# 2

# ENTERING AND LEAVING

This chapter explores the realties of joining a new organization, becoming socialized and part of the culture, and then exiting or moving on Each of these interlinked areas highlights specific organizational processes and procedures – such as recruitment, selection, redundancy programmes, downsizing and retirement. But, also, in their different ways, each is shaped and experienced through individual and organizational politics, values and emotions. How do we learn to survive or thrive in an organization? When does this work well and when does it fail?

Joining a new organization is usually a memorable experience, because of its mix of emotions – apprehension, excitement, tension, confusion. Each new encounter, each new person introduced, adds to the impression of what the place is like. It is the first of many steps through which we become part of something called 'the organization'. But while we gradually fuse with the organization, we also help make it what it is – we confirm and reproduce its culture and, maybe, change it.

Our initial experiences set some of the psychological and physical boundaries to the place that we call **work**. We cautiously experiment with what we say or do. What is the reaction? Is it acceptable? We are learning our way around, finding where we fit in. In social science terminology, we are seeking clues to the culture, **norms** and **values** of the community we are entering. None of this appears in the organization's recruitment literature. There may be a hint of things to come from rumours and stories about the organization. Mostly, however, we have to find out as we go along.

Leaving the organization changes the scene. It may occur smoothly and comfortably at the statutory end of a working lifetime. Traditionally, this has been celebrated in eulogies and the presentation of gifts, often for long, loyal service. But this picture is becoming rarer. Fewer organizations nowadays have permanent employees, signed up for a lifetime **career**. There is a flow of short and medium-term appointments, a coming and going. Entering and leaving can often be a fairly anonymous affair, neither particularly celebrated nor mourned. Aaron, an engineering manager, makes the point:

> You know, in this place it's hard to keep track of who's joining and who's away. People are moving around all the time. I'm now on my third assistant in 18 months! I keep getting emails from my boss about who's arriving and who's going – would I like to sign a farewell card? Often I haven't a clue who they are! Working in project teams doesn't help. When the project ends, people move on – sometimes here, sometimes to another company, sometimes unemployed. It's a peculiar atmosphere, but I take it for granted now.

While Aaron has accepted the rapid changes, those seeking stability and security at work can feel unsettled by the shifting patterns. The temporariness, the faces that come and go, reduce feelings of belonging and commitment to the organization – 'I obviously have to look after myself here; I'm on my own'.

Retrenchment and downsizing sharpen the picture. Layoffs and redundancies are commonplace in our times of boom and bust. They mark a pragmatic approach by companies: when times are tough, people will lose their jobs; they are costly 'extras'. They may also be victims of a **management** fashion to create a 'leaner', 'fitter', or 're-engineered' organization. But redundancy, for whatever reason, is typically a harsh way of separating a person from an organization and can leave psychological – as well as organizational – scars. Like most separations or drastic changes, it quickly exposes the raw elements of the relationship between the individual and the organization.

## GETTING IN – FIRST IMPRESSIONS

### Why Join Shell?

The Shell emblem is reproduced with permission of Shell Brands International AG.

The top five reasons to join us:

- We're committed to securing a responsible future.
- We offer huge diversity.
- We're at the forefront of technology.
- We offer great training and development.
- We're truly global.

> Shell lets you choose. What you do and where your career goes depends entirely on how curious you are. There are no limitations. Shell invests in its people and recognises them as its most valuable asset. (Amir)

> I have great opportunities to make a difference by influencing the content of policies that are being developed for all Shell businesses in the UK and across the EPE businesses. I love working in an environment where I have real responsibilities, where I continue to be challenged and where I can add real value to the development of others – that's what's important to me. (Joanne)

Glossy brochures and company websites, like Shell's, contain enticing descriptions of corporate life[1]. They are skilled exercises in public relations, designed to extol the benefits and delights of joining the organization. Collectors of recruitment brochures will detect common images. They suggest, for example:

- multi-ethnicity
- advancement
- training
- internationalization
- equal opportunities
- serious work
- the latest technologies
- excitement.

In these ways, the organization parades its best costume, carefully tailored to influence the newcomer. The business of self-presentation has begun, exposing the surface symbols of the organization's **culture**. Shell includes a statement of corporate values that suggests care for the environment and contribution to community development. McDonald's vision is to 'put people at the centre of everything we do – and that goes for our employees as much as our customers'. And the British Army promises that 'Army life is always full of challenges and no two days will ever be the same'.

The formal apparatus of the organization has swung into action – and there is more to come. Wooing new, desirable-looking, employees means presenting an attractive organizational image. Blemishes are heavily camouflaged or simply left out of the picture. It is assumed, not unreasonably, that when people have to make a difficult decision on what job to choose, relatively unambiguous information is helpful. Given that the organization wants your skills, they gain little by revealing that, actually, there are controversies over its environmental record, that its employment practices are sometimes exploitative, that very few black people or women get to the top, that you might be bullied, that international travel is reserved for senior managers, that the computer system is in desperate need of renewal, or that the training budget has just been substantially cut. Moreover, it is likely that many potential applicants will want to believe the organization is glamorous, socially responsible, international, aggressive, or whatever, because that represents some ideal image they hold of themselves. They are therefore content to collude in the **myth** of the exemplary organization – especially if jobs are in short supply. The business of selection has begun; both parties – candidate and organization – are exchanging the **impressions** they want to present to one another.

Typically, interested job candidates will groom themselves for the part. 'Respectable' suits and shirts – 'power dressing' – replace casual wear for males and females alike.

**Men's Interview Attire**

- Suit (solid color – navy or dark grey)
- Long-sleeved shirt (white or coordinated with the suit)
- Belt
- Tie
- Dark socks, conservative leather shoes
- Little or no jewelry
- Neat, professional hairstyle
- Limited aftershave
- Neatly trimmed nails
- Portfolio or briefcase

**Women's Interview Attire**

- Suit (navy, black or dark grey)
- The suit skirt should be long enough so you can sit down comfortably
- Coordinated blouse
- Conservative shoes
- Limited jewelry (no dangling earrings or arms full of bracelets)
- No jewelry is better than cheap jewelry
- Professional hairstyle
- Neutral-coloured tights
- Light make-up and perfume
- Neatly manicured and clean nails
- Portfolio or briefcase

**Figure 2.1** How to dress for an interview

There are recruitment consultants keen to advise on such matters, such as About.com. Figure 2.1 shows some of their suggestions.

To deviate too far from expected, conservative dress risks being stereotyped, labelled as 'unreliable', 'radical', or 'will not fit in'. First appearances are notoriously poor guides to character; nevertheless, we use them all the time in our interpersonal judgments. Street-wise job applicants know this, and learn to adjust their résumés to the requirements of the job – accentuating some features and playing down others. They also research the organization in advance to demonstrate the seriousness of their intent to an interviewer. Some will have topped off their armoury of **skills** with special training on being an effective interviewee, to create the right impression or **perception** (countered, ironically, by interviewers trained to see beneath a feigned presentation).

## CONVINCING PERFORMANCES

The initial coming together of company and candidate involves careful make-up and posturing. At first sight, this may appear irritatingly trivial: 'what's it got to do with the real me, and the actual job?' But the way we present ourselves to others, through a rich array of social protocols – language, dress, gestures, rhetoric – constitutes an essential part of social reality. From an early age, we learn certain social conventions through which we can interact – with a fair amount of shared meaning. There is much


**Figure 2.2** cartoon

*Source*: www.cartoonstock.com/directory/s/smart_dress.asp. © Original Artist Reproduction rights obtainable from www.CartoonStock.com

'impression management'. We are constantly managing how we come over to others, wanting to look 'right' in their eyes.

At certain points in time, getting our **performance**, appearance or act right – doing what is socially correct within extant conventions – is vitally important. This holds as much for a first romantic date as a selection **interview**. The moment is all. If we fail in our judgement or act, we risk rejection. This sometimes means a strange 'double take', of the sort: 'I need to give that person interviewing me a strong impression of my strengths and enthusiasm for the job. But I'm sure she knows I'm doing that, so will she believe what I say?' If we extend this analysis, it is possible to view life as a stream of public performances, a dramaturgy, accompanied by private, in-the-head, commentaries.

## Selection

The time and effort a company wishes to devote to selecting its employees can vary enormously. A selection decision may be made on the basis of a letter or web-based application and a short interview. In the now global recruitment market, the face-to-face interview can be dispensed with in favour of a virtual interview via video conference, web cam, or the services of a recruitment consultant to screen candidates.

Many large companies subject candidates for managerial and professional jobs to a sequence of interviews, **psychological tests**, group discussions and exercises. Assessors will record their observations and candidates will be judged against a set of previously agreed criteria of competence. This is the questionable arena of selection. Questionable, because there are many studies which reveal that devices such as selection interviews and **personality** tests have variable reliability and predictability. Judging people's competence in areas such as leadership, interpersonal relationships, working under

pressure and so forth is notoriously difficult, not least because, as suggested earlier, a candidate's performance in a selection procedure can reveal as much, if not more, about that procedure as the candidate's actual work behaviour. But an elaborate selection process offers the apparent reassurance that a poor decision will be unlikely and it will be possible to control entry to the organization. It is also a **ritual** through which difficult decisions can be made to appear possible. With tools that promise objectivity, selector and candidate alike can feel that a thorough and fair job is being done.

Sometimes the **ritual** of selection can border on the absurd or reckless when some of the common methods are omitted, or treated too casually. In 2003, for example, officials at Buckingham Palace, the London residence of the British monarch, failed to do a basic web search which could instantly have revealed details about a particular applicant for a footman's job. They also failed to follow up a brief telephone conversation they had had with the applicant's referee. The man, nevertheless, got the job. He happened to be an investigative journalist for a major newspaper. He was given access to some of the most sensitive areas of the Palace in a time of very high concern about security and terrorism. Moreover, the Palace was supposedly ringed by foolproof security. Events such as these show selection in a different light: how it is done provides a clue to how the organization appears to care for its staff and how professional it is in some of its judgements and procedures.

## Politics and Cultures

Yet the elegance, or professionalism, of a selection procedure does not insulate it from political influences. **Politics** focuses attention on the personal interests and idiosyncrasies of the selectors and their power to make their own particular judgements prevail. They also demonstrate that we often need to turn our attention to *informal* mechanisms in the organization for a more complete understanding of what is happening.

An associate of ours failed to win a top appointment with a London-based publishing company. She was one of two shortlisted candidates and she had attended four separate interviews, the last one being with a panel of directors in the company. To all outward intents and purpose, the job should have been hers. She had a fine reputation in her field – she outshone the other candidate in her qualifications and experience. Furthermore, the night before the final interview, she heard, from an 'inside source', that the job was hers. So what went wrong?

It was hard to find out – details of the proceedings were secret, as they often are. But the insider, now much embarrassed, was determined to uncover the reason. It transpired that, in the final interview, our colleague had mentioned that if she were offered the job, she would have to commute to work for a time. Her family were well settled in their home town out of London where her children went to school. She would consider setting up a second home if necessary, but first she would like to take the commuting route. The point was well taken, with apparent sympathy, during the interview. Her honesty, however, proved to be a tactical error. After the interview, the Managing Director, who was chairing the selection panel, declared firmly that this was not his idea of commitment or loyalty to the job; it was not what he would do if he were in the applicant's position. He would not permit the appointment of someone who did not move to the job right away. **Prejudices** and dubious practices meld in the informal practices that underpin some selection decisions.

Job applicants who dutifully respond to advertised vacancies can unwittingly fall foul of invisible political structures. Personal contacts and friendship networks bring some people, but not others, to the special attention of employers. In close communities, informal channels (rumour, casual chat) can keep many available jobs filled – especially in times when work is scarce. It is not unknown for an applicant to be processed right through a selection procedure, ignorant of the fact that the job has already been offered to someone else – secretly. Sometimes, when various people are involved in an appointment (such as a specially convened interview panel), not all of them know that there is already a favoured candidate – something that is revealed in the discussions and **political** squabbles following the interview.

This is a clear example of 'homosocial reproduction', rather inelegant shorthand for the phenomenon of hiring people who are similar to influential people already in place. Put another way, people feel less **anxious** about working with others who are like them, so they will consciously or unconsciously veer toward people who seem, on first impressions, like them in social values and **attitudes**. This is the psychological explanation for the 'old school tie' phenomenon – feeling warmer towards people who share one's own educational background, especially a specific school or university. It also accounts for why certain, 'strong', organizational cultures perpetuate themselves: that 'Shell', 'Disney', 'Hewlett Packard' or 'Marks and Spencer' way.

A strong **organizational culture**, where everyone shares a common vision and purpose (often influenced by a charismatic chief executive), can be a recipe for corporate success. It is an idea that gained prominence in the 1970s to account for the considerable success of Japanese organizations. Japanese organizations and Japanese society, it was argued, foster values of cooperation, loyalty, innovation, flexibility and sheer hard work, which account for their success. Above all, Japanese companies have strong cultures, which bond their members into highly cohesive and effective teams (although under fairly paternalistic management). In sharp contrast to many Western companies, they are part of a bigger 'us'. People are inspired to great feats of productivity, seeing themselves as heroes. A British, an American and a Japanese car worker, runs the story, were asked by a researcher what they do: 'I'm fitting hub-caps' says the British worker; 'I'm making profits for Henry Ford', says the American; 'I'm a member of a team who make the best cars in the world', says the Japanese worker.

The Japanese success story has faded in recent years, as have many of the Western corporations that have followed their lead. This is because strong cultures have been found to work well in stable social and economic times, but when they need to respond to rapid economic or social **changes**, to transform themselves to survive, they are often slow and ponderous. Indeed, it almost spelled the demise of an inward-looking Marks and Spencer in the 1990s. The company had failed to acknowledge and respond to radically changing consumer tastes.

## SETTLING IN AND SOCIALIZATION

The period of settling in can be a confusing time. The cultural messages from the recruitment literature and selection process do not always match the actualities of being in the organization. The first hint about organizational *sub-cultures* begin to emerge – the sales department is cynical about the production unit; both despair about the poor service from the human resources department; no one speaks to quality control.

**Sub-culture** is an important concept in that it describes the special understandings, bondings, shared backgrounds and beliefs of particular groups within an organization. They are *sub*-cultures because they exist beneath the wider organizational culture. While the *overall* culture of an organization may be shared by everyone, significant sub-cultures will bind, say, just all women within the organization, all the older staff, all the black employees or all the smokers who meet outside the building for a cigarette break. These people may feel that, irrespective of rank or department, they are emotionally bonded through their particular common experience, background or heritage. Different departments may develop their own sub-cultures and end up seeing other departments as 'them'.

Some of these organizational sub-cultures may challenge the **values** promoted by management. For example, one of our students worked for a large accounting firm, the product of a recent merger. The merged company produced an attractive brochure extolling its 'core values' – the fundamental beliefs which supposedly underpinned its whole way of working: 'excellence, dedication, team work, decisiveness and integrity'. But these values, according to our student, carried little credibility with the staff. In her own words:

> The merger had produced a company in which people refer to themselves as ex-A or ex-B; different paperwork and different procedures are still in operation. As far as decisiveness is concerned, after nine months of negotiation, no decision has been made by the two rival camps about which computer system should be used. As for integrity, who can forget that the man who masterminded the merger, and who now stands behind the 'values campaign', had told the financial world that there would be no merger, just three months before the event?

In these instances, we can talk of the emergence of 'counter cultures', which define themselves through their opposition to the dominant value system – or at least to the values of those who dominate. Newcomers are exposed to such cultural nuances, sometimes in surprising ways. For example:

> Christine started working at a branch of an elite jewellers which was based in the duty-free area of Manchester airport in the UK. 'I had a short training in which the company's main values were drummed into me. Customer service – doing anything to please the customer and effect a sale. It didn't take me long to realize that this was not how the employees saw it. I was surprised to see that the unspoken rule among employees was to be as difficult and unpleasant to the customers as possible. If a customer was in a hurry to catch a plane, staff would prolong the procedure to the point where the customer was red with impatience. If a customer appeared not very well off and asked for a price, staff would say: "this is outside your price range, Sir." In fact, I soon realized that there was a kind of league table – the more unpleasant and difficult you were to the customers, the more you rose up the scale.'
>
> Hassan discovered he had made a mistake and mentioned it to his boss. 'Listen', retorted the boss, '**you** haven't made a mistake. The system has. Whenever something is wrong, you must come and tell me the accounts system has screwed up. Then we can look at the problem and try to improve the system. The system will lose prestige, whereas you'll have gained recognition because you spotted the error. You see, this company likes winners'.

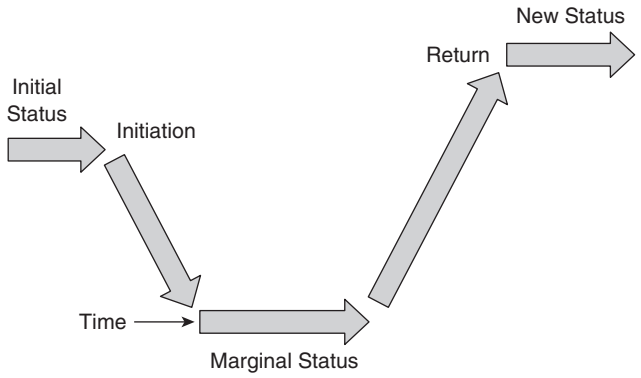


**Figure 2.3** Rite of passage

These events are **rites of passage**, ways by which established organizational members initiate and socialize new people into the actual working customs of the organization. Rites of passage appear in all communities and have long fascinated anthropologists. They are key processes or events that affirm or deny a worker full status amongst their colleagues. Figure 2.3 tracks the way one's status shifts during a rite of passage, from entering the initiation process to successful accomplishment.

Rites of passage can sometimes be gentle and full of light but pointed humour. At other times, they can be harsh, even humiliating. Indeed, groups as diverse as military personnel, prisoners, chefs, the police and fire-fighters will use degradation as a way of socializing the newcomer. Others are mixed in their methods. For instance, waitresses can confront some **stressful** challenges in order to 'make the grade' with their colleagues:

> I remember my cousin who was hazed [initiated] in a job. It was her first night as a cocktail waitress in a bar. Her manager and colleagues told her, about 20 minutes into the job (so she was already set up for stress), that a key part of her job was counting how many straws and napkins she was distributing to customers that evening. It was a Friday night in a college town bar. You can imagine how crazy the place got. Well, needless to say, she lost count, and things got dicey. Some convincing drama by the manager and colleagues reduced her to tears by 2:30 am. Then she was let in on the joke. All night, her colleagues had been observing her frantic efforts to comply with the napkin/straw inventorying, and it must have given them all that warm fuzzy sense of re-commitment to the team. But I can tell you it bonded her instantly to the organization and she got a lot of mileage out of the story over the years.[2]

Rites of passage are part of the unwritten socialization procedures of organizational life; they are not to be found neatly listed in a job description. They are akin to a second selection system, but are every bit as important as the first one. Surviving them connects the individual to the work group, an emotional bonding that is crucial for group cohesion and is at the core of an organization's sub-culture. Rites of passage reveal themselves most clearly and consistently in strong-culture companies. For example, some present new employees with a series of specific hurdles to jump – surviving punishing

working hours; performing very basic work to remind them of their humble status in the face of all they will have to learn; complete immersion in one part of the company's core business until they have full mastery of it; sacrificing domestic and leisure time for the company. McDonald's, the pervasive hamburger chain, is meticulous in ceremonially rewarding its staff with badges and certificates as they move from one hurdle to the next. In this way, one's progress is visibly delayed until one conforms to the company's expectations. Such is the potency of this form of conditioning that it can take a remarkably short time for people to fall into line. They soon speak the corporate language and perform according to the rules: socialization is complete. This often involves a change in self-identity where our self gets fused, to a lesser or greater extent, with those with whom we now feel we belong. The tell-tale signs of this are when people start making statements about what 'we' are doing at work; 'our' latest project; the way government fails to understand 'our' way of working and so forth. 'I' is not used; it has become part of a greater whole.

## ... AND LEAVING

Some people leave organizations quietly, unnoticed. This can be because it is the way they want it: they are uncomfortable about public attention on themselves. Alternatively, they may be part of a floating population of temporary workers who have no deep, or sustained, attachment to the organization. As we have mentioned, such impermanence is becoming much more prevalent in today's organizations. For longer-term employees, however, the farewell party is perhaps the most common organizational ritual, an exit rite of passage. There are the complimentary farewell speeches tinged with nostalgia and humour and the presentation of a gift. A mix of alcohol and bonhomie helps transcend political frictions which may have existed and the leaver should feel able to quit gracefully, with a sense of completion to his or her endeavours. A brief period of mourning may follow, with people talking about how things used to be when the leaver was around. If the person strongly influenced the direction of the organization (for good or ill), his or her memory may be enshrined in stories which are passed on to future employees.

As well as marking an end to someone's organizational efforts, the farewell celebration legitimates vacating the job for someone else. It is problematic if this point is misread, or misunderstood. To illustrate: many a leaver will exit to the sentiment, 'it will be great to see you around here any time.' Those who respond literally to such an invitation may be disappointed, as the following tale from a human resources manager reveals:

> Brian was a production executive. He loved his work with us; I guess he was a workaholic. He's been retired about a year now. We gave him a lavish send-off, a huge party. He was a popular man, you see. About a month after he left, he popped in to see us. Of course, it was great to see him and to exchange stories. I got the feeling then that he wasn't adjusting too well to retirement. He said he'd keep in touch with us, and that he did! It seemed like every week he'd be in – trying, really, to be where he thought he belonged. Eventually, one of his old colleagues came to see me, in despair. 'He's driving us mad,' he said. 'He's a nice guy, but we don't want him any more. He wants to do our job for us; he can't let go.'

The emotional bonds of organizing are very real, but they are often temporary and heavily entwined with daily work routines. The leaving ritual effectively marks an end to a person's organizational membership and disenfranchisement can be rapid. Only special friendships survive. Without the everyday sharing of work, old interpersonal attachments are left without roots, or a proper context for expression. This can come as quite a shock to people who quickly find their old workmates relative strangers once they have left the organization. More cynically, one can regard many organizational relationships as a means to an end. We try to get on with people because we have to – to get the job done, to get through the day, to earn a living.

Recently, exiting organizations and employment has become complicated by an additional factor: the longer active lifespan of many workers and a trend away from a mandatory retirement age. Changing demographic patterns have challenged traditional notions of retirement. There is an increasing number of people wanting to work beyond 60 or 65 years of age and many are supported by legislation that outlaws age discrimination at work. Furthermore, as both the state and employers begin to withdraw from pension provision, many workers need to supplement their existing pensions with further paid work.

These changes have opened the door to more flexible retirement policies: some employees choose to continue to work full-time into their senior years, deferring the exit process, while others will complete the retirement ritual, only to return to their previous jobs on a part-time basis. For employers, such arrangements challenge any overt or covert ageism in their employment policies, while offering the benefits of retaining important knowledge, skills and social capital.

Yet there is another image of leaving, which is far removed from the canapés and congratulations. This is the world of redundancy, restructuring and **downsizing**. People have to leave because their jobs are no more. The vagaries of the market economy can sometimes, seemingly overnight, turn a 'caring, family' organization into a beast which consumes its own children – in order to survive commercially. 'Our most important asset, people', rarely endures a severe downturn in trade, a world recession, or new mechanization; other interests take precedence. Yet when people invest fair parts of themselves and their security in their employing organizations, job loss comes as a very upsetting event. A person's identity is at stake. For the first-time **unemployed**, the loss of income, status and routine activity can feel like a collapse of **meaning** at the centre of their lives. Those who have been made redundant more than once tread warily through the world of work, cautious about their commitment to any one company and with a sense of detachment – 'it's just a job'.

Organizations approach the management of redundancy in different ways. The closest one finds to a supportive ritual is in attempts to soften the blow through generous redundancy payments and 'outplacement' support – to help people find new jobs or other activity. Otherwise, there is a mishmash of responses. Some senior managers cannot face the task of announcing redundancies themselves, so they delegate it to an internal, or external, 'hatchet person', some of whom are well practised at that kind of work. Then there are people who find out about their own redundancy from internal rumours or what they read in their local newspaper. Others hear by letter, or return from a break to find that their job is no more. The UK Accident Group has added a new dimension to this process. The company employed a large number of staff to advise clients on how to recover damages due to accidents they had suffered.

In 2003, without warning, all staff received a mobile phone text message that they were not being paid and were redundant, forthwith. The company had gone out of business. The message came as a huge shock. But the technology that carried the message added insult to the injury.

In sum, we cannot but wonder at the apparent courtesy and charm which can bring a person into an organization, and the acrimony and disarray which, sometimes, can mark the leaving. Perhaps, most of all, it reminds us of the curious fragility of social orders and of organizing.

**KEY POINTS**

- Entering and leaving organizations are critical transitions in our work lives.
- Most organizations wish to present a glossy image to the outside world, but once inside an organization, one often gets a different picture.
- The rational procedures of recruitment and selection are often overlaid with political interests – which may not give the candidate a 'fair' hearing or decision.
- Entering and leaving is marked by both formal and informal social rituals, exposing the deeper aspect of the organization's culture and sub-cultures.
- There is a gradual process of getting to know one's place in an organization – learning its customs and practices, becoming socialized. This is crucial to survival, and can sometimes be testing.
- An organization can soon become part of our self-image and identity, complicating departures, especially forced departures.
- We can insulate ourselves from the stresses of job change by reducing our commitment to an employer.

**› › › › › › › › › › › › THEORETICAL SIGNPOSTS › › › › › › › › › › › ›**

The major ideas in this chapter can be found in three main areas:

- career theory
- dramaturgy and impression management
- socialization and rites of passage.

## Career theory

Entering an organization has traditionally been associated with a step on the career ladder, a notion that can be traced to the seminal writings of Max Weber and his ideal

type bureaucracy (Weber, 1946). Workers can gradually ascend the hierarchical ladder as they acquire more qualifications and experience; and their personal identity is much determined by their work role, their position and their organization. While this picture has not vanished, career theorists are now more concerned with. 'post-bureaucratic' organizations, where structures are more fluid and people are in and out of different types of work, refining their 'employability' through training and education (see Hall, 1996; Osterman and Arthur, 1998). Theorists, such as Arthur and Rousseau (1996) and Hall (1996) have described the 'boundaryless career' where people criss-cross different employment sectors. Others talk of 'portfolio careers' (Handy, 1996) where several mini-careers or contrasting jobs are pursued with no exclusive commitment to any one or to any single employer. Flexibility is the key. Post-modern theorists, such as Fournier (1997) and Grey (1994) have argued that such shifts are marked by more fragmented personal identities, assisted by. 'disciplinary technologies', such as frequently re-crafted CVs and advice on new ways of presenting who you are.

## Dramaturgy and Impression Management

These are rooted in the seminal work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1959). He speaks of the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life – how we don particular 'masks' and use role 'scripts' to give the right social impressions to others. In his turn, Goffman was inspired by role theory, a cornerstone of social psychology (Biddle, 1986). Dramaturgy, as the label suggests, takes the theatre as analogy for social life and the importance of pulling off a good performance – as befits formal interviews for jobs and other social encounters where we are being evaluated or judged. For dramaturgists, appearances are everything and rehearsals are vital: we are managing the impressions we give off to others and adjusting them to particular contexts. These can sometimes be subtle processes as we adjust to the feedback we receive from others. Following such ideas, writers such as Mangham and Overington (1987), Rosen (1985) and Giacalone and Rosenfeld (1991) have looked at the nature of impression formation in a variety of.organizational events or settings.

## Socialization and Rites of Passage

Socialization theory aims to explain how we become part of a social unit, gradually adopting some of its ways: norms, values and beliefs. Schein (1968) argues that socialization in the organization's process varies in its consistency. Some individuals may accept socialization and conform, while others will rebel or even adapt the organizational norms to their own needs. In other words, it can often involve conflict and struggles. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) focus on the importance of organizational learning in a dynamic model of socialization, where tacit knowledge – such as stories and gossip – is in constant interplay with formal knowledge – the sort found in rule books, reference manuals and job descriptions. The two different sorts of knowledge inform each other while sharing tacit knowledge is fundamental to the process of socialization.

Rites of passage are often intrinsic to organizational socialization, defining the passage from one status to another. Its academic origins attest to the early twentieth century work of anthropologist Arnold Gennep (2004). He noted how particular rites,

or ceremonies – such as baptism, marriage and funerals – were key to a major change in one's position in society. He argued that all rites of passage are marked by a phase when the individual is separate from their social group; a phase when they are in 'liminality', between the old and new groups; and a final phase when then have passed successfully into their new group. Formal rites of passage can be found in the swearing-in ceremony that marks a foreigner's passage to full citizenship of a nation, and an employee's need to complete the 'rites' of their company training programme in order to move from probation to full-employee status. Informally, organizational folklore abounds with stories of ritual fun or humiliation that the novice must bear in order to become fully accepted. Indeed, some writers, such as Nuwer (1999), see rites of passage as an important way of deciphering the key values and constraints of an organization how micro changes occur (see also Ashforth et al., 2000; Trice and Beyer, 1984).

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. In what way is impression management part of the recruitment and selection process? How have you managed your part in such circumstances?
2. What are the roles of dramaturgy and organizational culture in explaining how we become socialized in the workplace?
3. What is the function of rites of passage when entering and finally leaving an organization? Could we do without them? Relate to ones you have personally experienced.

## NOTES

1 See http://www.shell.com/home/content/uk-en
2 See http//www.hrpost.com/forums/teamwork/9910/msg00017.html

## *Reading On*

Bozionelos, N. (2005) 'When the inferior candidate is offered the job: the selection interview as a political and power game', *Human Relations*, 58(12): 1605–31.

The article advances the view that the selection interview frequently serves as a political arena for various power networks in the organization whose interests may be conflicting. Members of the interview panel try to advance the interests of the power networks to which they belong by lobbying for the candidates whose background and values concur most with those interests. The notion of the interview as a political and power game is illustrated with a case from the academic environment.

Feldman, D.C. and Ng, T.W.H. (2007) 'Careers: mobility, embeddedness, and success', *Journal of Management*, 33(3): 350–77.

This article proposes refinements of the constructs of career mobility and career embeddedness and reviews the array of factors that have been found to energize (discourage) employees to change jobs, organizations, and/or occupations. The article also reviews the literature on career success and identifies which types of mobility (and embeddedness) are most likely to lead to objective career success (e.g., promotions) and subjective career success (e.g., career satisfaction).

Schein, E. H. (2004) 'Learning when and how to lie: a neglected aspect of organizational and occupational socialization (Introduction by Hugh Gunz and Paul Willman)', *Human Relations*, 57(3): 259–73.

This article is based on the lecture delivered by Professor Schein at the Academy of Management meeting in Toronto, 2000. The article builds on Professor Schein's widely cited work on career anchors, examining the various kinds of socialization that individuals undergo in a typical organizational career, focusing in particular on the norms learned about information management in the different functions that the career occupant will encounter.

Sullivan, S.E., Martin, D.F., Carden, W.A. and Mainero, L.A. (2003) 'The road less traveled: how to manage the recycling career stage', *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 10(2): 34–42.

This article examines how organizations can better respond to the needs of individuals who are reexamining and changing their chosen career paths. The term, "career recycling", reflects a segment of the workforce describing individuals who are reexamining and changing their career paths. Through exploratory interviews, the authors find that recylers were dissatisfied with their careers and willing to accept the risks associated with changing career direction.