

Managing Changeability:
Workaholism versus Work-holism

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- The models are based on a research project conducted with Bryan Hayday and Janet Brown.

Introduction

In the past few years management writings, sensitive to both the theoretical and empirical realities, have become increasingly concerned with organizational change as opposed to stability (Vaill, 1989), processes rather than structures (Mackenzie, 1989) and the complexity of organizational arrangements (Doz and Prahalad, 1991). The growing requirement to study complex dynamic phenomena requires new metaphors and new theories.

This study examined two large bureaucratic organizations which are in the midst of massive change. One is in the public sector and the other is a private sector corporation. The industries of these organizations (health care and financial services) are being redefined and restructured. Both organizations have new leaders who expressed a desire to change the organization culture to be more innovative and flexible. There is tremendous uncertainty in both the industries and the organizations.

We were particularly interested in the concepts and processes of managing change-ability versus managing change. *Managing change* addresses the issue of moving an organization or a system from point A to point B in the most effective and efficient manner. It assumes that one can predict where point B will be or should be in the future. *Managing change-ability* implies creating the conditions or environment in the organization or system so that it has the innate capacity to change. There are instances in every organization, where the future is not just unknown but inherently unknowable. In these cases, the skills required to thrive, shift from managing change to managing change-ability. *Managing change-ability* implies that change is a constant – not a state to get through before the next stable equilibrium. If change is assumed to be a constant, then a critical management skill is pattern recognition – an ability to be ultra-sensitive to the evolving patterns unfolding in an organization and its context. The study is based on an assumption that organizations need to become more adept at managing changeability given the unpredictability of future outcomes in the economic, social and political arenas.

We looked to recent work on chaos theory and complex systems thinking to provide us with a lens to understand change-ability and unpredictability. However, as we examined the transcripts we

found a recurring theme of work addiction or workaholism. Therefore we reviewed literature on workaholism and developed a framework which merges the insights from addiction, complex systems and the data. The conceptual framework is labelled “*workaholism versus work-holism*.”

The literature on addictive organizations provided us with a reference point from which to examine the tension we observed between workaholism and what we call work-holism. Concepts such as perfectionism, external referencing and dualism were reflected to greater and lesser degrees in almost all of the interviews. These themes became increasingly important to us as we recognized the potential role these thoughts or values may rate in defining organizational culture and tolerance for change and uncertainty.

The insights which emerged from the data suggest that workaholism, at an individual or an organizational level, inhibits change-ability in the long run. Work-holism, a term we coined to reflect the self-referent quality in some of the transcripts, is seen to facilitate a tolerance for change and uncertainty.

Chaos Theory, Complex Adaptive Systems and Fractals

In this section, we will provide a brief overview of the science fields of chaos and complex systems. The key attributes will then be linked back to organizations. In effect, the question posed by this section is “how can these sciences inform our understanding of organizational change processes?”

The science of complexity, chaos theory, and fractals are proving to be valuable for scientists in many fields in understanding adaptive systems. Its application to the social sciences and organizational processes is growing fast (Drazin & Sandelands, 1992; Gersick, 1991; Goerner, 1994; Goldstein, 1998; Kagono, 1985; Leifer, 1989; Nonaka, 1988a&b; Smith & Gemmill, 1991; Stacey, 1991, 1992, 1993; Wheatley, 1992; Zimmerman, 1991, 1993a, 1993b; Zimmerman and Hurst, 1993).

These sciences provide us with a means of examining and understanding the dynamic tensions which both result from and contribute to changeability in organizations, including the primary tension between stability and innovation. Managing change-ability is derived from complexity theory. Complex systems have many points of interaction between their components. In effect, there are infinite ways to create connections due to the large number of points of interaction. Therefore the number of outcomes from a complex system is theoretically infinite. Complex systems (for example – weather systems) are therefore inherently unpredictable beyond a short time frame. The future outcomes are unknowable. Paradoxically complex adaptive systems are created by patterns that repeat. It is the patterns of interaction that become the driving force.

We are using the concept of complex systems as a metaphor for organizations. In both cases, there are (1) many points of interaction, (2) many (perhaps infinite) potential outcomes from the interactions and (3) yet patterns which repeat in the organizational context.

Fractals, the geometric outcomes of complex systems, are complex intricate patterns. We see fractals in nature – i.e., clouds, coastlines, leaves. Some of the determining attributes of fractals are: (1) self-similarity or “whole in the parts”; (2) micro-macro complexity; and (3) constant change but order.

Self-similarity is demonstrated by showing that every piece of the fractal bears a resemblance to the whole. A cauliflower is an example of this. If one breaks off a piece of the cauliflower, the piece is in the same form as the whole. The part is a miniature cauliflower.

Micro-macro complexity builds on the whole in the parts concept. As one zooms in on a fractal, the

complexity is not decreased. A coastline from a distance has jagged, irregular and complex boundaries. If we take a close look at a portion of the coastline, it too is jagged, irregular and complex. We could continue this process of zooming in indefinitely and never lose the jagged, irregular and complex features. The boundaries are permeable and yet seem to have an infinite length.

Constant change but order is a critical attribute of fractals. There is an unreconciled tension between the positive feedback loops which push the process to change and the negative feedback loops which try to maintain the patterns. Prigogine (1984) refers to this as “order through fluctuation”. The order is not in the structures which are inherently unstable but in the processes or the patterns which create the structures.

With complex adaptive systems and fractals as a lens to view organizations, we used this study to uncover some of the underlying self-similar patterns in the organizations. One of the implications of this lens is the belief that patterns are repeating at all levels in the organization which are creating the order and also the change-ability. We chose a research method which reflected our lens of self-similarity. The research method which best suited this lens is ethnographic interviews. This is described in more detail in the methodology section.

The Framework: Workaholism versus Work-holism

The framework which emerged from the data is called workaholism (an addiction) *versus* work-holism (a healthy state). It reveals the realities of both organizations in terms of the meaning of work. It also explores our assessment of work attitudes to inhibit or facilitate change and learning in the organizations.

There is an apparent simplicity and naiveté in focusing on workaholism as unhealthy and counterproductive given today's competitive environment. Yet the patterns in the data were strong enough that we felt compelled to create a conceptual framework through which to examine these patterns. A recurring theme in the interviews was “workaholism” and the need for managers and executives to be workaholics to survive and advance their careers in the organizations. We believe that the framework in this paper shows how workaholism and its paradoxical counterpart work-holism influence leadership, management and independent functioning in the workplace.

Our research suggested that the issue of work addiction was more complex than merely working long hours. Using the interview data, we found a pattern which became coherent as we compared it to the literature on chaos theory and addiction. The distinction we have made is between *workaholism and work-holism*. In the healthy state of work-holism, work is viewed as an extension of self-identity. We will describe the differences between workaholism and work-holism more fully below.

Workaholism – The Literature

In the 1960s, there were forecasts of increased leisure hours as technology increasingly influenced our workplaces. The forecasts were far from accurate and the norm of longer working hours in the 1990s is widely accepted as a necessary condition for economic survival. The question remains as to whether working longer hours necessarily leads to workaholism, an addiction.

Addiction has been defined as maladaptive behaviour or “any activity which diminishes the person's ability to deal with other things in the environment” (Haas, 1989: 14). The inability to be sensitive and responsive to the environment is a critical concern for long-run organizational effectiveness. Schaefer and Fassel (1988) say that any process can be used addictively. They argue that the function

of the addiction is to reduce awareness, to numb oneself so that there is no energy left to be aware of other aspects of life or the environment.

Unlike other addictive substances or behaviours, work is a necessary part of normal living. According to Machlowitz (1980:7) “what distinguishes workaholism from other addictions is that workaholism is sometimes considered a virtue, while others, such as alcoholism and drug addiction, are invariably considered vices.”

It becomes more difficult to discern when working hard has moved from health to unhealthy. Boronson (1976) distinguishes between workaholics and work lovers. Both may work hard, but work lovers are not emotionally dependent on work to provide all source of satisfaction. They see their work as a means to contribute to themselves and to society. Cherrington (1980) sees the difference between workaholics and hard workers as the level of need. The hard worker may put in excessively long hours on a short term basis but does not need this to be the norm. The workaholic has an uncontrollable need to work incessantly. Siegal (1974) argues that workaholics will suffer from withdrawal symptoms when they are deprived of work. They have lost their ability to understand life outside of a work context. Doty (1984) proposes a typology of hard workers as either those with high levels of work commitment or workaholics. The individuals with a high level of work commitment have healthy attitudes about work and themselves. They are “challenged, stimulated and satisfied with work” (1984:19). Workaholics have unhealthy attitudes and hence do not achieve satisfaction with work or themselves. Workaholics cannot be identified by the number of hours worked.

Work addiction is both an individual and system level problem in two ways. First, the system can create conditions for individual workaholism to thrive. Schaefer and Fassel (1988) suggest that organizations and society can derive some short run benefit from creating conditions where individuals are “numb” and unaware of the environment. They are more likely to keep busy and not raise issues of long run concerns. Second, the organization itself may exhibit characteristics as a system which are addictive.

In this context, a system is “an entity that comprises both content (ideas, roles, and definitions) and processes (ways of doing things), and that is complete in itself... a system is made up of parts, and the system is larger than the sum of the parts” (Schaefer and Fassel, 1988:60). The system implicitly has a paradigm by which it operates. Closed systems will not take in information which is inconsistent with the dominant paradigm. Open systems have permeable boundaries and espouse flexibility and paradigm changes as a meta-paradigm. Systems explicitly and subtly reward people for behaviour consistent with the paradigm. Hence a closed system will discourage new information and will be less aware of changes in their internal and external environments.

Schaefer and Fassel (1988) list some of the major characteristics of addiction as self-centredness, denial, perfectionism, external referencing, and dualism. Robinson (1989) adds a few more characteristics: over seriousness, overacting to uncontrollables, ignore conflict and fear of failure. In addition to these attributes from the literature, we have added temporal blindness – an inability to recognize patterns over time. “Work addicts live in the future because of their underdeveloped ability to live in the present (Robinson, 1989: 52). The following list of attributes of workaholism are seen at both an individual and an organizational or system level.

(1) Self-centredness.

Self-centredness is a critical attribute because getting the “fix” dominates all other aspects of life. The fix is achieved by losing one's self in work. The needs to satisfy this addiction become the centre of the universe for addicts.

(2) **Denial.**

A common dictionary definition of denial is the refusal to recognize reality. Denial exists in organization when individuals block or resist hearing information or interpretations which could reveal new but unsettling aspects of reality (particularly an issue in change management). At an organizational level, denial can be seen as secrets (both power secrets and access secrets) or censorship of material – the undiscussed or undiscussable aspects of the work and the workplace. Denial is a key characteristic of a closed system.

(3) **Perfectionism.**

Striving for unattainable perfectionism is an obsession with addicts. Unlike striving for a high-quality product or service, addicts believe there is a perfect product, output or form of organizing. Mistakes are invalid because they deny perfection and therefore mistakes are not used as a source of data or learning.

(4) **External referencing.**

The sense of self is externally defined and derived from others' perceptions. This leads to a lack of boundaries and no way of distinguishing self from others' definitions of self. This is counterproductive to an environment which promotes self-organizing work teams and task forces.

(5) **Dualism.**

Dualistic thinking is the source of most of the characteristics of the addictive system. Choices become either-or rather than both-and. It creates a false sense of simplicity from complex realities. Individually the two choices are unpalatable and the addict switches between the two choices without any integration or linking between them. Robinson (1989) points out that this switch often manifests itself as super-responsibility in certain areas of life and super-irresponsibility in others.

(6) **Over seriousness.**

Taking oneself too seriously can lead to a feeling of isolation and inability to connect with others. If one is too serious about oneself, then it is hard to trust other. Delegation is avoided and over scheduling of time becomes prevalent (Oates, 1971).

(7) **Over reacting to uncontrollables.**

Addicts tend to over react to changes over which they have no control. Workaholics have a need to control outcomes and hence are uncomfortable with unpredictability and ambiguity. “Trying to eliminate the unexpected and the changeable, they over-plan and over-organize their lives through work so that conditions are predictable, consistent and thus controllable. They cannot be spontaneous or flexible because the fear of losing control is too great” (Robinson, 1989:42).

(8) **Ignore conflict.**

Conflict is either avoided or created by not addressed. They cannot cope with conflict directly because it addresses differences and requires a heightened level of awareness of self and others.

(9) **Fear of failure.**

Linked to the fear of losing control is the fear of failure. This fear drives the workaholic more than the desire for success. The fear of failure influences the choices made by the workaholic.

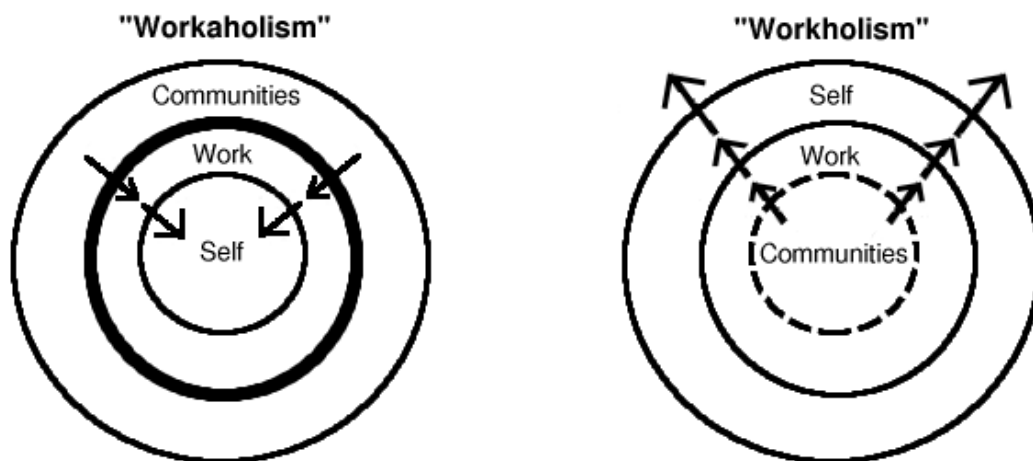
(10) **Temporal Blindness.**

Addicts are unaware of their environments, others and even themselves. This blinds them not only to the current situation but also to how today's events are related to history and future. They cannot recognize the patterns that are created and being created. Their need for a fix is a very short-run focus which leaves them unaware of the broader context of actions.

Work-holism: The alternative

In analyzing the transcripts we came to distinguish between workaholism or work addiction and work-holism (a healthy state). In the healthy state of work-holism, work is viewed as an extension of self rather than the driving force. We have depicted the difference between workaholism and work-holism on the following page. The diagram incorporates many, but not all, of the differences between workaholism and work-holism.

Figure 1:



In the diagram, we have shown a lack of boundaries as faded lines and highly permeable boundaries as dotted lines.

Self may be an individual, an organization or another system. *Communities* are the common connections with others. For an individual, communities include their place of employment, their families, the neighbourhoods in which they live, and their pursuits or leisure activities. For an organization, communities include other organizations in the industry, their suppliers and customers or clients and the geographic areas in which they operate. *Work* is the effort or exertion directed to produce or accomplish something.

The circle on the left – workaholism – depicts three of the key characteristics of addiction: self-centredness, external referencing and denial. The transcripts also show evidence of perfectionism and dualistic thinking.

The workaholic individual or system is self-centred. But in the process, the self-identity is eroded – it is subsumed by the work or other addictions. Self is externally determined or externally referenced in that it is defined by work. Therefore self-identity is vulnerable to being diminished or eroded by an external force. We have shown the boundary between self and work as faded to depict

this lack of separation. Because there are no boundaries, the definition of self can shrink due to the force of the impinging concentric forces of work and communities. This diminished self-identity results in a loss of a strong and stable reference point for decisions and actions, i.e., with a diminished sense of self, one's value base and perspective is also diminished or eroded.

The boundary between work and communities is impermeable in the workaholic system – it is “the great divide”. The employee acts as if s/he were two people, with different values and attitudes on either side of the great divide. We have used this to represent denial; a lack of information flows between work and the rest of one's life or connections.

The circle on the right – work-holism – depicts a sense of self which is not defined by one's activities and behaviours. In this case, the frame of reference extends beyond one's relationship to work and includes one's relationships to others in the larger communities. Paradoxically, workholism is community centred, rather than self-centred, because of the clarity or strength of self. The individual's (or organization's) identity is distinct from the work one performs. The boundary between work and self is clear. The identity of self is not externally imposed. The “self” is not defined by work. Work and other activities are seen as extensions of self. It is self-identity which grounds the actions or frames the picture.

In the work-holistic system, the boundary between work and communities is permeable. Information and interpretations from work influence the communities. Similarly information and interpretations from the communities in which one interacts shape and influence one's perceptions of work. One's role in communities and one's work are seen as connected and interacting systems.

We have described the model at the individual level of analysis. However, the model is equally appropriate at an organization or system level. The chart below summarizes the key characteristics of an addictive organization (or individual) and work-holism.

Addictive Organizations

Self-centred

Denial

Perfectionist

External referencing

Dualism

Over seriousness

Inability to deal with uncontrollables

Ignore conflict

Fear of failure

Temporally blind

Work-holism

Other centred

Acceptance

Learns from mistakes

Self-referent

Both-and

Realistic

Accepts ambiguity

Embraces tensions

Celebrates success

Recognizes time

Methodology

If the whole is in the parts, if there are self-similar patterns in organizations, we should be able to “zoom in” on parts of the organization and reveal some of these patterns. Ethnographic interviews were used as a technique to zoom in on individuals in these organizations. One organization had over 30,000 employees and the other over 10,000. In both cases, we interviewed 14 people. In addition to ethnographic interviews, we conducted archival analysis in preparation for the interviews.

Our research methods were viewed with suspicion by members of the organizations. “How could we uncover patterns with such a small sample?” After three months of archival analysis and interviews with 10 employees, we were able to demonstrate to one of the sites the power of the method. They had just completed a large sample survey (10,000 employees), and focus groups or structured interviews with 1000 employees. Our interviews revealed approximately 75% of the findings that were uncovered in the larger samples. In addition, we revealed other patterns which members of the research sites found helpful. The whole was in the parts and needed a research approach which could access these patterns.

The ethnographic interviews followed Grant McCracken's approach as outlined in his 1988 book, “The Long Interview”. This technique involves probing the respondents to reveal their experiences and insights. Interviewers used cues in the language of the respondent to shape the interview. This flexibility in design allowed the interviewers to discover the categories of data as they emerged and further investigate those that seemed most promising. Interviews were 2 hours in length and focused on personal perspectives on change. The interviewee is disguised in the reports. This encouraged more openness and personal reflections in the interviews.

Two overall themes or conceptual views of the data emerged from the research. One is labelled “Tension through Suspension” (Zimmerman, 1994) and is addressed in another paper. Tension through suspension highlights some of the vicious cycles in which the organizations were trapped as they attempted to create a continuous learning environment. Virtuous cycles, in which the organization was able to create the change-able environment, were enhanced by work-holistic attitudes. Workaholism versus work-holism is the second framework and the subject of this paper.

THEMES FROM OUR INTERVIEWS

The following discusses the themes further in the context of specific interviewee responses. The first six themes relate to workaholic behaviour and the last six to work-holistic behaviour.

WORKAHOLISM

The Erosion of Self: The Paradox of Self-Centredness

A recurring theme in the interviews was the loss of personal identity to the corporate entity.

Chris Rawlins: “I think you lose your identity in here, so I think it becomes a very difficult issue as to who you are as an individual and what you are as a corporate being. And it's hard to retain who you are through the corporate process.....I think the environment here doesn't reward or accept a lot of individuality, a lot of risk taking. It accepts eccentricity. It doesn't accept personality, it doesn't accept creativity, it doesn't accept individualism per se.”

Chris: “It's kind of like going into military service in a way....frankly you're in danger

of losing your family life...there are a lot of organizational widows frankly in here who have given themselves so significantly as enthusiastic women professionals, particularly to this kind of job, that they've lost their family."

Charles Pegg talked about the particular dilemma that women face within the company. Charles drew three circles, each of them slightly overlapping, within a box. In one circle he wrote the word "spouse", in another "family", and in the third he wrote the word "work". Charles said that his female managers and employees who don't have children often claim the full page for the work circle. If they are mothers, the full box is consumed by the work and children circles. The circle with spouse in it is the one that is compromised or sacrificed for the sake of career. He talked about the need for the circles to take turns, sharing so that each has the option of claiming the whole.

Charles' analysis is that something was being lost, especially for women managers at the company. His analysis was that time with marriage (or another intimate relationship) would be sacrificed for the duties to career and to children. There was no sense in his depiction of self outside of the three roles. What is clear in his mind, is the loss of balance. It is this balance which he sees as a reference point or identity of an individual.

Another message from his pictures is the notion of fluctuation. At times each circle should be able to claim the whole. In effect, he is arguing for an ability to be completely "present" to the career, to the marriage, to parenting at various points. The literature on addiction suggests that the addictive substance or behaviour eventually consumes the individual (Robinson, 1989). In this state, they are unable to be fully present to any dimensions of their lives, including their work. In effect, loss of self means a loss of perspective.

Paradoxically, the interviewees who argued, in various ways, that they have lost themselves to the organization, also stated that they were so crucial to the organization that the entity would not be able to function without them.

Julian Lewis: "So we are being asked to take 12 days off without pay. It is a joke. How am I going to get 12 days off? I can hardly get a half day's vacation, if I have to work twice as hard to make up for it."

Julian's comment was typical of the interviewees. Some argued that they were the only one who could fulfill a particular function at the organization. This sense of being irreplaceable or indispensable is a common trait of workaholism according to the literature.

One executive talked eloquently about the need for a "*shared vision in terms of everybody's life and values*". Yet when the description of the process was described of how the executive was attempting to create the vision, the tone sounded narcissistic: "*I'm trying to turn what's inside me into our group and what's inside our group into the organization.*" In this quote, we see the executive trying to replicate a personal vision and label it as a "shared vision". The mere fact of trying to disseminate a personal vision is not a problem per se. The issue is the lack of awareness on the part of the executive that the value generating process which was described as "open" was actually a closed process. The process was implicitly designed to replicate the executive's personal values. This lack of awareness seemed to stem from an erosion of self: at the same time that the executive self-centredly tries to replicate personal visions for the whole organization, the individual had lost the ability to reflect on their role and the implications it had on the process.

Getting the "adrenaline hit": The NEED to win

The addict will do anything for a "hit" (Schaeff and Fassel, 1988). In workaholism, the hit may be

winning an issue as Jo Murray's comments below indicate. The addiction is the need to win.

“I think the other thing that is important about the organization, other than the stress which is real and the pressure to make decisions fast and at high quality, I think the other thing is the passion and excitement of it. And, I mean, some of that is a straight adrenaline hit –it is really getting into an issue that you need to kind of win.”

The need to win sets up a cycle – having satisfied the need to win sets up a desire to win yet again and again and again. Research on workaholics argue that they often have this need to win and that the need is never fully satisfied (Robinson, 1989; Schaefer and Fassel, 1988).

One executive described a dinner meeting with several other colleagues. The excitement of the evening came from knowing that all of the attendees were real change agents. In their own way, each was seen, by this executive, as indispensable to the changes the organization was creating. It was a “dinner of indispensables”. They were all working *“flat out to do a phenomenal job, don't feel very much appreciated... who were very stressed out but phenomenally excited that they can be at the centre of things and can be the ones who can make things happen.”*

According to this executive, a change agent means:

- (1)“working flat out”,
- (2)“being unappreciated”,
- (3)feeling “very stressed out”,
- (4)“at the centre of things”, and,
- (5)“can make things happen”

This model of success of being indispensable was seen in several of the transcripts.

Assuming it is desirable for the organization to have the “whole in the parts”, this definition of success is problematic. The more indispensable an individual “part” is to the system, the less likely that the whole can be fully found in the other parts. Redundancy – a necessary attribute to achieve “whole in the parts” - is in direct contrast to indispensability. Whole in the parts implies a commonality in pattern recognition skills such that a division of the organization can work constructively with other divisions. Each would have a sense of the whole and thereby would have congruity in decision making.

Denial – Creating the impermeable boundary

Lee Copeland volunteered the story of an executive who many described as a perfectionist and a workaholic. She was a 35 year-old executive who drove herself into a bridge abutment at 3 o'clock in the morning. Several interviewees also spoke about this event, believing that she was on her way to work.

It's very tragic because there were signals that people didn't read, and I think that if you were to go around with a video camera today that there would still be signals. There are still people that are suffering because you've got individuals in fairly senior position who are very cold, profit-driven types of individuals. They consider the model of long hours being the only model and of commitment only being measured by the sacrifice of everything else in your life. I don't think that there has been any change after her death....There was a lot of unhappiness at the time, people feeling guilty but it's the classic dysfunctional family where that sort of thing gets repressed. We don't talk about it because it's one of those things that's too painful and we have too much ownership.

Lee's description and the quotes from other transcripts suggest a denial of the problem from an

organizational perspective. As Pat Schroer pointed out they will never know whether the executive was on her way to work or not. In addition, Pat Schroer, Terry Thompson and Jay Walker all argued that since the company would never ask a person to come to work at 3 in the morning, they company bore no responsibility. But Lee and Dale MacDonald said it was irrelevant whether she was going to work. They argued that it was an indication of an organizational problem – that the company did share some ownership.

In one organization, there was a rear guard attempt by an executive to suppress the examination of the findings and dissemination of the report. This executive was concerned about the behaviours and values that were revealed by the data. This independent action was contrary to the expressed wishes of the CEO. Nonetheless, this action did result in a reduced distribution of the report. The management team deliberately attempted to suppress information which did not fit with the dominant paradigm they wished to perpetuate by attempting to withdraw all copies from circulation.

External Identity: Who do YOU Say I Am?

Many interviewees revealed some personal pain about the impact working had on their health and personal life. Yet many described their sense of achievement or success as derived from external labels, such as “*pleasing the boss*”.

Dale MacDonald was highly successful in the company. The promotions had come earlier for Dale than was standard at the company. During the first hour of the interview Dale talked about the company as exciting – a place for highly motivated intelligent people to learn and grow. But in the last half hour, Dale went through a subtle shift. The tone became more personal and at one point Dale turned away from the interviewer and stared quietly at the opposite wall for a minute. Then Dale began to reveal some personal pain about working at the company. It was as if Dale had removed a mask to show a different face. We get some sense of Dale's loss of control over the work.

... The women are not being pushed harder than the men. We are all being pushed too hard. ...It's very difficult to say No at the company.... You can't say, “Gee, I'm sorry, but my train's leaving, and I've got a wife and three kids at home.” How do you do that? ...It's just physically impossible for me to meet all the deadlines which are on my desk right now. Even if I worked seven days a week – which I do sometimes. ... There aren't a lot of options. If I don't deliver on time, then what's it doing to my career? Now I'm suddenly someone who can't get staff work done on time. Which is not what you want to be labelled with if you want a career in the company. If I make a big fuss about not having the resources, then I become “not a team player”. If I walk in and say “I'm sorry, I'm not going to drive myself into a bridge abutment”, I have an attitude problem. So how do you say No? I don't know how you say No.”

Dale's sense of achievement or success was derived from external labels - “pleasing the boss” to quite an extent. Dale covered up the insecurities about completing the work for fear of negative attribution. The work and the definition of career superseded Dale's own sense of self.

Both Lee's and Dale's comments point out another layer of the addiction. The “they made me do it” attitude. Lee claimed that the people at the top can make others behave in ways that are inappropriate or even dangerous. It is an attitude which can perpetuate the addiction because of not assuming responsibility for one's own actions.

Terry described this syndrome as “lining up behind the boss”.

People very much watch how their bosses are, and they line up behind them.I had

a discussion with another executive three years ago. I'll never forget it as long as I live. ...I had made a suggestion how I thought there was something that we could do together that would be really good for the customer, and this executive said to me, well yes I agree with you. "Well then," I said, "why can't we work together on getting it through?" And he says, "well it's not on my boss's agenda." I said "yes but you agree that it would be good so shouldn't we do something to get it on your boss's agenda." "No", he says, "that won't do anything for me... so as much as I agree with you, no I don't feel comfortable about taking it forward." So I said, "Well that's fine, I'll go to him and I'll take it forward." "Oh you can't do that, you can't go directly to somebody that senior!" I just looked at him and I said, "You and I become part of the problem if we can't solve this..... Effectively what he was saying was "anything outside that box I can comfortably tell you to go fly a kite because my boss won't get mad at me." You know, so there's no ownership for what's going on in the total organization. I've seen it on many occasions."

“Lining up behind the boss” is evidence of a lack of ownership for decisions – a lack of assumption of responsibility for one's actions.

As Andrée Illes said:

“There certainly is recognition of people having lives outside this (work) context, but some of the people, even the women at the top, are pretty driven, and their days start at 6:00 in the morning and they end at 10:00 in the evening. So I don't know if they expect everybody else to move in their circles but sometimes that happens. It seems to be expected. I am not sure if I am supposed to act like them.”

Sam Alin: “A lot of us assume with an executive group of this stripe that we'll be looked after. Many are looking for the magic training course that they can be given that will keep them in a job forever. So part of the problem with change for a lot of people is the very strong expectation that someone is there to look after you, and that anything else is “doing something to you.””

Sam's comments have several elements of seeking external reference for identity. First is the notion that someone (e.g. The organization) will take care of you and give you the “magic” training courses that you will need. The risk of this dependence on an external body is evident when Sam suggests that anything less than “being taken care of” is seen as abusive, as “doing something to you”. There is a paradox in this paternalistic assumption – assuming one will be taken care of provides power to the care-givers. Leaving the power to control one's destiny in another's hands runs the risk that this power can be used to harm as well as to hurt. The all powerful care-giver can also be abusive to the care-recipients. The fear of potential abuse by the “someone who will take care of them” was seen in several interviews. They included descriptions of fears of “*subterranean plots*” or “*leakages of information*” within the organization and “*widespread paranoia*”. The flip side of the coin was evidenced by an executive who spoke about the importance of “*taking care of our people ... to make sure that they don't fall into the trap of workaholism.*” In effect, the executive is perpetuating the co-dependency problem by creating a system of “parenting” workers rather than creating an environment where they can take responsibility for their own actions.

Obsession With Perfection: Denial of Reality

“Perfect” was a word used by several interviewees in talking about the progress of change at the company. Alex Moore argued that although they hadn't achieved perfection, the company was aiming for it.

“I think that there is still a lot of confusion. Everybody hears that everything is going

to be perfect right away, and they forget that it takes a little while to get there.”

When talking about the changes in the human resources approach, Jay Walker commented that “we don't have it perfect yet”. Both Jay and Alex imply that patience is needed because the changes take time. But embedded in their remarks is the idea that in time it would be perfect.

If the standard of perfection is held as the achievable standard, individual performance will always be lacking. Hence, it sets up a process of aiming for perfection, not achieving it and being punished.

Julian Lewis: “In terms of people doing work, we tend to communicate mistakes back to people as punishment, as potentially career ending moves. It tends to be a rather perfectionist, static organization in the way we communicate to people if they succeeded or failed. ...we're not at all good at telling people that they're rewarded and they've made a difference and they've made something happen.”

Very soon, the participants learn to cover for their errors as revealed in several transcripts. One way to “cover” is to avoid making decisions which can be judged against perfection standards. The “*briefing note mentality*” mentioned by one of the CEOs was reiterated in various ways by interviewees, for example in nicknames for change initiatives. The interviewees said that these initiatives were so long in the making that they would never see the light of day. A perfectionist standard was a barrier to action.

Success comes from “*keeping clean*” according to one branch manager although he argued that “*if you play by the rules you get shafted*”. It seemed that “*keeping clean*” meant presenting an appearance of being clean. An executive commented on the “*cascading of blame*” that happens at the organization. This is yet another approach to keeping “clean”.

Perfection relates to information as well. Andrée's comment below indicates the effort that is extended to ensure a memo is “perfect”. Gerry talks about the need for information to be perfect before it is shared which often means it is too late to be relevant.

Andrée Illes: “...People expect you to turn things around to quickly, because of the technology now. And something goes upstairs and they want one sentence changed, you know four or five years ago they never bothered to change the sentence, but now.....I don't think it is any more perfect than it was before, but it provides an opportunity for everybody to have one input, or change, on the way up. Each level adds their input to ensure perfection.”

Gerry Woodman: “We still have a lot of people who have a centralist mentality, and you know it's sort of like information is power so they need to actually control the use of information. Yes control the use of information yet make a lot of information available to people so they can plan and so they can make decisions. So we end up sitting on a lot of information.

We had, for example, an [industry] survey that was started some, I forget when it was, about four years ago. It was across the province. It was done with Statistics Canada and everything else. We still have not disseminated most of the information that we got from that survey to the universities, to the people that are doing research. We've done it in dribs and drabs and so forth. Why??? Because we sit here saying, “well now that's not perfect” or “oh my goodness, you know we better take a look at that and see if that's sterilized enough” and so forth. So the fact is what we're really doing is we don't trust probably most of the people within our own system with some of this information for whatever reason.”

Gerry's comment about trust in relation to perfectionism is interesting. If perfection is the standard,

it would be irrational to trust others because it would be impossible to meet the standard. So the standard of perfectionism for the data, documents, and people within the organization and the system generally, undermines the ability of the organization to network, share information or to move quickly on issues.

Dualism - “Either-or” Thinking

The problem of work driving the individual is even more prevalent at the top than at the lower levels according to Jay Walker, a senior executive. Jay said that the more senior people carry a heavier load in part because of the new emphasis on a philanthropic position in the community.

So not only are they working long hours, they are also doing community work on top of it. And the signal is that is the way that it should be for senior people. For more junior people we should be flexible. I think it is a bit unfair, just because you happen to be senior doesn't mean that you don't have a need to balance work and family life...So we haven't got the community work and balance right.

Jay's perspective on community work is as an extra contribution to the company. Jay saw these as more commitments required to “please the boss” rather than as extensions of “self” or contributions to the community. There was again a sense of losing one's life to the company – losing control over one's destiny.

In addition, there was a sense of dualism in Jay's assessment. Either one is doing work, in whatever forum, that is part of the responsibility of being an employee, or one is involved in personal endeavours. Jay did not reveal a belief in satisfying both company needs and personal development or growth needs through community activities and contributions. Family time was also shown by Jay to be a separate activity from community work. In contrast, another employee revealed the connections that were possible between family time and community work by volunteering in organizations where family members spent time including recreation activities.

Sandy Cook was one of the interviewees who said that being a workaholic is a prerequisite for the most senior executive jobs. Sandy turned down the opportunity to be an executive explaining,

“You get to be an executive and your life gets even worse, because all the more is expected of you and your life is not your own... If you look at the people at the top of the house, they're all workaholics – most of them have very few outside interests and fit their families in as they can, however, they are workaholics.”

The dualism of either work or personal activities was evident in Sandy's remarks.

Several interviewees referred to a story in which the CEO of one of the organizations was quoted as saying “when you become an executive around here, you leave your family at the door.” This phrase was played back to a senior executive who said that the comment was taken out of context and should not be understood at face value. Nonetheless, the phrase had become a powerful myth in the organization. The interviewees who mentioned it felt they had to make an either-or choice about being an executive or having a full family life.

WORK-HOLISM

Some interviewees talked about the need to satisfy the needs of the organization without sacrificing their own needs or losing their self-identity. In essence, it was a call for separation and balance. Others that we interviewed, found their self-identity not through separation but increased connectedness between the facets of their lives. It is this interpretation which we have labelled work-holism. The increased connectedness of work-holism is an attitude rather than a specific allocation of time to various activities.

Seeking Connectedness Between Communities And Work (Permeable Boundaries)

In the same way that denial is the refusal to recognize reality and thereby shut down information flow, so connectedness requires an examination of often difficult realities and an increase in information flow. Information in this context includes both information as data as well as information as meaning. Information as meaning includes making sense of the data or interpreting the data. Increasing information flow can be seen as a means of breaking down artificial boundaries and promoting permeability of perspectives.

Breaking the boundaries and increasing the information flow can happen between work and community activities directly, or between the internal communities (i.e., communities of gender, race, disability) and work. Both organizations had established a major “project” outside of the regular bureaucracy to address issues which ran across all divisions. In one case, the group related to learning and training and in the other organization, the group related to an entrepreneurial activity designed to redefine the industry. Both were examples of breaking the boundaries because it “*destroys barriers between divisions*”, and the senior project manager reported directly to the CEO in spite of not having the hierarchical status of a senior executive. In both projects, the boundaries between the organization and the rest of the world were permeable. In one case, the concepts of learning and training were being extended beyond training of employees to training for the children of the employees. In the other organization, the project involved economic development which would benefit the organization indirectly by changing the industry. There were other examples in the transcripts which involved: (1) a change in information flows both within the organization and between the organizations and external groups; (2) challenging fundamental assumptions about the industry; and (3) an entrepreneurial or opportunistic attitude within the large bureaucratic organizations. The boundaries which had been solid were becoming permeable in these instances.

Breaking the boundaries involves a redefinition of risk. Risk is seen as inaction rather than error prevention as noted below.

Daryl Lee: “We have to be proactive as hell not to be a risk taker. We have to find organizations with potential to grow, tease them with the growth and opportunities and then sit back and hope they do it...The real risk is in not moving, not seeking opportunities.....

Part of what we do is help to rid them of the obstacles... show them another way to enter... Another part of what we do is give them the confidence to be world players – cheerleading, orchestrating, facilitating, deal making... We tease them. We go out and try to paint visions for them. Show them things they can't quite see.... Sometimes it involves telling them, “you've got what it takes, get your butt in gear for God's sake.” Because we Canadians lack a little fibre. So here I am an executive whose role is to dispense fibre.”

It is as if they are breaking the boundaries to allow more boundaries to be broken – a cycle that can feed on itself in a positive feedback process. Rather than being in the traditional (usual) policy-making or service provision roles, these boundary breakers are holding up a mirror to others to show them their own competencies, to cheerlead their innovations and accomplishments and to reveal their abilities to assess risks and make choices. Instead of a paternalistic “we'll take care of you” attitude, these executives are creating an environment where challenges can be accepted and acted upon by the individual players in the organization and the industry. This is down both by holding up the mirror and by breaking boundaries which creates the potential for new connections.

Part of the process in creating the connections is making the “undiscussables” discussable – revealing the power or access secrets or myths which are implicit in the workplace. In some circumstances, this is fraught with problems.

Sam Olin: “There isn't “a” clear message – and that's one of the things we have found in this whole evolving process, is that there is always an element that thinks there is some subterranean plot going on at any given point in time. Who thinks the plot is occurring, varies too in terms of their membership in that club, and particularly when you are dealing with uncertainty which is what change is all about; when you are coming out of what was – and still is to a far too great an extent, a hierarchical organization, there are fairly authoritarian ways of doing things. So you end up with the same problem internally, as this organization has externally. That is, you start to involve yourself in consultations, and people feel good initially about being consulted, but then it is very hard not to say, “Well, you asked me. Why aren't you doing it my way?”

Although we are doing part of it. And there is also a very proprietary sense about some ideas. “Why is this part of the organization doing this? I thought this was our idea over here...or what have you.”

Gender, race and other sources of discrimination are often undiscussable. Robin Jones talked about the influence of the formal processes to study the issue of gender in the company. She said these processes brought out into the open the myths and assumptions about women in the company.

“I have seen the topic openly discussed, when it was never discussed before. And I have seen very healthy debate about it.... I've seen a bit of concern and reaction ... but I think that continues to raise the awareness.”

A course which has been nicknamed “the gender bender course” is another example of creating a forum for discussing the undiscussables.

Learning by Doing – Mistakes Matter

Pat Schroer talked about a project which involved closing a major operations centre. He talked about the process of the closure, before, during and after the actual move.

“Change never goes perfectly... there are always some hiccups....Change, by its very definition, is being done for the first time. If humans are involved you seldom do anything perfect the first time right? So you can't plan for perfection.”

His solution to the inability to expect or plan perfection was to include all of the interested parties at the table – not necessarily in terms of decision making but in terms of information flow. The interested parties crossed boundaries within the company and also outside the company by including major customers in the process of the decision. Keeping them informed of all the “hiccups” and using their input to influence the process allowed them the necessary luxury of not aiming for perfection according to Pat Schroer.

Integration of the Patterns

In contrast to Sandy Cook's assessment that executives lose control of their lives, one senior person argued that, at the senior level, there may in fact be even more control.

The people who have the most flexibility to design the work environment, to accommodate their own needs and their own commitments, are first the CEO, second the president, then the senior executives and all the way down the hierarchy. I can decide whether I want to take a day off and go on a course, arbitrarily. I'm completely the master of my own destiny. I can decide when I want to take my vacation. ... If I

was off on a business trip and I don't get home until 2 o'clock in the morning, well, I don't get up until ten. If I was working in a branch I'd be shot if I didn't show up on time... So the ultimate irony is that the more senior you are in an organization, the more control you have over your own time schedule. You work hard. But this is not about working hard or not working hard. This is not about commitment. This is about scheduling. I have incredible flexibility in terms of my scheduling. I have to do it farther in advance. But I have to be more careful to control that my eyes are going to be bigger than my stomach. You can walk into this kind of a job and get committed beyond all control. But that's by choice. The organization doesn't force me to do all that. I can turn on and turn off the number and type of community commitments I make... Balancing multiple commitments doesn't mean working less hard. Balancing multiple commitments is a scheduling issue.

This executive argued that the more senior executives have more choices and fewer constraints other than “your eyes being bigger than your stomach”. His comment was that the senior people in the firm make their own choices for their lives. They are expected to work hard but they can choose how they will spend their time. The community commitments were seen as voluntary and extensions of his interests rather than as requirements. In effect, this interviewee was talking about breaking the boundaries between work and community. In doing so, information can flow both ways – the company can learn from the activities of the employees in their communities and the communities can learn from the employees' participation. The activities are not separate but interconnected.

Some interviewees were seeking connections between their external lives (community roles) and their work. These employees sought integration of work, family and personal development rather than separation. The position in the hierarchy did not seem to predetermine this integrative approach.

Self-Identity: Who Do I Think I Am?

When talking about how to know whether one is successful or not, Jo Murray said:

“All of your check points, I think frankly are internal. So how do you know? I think you have to put your own value system and your own objectives, you own very clear mapping out of what you want to achieve, by when and how, and how far you're willing to push the envelope to do that.”

By contrast with “who do you say I am?”, there was a clear sense that success was internally determined – the self was the reference point. Being self-referent is not the same as being self-centred. In fact, self-reference can allow individuals to be more aware of their “communities” and hence be loyal employees. Lisa Devon demonstrated that in her interview. She was extremely loyal to the organization and scrupulously ethical about how she spent her time. For example, she argued that she would never travel during work hours in spite of the fact that she travels more than half of every month. Travel is considered “commuting” and is therefore done on private time according to Lisa Devon. Yet she demonstrated a strong internal grounding to issues and her job. Although she appreciated promotions, raises, and “pats on the back”, they were not her driving force. Instead she presented a life vision which she was enacting with her husband through his work, with her children and with her job at the organization. The vision included a strong ethical code, hard work, personal growth, justice and the recognition of a lag between actions and results. She had an integrated, long-term view of the decisions and actions made in her daily life.

One senior executive argued that the employees lower in the company hierarchy were constrained with fewer options in the workplace because more of the demands were externally determined. But

he argued that often this was an excuse to maintain the status quo. He said he felt there was “psychological comfort” for some to say that they are required or not allowed to do certain activities. He said he often challenges employees to show him where it is written down that it is required. This person's attitude could be seen as treating people like adults – which is his stated philosophy. He says that he expects them to make their own choices and that they can weigh the costs and benefits or the alternatives in making those choices.

This sincerity in relation to work and personal responsibility was mentioned by many interviewees. According to one executive, work should be fulfilling and when it is one may want to work long hours.

If you enjoy what you're doing, and that's what you're committed to doing, why is it a bad thing to work hard at doing that? You know, nobody ever told Michelangelo to get down off the ceiling at 5 o'clock at night and go home. Why? Because he enjoyed what he was doing. The only thing bad is when you're working hard at things you don't enjoy doing.

His description sounds like work-holism as we have described it – work as a fulfilling activity which is enjoyable, challenging and an extension of self. Perhaps it is naïve on the part of the senior team to believe that “if it isn't written down” the employees have the freedom to act. The “lining up behind the boss” that Terry referred to earlier is more “real” in the eyes of many employees than the pronouncements on official circulars. Denying the strong influence of body language and precedents in the hierarchy will not make them disappear. This leader's approach – ‘show me where it is written’ - is one of subverting the existing culture by removing the “artificial” constraints of past practice.

Some of the interviewees did demonstrate a work-holistic attitude. Terry Thompson, Sandy Cook, Lisa Devon and Charles Pegg had all made some choices in their careers and lives which indicated that they saw their work as one of the opportunities to find fulfillment. In all cases, they had made at least one major career decision which was not a “boss pleasing choice”. Sandy had turned down an opportunity to be an executive, and Charles had chosen a job which was lower in prestige than others he had been offered but where he felt he was better suited and could find more fulfillment and satisfaction. Both Lisa and Terry chose job opportunities which would “stretch” their skill sets knowing that the implications for performance evaluation were likely negative, at least in the short run. Terry and Charles work very long hours but argue that the schedules and commitments are on their terms.

Terry had spent years doing what “the company wanted” until Terry discovered that the individual thereby forfeited their right to choose and influence outcomes.

I think every person has to see how they fit as part of the big picture, whether it's in the whole world or whether it's in the organization that you work for, and if you don't feel that then, for me it becomes, -- you become so internalized, worrying about what you're not getting, what you're not learning, how you're not participating...

Terry talked about the need to find connectedness which you can't achieve without understanding “how you fit” and having a clear sense of self. Terry argued that this is a continual dynamic process through which more meaning can be derived from work.

One of the critical differences between the work addicted and the work-holistic individuals was the reference point for their decisions. We have set it up, in this paper, as a dichotomy although the

transcripts revealed that there was a continuum between the two extremes. The individuals who were closer to the work-holistic scheme had a strong self-definition. Their transcripts were filled with “I” and “we” rather than “they” or “them” which dominated the work addicted transcripts. External labels took on less importance and were seen as temporary. The work addicted were much more inclined to define themselves based on external labels, positions and accolades.

The Paradox of Egoless Debate and a Strong Sense of Self

A senior executive referred to the role of “*egoless debate*” in promoting innovation. The key attribute of “*egoless debate*” was that ideas were seen to be independent of the person who proposed them. Consequently, the debate could be vigorous without being personally threatening. This is in stark contrast to the “*popularity culture*” commented on by several interviewees.

Sal Cobb: “Many people below the very senior executive level have gained their positions through exploiting their relationships. It is part of the culture, it has been for a long time. Relationship is defined as having friendship that goes beyond work. Typically for women to succeed at the organization they have to be attractive and presentable.”

A strong sense of self may not be a route to popularity but it does not necessarily mean arrogance. It means understanding who you are and who you aren't. Several members of the management team talked about the importance of the long serving employees. These people have a “*wealth of history which we need to understand to move forward*”. A CEO spoke of the paradox in seeking the knowledge of long-serving employees.

“I desperately need their wisdom, and their insights of the past. But I always have to be cautious about their need to stay with the “way things were”. ... Seeking their input is critical, being bound by their advice is foolhardy if you want to make change.”

He told a story of an employee who when asked about an issue walked around the board room explaining why each of the previous CEOs had not enacted the changes. The CEO argued that you had to have a strong sense of direction to not be overwhelmed by such history.

He said seeking the wisdom but not acting on the advice often made him unpopular at the organization. Developing a thick skin was seen as a necessary part of the job. Lisa Devon also mentioned the role of unpopularity in her decisions. She was aware that her stand on a number of issues had made her unpopular. She trusted her knowledge of the context and long-run implications of the decisions which in her mind overrode the problem of unpopularity.

We were told that managers and executives at both organizations are expected to work long hours. The expectation is very real in the minds of the managers and executives interviewed. However, some of the interviewees had framed their lives in a fashion that allowed them to satisfy the needs of the company without sacrificing their own needs or losing their self-identity. Charles Pegg talked about separating the different parts or roles in one's life so that each could take turn. In essence, it was a call for separation and balance. Others that we interviewed, found their self-identity not through separation but increased connectedness between the facets of their lives. For example, Terry talked about finding meaning from her life, which included but was broader than work. The connectedness implied a need for congruence between the meaning and fulfillment derived from work and other non-work activities. It is this interpretation which we have labelled work-holism. The increased connectedness of work-holism is an attitude rather than a specific allocation of time to various activities.

Living in the “Border” - Creative Tension

In a speech one of the executives spoke of business as a community affair:

“We begin by eliminating in our minds the distinctions we have made between business and the rest of life. That is the essential first step toward business success in the future....By helping more women succeed, we help give society access to a pool of untapped talent – a whole new set of contributors to the community's economic well-being.....We benefit from that, but only because everybody else does. And benefit to the community, I predict, will soon be one of the standards by which success in business is defined.....In helping to build healthy communities, we ensure our own long-term survival...And the most pressing need we face right now – all of use together – is to build strong health communities.”

His comments revealed a sense of interconnectedness between the various facets of his life and the communities in which he and the company interacted. The reference point for comparison became “self” as part of a community or communities. For example:

- How am I a part of the community?
- How is my community connected to this organization? To me?
- What learning and opportunities are available in these interactions? In these communities?

Discussion and Conclusions

The data revealed patterns that replicated throughout the organizations. The pattern of workaholism as both an individual trait and an organizational culture is evident. Also present, though to a lesser degree in the data, is the pattern labelled as workholism.

The power of workaholism was a dominant force in both organizations. Given the characteristics of workaholism, this does not bode well for these organizations' capacity for change-ability. This addictive behaviour can inhibit the pattern recognition skills needed to adapt in a dynamically changing environment. When an organization's executives model and exert patterns of influence based on workaholic characteristics, the organizational culture is susceptible to the following:

- an internal organizational focus to the exclusion of significant community (marketplace) variables and trends;
- an obsession with “perfection” which shifts the orientation away from an individual's capacity and expectation to learn from mistakes;
- limiting the organization's focus to simple either-or choices at a time when the world is increasingly full of both-and environments and scenarios; and
- a tenuous grasp of marketplace, community, timing and change, because of a tendency to deny ambiguity, conflict, time and failure – all of which is compounded by a drive for external validation.

However, there were signs of work-holism as well which suggested a competing pattern in these organizations. Both organizations were creating conditions for work-holism to flourish in some parts of the organization. Their proponents were eloquent in understanding both the damage to the organization by its addictive traits and the productivity benefits to the organization, the individuals, and to the broader community from a more holistic perspective. They painted a picture of discretionary energy that had the potential to grow if it was nurtured. This was not another means of “getting more from less resources” but tapping the natural strengths of the employees in building on their gifts, talents, life experience and context. In essence, the discretionary energy is released by finding connections between “self” and work rather than requiring self to fit to work. This intentional exploration supports the organization's capacity to manage change-ability and explore innovation, with all the opportunity, ambiguity, and constant flux that this orientation represents.

Evidence of complexity, chaos theory and fractals is limited in addictive organizations. Self-similarity in a work-holistic environment could be argued by some as creating organizational conditions of inefficient redundancy – certainly this seems to be a view implicitly revealed in the command-and-control orientation of the workaholic organization. Rather, self-similarity in a work-holistic organization means that the part contains the direction and shape of the whole. This work-holistic part of the organization is then able to integrate broad strategic vision in its full range of immediate decision-making requirements, opportunities, and community contacts.

Constant change but order, a critical attribute of fractals, is anathema to the workaholic organization's drive for "perfection" and its inability to deal with uncontrollables. The workaholic organization will actively resist complexity. By contrast, as one zooms in on a fractal, the complexity is not decreased – micro-macro complexity abounds. The workaholic organization will feed a culture of "indispensable" parts, rather than promoting the fractal-like conditions where the whole can be in each of the parts. In the addictive state, indispensability of any one part is a threat to the life of the organization, since it represents an orientation towards individual dependency, and therein lie specific vulnerabilities and limits. Conversely, the work-holistic organization promotes each of the characteristics of complex systems – (1) many points of interaction, (2) many potential outcomes from the interactions, and (3) patterns which repeat in the organizational context.

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