
The *Essentials* of the New Workplace

A Guide to the Human Impact of Modern Working Practices

Edited by

**David Holman, Toby D. Wall and
Chris W. Clegg**

University of Sheffield, UK

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University of Manchester, UK

and

Ann Howard

*Development Dimensions International,
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Preface

The make-up of today's workplace is characterised by the use of a wide array of modern working practices and technologies. Lean manufacturing, total quality management, advanced manufacturing technology, call centres, team working and knowledge management are just a few of the practices that organisations are using in their search for effectiveness. The introduction and use of these practices has provoked much debate and research on their nature and effects. A consistent theme within this has been that the social, psychological and organisational aspects of modern working practices and technologies must be considered in order to understand, design and manage them effectively. In order to bring this research together in one volume, we have invited leading authors from around the world to provide an up-to-date assessment of research on the main working practices that are shaping today's workplace. Most authors were invited to write on a particular practice, and to comment on its prevalence, to review its impact on employees' experience of work and to consider the human resource management implications of the practice. Where possible they also consider the impact of their chosen practice on performance. This theme is further developed in the final two chapters that examine, respectively, whether modern working practices and human resource practices more broadly have an effect on organisational performance in manufacturing and service sectors.

The breadth of working practices covered, the multi-disciplinary nature of the chapters and the focus on performance distinguish this book from others. We believe that this will help the reader gain a comprehensive understanding of the social, psychological and organisational aspects of modern working practices. Ultimately, though, this book is designed to make a contribution to the understanding, design and effective management of modern working practices. The book's breadth will appeal to those with an interest in industrial/organisational psychology, human resource management, management and business studies, manufacturing, production engineering and change management, as well as those who are involved in the design, implementation and effective management of innovative working practices.

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Introduction to the *Essentials* of the New Workplace

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Modern working practices and technologies are typically designed to shape the nature of work and affect employees' behaviour. They include, for example, lean manufacturing, advanced manufacturing technology, total quality management, call centres, supply-chain partnering and knowledge management. Surveys show that these practices are increasingly prevalent in organisations in advanced industrial societies (Clegg, *et al.*, 2002; Lawler, Mohrman & Ledford, 1995; Osterman, 1994; Waterson *et al.*, 1999; Wood, Stride, Wall & Clegg, 2005). Yet when modern working practices are implemented they can alter work in unintended ways, have deleterious effects on employees and not produce the hoped for improvements in employee and organisational performance (Clegg *et al.*, 1997; Parker & Wall, 1998; Patterson, West, & Wall, 2004; Waterson *et al.*, 1999). Indeed, changing working practices often creates problems for employees at all levels in the organisation. It is therefore essential that we understand the nature of modern working practices, the extent of their use, and the effects that they have on employees and organisational performance so that they can be more effectively designed and managed.

Needless to say, considerable research has already been conducted on these issues in areas such as human resource management, occupational psychology, strategic management, operations management, economics and sociology; and one of the strongest messages to come out of this research is that the social, psychological and organisational aspects of working practices and technologies must be considered in order to understand, design and manage them effectively (Cherns, 1987; McLoughlin & Harris, 1997; Salvendy, 1997; Storey, 1994; Wall, Clegg & Kemp, 1987). As such, the main premise of this book is that the social and psychological side of modern working practices and technologies must be addressed. The aims of this book are therefore to examine:

1. The nature and extent of modern working practices and technologies.
2. The impact of modern working practices on how people work and their experience of work.

Table 1.1 Definition of the modern working practices

Modern working practice	Definition
Lean manufacturing	An integrated system of production with a single production flow that is pulled by the customer. Emphasis on small batch manufacture, just-in-time, team-based work and participation to eliminate non-value-adding activities and variabilities
Total quality management	A comprehensive, organisation-wide effort that is an integrated and interfunctional means of improving the quality of products and services and of sustaining competitive advantage
Advanced manufacturing technology	The application of computer-based technology to automate and integrate the different functions in the manufacturing system
Supply-chain partnering	Developing long-term, cooperative relationships with suppliers and customers
Team work	A collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks and outcomes, who see themselves and are seen by others as a distinct social entity within a larger social unit
Call centres	A work environment in which the main business is mediated by computer and telephone-based technologies that enable the efficient distribution of calls (or allocation of outgoing calls) to available staff, and permits customer–employee interaction to occur simultaneously with the use of display screen equipment and the instant access to, and inputting of, information
Knowledge management	The use of practices, particularly IT-based technologies and community- and network-based practices, to centralise, collectivise and create knowledge so that it can be exploited to increase organisational performance and to develop new opportunities
Employee involvement and empowerment	The use of practices to increase employee control, participation and involvement, and the supply of personal and organisational resources necessary to do the job
Teleworking/Virtual working	Working remotely from the home, remote offices or other sites for all or most of the working week, and connected to the main organisation by telephone and computer technologies

3. The human resource management implications of such practices.

4. The effect that these practices have on productivity and organizational performance.

These aims are covered throughout the book. Specifically, chapters 2–10 deal with the first three aims in relation to nine important modern working practices: lean manufacturing, total quality management, advanced manufacturing technology, supply-chain partnering, team work, call centres, knowledge management, employee involvement and virtual working. These practices are defined in Table 1.1 and were chosen because their use is thought to be on the increase and to be having a significant impact the nature of work. The last two chapters are concerned with the fourth aim of the book, the relationship between modern working practices, human resource management and organisational performance. Chapter 11 focuses on manufacturing organisations, Chapter 12 on service organisations. The rest

of this chapter sets out some of the main issues that have concerned researchers when examining the area of modern working practices.

THE CONCEPTUALISATION AND NATURE OF MODERN WORKING PRACTICES

A working practice can be broadly defined as a set of technique- or technologically-based tasks that directly shape the labour process.¹ Technique-based tasks involve the practical application of a particular method, procedure or skill. Technologically-based tasks are those in which the practical application of a particular method or skill involves using technological hardware such as machinery or computers. According to this definition, working practices are likely to differ in the extent to which they use technique- or technology-based tasks. Advanced manufacturing technology primarily involves technology-based tasks; team work primarily involves technique-based tasks, whereas knowledge management appears to be a combination of technological and technique-based tasks. However, while this definition is useful in highlighting the basic nature of a working practice, and while general definitions of each working practice can be made (see Table 1.1), they hide a degree of conceptual variation within definitions of each practice. For example, Cooney and Sohal (Chapter 3) point out that TQM is “something of a fungible concept and one that is sometimes difficult to pin down. There is not one TQM, but a range of TQMs” (p. 34). They illustrate this by stating that TQM “may be seen as a technically-focused quality management programme, as a philosophy of business concerned with strategic business issues or as an organizational-behavioural intervention designed to promote the more effective use of human resources” (pp. 33–34). Similar degrees of conceptual variability are found in the concepts of advanced manufacturing technology, lean manufacturing, supply-chain partnering, call centres, team working and knowledge management.

In parallel with this conceptual variability, there is also a degree of variation in the actual form of a working practice. There are a number of reasons for this heterogeneity. First, working practices are used to achieve multiple aims, and different aspects of a practice may be emphasised in order to achieve those aims. Second, working practices rarely occur on their own as independent entities. Delbridge (Chapter 2) notes that lean manufacturing will contain TQM practices, team work and supply-chain partnering initiatives, while Benson and Lawler (Chapter 9) show how TQM can be an integral part of an employee involvement initiative. Even “remote” practices such as telework may be part of a supply-chain initiative or involve team working, albeit virtually.

Third, a modern working practice is always embedded within a broader social system and is best considered as a socio-technical system (Cherns, 1987). As a consequence, the nature of a working practice—and its effects—will be affected by the social system of which it is part. Significant aspects of the social system, and ones that are a core concern in this book, are job design and human resource practices. These two aspects will be discussed in more depth shortly, but job design varies along a continuum that runs from “Taylorist” to “Empowered” (Parker & Wall, 1998). In Taylorist jobs, employees have little discretion

¹ That working practices have direct effects on the labour process helps to distinguish it from human resource practices, which are likely to have indirect effects on the labour process.

over how they do their work and tasks tend to be unskilled and repetitive. In empowered jobs, employees are given responsibility for a broad range of varied tasks, a high degree of discretion in how they work, and opportunities to use and develop their skills and participate in decision-making processes. Human resource practices vary in the extent to which they are present in an organisation, and in their degree of sophistication. One organisation may make extensive use of high quality and continued training, regular performance appraisals, well-resourced recruitment procedures and performance-contingent payment systems (such as profit sharing); another organisation may use these for a specific group of employees, while another may use little or no induction, sophisticated selection or training practices regardless of the type of employees. It is often assumed in characterising the modern organisation that sophisticated human resource practices will be combined with empowered jobs to form what is called a high-commitment or involvement approach, while the minimal use of sophisticated human resource practices and Taylorist jobs are taken to form the low-commitment/involvement approach assumed to characterise the organisational model of the past (Lawler, 1986; Walton, 1985; see also Benson & Lawler, Chapter 9; Wood, Chapter 11; Batt & Doellgast, Chapter 12).

Throughout the book the reader will see how variations in job design and human resource practices affect the nature of a modern working practice. For example, Cooney and Sohal (Chapter 3) suggest that TQM can be used with either Taylorist or empowered jobs and that this leads to two very different sorts of TQM (cf., the distinction between total quality control and total quality learning forms of TQM; Sitkin, Sutcliffe & Schroeder (1994)). Moreover involvement initiatives, which are generally associated with empowered jobs, can be accompanied by Taylorist jobs (for an example of the latter see Adler and Borys' (1996) description of enabling or learning bureaucracies).

In sum, modern working practices are likely, so theory suggests, to be bundled together with other working practices and are embedded within a social system in which two significant aspects are job design and human resource practices. The mixture of technical and social practices means that a single practice can take on a variety of forms, and that the effects of a practice may ultimately depend on the form it takes.

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Most of us are now fairly well versed in the changes occurring in the economic, political and social landscape. These include: the internationalisation of the economy; a reduction in trade barriers between countries; the deregulation of markets; privatisation and the ending of state monopolies; increasing demands for greater accountability and efficiency in the public sector; and changing consumer demand (e.g. a desire for more customised products or better quality) (Appelbaum & Batt, 1994; Doganis, 2000; Gabriel & Lang, 1998; Katz, 1997; Pollitt, 1993). The changes have intensified competition and achieving a competitive advantage will depend on the simultaneous pursuit of cost minimisation, quality, innovation and customisation (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg & Kalleberg, 2000; Piore & Sabel, 1984). Similar demands for cost efficiencies, quality and customised services are evident in the public and not-for-profit sectors (e.g., in universities; see Peters, 1992). In addition, the creation, ownership and management of knowledge-based assets is increasingly recognised as a basis for competition (see Scarbrough, Chapter 8, on Knowledge Management, and Hodgkinson and Sparrow (2002), for the implications of knowledge management for

organisational learning processes, the co-ordination of distributed cognition and top team behaviour).

Organisational change is undoubtedly taking place in response to these general economic and societal changes and in the expectation of such changes (Sparrow & Cooper, 2003). The chapters in this book provide evidence for this organisational change through the adoption of new working practices.² There appears to be fairly widespread use (in some 40–60% of organisations) of TQM, team work and supply-chain partnering, particularly in UK manufacturing companies (Clegg *et al.*, 2002; Wood *et al.*, 2005), while the service sector has witnessed a rise in the use of team work, TQM and information technology since the 1990s (Batt & Doellgast, Chapter 12). Advanced manufacturing technology is reported as being used, at least to a moderate extent, by some 40% of all manufacturing organisations and lean manufacturing appears to be fairly widespread in the automotive industry but less extensively used in other parts of the manufacturing sector (Clegg *et al.*, 2002; Delbridge, Chapter 3). There is also evidence of initiatives that empower employees occurring in about one quarter of UK, Japanese, Australian and Swiss manufacturing organisations (Clegg *et al.*, 2002; Wood *et al.*, 2005), although Benson and Lawler (Chapter 9) do question the extent to which firms strongly embrace such initiatives and show that involvement initiatives declined in the US in the mid-1990s. Less extensive but growing in popularity are newer practices such as teleworking and knowledge management, while call centres now employ 1–2% of the working population in many industrialised nations and are of growing importance in developing economies such as India and Malaysia.

The common interpretation of the prevalence of modern working practices is that they represent part of a radical move away from the “old workplace”, characterised by Fordist large-scale, hierarchical bureaucracies designed for mass production and mass service (see Wood, 1989, pp.10–11, for a definition of Fordism). This old workplace is being replaced by a “new workplace” characterised by the co-occurrence of four factors: flexible modern working practices; high-involvement human resource practices; a managerial orientation that views these two sets of practices as integrated and complementary; and an employee orientation that is flexible and pro-active (Amin, 1994; Kumar, 1992; Lawler *et al.*, 1995; Schneider & Bowen, 1995; Storey, 1994; Unsworth & Parker, 2003; see also Wood, Chapter 11). This implies that “the new workplace” can be defined as comprising an “historical new”, i.e., the presence of new working practices, types of HR practices or bundles of practice, and an “experiential new”, i.e., the presence of qualitatively different managerial and employee orientations and experiences of self and work.

However, we must exercise some caution when applying these categories to the real world. First, a substantial proportion of organisations have not adopted many modern working practices, nor are modern working practices necessarily accompanied by high-involvement HRM. Second, “old workplace” ideas are still influencing how “modern” working practices are designed and managed, as is illustrated by the influence of Taylorism in some call centres and other service organisations (Ritzer, 1998; Taylor & Bain, 1999), and the extension and revitalisation of Fordist principles in just-in-time, an essential component of lean manufacturing (Tomaney, 1994; Wood, 1993). Third, modern working practices are

² Two caveats on this are that much of the available data comes from the US and the UK, and that not all changes are in the direction of new working practices, as some firms may be introducing practices for the first time or reformatting those associated with Taylorism.

not always accompanied by flexible, pro-active employee orientations and fundamentally different experiences of self and work. At this stage of knowledge it is safest to assume that throughout the economy there will be considerable variation across organisations. Combining our historical and experiential categories, there are logically four possible types of workplace:

1. *The “new/new” workplace* in which modern working practices are associated with a qualitatively different experience of work. For example, workplaces with a combination of TQM and employee involvement initiatives that are accompanied by qualitatively different employee orientations to work, customers and their lives.
2. *The “new/old” workplace* in which modern working practices are associated with a quantitative change in how jobs are designed but employees’ experiences of work are not radically or qualitatively different as a consequence. For example, an organisation implements TQM and it results in employees experiencing less control and more stress. However, the introduction of TQM does not alter their sense of self or orientation to work, and thus the change has been one of degree, not type.
3. *The “old/new” workplace* in which traditional working practices are associated with qualitatively new experiences of work, for example when young employees have been socialised in a different economic climate and have radically different work expectations from those normally associated with the traditional practices prevalent in their place of work.
4. *The “old/old” workplace* in which traditional working practices are associated with a relatively unchanged experience of work.

We do not have the knowledge to identify the relative prevalence of these different types of workplace. For example, we do not know enough about the exact co-occurrence of modern working practices, HRM practices, managerial orientations and employee experiences. We know even less about the effects of such practices on how people experience or approach their work.³ It is probable that all four types of workplaces will exist, but we might also speculate that it is likely that a sizeable proportion of contemporary workplaces will be a mixture of “old” and “new” (Blyton & Turnbull, 1994) and employees’ experiences will mirror this. Just as there are questions about the extent and nature of workplace change, questions are also being asked about whether the effects of change are as beneficial as many imply (Knights & Willmott, 2000; Philimore, 1989). Modern working practices and high-involvement human resource practices are often portrayed as leading to a win-win situation for the employee and the organisation. But, while there is research that demonstrates that the introduction of modern working practices can lead to more interesting work, more skilled work and lower levels of employee stress, there are also studies that show that the introduction of modern working practices can intensify work, de-skill employees and reduce well-being (Adler & Borys, 1996; Braverman, 1974; Klein, 1989; Knights, Willmott & Collinson, 1985; Parker & Wall, 1998; Sturdy, Knights & Willmott, 1992).

³ This lack of understanding of the employees’ experience partly reflects the fact that the measures typically used to assess employee experience, such as job satisfaction and job control, are not designed to assess qualitative shifts in experience, and because factors tend to be examined independently, making it harder to ascertain global aggregate changes in individual experience. Qualitative shifts in the experience of work might be discerned more readily if other factors, such as identity or the psychological contract, were assessed, or if individual change was examined in a more aggregated manner (Jermier, Knights and Nord, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; Sennett, 1998).

While definitive answers cannot yet be made about the nature of change in the workplace, this book will equip the reader with a means of achieving a critical, nuanced understanding of the contemporary workplace and its social and psychological effects on employees. To help further achieve this, it is necessary to appreciate the three main traditions in which research on the human side of working practices has been conducted. They are:

- job design theory
- human resource management and its link to organisational performance, and
- socio-political perspectives on the design and management of working practices.

JOB AND WORK DESIGN THEORY

Historically, the main focus of job design research has been on the psychological consequences of work simplification brought about through the pervasive adoption of Taylorist and Fordist approaches to work organisation. Two approaches, job characteristics and socio-technical theories, have been particularly influential.⁴ The job characteristics approach to job design has been strongly influenced by Hackman and Oldham's (1976) Job Characteristics Model (JCM). They proposed five core job dimensions (autonomy, feedback, skill variety, task identity, task significance) that determine one of three "critical psychological states". In particular, autonomy affects experienced responsibility, feedback affects knowledge of results, and skill variety, task identity and task significance affect the experienced meaningfulness of work. Collectively, these critical psychological states affect the level of work satisfaction, internal work motivation, performance, absence and labour turnover. Research has generally demonstrated that the core job characteristics all predict affective outcomes such as satisfaction and motivation, but evidence for their affects on employee behaviour, performance, turnover and absence, is less consistent (Parker & Wall, 1998, pp. 15–16). The motivating potential of job design has been a central issue within this research tradition (Campion & McClelland, 1993; Wall & Martin, 1987), as it also has been within debates on modern working practices and high-commitment human resource practices.

Karaseck and Theorell's (1990) control-demands model is another job characteristic approach that has been influential. It predicts that "high-strain jobs" are those characterised by high work demands and low control. Although the evidence for interactive effect of control and demand assumed in this prediction is inconclusive (Van Der Doef & Maes, 1999), numerous studies have confirmed that the absence of control and the presence of high job demands are consistent predictors of job-related strain (see O'Driscoll and Cooper (1996) and Parker and Wall (1998) for summaries).

The second main approach to job design has been socio-technical theory. Socio-technical theory is concerned with the design of work systems and posits that these are comprised of a technical system and a social system. These subsystems are seen as interdependent and should therefore be jointly designed in such a way that the overall system is optimal (de Sitter, den Hertog & Dankbaar, 1997). Socio-technical theory has made a number of contributions to our understanding of job design. It is best known for its articulation of a set of design principles and for its advocacy of autonomous work groups (Cherns, 1987; Clegg, 2000; Emery, 1964). These design principles include: methods of working should be minimally

⁴ For a fuller discussion of the main job design traditions, their limitations and future prospects, see Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2003; Holman, Clegg & Waterson, 2002; Parker, Wall, & Cordery, 2001.

specified; variances in work processes should be handled at source; boundaries between tasks should not be drawn to impede the sharing of information, learning and knowledge. Desirable job characteristics thus include a reasonable level of demand, opportunities for learning, and an area of decision-making owned by the operator. These principles of design for desirable jobs are seen to be best expressed in autonomous work groups (AWGs), and much socio-technical research and practice has been focused at a group level. Although it has been suggested that an “underlying lack of specificity about the nature and effects of such initiatives [i.e. AWGs] makes a coherent assessment of their outcomes difficult” (Parker *et al.*, 2001, p. 416), research demonstrates that AWGs can have positive effects on well-being and productivity (Parker & Wall, 1998).

Another notable feature of job design research is that it has reflected many of the debates and issues concerned with the changing nature of work. For example, the recent interest in cognition and knowledge at work has focused attention on cognitive job characteristics, such as problem-solving demands and attention demand (Jackson, Wall, Martin & Davids, 1993), and the opportunity to develop and utilise skills (O’Brien, 1986; Holman & Wall, 2002), as well as knowledge-based job outcomes, such as skill and self-efficacy (Holman & Wall, 2002; Parker & Wall, 1998). Consideration has also been given to the development of skills and knowledge as a mediator of the link between job characteristics and performance, as these make employees better able to deal with variances in the work process (Miller & Monge, 1986) and to decide the best strategy to deal with a particular situation (Frese & Zapf, 1994; Wall, Corbett, Martin, Clegg & Jackson, 1990; Wall, Jackson, & Davids, 1992).

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Key concepts in human resource management (HRM) theory are fit and synergy (Wood, 1999). Three types of fit can be identified:

1. The internal fit between human resource management practices.
2. The organisational fit between HRM systems—coherent sets of HRM practices—and other systems within the organisation.
3. The strategic fit between HRM systems and organisational strategy.

The discussion of internal fit centres on the idea that some HRM practices combine better than others, and that coherent bundles of practice will have synergistic effects. A corollary of this is that any difference in organisational performance between organisations will be partly explained by the differential usage of bundles of practice. Two main bundles of HRM practice are normally identified, at least as ideal types, that correspond to the high-involvement (or high-commitment) approach and low-involvement approach (Lawler, 1986; Walton, 1985; see also Benson and Lawler, Chapter 9; Batt & Doellgast, Chapter 12).

The rationale of the high-involvement approach is that a particular bundle of HRM practices is needed to recruit, develop and maintain a workforce with the high-level technical, cognitive and interpersonal skills that are assumed to be necessary if organisations are to deal with rapidly changing demands, to provide a high quality service or product, and, crucially, to realise the full potential of complex modern working practices (Becker & Huselid, 1998;

Lawler *et al.*, 1995; Steedman & Wagner, 1987; see also Chapter 8 on knowledge management). The human resource practices used to achieve this include: employee involvement schemes; job flexibility; continued training; performance appraisal; well-resourced selection and recruitment procedures; and performance-contingent payment systems (Wood, 1999). In addition, jobs must be designed so as to provide employees with a high degree of discretion and responsibility so that employees can use their skills and abilities in the most effective manner, respond to variances in the work process as they occur and exhibit discretionary behaviours (Susman & Chase, 1986).

The rationale of the low-involvement approach is that it may not be desirable, possible or strategically necessary to use a costly but highly skilled workforce. For example, an organisation may offer a simple service or product to a mass market in which profit margins are low and in which they compete on low cost. Organisational effectiveness depends on keeping costs low. This is achieved by using simplified, Taylorist jobs with low variety and discretion so that less skilled, cheaper labour can be used. The use of unskilled labour also means that less sophisticated recruitment practices can be used and that little training is needed.

The current emphasis on the high-involvement HRM system as a replacement for an outmoded Taylorist, bureaucratic and low-involvement approach implies that it will have positive effects on organisational performance in all circumstances. From this “universalistic” perspective, modern working practices are most effective when underpinned by a highly skilled and committed workforce and secured through appropriate human resource management practices (Becker & Huselid, 1998; Lawler *et al.*, 1995; Walton, 1985). This implies that the high-involvement HRM system is a necessary but not sufficient basis for high performance. The added ingredient is modern working practices, such as TQM and lean manufacturing. It is matching or aligning high-involvement systems and modern working practices that will maximise performance (Wood, Chapter 11; Beaumont, 1995; Kochan & Osterman, 1995).

An alternative to this approach is the “contingency” approach, which places emphasis on strategic fit, and on the need for the HRM system to be chosen in the light of the organisation’s strategy. A common formulation of this is that a high-involvement system will fit an innovation/quality strategy and a low-involvement system will fit a cost-minimisation strategy (Batt, 2000; Hoque, 1999; Schuler & Jackson, 1987). These different approaches are presented and discussed in more depth in Chapters 9, 11 and 12.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROCESSES IN THE DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT OF MODERN WORKING PRACTICES

A basic assumption of this book is that job design and human resource management are fundamental to an understanding of modern working practices. However, much job design and HRM literature neglects the issue of why a particular practice takes its current form. Neither does it have much to say on the active role that employees play in shaping practices. In contrast, interpretivist research has illuminated how the political and social assumptions of those involved in the design and introduction of new technology become embedded within the technology, in the form of prescriptive design rationales that prescribe a particular view of how work is undertaken (Moran & Carroll, 1996). The configuration of a technology and the social practices that surround them can be seen, at any one point in time, as an outcome of

social and political negotiation between various groups (Barley, 1990; Buchanan & Boddy, 1983; Mueller *et al.*, 1986; Orlikowski, 1992). Technologies can therefore be understood as “a frozen assemblage of practices, assumptions, beliefs [and] language” that has become “fixed” in a material form (Cooper & Woolgar, 1993, p. 2) and, because of this, design processes have lasting effects on job design, productivity and the quality of working life.

Critical research within the labour process tradition has drawn attention to how management attempt to instil within workers the belief that organisational objectives are their own and to ensure that these objectives are considered when making judgements at work. From this perspective, managements try to use working practices as mechanisms through which employees are encouraged into making positive productive responses (Grenier, 1988; Knights & Sturdy, 1990). But workers need not be seen as passive reactors to management initiatives. Rather, labour process theory treats workers as active agents who have to consciously comply with managerial efforts to control them and may equally resist these, and that these psychological processes in turn shape working practices (Burawoy, 1979; Collinson, 1994; Knights, 1990; Sturdy *et al.*, 1992).

These two approaches that emphasise the social and political processes involved in the design, introduction and management of modern working practices paint a dynamic picture of organisational life in which employees actively shape working practices and one in which there may be conflicting interests over their uses and aims (see Chapter 7 on call centres).

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this chapter has been to set the scene for the rest of the book by discussing the working practices that organisations are using to respond to the changing social and economic landscape and introducing the main issues and theoretical approaches to the social and psychological side of modern working practices. This brief introduction suggests that a number of critical questions that the reader can bear in mind when reading this book. They are:

The New Workplace

- How prevalent are modern working practices?
- What is the evidence for the co-occurrence of working practices, job design and human resource practices?
- What is the evidence for the co-occurrence of working practices and particular types of managerial and employee orientations and experiences?
- To what extent does a new workplace exist?

Job and Work Design

- What are the impacts of new technologies and new working practices on job content?
- How do the job and work designs of modern working practices vary?
- What are the core job characteristics of modern working practices?
- What effects do the particular job designs of working practices have on employee well-being and performance?

- Through what mechanisms do job characteristics affect job outcomes in modern working practices?

Human Resource Management

- What human resource practices are used in conjunction with modern working practices?
- How do HRM practices affect the form of a practice?
- How do HRM and modern working practices affect employee and organisational performance?

Social and Political Factors in the Design and Management of Modern Working Practices?

- How do the designs of modern working practices arise?
- How are working practices shaped and configured by the various actors?
- What are the values and goals of the actors?
- Do these values conflict and, if they do, how is this expressed?

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