard to complete all the stages of data collection without willingness to share during conversations and interviews.

TABLE 3-1 PARTICIPANT SELECTION

CASE STUDY PARTICIPANTS	REASON FOR SELECTION
<p>Eric Human resources 3.5 years at RMG at the time of interview 1</p>	Had recently taken on more responsibility. Implemented and designed change agendas.
<p>Linda Industrial relations 1 year at RMG at the time of interview 1</p>	Was relatively new in the organisation. Had important responsibility in facilitating organisational change through her work with the unions.
<p>Julian Mail Centre 34 years at RMG at the time of interview 1</p>	Worked at the core business of the organisation: the delivery of Mail. Had more than one thousand employees working at his Mail Centre. Had a long trajectory in the organisation.
<p>Margaret Mail Centre 11 years at RMG at the time of interview 1</p>	Her role had changed and she was adapting to new responsibilities. Was responsible for characteristic transformation agendas in her unit.

I initially intended to have four to eight managers in the study. The number seemed reasonable so as to acquire an in-depth understanding of each case and yet have enough cases to observe differences and similarities across them. That number was also in line with Stake’s (2006) argument that the benefits of multiple case study research are undermined if fewer than four cases and more than ten cases are selected. To select them, I considered the advice of van der Waal, who suggests that the first stage of ethnographic research, “that of reconnaissance — should not be rushed” to identify the settings in which data should be collected and that “spending time in alternative research settings, getting to know local role-players informally and establishing contact with gate-keepers is absolutely essential” (2009: 18). In following this advice, in addition to attending the Executive Leadership Programme at Said, I also approached more than 25 senior managers and interviewed a total of nineteen of them at least in one occasion. From those nineteen, I interviewed six at least on three different occasions. Finally, from those six, I only shadowed four. This thesis is based on the four that I shadowed and interviewed. Table 3-1 provides some details about each one of them.

Linda and Eric were ‘new blood’. Linda had worked for the organisation for one year, and Eric for three. Both were Human Resources managers. Linda was part of the Industrial Relations team and her work consisted largely of advancing the

business agenda while striving to maintain a healthy relationship with the frontline staff union and the managers union. Eric designed, supported and coordinated training initiatives across the business.

Margaret and Julian were old-timers at the Royal Mail. Julian had spent over thirty years in different positions within the organisation and Margaret ten. Margaret and Julian both worked in operations, which was generally referred to as 'the core business'. Julian directed the Mail Centre and Margaret was the Director of Quality. They were two of six managers directing an operation with more than one thousand staff. Julian was Margaret's boss.

Julian joined the Royal Mail to work as a postman and had worked in different functions and locations. Margaret began working as a factory line employer in a different company. Her entire time at the Royal Mail had been spent at the same location. Linda left school at 16 and had worked in different jobs mainly in Human Resources. Neither Julian, Margaret nor Linda had a university degree at the time they began their work career. Eric did have a degree and had been working in Human Resources for a number of years.

3.5. Research site

The business of mail delivery requires different sites of very different character and function. There are, for example, delivery offices, mail centres and administrative offices. Data collection and observations throughout all the research phases took place in a number of different locations. I visited one delivery office. The delivery offices receive local mail that is allocated among postmen and postwomen to be taken to its final destination. They are significantly smaller than mail centres. I visited two mail centres which were large industrial-like sites where the mail is taken after collection and where the sorting process begins. Finally, I visited three buildings of administration offices. I will now describe the four sites where most of the fieldwork took place.

3.5.1. Mail Centre

Julian and Margaret worked here. It was a site located on the outskirts of a large city in the UK. Some of the interviews happened in a medium sized drywall meeting room. The lights were of a white neon colour, the furniture consisted of a conference desk and about five seats. The large intercom sitting on the table was hard to ignore. It was also a characteristic object of most Royal Mail sites. The space was well maintained and air conditioned. Yet, a view of a large green field, a cup of coffee and an ergonomic office chair were not enough to make the space feel cozy. The room was exactly what I expected from one in a corporate environment.

Plain, lacking identity and fairly unwelcoming. This room was to me what Marc Augé (2008) would call a 'non-place'.

To get to the Mail Centre I had taken a train and a long bus ride. After getting off the bus and walking a few metres, I found a large gate. I rang a bell and the gate opened. I could not see one soul, yet I knew that hundreds of people were working there. I walked down a long parking lot and finally found the automatic glass door to a building where a man sitting behind a desk and wearing a uniform welcomed me in a reception. He announced me and asked me to sit in a waiting room while someone came to find me. While waiting, I filled in the usual form for visitors that was the same in all sites I had visited, and was all too familiar to me already. I examined a scale 3D model of the Mail Centre which was right in the middle of the waiting room.

Finally, a man dressed in a suit, a vest and a helmet came to pick me up. He gave me a pair of heavy duty boots, which turned out to be terribly uncomfortable and which reminded me for a couple of hours that this was not my place. I also had to wear a fluorescent vest. Once I was ready I was guided through a tour around the 6,000 m² site. I saw postmen and post-women of the morning shift, operating and walking around technological, unimaginable and carefully crafted pieces of equipment which aid to sort the thousands and thousands of letters and parcels handled every day. I was struck by the amount of posters that reminded workers of important aspects at work. Handmade drawings were combined with computer software printouts to layout important messages, reminders of lessons and illustrations of processes. While the drawings and diagrams on the visuals were fairly clear, they looked quite school-like, like the kind that remind students to recycle or to abstain from running in the corridors.

Margaret and Julian's offices, however, were in a different part of the building. To reach their offices you had to go up a couple of storeys, walk through labyrinthine corridors and cross many fireproof doors. Most of these doors required a magnetic key to open, so security was tight. The office space was open and shared by at least forty workers, and perhaps more. Julian was the head of the Mail Centre, so he had a large desk by the corner and next to the window. There were no walls and no division panels at all.

The more than one thousand employees who worked at this Mail Centre, frontline workers and managers alike, shared a large canteen. Lunch was served every day at a convenient price for employees.

3.5.2. Administration Offices

Shadowing Julian, Eric and Linda took me to three different administration buildings in London: Victoria Embankment, Rathbone Place and Mount Pleasant.

Victoria Embankment

The most frequent place for interviews and shadowing of participants was the third floor of 100 Victoria Embankment, a large historical building by the Thames, near Blackfriars station. The building is also a site for Unilever and a few other companies. While the facade is neoclassical, the building was completely refurbished and the inside made a modern, rounded and airy building. With an open atrium, as soon as you stepped in, you heard the ding-dong of four semi-transparent elevators that you could watch going up and down the seven stores. The ground floor, a common area for the whole building, had a large hall, a reception and a cafe.

Every time I visited, I announced myself at a general reception at the lobby. Once admitted, I was provided with an electronic key that opened the gates to the elevators. From the lobby, as you looked up, glazed walls made it possible to see the different character of each company's offices. The Royal Mail was located on the third floor and was easily identifiable for the amount of red and white on its walls and panels. The design of its offices was modern. Walls were decorated with large format frames showcasing carefully chosen mail stamp designs. A portrait of Queen Elizabeth hung in the main waiting area.

The receptionists knew me by name, greeted me and said: 'who are you visiting today?' If it was a manager whom I had not interviewed before, I was asked to wait for someone to pick me up. I liked the ritual, as it gave me a few minutes to sit down, get ready for my meeting and take a copy of the latest issue of the Courier, the internal newspaper of the organisation. Typically, a personal assistant came to greet me and show me the way to the meeting place. Many personal assistants soon became my allies, helping me find a space in the busy agendas of participants. As my presence became more familiar to the participant, I would just walk straight in, knowing exactly where to go and what to do. The tea selection, the place where the mugs were stored, the spots where I could find some peace quiet, and the different networks to access Wi-Fi became all too familiar to me.

Despite the many hours spent in this building, I never got to see the whole office space. There was one wing in particular, to which I was seldom invited. The CEO's office was on that side of the building. Instead, I typically walked in the opposite direction, along a large corridor. On my right there a glass wall, from which you could see the atrium of the building. There was a balcony, overlooking the lobby, where some people ate their lunch or had a chat. The balcony was loud, filled with the hustle and bustle of a well visited building entrance. On the other side of the corridor there were lines of meeting rooms with transparent walls. They could be so tiny as to accommodate one person (typically for someone who had a conference call and needed the quiet) and so large as to accommodate twelve. Most meeting rooms had a flat screen and a large black intercom. Conference calls were a significant part of the day-to-day at every Royal Mail site I ever visited.

With the well-established trend of open offices in the corporate world, I was only a little surprised to find that almost no senior manager at Head Office, even if quite up in the hierarchy, had an office with a door. A few did; medium size cubicles of transparent glass walls, usually with a desk and a rounded table. A very few privileged managers, all of them members of the executive committee as far as I could tell, had a window with a view of the Thames. Right outside their doors their personal assistants sat in individual desks like small islands. The rest of the senior managers and their personal assistants sat side by side, in lines and lines of long desks with multiple workstation. There was no evident sign of hierarchy. Team members sat close to each other. You could always spot some empty spaces here and there, and those I was welcome to use on shadowing days. The personalisation of the space by employees was kept to a bare minimum. Many of the work stations were available to a floating population of employees who moved across different sites in London and throughout the regions. A manager coming all the way from Scotland would use any available space, hopefully close to her team, as her office for the day.

Rathbone Place

I visited Rathbone place a few times. In the midst of fieldwork, the building was shut down and all of the staff were relocated to Mount Pleasant, which I will describe in the next section. Closing this building was part of the modernisation programme. Rathbone made part of the “greater London rationalisation programme” which was “expected to achieve annual savings of £30 million”⁶. The building was of exclusive use to the Royal Mail, and unlike Victoria Embankment, had a considerably smaller reception. The process to register was slower. As in Victoria Embankment the offices were an open space, and the prevalent colour was white. Although furniture and decoration were modern the place felt somewhat tatty. It was never as tidy and fresh as Victoria Embankment. Art prints of stamps also decorated the walls, but for some reason I did not find them as stylish. The transition to another building was slow, so many areas of the office floor had empty tables.

Mount Pleasant

A historic Royal Mail site, Mount Pleasant opened in 1889, and was mainly a “vast sorting office in Islington (...) universally known as just “The Mount”” (Campbell-Smith, 2011: 202). During fieldwork Mount Pleasant was in the middle of a large modernisation process. The Rathbone administrative offices were relocated there. Mount Pleasant was expected to work as a main administrative site, and a Mail Centre. I first visited the site when the new building had just opened. It was not yet complete, so as you walked through the building you encountered modern, brand

⁶ Royal Mail News and Press releases, 21st March, 2011, retrieved 21st of April, 2015 from <http://www.royalmailgroup.com/cy/royal-mail's-rationalisation-and-modernisation-continues>

new offices as well as corridors cordoned with yellow and black barrier tape. The furniture and the interior design were impressive. In contrast to Victoria Embankment, where red and grey were the dominant colours around you, Mount Pleasant had a wider colour palette. Office space was again open, and some couches with tables suggested that the space was promoting some form of collaborative work.

3.6. Data Gathering

Data gathering consisted of three main stages described in Table 3-2. Table 3-3 specifies the data collected for each participant, and a timeline of collection can be found in Annex 5. As I mentioned earlier, in the process of selecting the four case study participants I interviewed a total of 19 managers and recorded 39 interviews. Most interviews took place at the interviewee's workplace, two were in a cafe, one was in a car, two were on the phone and two were at the Business School. Besides formal interviews, I had many conversations with managers of which I kept notes. I now proceed to describe and explain each one of the data collection methods that I used with Linda, Eric, Julian and Margaret.

3.6.1. Work Shadowing

Practice theory literature (Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, 2001) suggests that a suitable path to understand the context and the situation of research participants consists of observing their practice. Shadowing refers to a data collection technique widely used in organisational ethnography where the researcher follows and observes the research subject, in this case senior managers over a period of time (Czarniawska, 2007). Shadowing the managers allowed me to observe actions, which were initial clues to exploring those intentions, the moral beliefs on which they were grounded and the larger schemes of beliefs from which the intentions derived.

Although my initial plan was to shadow all participants during two days prior to an interview, access had to be renegotiated with each one of the managers. Therefore the shadowing schedule varied widely across participants. I was able to shadow the four managers in the study at least one time. Julian and Margaret I shadowed one day each. Eric and Linda I shadowed 10 and 15 days respectively.

The kind of access that each participant gave me was somewhat different. Eric invited me to the workplace mainly on the days in which he knew he was going to be at the office. Therefore shadowing him often meant being in the same location and accompanying him to the meetings in his schedule. I was not invited to some of the meetings, for example performance appraisals with his team members, some meetings with his boss or when he was interviewing a candidate to fill in a position.

TABLE 3-2 DATA GATHERING STAGES

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Activities	Observed modules of Executive Leadership Programme at Business School. Had informal conversations with senior managers. Visited a Mail Centre	Interviewed senior managers about their trajectories at the Royal Mail.	Shadowed and interviewed selected case study participants.
Purpose	To become familiarised with RM. To define research questions.	Understand the work of the managers, learn about their demands in dealing with change and recruit case study participants.	In depth data collection of four managers selected. Learn about their trajectories, their demands and their strategies.
Dates	June 2012-March 2013	October 2012-October 2013	February 2013-February 2014

TABLE 3-3 DATA COLLECTED FOR EACH PARTICIPANT

	Interviews	Shadowing
Eric	Seven interviews between October 2012 and July 2013	10 across five months
Linda	Four interviews between April and August 2013	15 days across 4 months
Julian	Five interviews between August 2013 and February 2014	One day
Margaret	Three interviews between October 2013 and February 2013	One day

Many of the work he did while I shadowed was on his computer. Not being able to see what he was doing, I asked him about it.

Of all the managers, Linda gave me the most open and unrestricted access. She was happy to be shadowed even if she was not going to be in her office and visiting other locations. Thus, I spent time commuting with her in the city and in other regions as long as my travel budget allowed. Her openness was an opportunity to spend a number of consecutive days with her.

Julian and Margaret, whom I shadowed only once, were not unwilling to give me access. However, their hectic agendas coincided with working in a difficult to reach location.

Overall, my observations were valuable, helping me to understand the nature of their work, the context and the challenges that they were dealing with. Shadowing was also important to get a feel of their relationships and political map in the organisation. The lack of equilibrium of data collected was problematic. As a novice researcher, prior to fieldwork I made a structured plan of interviews and shadowing intending to spend approximately the same amount of time with each participant, within the same timeframe. However, access varied across cases as I very much depended on the managers' agendas and this made it impossible to standardise the data collected.

3.6.2. Interviews

Just observing did not suffice to understand what mattered to the managers. MacIntyre argues that actions "can embody intentions whose import derives from some large-scale project of the individual, a project itself intelligible only against the background of some equally large or even larger scheme of beliefs" (2013: 35). Hedegaard suggests that to make these motives intelligible, the researcher can observe the actions and later ask the participants about the 'whys' of the actions that they took (Hedegaard, personal communication). The interviews therefore had that purpose.

Initial Trajectory Interview

The first interview with the four participants was about their professional trajectories. A first understanding of who the manager was was imperative to understand managers' commitments and identifications. Also, I said that both the sociocultural perspective and MacIntyre insist on the importance of historicity and that intentions behind actions are only intelligible in the light of the history of the individual. Therefore, I tried to build a portrait of who the managers were and what mattered to them that also drew from their own histories. The interview dynamic was quite straightforward, simply asking participants about themselves. The

conversation usually started with a question such as: ‘can you tell me a little bit about you?’ and ‘how did it happen that you got to this position?’ With only that question and by paying close attention to their accounts, the participants shared significantly. In my study, as in Wilcox (2012: 89), “the prolonged time spent with the managers meant that (...) a degree of trust could be developed, and to some extent the various parties could become less guarded in their interactions.” Therefore, as the data collection unfolded, stories about their trajectories were complemented in later interviews, as we got to know each other better.

Later Interviews at the Workplace

I earlier mentioned that it was important to ask the managers about the motives and intentions behind the actions that they took. Thus the purpose of the semi-structured workplace interviews was to identify the ‘whys’ of their actions and to probe and clarify issues that arose while shadowing.

With this purpose, an interview was typically scheduled right after or in the midst of a shadowing period. The first interview question was based on an issue that I wanted to discuss further. From then I let the conversation flow probing on the issues that caught my attention. My focus when choosing probing questions was on understanding the misalignment situations that the participants were navigating, what mattered to the participants, and the motives behind their actions.

In some interviews, an initial question was not even necessary. After spending days with the managers, they already knew that I was interested in debriefing what I was observing. Therefore, in the midst of a coffee break or during a commute, they would take the initiative themselves and explained the meeting that they had just had or used the opportunity to discuss whatever was in their minds at the time. In such cases, I tried as often as possible to interrupt briefly and ask for permission to voice-record them. In some conversations, recording did not seem appropriate or opportune. Thus, I used the first opportunity at hand to make my own voice notes or take notes in my research journal.

Eliciting stories about work

In some interviews, and particularly in those which did not happen right after a shadowing period, I laid out four plastic cards in front of the managers at the beginning of the encounter. Each card had a word written on it: headache, puzzle, dilemma or victory (Fig. 3.1). I then invited each manager to choose one of the cards, and tell me about a headache, puzzle, dilemma or a victory that they had recently had.

The purpose with such approach was to prompt the narration of concrete work situations that would reveal what the managers were working on and what was important to them. This strategy was the response to a methodological challenge

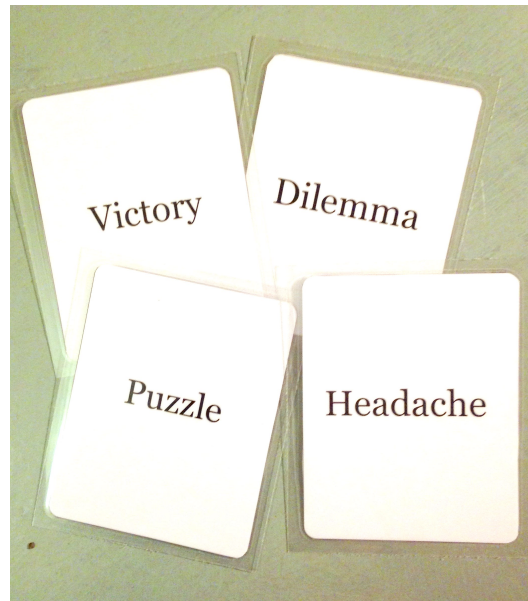


FIG. 3.1

that I faced. As I explained earlier, the shadowing time was sometimes limited. Also, shadowing was intermittent. Therefore, there was a gap in my understanding about the managers' work. The method was fruitful in prompting participants to narrate concrete work situations and in revealing what their purposes and goals were in such scenarios.

The method was inspired in other researchers' insistence on the value of stories for qualitative research (e.g. Boje, 2001; Conroy, 2010; Cunliffe, 2002; Czarniawska, 1997; 1998; 2010) and particularly in how Conroy (2010) categorised the stories from managers at the NHS. My method was different to his, in that I gave 'genres' to stories at the time of data collection, and not data analysis. My choice of words, i.e. headache, dilemma, puzzle and victory, was rooted on the data that I had collected earlier. I had noticed that managers' stories of work were of different sorts: puzzling or interesting problems (puzzles), moments of success and satisfaction for something they had accomplished (victories), situations of distress which were emotionally taxing (headache) or situations in which determining what was the 'right' thing to do was not straightforward (dilemmas).

Headaches: By asking managers about a headache that they were having I expected issues at work which were stressful or which troubled the manager in some way. Headache stories were opportunities to learn about the barriers that managers were having in advancing their agendas. In narrating a challenge, managers also revealed what mattered to them. The data offered hints about areas and skills that the managers needed to develop further and about misalignment of values that they were encountering.

Puzzles: They were different to headaches in that the latter implied some sort of unrest on behalf of the manager. Managers in the study often enjoyed challenges. One manager described this as 'getting a thrill out of it'. Puzzles prompted challenging problems, but not ones which elicited negative emotions. Puzzles were helpful to reveal managers' strategies to move their agendas forward, as well as gaps of skills that they had identified in themselves, their teams or the organisation.

Victories: Asking managers about them gave managers an opportunity to showcase their skills and talents. Victories also elicited stories about learning that had happened, and about the successful handling problematic notions of what mattered (Edwards and Daniels, 2012). Usually, victories had previously gone through a headache or puzzle stage that managers needed to narrate, to explain why they were such an achievement. At this celebratory state, victories spoke of barriers or challenges which the managers had tackled successfully.

Dilemmas: Before I introduced this interview protocol, I had observed managers facing dilemmas and I had also listened to some stories about dilemmas during our conversations. I therefore expected that the dilemma cards would prompt conversations about managers' ideas of 'right' and 'wrong' and how these might be challenged in their figured world. Interestingly, this was the least popular of the four cards and no participant ever chose it. This in itself reminds of MacIntyre (2013) and Roberts (1984) who argue that managers might think of themselves as morally neutral.

3.6.3. The Courier and Other Documents

The Courier is an internal newspaper that is issued every month and is sent to all employees. As I described in section 3.4.2, The Courier was always available in the waiting areas of some of the buildings that I visited. On many occasions when senior managers saw me carrying the Courier, they gave me a surprised look and asked me why I read it. Some suggested that not many people at the office read it. I was told that, although all staff received it by post, it was more addressed to frontline staff.

The Courier was a valuable artefact for understanding the organisation, as it contained carefully-crafted pieces of information addressed to employees, explaining in very clear terms the plans of the business. In what were some very active months, prior to and after privatisation, reading The Courier helped me to see how the organisation was presenting itself to its employees. It is reasonable to imagine that before this piece reached my hands, there had been careful discussions about what material to include, what to leave out and "what tune the CEO's letter should strike" (Czarniawska, 2007: 9). It was an account of the organisation, written by the organisation itself, which therefore made it rich in understandings of what was considered good in the central administration.

3.7. Making Sense of the Data

The process of analysis was organic and emerged as I engaged with the data from the very beginning of the study. I agree with Stake in that “there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. (...) There may be a period in which we concentrate more on analysis than anything else (...) but (...) analysis should not be seen as separate from everlasting efforts to make sense of things” (1995:71-72).

Stake (1995) also emphasises that researchers should make every effort to make the distinction between observed and inferred behaviour as data is gathered and analysed. Wolcott (2009) and Stake (1995) agree that analysis and interpretation are different processes. Following Stake and Wolcott’s recommendations and with the purpose of making interpretation and description as explicit as possible, I maintained a reflective stance during all data collection and analysis. This involved, for example, including margin notes throughout my fieldnotes to flag interpretations and hypotheses. Also, I tried to phrase interpretations in such a way that their interpretative nature was explicit, e.g. “it seemed to me that [participant] was in a bad mood and having a stressful day”.

Analysis implies systematic, standardised and specified procedures (Wolcott, 2009; Stake, 1995). To make it systematic and standardised, I kept a detailed record of the process and relevant steps were repeated throughout the data collection process. In addition, procedures were grounded in the literature. I now proceed to specify them.

The main steps I took can be synthesised in Table 3-4 and are represented in three main blocks: thematic coding, narratives and theoretical coding. Throughout the process and since the first steps of data collection, Srivastava and Hopwood’s iterative framework (2009) served as a guiding thread and articulated all the blocks of analyses. I now proceed to explain each component in more detail.

TABLE 3-4 DATA ANALYSES COMPONENTS

Block 1	Block 2	Block 3
THEMATIC CODING	CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVES	THEORETICAL CODING
<p style="text-align: center;">Progressive Focusing What are the data telling me? What is it that I want to know? What is the dialectical relationship of what the data are telling me and what I want to know? (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009)</p>		

3.7.1. Progressive Focusing

The analysis implied a constant revisiting of the data with the conviction that an iterative approach would “progressively [lead] to refined focus and understandings” (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009:77). The iterative approach was guided by Srivastava and Hopwood’s analytical questions:

- What are the data telling me?
- What is it that I want to know?
- What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?

Keeping these questions at the forefront throughout the analysis helped me to refine the research questions, data collection instruments and analyses. Also, the process allowed me to explore useful theoretical tools to further my analysis. This, for example, included the consideration of MacIntyre’s work (2013) as will be later discussed. Such an approach aligns with Stake’s argument that case study researchers should be open to unexpected directions by “progressively [redefining] issues, and [seizing] opportunities to learn the unexpected” (1995:29).

3.7.2. Block 1: Thematic Coding

Synthesised in Table 3-5, this was the first approach to data analysis. It consisted of an initial reading of interview data, guided by Srivastava and Hopwood (2009). In answering the questions ‘what are the data telling me’ and ‘what is it that I want to know,’ I looked for patterns and recurring themes. Some of the codes that emerged are described in Table 3-4. In some cases, the codes were relevant to all participants. In some others, recurrent themes highlighted particular aspects of each of the manager’s situation. For example, empathy came across strongly in Margaret’s case but was not as relevant for the other cases. This was helpful in understanding each of the cases better. While this first approach to the data pointed to a varied and interesting array of lines of inquiry (for example gender considerations), Srivastava and Hopwood’s questions helped me to maintain the focus on the research questions.

TABLE 3-5 - THEMATIC CODING

Rationale	Look for patterns and recurrent themes in relation to research questions. Get acquainted with the data.
Process	Read the interviews and coded excerpts that were related to the research questions, were repetitive or were surprising.
Data analysed with this approach	All interviews of the four case study participants.
Emergent codes	Transitions, what matters, conflicts and tensions, learnings, strategies, empathy, gender, skills, etc.

3.7.3. Block 2 - Narratives

The richness and variety of data rendered by workplace shadowing and open-ended interviews called for some order to make the data usable. With the pressing need to better understand what mattered to the managers and the misalignment situations that were taking place, I decided to write narratives that would give order to senior managers' trajectories as they navigated change. For this purposes I adhered to Polkinghorne's (1995:5) definition:

“narrative is the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes. I am using the phrase narrative configuration to refer to the process by which happenings are drawn together and integrated into a temporally organized whole.”

A narrative approach was coherent with the theoretical foundations of the study. As earlier, understanding managers' trajectories and motives was important. Narratives, in the sense that Polkinghorne refers to them, made sense with the theoretical approach of the inquiry. Other MacIntyre-inspired studies have also adhered to a narrative methodology for their own empirical work (e.g. Beadle, 2013; Conroy, 2010) and as Morrell and Brammer (2014: 5) argue, “[t]he value of a narratological approach is that (...) it allows insight into elements of chronology, sequence, and learning.”

Polkinghorne differentiates narrative as story from narrative as the prosaic text which makes up interview material. Drawing from Ricoeur, Polkinghorne says that “stories are particularly suited as the linguistic form in which human experience as lived can be expressed” (1995:7). From the raw data stemming from interviews and

workplace shadowing I built stories with a twofold purpose. First, they served to reconstruct the timeline of the senior managers' trajectories. Second, they were tools to identify and articulate significant episodes of the senior managers' work that were observed during shadowing and discussed during interviews.

The reconstruction of raw data into stories helped me to become better familiarised with the data. Narratives made evident recurrent topics in my different encounters with the four case study managers, the struggles they were having and how situations evolved over time. More importantly, the episodes were unique and rich opportunities to identify what was important to the managers and to observe instances in which their values and self-understandings (what matter) were at odds with the expectations of the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. I was then able to elicit the actual strategies that the managers used when facing the demands in the changing realities of the organisation.

Wolcott (2009: 32) supports my claim that the construction of narratives is an element of the data analysis in this study. He argues: "a good case can be made for drafting the descriptive part of the account prior to beginning the analysis, prior event to determining what the course of that analysis will be" (Wolcott, 2009:32). I consequently made an effort to keep the narratives descriptive. This was not always easy. Wolcott argues that "even as we describe we are engaging in analysis and interpretation" (2009: 29) and Stake underscores that case study relies on both description and interpretation. To compensate for the inevitable act of interpretation as I constructed the narratives, I wrote in them in the first person, ensuring that I made explicit that "here is what I saw, presented in terms of what I made of it" (Wolcott, 2009:29). With this approach, the narratives end up having some confessional and a strong impressionistic character (VanMaanen, 2011). The narrative block of analysis is synthesised in Table 3-6.

The writing of narratives offered good grounds for a more structured, theory-driven analysis, which will be described next.

TABLE 3-6 CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVES

Rationale	Give order to raw interview and observation material.
	Map senior managers' trajectories chronologically Identify important and recurring events emerging from observations and interviews.
Process	Read each participants' interview in chronological order. Mapped the senior managers' trajectory chronologically. Opened headings for salient and recurring events that resonated with the research questions, and wrote narratives of such events drawing from all interviews and work shadowing fieldnotes.
Data analysed with this approach	All interviews and fieldnotes of the four case study participants.

3.7.4. Block 3 - Theoretical Coding

A theoretically-driven coding of the data was the third block of analysis and is synthesised in Table 3-7. Srivastava and Hopwood's (2009) question 'what is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?' in conjunction with the thematic coding, the construction of narratives and an undergoing review of the literature, pointed to the concept of identity as a useful anchor to understand the negotiations that managers were undertaking.

Inspired by MacIntyre (2013) and Sfard and Prusak (2005) I developed a number of questions to pose to the data. The questions were designed to evidence the gap between who the managers were and who they had to become in order to meet the expectations of the institution. Phrased in the first person to better convey the personal and significant nature that the data conveyed, the questions are as follows:

1. Who am I? Makes reference to MacIntyre's (2013) concept of person-as-happens-to-be, what Sfard and Prusak (2005) would refer to as 'actual identities'. To understand who the managers are it is assumed that:

- Identities are stories about persons, told by others or by themselves (Sfard and Prusak, 2005).
- Behaviour is mediated by identities (Holland et al., 1998), and therefore, identities are enacted in doings.

- Identities are given by “what is of crucial importance to us” (Taylor, 1989: 27).

2. Who am I expected to become? Makes reference to persons-as-could-be-if-they-realised-their-telos. I paid attention to all instances in which the managers talked about what ‘ought to be’. Sfard and Prusak (2005) did something similar in their study, to identify ‘designated identities’ (2005). To answer this question – who should I become?– it was important to pay close attention to the use of ‘have to be’ or similar expressions, such as ‘I’ve got to’.

The narratives that resulted from block 2 of data analysis revealed that the tension between ‘who am I’ and the stage ‘who am I expected to become’ seldom had a straightforward solution. Both the accounts during interviews and my own observations while shadowing, evidenced great difficulty for the managers in moving from point A, person-as-is, to point B, person-as-could-be. In many cases, new expectations were plainly not welcomed. In others, they seemed insurmountable or impossible tasks. Contrasting narratives, misaligned notions of what matters, and a lack of skills and knowledge that impeded the managers to close the gap, all abound. To inquire further about the nature of these struggles I engaged in a more fine grained analysis guided by the questions:

- Who should I no longer be?
- Who do I resist becoming?
- Who do I struggle to become?

3. The question ‘who should I no longer be’ tries to capture a certain sense of loss. Becoming someone new to meet the expectations of change, implied leaving a self-understanding behind. This idea is fairly consistent with the adult development literature (Kegan, 1995) and explicitly mentioned by Vygotsky (1998). While the questions ‘who do I resist becoming’ and ‘who do I struggle to become’ might sound similar, there is an important distinction. The first question makes reference to value-laden resistance to change and the second one makes reference to obstacles pertaining to knowledge and skills.

The theoretical and empirical basis for all these questions will be further explained during the findings Chapters and particularly so in Chapter 6.

After this analysis, the question still remained of how managers were facing these barriers and dealing with the identity tensions and misalignment of values that change brought about. A second layer of fine-grained analysis allowed me to observe managers’ strategies to deal with such tension and to negotiate what mattered for them in their work. In asking the data ‘what did managers do to deal with these tensions?’ I observed episodes that could be categorised as follows: The

TABLE 3-7 THEORETICAL CODING

Rationale	To code the data with the emergent categories stemming from blocks 1 and 2 of analysis and theoretical tools. To provide a framework for cross-case comparisons.		
Process	Two initial questions developed to code the data.		
	A more fine-grained analysis led to new codes.		
Data analysed with this approach	All interviews of the four case study participants.		
	Initial analysis	Fine-grained analysis 1	Fine-grained analysis 2
Initial codes	Who am I?		
	Who am I expected to become?		
Emergent codes	Who do I resist becoming?	Why do managers resist or struggle to become?	Barriers of values, knowledge, skills.
	Who do I struggle to become?		
	In what ways are self-understandings confronted?	What do managers do to address the barriers?	Influence.
	Who should I no longer be?		Abandon.
	How is the institutional reality affected or influenced by the manager?		Endure and suffer.
		Learn and reframe.	

managers learned or reframed, hence learning a new skill, acquiring new knowledge or re-interpreting an experience or a value. They also influenced the expectations coming from the organisation so that instead of having to adapt, the organisation accommodated to their values, knowledge and skills. Instances in which senior managers resisted the demands but could not influence them, led managers to consider abandoning the problem at hand or even the figured world. Also there were instances of no resolution through which the managers endured and suffered.

3.7.5. Analytical Framework for Cross Case Analysis

As I have already explained, it was important to consider time in the analysis. As the analysis progressed, this necessity became even more stark. Past notions of who senior managers were, were challenged by new demands from the figured worlds. Such expectations were resolved in the form of new identities. Once a changed identity was consolidated and owned, new expectations arose and called once more for identity work. The tension between ‘who am I?’ and ‘who am I expected to become?’ unfolded iteratively in senior managers' timelines and resulted in updated accounts of who they are. These observations will be discussed in Chapter 6. As a result, the analytical questions became the basis for three stages of identity work that happened cyclically. The demand-reponse cycle (Fig. 3.7) synthesises this process and became the analytical framework for the study⁷.

The questions ‘who should I no longer be?’, ‘who do I resist becoming?’ and ‘who do I struggle to become?’ are also part of the cycle and appear during the second stage, related to the question ‘who am I expected to become?’ Their location in the diagram does not intend to suggest that they are sub-stages and the order in which they appear is arbitrary. The three questions reflect sources of contradiction when facing new expectations from a changing figured world. This will be further elaborated in Chapter 6.

Cross-case comparisons

The conceptual framework just described served as the basis for cross-case comparisons. Each one of the stages and elements of the cycle was used to identify similarities and differences across cases. Once the cycle was finalised as a model, I used it to perform a final and systematic sweep of data analysis that considered all interviews, narratives and fieldnotes. The cross-case comparison highlighted that the model did not fit as comfortably for one of the cases. Julian did not seem to be struggling with expectations on who he was expected to become. This pointed out to the existence of more stable periods of identity. These findings will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

⁷ At the end of Annex 4 there are some sketches that illustrate how the cycle slowly evolved during the data analyses process.

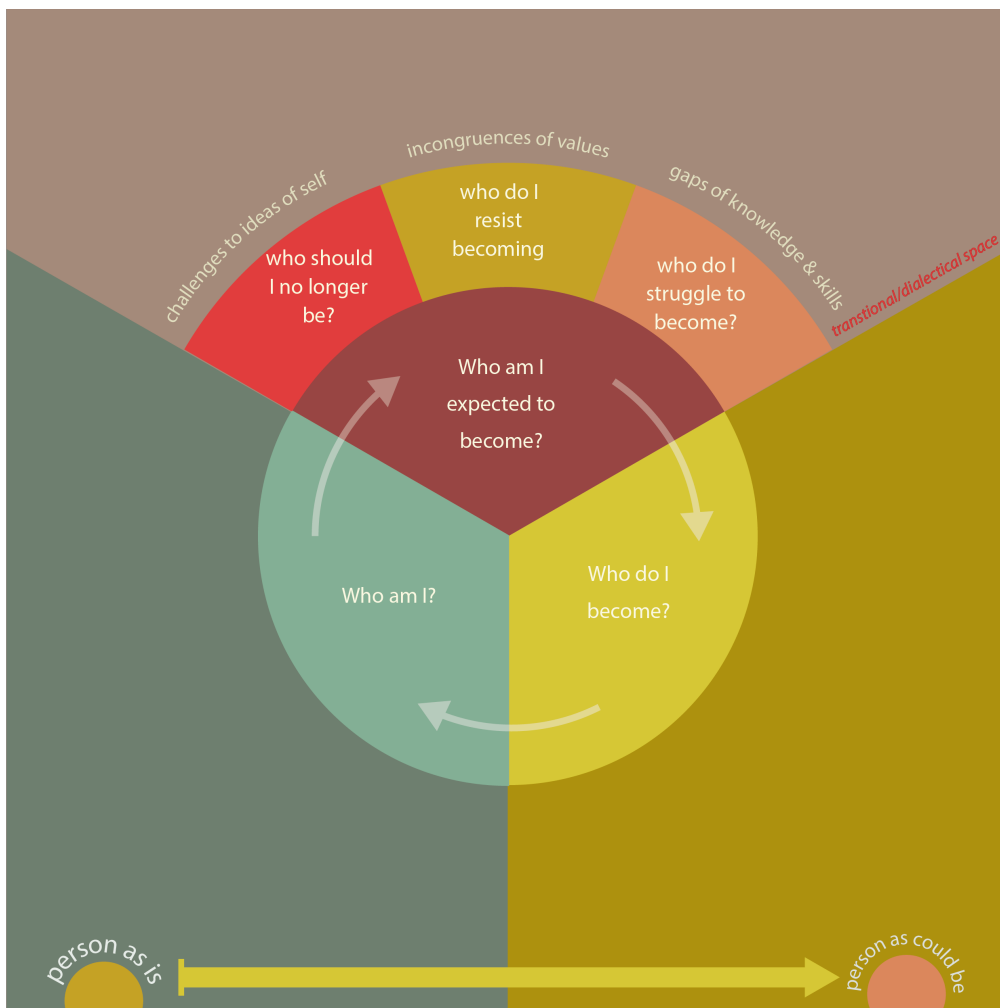


FIG. 3.7

3.7.6. Considering time in the analysis

In Section 3.1 I said that the managers' trajectories were one of the pillars of my methodological approach and I explained that considering time was essential. Because of the centrality of time it is important to explain how it was considered in the analysis and write up of this final document. Annex 5 presents a timeline with the months and year in which interviews and shadowing took place. Each interview was labelled with a letter and a number. For example, Eric's first interview is labelled E1, his second E2 and so on. These labels were helpful at all stages of data analysis. Time considerations were particularly relevant during the construction of narratives (Block 2 of analysis, explained in Section 3.7.3). Indeed, a core benefit of writing narratives for each participant as part of the data analysis process was that narratives allowed me to give a chronological dimension to the events and situations that I observed during shadowing and that I discussed with the managers. In my construction of narratives, as I quoted interview data, I labelled

each excerpt to identify the interview where it was taken. For example, if I cited an excerpt of my first interview with Linda it was labelled L1. An excerpt from the seventh interview with Eric was E7. An example of this labelling can be found in Annex 4, in my example of narratives. This approach was helpful to make sure that I considered time in the analysis and write up. When writing Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 I removed these labels, as they were no longer required and proved distracting.

3.8. Validity

3.8.1. External Validity

I earlier mentioned that cases were selected strategically and not by random selection. One of the main shortcomings of the strategic approach is that it is dependent on available information about the organisation and its members, information that was provided by my initial informants. Due to my over-reliance on accessible informants (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and the small number of cases considered, the findings of the study cannot be generalisable to a larger population.

This does not compromise the contribution of the study. The value of case study research stems precisely from the access to the particularity that it provides (Stake, 1995). Flyvbjerg (2006a: 227) argues that “knowledge that cannot be formally generalized does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society” and that “social science has not succeeded in producing general, context-independent theory and, thus, has in the final instance nothing else to offer than concrete, context-dependent knowledge. And the case study is especially well suited to produce this knowledge” (2006: 223).

While ‘grand generalizations’ cannot, and are not meant to be achieved, the multiple case study approach does allow ‘petite generalizations’ to be made (Stake, 1995:7). “Certain activities or problems or responses will come up again and again. Thus (...) certain generalizations will be drawn” (1995:7). In this study, the cross-case comparison allowed to observe ‘emerging patterns from one case’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 274) in other cases. These generalisations contribute to a refined discussion of the research questions and render useful tools to conceptualise of other managers’ struggles as they deal with changes in their organisational realities.

3.8.2. Internal Validity

To ensure internal validity, I engaged in different triangulation protocols suggested by Stake (1995) and Miles and Huberman (1994.) These included data source

triangulation, method triangulation, and to a lesser extent, investigator triangulation.

Data source triangulation. Miles and Huberman (1994: 265) note that “informants will often craft their responses to be amenable to the researcher and to protect their self-interests” and warn that informants might “switch into an on-stage role” when being observed by outsiders. This might have happened as well. The two phenomena might have had some bearing on interview and observation data as the followings excerpts suggest:

“I deliberately wandered off the subject because hopefully, you’re interested in some of the learning and how I link the Oxford learning in (...)” (Julian).

“in the meeting [I was] thinking, how am I conducting this? What am I doing? Am I not changing my behaviour? I don’t think so, because you were there observing... (...) I think I could have handled it this way, I could have handled it that way...” (Eric)

To counteract the ‘researcher effect’ during data collection I spent “enough time on-site to become part of the landscape” (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 265–266). I also conducted some of the interviews in places where participants might have felt more comfortable to speak openly about challenges at work (e.g. in a cafe, during a commute). Finally, the iterative interview and shadowing procedures allowed me to see the same participants at different points in time.

Method triangulation. Combining shadowing and interview strategies for data collection provided a more holistic picture of the kind of challenges that managers were facing. Different methods gave me grounds to probe about observations or interview data relevant to the research questions.

Member checking. Since my encounters with participants were repeated, I had the chance to share the interpretations that took place during field work and invited participants to comment on them. I could not, however, engage in the same process of member checking with the analysis and interpretations that took place post-fieldwork.

Investigator triangulation. While I was the only researcher working on this project, I had the opportunity to share my observations and interview transcripts with my supervisors and could discuss with them the interpretations that I was making of the data and consider alternative explanations.

Triangulation strategies were not intended to corroborate with other members of the organisation what participants were telling about themselves. The focus remained on how what mattered to the managers was challenged by changing demands and how they perceived the kinds of negotiations that needed to take place. Also, consistent with the sociocultural understanding of identities that I

adopt, and considering that by studying trajectories I was open to observing change rather than constancy, I do not intend to make 'essentialist claims' (Sfard and Prusak, 2005).

3.9. Ethical considerations

Royal Mail's privatisation drew considerable attention from the media and the nature of work the organisation does is quite characteristic. Disguising the organisation identity would have been challenging and would not have allowed me to offer enough context about the work of study participants. Therefore, from an early stage of the project I requested permission from senior executives to disclose the organisation's name. All interviewees were informed of this. Decisions about anonymity had important implications. Some managers that I approached refused to be interviewed, some of the initial interviewees asked to have a copy of all transcribed interviews and at some points during data collection interviewees asked me to keep some things off the record. I tried at all times to make my intentions explicit and let participants and other people in the organisation with whom I interacted know why I was there, who I was, how I was collecting information and what I was going to do with it (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

All interviewees were informed of the purposes of the study and I offered them anonymity. Participants were at all times aware that I was a researcher, making field-notes, voice recording, transcribing interviews and planning to write a thesis based on what they shared. I did not take their trust for granted and made a number of provisions:

- I changed their names and other identifiable information.
- I completed the appropriate protocol (CUREC 1A) and received approval from the University of Oxford.
- I maintained a reflective stance throughout the research process, trying at all times to be prudent.

Participants knew that they could request at any time to go off the record. During shadowing they decided to what meetings I could or could not have access. Whenever a participant requested to be kept off the record at any point of an interview or an observation, I turned off the voice recorder, avoided making any notes and/or disregarded what was said for the purposes of data analysis and the reporting of findings.

3.10. My role as a researcher

Reflexivity is considered central to any research process (Davies, 2008). Creswell (2009: loc 3613) argues that because "qualitative research is interpretative research, with the inquirer typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants" researchers should always be reflective about "their biases, values, and personal background" which may have a bearing during their interpretations of what is going on in the field. Reflexivity is particularly relevant in ethnographic research (Davies, 2008; Babcock, 1980; Madden, 2010), and consequently, in this research which draws from ethnographic tools. The act of reflexivity implies checking "my baggage for presumption and prejudice; to remind myself I bring just one perspective to [the research] and that perspective is informed by my own upbringing, education and history" (Madden, 2010: 22). The purpose of the reflexive exercise, and the one and only reason why it matters, is because it is an attempt at creating "a more reliable portrait, argument, or theory" about the participants (Madden, 2010: 23). The centrality of reflexivity in this research project was sustained during all the stages of the inquiry and is expressed for example in the measures taken to strengthen internal and external validity that I earlier described. In addition to this I find it relevant to speak about both my epistemology and my positionality as a researcher.

3.10.1. Epistemology

I strongly distance myself from a postmodern understanding of social sciences, which denies the possibility of truth (Beadle and Moore, 2006). At the same time I am critical of our ability to understand and conceptualise objective reality. Therefore, despite that I do not engage with the wide array of concepts emerging from critical realism (see Bhaskar, 2008; Gorski, 2013), I do identify with its "realist ontology" and "critical epistemology" (Beadle and Moore, 2006: 325). In this light, I do not pretend my findings to be unquestionable discoveries. Rather I want to present them as a photographer would present her portrayal of a visit to an unfamiliar place. It is indeed based on reality: the daily work of senior managers at the Royal Mail, but it is unavoidably my choices of framing and composition which end up leaving a trace on the photographic paper. Like photography, my observations in the field were partial and selective and they did not have further pretensions. They are arguably loaded with my own trajectory. It is my story that determined the framing of the photograph.

3.10.2. Positionality

No prior links to the Royal Mail, very little experience in a business environment, and not being British or even a native English speaker, made me very much an outsider. This generated some anxiety during the research process:

I don't think people around [the senior manager] are as comfortable with me being there... that's very natural, I guess. My positioning is definitely interesting. Not everyone is as smiling and chatty as I would expect them to be. And again, the language... I think I'm getting much better at understanding everything but still there is a lot... I don't know yet if it's just because of the company's jargon, which I'm not getting, or if there is just a lot of idiomatic expressions and accents that explain why I feel a bit lost. Some stuff is definitely going over my head... (Journal entry from a day of shadowing)

As I grew more used to the organisation, I became better at understanding organisational jargon, different British accents, and jokes. I also became more comfortable asking questions, and I came to terms with the fact that my presence in the room was sometimes awkward. Shadowing never became a completely comfortable experience. Czarniawska (2007: 33) draws from the experiences of other ethnographers and from her own to reflect on the difficulties involved: "shadowing can be awkward for the shadowed person, ambiguous for the researcher, and inconvenient for many others." There were "long days, doubts about whether or not the project made sense, and boredom" (2007: 32).

CHAPTER 4

MISALIGNMENTS

In the midst of practices shaken by change, Linda, Eric, Margaret and Julian all had to deal with misalignment. This chapter presents examples of the misalignment situations they were facing. Linda and Eric, in their initiatives to support the business from a Human Resources perspective, faced resistance from members of the operations function. Julian and Margaret needed to implement changes which were problematic to others in their units. This chapter will use the concept of boundary spaces to explore the situations of misalignment that the managers were navigating.

4. MISALIGNMENTS

Misalignment of what mattered to the managers and what mattered in the figure worlds that they inhabited guaranteed a situation of tension in which to observe how the managers accommodated to the demands of an institutional reality and/or accommodated the institutional realities to them. In Chapter 1, I argued that misaligned notions of what matters to different members of an organisation and other stakeholders are highly characteristic of managerial work (e.g. Hill, 2004), are more intense during times of organisational change (e.g. Branson, 2008), necessary for innovation (Moran, 2010) and problematic for engagement, excellence and ethics at work (e.g. Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon, 2002). With these ideas in mind, along MacIntyre's (2013) indication that institutions can undermine the pursuit of internal goods and therefore the flourishing of individuals, I placed particular attention to situations in which what mattered to Linda, Eric, Julian and Margaret were somehow incongruent to other notions of what mattered in the organisation. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the misalignment situations that the managers were dealing with. This will set the scene for later showing how the managers navigated misalignment.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 4.1 presents the concept of boundary space. Section 4.2 presents one or two misalignment situations experienced by each one of the managers in the study. Linda's and Eric's situations are presented as a joint account because the misalignment that each of them was dealing with happened in a shared context. I will however comment on their experiences discretely. Next, I will present the misalignment that Julian was dealing with, and then present Margaret's situations of misalignment. In section 4.3, drawing from the misalignment situations described, I will discuss the commitments and identifications that were at stake for each one of the managers. In section 4.4 I will comment on the differences observed across the misalignment situations of the four managers. I will argue that the nature of misalignment situations varied widely and that navigating misalignment was experienced quite differently between the managers. Based on this, the chapter is entitled 'misalignments' in the plural form. Differences included the degree of alignment the manager had with the central business agenda, the vertical or horizontal spread of actors involved in the misalignment situation, the character of incongruences taking place, managers' positionality within the boundary space, the extent of emotional investment, and the degree to which the misalignment situation could become a social situation of development. To finalise, in section 4.5, I present some conclusions and discuss the implications of the findings of this chapter in the framework of this research.

4.1. Boundary space as a tool to conceptualise misalignments

Boundaries have been used to explore different organisational realities (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2005). Edwards describes boundaries as social constructions "which separate different communication systems, meaning systems, different priorities, different time-scales and so on" (2010: 41) and which "define who is included and excluded from interactions" (2010: 43). Boundaries, she says, can be given by the interaction of different professions as well as by different areas or functions of the same organisation. She employs the concept in her inquiries of how practitioners with different professional expertise build 'common knowledge' as they tackle complex problems. With this approach

various researchers (e.g. Edwards, 2010; Rai, 2013) have found that people learn as they try to translate to others their function-oriented and unique professional understandings of what matters to them and that they build common knowledge as they grasp the understandings of others.

Although Edwards' (2012) interest in common knowledge is relevant to this research and will be discussed later, I required a somewhat different understanding of boundary space. In the framework of this research, a boundary space emerged in any situation in which differing understandings of what matters happened to interact and created tension. This conceptualisation is different to Edwards' (2010) in that it has a wider focus. She focuses on boundaries between practices (in the sociocultural sense) or professions and therefore considers different understandings of what matters, particularly from a practitioner-bound perspective, while I do not. The second difference is that my attention as a researcher is not placed on the interactions of the different actors involved in a certain boundary space, but rather on the single perspectives of Linda, Eric, Margaret and Julian on how *they* experienced the boundary space and its interactions.

4.2. The boundary spaces

In this section I will present situations of misalignment that each of the managers were dealing with. Section 4.2.1 is dedicated to Linda and Eric. Although Linda's and Eric's work as a team was never studied⁸ the analysis of their cases revealed a shared motive: to give support to Royal Mail's delivery office managers as they strived to adapt to organisational change. In working to achieve this, both managers needed to navigate boundary spaces. Section 4.2.2 describes Julian's struggle to relocate one hundred staff to a new building within a given timeframe and his preoccupation to protect frontline employees from bullying in the context of a national strike. Finally, section 4.2.3 presents Margaret's clashes with two members of her team.

4.2.1. Linda and Eric

Royal Mail's functions included Operations, Human Resources, Information and Technology, Strategy, Customer, Network and Legal among others. Operations, which comprised the mail centres and the delivery offices was in charge of all the postmen and postwomen. Operations was right at the centre, hence it was referred to as 'the core business'.

Linda and Eric worked in different subdivisions of the Human Resources function, Industrial Relations and Learning and Development respectively. With the threats to industrial action and all the Unions' activity to resist a potential privatisation, Industrial Relations was very much in the spotlight (see Annex 2). Likewise, Learning and Development had an increase in momentum with a high demand for training due to modernisation requirements. But the centrality of the two subdivisions in relation to the change agenda was not enough for Linda and Eric to convince some senior executives in Operations that their initiatives were worth Operations' resources. On the contrary, Linda

⁸ It was never intended to observe them as a team. However, while shadowing one or the other, there were meetings to which both of them attended.

and Eric felt that Operations did not have the will to advance strategic programmes that they considered important, including the training of delivery office managers. Therefore, much of Linda's and Eric's energy was invested in navigating a boundary space dominated by the clashes between their priorities and those of key senior executives in Operations.

In the framework of modernisation, middle managers were under considerable pressure. Modernisation meant that over 1,300 delivery offices needed to undergo a 'revision' programme. Revisions were addressed to better prepare the business to absorb the growth of the parcels market. The changes involved in the delivery of mail delivery were not small. As stated by *The Courier* on September 2013, they included "shared vans, bringing new delivery routes with a new partner to work with, and trolleys replacing mailbags on the shoulder and cycles" for postmen and postwomen. Changes were costly and difficult for many postmen and postwomen, many of whom had been working for the Royal Mail as long as 55 years (see Annex 3). The tension between delivery office managers and frontline staff was high in some of the offices.

Linda's team in collaboration with the union administered a survey to delivery sector managers (DSMs)⁹ to collect their perceptions about the nature of delivery office managers' work, how their workload had been affected by change, and the barriers that they were facing. One DSM said: "the role has changed massively. There is a bigger skills gap for what the role has become; numeracy, analytical, 'soft' skills, time, planning, budget – they don't get it." Some of the obstacles that delivery office managers were facing according to the survey results included a high workload, an increase in the amount of reporting, significant skill gaps, limited resources and support, lack of engagement, resistance to change, and a lack of knowledge of the business' vision.

Organisational change meant that delivery office managers needed new skills to do their jobs. For example, a new attendance policy required delivery office managers to have more difficult and frequent conversations with the employees reporting to them. A more centralised system to manage information meant that delivery office managers had to do much more reporting than before. Changes in routines and delivery routes implied managing time in new ways. A better planning of resources in order to get all deliveries out and on time was seen as imperative, due to higher than ever efficiency demands.

From Eric's perspective a shift of values was also taking place in the business, and attention to revenue (an external good) had become more important than ever before, to make the practice of mail and parcel delivery sustainable. Providing a good service was no longer the only focus that managers had to hold. Their priorities needed to shift and new understandings had to be developed:

"[Managers] need to be more commercial, (...) far more aware of the cost [and] of the way that they run their part of the business. (...) In terms of the way they manage people we need to develop more (...) mature relationships around staff; (...) our managers seem to struggle with having difficult conversations."

⁹ delivery sector managers were one grade above delivery office managers. delivery office managers reported to DSMs and so DSMs. (No entiendo esto: and so DSMs)

Added to the strains that modernisation brought about, privatisation was drawing closer, and there was considerable threat of industrial action. Linda was worried about managers' readiness to deal with a potential strike:

"I know that a lot of the management are (...) planning for how we will deal if there is a strike, but I just thought to myself (...) what are we telling our managers? Not all managers are going to be involved in planning so are they merrily sat in their offices thinking nothing's being done? Or are they sitting in their offices panicking that actually, we're going to have a strike [and what shall they] do? (...) How are they answering questions if you've got unions standing up saying: 'we've all got to stand as one and we need to fight privatisation?'"

Better supporting delivery office managers to meet the new demands of their jobs was of critical importance to both Linda and Eric. Each had at the top of their agenda the design and implementation of initiatives that would better equip delivery office managers with the skills to do the job, and that would provide them with adequate tools to perform as expected.

Linda was working on an assessment to identify how the workload had changed. She also had an array of small and large scale training initiatives, a mediation programme and other strategies expected to improve management skills and better prepare the managers to foster healthy relationships with union representatives and with their employees. One person in particular, had become a major source of resistance. Inadvertently, Linda had left him out of the consulting process of a project mistakenly assuming that he did not have much say. "I thought I was talking to the right people... but with him, I'd missed a massive stakeholder out." The senior manager did have power and did "not want [the initiative] to go ahead."

Linda and this manager had very different priorities. According to Linda, he believed that her plans distracted the business from the transformation programme. She was in profound disagreement with his perspective:

"[the programme] is all about giving the managers the tools to put the transformations in. He's very much 'transformations have to come first'...(.) [But] which comes first: the chicken or the egg? (...) If [managers] don't have the skills, the transformation is not going to go in and they're not going to be able to manage it."

At the same time, Eric was working intensively on the design and implementation of an ambitious training programme to improve delivery office managers' management skills. Both sets of initiatives related heavily to what is often referred to as 'soft skills'.

Linda and Eric's initiatives had the support from their direct lines of reporting in Human Resources and there was a declared intention from central leadership to foster the skill development of organisational members (vignette 4.1.1). In this sense, Eric's and Linda's work was apparently in line with the organisational agenda. Moreover, they were being kept accountable and their performance reviews were attached to their success in this front. However, priorities were not uniform across the business, there were inconsistent accounts of expectations and Linda and Eric felt that key actors in central leadership were steering in different directions:

“[These managers] are not quite on the same page. I think they both want the same outcome. I think they’re both excellent on their own way, (...) but they are not working on the same plan. I keep feeding this up and saying ‘this is incongruous, this is causing undue pain and inefficiency’.”

“Because right now, we’ve got a CEO who doesn’t understand why we can’t train all our managers to be really good managers, and we’ve got a managing director who can’t understand why I keep on at him saying: ‘we need to start training our managers in how to manage people properly’” (Eric)

The interpretations of the kind of learning and development that needed to take place, for example, were contested. Eric noted: “I’ve always had this problem ever since I’ve been in the role, what Operations want, what I think is right, what [the CEO] thinks is right and to get that to work together. It’s never really been tackled or resolved.” Some senior people expected delivery office managers to receive support related to their management style and people skills, while others would only allow training related to technical skills. As managers in human resources, Linda and Eric suffered through what Argyris and Schön (1974) described as theory in action and theory in use. While the Operations function had a declared interest to work on the training of middle managers, they were not facilitating the space for it to actually happen. This made it increasingly difficult for Linda and Eric to make what mattered to them visible to others. Their priorities were visible and the people involved all seemed to agree they were important. Yet, declared agreement made it particularly difficult for them to overcome the more subtle barriers posed to their work.

4.2.2. Julian’s boundary space

Two issues that Julian was dealing with illustrate the sort of misalignments that he was navigating. Julian labeled the first episode as “puzzle.” The Mail Centre that Julian managed worked in a number of properties located relatively close. One of these buildings, where about a hundred of employees worked, was one of Royal Mail’s most expensive leaseholds. The operation was costly and in the framework of modernisation it added little value. Therefore, it was decided that the lease had to end. He had a couple of months to inform the landlord. If he did not notify him on time, the lease would be renewed automatically for ten more years. “There’s a big pressure for me to achieve this,” Julian explained. The pressure came from central administration and the facilities department.

Although no lay-offs were planned, the staff working in the building had to be relocated, some possibly to different jobs. Because of the amount of staff potentially affected, it was mandatory for the union to be consulted. Julian was confident that, with the appropriate autonomy, he could handle the transition smoothly. However, he was on a tight schedule and the timing was very inconvenient. Privatisation was drawing closer and saying that industrial relations were tense is an understatement:

“At the moment, nationally, [the CEO] is negotiating a deal with the union. A month ago, she communicated what that deal was. It’s not yet been agreed. It’s part of the issues that are going on with, potentially, a national strike on job security and the privatisation.”

A national strike was a highly undesirable but fast approaching scenario; frontline workers and middle managers were uneasy and there was a widespread feeling of uncertainty. Industrial Relations was very active and they had asked Julian not to do anything that would increase the tensions. The message that he was getting was: “Don’t give [the staff] bad news yet. We don’t want bad news.” Their strategy, he said, “[was] (...) to keep things nice and calm and quiet.” This quote reminds of MacIntyre's (2013) accusation that managers resort to manipulative action, yet I will come back to this analysis later.

In parallel, pressure was building for him to notify the landlord. “As soon as [the time] comes, [a manager in the Facilities department] will be saying: ‘when are you going to make a decision? When are you going to tell the landlord?’” The situation required Julian to understand and manage the priorities of Facilities, Industrial Relations, the Union and his own staff.

The second episode was also related to the national strike that was being planned against privatisation. One of the strategies that the business was using to prevent it was to offer a monetary incentive to all the frontline workers who decided not take part. Also, those striking would not be paid during their absence from work. Julian estimated that thirty to forty percent of the workforce were reluctant to participate in the strike either because they did not want to or because they could not afford it. However, Julian thought peer pressure was a real obstacle and that those not taking part were vulnerable to bullying and harassment. He had experienced that in the national strikes of 2007 and 2009 and he thought it was happening again:

[L]ots of our people at [the mail centre] are saying to us: ‘How can we come into work? We don’t want to lose a day’s pay, we don’t want to lose a £300 Christmas bonus.’

Julian needed to devise strategies in order to protect this population:

“There’s ways that we can try and say that the people that work, we can get them to work with no one else knowing. Get them to work at another location, hide the fact that they got paid, so I’m pushing human resources to help us with that. It is difficult but it’s possible. I’ve seen it before.”

4.2.3. Margaret’s boundary space

As Margaret assumed a leadership role she was caught by surprise by the accumulated tensions in her team from intense organisational change: “No one tells you before you join the team that this is going on.” She found herself in a boundary space where different meaning systems and priorities troubled her transition into the role. In her words, “there was a lot of unhappiness for various reasons, for various issues.” Two episodes are illustrative of the kinds of tensions that were affecting her. The first episode relates to the

exit of a member of her team. As the team became “leaner” and some of its members “surpluses,” a step to avoid laying off people was to give them a different role: “If there’s a role at the same grade, or a grade below, you can put them into that; regardless whether they’ve got all the skills or not because if it’s a trainable skill they’ll go into it.” One person from her team had been moved to do something else, but he was not meeting the expectations: “[R]eally basic things he couldn’t perform. We trained him; we spent so much development time with him,” Margaret recounted. According to Margaret, the gap in performance turned out to be irreconcilable by means of training:

“We kept in that, and no matter what we did he couldn’t do it, or he would get other team members to do the work then pass it off as his own. I couldn’t allow that to happen because they had a lot of work themselves.”

The mismatch of skills resulted in poor performance and in unethical behaviour, as the employee began taking credit for other people’s work. Margaret decided to move him again, but this time to a completely different function where she was no longer his boss:

We had to put his performance marking down. (...) We worked him through, tried to develop. (...) Essentially I had to make that person surplus, which I don’t like doing. We managed that situation... he was more of an operational person. (...) So we got him a role in [a more appropriate function].

The relationship was damaged, but Margaret trusted her judgement: “Now that person is really bitter towards me, but I know in my head I did the right thing ...”

The second episode also involved friction with a member of her team. Before Margaret assumed the leadership, he had been offered a promotion that he never got: “He was very bitter that he never got that, and that bitterness carried on. Part of [this employee’s] culture was ‘you don’t get managed by a female’. Now, he had to overcome that, I couldn’t change that. I couldn’t help it that I was a female. But his bitterness at not being promoted and the combination of having a female manager just was really clear...”

The bitterness of the team member towards her was made worse because according to Margaret he did not like having a woman as his manager.

4.3. Commitments and identifications at stake

In Chapter 1, drawing from Edwards (2010) and Taylor (1989), I argued that ‘what matters’ can be understood in terms of people’s commitments and identifications. In all the misalignment situations described there was misalignment between Linda, Eric, Julian and Margaret’s commitments and identifications with what mattered to others in the boundary space. In the following sections I will discuss those commitments and identifications of the participants which were at stake in the boundary space.

4.3.1. What mattered to Linda and Eric

From Eric and Linda's point of view it was common sense that offering delivery office managers tools for better management would facilitate the business modernisation agenda. However, their commitment to people's welfare and the importance that they placed on soft skill development was not entirely understood by some senior managers in Operations. Speaking of one of the managers who was resisting, Linda said: "he's not necessarily a great people person. So consequently he doesn't always see the people issues and how people behave (...)". From Eric's perspective the problem was even deeper: "[This director] (...) really philosophically is in a place where he can't support my department and what we do. It runs contrary to the way he's trying to run his business."

The boundary space was also characterised by a clash of time-scales. Though everyone, including senior executives in Operations, seemed to share the idea that some kind of training was important (Fig. 4-1), it was just not at the top of Operation's priority list. The focus of Operations was on getting the revisions of delivery offices done and this was overwhelming enough. Training was something that could happen at a later stage. Linda thought that "the reservation from their side is that we are already spending so much of their time (...) and (...) it's later down the road we need to do [the training]". For Eric this was problematic, because he thought the demands placed on middle managers were beyond their resources. For him, training should have happened earlier.

With a lack of formal authority (they were not the ones who approved budgets or times off for training) both Linda and Eric needed to persuade senior executives in Operations by translating their motives.

FIGURE 4.1

CEO & OPERATIONS DIRECTOR STATEMENTS ON TRAINING (DRAFT BOOKLET)

"We can only deliver exceptional service if our people have the right skills and know when and how to use them. In a market of changing competition, technology and expectations, we need to continuously improve our skills both as individuals and as a company to maintain our respected brand."

-CEO statement,

"We have some challenging targets to achieve over the next year in terms of modernising our Delivery Function, so it is vital that we are supporting your skills development. I am therefore committed to help ensuring that you receive the development that you need to help make our Delivery function fit for the future."

-Operations and Modernisation Director statement,

4.3.2. What mattered to Julian

Julian was explicitly committed to the business' agenda: "My viewpoint is the business' viewpoint." He identified himself as organised, strategic and as someone who "delivered results". Throughout the period in which he had held the director role he had already implemented aggressive transformations. In doing so, he had dealt with the incongruences of sustaining the practice of mail collection and delivery, (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2005) while balancing employees' expectations and considering what mattered to them:

"I really needed to push to do the case for a transformation (...), because things were all wrong, we didn't have enough capacity, the operation isn't flexible enough to meet customer needs, we know we're getting growth in parcels and priority services, we know we're too expensive, but we also don't want to upset all the people..."

"It's always the thing that probably delays major change the most; resolving the people issues."

Determined to cut the costs of his operation, end that lease and relocate the staff within the timeframe was a key element to his plan. If not managed well, the boundary spaces he was navigating (particularly so the building's relocation) threatened the recognition he received as someone who delivered results. He had to proceed carefully managing stakeholders while also accomplishing his goals: "the puzzle is how do I move all the stakeholders forward, including the Union and the employees and all these other functions to get to where I want [in the timeframe I have]," Julian said.

Julian also evidenced a commitment towards employees by expressing empathy and concern for frontline staff in the face of a potential strike. His concern was consistent with what he said motivated him. He had a broad experience in dealing with the union, but was very much misaligned with them. In theory, the union represented the interests of frontline workers, but Julian was highly sceptical and thought it was his role as a leader and as someone representing the business view to take care of employees. He therefore felt compelled to find alternatives to protect the staff.

4.3.3. What mattered to Margaret

Margaret's accounts of the misalignment situations that she was experiencing evidence a commitment to justice. When she noticed that a team member was taking credit for the work of others she stated: "I couldn't allow that to happen because they had a lot of work themselves." Margaret acted according to her commitment to being fair even when it meant becoming unpopular or disliked. In relation to the person she moved out of her team she said: "Now that person is really bitter towards me, but I know in my head I did the right thing." Also, offering someone a promotion without the proper due process was something that she was unwilling to do: "everyone's got to apply and it's the successful candidate who gets it." Finally, she did not let someone's resistance towards her because of her gender interfere in her judgement of what was fair:

"But his performance was excellent and he should have been at a higher level. (...) [H]e got his promotion three months ago. It's taken a long time, but he deserved it. He did deserve it, but I couldn't just come in and say: "Yeah, you're getting a promotion." (...)"

In addition to her commitment to justice, Margaret's identification as a good manager was threatened when she found someone questioning her ability based on her gender. In the boundary space, Margaret needed to defend her authority and the image of respect she elicited in others.

4.4. Different misalignments

The misalignment situations varied widely across participants. To explore the differences I used four differentiating factors:

- the level of alignment with central business concerns;
- kinds of misalignment taking place;
- the positionality map within the boundary space; and
- the emotional implications the boundary had for the manager.

4.4.1. Alignment between the manager and central business concerns

In Chapter 1 I said that misalignment can result from clashes "between self-authored and top-down imposed narratives" (Conroy, 2010: 79). For the managers in my study, misalignment was always experienced in relation to concrete actors. Yet, there was a central business agenda, a top down narrative that was embodied, communicated and realised through different channels such as official documents, key performance indicators, large conventions and small meetings. The central business narrative was also communicated through concrete actors in the organisation.

As I collected and analysed the data, I found that not all managers seemed to struggle in aligning their own purposes and values to those of the 'top-down' narrative, and that quite on the contrary there was some harmonious alignment. All the managers that I interviewed throughout the study, including Linda, Julian, Margaret and Eric, considered that an infusion of private capital was of utmost importance, and perhaps the only sustainable alternative for the organisation to survive. Furthermore, some like Eric held the view that public organisations have difficult bureaucracies that impede action, and longed for a more private sector-like environment. In these and in other situations managers seemed quite aligned with the organisation, its purposes and the steps it was taking towards change.

Although the four managers supported modernisation and privatisation in general terms, both sources of change placed them in boundary spaces where misalignment was acute. At the core of the misalignment situation were incongruent notions of what mattered to the people involved. Yet there are differences in the sorts of boundary spaces that each of the managers were navigating, as well as variations in their levels of alignment with the central business agenda and with its *modus operandi*. Julian, for example, considered himself very much aligned the business central administration. Yet, the clashing priorities of a wide array of people converged in a boundary space that he had to navigate. The parties involved included managers in central administration, the facilities department, union representatives and staff. Misalignment affected him in that he had to cope and assist with the misalignment of others. Perhaps, being a part of Operations was an advantage that he had. As mentioned earlier, operations was 'the core business'. With cutting-edge technology for mail handling and one of the largest operations, his mail centre was at the forefront of the modernisation programme. For this it had received a few business-wide recognitions.

Meanwhile, Linda and Eric did not experience the same kind of alignment with the business as Julian did. Linda's and Eric's boundary space was highly characterised by different priorities between them and Operations. In this sense the kind of boundary space that they were navigating is very much of interest from Edwards' (2010) perspective. Edwards' approximation to boundary spaces is more focused on a systemic view between functions or areas. Yet, it is explicitly intended to unearth the resources that professionals use to create common understandings as they work in complex problems. Linda and Eric's misalignment situation was a boundary space in which the motives of different practitioners with different kinds of expertise converged. Another question that is raised by Linda and Eric's case, is whether there was indeed a very intense alignment with central administration as perhaps, as MacIntyre says, they were only concerned "with effectiveness in transforming (...) unskilled labor into skilled labor," and this was a path to turn "investment into profits" (MacIntyre, 2013: 35) without any real concern for the internal goods of the practice and specifically the quest for the good life of the middle managers who would benefit from their initiatives.

Although the levels of alignment with the central business agenda were different, there are some commonalities among the boundary spaces that Eric, Linda and Julian were experiencing. The three had to juggle the incompatible messages they were receiving from different actors in central administration. At least in Julian's case, the differences between stakeholders were explicit. In contrast, an added difficulty in the boundary space that Linda and Eric were navigating was that the incongruences between what was being said and what was being done was not entirely known to all the parties involved. Following Argyris and Schön (1974), they were caught between central administration's espoused theory, where training and supporting middle managers was a priority, and its theory-in-use, where in effect the time and resources for the training were not in place.

Similar to Julian, Margaret evidenced considerable alignment with the central business narrative. In our conversations she questioned very few aspects of the change initiatives

that she had to implement, and she constantly looked for support from her superiors to make important decisions and to consult on how to implement change. Yet, the misalignment that emerged in her case is different to the misalignments that Eric, Linda and Julian experienced in two ways. First, Margaret's navigation of a boundary space was very local; it involved her and other members of her team. In contrast Linda, Eric and Julian's cases of misalignment were between their team and other teams, or their function and other functions. Second, Margaret's navigation of boundary spaces can be more characterised by their efforts to draw limits before building bridges. Santos and Eisenhardt (2005: 491) note that boundaries can be understood as demarcations in organisations which shape "how things are done," the "rules for inclusion," how resources are used and organising "spheres of influence." In protecting the business' competence and efficiency requirements (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2005) her own authority and her sense of justice, Margaret took "defensive and offensive strategies" that implied demarcation and exclusion. Her navigation of misalignment highlights that, while efforts to draw organisational members closer is important to advance professional goals, establishing distance might be just as relevant.

In the next section I will discuss the emotional significance of the misalignment situations for the managers and to follow I will consider managers' positionality within the boundary space.

4.4.2. Kinds of misalignment taking place

The sort of incongruences that were taking place in the boundary spaces are varied and therefore difficult to categorise. Yet, what becomes clear is that the misalignment situations that managers dealt with were not limited to different notions of what matters for different kinds of professional expertise. Some did relate to what was valued by different professionals, as was the case of Eric and Linda whose Human Resources perspective and their attention to 'people issues' had to be translated to senior executives in operations. But other incongruences appealed to more general understandings, perhaps what Taylor (1989) calls 'background images' of what was good and of how one should act at the workplace. For example, the gender biases held by Margaret's staff, which undermined and contended her positionality as a team leader. Another example, also from Margaret's case, was a misaligned notion of justice. On the one hand there was an employee who expected a promise to be fulfilled, and on the other a manager who believed that 'you don't just give promotions', but rather that individuals have to apply for them through a more transparent process.

The kinds of incongruences taking place in Julian's boundary space were yet of a third kind, which combined the practitioner bound understandings of what matters with the frameworks of what is good in a more general sense. What was contested in his boundary space was not a matter of professional expertise. Rather, the union needed to be acknowledged and they had to become involved in the relocation to a different building.

Their inclusion was mandatory, even though the union itself ended up showing little interest in that particular issue.

4.4.3. Positionality map in the boundary space

A full understanding of the boundary space required an analysis of positionality of the actors involved. Holland et al. (1998: 128) speak of positional identity as “a person’s apprehension of her social position in a lived world: that is depending on the others present, of her greater or lesser access to spaces, activities, genres, and, through those genres, authoritative voices, of any voice at all.”

A consideration of the actors navigating the boundary space and their positional identity is relevant to better understand the challenges involved in dealing with the situation. Positionality is given by understanding:

- who was involved in the interactions of the boundary space;
- who was affected by the results of the interactions; and
- what was the position of the manager whose perspective I am considering.

Who was involved in the interactions: The comparison across boundary spaces shows that boundary spaces can consist of close-knit interactions or interactions of actors spread out across the organisation. The most close-knit boundary space was the one experienced by Margaret. In the first situation there was some vertical participation (her and her reports) and some horizontal participation (between peers of her team). In the second situation there was small vertical distribution, with Margaret’s direct superiors and one of Margaret’s direct reports being involved. Their involvement concerned the promotion of the team member, which was not granted when he expected.

The largest spread of participation in terms of the actors involved in the interactions took place in Julian’s boundary space. There was vertical and horizontal participation. The horizontal actors involved, included members from central administration (Industrial Relations and Facilities) and members from the Union. Vertical participation was given in the relationships such as the one between Julian and the employees that he expected to relocate, and between Julian and his boss.

Eric and Linda’s boundary space also had horizontal and vertical participation. This boundary space calls for a diagonal category to understand the relationships taking place between senior executives in operations who were up in the hierarchy in relation to Linda and Eric, but who were not in their direct reporting line. The diagonal dimension of Eric and Linda’s boundary space adds a layer of difficulty, given that their agency was mediated by their bosses. In Eric’s case, a lack of involvement and support from his own

superiors was in detriment of his efforts to making what mattered to him visible to senior executives in operations.

Who was affected by the results of the interactions: In Margaret's case, those directly affected were the same actors who were interacting in the boundary space. In contrast, in Julian's, Linda's and Eric's cases, the boundary space interactions happened mainly between decision-makers and the role of the potentially affected parties was very limited (i.e. employees being relocated or of the delivery office managers who were not receiving the desired training).

Managers' positionality: Managers' positionality within the boundary space affected how the boundary was experienced. Julian, for example, embodied the business agenda and had the formal authority to make the required choices in order to advance it. To him, the boundary space was a place in which he had certain degree of control. Indeed he had to act with caution and he needed to be strategic, but in the end was confident that he had the upper hand. Margaret was in a somewhat similar situation. In the close-knit boundary space that she was navigating she had the formal authority to make decisions regarding who was excluded and included in interactions and in what ways they participated. Although her positionality as a manager was challenged based on her gender, it was clear to her that: "he had to overcome that, (...) [she] couldn't help it that [she] was a female.". Being the boss granted her the power to assert her authority.

Different to Julian and Margaret, both Linda and Eric had no formal authority for the implementation of their initiatives. To meet their goals they relied on their ability to persuade others that their initiatives were valuable. Relational expertise was required to translate their motives to those that had access to the allocation of time and could sign off budgets. Meeting their agendas implied taking "their knowledge upstream" (Edwards, forthcoming) in a way that Margaret and Julian did not have to. To them it was key to understand their own positionality within the boundary space that they were navigating. Eric felt that his power was particularly limited because he was excluded from some spaces:

"My last company, that was 15,000 people, and I was in a similar kind of role to this, I used to go to board meetings all the time. I felt very listened to. Here, it's just different. It's such a large organisation, I've been to the board meeting once, was given about 30 seconds to talk and that's it."

Nevertheless, Linda's and Eric's positionalities were not identical. Eric, on the one hand, felt there was an irreconcilable difference between him and the senior executive in operations who was blocking his initiatives: "It feels like it's impossible for me to win the argument." And although he tried to understand the senior executive's motives he was not getting too far: "It's quite hard to get into his head. I try hard to do it (...) He may be right, it's not for me to say he's wrong, yet I don't see the world that way." Linda, on the other hand, could at least empathise with what mattered to senior executives in operations and find common ground: "We all have the same agenda, but some of our approaches

don't appeal to him.” Relational expertise does not only consist in one's ability to translate one's motives to others, but also in one's ability to understand where others are coming from. To this extent, Linda's positionality suggests a greater degree of relational expertise. Another difference is that while Linda considered herself strongly supported by her boss, Eric felt somewhat lonelier in his crusade. When I asked him whether his team and his supervisors supported him he said:

“My team, definitely, but my bosses, not enough. (...) Of the two, one is very diplomatic and I think he sees my problem, but kind of leaves it to my other boss, perhaps rightly, to sort it out. I think my other boss, he knows it's difficult but he just says, find a solution, that's kind of what I pay you for.”

Understanding managers' positionality within the boundary space is important to later understand what the managers did in order to navigate misalignment.

4.4.4. Emotional Significance

Drawing from Kerouso, Edwards (2010: 43) notes that “boundaries can be uncomfortable places to be” and “when the possibilities for action afforded by a figured world are misaligned with one's motives, frustration ensues” (2010: 70). Likewise, Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon (2001) argue that the lack of alignment derives in lack of engagement. Findings were consistent with Edwards in that navigating misalignment was emotionally taxing for some managers. Findings were also consistent with Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon that, when intense misalignment ensued, engagement at work was compromised. Yet, this was not the case for the four of the managers in this study, and the emotional significance was also not the same across the four cases. I perceived Julian as more emotionally detached from the situation than the other managers. Although the misalignment situations he was dealing with were complex, he considered them 'puzzles' rather than 'headaches'. Furthermore, as it seemed common among the managers that I interviewed, Julian enjoyed puzzles. Linda also seemed more in control over her emotions. Nevertheless misalignment was in fact stressful for her, particularly so when she saw her identification as an influential manager threatened. Of the four managers Eric evidenced the largest degree of frustration. For Margaret, the misalignment situations that she encountered as she took on a new leadership role did pose emotional challenges.

4.5. Conclusions

As I paid attention to situations of misalignment in the data, I found managers to be in a surprising consensus regarding privatisation. Despite the lack of ideological debate, privatisation did bring in tensions that the managers had to deal with. Modernisation, like privatisation, was not questioned *per se* by the managers. Participants all agreed in that the Royal Mail needed new technologies and processes to better deliver mail and parcels if it wanted to survive in a competitive market. In this, the managers were attempting to

protect the sustainability of the practice of mail collection and delivery. As MacIntyre (2013: loc 4245) argues "no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions." Yet, the 'hows' involved in privatisation and modernisation were somewhat more contested. Thus, both privatisation and modernisation resulted in boundary spaces that the managers had to navigate.

The boundary spaces that the managers navigated were very different. I discussed the differences among them based on four characteristics: level of alignment that the managers had with the central business narrative, character of the incongruences taking place, positionality map of actors involved, and emotional significance for the manager. Despite their alignment with the general terms of privatisation and modernisation, the four managers evidenced different levels of alignment with the central business narrative. Linda and Eric, who did not have the formal authority that Julian and Margaret had, seemed to struggle more to make what mattered to them visible to senior executives in Operations. This represented a barrier to accomplishing their goals. Julian and Margaret experienced more alignment with the central business narrative, but had to deal with the misalignment of others. Margaret experienced more local boundary spaces, given that the actors taking part in them did not spread across functions as was the case with the other managers.

The character of incongruences taking place was difficult to categorise. Yet, they included matters of professional expertise as well as differences in general understandings of what was good and of how one should act at the workplace. This included notions of justice and gender biases. These incongruences might be better understood as differences in 'background images' (Taylor, 1989).

A more complete understanding of what was happening in the boundary space demanded attention to the positionality of the managers and other actors involved in the boundary space. This need resonates with the literature which points to the relevance of social positions for the ability to transform figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998). Considering the positionality map acknowledges the importance of identifying who the actors involved in a boundary space are, what are their roles and what is the position of the manager in terms of the authority and resources available to act on the boundary space. Because this touches very specifically on the 'how' the managers navigated the boundary space, it will be also elaborated in Chapter 7.

Regardless of their level of alignment with central administration, the four managers had to deal, from different positions and with different resources, with situations of misalignment. Sometimes the struggle required defensive strategies to protect what mattered to them and in other occasions their work at the boundary space consisted more on facilitating the alignment or coping with the misalignment of others. This affected the ways in which the boundary space was experienced. For some managers boundary spaces were more emotionally taxing than others. Julian for example showed more emotional detachment. He understood the challenges involved as "puzzles" rather than as "struggles" with a personal significance. For Eric frustration and stress were very real.

Boundary spaces were a social situation of development for the managers. The chapter that follows will explain the concept of social situation of development. It will also discuss the demands that the managers faced in the boundary spaces and in other situations, while Chapter 6 will explore how the demands were recognised and refashioned. Chapter 7 will present the strategies that Linda, Eric, Margaret and Julian used in response to such demands.

CHAPTER 5

DEMANDS

In this chapter I identify and discuss the demands faced by Margaret, Linda, Julian and Eric as their roles changed. Some of the demands are directly linked to the misalignment situations that I discussed in the previous chapter and others stem from other situations the managers navigated. The findings are consistent with Hedegaard (2012) and Edwards (forthcoming) in that demands needed to be recognised before they were addressed. As new demands were recognised, a gap between who the managers were and who they were expected to become became visible to the managers. A reflection on how the identified demands challenged what mattered to the manager indicates that demands recognised are actually refashioned demands which make provisions for what matters to the managers. This is evidence that agency is involved in how demands stemming from the institutional reality of the managers are internalised. The commonalities across demands are a point of departure to discuss understandings of 'what is good' in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. Images of what a good manager was supposed to be and supposed to do shaped the curriculum of the learning and development that the four managers underwent.

5. DEMANDS

In the previous chapter, assisted by the concept of boundary space, I discussed situations of misalignment that Linda, Margaret, Eric and Julian were going through. Towards the end, I mentioned that boundary spaces are social situations of development. This chapter uses Vygotsky's (1998) notion of a social situation of development to explore the demands that managers encountered in the boundary spaces and in other lived situations at the Royal Mail. The idea of social situation of development will remain relevant in the two coming chapters. By the end of the account, it will become clear how all aspects entailed in the social situation of development were experienced by Linda, Eric, Julian and Margaret.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, in Section 5.1 I present how demands are hereby understood and the role they play in learning and development by connecting them to Vygotsky's notion of social situation of development. Then, in Section 5.2, I use the demand-response cycle (Fig 3.7.1) as an organising device to illustrate who the managers were and who they were expected to become (stages 1 and 2 of the cycle). In section 5.3, I then proceed to discuss and compare the demands across cases and the kind of agency displayed. Such analysis grounds a discussion about the kinds of expectations encountered in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail.

5.1. Demands and the social situation of development

In Chapter 1 I argued that underlying this research is a preoccupation about the affordances and limitations that workplaces brings to people's development and flourishing. Informed by a Vygotskian understanding of learning and development, I depart from an assumption that people are shaped by the figured world that they inhabit, and that as agents they can also shape the figured world in a dialectical dynamic (Edwards, 2010; Holland et al. 1998). Drawing from the work of Hedegaard (2012) I argued that demands are driving forces for the learning and development of individuals. Demands set the curriculum of what should be learnt and cast who we are as we respond to them. "Children learn and develop through their orientation towards the demands in institutional practices" (2012:9). And as Edwards notes: "what is learnt will depend on what is recognised as the demand" (Edwards in Clandinin and Husu, forthcoming). It is in response to new demands in the figured worlds that we inhabit that we devise new approaches and ways to act "in and on them" (Edwards, 2010; Holland et al., 1998). Although I do not engage with Vygotsky's and Mead's work directly, it is worth noting that both Holland et al. (1998) and Edwards (2010) draw from them. Vygotsky and Mead's work is a pillar of the argument that identities are shaped in response to social expectations, and that agency lies in the dialectic between person and figured world (Edwards, 2016).

The notion of demands is associated to Vygotsky's social situation of development. The social situation of development explains the centrality of the social in the development of children and is defined as the relation "between the child and reality, mainly the social reality, that surrounds him..." (Vygotsky, 1998: 198). The social situation of development, Vygotsky says, acts as a departure point of all possible learning, posing demands to individuals (Hedegaard, 2012), and is the repository of the resources available for such development to take place (Holland et al, 1998). Although Vygotsky's concern was the learning and development of children, the concept of social situation of development has been used extensively in relation to adults by post-Vygotskian theorists including Holland, Edwards, Daniels and Lave and Wenger. Organisation theorists have also acknowledged the role of the social for individuals' learnings in the workplace. Almost forty years ago, Van Maanen and Schein argued that:

"work organizations offer a person far more than merely a job. Indeed, from the time individuals first enter a workplace to the time they leave their membership behind, they experience and often commit themselves to a distinct way of life complete with its own rhythms, rewards, relationships, demands, and potentials." (1979: 1)

Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) argument can be taken to imply, when reading it with Vygotsky in mind, that the social reality of organisations provide a particular social situation of development to those who inhabit them.

Holland et al.'s (1998) concept of 'figured worlds' convey significant and distinct elements converging in a social situation of development. Firstly, figured worlds have a historical nature, we enter them at some point in time and they develop through our participation in them. In the same way that we shape figured worlds as we take part in them, they have the ability to shape us. Second, figured worlds are "social encounters in which participants' positions matter" and they have a particular context in time and space. Third, figured worlds are "socially organised and reproduced (...). They divide and relate participants (almost as roles)," (1998: 41) and their existence depends on the interaction of their members. Finally, figured worlds "are characteristic of humans and society" and are "populated by familiar social types and even identifiable persons, not simply differentiated by some abstract division of labor" (ibid.). These four aspects were all critical to the institutional realities in which Linda, Eric, Margaret and Julian found themselves, and had a bearing on the boundary spaces they navigated as well as on the demands that this chapter will discuss. But figured world and social situation of development are not interchangeable terms. The figured world conceptualisation illuminates those relevant elements of social reality and of the relation between the person and reality which are central to Vygotsky's thought. Yet, in one figured world a person can encounter more than one social situation of development. The social situation is then a situation happening at a given time and that, depending on the agency of the individual, can become an opportunity for learning and development.

Indeed, although that social reality is described as the “basic source of development” (Vygotsky, 1998:198) many, including Vygotsky, have underscored the role of agency. Edwards, for example, notes that for a social situation to become a developmental situation, the individual needs to recognise the demands given in social reality and act on them (forthcoming). The relevance of agency in this research will be further elaborated in Section 5.3, where I will argue that the demands embraced by the managers involved a process of refashioning in order to shelter what mattered to them.

To structure the findings in relation to the demands the managers were facing I will use the demand-response cycle presented in Chapter 3 (Fig. 3.7). The cycle recognises the relevance of the context in which demands arise (i.e. figured world, social situation of development, framework, tradition) and points to key factors that can be considered in any attempt to understand a dialectic of person and figured world. As can be observed in Figure 3.7 the cycle has three main stages:

- Who am I?
- Who am I expected to become?
- Who do I become?

The following sections of this chapter are concerned with the movement from stage 1 to stage 2 of the demand-response cycle. The chapter therefore considers:

1. Highlights of the managers’ trajectory in arriving at the social situation of development at hand;
2. The demands recognised in the social situation of development; and
3. The implications of such demands across the cases.

5.2. The managers and the demands they recognised

In Chapter 3 I said that attention to trajectories was an opportunity to access situational uniqueness (Stake, 2006) and observe how the manager’s development unfolded over time in response to new demands. Importantly, taking a trajectory perspective helps to recognise the lived history of participants which influences how a social situation of development is interpreted and tackled. Using the trajectories as a point of departure, I introduce each one of the managers and present the most salient new demands that they were facing at work.

5.2.1. Linda

In the previous chapter I discussed the boundary space that Linda navigated as she pushed initiatives to support delivery office managers. This situation was not at all unique. The nature of her job at the Royal Mail was characterised by the navigation of boundary spaces. As an Industrial Relations manager she was required to understand the needs and interests of the unions as well as those of the business. Her work very much consisted in understanding the worlds of senior managers as well as the worlds of the union and frontline employees:

One minute you are sat in the board room and you are presenting to senior directors, and you're trying to influence them into the way you would like to either implement something [or] you're sat with the senior union executive (...); white-collar individuals(...). Then you go down to what I would call the shop floor and you have to be able to have a chat about football or (...) the motorbike that they've got a picture of (...), the kids they've got a picture of (...), and you have to change completely; what you like, what your personality comes out like you have to be able to connect with him in a very different way.”

Linda was highly skilled at doing such a thing and it was due to this talent that she had been recruited. At the time of our first interview, she had been with the business for only one year. Linda described herself as attracted to large organisations with a national feel and to the thrill of ambitious projects. Based on this, she decided to join the Royal Mail when the opportunity came. Her previous position was at a large unionised business where she had worked for ten years and where she had gained ample experience in change management.

Understanding people's needs and interests had been indispensable for her success as a professional:

“All the time I'm thinking what is it [he] needs. For me to get my deal, what does he need? What's important to him? And sometimes I will ask: What is important to you?” So you understand what you've got to play with. You've got to do that, otherwise you have nothing to bargain with”

Linda's excellence at understanding different groups, such as unions and senior executives, and building bridges among them was shaped over time. She had started working at age 16 and had been working ever since. At 17 she was a hotel manager, followed by a job in recruiting. In her hotel management role, Linda managed a team of “housekeeping, catering, bars, porters...”. Early on, Linda realised that to lead effectively, and particularly in moments of crisis, “you have to keep [everyone] on [your] side, and working with you.” This understanding was transferable to the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail: “it's very similar to running a business now within Royal Mail. You have to keep all the stakeholders (...) on [your side].” Later, she became a recruiter, and in that position, Linda continued consolidating her talent to build good relationships with different kinds of people. She identified herself as talented and held her ability proudly.

Her social reality in the jobs that she had held prior to joining the Royal Mail had been social situations of development in which Linda recognised critical demands to doing her job. As she addressed such demands, she built a repertoire (Holland et al., year: 289). Recognised by her as abilities, the strategies became deeply intertwined with her notion of self. Her strategies were part of her identity and so tools for action.

Demands recognised by Linda

Joining a new organisation brought about new demands to Linda. Although she considered herself talented at influencing others, when she joined the Royal Mail she found it difficult to gain approval for her initiatives to support delivery office managers in the development of new skills. Finding herself in this boundary space, Linda's ability to influence others was not enough to move forward her intentions. She recognised four demands. Building a network, knowing who, navigating bureaucracy, and exhibiting confidence.

Build a network: Edwards (2010) emphasises the importance of identifying what matters for people in order to achieve relational expertise. However, Linda's ability to do this depended on having an effective network and a thorough understanding of the organisation's political map. But having been with the business for less than two years, Linda was a newcomer and therefore did not have the kind of network to which she was used to in her former job:

“I can remember going to an employee (...) update¹⁰, and there must have been probably 300 Royal Mail people in one room. (...) In [my former company] I would have loved that because I would have known probably 250 of them. [This time] I walked in and I was like, actually, ‘Oh! There is someone that I met last week’... and I went over and I immediately said: ‘Can I sit with you, because I don't know anybody in here?’... Very strange, very strange.”

Know who: An added complication to her work was that the business was changing at an accelerated pace and therefore made it difficult to identify a stakeholder map. This added to the difficulties of not having a network and related to her position as a newcomer:

“you need to really understand how the organisation is set up and that's been quite difficult because we've changed quite a lot in the last year. (...) The business is so big, nobody tends to tell you what's happening. No-one says, “by the way, we've reorganised operations and this is what's happening,” or, “this is now who's the head of this.” Things just seem to happen and centrally. You haven't got a clue what's going on.”

¹⁰ Linda was making reference to a large meeting for employees designed to update them on strategy or other business' plans.

She needed to read the politics of the organisation and build an understanding of who was who and where the power really was. I named the demand 'know who' using Edwards (2010) findings about how professionals navigated boundary spaces.

Navigate bureaucracy: The Royal Mail felt to Linda very 'public sector-like'. Both Linda and Eric, who identified themselves as new in the organisation, used the term 'public sector-like' to refer the organisation's approach to doing things. Railey (2009) suggests that, although people tend to associate 'public sector' to more bureaucratised and slower systems, the difference between public sector and private sector work cultures might relate more to the magnitude and complexity that typical public organisations have, rather than to the nature of their ownership. The discussion of what it means for the Royal Mail to be 'public sector-like' is only relevant in this thesis to the extent that it is a category that Linda and Eric used to make sense of their environment and to explain their commitments and identifications. Thus, Linda came with different ideas of how things are done, with experience from a 'private sector' company and a more 'modern' way of doing things. She had to adapt to a heavier bureaucracy where she had less autonomy to act, and to a place with a strong culture that valued longevity in the company. Many of the actions she needed to undertake required approval from a variety of stakeholders. From her perspective, people were "very uneasy about delegation" and "every man and his dogs [wanted] to be involved".

Exhibit confidence: Lacking a network and understanding of the business and its politics, Linda saw her power diminished and was thus experiencing a lack of confidence that felt very strange to her. Yet, she was not in the position to let her insecurities show. In order to do her work properly, it was imperative that she built a reputation and gained the respect of different people across the business. She felt she needed to look confident to others in order to achieve that.

5.2.2. Eric

Eric was trained as a psychologist and had spent most of his career working in Human Resources. The years prior to joining the Royal Mail had been spent in private companies that he considered more modern and evolved than the Royal Mail. This included a large organisation that had also undergone privatisation, an experience that he recalled frequently during interviews, and which was to him a point of reference to make sense of his current experience at the Royal Mail.

He first joined the Royal Mail in recruitment and soon after he secured a position that he thought could have real impact on Royal Mail's transformation. "Part of the reason why I moved to [this unit] is because I said [it] is rubbish, let me sort it out." His ideas of improvement had been heard: "[The director of the function] said 'put your money where your mouth is', which basically means 'sort it out'." Taking on a leadership role was an exciting challenge for him and a peak in his career. The

promotion meant being responsible for a wide number of managers and other people across the country, and the opportunity to implement ideas that he was committed to.

His role, he thought, was central to the business at the time of privatisation and modernisation. From his perspective, successfully shifting from a letters business to a parcels business, and from public to private organisation required offering high quality and opportune training to people. In relation to privatisation, Eric thought that learning and development were key so that staff could develop the necessary skills that would make the organisation attractive to investors. From the modernisation perspective, it was crucial that the staff received the proper support as to adapt to the new demands of the workplace. The CEO and other top leaders agreed with Eric and declared their commitment to the training agenda. Some expensive programmes that Eric had successfully implemented across the business were an evidence of the businesses' determination to offer high quality training and of Eric's ability to deliver great results: "I'm beginning to get (...) fantastic feedback, really positive feedback from the senior people, from the [executive committee]. (...) People love the being on the programme. They have hardly said a bad [thing] about anything." Yet, not all of Eric's initiatives were being as well received.

Demands recognised by Eric

"Gets me through the day" said Eric one day as he gave me a copy of Rudyard Kipling's poem "If". He was particularly fond of the verse about triumph and disaster: 'If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two impostors just the same' (Kipling, 1910: 175). Indeed, during the four and half years that he had worked at the Royal Mail¹¹, he had met both triumph and disaster. Although he had progressed in his career having taken on a leadership role and with some victories under his belt (for example the programme mentioned in the previous section, from which Eric received excellent feedback), the rally towards privatisation was difficult for him and for his team. Eric felt that his unit was "right at the centre of [the] huge organisational change" and the pressure was intense. The workload was high and the morale low. Eric recognised five demands as he faced these difficulties at work: managing size and complexity, prove his team's and his own worth, make his motives visible to other functions, manage his team better, and handle public sector-like culture.

Manage size and complexity: Eric found that the size of the organisation and the complexity of managing it was unlike anything he had done before. "When I first came to the company it was just the size, the size... the huge kind of dimensions of everything." He found it really hard to manage a larger number of people than he had ever done, who were spread across the UK. In addition, the task was more

¹¹ 4.5 years at the time of the last interview. The first interview had been over one year before.

challenging than he thought. "So, the learning agenda in Royal Mail is quite huge, much bigger than I thought it was if I took on the role, and it's growing at a tremendous rate." This kind of demand is a common one. In her study of new managers, Hill (2004: loc 326) found that "[i]nitially the new managers had no real idea of what they had gotten themselves into. They could not appreciate the complexity and breadth of their new role." Eric's demand of managing size and complexity shows how what Hill (2004) found applies also to those with management experience as they take on new responsibilities or larger management roles.

Prove his team's and his own worth: The leadership was not entirely satisfied with the work and an unexpectedly low performance evaluation was underway: "there was a possibility that my rating, and in effect therefore, the rating [of my unit], might be less than good, because we have heard some things from the CEO suggesting that she doesn't think [our work] has been done very well." Eric felt that the unit was under scrutiny and that it needed to prove itself in order to exist. "If we are not seen to be a team capable of delivering, if we've got the wrong strategy, the wrong capability, the wrong team, they could say get rid [of it], outsource it."

Make his motives visible to other functions: Eric's major headache was his relationship with senior executives in Operations. Getting on the same page with them was proving impossible and had become a massive obstacle to doing his job. He was very aware that there were clashing motives between his unit and operations, but struggled to get his point across.

Manage his team better: As the team went through an intense time in terms of its workload and the expectations laid upon them, Eric recognised that he needed to do more in order to keep the workload balanced: "Perhaps one member of my team is... he's not lazy... he is definitely not lazy but he is far slower to volunteer for anything, for any activities. While another member of my team who would be "yes! I'll do it, I'll do it!". To handle this and other challenges with the team, Eric felt he needed to have a more flexible leadership style.

Handle 'public-sector like' culture: Coming from private companies that he considered more "modern" and evolved than the Royal Mail, Eric struggled adapting to a public sector culture, often getting the response: "That's not the way we do things around here." Eric felt compelled to influence the culture:

"I often have to have these discussions 'well, that is why Royal Mail is where it is... That's why we need to do things differently'. And no matter how politely or subtly one puts that, it is just threatening. (...) That's a big challenge... That's a challenge that perhaps I expected but slightly underestimated coming into Royal Mail."

He also struggled working with 'operators' and gaining respect despite being a newcomer: "I had to be able to be taken seriously, which is quite difficult when you are not from Royal Mail in the first place."

5.2.3. Margaret

If her 16-year-old self could have a glimpse of Margaret's future, the turn of events in her life would be surprising. Margaret joined the workforce straight after school as an operator in the assembly line of an electronics company. "I'm not very academic at all. I went through school as normal. I didn't go to college, or university, or anything after school. (...) My parents weren't that well. I feared I needed to come out of school and work and get money." At that time, she had no aspirations to complete a higher degree. "Studying frightened me because I was great throughout the year, but sit me in front of an exam paper and I get too nervous." Yet, at the age of 45, Margaret had obtained a degree in Business Administration and had made it to the senior leadership team of the mail centre. She was the only woman in a group of four senior managers who ran an operation with over 1,500 staff. Margaret led a team of five other managers.

Margaret had progressively received more responsibility because she was perceived as a reliable and detail-orientated person, she thought:

"I'm seen as someone that you just need to ask me and I will go and get it done. You don't need to worry about it. [My former boss] very much recognised that in me, which is why he put me forward for the Quality [position]. (...) He needed somebody strong."

This self-understanding had been reinforced throughout all transitions in her career. Having started her work life as an operator, she began her way up the hierarchical ladder in her very first job. As she worked as a middle manager in a retail company she enrolled in night school and completed a Business degree. Margaret applied to the Royal Mail and was hired as an account manager ten years prior to our first interview. As her career progressed at the Royal Mail, she had been given further responsibilities and had held a variety of roles. Recently, she had been promoted becoming a member of the small leadership team that ran the whole operation in one of the many Mail Centres of the Royal Mail.

Margaret identified herself as a 'hands-on person'. Rather than sitting on a desk and charting process maps for people to follow on the floor-shop, she liked to walk the steps of new workflows. Her approach helped her to understand from firsthand experience potential pitfalls in procedures. The method was also helpful to assess existing routines which were causing mail sorting mistakes. "Had I not done that on my own, I would never have understood why the problem occurs," she said speaking of one of these occasions. Also, she could better understand the implications that procedure changes had for her staff. "I always want to put myself

[in the situation]. If I'm asking someone to do something, what would I think if someone asked me to do it?"

Demands recognised by Margaret

At the time of the study, Margaret was implementing changes related to modernisation and privatisation. Margaret's work was affected by any small modification in the handling of mail:

"Any changes at all that we do (...) I have to look at that in what will that do to all the Quality diagnostics that we have; the commitments that we give to our customer. That's the key part of change in my role that would actually be the big thing that we do, because we've got very [high] standards."

The implications that organisational change had for members of her team took a larger emotional toll than any other adjustment in the Mail Centre. Layoffs, relocations of people to new teams, and downgrades were difficult for her to handle. Also, Margaret faced new demands directly related to the kinds of boundary spaces that she navigated and that I discussed in Chapter 4; hence Margaret's own repositioning within the organisation implied new challenges for her. Six demands were salient: reposition herself with colleagues, buffer the impact of change on others, overcome stage fright, balance empathy, balance judgements, and control her emotional responses.

Reposition herself with colleagues: Margaret became the manager of her former peers and a peer to former bosses, yet gaining that recognition among co-workers was not straightforward. In the senior leadership team she was not being taken as seriously as she wanted:

"(...) senior managers, within this unit that I used to work for, are the hardest people (...) to influence because I used to work for them and now I'm (...) equal."

"They could be great to say it to me face to face: 'that's fantastic, I'll get that done, let's work together'. Then [they] walk away [and] it's like: 'It's just Margaret'. (...) I don't know how to overcome that. (...) I just can't influence them to the same level as I can people outside of here because I've worked for them, I don't know what it is."

Among her former peers, of whom she was now their boss, something similar was happening. Margaret felt that an attitude of camaraderie towards her, of one member of her team in particular, was undermining her authority.

Buffer the impact of change: Margaret was committed to taking care of her staff. "Each of them [in my team] always say: 'We know that you will fight our corner with things,' and I will. I will always look out for them just as I would like somebody to look out for me." But this was hard for her to deliver. Organisational

changes affected the makeup of her team in ways that she could not control. Thus, she needed to find ways to buffer the impact of change.

Overcome stage fright: Margaret reported having struggled with confidence throughout her life. Now that she had a senior management role, she again had to overcome her fear of "being put on the spotlight." Her confidence varied in different situations:

"It's like we do managers' events in Royal Mail, (...) I can stand up in front of a room of a thousand strangers and present. I stand up here in front of a room of all the managers in [this Mail Centre] and I am so nervous. (...) It's crazy, but that I just can't. I haven't been able to change that at all. That confidence bit still comes in. I don't know why it's the way it is, you know?"

Balance empathy: Margaret had a special sensitivity towards people's needs and emotions. But as a manager, empathy was a double-edged sword. "Early days, when I became manager, I had a tough time because I [had] probably too much empathy, to the extent that people took advantage. I paid the price for that, and I know it's my fault." Although she considered she had improved at managing empathy, it was a continuous struggle:

"I can go automatically for the empathy rather than looking at the true facts of something."

"There's some people that I have probably too much empathy with and they've drawn me in and I've let them get away with not performing as they should to the detriment of other team members (...) I can get sucked in quite easily so I've got to try and look at it more balanced."

A lack of balance in the empathy that she displayed was in detriment of the sense of justice to which, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, she was committed to. I will explore Margaret's sense of justice further in Chapter 6.

Balance judgements: Margaret's straightforward judgements of right and wrong, and her rigid perspective on rules became insufficient as she became part of the leadership team:

"I can adapt very quickly, but I like... If it's a procedure it's there for a reason. I didn't like people bending the rules to suit themselves, because it's unfair to others. I was very structured until Julian started saying: "you know in this business sometimes you have to, you've got to have that balance of the procedure, but what is best for the individual, the company, or reverse."

Thus, she found she needed to make an effort to have a more patient and balanced take on some situations.

Control her emotional responses: Margaret was not good at hiding her emotions and that was proving problematic in her workplace interactions: “I wear my heart on my sleeve (...) Whatever is going on you’ll know from my facial expression. I’m not one that can hide it. If I’m angry or if I’m sad I’m not one that can hide it.” Assisted by her boss, she recognised the need to work on that: “I used to jump in with reactions to things, and now Julian is just saying: “take a step back”. He coaches me in that way: “Just absorb it. Things happen that you can’t control.””

5.2.4. Julian

Julian first joined the Royal Mail as a postman, and thirty years later was the director of large Mail Centre. Yet, having had only one employer throughout his career did not translate into career stability. The Royal Mail had undergone enough restructurings in the time frame that had affected him directly: “I’ve lost my job four times, but always gone for different jobs (...) I’ve probably done around twelve to fifteen jobs in thirty years.” He had gone through roles including regional manager, human resources manager and operations manager; “quite a varied career,” according to him. Not all the jobs had resulted from a promotion. Of one in particular he recounted: “It was quite a big move, (...), I actually took a pay cut and it was quite tough but it was great learning because suddenly I was within a different culture.” Looking back, he was positive about the different roles he had held: “I see it as an opportunity more than a threat, because they often say ‘well, that job is gone, go and do something different.’” This had been the case when he took his current role as a Mail Centre director:

“My boss said: why don’t you become [Mail Centre] operations director? I didn’t know what was that, really (...) so I probably wasn’t fully qualified for that (...) but I applied and I got the job. So that was an example of where that move was enforced on me and it turned out it was a good move.”

Like Linda and Margaret, Julian had not gone to college when he joined. Different to Margaret, he did identify himself as an academic person. He completed his A-levels and was offered a place at a good university. Before enrolling, he decided to take a gap year and work as postman. But he could never leave the workforce and go back to school:

“I got quite settled, [I was earning] a lot of money for an 18-year-old, I also got engaged to my first wife. So when I went to [university] I didn’t give it a proper chance, I was coming back to London every weekend and so I only lasted one term, and then I decided to give it up.”

Having made up his mind to drop college, he learnt that having A-levels made him eligible to apply to junior management position at the Royal Mail. His progression was fast: “I had a boss who was quite strong-willed but I learnt from him quite

quickly, and within a year he asked me to be delivery sector manager and put me in charge of ten delivery depots.” By the age of 27 he was in charge of 800 staff.

At the time of our first interview Julian was in his fifties and had held a director role for the last four years. Since appointed, his mind was set to move transformation forward. Change, he thought, was urgent: “when I came here, back in 2008 [the Mail Centre] had been through a bad time, [the] plant didn't work, they were failing to clear the mail, there was no plan at all (...), literally no plan (...).” While committed to the overhauling of the Mail Centre he did not start it immediately: “I wanted to bring (...) stability before I brought in transformation.” In 2012, Julian already had some victories in his transformation agenda. “Now that we've got the business case and we have transformation a program we are moving at quite rapid pace to deploy it.”

Demands recognised by Julian

In Chapter 4 I discussed Julian's boundary space and narrated how, despite of his own alignment with institutional goals, Julian had to cope with misalignment among different stakeholders. In navigating that boundary space and the other change challenges he had at work, the most salient demands were to secure support for his business plans, manage stakeholders, reassure staff without union interference, and retain autonomy.

Secure support for business plans: Some of the large scale projects Julian proposed required CEO sign-off. Taking a business plan to the Executive Committee was a new thing for him, and building the case with the confidence he required implied developing new skills. He needed to learn “how to take a case to an investment committee, understanding (...) rate of return and (...) payback, things unless you take a case you really don't have to deal with them in operations...”

Manage stakeholders: The boundary space that Julian was navigating and that was discussed in the previous chapter related to the relocation of a unit to a new building. In this and in many other initiatives he led, Julian needed to use his negotiation and influencing abilities to try and achieve some alignment. Speaking of transformation plans Julian said: “I know the path I want to take but it's almost like (...) a jigsaw puzzle. I know exactly the picture I want to produce, but people take the pieces [away] and they give them back.” He therefore needed to manage the parties involved in order to recover the jigsaw pieces and execute the plan.

Reassure frontline staff without union interference: Julian needed to find ways to reassure his staff about the changes taking place:

“They'll be worried whether they can still get their overtime on a Sunday, and they will be able to. So we'll be able to say 'no one will lose a job, no one will be asked to

move more than four miles, we can even keep you on your same times of attendance, and we can offer you the same opportunities to earn overtime'. Despite all those assurances they'll still be worried"

Julian believed the union distorted messages and sometimes protected its own interests rather than those of its members:

"I honestly feel I've got more responsibility to [my employees] at the end of the day, they're my employees. They're not the union's employees. They're just their members."

So it was important for him to get the message across, despite the union's interfering. In this Julian was in the practice of sustaining the institution.

Retain autonomy: Given the antecedents in his trajectory at the Royal Mail, Julian realised his role could change. He had perceived that the CEO was questioning his reporting line:

"I go to the meetings with the domestic people and it's quite bureaucratic. They look at details, they don't look at strategy enough... The strategy is [managed by others], whereas with me, it's largely devolved which is very nice for me (...) but [if they] pull some of that strategy in and take it away from me and say to me: 'you just run the operation, we'll do the strategy' (...) I would think about whether I still want the job then."

He belonged to an administrative unit in which he had status and autonomy. If the reporting line changed, the autonomy would as well. Therefore, Julian needed to make sure he was prepared to justify the existing administrative structure.

5.3. Demand recognition and agency

Overall, I identified and labeled nineteen new demands summarised in Table 5.-1. The list is not exhaustive, as the data is quite rich and more demands could be teased out in each one of the cases. I therefore selected for this discussion the most salient demands in the accounts, either because they came up repeatedly during interviews, or because they seemed particularly vivid and relevant to the managers. Also, I focused on the demands being worked on at the moment of the interviews. All managers also recounted demands that they had dealt with in the past and these will be relevant later on for my argument.

TABLE 5-1 DEMANDS

LINDA	ERIC	MARGARET	JULIAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a network. • Knowing who. • Navigating bureaucracy. • Exhibiting confidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing size and complexity. • Proving his team's and his own worth. • Making his motives visible to others. • Managing his team better. • Adapting to a 'public-sector like' culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repositioning herself with colleagues. • Buffering the impact of change. • Overcoming stage-freight. • Balancing empathy. • Balancing judgement. • Controlling her emotional responses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing support for business plans. • Managing stakeholders. • Reassuring frontline staff. • Retaining authority.

Two insights stem from the cross-case analysis. First the demands, as recognised, were embedded with agency on behalf of the managers, loading them with what mattered to them. Second, the collection of demands across the four cases is indicative of what was considered good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. The two themes will be elaborated in the next section.

5.3.1. Demand-as-identified and demand-as-refashioned

The research question guiding the inquiry reads: “how did senior managers face new demands that challenged what mattered to them?” Yet, the demands identified in this chapter do not seem to be so at odds with what mattered to the managers. On the contrary, many of the demands seem tailored precisely to protect what mattered to them. So was there such an alignment between the managers and their institutional realities that the demands laid upon them actually did not challenge what mattered? Or, perhaps, the managers did not, as MacIntyre (2013) argues, engage in any kind of moral debate and instead treated ‘ends as given and as outside their scope’? Both alternatives seem unlikely considering the boundary spaces that the managers were navigating, in which misalignment is quite blunt. Indeed, the profound and emotionally taxing misalignments that at least three of the four managers were dealing with suggests quite the opposite: each manager’s notion of what mattered faced plenty of resistance as they navigated the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail.

A better-suited explanation is that the demands presented in the chapter already involved a certain degree of adjustment on behalf of the manager, with the goal of protecting what mattered to them. Post-Vygotskian theorists have amply discussed the agency involved in demand recognition, and therefore in the learning that

follows (Edwards, forthcoming; Hedegaard, 2012; Chan, 2014). Edwards is very specific in saying that

"the relationship may be problematic: learners may not recognise the demands presented to them, or may find them too uncomfortable to tackle; in both of these situations there is no [social situation of development]" (Edwards in Clandinin and Husu, forthcoming).

Although the argument is clear in that recognition is central, problematic and dependent on the individual's perspective, a more nuanced definition of demands is called for in this analysis. Hence, borrowing from MacIntyre's use of dashes, I will use the terms 'demand-as-identified' and 'demand-as-refashioned' to make provision for the distinctions that I observed in the managers' trajectories.

This distance between the demand-as-identified (one that clashes with what mattered) and the demand-as-refashioned (one that shelters what mattered) applies in all four cases. Margaret, for example, did at some point ask herself if to be a good manager she needed to stop being empathetic. Yet, this was not the demand she went on to tackle. Instead, the demand she embraced was to "balance empathy," and that is quite different to "avoid empathy". The recognised demand made provisions for what mattered to her. If successful in addressing it, Margaret would protect three commitments and identifications: her sense of justice, her commitment to being a good manager in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail and being empathetic.

Eric recognised the demand to prove his worth or to make his motives visible to other functions. The demand did not read: 'limit your efforts to training technical skills,' although this message was coming loud and clear from senior executives in operations, and if he had done so, perhaps he would have been in far less trouble.

The managers themselves could also create demands. Julian, who reported the highest alignment with the business among the four managers, explicitly recognised a demand to improve his financial skills. Such demand was not an imposition from the top. His boss was not telling him: "your role has changed, please become better at finance." Instead, he agentially recognised this demand because it contributed to protecting what mattered to him: acquiring approval for his business plans (which at the same time related to his interest in remaining autonomous).

Linda recognised the demand "navigate bureaucracy". Had she assumed a demand as laid upon her when she realised that at the Royal Mail "everybody wants to see the paperwork before they talk to you," the demand might have been of the sort: 'send a memo to everyone well ahead of the meeting' or 'get approval from a few senior managers more before you send out a communication.' The next chapter will explore how a distance was established between messages coming from her institutional reality, to the recognised demand of 'navigate bureaucracy', a direction

ample enough for her to protect her ways while also surviving in the new organisation that she had recently joined.

My argument echoes the idea that individual agency influences how a figured world evolves. This explanation links back to Vygotsky's understanding of externalisation and internalisation, resonates with the person-figured world dialectic and reiterates that the ways in which "opportunities for action (...) are interpreted by individual actors" determine how work is done, and ultimately how practices¹² are shaped (Edwards & Daniels, 2012: 110). Edwards emphasises that "while practices offer distinct affordances and demands, which call for "gap-closing"; what is learnt will depend on what is *recognised* as the demand" (forthcoming, emphasis added). Based on the case of the managers, I take the argument further by speaking of *identification* and *refashioning* as sub-categories of *recognition*. The reason for this is that with the use of the term recognition Edwards seems to imply visibility, interpretation and acceptance. Yet, in the case of the managers, an unrecognised demand was not necessarily an invisible demand. Instead, a demand could be acknowledged and yet not embraced, at least not before it was modified agentially to shelter what mattered to the managers. While recognition may imply this agentic modification, 'refashioning' highlights the centrality of *interpretation* and *modification* of the demand on behalf of the manager. I will henceforth refer to demand recognition as the process encompassing the identification and the refashioning of a given demand, and use demand-as-identified and demand-as-refashioned when the nuances need to be made explicit.

So what does this mean for the research question 'how did senior managers face new demands which challenged what mattered to them?' The first thing we know to be an answer is that when managers encountered demands which challenged what mattered to them, they modified the demand, making it more congruent with what mattered to them. Moreover, demand refashioning had the very purpose of protecting what mattered.

At the beginning of this chapter I said that demands drive the curriculum of learning and cast identities. It must be clarified after this analysis, that *agentially refashioned* demands are the ones which indeed drove the learning and casted the managers identities. Insofar as a distance was established between demand-as-identified and demand-as-refashioned, at least 'the modicum of agency' of which Holland et al. (1998) speak had a place in the managers' trajectories. Perhaps this is also in contrast to MacIntyre's (2013) rejection of managerial agency. Fig 5.3 presents an update of the demand-response-cycle to make provision for these findings. In the new diagram, the identification of a new demand and the refashioning of the demands are expressed graphically with an arrow. The next

¹² In the sociocultural sense.

chapter will explore further the act of demand recognition as well as the building of such distance between demand-as-identified and demand-as-refashioned.

5.4. Conclusions

In this chapter I focused on the emerging demands the managers faced as the work of the managers changed. The chapter introduced the four managers and offered some insights about the trajectories that led them to their current position at the Royal Mail, in navigating their figured world, and in dealing with new demands which challenged what mattered to them. Nineteen demands were identified. Some of the demands were similar across managers, suggesting the existence of an institutional curriculum about what was considered good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. The demands can be grouped in three categories: those primarily regarding work on oneself, those primarily linked to working on one's team, and those primarily linked to working on others.

A reflection on how the demands challenged what mattered to the managers suggests that the agency of managers was manifested from the very moment of encountering a mismatch between who they were and who they were expected to become. Agency was manifested in at least two ways. First, not all demands were taken upon. Second the demands that were taken upon, did not remain as given, but rather were strongly attuned to shelter the managers' commitments and identifications. Such accommodations did not happen straightaway. Instead, there was a process taking the manager from an initial answer to the question 'then what am I supposed to do if not what I have been doing?' to the response 'here is the demand that I will actually tackle'. This process is represented in stage 2 of the demand-response cycle on what I have called the transitional/dialectical space. The next chapter will engage in a more fine-grained scrutiny of how this process occurred.

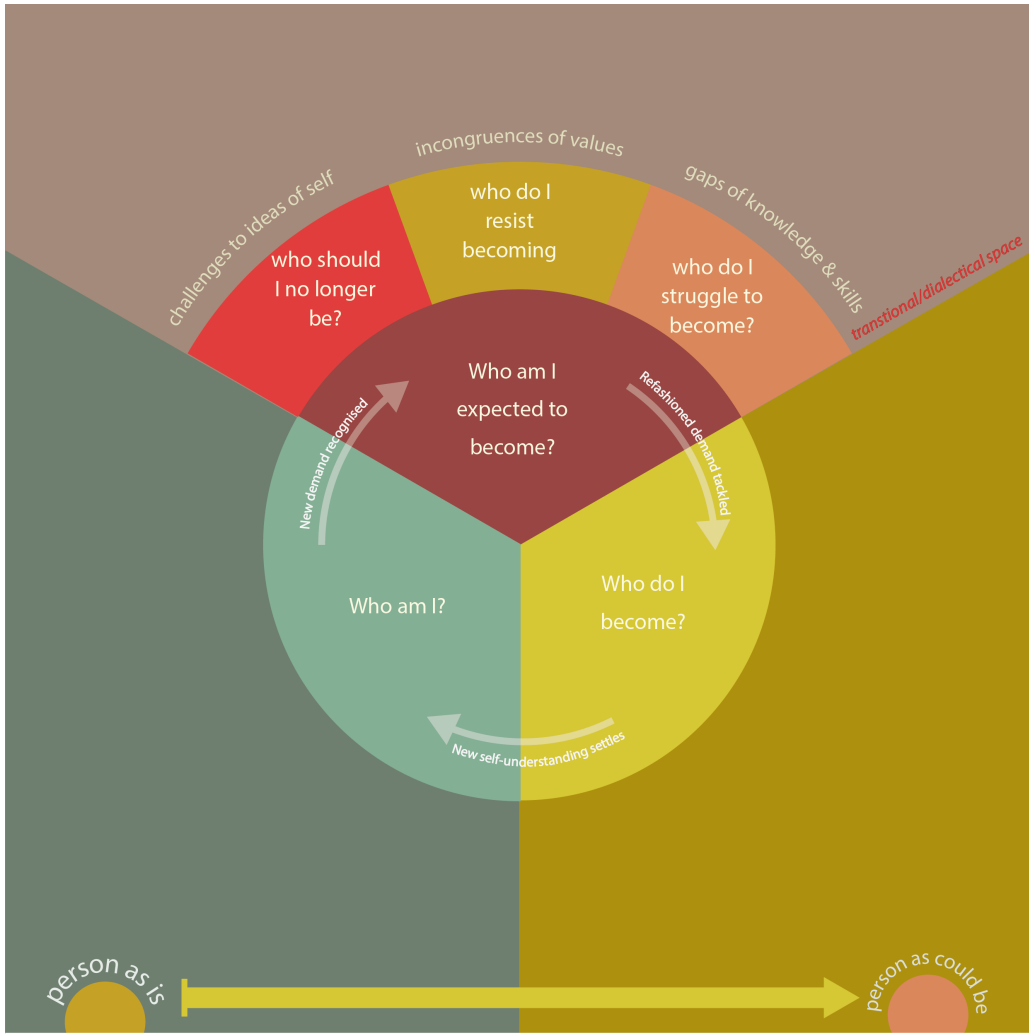


FIG. 5.3

CHAPTER 6

CONTRADICTIONS AND GAP- CLOSING

In the previous chapter, I argued that as managers faced new demands from their institutional realities, they engaged in a refashioning of such demands so that they better accommodated and sheltered what mattered to them. In this chapter, assisted by the concepts of contradiction and gap-closing between person-as-is and person-as-could-be, I will focus on how the identification of demands happened, as well as on the considerations that influenced their refashioning. I will first explain the theoretical tools employed. Then, I will examine the role of challenges to self-understandings, value incongruences and gaps of knowledge and skills. The next chapter will discuss the strategies devised by the managers to respond to the demands of the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail.

6. CONTRADICTIONS AND 'GAP-CLOSING'

I have insisted that facing new demands and refashioning them so that they sheltered what mattered to the managers was a costly exercise. It involved resolving crises and contradictions of the sort that Edwards speaks about:

“(...) coping with change (...) involves a relatively slow process of working through contradictions or ‘crises’ and gaining new forms of mental equilibrium which enable functioning.” (Edwards, 2010: 70-71)

Contradictions, as I explained in Chapter 1, are different to the concept of misalignment. In the framework of this thesis they make reference to competing commitments held by a single individual, while with misalignment I have referred to the convergence of different notions of what matters to varied stakeholders interacting in a boundary space. Defined as situations in which inconsistent elements are present as well as ‘double binds’, in Chapter 1 I mentioned that contradictions are a core concept in a dialectical notion of development, since their resolution is thought to be the very moment in which learning and development take place. Contradictions have a central role in Vygotsky’s social situation of development and have been considered in the learning and development literature across different traditions at the level of the individual or the system (e.g. Engeström, 2010; Kegan and Lahey, 2009).

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 6.1 will elaborate on the conceptual grounds of the chapter by explaining further the idea of person-as-is and person-as-could-be. Section 6.2 will discuss demand identification by the use of the question “who am I expected to become?” In this section I will also elaborate on the three factors associated to the refashioning of the demands identified: challenges to ideas of self, incongruences of values, and gaps of knowledge and skills. Section 6.3 will focus on Julian’s case. Julian was found to be undergoing a period of managerial identity stability. In that section I will explain what I mean by identity stability and present the evidence grounding such findings. In Section 6.4 I will argue that the managers responded to stories of what was good at the Royal Mail and that these stories gave direction to their learning. In section 6.5 I will draw some conclusions.

6.1. Learning, gap-closing and person-as-is and person-as-could-be

Identifying a new demand implied the realisation that there was a gap between the managers as they were with the managers as they had to be, as to fulfil the expectations of the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. Eric and Linda, for example, were expected to become full members of the organisation, and an authentic membership, as van Maanen and Schein (1979) point out, did not mean just having signed a contract. As van Maanen and Schein argue (1979: 2): “from

the time individuals first enter a workplace, to the time they leave their membership behind, they experience and often commit themselves to a distinct way of life complete with its own rhythms, rewards, relationships, demands, and potentials.” In their situations as newcomers the difficulty to commit to different “rhythms, rewards, relationships”, etc. was concreted in specific situations and interactions. Margaret, although she had been with the business for ten years already, was also experiencing something similar as she assumed her new role in the Mail Centre.

In the process of learning and development of an individual, the question ‘who am I expected to become?’ signifies the realisation of a gap between the managers’ self-understandings and the expectations placed upon them. Self-examination was not necessarily explicit, “[m]ost of the deliberation does proceed and must proceed without bringing this question to mind” (MacIntyre, 1999: 69). Closing the gap was a must if they were to navigate successfully the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail.

Before delving into the data, it is time to go back to a few points that I touched upon already in Chapter 3, and to elaborate them further. I explained that identity had become a useful tool to explore the research questions. I also said that the question ‘who am I expected to become?’ became crucial to understanding the trajectories of the managers as they navigated misalignment and encountered new demands which challenged what mattered to them. Conveyed in Stage 2 of the demand-response cycle, ‘who am I expected to become?’ is a pivotal question to understanding the kind of learning that the managers underwent. The question emerged as a tool to make sense of the empirical data, and is also strongly backed by the literature. Sfard and Prusak’s (2005) work is relevant here because it captures core elements of sociocultural thought about identity, including Holland et al.’s (1998) contributions, and also, Sfard and Prusak (2005) offer unique insights on methodological considerations for the study of identities. They argue that “learning is often the only hope for those who wish to close a critical gap between their actual and designated identities” (Sfard and Prusak, 2005: 19) and define these two identities as

“significant narratives about a person where actual identity, [consists] of stories about the actual state of affairs, and designated identity, [consists] of narratives presenting a state of affairs which, for one reason or another, is expected to be the case, if not now, then in the future.” (2005: 18)

A similar but different account to designated identities is given by Markus and Nurius (1986: 954) who speak of possible selves that “represent individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming, and thus provide a conceptual link between cognition and motivation.”. Markus and Nurius’ possible selves are only partially relevant to my argument. While identity aspirations and fears must certainly be considered in how

demands are refashioned, the crucial question I am addressing is centred on demands and attention is on the managers responding dialectically to their institutional realities. Thus the issue at heart is who the managers are expected to become instead of who they aspire to become.

Accounts of development as gap-closing, such as Sfard and Prusak's (2005), Ibarra (1999) and Markus and Nurius (1986) are not at all modern. MacIntyre's (2013) analysis of Nichomachean Ethics helps to link them back to Aristotle. What Sfard and Prusak (2005) call 'actual' and 'designated identities', in MacIntyre's account are commensurable to two contrasting elements of a "teleological scheme" that he says underlies Christian, Jewish and Muslim thought and that dominated the "European Middle ages (...). [M]an-as-happens-to-be and man-as-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature" (2013: 62)

MacIntyre's (2013) analysis of Aristotle provides a whole new layer of considerations. First, while Sfard and Prusak (2005: 19) leave the purpose of gap-closing quite open "depending on what counts as critical to one's identity" and give as examples "the craft of cooking, the art of appearing in media, or the skill of solving mathematical problems," for MacIntyre gap-closing consists in reaching one's "essential nature" (and also uses the terms purpose or *telos*, appealing to Aristotle's function argument). Second, while for Sfard and Prusak (2005) the path to gap-closing is learning, for MacIntyre the path is ethics:

"Ethics is the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter. Ethics therefore in this view presupposes some account of potentiality and act, some account of the essence of man as a rational animal and above all some account the human *telos*."

By ethics, MacIntyre means "the precepts which enjoin the various virtues and prohibit the vices," and goes on to say that such precepts "instruct us to move from potentiality to act, how to realize our true nature and reach our true end" (2013: 63). This point links back to the function argument of which I spoke in Chapter 2.

MacIntyre (2013) also holds some theory of learning that he considers is involved in gap-closing. For him person-as-is, is a person in her "untutored state (...) and needs to be transformed by the instruction of practical reason and experience" into person-as-could-be if she reaches her purpose. He argues that

"[t]he desires and emotions which we possess are to be put in order and educated by the use of such precepts and by the cultivation of those habits of action which the study of ethics prescribes; reason instructs us both as to what our true end is and as to how to reach it" (2013: 63).

In *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999) MacIntyre's develops further his understanding of the role of learning and development in the process of gap-closing. While Sfard and Prusak (2005) and MacIntyre's (2013; 1999) accounts

have similarities, such as an emphasis on self-understandings, there are also categorical differences. A thorough parallel is out of the scope of this chapter, but to give an example, Sfard and Prusak distance themselves from words such as nature, character and essence, used frequently in MacIntyre's argument, because to them such words are "irrevocably tainted with connotations of natural givens and biological determinants, [that] are ill suited to the sociocultural project" (2005: 15). Nonetheless, there are at least three reasons why connecting these accounts is powerful and highly relevant to this inquiry. First, the sociocultural tradition has explored gap-closing in a way that the MacIntyrean tradition has not. If morality is defined by a scheme in which gap closing between person-as-is and person-as-could-be is at its core, virtue ethics scholars should not leave out of sight a developmental and learning perspective. Other scholars have considered learning to some extent. Annas (2009) does so in a way in her consideration of a relationship between virtues and skills. Morrell and Brammer (2014) highlight the relevance of training in the formation of habits of police officers, and Hall (2011) reflects on the apprenticeship model of surgeon residency as a way to cultivate phronesis.

Second, connecting MacIntyre's notion of *telos* and purpose with the sociocultural emphasis on gap-closing through identity work gives ground to the question: 'what is worth learning?' Such question, encouraged by Perkins (2014) in his pedagogical reflections, should be far more central than it usually is in sociocultural inquiries and generally in any inquiry about learning. This is a point that Neil Postman (1996) has underscored. The answer might as well be cooking, doing a math problem, developing a more flexible leadership style, or understanding the political map of the Royal Mail. Yet, the value of the question lies in that it emphasises a careful consideration of whether any of such answers can be justified in the light of the larger purposes of a human life. Is such learning a path towards flourishing? Avoiding this question suggests that debates about learning have as well "eschew[ed] moral debate regarding questions of ends as beyond systematic rational assessment," and that like MacIntyre's account of the 'Therapist' education and learning, specialists are only concerned with the techniques of education and "not the values of the goals [learners] pursue" (Mangham, 1995: 181). While, the sociocultural tradition speaks of goals, motives and 'what matters,' it abstains from tackling issues of ethics and morality more bluntly. Such a concern, is one that should not be overlooked in any study of the dialectics of a person and their social reality, and even less so in an exploration of the 'affordances and limitations that work poses to our development' (as I said in Chapter 1 that this thesis was about). Neglecting these sorts of questions would be to neglect the teleological character of a human person to which MacIntyre (2013) and other philosophers (like Edith Stein) give a central importance.

Third, MacIntyre highlights the role of virtues and vices in gap-closing. In so doing, he taps into the relevance of paying attention to what is considered good in a social situation of development. Here, narratives are the main connecting link between MacIntyre's emphasis on virtues and the *telos*, a sociocultural account of

motives, and the work of managers at the Royal Mail. Linda, Eric, Margaret, and Julian were navigating a figured world where “significance [was] assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes [were] valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998: 52). Some behaviours were rewarded and others penalised. Narratives have the potential of establishing common understandings (Fancourt, Edwards, and Menter, 2015) and are essential to the story-telling animal that MacIntyre argues that we are. “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” (MacIntyre, 2013: 251). The demands that Linda, Eric, Margaret and Julian were facing, and more importantly, the considerations taken as they refashioned and addressed the demands, were heavily loaded with the stories of which they were part. Borrowing from Taylor (1989), such stories were managers’ sources of the self. While this chapter will offer some hints, the central discussion about those stories of which the managers were part I leave for Chapters 7 and 8. For now, I proceed to present the findings in regards to the managers’ realisation of who they were expected to become.

6.2. Who am I expected to become?

Attempts at understanding how the managers worked through the inconsistencies between manager-as-is and manager-as-could-be revealed that the gap comprised three more fine-grained kinds of contradictions:

- challenges to ideas of self
- value incongruences
- gaps of knowledge and skills.

Such kinds of contradictions can be translated into the questions:

- Who should I no longer be?
- Who do I resist becoming?
- Who do I struggle to become?

It was in working through these contradictions that demands were identified, refashioned and addressed. Such a process happened in a specific time and space. To acknowledge the timeframe and the material context of those situations I will speak of ‘dialectical space’. The dialectical space (which is also conveyed in the demand-response cycle) was informed by notions of what was good, stemming from the figured worlds to which the managers belonged.

6.2.1. Who should I no longer be?

Speaking of teacher education programmes, Edwards (forthcoming) notes that "there is a specific role for mentors" in helping new teachers to recognise demands. Thompson (2013) has also highlighted the role of teachers in helping students recognise what they ought to do in order to develop. At the Royal Mail, demand recognition was also mediated by others. For Margaret, for example, it often was her boss who helped her recognise demands: "I was very structured until Julian started saying, 'You know, in this business sometimes (...) you've got to have that balance'... He's sort of coached me on that to take time out, think about it, and then come back." In the organisation, there were resources in place that assisted demand recognition. For example, monthly meetings of each person with their boss. These meetings were a requirement across the organisation and were called 'one-to-ones'. There were also other activities and spaces specifically purposed towards demand recognition, such as mentoring, coaching and performance reviews. These spaces are important because it was in them that stories of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail, were reproduced and enacted.

Whether demand recognition was triggered or not by the mediation of others, challenges to self-understandings had a particularly relevant role in the identification of demands. In some cases, it was in the moment of questioning themselves and their own accounts of who they were that the unfolding of learning began.

I found three different kinds of manifestations of questionings to self-understandings. First, there were instances in which the managers synchronically held multiple self-accounts. This is a phenomenon that Gilligan first observed in her studies of women and labelled '*contrapuntal voices*' (Gilligan, Spencer and Weinberg, 2006). Second, there were instances in which the managers questioned *whether they were who they thought they were*. The third challenge to self-understanding implied considering who they should *no longer be* in order to tackle the demand. I will discuss the first two kinds under the heading 'who am I really?' The third kind under the heading 'who should I no longer be?'

"Who am I really?"

The 'who am I really' question is central to demand recognition and reminds of MacIntyre's remarks that:

"genuine and extensive self-knowledge becomes possible only in consequence of those social relationships which on occasion provide badly needed correction for our own judgments. When adequate self-knowledge is achieved, it is always a shared achievement." (1999: 95)

But this process of demand identification was seldom straightforward. During our year of interactions for most of the time Eric knew that something was not working well. Yet, although he could speak directly of the misalignment with Operations, it took him months to articulate which adjustments were required on his behalf to better navigate the situation. During that time, a dissonant polyphony of co-existing accounts about himself came across loudly in the data. Table 6-1 shows a breakdown of excerpts illustrating Eric's confident and insecure voices. What is very interesting about the contrast is that every phrase on the table was drawn from one single stream of dialogue during an interview. Contrapuntal voices in Eric's case, seem to be an indication of an existing gap, rather than the step prior to the recognition of demands. Eric's contrapuntal voices eventually, but not immediately, translated into the recognised demand of 'proving his own worth' to others in the organisation. In a sense, they evidence Eric's struggle in understanding and navigating the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail.

Linda's challenges to self-understandings were different to contrapuntal voices. They implied an explicit questioning of whether she was who she thought she was. After being in one same business for ten years, and feeling that she knew it like the palm of her hand, at the Royal Mail she was now 'the newcomer,' and this realisation took a while to settle in her. She reflected: "It was like: take a step back, you're still very new to this. You haven't got the experience and knowledge that you thought you had in this organisation." Her new position as a Royal Mail manager, challenged deeply rooted self-understandings such as having a strong network, and brought about new ones, such as being the newcomer. As she grasped her new position, she was caught by surprise by her inability to influence some stakeholders:

"It was quite a bump personally because one of my own standards is never to cut somebody out of the process, and without realising I was doing it, I had cut a huge influence and stakeholders out of the process so personally I felt I'd got it wrong (...) and I don't like that, I'm very hard on myself."

A lack of clarity about who were the precise stakeholders that she should involve to move her agenda forward was very unusual, and thus frustrating for her:

"One of the things I know is one of my strengths is building relationships and using that as an influence and I completely got it wrong. It's confronting that I've done that wrong."

As with Eric, it also took Linda a while to recognise the demands. Linda's confidence, understood as an ability to read and navigate a figured world to accomplish her intentions had been compromised (Edwards, personal communication). The refashioned demands, in Linda's case, were intended to close the gap in relation to the challenges to self-understandings that she was experiencing. A demand she embraced was not to comply with the expectation of asking for everyone's approval before sending a communication to the unions (demand-as-identified), but rather it was to become the person that she used to

believe she was before joining the Royal Mail: one who could influence others and get ambitious change projects done. This one goal was conveyed in the multiple demands-as-refashioned that I presented in Chapter 5.

Margaret also appraised if she really was who she thought she was. In the past, she had never seen her gender as having any bearing on her managerial identity: “I don’t see myself as a female manager (...), I just see myself as a manager, I always have.” Yet, a few interactions at work made her question whether she should identify herself as a manager or as a *female* manager:

“I’m the only female on the [team]. There’s been a couple of comments made by [one of the managers], it’s good to have a female in [team], but I haven’t felt it in a way that I’m only here because I’m a female. I haven’t felt that, but I sometimes [think]: am I better placed because the female population of managers is a lot smaller? Since [this CEO came] in, she champions this female element.”

Margaret reported that the comments of her colleagues continued and became more explicit in questioning her merit. She reported being told things like: “If the [CEO is] going to start cutting jobs you’ll be fine because you’re a female.” She was also dealing, as I mentioned already in Chapter 5, with a subordinate who resisted her authority because she was a woman. Margaret justified such remarks based on the culture of the organisation: “Some people in here will say [that for] a female manager is quite hard, (...) It’s peoples’ way, it’s not [that] they don’t want to have a female managing them.”

Echoing the identity work literature (e.g. Ibarra, 1999; Holland et al., 1998; Sford and Prusak, 2005), Margaret’s case reminds one of the role that others have in the building of one’s identity: “by observing their own behavior as well as the reactions of others, who accept, reject, or renegotiate these public images, [people] maintain or modify their private self-conceptions” (Ibarra, 1999: 766). It should be noted that narratives in the organisation around gender informed Margaret’s self-questioning. At the time in which all these interactions with her colleagues were taking place, a recently appointed and female CEO was “champion[ing] the female element,” and openly pushing for more gender balance at the top levels of the organisation. All these considerations raised questions about her own merit, and consequently challenged a story about herself through which she had so far made sense of her career success.

Margaret’s challenges to ideas of self resulted in recognising the demand of ‘repositioning herself with colleagues.’ This was a refashioned demand. Margaret took a stand and decided to “maintain (...) her private self-conception” (Ibarra, 1999: 766) and seeing herself as a manager, rather than as a female manager. Such a stance had implications on the ways in which she handled the situation and will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

TABLE 6-1 ERIC'S CONTRAPUNTAL VOICES

CONFIDENT VOICE	INSECURE VOICE
I'm doing something bigger and better that they (...) really understand. That's some of my arrogance coming through but I couldn't do this job if I didn't feel a bit overly confident.	I've got some people who probably think I'm a waste of space. And don't get me wrong, I have days when I think, God maybe I'm a waste of space, Am I really doing all that I should do?
I have some people in this organisation who really like what I do (...)	I don't know everybody's confident of my abilities to deliver
Now (...) my kids are fairly grown up, (...) if I lose my job now, I get paid an awful lot of money and I can probably survive at least a couple of years on the money that they pay me, and that changes you out, so I'm able to be slightly braver, bolder, more self-confident	somehow I still have the gigantic mortgage, that's my fault (...)
give me any organisation and I think I can sort that out to (*in), with the right people around me.	There is a risk that I'd been associated with the old ways, when we get privatised unless I can convince the new owners that I am a more corporate (...) director, I may not stay, they may say go, and get someone else in"
(...) I think I still have the best to come for me, I actually believe that, so from a personal level the jobs I've had, the work history, has increased my confidence	And there's no way I'm [as] far as I wanted to be, nowhere near. I have some reasons, some excuses... (...)And specially when you're starting to get in your late forties and beyond you start thinking well, have I peaked? Am I going to get another job?

Challenges to self-understanding in the form of 'who am I really?' could also take place at the team-level. This was Eric's case:

"I spoke to [the head of a unit]. 'I need to catch up with you about [project x]' He said: 'Oh well it's about time! (...) I've been waiting for three or four months and nothing's happened... you keep telling me... and I've given up'. That was painful to hear... In my team, they've said, 'Oh well... things are going a bit slowly.' I didn't realise [we were doing this]. (...) We've let them down."

His encounter with a colleague made him question if his team was as effective as he thought it was. Here too, demands were recognised. In addition to 'proving his own worth,' Eric needed to 'prove his team's worth' and 'manage his team better.'

Who should I no longer be?

Vygotsky argues that “the appearance of the new in development necessarily signifies the dying off of the old” (Vygotsky, 1998: 194). Margaret and Eric went through having to abandon a self-understanding in order to assume a new position within their figured world. A shared experience was the need to let go of their camaraderie with others in order to assert their recently acquired authority. In Margaret’s case she quite decided to end a friendship:

“One of the hardest things I did was, when Julian moved [Fred] into my team, [he] was one of my best friends [at] work. That was the hardest thing I’ve probably had to do, because his behaviours sometimes aren’t great in certain circumstances... Which (...) [if] it’s just friendship then I’m okay, because everybody’s different. When there’s expectations as a manager, for me to say something... that was quite difficult; he wasn’t great at closing out actions on time, and if you’re committing to something you will get all the actions closed in time. If you have got a reasonable explanation as to why that’s fine, but it was just I don’t really like doing that. I had to be very strong in that, and he did get [a] strange behaviour but I said: ‘I can’t treat you differently [to others]. It’s different now’. I’ve got to be responsible now for our team. If we’re not delivering, I have to answer to that.”

For Margaret, letting go implied a sense of loss. “That was the hardest thing,” she said. Robert Kegan, known for his constructive-developmental theory of adult development has found this sense of loss to be commonplace as people develop (personal communication).

In his trajectory, Eric had a similar experience to Margaret’s:

“[people] knew I was coming to make changes, so some of them got very chummy (...) I don’t mind someone saying ‘yes boss’ and I really don’t mind someone saying ‘yes Eric’, I don’t expect them to say ‘Yes Mr. Harris’, [but] there’s something about (...) ‘saying [yes] mate’. (...) It’s a little bit chummy, a bit close, and it kind of felt awkward (...) some people, you know, trying to get disproportionately close and then taking some leverages with that.”

Margaret and Eric both recognised the demand to abandon their self-understanding as a friendly kind of person in certain situations. In Eric’s case, this took a number of attempts in which he experimented with ‘provisional selves’ (Ibarra, 1999): “I went through several phases (...). At a moment, (...) to a few people (...) I was the antichrist and no one [was] talking to me...” As a new self-understanding became more settled, Eric also advised his team on establishing a distance. This sort of advice is evidence that Eric was adopting new stories of what was to be a good manager in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail.

“[in telling them how to be as managers] I had to tell them to be a bit careful about how they [interact]. I learned the lessons early on (...) They [have] to present themselves in a certain way. (...) If you’re too relaxed, if you’re too slack about things you can lose respect and they will start giving you the run around. It’s the advice that a friend of mine has given me... he’s a primary school teacher and would go in to do a term of teaching practice when they were training, he said don’t even think of smiling until half term...”

Overcoming ‘friendliness’ was important for both Eric and Margaret to navigate the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. As Ibarra points out: “[f]ailure to convey impressions or images that are consistent with one's social role not only diminishes one's effectiveness in that role but may also cause the individual to lose the right to enact the role” (Ibarra, 1999: 764).

Self-understandings could also have a negative connotation and impede action. This was Margaret’s case. “I was very shy as a youngster, so very timid,” Margaret said of herself. “It’s a long story but since I was a child I’ve just not had that [belief in myself]. In Margaret’s narration she spoke of a pervasive angst of being caught short in front of others. Her stage fright, or lack of confidence as she often called it, influenced her choices and her work. For instance, it restrained her from seeing herself as an academic person: “studying frightened me because I was great throughout a year, but sit me in front of an exam paper and I get too nervous.” This self-understanding informed her decision of not considering higher education at first. At work it was a problem as her role implied having more exposure:

“I think I don’t like getting put on the spot. I don’t want to turn around to people that I respect a lot and say, ‘I don’t know. I don’t know the answer, can someone help please?’ For me, I always thought I had to know everything rather than say ‘I don’t know’.”

Margaret was working on leaving behind these negative self-understandings, including her belief that she should have had an answer to every single question that she was asked. Fighting such self-images was an enduring struggle for her (Holland et al. 1998). Such stories about herself were affecting her performance, so she recognised the demand to “overcome stage-fright.”

6.2.2. Who do I resist becoming?

The data indicates that managers resisted some impositions of their institutional realities based on the values that they held. Value incongruences that complicated change and made it difficult to respond to new demands from the institutional realities have already been hinted in the previous chapters and addressed quite directly in Chapter 5. Value incongruences were evidenced in ‘I can’t do that’, or ‘am I willing to do that?’ moments. In those circumstances, the managers attempted to reject the demand-as-identified and tried to refashion it in a more suiting mode

in order to protect their commitments and identifications. But they were not always successful.

Eric for example, resisted identifying himself with a 'command and control' leadership style because it was contrary to what he thought was right:

“if you look in the textbooks it's normally when you are under real pressure, well everyone is under real pressure all the time... But extreme pressure, or an emergency that's when you have to be command and control. That wasn't an emergency, it wasn't extreme pressure but I look at it and I think to be fair to the team I probably should have gone back and said: 'Francesca you are doing this, Mark you are doing this, Tom you are doing that'.”

As he refashioned the demand of managing his team better, and as he tried to balance his commitment to being fair and to being a less 'command and control' kind of leader, he again had to try a 'provisional self' (Ibarra, 1999). This implied stretching his understanding of command and control leadership: “I have to be, it's not myself, but more command and control. Royal Mail leads you as a management leadership style to say 'Francesca you do that, Tom you do this'.”

Like Linda, Eric considered himself 'new blood', as opposed to an 'old-timer'. He had a strong commitment towards a way of doing things that reportedly came from his past jobs and he interpreted this commitments as an asset. He thought that the Royal Mail, in its modernisation and privatisation journey, was trying to shift to more modern ways of working, which he believed were better aligned to his own. However he clashed with the culture of the business, and started questioning himself about whether his approach was a talent or a weakness.

Margaret encountered value related double-binds. I have mentioned a number of times that she held a commitment to justice and a commitment to empathy. These two were sometimes at odds with each other, and sometimes at odds with being the kind of manager that she was expected to be at the Royal Mail:

“There [are] team members that probably... they're strong people so I don't give as much of that empathy because I don't feel that they need it and that's not right because I'm not putting people on a level playing field. (...) So I started seeing myself as being unfair to some, because there was one team member whom began having troubles at home... (...) he was... not telling lies, I don't like that word at all, it's too strong. But he was creating all this untruth and I was totally bought into it and I was like, well work from home today, or we'll change your hours here, or we'll do this. And it wasn't accurate what he was telling me, but I was totally sucked in and because I was allowing that to happen my other team members were having to pick up all the pieces, and I'd never seen it, because they were people who never needed support, they get on with it, they worked hard and I think when we had one-to-one meetings it kind of teased out, because they never came out and say well you are unfair, it kind of came out: 'well, he's not doing much and did you know that the work that he's saying is his we've actually been doing it and I thought that's not [right]'.”

This quote reflects how Margaret realised that her commitment to empathy was blurring her judgement. It also shows how a challenge to a self-understanding was intertwined with value incongruences: “I started seeing myself as unfair.” This is important to indicate that the way I have categorised the types of contradiction does not imply that they are mutually exclusive. In this particular situation, demand recognition was again mediated by others in her team: “I’d never seen it (...) when we had one-to-one meetings [with other team-members] it kind of teased out.”

Linda had to protect aggressively her values when she arrived to the Royal Mail. During her career trajectory she had come to develop a way of working with unions:

“It’s something I’ve used in the past and I know that I’ve had really good successes from it because they feel they are part of it and it really stops that, ‘We don’t have any responsibility or accountability for this, we can just say no, we don’t like it.’ Whereas involving them much earlier gives them that responsibility and accountability. I’m sure we’re going to have to take it to higher people than them in the union, but I’m not going to have to stand up and sell it. We’re going to have to stand up and sell it because they’ve agreed it. They designed it.”

As Van Maanen and Schein (1978: 2-3) have pointed out, it is expected that newcomers will bring their own values to work: “[n]ovices bring with them different backgrounds, faulty preconceptions of the jobs to be performed within the setting including their own, and perhaps values and ends that are at odds with those of the working membership.” Indeed, Linda’s approach was not at all the approach of some old-timers in Industrial Relations. Therefore, they posed resistance. This again is warned by Van Maanen and Schein (ibid.):

“The more experienced members must (...) find ways to ensure that the newcomer does not disrupt the ongoing activity on the scene, embarrass or cast a disparaging light on others, or question too many of the established cultural solutions worked out previously.”

Julian also questioned whether some of his approaches were congruent with his values. Trust was important to him. He was convinced that you “build up trust for leading (...) your change.” Yet, he realised that his commitment to trust was sometimes at odds with his strategies to deal with the union:

“I sometimes question myself because you find yourself thinking: ‘Well, I’m sparing the truth here. That’s not natural for me to do that.’ When the union says ‘is it in your business case that you want to shut [building x]?’ I’d give a political answer. That’s not ‘yes’ or ‘no’. I’d say, ‘we still want to evaluate a whole range of options’. They might think that: ‘yes. It’s in his business case’. I can’t say, ‘yes’, because the game’s over then. I can’t actually tell the truth.”

In this dilemma, Julian embodied a tension that he thought stemmed from the organisation:

“The company doesn’t trust the union because they think the union will just try and stop any change. The union doesn’t trust the company because they think we won't really involve [them], probably because we’ll make up our own plans on our own and just pretend to involve them. I do see the sympathy on both (...) points there.”

In this issue, as in others, Julian’s stance was clear:

“I’m very much a part of the business. I understand their arguments. I’ve got the empathy to understand their arguments (...). I don’t agree with [the union] because they’re not seeing the full picture. Also, if I was doing bad things to the employees, I don’t think I’d do them. If I was just saying, ‘you’ve all got a month’s notice. You’re sacked next month’. I don’t think I’ll do that.”

6.2.3. Who do I struggle to become?

In many occasions the gaps recognised by managers between person-as-is and person-as-could-be were gaps of what they knew or what they were able to do. For Eric, working on his management style was a matter of values and self-understandings, but also a matter of closing a skill gap:

“And I suppose it comes down to adaptive leadership and flexing your style more readily (...) I don’t think I do it well, there are a couple of people in the organisation I think who do it quite well, but it’s hard to get the hang out of it...”

In Margaret’s case, she was finding it difficult to be able to ‘take everything to heart’. For her, this was a skill to be developed:

"Probably, the biggest challenge is me, as a person, not taking everything to heart. Separating my emotions from the way I have to be as a business leader. That’s the biggest journey I have been on. I’ve overcome some, not much.”

Margaret’s example is a situation that could also be categorised as a value incongruence. “I was only managing the team for over a year when I had to cut [it] by 25%, and that was the toughest thing,” Margaret recalled. She could not avoid empathising with her staff’s emotions because her husband was on the verge of a layoff as well. Although Margaret considered herself good at separating (“I’ve always have [been], I’ve worked with [my husband] for twenty years”), it was impossible for her to be oblivious: “I was on the senior leadership team, knowing what was going to happen to them. (...) So I was going through that... (...) I do genuinely know what it feels like (...)”. I nevertheless use this example in this section because from Margaret’s perspective controlling her emotions needed to be tackled as a skill: “This is tough. I think: ‘oh my goodness, I’m really sad about doing this’. But I’ve had to try and separate.” These fragments strongly remind of MacIntyre's (2013) concept of compartmentalisation. As I have pointed out earlier, MacIntyre argues that managers cannot help living a compartmentalised life. Margaret's case presents strong evidence that compartmentalisation is a reality in

organisational life, that is regarded as good, and also, that sometimes it requires a particular effort. I will come back to discussing compartmentalisation, particularly in Chapter 8. Again, Julian mediated Margaret's demand recognition:

"Julian (...) has helped with that part saying: 'you can't take everyone's emotion with you. You're a business leader, you need to be able to cut that. What will be sad today will be gone tomorrow. It will work itself as long as you've done it fairly'."

Not taking everything to heart and controlling her emotions has also implied learning how to control what she revealed with her body language:

"I wear my heart on my sleeve (...). Whatever is going on you'll know from my facial expression. I'm not one that can hide it. If I'm angry or if I'm sad I'm not one that can hide it. I used to jump in with reactions to things."

Jumping with reactions was not helping Margaret to assert herself with her colleagues. To gain more authority and improve her reputation as a manager Margaret needed to work not just on how she felt about things, but also on how she looked. She felt: "now Julian is just saying 'take a step back.' He coaches me in that way, 'Just absorb it. Things happen that you can't control'."

There are two interesting elements from how Margaret reports Julian helped her in working through this demand. In his coaching, he assisted Margaret in refashioning the demand of shutting off her empathy, by tapping into something that mattered to her: fairness. Second, according to Margaret, Julian underscored what was considered good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail by appealing to images of what 'a business leader' does. I will come back to this point in the following section.

6.3. Periods of stability

Based on the data I have so far presented, it should already be apparent that change and new demands were equally challenging for all managers. Although I have mentioned Julian occasionally, there is a notable absence of him in this chapter. I admit that I struggled with his case, scrutinising the data once and again in the search for contradictions, crises and perhaps some pain. But the truth is that both during workplace observations and during interviews he came across as serene. Despite him dealing with misalignment, he did not seem to be undergoing such a critical period or facing profound contradictions. He described himself as confident in dealing with the challenges he had at work: "I get stressed about maybe a minor thing, whether the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed, but I'm not stressed about leading major change because experiences have given me that confidence." His case reminds of Vygotsky's remarks as he explored the problems of age in children:

“Critical periods alternate with stable periods and are turning points in development, once again confirming that development of the child is a dialectical process in which a transition from one stage to another is accomplished not along an evolutionary, but along a revolutionary path” (Vygotsky, 1998: 193).

Julian was in a stable period. Stable periods are categorised in the literature by a clear notion of who one is and for what one stands. Taylor says “[t]o be able to answer for oneself [to the question ‘who are you?'] is to know where one stands...” This idea is congruent with Julian’s data. I have quoted him before saying that his view was the business’ view. He was satisfied with his job and felt confident in his navigation of the figured world. Julian also identified himself as smart, and he said that was part of the reason for his success in dealing with change:

“don’t underestimate intellect because leading major change you need to maybe not have, you don’t necessarily need the theoretical sort of abstract mind, so not that type of [creating this] but you do need to have ideas, you need to be able to keep track on what everyone is doing even if you have processes to control delegation and to organise what people do, so you can’t just rely on organisation, you need your brain to be processing a lot of information.”

Sfard and Prusak (2005) argue that “the people to whom our stories are told, as well as those who tell stories about us, may be tacit co-authors of our own designated identities.” MacIntyre too comments on the relevance of others in the shaping of our own self-understandings: “our self-knowledge too depends in key part upon a confirmation of our judgments about ourselves from others” (1999: 94). Julian indeed validated his self-understandings upon the recognition of others: “lots of people quote that they love working for me, it’s not something I’ve said myself but people feed it back to me, my boss (...), feeds it back that I lead my team well, so that’s important.”

Long-held self-understandings were Julian’s sources of certainty that he was in the right place:

“...when I used to do A-levels I was very organised, I scheduled when I did my revision, I’ve always liked lists and maps, so it’s that... I think it’s that what makes operations (...) the right function for me... because I was probably doing that when I was young, so if I was walking in the hills I’d plan a map, I’d list the hills I’m going to climb and things like that...”

Julian’s longevity in the organisation should by no means be factored out of the analysis. Holland et al. (1998: 65) note that identities are “unstable, especially as people are first inducted to a figured world and they continue to undergo heuristic development in concert with people’s acclimation to new spheres of activity.” Arguably, Eric, Linda and Margaret were in a larger need than Julian was to acclimate “to new spheres of activity.”

Julian's retrospective accounts, however stable his identity was at the time of the study, do suggest that he had undergone less stable periods throughout his trajectory. In those periods his self-understandings had been challenged. The difficult experiences that he recollects, he says, made him resilient to face the change at hand: "You get confidence from having achieved things, so you also get confidence as well from bad things... As I said, I lost my job four times and it's stressful at the time, you know..." The kinds of challenges that Julian had faced in the past had prepared him for the role he had today: "maybe ten years ago I wouldn't have liked to move into this job, because I wouldn't feel comfortable (...) enough." Such challenges were not just work-related. Personal challenges made him place potential failures in perspective:

"...it doesn't worry me losing the job now because I think I might leave Royal Mail someday when I leave my job, but I've got confidence to do something else, you know I've had some sad times in my life, you know, my parents are both dead, my marriage broke up, my wife's mom died of cancer, my wife had cancer and recovered... all those things make you very resilient, (...) so I'm 52 now but I feel resilient to cope with anything."

A hindsight account is not enough to scrutinise for the specific contradictions that he had dealt with when he was in a dialectical space. Yet, a relevant finding is that at the time of the study the gap between Julian-as-is and Julian-as-could-be was difficult to observe. He had the situation under control and he accounted for his imperturbability on the grounds of his past experiences of crises. His self-understandings were resources in navigating the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. Periods of stability, as Vygotsky indicates, are to be expected in any process of development. Julian's case suggests that stability can happen even when one's figured world is being overhauled.

Holland et al. (1998) and Van Maanen and Schein (1979) insist that development is undergoing throughout one's navigation of a figured world. In Julian's case, a period of stability was quite different to stagnation. Without the varied degrees of emotional drama perceived in the other cases, the data suggests that Julian was dealing with new demands:

"I had never taken a business case to the group investment committee, the first time I've ever done it was last year, you know, and that meant I had to do the design with my team, I led the business case and I had to then present the business case, and go in front of [the CEO] and the group investment committee and ask for (...) what potentially was £25 million, and so I wouldn't have had the confidence to do that;"

that new demands challenged self-understandings: "my natural thing would be, 'oh I'll leave the numbers to someone else'. But I felt I needed to learn them... and that was hard because it wasn't natural to me;" that there were instances of self-questioning: "I sometimes question myself because you find yourself thinking 'well,

am I sparing the truth here?’ That’s not natural for me to do that.” There was also resistance to hypothetical change scenarios:

“In all the roles I have done this is probably the one with the most autonomy. And that is one reason I like it, I have been a director of [function x] in the bigger part of Royal Mail (...) mail centres. You are one of maybe ten people nationally working [for senior executive x] and that’s quite frustrating. If they ask me to go back (...) I wouldn’t do it, I really wouldn’t, I’d rather leave because to me it would be going backwards;;

and gaps of skills that were being worked on:

“it was so important that when I went to the business case [presentation], that I’d learnt my numbers, because I knew if [the CEO] says ‘how much will you save if you do this?’ I’ll need to know that number. And literally [I] had to do it like learning for an exam, you know.”

Julian therefore continued learning.

6.4. Stories about what was good

Towards the beginning of the chapter I said that narratives were important to understand how managers refashioned their identities. I also said that the stories of which the managers were a part of were the grounds for deciding how they should act (MacIntyre, 2013). Stories were their sources of the self (Taylor, 1989). Fancourt, Edwards and Menter (2015: 365) have discussed the ways in which narratives provide that “discursive space in which others people’s motives (...) surface, and (...) characters emerge.” MacIntyre insists that characters are recognisable types (Mangham, 1995). The character of the Royal Mail manager was also recognisable, and stories about this character were abundant in the data. I for example quoted Margaret speaking of how Julian helped her by telling her: “You’re a business leader, you need to be able to cut [taking everyone’s emotion with you].” In this statement Margaret evidences the recognition of a new demand. This indicates that Margaret recognised a designated identity on the grounds of “the way [she had] to be as a business leader.” Thus, the stories of what ‘managers’ as a type do are images from which Linda, Eric, Julian and Margaret drew in order to shape their designated identities. Eric also used stories about ‘who managers are’ in trying to assist the development of a subordinate. In speaking about such subordinate, Eric said: “He’s a senior manager, he’s got to get stronger.” For Margaret, becoming the business leader that she was expected to become, demanded that she put her emotions in order to reach her true end. Margaret used a journey metaphor to make sense of the dialectical space: “That’s the biggest journey I have been on.” The idea of journey conveys the effort, patience and constancy required in the task of change.

6.5. Conclusions

In this chapter I examined the contradictions that the managers were dealing with, assisted by the concept of gap closing between person-as-is and person-as-could-be. Such framework draws from the identity literature, primarily a sociocultural understanding of identity, from MacIntyre's analysis of the Nichomachean Ethics in *After Virtue* (1981; 2013) and his account of flourishing in *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999). The chapter examined how, as the managers identified and refashioned the demands of the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail, they faced contradictions of three sorts: self-understandings, congruences of values and knowledge and skills. The three kinds of contradictions are not exclusive of each other.

Vygotsky argues that "the negative content of development at turning points is only the reverse or shadow side of positive changes of the personality that make up the principal and basic sense of any critical age" (Vygotsky, 1998: 194). Echoing Vygotsky, there was a content of "shadow" in managers' realisation that they were not who they thought they were, or that they had to let go of a certain self-understanding. Nevertheless, the negative was a "turning point" for demand identification and marked the beginning of demand refashioning. By the changes happening in such turning point I should not imply a notion of progress, as the turning towards what should then be evaluated. It is a turning, however, towards a new self-understanding.

The awareness of a gap between who the managers were and the expectations laid upon them was difficult to varying degrees. An analysis of Julian's case suggested strong differences between his experiences and those of the other managers during the time of the study. His case is evidence that there are periods of identity stability and that in those periods learning also occurs.

As a result of this analysis I particularly underscore the relevance of challenges to self-understandings in the process of demand recognition. In at least three of the four cases, internal battles between managers' ideas of who they were and the images of who they were expected to become, were salient and problematic. I found three kinds of challenges to self-understandings: contrapuntal voices, reappraisals of self-understandings, and realisation of the need to abandon certain self-understandings. I grouped these three in two analytical questions: 'who am I really?' and 'who should I no longer be?'

CHAPTER 7

STRATEGIES FOR NEW DEMANDS

This chapter is focused on the strategies used by the managers to navigate misalignment and contradiction, and to address the new demands of their institutional realities. A cross-case analysis suggests that the managers took (or considered taking) four different positions in relation to their figured world as they faced the new demands: taming, adopting, enduring, or abandoning. Two entwined factors had a bearing on which position was taken by the managers: the resources available to them and the flexibility of the commitments and identifications at stake.

7. STRATEGIES FOR NEW DEMANDS

I began the inquiry guided by two research questions:

- How did the managers in the study face new demands that challenged what mattered to them?
- How do they negotiate their way through contradiction and misalignment?

So far, I have argued that misalignment situations constituted a social situation of development for the managers, bringing about new demands. After presenting the misalignment situations the managers were navigating (Chapter 4), I described the demands that each one of them was facing (Chapter 5). Noting that the demands recognised by the managers were not as incongruent to what mattered to them as I expected, I emphasised how agency was manifested in the very process of demand recognition (Edwards, forthcoming). In such a process the managers adjusted the demands so that they sheltered, instead of challenged, what mattered to them. I therefore distinguished demand-as-identified from demand-as-refashioned to acquire a more nuanced understanding of the process of demand recognition. In Chapter 6, I engaged in a more fine-grained analysis to understand the process through which demands were identified and refashioned. In this chapter I noted that demand recognition implied realising a gap between who the managers were and who they were expected to become in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. In their efforts of closing the gap, the managers had to work through three kinds of contradictions: challenges to ideas of self, incongruences of values, and gaps of knowledge and skills.

In this chapter, I will discuss the strategies that the managers took in addressing the demands and in navigating the misalignments and contradictions so far discussed. The chapter is structured as follows. In Section 7.1 I will discuss the strategies used by the managers in their efforts to close the gap between who they were and who they were expected to become. In Section 7.2 I will engage in a cross-case analysis. The analysis considers the strategies discussed in Section 7.1, as well as other data that speaks of how the managers addressed new demands and misalignment. The analysis suggests that managers assumed four kinds of stances at different times in their journey towards addressing new demands: taming, adopting, enduring, and abandoning. Many of the strategies that will be described in this chapter seem to echo MacIntyre's (2013) argument that managers are characterised by their use of manipulation. I will analyse this further in Chapter 8 where I will discuss the manipulatory character of some of the influencing strategies employed by the managers and argue that some of the strategies are non-manipulatory. In Section 7.3 I will comment on how the resources available to the managers influenced the stances they assumed. Finally, in Section 7.4 I will draw some conclusions.

7.1. Strategies

Throughout the thesis I have argued, based on Edwards (2010) and on Taylor's (1989) account, that 'what mattered' to the managers can be understood in terms of their commitments and identifications. I have also said that misalignment was problematic for the managers because it threatened what mattered, and later I argued that commitments and identifications had a heavy weight on how demands were refashioned. I will now discuss the strategies that the managers used to navigate the boundary spaces and address the demands showing that commitments and identifications were the very resources employed to resolve contradictions, tackle demands and navigate the situations of misalignment that they were encountering at work.

In any case, commitments and identifications were not static. In the dialectic between the managers and the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail, such commitments and identifications were adapted and reframed. Also, insofar as the managers were committed to the business and identified themselves as good managers, Linda, Eric, Julian, and Margaret enacted the stories of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail, to which I have made reference, particularly in Chapter 6. I now proceed to discuss the strategies that each one of the managers took in navigating misalignment, new demands and contradictions at work.

7.1.1. Linda's strategies to deal with the new demands

Linda's demands included building a network, knowing who, navigating bureaucracy, and exhibiting confidence. "[It] was a massive learning curve for me," said Linda speaking about the political trouble she had had during her first year at the Royal Mail. As Linda realised that she was not as proficient navigating the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail as she had been navigating the figured world of managing in her previous job, she was determined to go back to her old self. If she managed to do that fast she was confident that she would be able to influence the unions and the managers as successfully as she had done in the past.

Linda's strategies to adapt to the organisation and advance her purposes relied on her self-understandings, on her goals for the institution, and on the repertoire of strategies that she brought with her. As Holland et al. (1998) state, the "objectifications of self-understandings [guide] subsequent behavior" (4) and "identities constitute an enduring and significant aspect of history-in-person, history that is brought to current situations" (65). In other words, Linda's very identity was a tool for her to navigate her institutional reality. Her doing so, was very much an expression of Holland et al.'s (1998: 3) idea that "people tell others who they are, but even more importantly they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are." As she became better at navigating the

figured world of managing at the Royal Mail, more aware about the nature of the organisational change happening around her, and of how it affected her agenda, Linda also acquired new ways of acting. Determined to move forward with her intentions, Linda took a stand and tackled the opportunities of action available to her in order to move her priorities forward. Quite rapidly, after only a year and a half of working at the Royal Mail, Linda managed to build the network that she so much valued. A better, if not an ideal, network meant to her more power:

“I think now I’ve got quite a good network. It’s not brilliant, but I’ve got a good network. [In my old company] I had a massive network so I look at this one and think it’s not bad, but it’s not great. But if I think back to a year ago, I probably knew about four people in the company other than the team I worked with, whereas now if I look at my telephone, I’ve got a pretty good network.”

Linda's strategies were:

- Being humble.
- Considering what mattered to others.
- Gaining the trust of others.
- Being resourceful and adopting new tools.
- Faking confidence.
- Absorbing the business unspoken rules.
- Being a chameleon.

Being humble: I mentioned earlier that Linda had missed a crucial stakeholder as she negotiated with operations the implementation of a major initiative. The senior executive was proving to be a real roadblock for her work. Rebuilding the relationship was an ongoing struggle: “I kept holding out the olive branch to try and put it right and he was just not going to take it.” Eventually, she felt that the situation was slowly improving:

“(…) I think he realises now [that leaving him out of the process was pure misunderstanding] and he’s a lot better with myself (…). I’ve had a couple of chats in the lift, just, ‘How are you? How’s the new baby?’ (…) [The situation] made me much more aware that I [have to] make sure I drip feed things into his team, so he knows what’s going on.”

As a result of her mistakes, Linda realised that she should not over-rely on her own understanding of the organisation. “I’ve learned from that that I’ve got to ask more questions of all the stakeholders too. ‘Who else do you think should be on this list?’

Because I don't know the organisation well enough." She therefore decided to examine more carefully whether she was considering all the factors that needed consideration.

Considering what mattered to others: Trying to include all stakeholders in the process from early on was not just a political strategy. Linda seemed to understand that "the resources that others bring to problems can enhance understandings and can enrich responses" (Edwards, 2010: 13). In that sense, she exhibited skills that remind of relational expertise (Edwards, 2010).

Gaining the trust of others: Linda used strategies that were already familiar to her. Feeling unable to gain the senior executive's trust, Linda tackled those closer to him. To this end, she used influencing strategies based on what she believed matter to them:

"With [Zita] it's little thing. (...) Giving her a bit more information than she needed, asking her not to discuss (...) It's just: 'I'm thinking about this', so she feels I'm trusting her. It's just giving her little bits [of information], because [Zita] loves that power, that's my impression."

With the mission of extending her network, she also made an extra effort to connect with others in the business. She explained: "I've got a meeting tomorrow with one of the new directors [for a region] who's brand new. (...) I'm going to go and see him and tell him about the work. It's just about putting a name to a face."

Linda realised the importance of getting into 'people's airspace':

"We don't get involved in the day to day meetings, so it's harder to build a relationship up with people. [My colleague] who deals with [senior executive x] all the time has a different relationship to one where I'm just popping in."

To change the lack of a relationship with key stakeholders, Linda tried to book more meetings and give more updates than she would normally have. "Now I (...) keep going back to [senior executive x] and giving him updates on things. [Getting involved in certain projects] so you're going to get more face to face time with him." More frequent face to face contact with the senior executives that she wanted to influence to Linda was crucial: "you can't invite a manager to a 45 minute presentation and hope they're going to completely change how they work." These evidences that Linda's gap-closing efforts also involved 'changing others' and not just herself. It is thus a manifestation of the dialectic between Linda and her figured world.

As important as it was gaining people's trust, was knowing who not to trust as much. "[My colleague] pretends that he doesn't care who deals with what, but he's very territorial and you've got to be really careful how you deal with that."

Being resourceful and adopting new tools: Having identified her weaknesses through the challenges to self-understandings that I discussed in Chapter 7, Linda grabbed all resources at hand that would help her close the gap. For example, Linda acknowledged that “the Oxford course really helped”¹³ her. Also, she was quick to adopt a tool for stakeholder mapping introduced to her by a group of external consultants:

“I’ve learned I’ve got to really look at who my stakeholders are right up front, whereas I would probably think [before, that] I knew who they were (...) I always used to do a stakeholder [map], but [the consultants tool] makes you fill out the tab for stakeholders and you do it straight away.”

Faking confidence: Linda’s confidence was undermined by the challenges to self-understandings that she underwent. Ibarra (1999; 2014) based on the idea that imitation is a useful approach to learning, argues that managers in transition should feel less conflicted about faking, when they are in the process of adopting new ways of doing and of being. A talented actress in Goffman’s terms, faking was precisely what Linda did: “It’s a bit like the duck who sits very serenely on the top and everything is there but underneath they’re paddling away. Coming into a new organisation this size, to have that confidence, you’ve got to paddle a lot underneath.”

Absorbing the business’ unspoken rules: It took time for Linda to come to terms with the heavier bureaucracy that she encountered at the Royal Mail. To address the demand of navigating bureaucracy, Linda drew from her old repertoire, specifically her talent of identifying what mattered to others:

“In Royal Mail everybody likes to have a paper on everything, so I’ve got much more proactive in getting the papers ready. It’s more in a business case situation, which was a learning curve from where I’ve previously been. You go and talk and you present it and when we’ve got to a point where we need to, you then put a business case together whereas here, everybody wants to see the paperwork before they talk to you.”

Yet, I have said earlier that Linda refashioned the bureaucracy demand: “I have tried to change that a bit because I think a paper can put people off, but going to [senior executives], I’ve got the meeting booked, the paperwork is all ready (...) then four days before the meeting [I’ve asked my assistant] to send them the paperwork.” Linda’s approach was a comfortable compromise for her. “Give them too long and they then cancel the meeting, [but] if you don’t give them anything, they arrive at the meeting completely switched off.” With her approach, Linda managed to get in the agenda of the senior managers, without them being ‘put off’

¹³ Linda is making reference to the Said Business School programme, which was intentionally designed to expand participants’ networks. More information on the programme is available in Chapter 3.

by what she was going to tell them. At the same time, she met their expectation of receiving her proposals on paper prior to the meeting.

Navigating bureaucracy also implied learning who to involve in her projects and when to do so: “some of the bureaucratic departments like finance and purchasing, you need to get them [on the loop] right at the very beginning. We didn’t do that but we’re getting them involved now quick... (...) Again, that’s about who to talk to.”

Being a chameleon: Ibarra’s (2015) idea of chameleon resonates with some of Linda’s strategies:

"Chameleons care about managing their public image and often mask their vulnerability with bluster. They may not always get it right the first time, but they keep trying on different styles like new clothes until they find a good fit for themselves and their circumstances. Because of that flexibility, they often advance rapidly" (Ibarra, 2015).

Skilled at reading people and adapting her style, Linda had a chameleonic approach to many of her problems, changing her colours if that could help her move her agenda forward. Indeed, the way in which Linda presented herself to colleagues and others at work reminds of Goffman’s idea that life in organisations can be like acting on a stage (Mangham, 2005). Borrowing from Mangham’s (2005: 943) words in a paper that he wrote on MacIntyre, Linda can be thought of as “an actor, stepping onto situations and roles, staging performances like a trouper and striving to project an image that (...) she [claimed] to be appropriate to the situation”. Like a chameleon, Linda tailored her act to suit the situation in which she found herself. Given her strategies, Linda can be thought of as being manipulative, hence supporting MacIntyre’s claim that managers see manipulative relations as justified at work. I will analyse this argument further in Chapter 8.

7.1.2. Eric’s strategies to deal with the new demands

The demands that Eric recognised were to manage the size and complexity involved in his recently acquired role, to prove his and his team’s worth, make his motives visible to across functions, manage his team better, and handle the public sector like culture.

Working through misalignment became a crusade. Torn between the different and conflicting agendas of managers above him, he was finding it impossible to align what mattered to him with the already contradictory expectations and motives that he encountered around him. “I’m doing my best here. This is how we do things. If they’re not happy with it, I should go somewhere else. (...) I didn’t come here to do a mediocre job. I want to do a really big job.” In the midst of disruption, frustration

and challenges to self-understandings, Eric flirted with the idea of abandoning his role:

“I think if I, in my style of leadership, and my understanding of how organisations should work (...) if I can't do that here, then maybe they need a leader who can work in this environment more effectively than me, and I'm sure that there are.”

I can't say I've been a failure or the organisation hasn't suited me, but I think you sometimes get to a point where you think, ‘Hmm, not quite sure if I can add the value that I could somewhere else’.”

It had become clear to Eric that the share of contradiction that he was dealing with was unsustainable: “I have to either accept this situation, or move to a company that works in a different way.”

Regardless to how ‘fed up’ he was, Eric did not abandon his role and decided instead to search for some sense of coherence and alignment:

“I'm still working my way through this (...) I need to know that we have something coherent that I can follow and I can use to lead my people. If I don't have that, then there's an obvious conclusion for me...”

Stepping on the balcony (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002) led him to consider and renew his commitment to what mattered to him.

“I took a step back and said ‘what's the issue?’ Not necessarily my skill set in terms of [the work of the unit] but in terms of influencing people. So I reflected a good deal: when in my life have I felt like I can really influence? (...) Basically, I've had something I believe in to sell. So what do I believe in? I believe in what I'm doing, I believe in this [programme] so I need to get myself in a position where I can sell...”

His strategies were:

- Keeping his own priorities at the forefront.
- Finding allies.
- Marketing.
- Gaining boss' solidarity.
- Sabotaging.
- Bending rules (by sabotaging and avoiding).

Keeping his own priorities at the forefront: When the consequences of not addressing the misalignment issues which were affecting Eric's work became quite blunt for him, he reflected:

“When I'm sat here some days thinking: ‘Right, what are my priorities? What do I really need to focus on? I need something simple, straightforward in front of me. ‘Right, okay, of course. That's where we're going.’ I need it clear in my head.”

Sabotaging: After many failed attempts at making his motives visible and finding common ground, Eric realised that playing by the book was not helping him accomplish his goals. In the light of his commitments, and with the purposes of doing a good job, Eric decided he had to be more aggressive: “I'm being a bit bolder in some of the things I'm doing.” Sabotaging some ongoing initiatives was “radical move number one.” Operations would not let him do his job as he thought it had to be done, so he considered abandoning all efforts instead:

“I've got to a point now where I'm saying, ‘there's six managers that support [unit x]. I want them pulled out of it. Stop immediately!’ The immediate reaction from their boss was: ‘It will all fall over.’ I said, ‘Yeah, that's exactly what I want to happen,’ which may not be in the business interests in the short term, but I think it will be in the long term. I suppose you could say it will create some noise that will go up to [the director], and he'll appreciate that [my unit] did do something for [them]. In many ways I will be happy if it just slowly crumbles... slowly crumbles. (...)”

This time around Eric's strategy to influence was not to try harder but rather to abandon the problem temporarily. Another risk that he took was to influence by 'being a bit awkward' and avoiding:

“I've got a role (inaudible) that a managing director thinks it's really, really important, (...) and I am saying, ‘no’. I've got another role, (...) that's far more important. (...) My boss keeps on saying ‘where are you with recruiting that (...) person?’ [I reply] ‘Well working on it... Anyway let's talk about... something else’. It makes me a bit unpopular with my boss, but I think it's actually serving the team better at the moment.”

Finding allies: While the moves just described were risky, Eric expected two main outcomes as a result. First, he hoped that his team's worth would be better appreciated in their absence: "he'll appreciate that [my unit] did do something for [them]." The second expected outcome was to find allies in other areas of the business who would spread a good word about his unit with among the leadership team. In Eric's view, his strong focus on the one unit that was giving him trouble had resulted in neglecting other units which were in equal need of the services of his team.

“I've learnt with the [leadership team members] never to think they're as happy as they appear. In the boardroom, it only takes one or two of them to start saying they

haven't done much for me and the rest can turn. So I really have to keep close to them, keep them warm, keep delivering."

Marketing: To find allies and prove his team's and his own worth, Eric also engaged in an intense marketing plan. Some of his team thought he was being too bold:

"[Others in the team] are inclined to be more cautious than me. But this wasn't the time to be cautious, this was the time to go in and sell. When people say, 'I really need something on [such topic]' [I say] 'Yeah, I've got a programme like that' (...) We can tailor it for you'. So it's being a bit more 'salesy'."

But with nothing to lose, Eric was willing to move forward:

"[I am] going round and seeing all these key stakeholders, going into these meetings and selling... Passionately believing and thinking about what they want, what will benefit them. (...) I've then gone to their lead team meetings, (...) You go in there [and ask] 'What do you want?' [Then] writ[e] it all down."

Gaining his boss solidarity: One of Eric's problems, as I mentioned in Chapter 4 and 5, was that he did not feel supported enough by his own boss. So part of his plan of finding allies is that the good word about his work would reach his boss: "How can I get good positive (...) messages to spread? How can I get [them to say] 'Eric did really good job... things are changing'. But how do I make sure that gets back to my boss?"

The support from his boss, Eric believed, was crucial to expose the misalignment that was taking place:

"I need to expose [the misalignment] and the impact it has on my team. (...) Somehow I need my boss be saying 'this is causing [the function] a problem, can you please sort this out?' (...) If the [leadership] is complaining about my team and what they do, then I think I've got to a right to push back. I've got [director x] saying, 'we're so busy in changing all these process we simply don't have time for this development'. I need [my boss] to say that to the [leadership]. I'm fed up of being the middleman."

The journey to addressing the demands of the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail was still in process at the time that the study ended, but Eric was comfortable with the actions that he had taken: "I'd like to think [that] if you could do an instant 360° [evaluation], [this has] been good for my profile (...) and for my confidence..." Eric's influencing by sabotaging strategies echo a number of studies about public servants, where rule-bending and resistance was manifested in similar ways (Thomas and Davies, 2005; Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter, and Warmington, 2009).

7.1.3. Margaret's strategies to deal with the new demands

Margaret recognised the demands of repositioning herself with colleagues, buffering the impact of change on others, overcoming stage-fright, balancing empathy, balancing judgement and gaining more control over her emotional responses. She very much believed in the stories of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. As such, she was eager to learn more about who she was expected to become and to work hard to breach the gap. Nevertheless, change was not easy: "I'm 42 soon; I'm not going to change overnight. I've changed a lot but I can't... I've still got that way." In her case, Sfard and Prusak's idea that "significant narrators, the owners of the most influential voices, are carriers of those cultural messages that will have the greatest impact on one's actions" (2005: 18), seems to have a particular resonance. There were a number of significant narrators in Margaret's trajectory. One definitely was her boss, but also her partner and others along the way on whom she had relied to work through her challenges to self-understandings. In response to new ideas of who she was expected to become as her role at the Royal Mail changed, Margaret resorted to five main strategies:

- Borrowing the gaze of others.
- Having a coach.
- Having role models.
- Asserting herself.
- "Not taking everything to heart."
- Staying true to herself.

Borrowing the gaze of others: Aware of her talent as a manager, Margaret was often self-assured of having made the right choices. But admittedly having trouble with her self-confidence she complemented her self-understandings by trusting others' perceptions of her. MacIntyre argues that "adequate self-knowledge is necessary, if I am to imagine realistically the alternative futures between which I must choose, the quality of my imagination also depends in part of the contributions of others" (1999: 95). This very much happened in Margaret's case, as she relied frequently on the voice of others to adjust her images of self: "I ended up working my way up but only with the belief of someone else saying: 'You can do it'. (...) That's when the career started taking off." In different occasions she referred to others 'seeing something in her' that she herself could not. She therefore credited her partner for encouraging her to take a first steps towards career progression: "[He] started saying: (...) 'You should be doing much more' (...) and a job came up

in an office role in the electronics company I worked for. He pushed me to apply and I got the job (...).

Her pursuit of an academic degree was a similar case example. Enrolling and succeeding in the programme required Margaret to re-examine the self-understanding of 'not being academic at all' and challenge the ways in which such belief anchored her choices. It was her partner's perspective of her once again, what pushed her to try night school: "he said: (...) Just try it; it's a different way of learning. It's not like when you're at school (...) I went on and got [the degree]"

Having a coach: Almost encompassed in the first strategy, borrowing the gaze of others, coaching deserves its own place as a discrete strategy because it was a widely adopted strategy across the Royal Mail, and as such it was a vehicle to carry those ideas of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. Margaret had two coaches. One was external to the Mail Centre, yet from the Royal Mail: "that was brought on, just [to work on] belief in myself." She was also coached by Julian, who she said helped her "bringing out things that [she] didn't think [she] was strong on." In that sense, her boss too provided Margaret with contrasting stories about herself, which she then used to re-assess the self-understandings that were holding her back:

"Then Julian has been amazing in his coaching and bringing out things that I didn't think I was strong on."

"I'll go to my performance review and he'll say, 'Right, your achievement for the last month. I'd be like, 'I haven't really had any.' He'll start writing it down, and you don't see that. That's my day to day work (...) and you don't realise that's an achievement."

Getting Margaret out of her comfort zone was often a coaching strategy used on her:

"I went on coaching. [In regards to] my confidence thing that's where Julian would say: 'I want you to lead this project with (...) because you're going to be in an environment that you're not comfortable with. You're going to be with people from all over the world. You are representing [the mail centre].' I think I had a fear that I'd go into a room and just not understand anything they were talking about. I go in; I come back from this now and say, 'That's not what I thought it was going to be like.' Julian said, 'I always knew you'd be fine.' Development for me tends to be getting put in a situation and then learning from there."

The strategy worked: "It's a building of my confidence". In speaking of the benefits of having participated in projects that gave her more exposure she said: "Now I'll have people like (...) our director [writing] back to say 'yup, this is what we want'" (...) "they take on board the suggestions that I have (...)." This social validation increased her certainty that she "kn[e]w what [she was] talking about."

Having a role model: Along with borrowing the gaze of others and coaching, Margaret sourced help from others through having role models. Modelling behaviour was a central strategy in Margaret's learning:

“I’ve learnt from Julian (...) Julian's got, as I call it, a glass half full approach it’s very positive. (...) I try and replicate. I’d say I’ve become a better manager. We’re using some of what Julian has done. He’s very good, very structured.”

“I will [coach] kind of the way that it was done to me. I won’t give him the solutions, but he ends up actually telling you the? solution. You just need to get it off him. Well, what would I? You? do if it was this way?”

“I’ve got another senior manager that is very logical in his approach to things. Comes across fantastic so I’ve tried to learn when he’s presenting, try and do it in that logical approach because sometimes (...) I can get carried away really easy or distracted and he’s so logical. I’ll take bits of that from them.”

In any case, having role models did not impede Margaret's agency. Instead, she would adapt and appropriate and was ready to change approaches if they did not feel right: “I tried [a strategy learnt from someone else] with my team and they did not like it. They felt really uncomfortable with it. (...) I stopped (...)”

Asserting herself: How others saw her had a strong bearing in Margaret's self-understandings. Nevertheless, she did not just trust anyone's perspective. In the cases of those colleagues who were challenging her merit and her authority she made a strong effort to not let them undermine her self-confidence. Instead, she confronted them: “I will speak up if I think something is being unacceptable.” After listening to his accusations a few times, Margaret finally had the courage to speak up:

“The fourth time it was said last week. He was with another colleague and I [replied], “No, I might be okay because I’m good at what I do, not because I’m a female (...) You’re actually insulting me by saying the only reason I may get kept in my job is because I’m a female.” (...) It’s a tough one to break down.”

This in itself was an evidence of learning, as she had not been able to speak up for herself consistently in the past:

“(...) It was hard for me to say it but because I thought, it’s what we would call tongue-in-cheek, it’s joking. But when someone said it that amount of times I actually start to feel this isn’t funny anymore.”

She also confronted that former manager who had questioned her merit because she was a woman. Although such confrontations felt out of her nature, she stood by her actions:

“[Normally] I will then go away and think, “Oh maybe I shouldn’t have said that... (...) Normally I would be on an email later in the evening saying, ‘Look, I’m sorry,

I was a bit short with you earlier, but (...) I'm not sorry, it was the right thing to say so we'll wait and see what happens."

Asserting herself also implied keeping a distance with certain colleagues with the purpose of reshaping a relationship from friendship to a more professional one:

"I've had to push him quite hard and have that balance in that with it. (...) I had to do for my own sanity for a period of time... we always had breakfast together, we always had lunch, and I stopped. I just had to put a little bit of space."

She adjusted her behaviour to become more authoritative with her subordinates if she felt the need:

"I didn't manage it too well last time. (...) I should have just said: 'Look. Enough.' Well, this time I've said: 'It's done. Here's what I expect you to do and here is the timeline you got to do.' The time will tell [if] that approach worked when we come to next month and [the tasks is] done."

"Not taking everything to heart": Margaret needed, like the participant's in Hill's (2004) study, to "gr[o]w the calluses necessary to cope" as she was "forced to engage in intense and demanding interpersonal interactions" (loc 2749). For example, soon after she assumed the leadership role she had to let people go: "[there were] people that had been with the business over thirty years that I had to say, "There's not a role for you." Her coping mechanism was to think it would eventually not matter:

"I think having that in my mind, what's today's worries will have gone by tomorrow is actually the best lesson I've learned. I will think along those lines now [and] say: 'I'm really upset for having to do this, I will be upset on the day but you know what? I'm going to come in next week and that's going to be another issue I have moved on to'. That's been probably the biggest thing."

With this lesson, that "today's worries will have gone by tomorrow" she gained some control over her empathy, but this with the consequence of compartmentalisation using MacIntyre's (2013) terms. Yet, Margaret did not entirely compromise her commitments and identifications. While she could not avoid the layoffs, when the time came to tell employees that they had lost their jobs Margaret did so in such a way that she did not hide her empathy and handled the situation in a way so fitting to her commitments that she felt proud of herself. This closely relates with the following strategy.

Staying true to herself: Hill says that the managers in her study "were rightfully worried that in time this "thick skin" might shield them from emotion. They were to maintain their humanity if they were to be effective people managers" (Hill, 2003: loc 2749). Although Margaret was working on her self-understandings towards becoming more balanced in terms of her emotions and her empathy, she also reaffirmed her commitment to being empathetic: "I can't let [empathy] go

completely because I don't think that it'll make me a better manager. I need to keep that... a level of empathy.”

Being true to her own commitment to empathy and justice was the strategy that she used to work on buffering the negative impact that change had on her staff. For this as well, she reaffirmed her self-understanding by considering the perspective of others: “Julian said it's lovely to have somebody with empathy on his team because sometimes they are so much the opposite, so it gives a more balanced approach.”

The relevance of having role models, having a coach and of ‘borrowing the gaze of others’ in Margaret’s case, reminds of Sfard and Prusak’s (2005) argument that stories that others hold about oneself become sources of one's own identity. This is a point also made by Holland et. al (1998), Ibarra (1999) and MacIntyre (1999).

7.1.4. Julian's strategies to deal with new demands

The demands recognised by Julian were to secure support for his business plans, manage stakeholders, reassure frontline staff without the interference of the union and to retain his autonomy. As time passed by, Julian managed to get stakeholders where he wanted them:

“succeeded in unlocking the impasse. I was very pleased with union’s response afterwards. I’ve been pleased with the response of people (...) and the Industrial Relations people. It’s good to know that that’s moved it forward nicely.”

Yet, managing to advance change successfully required being strategic and learning new skills: “has it been complicated? Yes. Because there’s a number of strands of activity and also stakeholder management is something that I think has been a big development for me.” In doing this Julian used three kinds of strategies:

- Those pertaining his own coping with organisational change (including ‘tackling what you are not comfortable with’, finding ‘golden nuggets’ and ‘observing others’).
- Those aimed at managing stakeholders to advance change (gauging people’s moods, divide and love, giving alternatives and making people feel a part of something).
- Those strategies primarily addressed at supporting his staff (coaching, giving credit, thanking people and caring about his staff’s needs and emotions).

Taking on self-imposed stretch assignments: Julian, in his role as Margaret’s boss, encouraged her to take on assignments that were out of her comfort zone. This was a strategy that he used himself in small and large-scale assignments. Working on

his financial skills is an example of this approach to learning. Although numbers felt very unnatural to him, he managed to do so:

“I think I learnt a lot and got better. Forcing myself to be aware of the numbers was key... and I haven’t found a magic trick to get better at that either, actually the technical side of investment and being able to understand what we mean by payback and rate of return.”

Collecting ‘golden nuggets’: From formal training opportunities Julian actively extracted tools to apply at work. He kept a record at hand of what he had found useful even in courses that had taken place years before: “If I want to remember a technique or a model or something, I look there. These are the little golden nuggets.” The golden nuggets became everyday tools to think and act in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. “I’m thinking how to weave some of these into my activity as well and update my personal development plan.” “It’s very interesting to try to relate it to some of what you’re looking at”. The sources from which Julian collected “golden nuggets” included: leadership development programmes, negotiation programmes and a coaching certification.

Golden nuggets proved helpful tools in the very concrete misalignment issues that he was working on: “actually, I did the proper stakeholder mapping and then the stakeholder plan for this, because I’ve learnt that as a technique in coaching and I thought I’d deploy it to that.”

‘Observing others’: Like Margaret, Julian also learnt from role-models. He not only looked for exemplar behaviours, but also for things to be avoided: “[A strategy to] making yourself equipped for these meetings is observing others, watching other case studies, seeing whether [that] maybe has gone well or gone badly and thinking: ‘I’m not going to make that mistake.’ Also, talking to people [and] speaking to [my boss] just to bounce your ideas off them, (...) that’s all part of the learning.”

Divide and love: According to Julian, an important “side of politics is relationships”, not only in the sense of being well connected, but also in understanding the nuances of relationships among others.

For example, in advancing one of his agendas, Julian leveraged his intuition “that [Unit A] aren’t very close to [Unit B]. Even though they’re [close geographically], they don’t like each other. (...)”. With this knowledge he could do “a little bit of (...) ‘divide and love’”:

“I talked to [union member A] about the slides I produced and what was on the slides, and asked him if he wanted to see them in advance. *I knew he didn’t.* (...) If he gave away that he had the slides or he brought a copy with him, they think: ‘well, Julian and [union member A] are close and we don’t trust [union member A]

because he knows stuff.' He'd prefer to go into a meeting not knowing what I was going to tell them."

This again, is a clear example of influencing strategies and the manipulatory character of managerial work of which MacIntyre (2013) speaks in *After Virtue*.

Making people feel a part of something: Julian used different strategies to increase people's involvement with the transformation agenda. For him, it was important that the staff and the union had their say: "Once you break down the big issue: 'we don't want to move out of [that building]', then they could be talking about how we move out of [the building]. I want to move them from the point of resistance into the point of being involved with the change. This will go on for the next two months, this discussion. There's a lot of stakeholders." A way to achieve the involvement that he was expecting, was to present different alternatives: "I've got around ten options for that which I am discussing with the unions so it depends on which option we finally go for."

A second approach was to acknowledge people for their merits, give credit and engage staff with his vision:

"I decided to not just say 'thank you', but I started by telling the story of the transformation program saying: 'Four years ago, the operation was bust. The capacity was broken and started to work on the design of a strategy get a new building. (...) I asked for the money for that. I got that money. (...) You've done a fantastic job of getting that building ready (...) in a very short space. (...) In all my career, I've never known a project go so quickly (...). You've done that fantastically well. I'm really grateful. (...) This isn't just a warehouse. This is Royal Mail which is one of the biggest companies in the UK, a brand that's known worldwide. Within this building, every item of mail that's posted from every person in the whole world to anyone in the UK comes through this building. That could be something that's a prized gift that someone wants to give'."

Supporting his team: Julian had nine direct reports. He needed to make sure they were all up for the game and that he had a stable and aligned team. "I enjoy seeing people develop and grow." Coaching strategies seemed to permeate most of the interactions with his team. To coach, Julian asked questions, gave positive feedback and acknowledged people's feelings. Using his training and commitment towards being a coach, Julian did not just leave lessons to himself but also tried to spread the knowledge.

Having an exit strategy: Julian valued his autonomy and was comfortable in the organisation as long as he could keep that. Yet he was not too worried if at some point this changed, and actually expected it would:

"I am happy with what I'm doing, I like the setup we've got, I like the autonomy, I like my boss, so, you know, that won't last forever. I accept it will change and I just keep head down out here, pushing on to deliver what I have to deliver and you know, I'm 55 now so I've got ideas of what would happen if I get into things I

don't like in Royal Mail, you know, I've got other plans that have nothing to do with Royal Mail and they're not even in management so... you know I've got an exit strategy..."

7.2. Managers' stances: Taming, adapting, enduring and abandoning

TABLE 7-1 STRATEGIES

LINDA	ERIC	MARGARET	JULIAN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being humble • Gaining the trust of others • Being resourceful and adopting new tools • Faking confidence • Absorbing the business unspoken rules • Being a chameleon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping his own priorities at the forefront • Sabotaging • Finding allies • Marketing • Gaining his boss' solidarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borrowing the gaze of others. • Having a coach • Having role-models • Asserting herself • Not taking everything to heart • Staying true to herself' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking on self-imposed stretch assignments • Collecting golden nuggets • Observing others • Divide and love • Making people feel a part of something • Supporting his team • Having an exist strategy

Table 7-1 summarises the 26 strategies used by the managers. By considering these strategies along with other observations related to how the managers dealt with misalignment and with new demands, I noted four different stances that the managers assumed at different stages in their navigations of the figured world: taming, adopting, enduring and suffering and abandoning. First, the managers tried to tame the expectations placed on them so that they would better suit what mattered to them. Linda, for example, managed to tame the figured world however subtly, in a number of occasions. One of these is how she managed to bring to the business some of her own approaches in dealing with unions:

"I think I've brought some of my experiences from how I've worked with the unions in the past (...) I've had really good successes from it because [the union] feel they are part of it and it really stops that, 'we don't have any responsibility or accountability for this. We can just say 'no we don't like it'.' Whereas involving them much earlier gives them that responsibility and accountability. I'm sure we're going to have to take it to higher people than them in the union, but I'm not going to have to stand up and sell it. We're going to have to stand up and sell it because they've agreed it. They designed it."

With her lived experiences, Linda was successful at bringing a new idea of what could be considered good. Although some people were resistant, others were learning from her: “I think [my colleague] has seen a different way of approaching things. (...) [That colleague] came to me and said ‘how about we do this in the same sort of way?’ Even those in the organisation who had been skeptical towards Linda’s way of doing things were accepting her new approaches:

“I think [my other colleague] acknowledges it’s a different way of working and (...) was quite taken aback at how much support I had from the union before we even got to a meeting. Do I think [that other colleague] will do anything differently? I’m not sure. I don’t think so.”

Second, the managers tried to adapt to those stories of what was considered good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. Adapting meant sometimes reframing or reconsidering some commitments and identifications; as Wilcox says: “assigning alternative meanings” (2012: 92). Margaret is a very good example of an adapter. With her keen eye to the experiences of others and searching for role-models, she strived to become a better manager. Thus, Margaret was a listener and many of her strategies were intended for just that. A very salient case is the way in which she resolved her empathy dilemma: “today’s worries will have gone by tomorrow is actually the best lesson I’ve learned.” Such lesson was a tool for her to act and to be able to let people go when she had to. Moreover, Margaret felt proud of herself on how she had handled such challenging situation for her:

“I actually got a thank you from this team, and that for me was the one time I could say: this is an achievement. Because that’s the most difficult time they’ve had. They have thanked me for how I’ve handled it. It actually made me quite upset, but that is when I started to think, ‘Yeah, I can do this, I can believe that I can do this.’”

The third stance I identified was *enduring and suffering*. Enduring happened when there was disruption enough that it was impossible to overlook the gap between who the managers were and who they were expected to become. Nevertheless, in enduring situations, the managers could not yet identify exactly what the demand was neither find a path to resolve it. Linda, Margaret, and Eric went through this at some point during fieldwork. It was in enduring situations that the managers experienced the most emotional distress. Perhaps Eric was in this stance for the longest. It was only towards the end of my fieldwork that he came to the realisation that he needed to take a more aggressive approach in order to protect what mattered to him. Many of the strategies in which he later engaged were attempts at taming the figured world. It is possible then, that both stances, adapting and enduring, co-existed at a given time. In Eric’s case, his strategies to tame put him in a risky situation and he was still experiencing emotional distress. Enduring generally involved feelings of frustration and could bring about some rule-bending.

Finally, the fourth stance was *abandoning* the figured world. Not one of the managers in fact left in the time in which the study took place. Yet, the stance was identifiable in the data for two reasons. First, Linda, Eric, and Julian all narrated experiences in which they had abandoned other figured worlds at earlier stages. In their narrations there was always a reference to what mattered to them. Julian, for example, argued that he had come back to a Mail Centre because when working at the administrative offices of the Royal Mail, he missed the interactions that motivated him and felt disconnected to the practice mail delivery:

“The people are definitely one of the things which stopped me working in Victoria Embankment, I missed coming to work where there’s real people, I used a little test with people to say ‘are you in touch with reality?’ And three things I’d say was: ‘when did you last talk to a postman/postwomen? When did you last touch a parcel or a letter and when did you last speak to a customer?’ And if you are in a job in Victoria Embankment some people will answer that question months, or years or never...”

This quote illustrates the sort of things that mattered to Julian and might also be a hint towards understanding the internal goods enjoyed by Julian which were directly associated with the practice of mail collection and delivery.

The second reason is that both Eric and Julian spoke of the hypothetical scenarios of abandoning the figured world. For Eric the possibility became very real at some point: “I’m doing my best here. (...) If they’re not happy with it, I should go somewhere else.” For Julian, leaving was a path that he was prepared to take if the conditions of his work stopped being as ideal as they were at the time of the study.

Clearly, not all four stances were equally comfortable. The position of ‘taming’ the figured world and its demands might be considered ideal and perhaps implies a larger display of agency. In the meanwhile, enduring and suffering was clearly undesirable. In looking for an explanation of why one stance had been taken over another I found two main decisive factors: resources and level of flexibility of commitments and identifications at stake (Fig. 7.1). In the first place, managers could not tame the figured world when they did not have the appropriate resources. Linda for example had unconditional support from her boss: “[My approach was] probably one of the reasons [my boss] asked me to come and join the team because he wants a different approach.” Eric, in contrast, had very little support combined with very little formal authority. Resources can also be of other kinds. Margaret for example, struggled for some time trying to assert her authority with some of her colleagues. At the same time she was working on improving her self-confidence. And Linda, during the time she endured and struggled because she was not being influential enough, lacked knowledge of the political map of the organisation. Hence, self-understandings and knowledge and skills are other examples of resources.

The second factor involved in determining the stance the manager took was the level of flexibility of the commitments and identifications at stake. Margaret, for example, stretched her commitment to empathy as much as she could to feel comfortable in her management role. Likewise, Linda flexed her acceptance of bureaucracy just enough to keep people around her at ease, while trying not to undermine her own agendas. An example of a very fixed commitment was that of Julian in regards to closing the building of which I spoke in Chapter 4. Yet, with the right resources at hand, he could get away with having fixed commitments and identifications at the same time as he achieved all the goals he had in mind.

Finally, it is important to clarify that not one manager experienced only one stance. Rather, they moved around the different stances as their situation changed in terms of resources and commitments and identifications. Also, taking a stance was always an attempt to deal with a situation. Managers needed to adapt these stances in order to succeed in navigating the figured world. Hence, the managers explored and experimented with different stances for gap-closing.

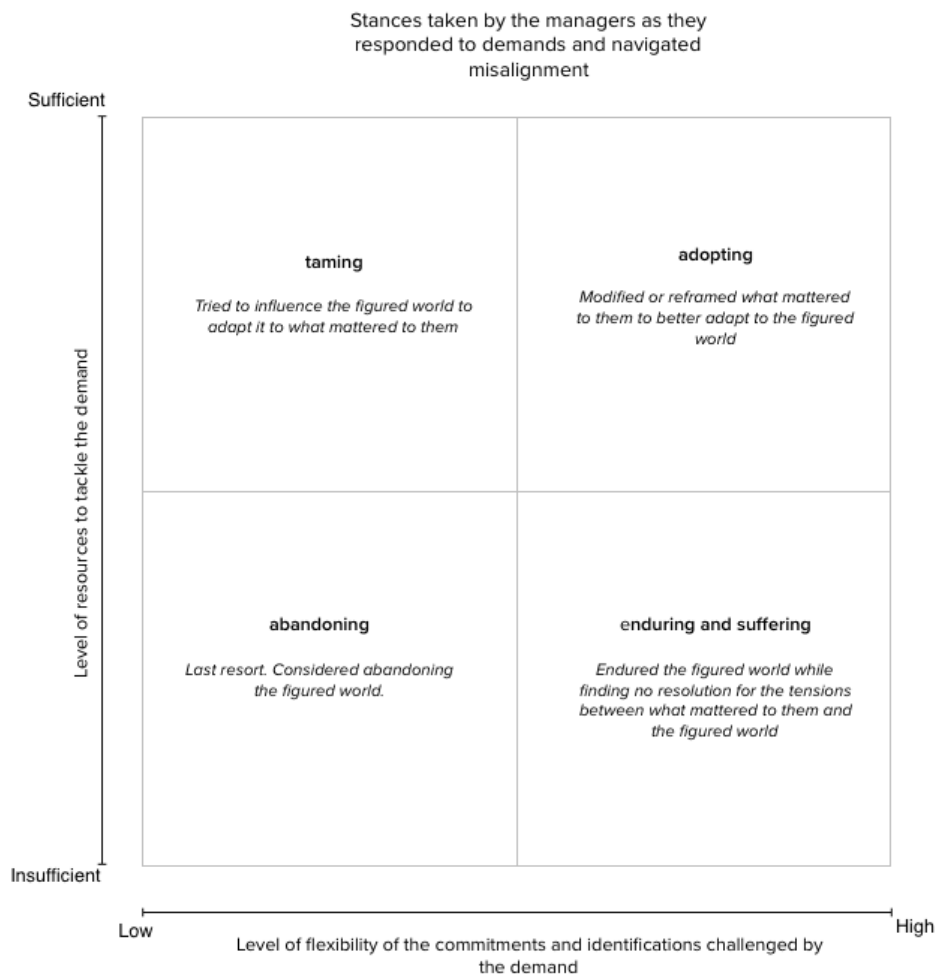


FIG. 7.1

7.3. Resources

In becoming better at navigating the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail, the managers were sometimes able to “manipulate” the figured world (Edwards, 2010: 25) so that it would better fit their intentions. Here, Edwards’ remarks about the notion of expertise, in which she draws from Holland et al., as well as from Dreyfus, becomes relevant. Edwards (2010) says: “figured worlds are sites (...) where expertise is acquired, developed and exercised” (2010: 24). In Chapter 6 (Demands) I mentioned that the social situation of development is the departure point of learning and also the *repository of the resources available* for such development to take place (Holland et al., 1998). To address demands, the managers drew from the resources they found in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail such as formal training opportunities, tools developed by organisational consultants, role-models and coaching, among others. In so doing, they used identity-based resources such as the formal authority granted by their roles, but also from their past experiences and transferable skills and knowledge. This also is expressed by Edwards (2010: 10) who says:

“[o]ne’s identity is (...) an organising principle for action: we approach and tackle what we think we are able to change and make changes in line with what matters to us (...). These interests are culturally mediated, but nonetheless experienced personally in terms of our commitments, standpoints and the resources available to us.”

Thus, the development of expertise in becoming better at navigating the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail did not come from a plain identification with the stories of what was good in such world. Rather, it was also informed by the commitments and identifications that the managers brought with them to the organisation. Fig 7.2 synthesises some of the resources and the strategies associated which each stance adopted by the managers.

Examples of strategies associated to each stance

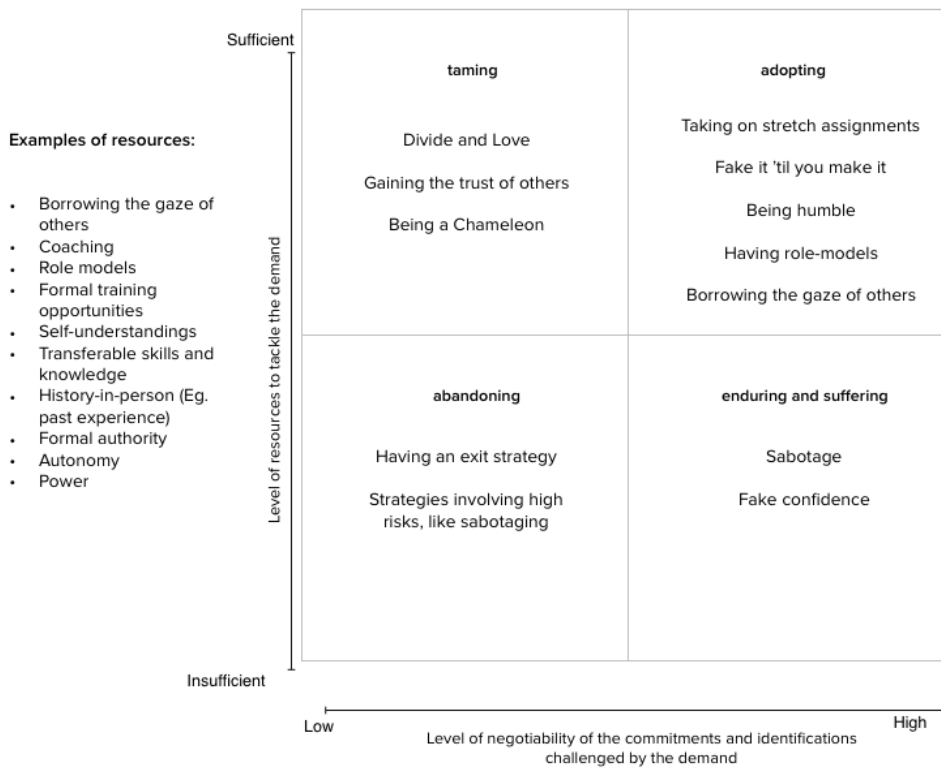


FIG. 7.2

7.4. Conclusions

In this chapter I discussed the strategies that the managers used to address new demands and navigate misalignment. I identified 26 different strategies, as with the demands presented in Chapter 5, it would be impossible in the length of this thesis to discuss all the strategies that the data might indicate. Therefore, some data was prioritised considering the most salient strategies in relation to the boundary spaces, the demands and the contradictions already discussed. A cross-case analysis suggests that at different moments in time the managers' position was to try and tame, adapt to, or endure the figured world. There is also data to indicate that abandoning the figured world was a realistic path for the managers, when thinking of hypothetical scenarios were a mismatch between what mattered to them and the expectations of the figured world could not be resolved. Influencing strategies also seem to be prominent across all cases. Many of these strategies could perhaps be considered manipulative strategies from a MacIntyrean perspective. Yet, the data suggests that the managers also used and protected virtues as they addressed new demands. This echoes MacIntyre who, according to Moore (2015), has said that virtues can be tools for resolving tensions. Both the prominence of influencing strategies and the presence of virtues will be discussed further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8

FINAL REFLECTIONS

In this chapter I summarise the key arguments developed in the previous chapters and build on them to provide a concise answer to the research questions. The chapter also discusses the learnings that can be drawn from this research in relation to MacIntyre's critique of the character of the manager and a sociocultural understanding of learning and development. I will reflect on the limitations of the inquiry and outline its theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions. The chapter ends by setting a research agenda that could extend the insights hereby presented.

8. FINAL REFLECTIONS

This research grew out of an interest on how adults develop at work and how the workplace fosters or hinders their flourishing. Provoked by Alasdair MacIntyre's (2013) assertions that managers cannot distance themselves from their social role, that they have a highly constrained agency and that their flourishing is unlikely, I selected the trajectories of four senior managers as the object of my inquiry. While many scholars have engaged with MacIntyre's ideas to research and reflect about work in organisations (see Beadle and Moore, 2006), I have made the case that a learning and development perspective is crucial to understanding of the work and flourishing of managers. By taking a sociocultural perspective of learning and development it was possible to explore empirically how managers confronted demands at work which challenged what mattered to them, and how they navigated misalignment and contradiction.

The chapter is structured as follows. In section 8.1 I will summarise the key arguments of previous chapters. In section 8.2 I will reflect on the implications that can be drawn from this study in relation to the learning and flourishing of managers. Section 8.3 will point out my contributions to the literature. Next, in section 8.4 I will discuss the limitations of the study and a future research agenda. The chapter ends with a final word about this dissertation.

8.1. Summary

From a sociocultural perspective, people learn and develop through “their active engagement with the world” (Setsenko, 2008: 471). Learners are those who are in a process of better understanding their reality (internalisation) and whom in turn, change this reality (externalisation) (Edwards, 2010). Because in this process persons adjust their self-understandings and the ways they present themselves to others, learning may be understood as identity work (Ibarra, 1999; Harman et al., 1998; Sfard and Prusak, 2005; Petriglieri, 2011).

This kind of organisational shift is known to result in misalignment between the values that individuals in organisations hold and those of the organisation (Mumby, 1987; Branson, 2008). The research questions were addressed at the exploration of the tensions between persons and their institutional realities at work. Considering misalignment was important because a lack of alignment of values has been thought to hinder excellence, ethics and engagement at work (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon, 2002). Paradoxically, misalignment of values has also been linked to innovation, creativity and organisational change (Moran, 2010; Tushman and O'Reilly, 2002). The relevance of considering contradictions in the research questions, stems from their centrality in a Vygotskian understanding of

learning and development as a pivotal event for learning and development to take place.

The specific research questions were:

RQ1/ How do senior managers face new demands that challenge what matters to them?

RQ2/ How do senior managers navigate misalignment and contradiction at work?

Iterative interviews and work shadowing were the main sources of data collection. Work shadowing was important to obtain a better grasp of the figured world of the managers. Both unstructured and semi-structured interviews were aimed at building an understanding of the past trajectories of the managers that led them to their current positions at the Royal Mail, what mattered to the managers at the time of the study, and to make intelligible the intentions behind the actions observed while shadowing the managers.

To make sense of the data collected I used three main methodological approaches: thematic coding, organising the data in narratives that considered the saliency and timelines of events, and theoretical coding. The demand-response cycle (Fig. 5.3) emerged from the dialectics between empirical data and theory and became the conceptual framework of the study.

The findings revealed that the main concepts of the research questions, misalignment, demands, and contradictions were interrelated in a very specific manner. Misalignment took place as the managers navigated boundary spaces where different actors in the organisation had different notions of what mattered. These boundary spaces became for the managers a social situation of development where new demands were recognised. The recognition and tackling of demands then required that the managers worked through very specific contradictions or double-binds.

Stories of misalignment were a good entry point to presenting the findings as they also provided context in relation to the work of Linda, Eric, Margaret, and Julian. Thus, in Chapter 4 I began by describing and discussing the situations of misalignment situations that each one of the managers was navigating. In Chapter 5 I explored the demands that the managers confronted, and in Chapter 6 I examined the contradictions involved in the demands. In Chapter 7 I presented the strategies that the managers used in trying to resolve misalignment situations, tackle demands, and navigate contradictions. I now proceed to highlight the key aspects of each of these four chapters.

Chapter 5

The four managers navigated boundary spaces, and in so doing, they all strove to protect their own commitments and identifications. Adapting Edwards' (2010) definition, boundary spaces were understood as a space of interactions between different members of a figured world, where clashing or differing notions of what matters co-existed. A comprehensive understanding of the boundary spaces required the consideration of:

- The level of alignment with central business concerns.
- The character of incongruences taking place.
- The positionality map of actors involved.
- The emotional implications the boundary space had for the manager.

An interesting finding was that there was general alignment with the central business agenda. None of the managers challenged the modernisation or the privatisation plans of the organisation. Yet there were clashes in terms of the actions that needed to take place, conducive to privatisation and modernisation. The levels of misalignment and, particularly, the degree of emotional significance varied across the managers. Julian had to deal with misalignment situations but was perceived as more detached and more at ease in navigating the boundary spaces. Eric, Margaret, and Linda seemed to be more emotionally involved. The boundary spaces became social situations of development (Vygotsky, 1998) in which the managers encountered new demands.

Chapter 6

In this chapter I gave a closer look to the demands that the managers faced and which challenged what mattered to them. I found that as the managers recognised new demands they also refashioned them to shelter their own commitments and identifications. This resonates with Edwards' (forthcoming) indication that demands are addressed in an agentic fashion. To emphasise the plasticity of demands in the hands of the managers and to offer a more nuanced understanding of the process of demand recognition, I used the concepts of demand-as-identified and demand-as-refashioned.

Chapter 7

Recognising new demands implied a realisation that there was a gap between who the managers were and who they were expected to become. In their gap-closing efforts, the managers worked their way through a number of contradictions. Solving such contradictions involved an implicit process of reconsidering who they were, what they stood for, and of working through gaps of knowledge and skills.

Chapter 7 was dedicated to a more fine-grained analysis of how the navigation of contradictions unfolded.

As the four managers in the study faced new demands, a process of implicit questioning of who they were and who they were expected to become was central to their learning. Answers to the questions ‘who am I?’ and ‘who am I expected to become?’ stemmed from an interplay between the managers’ commitments and identifications and the stories of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. In deciding how to proceed in the face of new demands, the managers navigated contradictions which can be expressed in the questions: ‘who am I really?’, ‘who should I no longer be?’, ‘who do I resist becoming?’, and ‘who do I struggle to become?’ These questions speak of the challenges to self-understandings, the incongruences of values and the barriers of knowledge and skills that the managers encountered as they tried to close the gap between who they were and who they were expected to become.

Chapter 8

I proceeded to present the strategies that the managers used in navigating their social situation of development and tackling misalignment, new demands and contradictions. As the managers tried to close the gap between who they were and who they were expected to become, they delved across four different stances:

- ***Taming*** (or adapting) the stories of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail so that their institutional realities better accommodated to their own commitments and identifications.
- ***Adopting*** the stories of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. This implied reframing or reconsidering their commitments and identifications to better accommodate to the figured world.
- ***Enduring and suffering*** the stories of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail.
- Harboring ideas of ***abandoning*** the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. Ideas of abandoning were evidenced as the managers discussed hypothetical scenarios in which they found no resolution between what mattered to them and what was considered good in their institutional realities.

Two factors seemed to have an incidence on which stance the managers took: the resources available to them and the flexibility of the commitment and identification at stake. When the resources available to the managers seemed richer and they were keen on protecting a commitment and identification that was at risk, then the managers were keener on trying to tame the figured world. In contrast, when

resources were low and the commitment and identification was equally inflexible, then the possibility of abandoning the figured world was considered.

The resources to tackle the challenge were in many instances located in others. Coaching, role models, one-to-one conversations and the availability of others' accounts of who the managers were, were all devices used by managers in addressing their own demands. This echoes Vygotsky's conception of development and learning as a social endeavour.

The time frame for tackling new demands, misalignment and contradictions varied widely. Sometimes it took years, thus becoming an enduring struggle, like Margaret's confidence issues. In other rare instances, once the demand had been recognised, minor adjustment sufficed for learning to occur and self-images to be adjusted.

8.2. Reflections on the flourishing of managers

8.2.1. What was good and who was it worth striving to become?

Beabout argues that "virtues are confirmed and consolidated through the deliberate choices of individual human persons, even as the social nexus in which one dwells shapes the way a virtue is embodied..." (2013: 213). Consequently, he indicates that the transformations of institutions and their culture can result from the transformations of individuals. Moore and Beadle's (2006) argument is that managers are more likely to be virtuous and to flourish when the institutional realities that they navigate are virtuous in character. A sociocultural perspective of learning and development that has the dialectics between a person and their figured world at its core proved ideal to see the interaction between the manager and their institutional reality. Thus, such perspective accounts for Beabout's emphasis on the deliberate choices of the individual and for Moore and Beadle's emphasis on the relevance of the institutional reality. The findings of the inquiry indicate that managers decided how to act in respect to new demands, misalignment and contradiction, considering both the stories of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail and their own commitments and identifications.

The stories of what was good in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail were crucial to how the managers responded to new demands. As managers became better at navigating the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail, they strived to bridge the gap between their commitments and identifications and what mattered in their institutional realities. Thus, managers assessed the demands and responded to them according to what mattered to them. That is, the commitments and identifications they had accumulated over their life trajectories and which

stemmed from the other figured worlds of which they were or had been members. The sense of urgency the managers experienced as they recognised the demand as well as the resources available to them also played a central role on how the demand was tackled. In this dynamic, the managers were shaped by the figured world and shaped it back. Such dialectical process has been very well described by Edwards (2010), Holland (1998), as well as by other sociocultural authors. The background picture shaped learnings and paths to development. Such background picture was itself portrayed within the background picture of the world of work, and more specifically of the world of working as a manager.

Now, it is important to acknowledge that commitments and identifications, and the stories of which they are a part of cannot be treated as separate issues. Quite the opposite, they are intimately intertwined (Taylor, 1989). Taylor (1989) argues that the frameworks in which we live are the very sources of the self. Thus, the only way to explain how commitments and identifications and the stories of what was good at the Royal Mail were not identical, is to understand that managers were members of different figured worlds, and that therefore found themselves as part of an array of different stories at the same time. Furthermore, as they navigated the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail, the senior managers brought with them their 'history-in-person' (Holland and Lachicotte, 2007) and with it, their past memberships, which had casted in them particular self-understandings. The multiple stories that loaded the managers' identities resulted in competing commitments. The idea of membership to multiple figured worlds is well discussed by Dreier (1999) and is accounted by MacIntyre in the concept of compartmentalisation.

What is important to underscore is that competing commitments were by no means silenced as managers navigated the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail and that the working through them had a central role in managers' learning and development. To MacIntyre, compartmentalisation implies that whatever competing notion of good the manager may hold is left in the realm of her private life, and not at all considered Mondays through Fridays from nine-to-five. So, echoing MacIntyre, the managers do seem to experience compartmentalisation. Yet, contrary to MacIntyre's claims, managers in this study did establish some distance between themselves and the demands of their institutional realities, between themselves and their roles. This echoes Conroy's (2010) study of managers at the NHS, and Wilcox's (2012) study of Human Resources managers.

8.2.2. Managers and the quest for a good life

There is enough evidence in the cases of Linda, Eric, Margaret, and Julian to argue that the managers were striving towards some flourishing. Beadle and Moore (2006: 332), in commenting on MacIntyre's notion of the *telos* argue that:

“there is within the concept of the quest the idea that it is a search for something that is not yet ‘adequately characterized’ and that it is through the search that the goal of the quest is finally to be understood.”

The deep questioning involved in the process of learning that I have outlined, and that is synthesised on the demand-response cycle (Fig. 5.3), is evidence that the four managers were in such quest. In their careers, the managers were, using Taylor’s (1989: 3) words, in an “attempt to live the best possible life.”

Managers’ definition of ‘good’ or ‘right’, was also given in the light of the frameworks of which Taylor speaks. He argues that we cannot understand what it is to be a person without understanding “how our pictures of the good have evolved. Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes” (Taylor, 1989: 3). His remarks are helpful to understand who the managers became as they participated in the figured world of work and more specifically in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. The good, Taylor says, is better described as “the object of our love or allegiance or (...) as the privileged focus of attention and will” (1989: 3). Linda, Eric, Julian, and Margaret were in pursuit of the good. They were authentic in their efforts to become good managers, and this was part of an effort to be good people. Taylor argues that frameworks play an important role in our lives, providing “the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgements, intuitions or reactions (...)” When we “spell out what is it that we presuppose when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement or status, or define our moral obligations in a certain manner, we are articulating (...) frameworks” (26). The figured world of managing at the Royal Mail provided the framework which shaped the aspirations of the four managers here studied. In form of explicit and inexplicit demands laid on them, the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail gave them a changing image of who they were expected to become.

Determination towards closing the gap between who they were and who they were expected to become drove the managers up the managerial hierarchy. Emotionally invested in their jobs, they strived to flourish and worked hard to identify and refashion the demands of the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. The four managers crossed challenging barriers (three of them for example did not hold a higher education degree when entering the workplace).

8.2.3. Virtues

MacIntyre argues that the virtues are the path to closing the gap between person-as-is and person-as-could-be-if-she-realised-her-telos and that there can be no account of flourishing without an account of virtues. There is evidence that the managers “self-understanding[s] involve[d] being charged with holding something in trust,” and that they were striving for the sustainability of the practice of mail

collection and delivery. The managers organised people to achieve what they considered “worthwhile goals” and in challenging situations asked themselves ‘what would a good manager do?’ In these, they exhibited the kinds of behaviours that Beabout (2013) assigns to the manager as a wise steward.

Eric and Linda stood for the wellbeing of middle managers and for their capacity to excel in their jobs. Margaret strived for fairness and looked after the emotional well-being of their sub-alternates. Julian was authentically invested in the personal development of his teams and was committed to protecting the interests of the frontline staff. All the managers were opened to learning from others and to explore new ways of doing things. In the doings that I just described, the managers exercised virtues such as courage, justice, charity, constancy, humility and fortitude. There are many more instances in the data that evidence the display of virtue. If one follows MacIntyre’s discussion, Margaret, Eric, and Linda, for example, exhibited the virtue of truthfulness about themselves and of humility when they accepted to question their self-understandings by acknowledging the views that others had of them. Of this, MacIntyre says “the virtue that is indispensable for achieving both the required degree of self-knowledge and the ability to resist all those influences that make for self-deception is of course honesty, primary truthfulness about ourselves” (1999: 95). Likewise, there are instances of prudence and misericordia as understood by MacIntyre (1999), based on Aquinas. Thus, the findings strongly back Moore and Beadle’s claim that managers can “exercise the virtues in the making and sustaining of the institution (enabling them on their own narrative quest towards their own *telos*)” (2006: 373) and MacIntyre’s idea that virtues are required in resolving tensions (Moore, 2015).

8.2.4. Vices

All this goodness is not without its vices. As MacIntyre argues: “where the virtues are required, the vices also may flourish” (MacIntyre, 2013: loc4224). I found empirical grounds for several of MacIntyre’s claims. Although the managers were observed engaging in moral debate in plenty of occasions, such challenges were either swept away or modified to turn them into manageable demands. Edwards argues that “actors deflect their attention away from demands that are too emotionally challenging and focus on those they can tackle with some success” (forthcoming). A possible explanation therefore is that the managers perceived such challenges as unresolvable, and therefore were less likely to tackle them. The concept of zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1998) is therefore relevant. Given the resources available in the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail, some moral considerations fell out of the zone of proximal development of the managers and thus were abandoned early on.

Another aspect that resonates with MacIntyre’s critique relates to influencing skills. An analysis of the strategies that managers used indicates that influencing

strategies were a common approach for the managers to negotiate their way through misalignment. A closer look to the strategies also suggests that in their attempts at influencing, the managers did resort to what MacIntyre describes as treating others as means to their ends:

“To treat someone as an end is to offer them what I take to be a good reason for acting in one way rather than another, but to leave it to them to evaluate those reasons. Is to be unwilling to influence another except by reasons which that other her or she judges to be good. (...) By contrast to treat others as a means is to seek to make him or her an instrument of my purposes by adducing whatever influences or considerations will in fact be effective on this or that occasion. The generalizations of the sociology and psychology of persuasion are what I shall need to guide me, not the standards of a normative rationality” (MacIntyre, 2013: 28).

The strategies can be considered manipulative given that when they were employed, it was not rare for the managers to conceal their true motives in order to advance their agendas in a highly political game. This resonates with MacIntyre’s (2013: loc 790) argument that managers do aim at “controlling behaviour and suppressing conflict” for example by “influenc[ing] the motives of [their] subordinates” and “ensur[ing] that these subordinates argue from premises which will produce agreement with [their] own prior conclusions”. So in their use of influencing strategies the managers seemed doing what MacIntyre criticises: treating others as means, rather than ends.

Moreover, influencing strategies used to navigate misalignment were, of course, not referred to as manipulatory. Rather, they were labeled influencing skills. The normative character entailed in labeling influencing strategies as ‘skills’ is an indication of a local and situated understanding of what was considered good, which can very much support MacIntyre’s argument of about the emotivist culture embodied in organisational life. In the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail influencing skills were perceived as necessary, held a high status and were only occasionally examined from a moral perspective (such as when Julian questioned himself ‘am I lying here?’). Such strategies were part of an informal curriculum in the organisation: they were promoted in coaching and mentoring initiatives and taught through formal training programmes financed by the organisation. The ‘influential manager’ was someone worth aspiring to become. With this image in mind the managers employed the strategies proudly and, encouraged by their own bosses and other members of the organisation, strived to become more proficient in using them.

8.2.5. Relational expertise as a virtue to navigate misalignment

Yet, the repertoire of influencing strategies that the managers used included strategies such as ‘divide and love’, ‘being a chameleon’ and ‘sabotaging’, as well as

‘considering what mattered to others’ and ‘working humbly through difficult relationships’. Reading Edwards’ conception of relational expertise from a MacIntyrean perspective, and contrasting it with the strategies employed by the managers to navigate misalignment, helps to distinguish two kinds of influencing strategies: manipulatory and non-manipulatory.

Edwards argues that relational expertise consists in trying to build common understandings. Authentic efforts to build common knowledge can very much meet MacIntyre’s definition of treating others as ends: as giving them “a good reason for acting in one way rather than another, but to leave it to them to evaluate those reasons” (MacIntyre, 2013: 28). Although, many of the influencing skills used by the managers in this study had an underlying manipulatory character, there are also evidences of a genuine interest on behalf of the managers to arrive to joint solutions to problems, to advance the common good and to protect the practice by ensuring its institutional sustainability.

The reason why this analysis is important is that influencing skills are quite characteristic of managerial work (Rodriguez Leal, 2015b). Yet, relational expertise might offer some light on how managers could influence, and strive for more alignment in the boundary spaces that they had to navigate, in a non-manipulative fashion. According to MacIntyre (2013), all virtues have to meet three conditions: 1) facilitate excellence in the practices in which we engage; 2) contribute to individuals’ quest for a life worth living; and 3) contribute to the quest for the best in society. Relational expertise meets the three conditions. It contributes to the excellence of the practice because its goal is to build shared understandings of what matters to people, and this includes the goods internal to the practice and of the best means to achieve them. It contributes to the individuals’ quest for a life worth living because it empowers professionals to direct their activities at work to the problems that matter to them, avoiding the frustration entailed in compromising one’s commitments and identifications. It contributes to the best in society because it exhorts for a thorough reflection and agreement upon the goals to which an activity is addressed, and to the purposes that it should serve. Furthermore, Edwards underscores the need to actively avoid manipulation and control:

“[O]ne should not ignore how the ideas [related to relational expertise] might be used to manipulate and control. It is therefore crucial to keep the democratic potential they offer as the acid test. Without sustained mutual respect for the agency as well as the motives of others, these concepts cannot be termed relational” (Edwards, forthcoming).

An intentional and explicit engagement with relational expertise could therefore be a tool to ‘enable moral agency’ (Wilcox, 2012), contribute to the kind of leadership as purpose that Kempster, Jackson and Conroy (2011) speak of, as well as assist managers in their exercise of ethical assertiveness (Watson, 2003). In the light of these relevant discussions for our times, I want to underscore the relevance of referring to relational expertise as a *virtue* rather than as a *skill*. I have reflected

elsewhere (Rodriguez Leal, 2015b) on how my conversations with managers at the Royal Mail made me realise how much we talk about skills and how little we talk about virtues. While skills are indeed indispensable to doing good managerial work, emphasising the role of virtues in achieving excellence in the practice of sustaining an institution (Beadle and Moore, 2006) is a path towards the moral agency and assertiveness of managers. Such agency and assertiveness hopefully can alleviate the tensions between institutions and practices that MacIntyre (2013) highlights in *After Virtue*.

8.2.6. Managing as practice

As a conclusion, this study shows that while the four managers indeed exhibited some behaviours which MacIntyre criticises. They were also agentic, strived to protect their commitments and identifications, and were in the quest for the good life. While what counts or not as practice is a rather contentious issue among those who discuss MacIntyre's work (Beadle and Moore, 2006), MacIntyre (2013) himself emphasises that theorising should never get too far from social reality. My exploration of how managers confronted demands that challenged what mattered to them has fully persuaded me that:

- There was a practice in the managers attempts at “making and sustaining [their] institution” (ibid.).
- Albeit sparingly, managers did question themselves and the ends that they pursued.
- That in their quest for the good life, managers learnt and developed, and in so doing shaped their very ideas of self.

8.3. Contributions

I am making five theoretical contributions: beginning a dialogue between MacIntyre and sociocultural thought, a characterisation of misalignment situations, a more fine-grained understanding of the process involved in demand recognition, an account of stances assumed as demands were addressed, and finally, the demand-response cycle.

My attempt to link sociocultural thought and MacIntyrean inquiry makes sense for a number of reasons. First, there is enough compatibility between the two literatures, and I found it surprising that there was not more cross-referencing between them. Commonalities include that both traditions are heavily influenced by MacIntyre's and Vygotsky's shared interest in Marx, they both have historicity and narratives are at their core, and they both underscore the agency of individuals.

There are many ways in which the two traditions can enrich each other. In Chapter 4 of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre (2013,1981) has pointed out that human flourishing implies a process of gap-closing. In his discussion there is some account of the role that learning and education have in the process. Yet, the sociocultural tradition has been exploring gap-closing ever since Vygotsky. In the process it has produced rich tools to understand the implications and challenges involved in gap-closing which are equally powerful to foster it. Therefore, sociocultural theory can become a mine of gold for virtue ethics scholars in their attempts at exploring and fostering flourishing. Third, the sociocultural tradition can very much benefit from MacIntyre's insistence on the *telos*. Educational specialists, who remind of MacIntyre's characterisation of the Therapist, have populated the field of learning and development. These educational specialists have become experts in technique, yet only sparingly really engaging with the question of purpose. Many have made this point, and I am particularly fond of Postman's (1996) argument in *The End of Education*. While sociocultural thinkers do emphasise agency, social justice, goals, and motives, sometimes they can fall in the trap of avoiding an authentic and courageous engagement with the question of what is worth learning and how such learning contributes to human flourishing.

My second theoretical contribution pertains to the study of misalignment. Understanding misalignment situations as boundary spaces provided conceptual grounds to explore in a more nuanced way the many different factors that need to be accounted for in any misalignment situation. My analysis resulted in four factors: the level of alignment that the managers had with the central business narrative, the character of the incongruences taking place, the positionality map of actors involved, and the emotional significance for the manager involved. These factors are not comprehensive, and a further analysis might unveil some others. I am convinced, for example, that a thorough understanding of misalignment needs to consider power. This, however, was beyond the scope of the thesis and shall be explored in the future.

Third, while much had been said in terms of demand recognition, understanding it as a phenomenon that encompasses demand-identification and demand-refashioning provides more fine-grained tools to study it. Such concepts acknowledge Hedegaard's (2012) and Edwards' (forthcoming) insistence on the agency involved in demand recognition, yet make the process of agency more explicit.

Fourth, I offered a synthesis of the stances that managers assumed as they tried to navigate misalignment and address new demands. This synthesis (7.2.1) and the concepts of taming, adopting, enduring and suffering, and abandoning might be helpful to understand how people respond to demands that challenge what matter to them and the role that resources, and commitments and identifications have in such responses.

Finally, as a result of the dialogue that I have established between MacIntyrean and sociocultural thought, informed by my empirical inquiry at the Royal Mail, I have produced the demand-response cycle. The model synthesises years of research in the field of learning and development, while also accounting for the *telos*. This model also draws from other literatures, particularly discussions pertaining identity work and misalignment. The value of the model lies in the synthesising exercise behind it, as well as on its research and practical applications. In terms of research, the demand-response cycle proved to be a valuable analytical tool to approach empirical data, helping me to understand the learning trajectories of the managers that I studied. In terms of practical applications I have insisted, largely drawing from Anne Edwards' work (2010; forthcoming) and on Vygotsky's social situation of development, that demand recognition is indispensable for any learning to occur. I have also mentioned that demand recognition is not straightforward. The demand-response cycle can be used as a teaching and a coaching tool to assist individuals' in their own demand recognition process (Rodriguez-Leal, 2016). As such, it can assist the coaching of managers oriented at identifying the internal goods of the practice (Conroy, 2009; 2011), which I have argued are difficult to specify, and in assisting them in the exercise of ethical assertiveness (Watson, 2003). The tool can also help to unveil the barriers that adults encounter as they try to change, and to acknowledge the taxing contradictions involved in such a journey.

I have already mentioned that the demand-response cycle has a methodological application. In addition to that, I would highlight the headache, victory, dilemma, and puzzle interview protocol that I described in Chapter 3. This is a very easy to replicate protocol that can add much richness to any data collection process.

The protocol emerged from my need to collect concrete stories about work while having limited access to shadowing the managers. With the protocol I could finally capture through the means of a conversation what was keeping managers awake at night, the specific issues that they had in mind at the moment of our interview and what mattered to them. Although by no means does the protocol replace the kind of data that can be collected while shadowing, it was a great tool to elicit very vivid accounts of the specifics of their work. Because of the normative character of each of the words (i.e., headache, victory, puzzle and dilemma), it was also a useful way to have managers identify on their own what mattered to them and hence their commitments and identifications. Finally, the managers reported it was an engaging way to get a conversation started. They enjoyed the interview, which contributed to the quality of data that I was able to collect. For the development of this tool I must credit Czarniawska (1997; 1998; 2000) and Conroy (2010). Conroy's study in particular, and the way he used genres to analyse the data collected in his study of National Health Services (NHS) managers inspired me to think of ways in which I could also elicit themed stories, not at the moment of analysis as he did, but at the moment of data collection.

8.4. Limitations and future research agenda

MacIntyre (2013: 307,308) argues that “academic disciplinary boundaries (...) often have the effect of compartmentalising thought in a way that distorts or obscures key relationships”. Yet, engaging in an interdisciplinary inquiry is risky and scary. Exploring literatures from domains as varied as Business, Education and Philosophy is more than overwhelming. While the efforts are necessary in the figured world of academia, which has also been fractured and compartmentalised, they also imply that the quest for answers remains incomplete. I see myself as just starting the journey of understanding the figured world of managing. There is a long road ahead for me to fully grasp MacIntyre’s ideas. The road is equally long to master the richness of sociocultural thought and the potential it holds for exploring human flourishing. This thesis is therefore a first step and I cannot but feel “that much more [needs] to be said than what [has been] said” (MacIntyre, 1999: ix). Yet, I am quite satisfied with the contributions that I have outlined. I am also looking forward to the reactions that my argument will hopefully provoke and to exploring further the implications of my ideas. In this section I reflect on the limitations of my thesis and outline some of the research possibilities ahead.

I began this research with an additional research question related to the strategies that the managers were using in assisting their subordinates with their own situations of misalignment and contradiction (Rodriguez Leal, 2015a). I soon realised that this question was too much to tackle, and could make for a whole different thesis. In any case, the data I collected intended to capture this as well and allows for such analyses. In addition to this, I interviewed fifteen managers. The data of those interviews was only used as background information for me to better understand the figured world of managing at the Royal Mail. I am curious to know how the findings of this study would be validated, extended or challenged by considering interview data from these other managers. Finally, the thematic coding led to emerging categories, which I left aside because they were out of the scope of the research questions. Gender, for example, was a salient topic. A particularly important one would be a more exhaustive and fine-grained analysis than the one I have already done, of the virtues and the vices that the managers displayed in facing new demands. In addition, the findings showed a strong difference between the misalignments of the two human resources managers and those of the operations managers. It would be interesting to explore these differences further. All these themes remain for future analyses.

An important limitation is that access and data collection was not even across cases. While with Eric I had seven interviews, with Margaret I only had three. Days spent shadowing the managers also varied. This raises the question of whether I would have had different insights had the data collections instances been equal with all participants.

It is quite clear that the purpose of case study research is not generalisation. Yet, I have argued that I have a number of theoretical contributions. These theoretical contributions will be strengthened once they have been validated by means of other empirical inquiries. Therefore, I hope future research can use the demand-response cycle as an analytical framework. There are also research opportunities in exploring its methodological applicability, as well as its teaching and coaching potential. In addition, the conceptualisation of misalignment given in this research could very much be extended by engaging with literature on power.

Exploring the work of managers in other settings could enrich this analysis. This would allow for cross-case comparisons among managers working in different organisations and types of organisations. A very interesting line of inquiry would be that regarding influencing skills. A theoretical approach that considers MacIntyre and Edwards (2010) could further explore the extent to which managers' repertoire resorts to treating others as means (manipulation) or treating others as ends (relational expertise).

This inquiry focused only on the managers' trajectories. It would be very interesting to take a more macro perspective and explore the tensions of internal and external goods as the Royal Mail transitions from a public to a private corporation. These analyses could draw from activity theory and MacIntyrean thought, to consider traditions and historicity in a way that this research did not do. Taking this more macro perspective would allow to explore the applicability of the demand-response cycle at the organisational level. The questions 'who are we?', 'who are we expected to become?', and 'who do we become?' would be equally useful to assist the demand recognition of groups, and not just individuals. An approach that considers challenges to self-understandings, incongruences of values, and gaps of knowledge and skills in the process of learning, might enrich the organisational learning and organisational change literatures.

I have argued that sociocultural and MacIntyrean thought can be complementary. Hopefully, this thesis can spark future and more exhaustive theoretical inquiries into the relationships between the two traditions.

Finally, one of the elements that drew me the most to MacIntyre's work was the notion of compartmentalisation. Compartmentalisation is a relevant concept in any inquiry related to misalignment and contradiction, and it is also central to the notion of *telos*. Yet, a limitation of this study is that the data that I collected had a limited potential to observe managers' lives beyond the workplace. Beadle and Moore, commenting on MacIntyre's insistence on the unity of a human life, say:

“(...) a life can be conceived of and evaluated only as a whole. But to evaluate a person's life as a whole requires the context of the relationships they are involved (...) requires that we understand the 'story' of that person's life.” (Beadle and Moore, 2006: 332)

Although my purpose was not to evaluate the managers' lives, it was to observe clashes of what mattered to them with the demands of their figured world. Yet, not having access to their 'life as a whole' perhaps concealed some commitments and identifications. Moreover, this makes also difficult in some cases to tell whether the commitments and identifications that the managers were sheltering were not more than commitments and identifications of their roles as managers; commitments as *qua* managers or commitments as *qua* person. This distinction is important, because a question underlying this research is the extent to which institutional life hinder managers' ability to formulate their own goals. Czarniawska (2005) has argued that organisational ethnography has this characteristic. It is not as complete as an immersion in the lives of research participants as other kinds of ethnography would be. Perhaps this is further testimony of MacIntyre's argument of compartmentalisation. Even management researchers, ethnographers and non-ethnographers, have taken for granted that one thing is the private realm of the life of participants, and quite another their working life, and that their private life is beyond the researcher's concern. To account for compartmentalisation, as researchers, we should consider the lives of participants in a more holistic manner. While I can anticipate the challenges of gaining such kind of access, further efforts should be done in breaking these barriers.

8.5. A final word

The Royal Mail in itself was a very rich setting to study. In fact the year of submission of this dissertation, 2016, the Royal Mail commemorates "500 years since Henry VIII knighted Brian Tuke, the first Master of the Post, in 1516" (Royal Mail Group, Press Releases 2016). While the focus of the study was not the Royal Mail, the thesis in any case offers a collection of snapshots of local stories on how modernisation and privatisation were experienced between 2012 and 2014 in this historic organisation. I hope to have offered rich stories about misalignment, demands, and challenges to self-understandings, and of how four senior managers dealt with all this. In addition to this, by means of the empirical inquiry, I have accounted for the learning trajectories of four senior managers, showing how they faced new demands that challenged what mattered to them, and how they navigated contradiction and misalignment. In the field, I found instances of moral debate, the exercising of virtues and the managers' very human efforts to live a worthy life and to flourish.

9. REFERENCES

- Annas, J., 2011, *Intelligent virtue*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York.
- Anscombe, G.E., 1958, Modern moral philosophy, *Philosophy*, 33(124), pp. 1-19.
- Aristotle. & Brown, L., 2009, *The Nicomachean ethics*, Translated by W.D. Ross. Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York.
- Argyris, C. & Schon, D.A., 1974, *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA
- Augé, M., 2008, *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*, London; New York; Verso,.
- Babcock, B.A., 1980, Reflexivity: definitions and discriminations, *Semiotica*, 30(1-2), pp. 1-14
- Barnes, B., Practice as collective action, 2001 in T Schatzki, K Knorr-Cetina & EV Savigny (eds), *The practice turn in contemporary theory*, Routledge, London; New York, pp. 1-14.
- Bauman, Z., 2008, *Does ethics have a chance in a world of consumers?*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Beabout, G.R., 2013, *The character of the manager from office executive to wise steward*, Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom.
- Beadle, R., 2002, The Misappropriation of MacIntyre. *Philosophy of Management*, 2(2), pp. 45-54.
- Beadle, R., 2013, Managerial work in a practice-embodying institution: the role of calling, the virtue of constancy, *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 113, no. 4 pp. 679-690.
- Beadle, R. & Könyöt, D., 2006, The man in the red coat—management in the circus, *Culture & Organization*, 12(2), pp. 127-137.
- Beadle, R. & Knight, K., 2012, Virtue and meaningful work, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 22(2), pp. 433-450.
- Beadle, R. & Moore, G., 2006, MacIntyre on virtue and organization, *Organization Studies*, 27(3), pp. 323-340.
- Beirne, M., 2013, Interpretations of management and modernisation at the UK Royal Mail: shifting boundaries and patterns of resistance? *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 28(2), pp. 116-129.

- Belitsky, A.H., 1978, *Productivity and job security: case studies of continuing education for engineers, technicians, and managers*, National Center for Productivity and Quality for Working Life, Washington D.C.
- Bhaskar, R., 2008, *A Realist Theory of Science*, Verso, London
- Boje, D., 2001, *Narrative methods for organizational and communication research*, SAGE, London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.
- Bowe, C.M., Lahey, L., Armstrong, E. & Kegan, R., 2003, Questioning the big assumptions. Part I: addressing personal contradictions that impede professional development, *Medical education*, 37(8), pp. 715-722.
- Branson, C.M., 2008, Achieving organisational change through values alignment, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(3), pp. 376-395.
- Brewer, K.B., 1997, Management as a Practice: A Response to Alasdair MacIntyre, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 16(8), pp. 825-833.
- Brydon, D., Prologue in Campbell-Smith, D., 2011, *Masters of the post: the authorized history of the Royal Mail*, Penguin Books, London.
- Chairman's statement 2012 Royal Mail Group*. Retrieved October 10, 2012, from <http://www.royalmailgroup.com/chairmans-annual-statement-2012>
- Chan, J. 2014. *Teachers' understanding of the purposes of group work and their relationship with practice*. DPhil thesis. University of Oxford
- Conroy, M., 2010, *An ethical approach to leading change: an alternative and sustainable application*, illustrated ed. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York.
- Conroy, M., 2011, Unravelling sutured stories: coaching NHS managers out from under the quilt, *Journal of Management Development*, vol. 30, no. 3 pp. 270-283.
- Conroy, M., 2009, Narrative-ethics informed approach to health services leadership development: leadership in health services, *Leadership in Health Services*, 22(3), pp. 259-72.
- Cunliffe, .L., 2002, Social Poetics as Management Inquiry: A Dialogical Approach, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 11(2), pp. 128-46
- Creswell, J.W., 2009, *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, Calif.
- Crisp, R. & Slote, M., 1997, *Virtue ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York.

- Crocker, L., 1980, Marx's use of contradiction, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 40(4), pp. 558-563.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., 2003, *Good business: leadership, flow, and the making of meaning*, Penguin books, London.
- Czarniawska, B., 2007, *Shadowing: and other techniques for doing fieldwork in modern societies*, Copenhagen Business School Press , Malmö, Sweden.
- Davies, C.A., 2008, *Reflexive ethnography : a guide to researching selves and others*, Routledge, London ; New York
- Darlington, R., 1993, The challenge to workplace unionism in the Royal Mail, *Employee Relations*, 15(5), pp. 3-25
- Dolan, S.L. & Bao, Y., 2012, Sharing the culture: embedding storytelling and ethics in the culture change management process, *EBS Review* (29), pp. 10-23.
- Dreier, O., 1999, Personal trajectories of participation across contexts of social practice, *Outlines. Critical Practice Studies*, 1(1), pp. 5-32.
- Edwards, A. 2011, The dynamic aspects in children's learning and development, in A Edwards, M Hedegaard & M Fler (eds), *Motives in children's development: cultural-historical approaches*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; New York, pp. 9-26.
- Edwards, A. & Daniels, H., 2012, The knowledge that matters in professional practices, *Journal of Education and Work*, 25(1), pp. 39-58.
- Edwards, A., 2010, *Being an expert professional practitioner: the relational turn in expertise*, 2010 ed. Springer, New York.
- Edwards, A. The dialectic of person and practice: how cultural-historical accounts of agency inform teacher education, in J Clandinin & J Husu (eds), *The Sage handbook of teacher education*, SAGE Publications, Oxford.
- Edwards, J.R. & Cable, D.M., 2009, The value of value congruence, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(3), pp. 654-677.
- Eisenhardt, K.M. & Graebner, M.E., 2007, Theory building from cases: opportunities and challenges, *Academy of management journal*, 50(1), pp. 25-32.
- Engeström, Y., 2010, Expansive learning at work: toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization, *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), pp. 133-56.
- Engeström, Y. & Sannino, A., 2011, Discursive manifestations of contradictions in organizational change efforts: a methodological framework, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 24(3), pp. 368-87.

- Fancourt, N., Edwards, A. & Menter, I., 2015, Reimagining a school – university partnership: the development of the Oxford education deanery narrative, *Education Inquiry*, 6(3), pp. 353-373.
- Flyvbjerg, B. 2006(b), Making organization research matter: power, values and phronesis, in S Clegg, C Hardy & T Lawrence (eds), *The Sage handbook of organization studies*, Sage Publications, London.
- Flyvbjerg, B., 2006(a), Five misunderstandings about case-study research, *Qualitative inquiry*, 12(2), pp. 219-245.
- Foot, P., 2001, *Natural goodness*, First ed. Clarendon Press, Oxford New York.
- Gabriel, Y. 2002, The hegemony of the consumer: administrative and management at the end of the century, in JS Jun (ed), *Rethinking administrative theory: the challenge of the new century*, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut.
- Gardner, H., Csikszentmihalyi, M. & Damon, W., 2002, *Good work: when excellence and ethics meet*, Basic Books, New York.
- Gilligan, C., Spencer, R., Weinberg, M.K. & Bertsch, T. 2006, On the Listening Guide, in P Leavy & S Nagy (eds), *Emergent methods in social research*, Sage Publications, United States, pp. 253-68.
- Gorski, P.S., 2013, What is critical realism? And why should you care? *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*, 42(5), pp. 658-70
- Hacon, R.J., 1968, *Organisational Necessities and Individual Needs*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Hager, P., 2012, Theories of practice and their connection with learning, in Hager, P., Lee, A. & Reich, A. (eds) *Practice, learning and change : practice-theory perspectives on professional learning*, Springer, Dordrecht; New York,
- Hall, D.E., 2011, The guild of surgeons as a tradition of moral enquiry, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 36(2), pp. 114-132.
- Hedegaard, M. 2012, The Dinamyc Aspects in Children's learning and Development, in M Hedegaard, A Edwards & M Flear (eds), *Motives in children's development: cultural-historical approaches*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; New York, pp. 9-26.
- Heifetz, R.A. & Linsky, M., 2002, *Leadership on the line: staying alive through the dangers of leading*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Mass.
- Heydebrand, W., 1977, Organizational contradictions in public bureaucracies: toward a Marxian theory of organizations, *The Sociological Quarterly*, 18(1), pp. 83-107.

- Hill, L.A., 2004, New manager development for the 21st century, *The Academy of Management Executive*, 18(3), pp. 121-126.
- Holland, D.C., Lachicotte Jr., W., Skinner, D. & Cain, C., 2001, *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Holland, D. & Lachicotte, W. 2007, Vygotsky, Mead, and the new sociocultural studies of identity, in H Daniels, M Cole & JV Wertsch (eds), *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky*, Cambridge University Press , pp. 101-135.
- Hooper, R., 2010, *Saving the Royal Mail's universal postal service in the digital age: an update of the 2008 Independent Review of the UK Postal Services Sector*, The Stationery Office Limited, UK.
- Hooper, R., Hutton, D.D. & Smith, I.R., 2008, *Modernise or decline: policies to maintain the universal postal service in the United Kingdom: an independent review of the UK postal services sector*, The Stationery Office Limited, UK.
- Ibarra, H., 1999, Provisional selves: experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(4), pp. 764-791.
- Ibarra, H., 2015, *Act like a leader, think like a leader*, Harvard Business Review Press, Boston, MA.
- Ibarra, H 2015, The authenticity paradox, *Harvard Business Review*, January 2015.
- Ilangovan, D. & Durgadoss, R., 2009, Value congruence - personal values and corporate values, *CURIE Journal*, 1(4), pp. 92-95.
- Kempster, S., Jackson, B. & Conroy, M., 2011, Leadership as purpose: Exploring the role of purpose in leadership practice, *Leadership*, 7(3), pp. 317-334.
- Kegan, R., 1995, *In over our heads: the mental demands of modern life*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA; London.
- Kegan, R. & Lahey, L.L., 2009, *Immunity to change: how to overcome it and unlock potential in yourself and your organization*, Harvard Business School Publishing, Boston.
- Knight, K., 2008, Practices: the Aristotelian concept, *Analyse & Kritik*, 30(2), pp. 317-329.
- Korsgaard, C., 2008, *The constitution of agency: essays on practical reason and moral psychology*, 1st ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York.
- Kraut, R., 1989, *Aristotle on the human good*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.

- Lawrence, J., 2005, Perennial themes in education, *Journal of Education*, 186(1), pp. 87-95.
- Lewis, M.W., 2000, Exploring paradox: toward a more comprehensive guide, *The Academy of Management Review*, 25(4), pp. 760-776.
- Lutz, C.S., 2012, *Reading Alasdair MacIntyre's After Virtue*, Continuum, New York, London.
- MacIntyre, A., 1999, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Duckworth, London.
- MacIntyre, A.C., 2013, [1981] *After virtue: a study in moral theory*, Bloomsbury Academic, London.
- MacIntyre, A. & Dunne, J., 2002, Alasdair MacIntyre on education: in dialogue with Joseph Dunne, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 36(1), pp. 1-19.
- Madden, R., 2010, *Being ethnographic : a guide to the theory and practice of ethnography*, SAGE, London.
- Mangham, L., 1995, MacIntyre and the manager, *Organization*, 2(2), pp. 181-204.
- Martinez Lucio, M. and Noon, M. 1994, Organisational Change and the Tensions of Decentralisation: The Case of Royal Mail. *Human Resource Management Journal* 5, no. 2, pp. 65-78.
- Martinez Lucio, M., and Noon, M., 2000, The Flexible--rigid Paradox of Employment Relations at Royal Mail (UK). *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 38 (2), pp, 277-298.
- Martinez Lucio, M & Kirkpatrick, I (ed.) 1995, 'The Politics of Quality and the 'New Industrial Relations': the Case of Royal Mail'. in *The Politics of Quality and the Management of Change in the Public Sector*. Routledge.
- Martinez Lucio, M., Noon, M. and Jenkins, S., 1997, Constructing the Market: Commercialization and Privatization in the Royal Mail. *Public Administration* 75, (2) pp. 267-282.
- Markus, H. & Nurius, P., 1986, Possible selves, *American psychologist*, 41(9), pp. 954-969.
- Mckenna, B. & Biloslavo, R., 2011, Human flourishing as a foundation for a new sustainability oriented business school curriculum: open questions and possible answers, *Journal of Management and Organization*, 17(5), pp. 691-710.
- Meglino, B.M., Ravlin, E.C. & Adkins, C.L., 1989, A work values approach to corporate culture: a field test of the value congruence process and its

- relationship to individual outcomes, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74(3), pp. 424-432.
- Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M., 1994, *Qualitative data analysis: an expanded sourcebook*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.
- Moore, G., 2015, Corporate character, corporate virtues, *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 24(S2), pp. S99-S114.
- Moore, G. & Beadle, R., 2006, In search of organizational virtue in business: agents, goods, practices, institutions and environments, *Organization Studies*, 27(3), pp. 369-389.
- Morales-Sánchez R. & Cabello-Medina C., 2015, Integrating character in management: virtues, character strengths, and competencies. *Business Ethics: A European Review* 24(S2), pp.S156-S174
- Moran, S. 2010, Returning to the GoodWork project's roots: can creative work be humane?. in H Gardner (ed), *GoodWork: Theory and Practice*, Boston, MA, pp. 127-152.
- Morrell, K. & Brammer, S., 2014, Governance and Virtue: The Case of Public Order Policing, *Journal of Business Ethics*, pp. 1-14.
- Mumby, D.K., 1987, The political function of narrative in organizations, *Communication Monographs*, 54(2), pp. 113-127.
- Nicolini, D., 2012, *Practice theory, work, and organization: an introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Noddings, N., 2003, Is Teaching a Practice? *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 37(2), pp. 241-51
- Nussbaum, M.C., 2010, *Not for profit: why democracy needs the humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock.
- Perkins, D., 2014, *Future wise: educating our children for a changing world*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Petriglieri, J., 2011, Under Threat: Responses to and the Consequences of Threats to Individuals' Identities, *Academy of Management Review*, 36(4), pp. 641-662.
- Petriglieri, G., Wood, J. & Petriglieri, J., 2011, Up close and personal: building foundations for leaders development through the personalization of management learning, *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), pp. 430-450.
- Petriglieri, G. & Petriglieri, J., (forthcoming) Can business schools humanize leadership? *Academy of Management Learning & Education*.

- Polkinghorne, D.E., 1995, Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(1), pp. 5-23.
- Postman, N., 1996, *The end of education: redefining the value of school*, Reprint ed. Vintage, New York.
- Quinn, R.E., 1988, *Beyond rational management: Mastering the paradoxes and competing demands of high performance*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Rai P. 2013. *Building Common Knowledge: A Cultural-Historical Analysis of Pedagogical Practices at a Rural Primary School in Rajashtan, India*, DPhill thesis. University of Oxford.
- Rego, A., Cunha, M.P.E. & Clegg, S., 2012, *The virtues of leadership: contemporary challenges for global managers*, Reprint ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Roberts, J., 1984, The moral character of management practice, *Journal of Management Studies*, 21(3), pp. 287-302.
- Rodriguez Leal, T.R., 2015a, Academy of Management Proceedings, *Pedagogies at Work. Senior Managers' Pedagogical Strategies During Times of Organisational Change*. p.18002.
- Rodriguez Leal, T., 2015b, Too Much Talk about Skills and Very Little Talk About Virtues, *The Good Project*. Retrieved February 30, 2016, from <http://www.thegoodproject.org/too-much-skill-talk-and-very-little-virtue>
- Rodriguez Leal, T., 2016, Academy of Management Conference, *The Identity Formation Cycle: A Tool to Understand Learning and Development during Times of Change*. Anaheim.
- ROYAL MAIL, 2016, 500 years of history delivered to your doorstep, *Press releases*. Retrieved March 27, 2016, from <http://www.royalmailgroup.com/500-years-history-delivered-your-doorstep>
- Rubino, J.A., 1998, Aligning personal values and corporate values: a personal and strategic necessity, *Employment Relations Today (Wiley)*, 25(3), pp. 23-35.
- Santos, F. & Eisenhardt, K., 2005, Organizational boundaries and theories of organization, *Organization Science*, 16(5), pp. 491-508.
- Schatzki 2001, Introduction: practice theory, in T Schatzki, K Knorr-Cetina & EV Savigny (eds), *The practice turn in contemporary theory*, Routledge, London; New York, pp. 1-14.
- Schwartz, A., 1982, Meaningful work, *Ethics-The University Chicago Press*, 92(4),

pp. 634-646.

Sfard, A. & Prusak, A., 2005, Telling identities: in search of an analytic tool for investigating learning as a culturally shaped activity, *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), pp. 14-22.

Smith, W.K., 2009, A dynamic approach to managing contradictions, *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 2(3), pp. 338-343.

Smith, W.K. & Tushman, M.L., 2005, Managing strategic contradictions: a top management model for managing innovation streams, *Organization Science*, 16(5), pp. 522-536.

Smith, W.K. & Lewis, M.W., 2011, Toward a theory of paradox: a dynamic equilibrium model of organizing, *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), pp. 381-403.

Spehar, I., Frich, J.C. & Kjekshus, L.E., 2012, Clinicians' experiences of becoming a clinical manager: a qualitative study, *BMC Health Services Research*, 12(1), p. 421.

Srivastava, P. & Hopwood, N., 2009, A practical iterative framework for qualitative data analysis, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), pp. 76-84.

Stake, R.E., 1995, *The art of case study research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.

Stake, R.E., 2006, *Multiple case study analysis*, The Guilford Press, New York.

Stetsenko, A., 2008, From relational ontology to transformative activist stance on development and learning: expanding Vygotsky's (CHAT) project, *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 3(2), pp. 471-491.

Suchting, W.A., 1985, Marx, Hegel and 'contradiction*', *Philosophy of the social sciences*, 15(4), pp. 409-432.

Taylor, C., 1989, *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.

Terkel, S., 1974, *Working: people talk about what they do all day and how they feel about what they do*, The New Press, New York.

Thomas, R. & Davies, A., 2005, Theorizing the micro-politics of resistance: New public management and managerial identities in the UK public services, *Organization studies*, 26(5), pp. 683-706.

Thompson, C. & Wolstencroft, P., 2013, Promises and lies: An exploration of curriculum managers' experiences in FE, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 39(3), pp. 399-416.

- Tushman, M. & O'Reilly, C.A., 2002, *Winning through innovation: a practical guide to leading organizational change and renewal*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.
- Van der Waal, K. 2014, Getting going: organizing ethnographic fieldwork, in S Ybema, D Yanow, H Wels & K Frans (eds), *Organizational ethnography: studying the complexity of everyday life*, Sage, Los Angeles, pp. 23-39.
- Van Maanen, J. & Schein, E.H., 1979, Research in organizational behavior, *Toward a theory of organizational socialization*. pp. 1-89.
- Vogt, C.P., 2005, Maximizing human potential: capabilities theory and the professional work environment, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 58(1), pp. 111-123.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1998) *The Collected Works of LS Vygotsky*. Vol 5, Child Psychology. New York: Plenum Press.
- Watson, T., Ethical choice in managerial work: the scope for moral choices in an ethically irrational world, *Sage Journals*, 56(2), pp. 167-185.
- Wertsch, J. 2012, Narrative tools and the construction of Identity, in M Schultz, S Maguire, A Langley & H Tsoukas (eds), *Constructing identity in and around organizations*, Oxford University Press, pp. 128-146.
- Wilcox, T., 2012, Human resource management in a compartmentalized world: whither moral agency? *Journal of business ethics*, 111(1), pp. 85-96.
- Wilde, L., 1989, *Marx and contradiction*, Avebury, Aldershot, Hants., England.
- Wolcott, H.F., 2009, *Writing up qualitative research*, SAGE, Los Angeles.
- Zinchenko, V. & Davydov 1985, Prologue, in J Wertsch (ed), *Vygotsky and the social formation of mind*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.

10. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 - PRIVATISATION AND MODERNISATION

THE ROYAL MAIL NEWSPAPER

JULY 2013

myroyalmail.com



Courier

SPECIAL

Delivering a
better future,
together

Welcome to
your Special Issue, where we
look at what privatisation
will mean for you.

WHAT PRIVATISATION MEANS FOR YOU

We want to create a legally binding contract to provide you with reassurance during this period of change as Royal Mail moves into the private sector.

The current legal position is that all terms and conditions that apply to you would remain in place, on the same basis, were the company to be sold.

To provide further reassurance, we propose

to create a legally binding and enforceable contract with the CWU. Pay and protections could not be changed for the period of the contract, without CWU agreement.

This would be part of the proposed three-year agreement with the CWU.

Turn to page 3 for more about job security and terms and conditions.

ModernisationMatters

POST OFFICE

Bringing you up to date with Network Transformation

Issue 5 – Friday 1 February

Introduction

Welcome to the latest issue of *Modernisation Matters*. It's been a busy few weeks for the programme as we head into the final few months of the financial year.

We recently passed the 650 mark for main and local contracts signed by subpostmasters, which is a great milestone.

And we're seeing more and more come through every day now as we aim for our 1,200 target by the end of March.

It's also been encouraging to see the amount of positive press coverage we're getting when branches open – local media is really embracing the idea of modernised branches and, in particular, the fact that we're opening for longer. It's a great story for customers.

We're now looking to establish a group of network champions – successful operators of main and local branches who can share their experiences with other subpostmasters (see article right). It will be another great way for subpostmasters to find out about modernisation as they make decisions about their own branches.

Neil Ennis,
Programme
Director



What do you think?

If you would like to have your say, and make any suggestions for what else we could include in this fortnightly update, just email us at

communicationsteam@postoffice.co.uk

BULLETIN NEWS

A round-up of the latest Network Transformation headlines

Network champions

Are you an existing main or local operator with a great story to tell? If so, we'd like you to become one of our network champions.

With more than 350 main and local branches running across the UK, there are some great stories out there of subpostmasters who have converted their branches and are realising the benefits.

If you are one of those operators, and would like to share your story – and possibly even host visits from other subpostmasters interested in converting – email lavinda.kaur@postoffice.co.uk with a few words about you and your branch.

Making headlines

Modernised Post Office branches continue to hit the headlines across the UK as they open to customers. Here are a few highlights...

- **The Worcester News** featured a story on Bromyard Post Office, which converted to a main branch, with the headline 'A first-class friendly service at the Post Office'. MP Bill Wiggin attended the official opening and praised the service.
- **The Mourn Observer** ran an article in January on plans to refurbish the branch at The Grove Shopping Centre in Downpatrick. South Down MP Margaret Ritchie said: "I very much welcome this and look forward to further investment by the Post Office in the South Down area."
- **The Basingstoke and North Hants Gazette** featured two Post Offices in the borough – Oakley and Shakespeare Road – that have extended their opening hours to offer services for seven days a week by converting to the local model.

KEY STATS

A look at some of the latest figures from Network Transformation

288

local Post Office
branches open

664

new model
contracts signed

68

main Post Office
branches open

over
90%

customer satisfaction
rate at all branches*

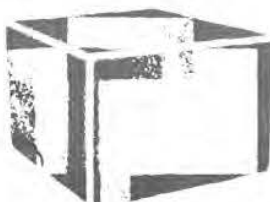
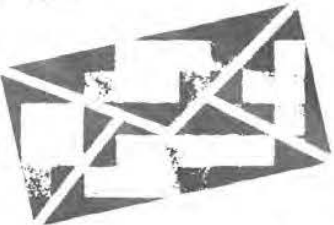

*According to independent research carried out for main & local branches on a monthly basis



Delivering a better future, together

OUR STRATEGY

Our strategy is about:

		
Being a successful parcels business	Managing the decline in letters	Being customer focused

Our strategy is delivering. By working together, we have a bright future.



INSIDE:

P2-3 A MESSAGE FROM
DAVE WARD AND BILLY HAYES

P4&5 YOUR PAY AND
WORK PLACE ISSUES

P6&7 ABOUT PRIVATISATION
AND UNFAIR COMPETITION

VOICE

SPECIAL

CWU
The communications union

SPECIAL VOICE POSTAL EDITION • APRIL 2013 • WWW.CWU.ORG

UPDATE ON:

- * YOUR PAY
- * WORK PLACE ISSUES
- * PRIVATISATION
- * COMPETITION
& THE BOYCOTT

**TIME TO CHALLENGE
ROYAL MAIL
ON ALL FRONTS**



ANNEX 2 - INDUSTRIAL ACTION

ADVERTISEMENT. This is an advertisement and not a prospectus. Please note that you should read the Prospectus relating to the Royal Mail Share Offer, and you should make your investment based only on the information in the Prospectus, which, when published, will be available online at www.gov.uk/royalmailshares

myroyalmail.com



THE ROYAL MAIL NEWSPAPER

SEPTEMBER 2013

Courier

GRAND ACHIEVEMENT

Delivery revision programme reaches significant milestone as 1,000th office is modernised
See pages 10-11



PROTECTING YOUR FUTURE

We cannot risk damaging our business

WE ARE VERY disappointed that the CWU has confirmed it will be holding a national industrial action ballot.

Previous industrial disruption at Royal Mail has been an opportunity for our competitors. Royal Mail lost significant business.

We operate in a very competitive market. Our customers can move their business very quickly.

OPPORTUNITY

Our difficulty is our competitors' opportunity.

TNT is expanding into direct delivery. Our parcels competitors are looking for every opportunity to win our customers. And email is now a real alternative for individuals and big business alike.

Faced with many challenges like these, we cannot afford to do anything that could disrupt our progress, seriously damage our brand or disrespect our customers. The loss of business has a direct

impact on job security.

We lost business to competitors following industrial action in 2007 and 2009. We did not win all of it back.

COMPETITIVE

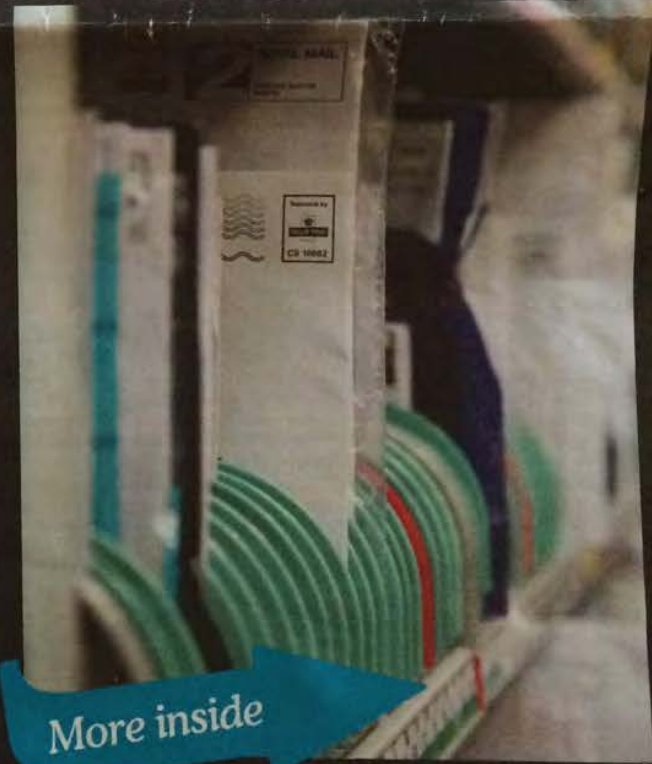
We have offered a highly competitive pay deal of 8.6% over three years,¹ including a £300 lump sum in year one. The lump sum is subject to a successful transaction before the end of the year.²

Any strike also means loss of pay including any supplements, allowances, overtime and SA earnings not worked, and pension contributions.

SIGNIFICANT

If the flotation of Royal Mail does not take place, you would not receive any Free Shares either.

We've offered a highly competitive pay deal and significant protections. We must protect our business, ensure its stability and become masters of our own destiny.



More inside

¹ The proposed agreement will apply to employees in CWU represented grades in Core Operations, Logistics, Engineers, Fleet Maintenance Services, RMSS and Royal Mail International until March 2016. Parcelforce Worldwide pay discussions continue to run separately with the CWU.

² This payment will be forfeited in offices where industrial action takes place before the payment date.

Courier

WHAT WILL CHANGE?

Some things will change if Royal Mail is privatised, but much will stay the same. *Courier investigates on page 3*



YOUR FREE SHARES

ELIGIBLE EMPLOYEES will automatically receive Free Shares if the company floats – you won't need to do anything to receive your shares.

The Government intends to give 10% of the shares in Royal Mail completely free to eligible employees at the time of the Initial Public Offering.

This is the largest free stake of any major UK privatisation. More Royal Mail employees will be able to participate in the Free Share scheme than in any other UK privatisation for almost 30 years.

Employees must have been employed by Royal Mail on 10 July 2013 (the date the Government made its Parliamentary Statement) and on the date the company

floats on the London Stock Exchange, to be eligible for Free Shares.

The same number of Free Shares will be allocated automatically to full-time employees, irrespective of their grade. The allocation will be pro-rated for eligible part-time employees.

During the first three years, the Free Shares cannot be sold. Full tax benefits are only available if the shares are held for at least five years.

The Government has also confirmed that employees who are eligible for Free Shares will have the option to buy additional shares through the retail offer. Eligible employees will be given priority over members of the public when those shares are allocated.

PLEASE REFER TO YOUR RECENT COURIER SPECIAL, PACKED WITH MORE DETAILS ABOUT YOUR SHARES

Turn to pages 4-5 for more information

JUNE 2013

THE ROYAL MAIL NEWSPAPER

Courier

News Flash

UPDATE

What has happened?

- When we work together, we achieve a lot. Working with CWU we have delivered significant change which has benefited all of us e.g. a new regulatory regime. So, our decision to take legal action today was not one that we made lightly.
- We understand the concerns about the growth of Access/DSA mail and the potential impact of growing direct delivery competition. We don't think that a threatened refusal to handle Access/DSA mail is the right or appropriate course of action.
- This is why we lodged an application for an injunction to prevent the CWU from inducing its members employed by Royal Mail to refuse to handle Access/DSA letters and parcels.
- The CWU has in the High Court (on Wednesday 19 June), given an undertaking not to induce its members employed by Royal Mail to refuse to handle Access/DSA letters and parcels. This is pending a further hearing at the High Court on Friday (28 June).

A new agreement

- This week we have put forward in writing, on a closed offer basis, to the CWU leadership, a new agreement covering a three-year pay deal, protection around our pension scheme, and important safeguards relating to terms and conditions if Royal Mail is sold. We will update you about this as soon as we can.



JULY 2013

THE ROYAL MAIL NEWSPAPER

Courier

News Flash

GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES PROPOSED FLOTATION OF ROYAL MAIL AND FREE SHARES FOR EMPLOYEES

Employees will have a meaningful stake in Royal Mail.

- Today, the Government has announced it intends to dispose of a majority of its shares (see Jargon Buster) in Royal Mail, relinquishing overall control and achieving minority ownership.
- The Government has also said that it intends to give 10% of the shares completely free to eligible Royal Mail employees at the time of IPO. You will automatically have a meaningful stake in Royal Mail.
- The Government intends to dispose of a majority of its shares through a flotation on the London Stock Exchange. This means we could be partly owned by high-quality investors, including pension funds, insurance companies, mutual funds and private individuals.
- We will look for shareholders who care about the business and its success. The Government's intention is to complete the sale before the end of March 2014, retaining flexibility around the size of stake to be sold via the flotation (see Jargon Buster)
- The provision of Free Shares is dependent on the company being floated on the London Stock Exchange. If this transaction does not take place, you will not receive any shares in the company. Eligible employees should therefore not base any financial decision on this announcement at this time.
- **You do not need to take any action today to get the Free Shares. We will write to you with further information in due course, including any eligibility criteria.**

YOUR TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- The current legal position is that all terms and conditions that apply to you would remain in place, on the same basis, were the company to be sold.
- To provide further reassurance, we will create a legally-binding and enforceable contract with the CWU. Pay and protections could not be changed for the period of the contract, without CWU agreement.

HOW FREE SHARES WILL WORK

- The overwhelming majority of Royal Mail Group Limited employees in the UK, including employees working in Parcelforce Worldwide, will be eligible for Free Shares if they meet certain criteria. Employees of GLS and employees of other subsidiaries and joint ventures are not eligible to receive Free Shares.
- This is the largest free stake of any major UK privatisation.
- More Royal Mail employees in the UK will be able to participate in the Free Share scheme than in any other UK privatisation for almost 30 years. Approximately 150,000 employees will be eligible for Free Shares.
- The Government intends to award Free Shares under a tax advantaged arrangement known as a Share Incentive Plan (SIP).
- In accordance with SIP rules, participating employees will be required to hold their Free Shares for at least three years before they can be sold.
- To be entitled to Free Shares, eligible employees must have been employed by Royal Mail for a qualifying period prior to the flotation. We will write to you about this in due course.
- Eligible UK employees of Royal Mail will automatically receive equal amounts of shares, irrespective of their grade. There will be a pro-rata allocation for part-time employees.



ANNEX 3 - 55 YEARS AND COUNTING

Courier

HANDY TO HAVE

We're issuing every delivery postman and woman with a PDA. Find out more on page 7



WE NEED ACCESS MAIL



CHIEF CUSTOMER officer Mike Newnham has spoken about the potential impact on the business of a refusal to handle Access/DSA mail.

The CWU is holding a consultative ballot this month that could potentially lead to industrial action. The union is seeking support for its proposed boycott of Access/DSA mail. Such a boycott would have a major impact on our business.

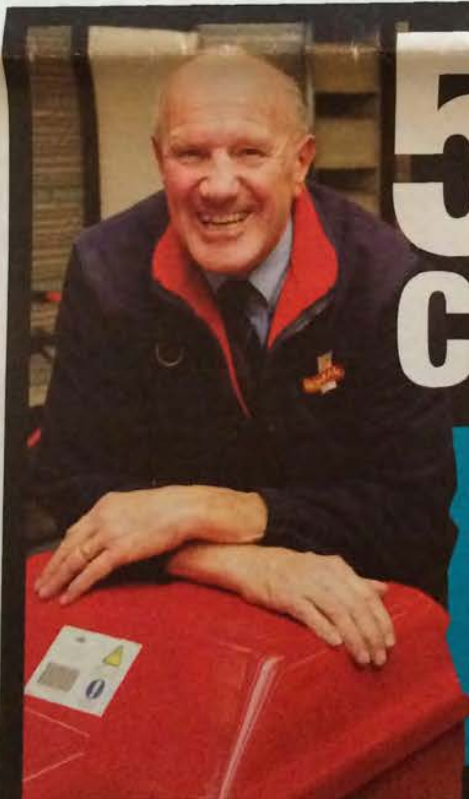
Mike says: "We operate in a very competitive marketplace. Customers can move their business very quickly. Access/DSA mail is a valuable part of our business. Of course, disruption might be limited to part of the business, but its consequences can be felt over the business as a whole. It could affect our parcels business, which we have worked so hard to develop. Parcels are our growth area. They are a key part of our future."

"We have made good progress. We're transforming the business. We cannot afford to do anything that would harm the business and hit that progress. Any action could force our customers to take business to our competitors, and we might not get that business back."

Access/DSA mail accounts for almost one in two of the addressed letters we handle. In 2011/12, we made £80 million on Access/DSA mail after modernisation and before exceptional costs.

Mike adds: "At a time when we're just starting to grow, the worst thing we could do is to stop delivering mail that accounts for almost half of our addressed letters."

"This would be playing into our competitors' hands. It could force those customers to look for alternatives, including using email instead. None of us wants that to happen."



55 YEARS AND COUNTING

AS OUR LONGEST-SERVING CURRENT EMPLOYEE, GRANTHAM'S DAVID COE HAS SEEN A FEW CHANGES OVER THE YEARS. AND HE HAS NO PLANS TO HANG UP HIS MAILBAG JUST YET.

Turn to page 5 for the full interview

Meet him on page 9

ANNEX 4 - DATA ANALYSIS EXAMPLES

Annex 4 - Data analysis

Data analysis was organised in three blocks, and so this annex is structured in three parts: a. thematic coding, b. construction of narratives and c. theoretical coding. In such sections I give examples of how each one of the blocks of analysis was done.

a. Block 1 - Thematic coding

The purpose of this early stage of data analysis was to become well familiarised with the data and use Srivastava and Hopwood's (2009) iterative framework of analysis as I explained in Section 3.7. In terms of technology I used three different tools for thematic coding: Dedoose, NVivo and pen, highlighters and paper. I must admit that pen and paper are my preferred methods to become well acquainted with interview material. Nevertheless, computer tools are very helpful to organise material and to make searches easy. I used software in a similar way that I would use a highlighter; by creating codes (eg. what matters, gender, nature of the job) and highlighted interview text assigning it the appropriate code. The reason why I used both Dedoose and NVivo was because at the time I began the analysis NVivo did not have a Mac version. However, Dedoose is an online platform, and although it is password protected, after having analysed a few interviews I decided to acquire a Windows PC to be able to store the data locally. The two images below are examples of how data was coded using emergent codes. While these two examples are taken from Dedoose, the process in NVivo was quite similar. In the images below I have redacted some items to protect participant anonymity.

Document: interview1_2013.rtf

Line #s Memos RTL

Address: 04/20/2013 Creator: Excerpt: 50 Memos: 0 Descriptions: 0

we need to be a little more what is important to us the business? We say some things, but actually the way we set our goals etc, it pushes totally different behaviour so we maybe need to align that.

Tatiana: So you think of the business actually knows what it wants from its managers?

Range: 24647-25673 User: []

What matters to senior management/the or... if they want, and that would be that these people are people managers, and we need in the softer people skills and the ultimate thing is you know, obviously the business employees. So that all sounds lovely, and that's perfect. Then on the other hand, the age their management teams they don't actually give them the autonomy to do that, command and control, so the actually push down onto the managers and then saving money may overrule some of the softer side that we are also asking. So I think so it. So we do think we know what we want, but I don't think we all act in the right way

Organisational challenges

skill and knowledge gaps

Management

Challenges and barriers for change

What matters to other employees

Great quotes

Date: 04/21/2013

WORK is jointly with the unions, so it's very open, we are going to try and at first go in and meet with managers and do interviews with managers so we have to devise what type of questions we are going to ask them, how we are going to get them to open up to us, so that they know there are going to be no repercussions, we just want a good honesty and that it would be anonymous, obviously we will know who we have spoken to but we are not going to publish that in anything, and from that we are going to set up what we need to do to move things forward. So that should be quite interesting, that piece of work.

Tatiana: So how much of your is with other areas and departments and how much of your daily job is only with your team or with other people?

I would say that actually for me most of my days are with other departments. I work very closely with policy who are HR, but a different part of HR. I worked very closely with policy because we are rewriting quite a lot of our policy documents and the way we are trying to rewrite them, is it to start to change the culture within the business. So for example, the bullying and harassment we've gone from a policy which is very much go down this process and we decide who was right and who was wrong and then that's the end of it, whereas we are introducing mediation into that policy so that, although we cannot force people to do mediation, what we going to do is encourage people to go down where we actually have a... Next Excerpt

Font Size: 0

Selection Info

Codes

- Work challenges
- Personal learnings
- Previous experience
- Nature of the job
- Working with others
- Interviewees skills
- Time in the organisation
- Change narrative and agency
- Gender

Document: interview1_2013.rtf

Line #s Memos RTL

Address: 04/20/2013 Creator: Excerpt: 50 Memos: 0 Descriptions: 0

what we called the direct workforce, and that took me through 2011, and again we completely redesigned the organisation, we took the terms and conditions, which I think we had something like [] sets of terms and conditions, and we actually got it down to one set of terms and conditions, the only thing we didn't touch was pay scales, left them on different pay scales, but we brought all of the other conditions into one and then I ran the implementation of reorganising, getting people into the right jobs, and all of the change side of things there. And then when they went life I decided that I'd kind of done all of the big programmes within [] and that we were moving our head offices to [] and it was a real time for me to go "do I want to go To [] or do I want to stay in []. What do I want to do, what role am I going to have there?" And (inaudible) I would have stayed in a similar change management role it was kind of, you know I've done this massive projects, that some of the smaller ones were not gonna have the same thrill and excitement that goes with them, so I decided that I wanted to... It was a really good time for me to move Businesses.

What I looked for and it's quite hard to find now in the UK, was I really like the mix of direct workforce, so the blue-collar and white-collar organisations, so I like the nitty gritty and the different style you've got to have working with a real direct workforce, but the corporate side of things that goes with that. I had [] employees and I liked that bigger national feel, so there were two: a mix of the criteria. I actually enjoy the unorganised work, so I want to go down in there as well. So when you start looking at that you actually don't have that much options, so Royal mail was one of the key places for me to come to, because they you know, huge, were 145,000 people, national operation, completely unorganised, and going through like the biggest changes they have probably gone through in the last 50 years if not longer. So that's why I came to Royal mail.

Tatiana: so you wanted difficult

Yes I wanted difficult! (Laughs)

I think so... (Laughs) maybe now I think all gosh maybe I'll just go and work in a bank (laughs) so much easier... But yeah those were all the criteria, that's the things that I think of, the challenges... And there are things that make you want... You have to think of different ways of doing things... So yeah...

Font Size: 0

Selection Info

Codes

- Reflection
- Strategies for promoting change
 - Strategies for promoting change
 - Strategies for promoting change
- Organisation's strategies
- What matters
 - What matters to senior management/l...
 - What matters to reports
 - What matters to other employees
 - What matters to the interviewee

b. Block 2 - Narratives

I explained in Section 3.7 that in order to organise the amount of data collected I wrote narratives for each participant paying attention to recurring themes throughout each participant's interviews and observations, timelines of events and integrating shadowing fieldnotes with interview data. In the pages that follow I present a journal entry containing a fragment of one of the narratives. At the end of the journal entry, I also reflected on my initial attempt to construct the narrative, trying to make sense of what was going on in the data, in the light of the research questions. This reflection is a good example of how my use of Srivastava and Hopwood's (2009) framework (which I explain in detail in section 3.7) unfolded as the data was analysed. It is important to note that the narratives for each one of the managers were typically above 5000 words, so what you will see in this example is just a small portion of the final narrative.

This is an entry from my research journal. I was working on Linda's narrative. This is an initial fragment of what I wrote for Block 2 of data analysis.

TUESDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2014 11:59

Linda

No matter how cold it was, I often saw Linda outside of the Royal Mail's [redacted] standing below a little entrance, almost leaning against the closed door and having a smoke while chatting and giggling with Michelle, her coworker and team ally. Indeed Linda is quite chatty. She was one of the most friendly people I met during the Oxford programme for Royal Mail managers. We met during a coffee break at [redacted]. She had been working for only one week at the Royal Mail, so we were both new in the crowd. After [redacted] years of a challenging and interesting job in another formerly government-owned company, Linda had decided to move on and join the Royal Mail. A year later Linda would tell me that being new was quite hard at first. After all, this is an organisation where you can easily find managers and 'posties' who have held their jobs for thirty years plus. "Managers coming in must feel pretty intimidated because [if] you haven't been here 20 years [they think], how can you possibly know anything about Post Office or the postal service. [redacted] [redacted] (L1, 8, 322-324)

Not knowing anyone made her feel very strange in this new environment. Chatty and friendly as she was, it is unsurprising that one of her strengths in her previous company was her network. And now here she was, surrounded by hundreds of people that she had never met, in a job that very much requires support in different areas of the business. "I can remember going to an employee law update, and there must have been probably 300 Royal Mail people in one room. (...) In [my former company] I would have loved that because I would have known probably 250 of them. [This time] I walked in and I was like, actually, 'Oh! there is someone there that I met last week'... and I went over and I immediately said 'Can I sit with you, because I don't know anybody in here'... very strange, very strange."

Although she acknowledges building a network was one of her challenges during her first year at the Royal Mail, what I saw as I shadowed her a year after her arrival to the organisation was a quite confident manager, who knew the job and the organisation well. And she knew people. On one occasion I saw her leading a meeting with over 6 [redacted] managers from across the country. Most of them had been in the business far more years than she had, nevertheless her presence came across as strong. She managed the agenda, set the pace of the meeting and refocused the groups attention. It seemed to me as she had always been there. On a different occasion I went downstairs with her for her morning smoke break. While for her nicotine was probably a must, taking the break was also an excuse

I used codes to identify the interview to which each excerpt belonged to. L1 refers to the first interview I had with Linda. The numbers that follow make reference to the page of the transcript and the line numbers from which the quote was taken. In the final document I deleted this codes as they interrupted the flow of the text and were not as helpful for the reader as they were for me as I worked with the data.

for both of us to check out the protest at the entrance of 100 Victoria Embankment. On that day members of the Communications Workers Union (CWU) were in front of the building holding banners and marching against privatisation. 'Save our Royal Mail!' the banners read. Linda was colourfully dressed and greeted the protesters with ease and grace. "Oh, hi Linda!" some protesters would say as they approached her for a quick friendly chat. Considering they were marching against privatisation, and that she very much represented the business pro privatisation stance, these friendly interactions seemed to me more bazaar like rather than protest like. Looking back, and as I analyse my fieldnotes and conversations with Linda, I realise that in this very moment I was witnessing one of her most outstanding talents. The ability to relate to different kinds of people, and inspire in them a cordial treatment, no matter on what side of the issues they were. I can't know to what extent I was seeing actors being strategic in their interactions, but for sure people did not seem to be taking their different views personally. Quite a useful talent to have when you work [redacted]

Nevertheless, one of Linda's strengths is her ability to relate to all kinds of people.

Here I started analysing the narrative based on a research question as it looked in 2014

How does Linda negotiate what 'she brings to the table' and 'what matters to her' with the changing values and expectations of the practices she navigates?

The problem with this question is that it sounds as if there was one set of changing values and expectations coming from the practice. The fact is that in the practice there are as many sets of expectations and of values as there are people. So sometimes it is about negotiating with them. In Linda's case there are a number of instances in which she needs to engage in this kind of negotiation, or even when she refuses to and simply moves on. I'll start by discussing the latter:

Linda left her former company, where she had spent [redacted] years, to join the Royal Mail. In her previous role she worked in the design and implementation of major transformations. This to the extent that the company was no longer the right fit for her after some time. As the organisation solved some of the major issues through the projects in which she was involved, it required her to shift locations and change the nature of her role. She decided leaving [redacted] was not for her, nor doing this new kind of job. So she left. So sometimes there is no negotiation. There is a plain disruption between what 'she brought to the table' namely her talents, knowledge and skills, and 'what mattered to her' with what the organisation was now expected and this was the right time to leave.

In the new organisation Linda had to make some adjustments. To begin with, arriving to a new position and to a new company confronted her with some new demands which felt strange. For example, Linda, who is friendly, extroverted and knows a lot of people arrived to the organisation not knowing anyone at all. Having recognised herself as someone who has a network, the new role put her in an unfamiliar identity position 'I don't have a network'.

As I reflected on the data I realised that the question, as was written at the time, was problematic.

I later adjusted the question to make it more useful and this is an example of how I used Srivastava and Hopwood's (2009) framework:

What is the data telling me?
What is it that I want to know?
What is the dialectical relationship between what the data is telling me and what I want to know.

Linda did build one using some external resources and skills. In terms of external resources the [redacted] programme [redacted] became handy. She begun the programme a week right after she started the job. The programme was indeed designed with this objective in mind. Allowing senior managers meet other members of the business, ideally from different regions and functions. In terms of her skills, she describes herself as knowing how to relate to people, and she used this talent to her favour.

The new practice she was joining had some other demands. She had to become used to a more bureaucratic culture. A place where 'delegation makes people uncomfortable' and many people wanted to be on top of what she was doing. Also a place

Through my narratives, I continue to identify some new demands that Linda was facing

c. Block 3 Theoretical coding

Having become well acquainted with the data through blocks 1 and 2 of analysis I designed new codes that emerged from both the data and the theoretical work of MacIntyre (2013, 1981), Sfard and Prusak (2005) and others, as I explained in Section 3.7. For this stage I relied almost entirely on the use of pen, paper and post-its. The journal entry that I present next is an example of how I kept a record of my thinking as I analysed the data. The entry also describes the process of theoretical coding and illustrates how the demand-response cycle begun to emerge. Following the journal entry I present a few images of showing what the post-its that I used for my analysis looked in the midst of the process. As I attempted to gain a thorough understanding of the data, I found it very helpful to have on my wall the graphic display that you will see. This display stayed up on my living room for several weeks, and to date I keep a detailed photographic record that allows me to see in detail the coding process. You will also see some initial sketches of what eventually became the conceptual framework of the study; the demand-response cycle, which was presented in Chapter 3. The examples in this annex should illustrate the organic, iterative and reflective nature of the data analysis process.

As I coded the interviews based on the questions below I wrote fragments or notes on colour coded post its for each question. My wall slowly began to look like this. This is a typical 'design thinking' methodology.



I printed all the interviews, four in total. I read them with a number of analytical questions in mind:

1. Who is Linda
2. Who is she expected to become?
3. In what ways are her self understandings confronted?
4. Who should she no longer be?
5. Who does she become?
6. Who does she resist becoming?
7. How is the organisation/workplace/practice changed because of her?

These were my initial codes. The continued evolving as I analysed more data, to eventually become the demand-response cycle in Fig. 5.3

I used different color post its to answer each of the questions and wrote down on them my answer or quotes. I also included examples or cited the specific places on the interviews that prompted the answers (eg. L4, 351-356). The image on the file shows the final map on the wall. The questions are in the same order as listed above. Interestingly there is very little material for 'who should I no longer be' and 'who do I resist becoming'. So apparently not that kind of identity dilemmas for Linda. There are however important transformation journeys in her self understandings and learnings as she become better acquainted with the organisation and with 'how things are done around here'. Being a newcomer, the learning curve is an important one. Before going deeper in the analysis (which I will, here or on the Scrivener file), I want to record here my notes as I went along with the analysis process:

As I continued analysing the interviews and the narratives I found more on Linda... these are initial thoughts.

This refers to the image above, but you can see more photographs in the pages to follow.

#METHODS. To answer the question 'who should I become?' it's

important to pay close attention to the use of 'have to be' or similar such as 'I've got to'. Examples are L4, 423. When participants use this kind of phrasing in the trajectory interview (first interview generally speaking) it can be used to build past identity cycles/identity work/learnings/development. Examples include L1, 116 and L1, 121.

Here I refer to the demand-response cycle (Fig. 5.3) I initially thought of the demand-response cycle (Fig. 5.3) as an identity formation cycle. Later in the process I decided to rename it.

#HYPOTHESIS The idea of identity cycles came up just as I was doing this. You can think of the questions 'who am I, who am I expected to become, etc.(see above) as identity cycles that are repeated in time and that are the progressive construction of identity and thus (the use of thus here still needs to be reflected upon) of learning and development. (a diagram of this must be attached. See Scrivener or iPhone. What this means is that at a moment of time the individual faces some expectations in the form 'who am I expected to become' When this is negotiated with the 'who do I resist becoming' and 'who should I no longer be' a new 'who do I become?' emerges which ends up being the answer to 'who am I' in another time stamp. An example in Linda's case is when she had the role as recruiter in sales she 'had to be' good at dealing with all kinds of people. This results in her 'being' good with all kinds of people when she starts working at the royal mail. A past demand on her becomes an aspect of her identity. I think I should look at Hedegaard and probably other identity literature to see if there's any value in this.

The formulation of the research questions had a number of iterations during the research process. Here is an example of an earlier iteration.

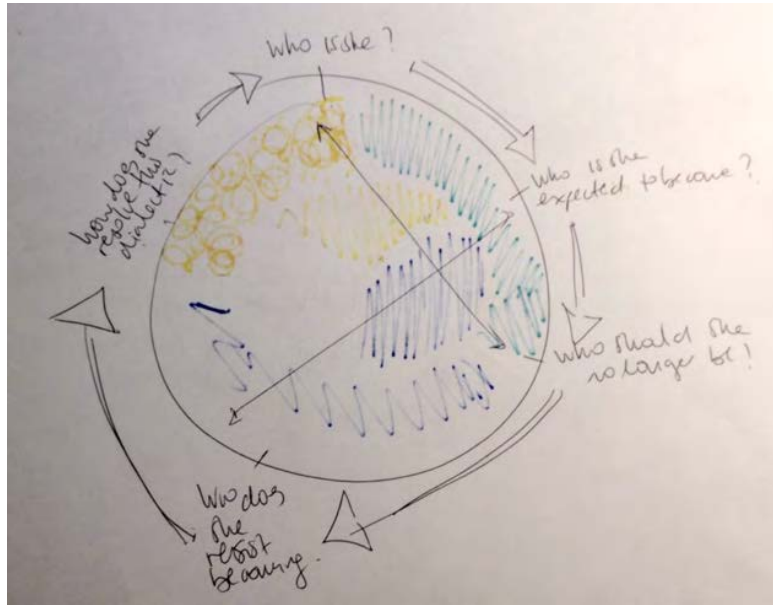
#METHODS The analytical questions I used in this round of analysis (again the ones listed above) are not enough to capture the answers to research question 1 (how do SM negotiate what they bring to the table and what matters to them with the changing purposes and expectations of the practices they navigate?). I need to go back to the data with questions that will help me understand how managers intend to and achieve to influence, or move their agendas forward. It's not just about identity, it's also about getting things done, moving forward what matters to them. It's also not just about what the practices that they navigate does to them but what they do to the practice, how they influence the practice. To address this problem temporarily I added an analytical question as I was going through this reading (number 7). I am thinking for now that:

You can see in this journal excerpt that Srivastava and Hopwood's framework (2009) that was described in Section 3.7, was useful throughout all stages of analysis.



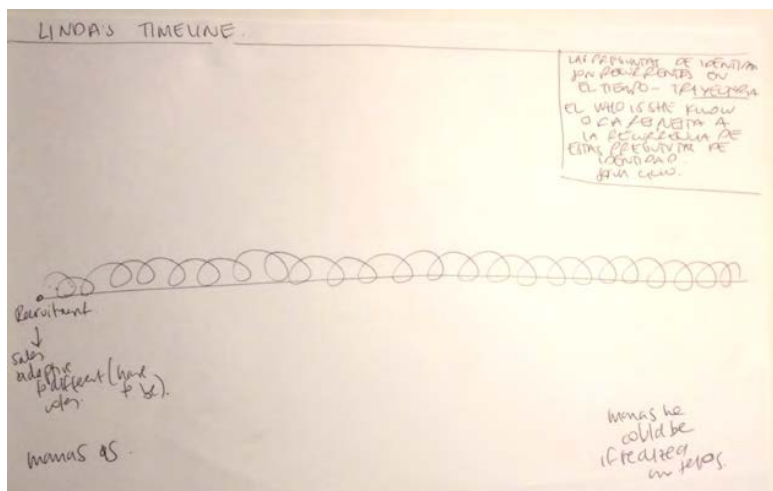
MONDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2014 15:59

These are initial sketches of what eventually became the demand-response cycle. They were done as data analyses unfolded.

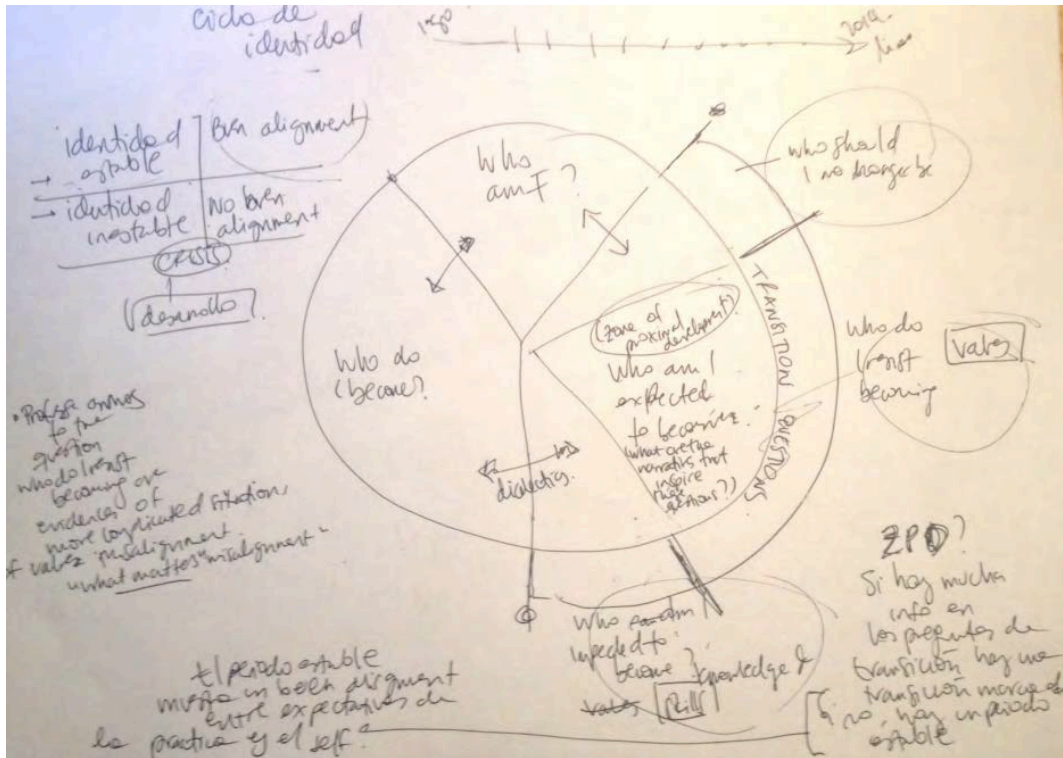


45 ALAN BULLOCK CLOSE, OXFORD, ENGLAND, UNITED KINGDOM • 11° MOSTLY CLEAR

MONDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2014 15:59



45 ALAN BULLOCK CLOSE, OXFORD, ENGLAND, UNITED KINGDOM • 11° MOSTLY CLEAR



ANNEX 5 - DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE

Year	2012		2013												2014	
Month	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2
Eric's interviews	E1			E2	E3	E4 E5	E6		E7							
Eric shadowing				xx	xx	xxx	xx		x							
Linda's interviews						L1 L2		L3	L4							
Linda's shadowing					xx	xxx		xxxxx	xxxxx							
Julian's interviews									J1 J2	J3		J4				J5
Julian's shadowing												x				
Margaret interviews												M1 M2				M3
Margaret shadowing												x				

x= 1 day of shadowing

E1= Eric's first interview

E2= Eric's second interview

Etc.