THESIS COLLECTION

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Work Stress and Organisational Justice

Ph.D. dissertation

Thesis supervisor:

Henriett Primecz, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

2011 Budapest

Faculty of Organisational Behaviour

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Table of content

1. Introduction: Social and scientific context and arguments for the necessity of the research

Hungary, similarly to the rest of the central and eastern European countries, has gone through dramatic and radical changes over the last twenty years. Due to the collapse of the soviet bloc, Hungary has regained its independence and a major transition towards market-economy and multi-party democracy has taken place.

As the dictatorial one-party system was axed, the Hungarian population had good reason to believe that this marked the beginning of a brighter future. Most people hoped that the formation of a democratic constitutional state and the introduction of a market-economy would result in prosperity and a higher level of societal well-being. However in the first years of transition these expected outcomes failed to realize and deep disappointment shook the country. It became clear that independence from the Soviet Union did not mean leaving behind all the structures of dependence. There were many Hungarians who were surprised that the newly evolving forms of capitalism did not result in a higher standard of living and did not guarantee a happier living for all.

This disappointment has increased greatly the uncertainty and division about how to rebuild our country. The difficulties faced during the transition revealed the true scale of societal, political, economic and moral destruction which took place during the forty years of soviet influence. Social tension, already present during the end of the so called "socialist era", dramatically changed over the following few years. The transition to a market-economy caused unemployment to rocket, a massive increase in living costs which proved unbearable for less well off families and the beginning of the degradation of the social welfare system. As a consequence of all these changes, the gap between those who could benefit from the new opportunities and those who were merely struggling for survival grew enormously.[1]

The idea of the "unfettered free-market" was utilised by the remnants of the previous political circles of power and their successors but resulted in a spiritually and mentally traumatised and broken society. The enthusiasm and hopefulness for an age of positive change met with the reality of human selfishness and greed and created the new social-economic system of Hungary; the most poignant feature being the accumulation of wealth by some. While a significant part of society has enjoyed rapid development, prosperity and an

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[1] This tendency can be considered to be a global trend, but it is noteworthy that, according to data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), by 1995 the difference between the living conditions of the richest and the poorest in Hungary was larger than that in Western Europe - 3,5 million people out of 10 million were living below subsistence level.

increase in wealth, this tendency took place in parallel with the impoverishment, growing defencelessness and hopelessness of many Hungarian citizens, a phenomenon that has resulted in an overwhelming disillusionment with the social justice of the "new system".

The rather difficult historical situation described briefly above transformed itself into a chronic crisis in Hungary that can be characterized by significant tensions between social groups and a feeling of decreased solidarity for others. Consequently, Hungary had to face the financial crisis which escalated in 2008 not just with a crumbling economy, but also with a country where a state of seriously weakened social cohesion and compromised morality characterized the second decade of the 21st century.

A great overview of the startling state of Hungarian minds is provided in a book edited by Mária Kopp (Kopp, 2008) from Semmelweis University. Based on a longitudinal and large sample size representative study by Mária Kopp and her colleagues[2] we know that 71% of Hungarians can be characterized as being in a state of **anomie.**[3] The tragically **low level of social capital**[4] is indicated by 70% of Hungarians claiming that it is better not to **trust** anyone. Knowing this, it may not be surprising that 17,3 % of our countrymen suffer from serious or close to serious **depression.** The concerning spiritual and psychological state of Hungarian citizens is most likely one of the reasons why male life expectancy in Hungary has decreased to the levels of the 1930's (Kopp, 2008).

In their search for explanations to the above-described burdens of the Hungarian society, professional researchers (Stauder, 2009; Kopp, 2008;), similarly to the media and public discourse, put the topic of **stress** and in particular **work stress** high on the agenda. Another concept appearing often directly or indirectly in the context of discussing these societal problems is **injustice**, with its far-reaching consequences and various possible manifestations. In the following few pages I will summarize my arguments for the necessity of my doctoral research aiming at the exploration and understanding of the connections of work stress and organisational justice in Hungary.

1. The academic and public interest directed at the phenomenon of workplace stress has reached an overwhelming magnitude.

Firstly, academic research (Cooper et al., 2009; Kopp, 2008; Barling et al., 2005), self-help literature and popular media coverage on the topic of workplace stress is flourishing, keeping it continuously on the agenda and inspiring ongoing research into the topic of stress.

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[2] Hungarian Health Panel (Hungarostudy 2006)
[3] The term **anomie**, primarily attributed to Émile Durkheim, can be defined as a personal condition in which one either has a lack of norms or of norms that are too rigid.
[4] The term **social capital** has various definitions, one of them describes it as being the network of relationships of trust, dependability, and respect for rules.

The roots of this great interest most probably lie in the growing concerns of people about their own and their loved ones' health. Another important influence are the UN[5] and EU[6] organizations' increasing awareness and interest in stress-related problems and the ever growing striving of business enterprises for competitiveness, productivity and commitment.[7] Hungarian legislation, in accordance with international guidelines, now includes new laws and regulation that obligate employers to regularly measure and decrease the physical and psycho-social stressors of the workplace.[8]

2. The constructs and discourse on stress have became a general label and framework with which to express concerns, anxieties and suffering related to work and workplace problems.

It is not merely the sensible and immense interest in stress that indicates the need for further research in this field. Stress construct and discourse has become a legitimate (and one of the culturally dominant) ways of understanding and explaining the problems in the world around us and particularly significant for dealing with the different sources of strain experienced at the workplace (Harkness et al., 2005; Kinman and Jones, 2005; Newton, 1995). The discourse around work stress has built up a historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs (Scott, 1990) that is widely accepted and cultivated across society. Although there is significant ambiguity associated with the term stress, it can be used for tracing the discourse and using it as a framework of investigation, according which environmental events ("stressors") through certain mediators (e.g. cognitive interpretations and coping strategies) induce consequences ("strain") on individuals (Kahn and Byosiere, 1992).

3. There is a strong need for multidisciplinary approaches in Hungarian stress research.

As could be seen in the previous statements, I do not consider the construct and discourse of workplace stress to be a well-defined phenomenon but much rather a frequently applied way of interpreting and giving meaning to a series of complex and diverse societal problems and personal suffering. As a consequence of this, it is highly important to apply a multidisciplinary perspective when researching the stress discourse. The relevant and often separated scientific disciplines need to be connected, as has been done in the leading stress

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[5] ILO / WHO Committee on Occupational Health

[6] EU Advisory Committee for Safety, Hygiene, and Health Protection

[7] These interests of business enterprises are often seriously damaged by the negative consequences of work stress. As an argument for the importance of battling workplace stress many scholars refer to the negative consequences of decreases in worker performance, increasing sick leave and worker fluctuation rates.

[8] XXX Law of Hungary, 2008 – see Makó (2009). In spite of the new law and regulations coming into effect in 2008, there is still a significant uncertainty associated with the required application of these regulations and the rights of authorities to monitor their implementation.

4

research work in Hungary by employees of the Institute of Behavioural Sciences of Semmelweis University (Kopp, 2008; Fujishiro and Heaney, 2007). In researching the workplace stress discourse the scientific disciplines of medicine, occupational psychology, management, ethics, communication science, sociology and political science can all play a significant role.[9]

4. There is a strong need for multiparadigm and qualitative approaches in Hungarian stress research.

Leading stress researchers of the last decades have attempted to develop new research frameworks and methodologies that can supplement traditional quantitative methods with in-depth, longitudinal, contextual and qualitative approaches (Makó, 2010; Ádám, Payne and Cooper, 2001; Sommerfield and McCrae, 2000; Dick, 2000; Perrewé and Zellars, 1999; Newton, 1995). These have tried to overcome earlier approaches that had a tendency to represent a highly individualized perspective, emphasizing the employee's personal responsibility in coping with stress (Wainwright and Calnan, 2002; Parker, 1999). It is important that workplace stress research explores and unveils the suppressing social structures which contribute to its development and expose the dominant constructions of reality and structures of power (Newton, 1995). When researching the workplace stress discourse we have to pay special attention to those *"medicalizating"* tendencies (Kovács, 2007) that declare consequences induced by common, everyday problems to be precipitately abnormal or morbid.

I see an opportunity in multiparadigm workplace stress research to expose the responsibility of all stakeholders, to unveil the dominant Hungarian stress discourse and to lay the ground for ideas for interventions that can lastingly contribute to the well-being of employees (Coope, Dewe and O'Driscoll, 2000). There is a strong need for research in Hungary that includes in its analysis the influences of societal level structures and an understanding of local processes that create the social world. Applying the multiparadigm research methodology that will be introduced later I use qualitative research tools to create a critical reading and a postmodern reading of a case. With this approach I aim to fulfil seemingly contradictory research requirements in one single piece of doctoral research.

The arguments above substantiate the fact that my research, focusing on the stress discourse on workplace problems and organizational justice, can significantly contribute to the academic work related to this phenomenon and to practical interventions from multiple perspectives.

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[9] This listing of relevant scientific disciplines does not claim to be complete.

I am convinced that the significant academic and public interest directed at workplace stress will be helpful in understanding the stress discourse on workplace problems, and thus will be useful in exploring and unveiling those deep societal structures and organizational processes that play an important role in the development of non-desired consequences. By focusing on the organizational justice aspects of workplace stress I can also bring to the surface those "suppressed miseries" and the unnecessary suffering in Hungarian work life that are the results of personal choices and actions and thus can be changed through the more responsible attitudes of stakeholders.

2. Research methods applied in the dissertation

The theoretical frameworks of the research, the research objectives and research questions, the detailed elaboration of the data collection and analytical methods are the results of an iterative process. The elements of the research plan are not built onto each other according to linear cause-effect logic. They can instead be described by a mutual and multiple interdependency as found in Maxwell's interactive model (1996) and so they make up together an integrated whole.

2.1. The possibility of multiparadigm research about work stress and organisational justice

In their seminal book, Burrell and Morgan (1979) argued very convincingly against the possibility of a synthesis between paradigms in social studies. Their strict notion of paradigm incommensurability ruled out any integration due to the mutually exclusive assumptions accepted in any two paradigms (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Their smart reasoning was at that time a significant contribution to the avoidance of a hegemonic dominance of the functionalist paradigm in organizational studies. However the dominance of the functionalist paradigm is no longer a realistic threat in European organizational studies and this has opened up the way to the employment of very different responses to the paradigm debate. The incommensurability thesis is now widely debated and various forms of multiparadigm research are advocated (Hassard and Kelemen, 2002). Scholars encourage communication between paradigms (Weaver and Gioia, 1994) or argue for the existence of common concepts, constructs and practices and emphasize the importance of exploring these 'transition zones'. Following this logic, it is indeed through the possibility of multiparadigm research that we are able to reflect on different facets of complex social phenomenon (Hassard and Kelemen, 2002). The art of multiparadigm research proposed by pluralist researchers is particularly close to my preferred research approach, as during the exploration of the discourse on

workplace problems I also analyse the social structures, power relations, ethical dilemmas connected with organizational justice perceptions and the social creation of local reality.

The critical reading of my thesis considers the concepts and definitions of work stress and organizational justice research fields as being starting points, and at the same time concentrates on the social structures and relations that lead to the sufferings of employees and the hindering of integral human development. In this critical reading I openly declare my commitment to healthy working conditions and the well-being of employees. I target conclusions that can be helpful in unveiling suppressing social systems and deep social structures, eliminate unnecessary suffering and provide the basis for creating alternative structures.

In the postmodern reading of my thesis I explore how the members of an organization create and maintain their social reality through their individual and collective meaning-giving and discourses. In this reading I rely less on using the pre-existing, a priori concepts of work stress and organizational justice but instead I analyse a critical series of organizational events with the help of Pearce's CMM methodology. My aim is not to define general laws or provide a critique of the social system, but to explore the processes that create the local interpretations and discourses. Based on these findings it will become possible to develop immanent critical observations and recommendations for strengthening alternative discourses.

2.2. Research goals

Among researcher motivations and ambitions we can distinguish **personal, scientific and practical** goals according to the classification of Maxwell (1996).The **personal research goals** and intentions concerning the research topic and applied methodology are very significant in the early phase of the research work, and the researcher must commit oneself to them. In terms of the successful execution of the research it is a prominent and important moment when the researcher transcends himself and instead of doing the research for himself, he or she commits to a research project that serves others by implementing a kind of self-transcendent act (Frankl, 1989). Making this conscious choice is a crucially important point, because finding the personal research goal and commitment develops moral responsibility and emotional obligation in the researcher that strongly influences all elements of the research process.

My initial personal intentions were dominated by the emancipatory interests deriving from my own negative work and life experiences. In the beginning I wanted my research to contribute to the unveiling of workplace domination and exploitation, so that the sufferings of employees can be decreased. After repeatedly getting in touch with the research field and the

stakeholders of the investigated organization the strong critical edge of my research interests became slightly more moderate. Thus the **scientific goal** of my thesis work is to create an organisational study which contains a critical reading and a postmodern reading of the dominating social structures, their development and suffering at the workplace, and this way provide a better understanding of the work stress process, discourses and perceptions of justice. The **practical goal** of my research, however, exceeds the scientific ambitions of my thesis, because I clearly want to support members of the investigated organization in their efforts to develop and improve communication with each other. I would like to contribute to the process in which the possible intervention points of the organizational structure, culture, technology, and constructed social reality are identified for these changes and developments. Based on these experiences my long term practical goals also include the establishment of civil organisations or institutions that foster improved cooperation between managers and workers.

Based on the above descriptions the primary goals of my research can be summarized as follows:

Scientific (research) goals:

1. Exploration of the relationship between the work stress process and the organizational justice perceptions.

2. Unveiling the social structures at the workplace that are oppressive and causing sufferings and revealing the communicative actions and meaning-giving that create them.

Practical goals:

1. The identification of development points and opportunities in the investigated organisation, that can become the starting points of changes and interventions that eliminate unnecessary suffering and negative consequences on health at this workplace.

2. Collection of the basic knowledge and experiences needed for the establishment of civil organisations or institutions that foster improved cooperation between managers and workers.

2.3. Research questions

Firstly I will formulate the primary research question of my thesis, then I will share with my readers further sub-questions based on the principles of the different research paradigms (critical and postmodern). All these sub-questions point in the direction of answering the fundamental research question and meeting the scientific and practical goals of my research. The primary question of my doctoral thesis is the following:

How are workplace stress processes and organisational justice perceptions connected to each other in the case of Factory X, and how are the "deep structures" of society and the series of communicative actions in the factory contributing to the development of these?

Based on this central question of my thesis, first I will formulate those sub-questions inspired by the critical reading of the research, which intend to serve the defenceless workers of Factory X:

C1: How are work stress processes and organisational justice perceptions affecting the physical and mental health of workers?

C2: Which accepted and never questioned deep structures, determine the work stress processes and organisational justice perceptions and how?

Looking at the questions of the critical reading above (C1 and C2), it is striking that they build very strongly upon the theoretical concepts known by me, my personal assumptions and my external critical perspective formulated outside of the investigated organisation. In the course of conducting my research I was convinced that by answering these questions with the critical perspective I can only grasp one specific aspect of the local reality of Factory X. In order to enrich this understanding, I turn for help to the communicational perspective of the "linguistic turn" which is applied in postmodern research approaches. The second reading of my thesis was inspired by this perspective, and instead of building on *a priori* concepts I have formulated research questions directed at the developing organisational discourse and the creation of the social world in Factory X.

PM1: How do the decisions and actions of Factory X stakeholders and the different interpretations and meanings given to these create the undesired social world of suffering?

PM2: What role do organisational discourses play in the creation of the social reality and the series of communicative actions in Factory X, and how could these be used to improve work stress processes and local social relations?

In order to formulate the best fitting questions to my research goals I have applied the principles and ideas of two different research paradigms. Thanks to this multiparadigm approach and the different kind of research questions we can hopefully reach a richer understanding of Factory X. Analysing the case from more perspectives serves the purpose of making each research reading more fruitful by the other, and at the same time improving the chances of developing more relevant, practical and concrete interventions at social, organisational or personal levels.

3. Most significant results and conclusions of the thesis

With my multi-paradigmatic research approach I have revealed for my readers two significantly different readings of the case of Factory X. In the critical reading of the thesis I have strongly built on the conceptual structures and models of previous research in the topic of workplace stress and organisational justice. However I focused on the unveiling of the power structures and the oppressive social relations that show strong connection with the employees' sufferings and the damage to their physical and mental health. At the same time, in the postmodern reading of the dissertation I was only a 'moderate consumer' of the theoretical structures connected to workplace stress and organisational justice. In this approach I primarily aimed at revealing and understanding the communicative series of actions in the development of which the participants' meaning-giving influenced by various contexts is determining. I analysed series of actions that could be interpreted as workplace stress and that showed how the participants jointly created a social reality filled with misery – a situation not desired by any of them.

The critical and postmodern readings presented in the previous chapters in detail have revealed a completely different light on the social reality and processes of Factory X. Due to this, based on the analysis of the research results I could draw different conclusions in the two interpretations. The different conclusions seem to contradict each other at times, similarly to the quotation from St Ignatius found in the beginning of this chapter. At the same time, after thoroughly and intensively thinking over the seemingly contradictory statements, we can discover that here we can face such paradoxes that simultaneously contain true statements. According to

the approach of the parallel and multi-paradigmatic methodology I have also tried to introduce my conclusions drawn from the two readings in the same time and side by side. It is not my aim, and therefore I did not intend to synthetize my conclusions drawn from the two readings or to integrate my suggestions in some sort of unified action plan. I am convinced that I can make the most valuable work if I present my conclusions and suggestions simultaneously and my readers can make sure that these are concurrently true in spite of their differences and that we need both of them in order to improve the social reality of Factory X.

3.1. The most important conclusions of the critical reading

By the help of the critical reading of my research I managed to outline a mind map of the relationship between the workplace stress process and the organisational justice perceptions, which includes the social-economic, the social relation and the technological context in the workplace. When preparing the mind map I basically relied on the stress discourse in the workplace, in the course of which the Factory X workers connected the organisational events to the physical and mental consequences that affected them; which with I could familiarise myself from their reports about the problems at the workplace. The important feature of the model presented again is that it stretches the point of the cause-effect relationships and the chronology; leaving room for parallel events, cognitive processes and free decisions:
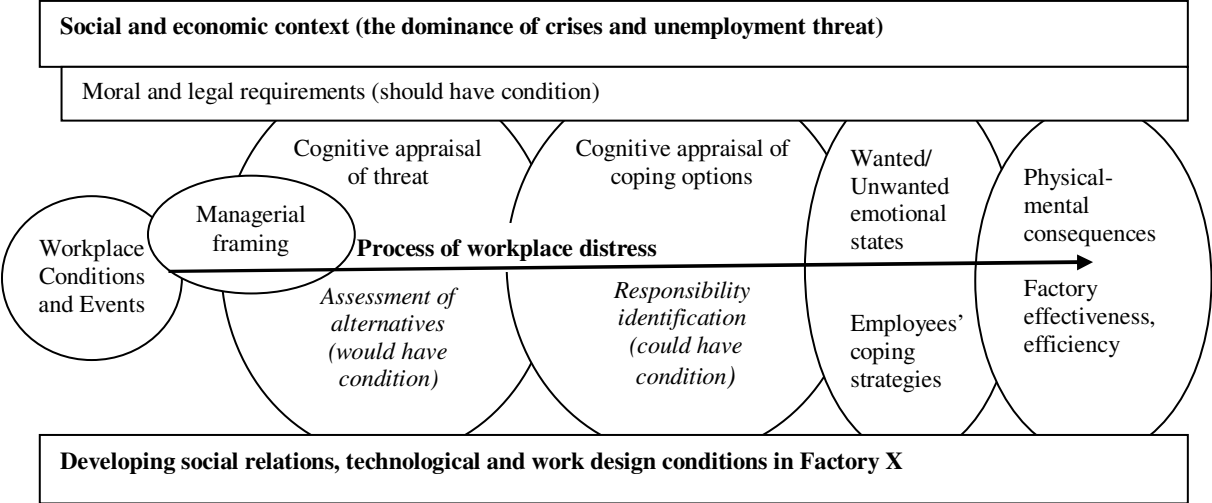

Figure 1 The mind map of the workplace stress process and its interpretation in Factory X

3.1.1. Strengthening the workers' sense of vulnerability due to the crisis

An important result of my critical analysis – that can be captured by the help of the mind map of the stress process at the workplace– is that it highlighted how difficult it is to

overestimate the effect of the managerial framing on the employee interpretation of certain corporate events. The factory and the managers of Factory X responded to the crisis affecting the industry, the decline in demand and the factory closures with a framing that has a dominating element of strengthening the workers' sense of vulnerability. By questioning the workers' value and with the lack of transparency in the important decisions the managers were trying to strengthen the feeling in the employees that under such circumstances they must accept every instructions and conditions. All this brought the workers to an extreme state of the deprivation of power. This resulted in that they quasi-renounced the possibility of individual initiatives and control over their work - along with becoming uncertain about their own employee competences.

3.1.2. The discrepancy between the managerial expectations and the conditions provided by the managers

The connection point of the workplace stress and organisational justice research is that they focus on capturing the dissonance and the discrepancy between two factors, which appear in both different theoretical approaches and models (Cropanzano, 2005). These include the person-environmental fit, the demand-control and the effort-reward imbalance workplace stress models. My research results have confirmed that the various discrepancies are playing a key role in terms of the workplace stress process. At the same time these are the manifestations of organisational justice (injustice).

From among the above mentioned theoretical structures I found examples for almost all of them when examining the workplace stress processes. Yet, in case of Factory X, a special discrepancy emerged in connection with the stress processes, which did not exactly link to any of the previous theoretical constructions. In the interpretations of the employees the biggest internal stress was caused by the lack of harmony in the **managerial expectations** and **the conditions provided for them by the managers**. Thus, for the Factory X workers one of the main stressors is the **discrepancy of the expectations and the provided conditions**, which of course can include the low level of the available control (decision making and used skills) or the absence of the necessary resources.

The speciality of this interpretation of workplace stress and organisational justice is that the employee is not in the centre,[10] since both factors of the discrepancy is within the competence of the manager's decision. **Therefore the manager can be held responsible** for it. At this point the connection of the workplace stress theories to fairness theory (Folger and Cropanzano, 2001) from among the organisational justice theories seems clear.

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[10] For example in the effort-reward imbalance model, where the effort is what I give and the reward is what I get.

3.1.3. The significance of having a share from the bad according to merits

The representatives (Folger and Cropanzano, 2001) of the integrative approach of organisational justice emphasize the importance of overlapping topics, such as the **question of responsibility** in contrast to the separations of the distributive, procedural, interactional, interpersonal and informational dimensions of justice. Due to the economic crisis the workplace stress processes and the organisational justice perceptions connected to the responsibility received higher significance. The classic justice concept according to which ***everyone should get what he deserves***, received a special interpretation in Factory X, since in the period of factory closures and layoffs the question stressed by the employees changed in the following way: '***everyone should get from the bad according to his merits'***. Hence, the Factory X workers believe it is a fundamental injustice that the directors of the factories that were shut down elsewhere were transferred to other factories. Thus, the ex-**factory directors did not have the same consequences** as the manual workers. They consider this an important part of the workplace stress process, also in the sense that due to the 'unnecessary' factory directors their overload cannot be reduced by hiring new workers and they blame the 'dawdling' ex-directors for the overgrowth of micromanagement. The Factory X workers are much more concerned about the 'missed bad fate' of the directors of the closed factories, than the layoffs of the employees working there. This is a finding of the critical reading that points out to the hostile attitude towards the managers and the vulnerability of the workers. I have not met any manifestation of compassion towards the workers of Factory Y, that operated excellently and still got shut down. From this I gather that despite the crisis situation the workers' solidarity towards each other is at an extremely low level in the examined factory.

3.1.4. The damages of the mental and physical health and the value of the workplace

I consider the consequences of the workplace stress process and the organisational justice perceptions manifesting in the damages of mental and physical health an outstandingly significant indicator of the 'sharing of the bad'. In terms of unveiling the oppressive structures causing suffering for the workers the understanding of the development processes of the physical and mental illnesses proved to have a crucial significance. Therefore I presented these in the subchapter 6.1 of the dissertation.

In the case of Factory X the physical and mental health appeared as a value that can be played down if necessary. The organisational members treat health as a 'reserve' that can be taken from constantly and for the augmentation of which no one takes real responsibility. The workers, the managers and presumably the regulatory bodies as well are actively taking part in the creation of the social structure that considers job retention more important than a healthy workplace. The essence of the interpretation can be captured in the belief that it is better for everyone to keep

their workplace that is to a certain extent a health hazard, than losing the workplace and, due to this, becoming unemployed. From a research perspective the most shocking in all this is that the workers of Factory X did not question this state in any sort of way. On the contrary, their psychological coping strategy manifests itself in that they identify themselves with the thought of worthlessness of their health and life. The disregard of the occupational safety rules and the alcoholism at a drastic level is not a sort of Hungarian and masculine bravado, but a screaming sign of the hopelessness that the workers accepted their startling life prospects and they do not want to do anything about it.

I managed to understand all the beliefs revealed in Factory X and the surface structures that were considered immutable with the method of the **intensive critical interpretation**. In order to illustrate the connections, I collected my most important results in the following model. In Figure 7.2 I will simultaneously show the surface structures and those not-questioned deep structures onto which the surface structures are being built. I will elaborate more on the alternative structures – also appearing in the figure – in chapter 7.2 which contains my proposals.
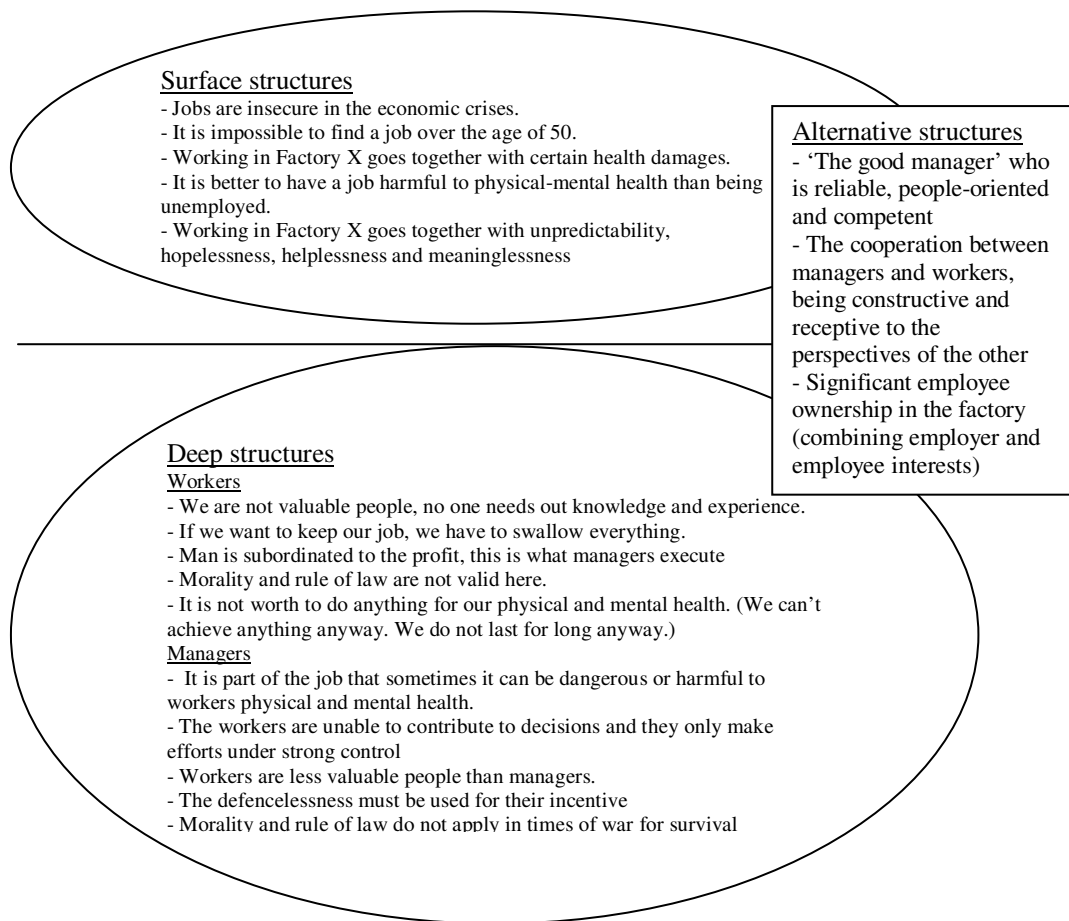
Surface structures
- Jobs are insecure in the economic crises.
- It is impossible to find a job over the age of 50.
- Working in Factory X goes together with certain health damages.
- It is better to have a job harmful to physical-mental health than being unemployed.
- Working in Factory X goes together with unpredictability, hopelessness, helplessness and meaninglessness

Alternative structures
- 'The good manager' who is reliable, people-oriented and competent
- The cooperation between managers and workers, being constructive and receptive to the perspectives of the other
- Significant employee ownership in the factory (combining employer and employee interests)

Deep structures
Workers
- We are not valuable people, no one needs out knowledge and experience.
- If we want to keep our job, we have to swallow everything.
- Man is subordinated to the profit, this is what managers execute
- Morality and rule of law are not valid here.
- It is not worth to do anything for our physical and mental health. (We can't achieve anything anyway. We do not last for long anyway.)
Managers
- It is part of the job that sometimes it can be dangerous or harmful to workers physical and mental health.
- The workers are unable to contribute to decisions and they only make efforts under strong control
- Workers are less valuable people than managers.
- The defencelessness must be used for their incentive
- Morality and rule of law do not apply in times of war for survival

Figure 2 Surface and deep structures explored in Factory X

3.1.5. The weakening and relativisation of the moral values and rule of law

Among the unquestioned convictions of the deep structures I ascribe prominent importance to the beliefs appearing by both employees and managers that question the persons' value; with special regard to the value of the workers over 50 years old. This is such an inhuman and destructive thought, that even the seed of this thought should not have been allowed to settle in an organisation; yet, in the case of Factory X it became part of the everyday life. At the same time, in view of the decisions and technological modifications experienced in Factory X it would be surprising if the traces of this could not be found at the level of values and convictions. The weakening of the belief in the value of any person can be connected to the eroding ethical values and legality, and even more so due to the crisis. There are no safe benchmarks for the managers and workers of Factory X, since they face with a strong violation of human life, dignity and health day after day. The legal regulations and the controlling authorities could mean another borderline, but even in connection with these only the uncertainty is certain. The concerned persons regularly violate the occupational health, safety or even the labour law rules; and the

strength of the law relativisated in Factory X and the consequences of their violation are completely unclear.

3.2. Key conclusions of the postmodern understanding

In the postmodern reading of my study I tried to explore the miserable social reality in Factory X, which I examined through work place stress processes and perceptions of organisational justice, to show how the communicative acts and meaning creations of the concerned parties in Factory X created these structures. For the postmodern analysis I found an enormous support in the methodological tools of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) created by Pearce (2004). With the help of the Serpentine Model, as a starting point, I could thoroughly examine the series of events, related to the critical processes of Factory X. As an example I present my findings concerning the shift scheduling:
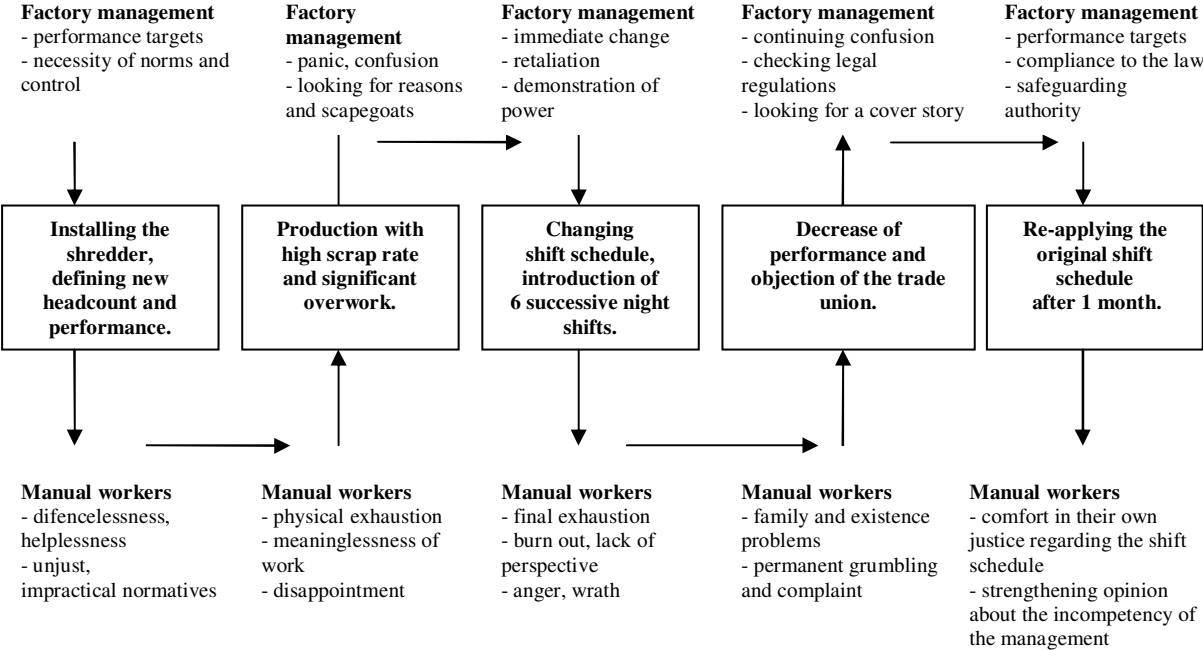
| Factory management
- performance targets
- necessity of norms and control | Factory management
- panic, confusion
- looking for reasons and scapegoats | Factory management
- immediate change
- retaliation
- demonstration of power | Factory management
- continuing confusion
- checking legal regulations
- looking for a cover story | Factory management
- performance targets
- compliance to the law
- safeguarding authority |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Installing the shredder, defining new headcount and performance.** | **Production with high scrap rate and significant overwork.** | **Changing shift schedule, introduction of 6 successive night shifts.** | **Decrease of performance and objection of the trade union.** | **Re-applying the original shift schedule after 1 month.** |
| Manual workers
- difencelessness, helplessness
- unjust, impractical normatives | Manual workers
- physical exhaustion
- meaninglessness of work
- disappointment | Manual workers
- final exhaustion
- burn out, lack of perspective
- anger, wrath | Manual workers
- family and existence problems
- permanent grumbling and complaint | Manual workers
- comfort in their own justice regarding the shift schedule
- strengthening opinion about the incompetency of the management |

Figure 3 Analysis of the communicative actions related to shift scheduling using the Serpentine Model and the Hierarchy Model of Meanings of CMM

3.2.1. Processes of the mutual feeling of unfairness

With the help of the reports on the problems of Factory X and the Serpentine Model, I managed to reveal several critical organizational processes and to discover that these follow a very similar pattern - consequent events repeat the logic of previous processes. It was clear from both the reports of the workers and the managers that the key points of the processes were understood by both parties as being unfair. This was crucial in forming their responding actions - also creating a feeling of unfairness. As a result, the concerned parties of Factory X created **processes of the mutual feeling of unfairness;** that is, work place stress processes that created

16

social relationships and structures in the workplace, which were undesired by all of them. Through the reports I met during the research I could identify the following typical phases of these stories:

Phases of typical stories at Factor X
1. Authoritive decision: A significant decision has been made concerning the work and life of Factory X employees (the decision is typically made in Mirdor without consulting with the workers of Factory X).
2. Dismissing reservations: In the course of the implementation of the decision the workers indicate the emerging problems and concerns, which are dismissed and ignored by the factory management (they follow the Mirdorian instructions).
3. Emergence of the problems: The first problems and difficulties occur in relation to the implementation. The efficiency targets and cost reduction could not be achieved.
4. Blaming and increase of control: The factory management blames the workers for the emerging problems and tries to remedy the problems by strengthening control over the workers.
5. Failure: The efficiency targets and cost reduction prove to be unachievable in the long term.
6. Restoring the state before the decision: The management restores the state prior to the decision due to the unambiguous failure. They do not inform the workers about the real reasons of the decision. They look for a cover story or do not share any information at all. The alternative for solving the situation by inclusion appears.

Table 1 Typical phases of the stories about processes of the mutual feeling of unfairness

3.2.2. Resources, forces and discourses forming interpretations of the events

The analysis of the postmodern reading of my study also helped to answer the questions, how and through what interpretations and meaning creation processes these sequences of communicative actions that were undesired and unintended by the concerned parties of Factory X were created. The Hierarchy Model of Actor's Meaning of CMM for example reveals that for the process of shift scheduling, the managers and the workers create a meaning from different, hierarchically embedded contexts (as resources), thus creating the stories about the events for themselves:

FACTORY MANAGEMENT

Culture: Culture of performance, enforcing efficient working

Episode: To assign maximum performance to the new technology, with a minimum of headcount

Relationship: Basic distrust

Self-concept: My task is to enforce intensive work

MANUAL WORKERS

Culture: Exposure and helplessness, minimum efforts for the survival

Episode: The new technology/machine is only good, to make us work harder and earn less

Self-concept: We will show them that there's no way without us

Relationship: Distrust, resentment and anger

Figure 4 Stories that were created from embedded contexts by the factory management and the manual workers

A common feature of the stories composed by the factory management and the manual workers, that the participants always use the highest level resource to create the critical story, and thus the stories that feed from the lower level contexts (as resources) can only fit to those as subordinated stories. Interpreting the events this way, however, does not give a fully satisfying answer to the question of why the individual participants decide to choose certain answers or actions. We can have a better understanding by using CMM model of four aspects of logical forces, that I have completed in Figure 5 with the most important discourses related to the stress processes met in Factory X:
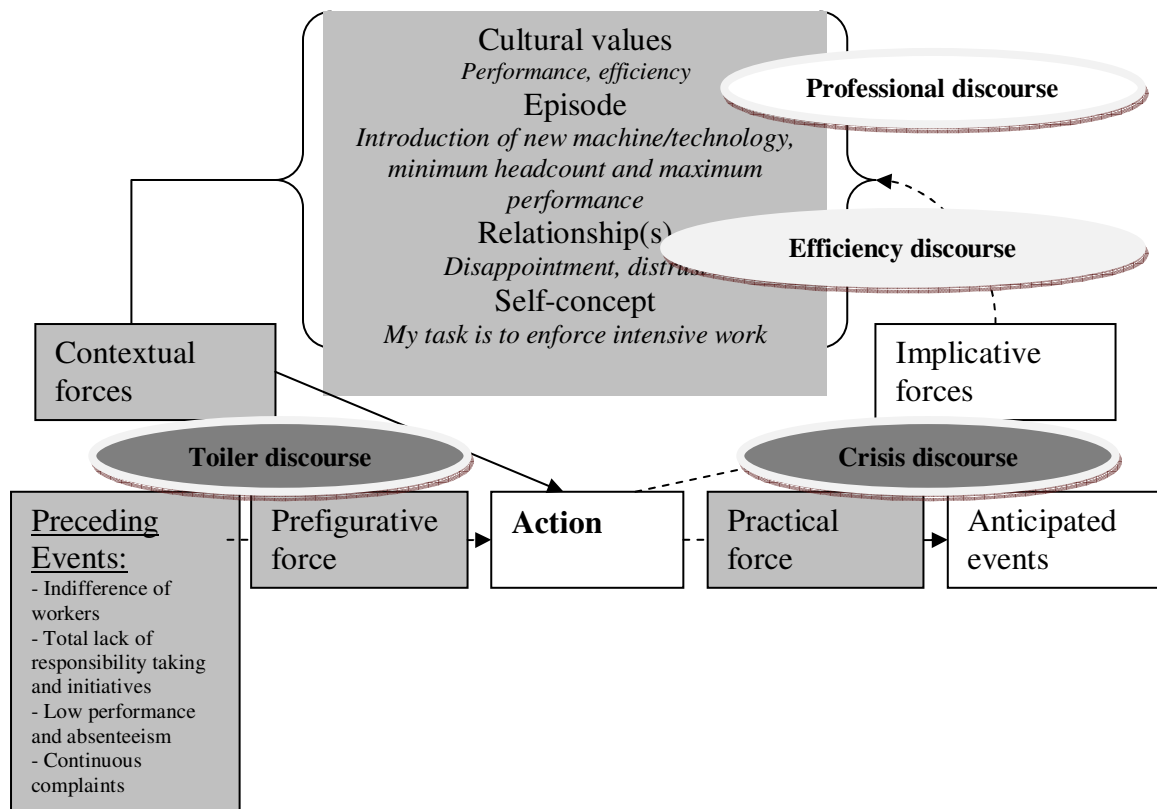
Figure 5 Most important forces and discourses affecting management activities in Factory X

With the help of the CMM analytical tools it is possible to reveal the key influencing "senses of obligation" that are enhanced by different forces. In Figure 7.5 strength of forces are indicated by the strength of the gray background colour. In the case of Factory X, contextual and prefigurative forces are the ones to have the strongest effect. Both in the case of managers and workers we can observe their decisions as something that was forced by the previous behaviour of others. Contextual forces emphatically transmit those resources (cultural value system, episode, connections and self-interpretations) that strengthen distrust, control and forcing others as a basic necessity in the decision maker. In the case of the managers of Factory X, practical forces can also be identified, but these point exclusively towards increasing efficiency and the survival of the factory. The failure of these practical forces does best to elucidate the importance of the organizational discourses, because the character and strength of this force is determined by the "crisis discourse". Crisis discourse gives an interpretation and explanation of the organizational problems and work place stress processes that are characterised by the approach to take all sacrifice in order to survive. Out of this reductionist discourse rational or moral considerations are often excluded. Its logic is "the end justifies the means" and "there are losses in all wars". Counter-productivity of this discourse is shown by the fact that, in spite of its striking power, Factory X is getting further and further away from the chances of survival. Based on the findings

of my analysis, there is a so called "toiler discourse"[11] that enhancing each other with the "crisis discourse" increases the influence of the contextual and pre-figurative forces to the extremity. "Toiler discourse" emphasises the separation of managers and workers, the inability of the workers to take responsibility (or the lack of its possibility) and the workers inferiority. In this discourse distrust and hostility between the workers and the managers is natural, which combined with the "crisis discourse" makes this war-like relationship structure more and more a reality.

In the case of Factory X I managed to also reveal through my data collection some latent, hardly effective discourses that could activate forces of other types. In the case of the managers, there is a spectacular lack of implicative forces (senses of duty pointing towards forming contextual forces). As I see it, the main reason for this is that in Factory X the "professional discourse" can only be found at a latent stage. This discourse emphasizing the appreciation for professional expertise, commitment to work and joy over good solutions to problems, is almost totally pushed in the background in Factory X. The statements fitting into the "professional discourse" are almost immediately marginalised and sometimes even made fun of. "Efficiency discourse", that is - if it works - characterised by expressions of economical and technological planning, sound and rational problem solving has also become similarly empty and suppressed. This, by now latent discourse can only be detected in retrospective thinking and nostalgic remarks. From the discourses about the present and future of Factory X the "efficiency discourse" was almost totally shut out by the "crisis discourse", that almost totally singled out in influencing practical forces.

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[11] For „toiler discourse" there is no appropriate English expression that reflects the Hungarian word „melós" perfectly. This word is used by manual workers and managers as well. This Hungarian word expresses the hard work done by the person but also has a pejorative style.

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