

**SWP 38/91 THE REDUNDANT EXECUTIVE : PERSONALITY
AND THE JOB CHANGE EXPERIENCE**

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THE REDUNDANT EXECUTIVE:

PERSONALITY AND THE JOB CHANGE EXPERIENCE

Abstract

This article reports on research undertaken to examine the relationship between personality and careers. A study of the personality characteristics of 204 executives who had been made redundant compared 16PF profiles with those of similar populations and it is argued that there are identifiable characteristics amongst the redundant sample, which shows them to be more creative and unconventional, but that they also possess a lack of social skills and poor organisational survival abilities. This suggests it is both personality and 'social fit' which are significant in suffering an enforced job change.

Further research drew on the experiences of 299 executives who had been made redundant. This study explored their reactions to the job loss event and their subsequent learning from the experience, in terms of 'psychological growth' and the changing patterns of their careers. This suggested that there is a wide variation in the response to the enforced job change and that the personality factors associated with this type of executive may strongly influence their subsequent career paths.

Introduction

The second major recession in the last ten years has produced a record number of business closures in the UK, and has drawn attention once again to those who suffer redundancy. In this paper, we seek to explore the evidence on whether the selection of executives for redundancy who have had organisational careers, is in any way related to their personality. We also wish to examine the consequential influences on career patterns for those who have experienced enforced job change. The first study on personality characteristics was completed in 1986 and the follow-up on careers in 1991.

Middle managers and senior executives have increasingly sought to build careers between organisations. The Vocational Guidance Association has reported a 30% increase in career changes for the over 35 year olds since 1984 (Cole 1988). Organisations also have had to introduce change: to reorganise, to introduce new technology, to restructure and to reduce the numbers employed (sometimes euphemistically called 'downsizing'). A recent study showed that in the 1950s one third of all managers spent their entire working lives within one organisation, whereas by 1983 only one tenth of all managers spent all their career with one company. This study revealed that enforced job change increases in late middle age when redundancies frequently occur (Nicholson and West 1988).

Redundancy

One company policy response to the need to move staff out of employment is to use an 'outplacement' service. This is the term used by consultancies which are engaged by an employer to assist departing personnel to come to terms with their situation, and to provide job search assistance. Over the last twenty years, the concept of 'outplacement' has become increasingly popular, and the number and variety of services in what has become an 'industry' have grown dramatically.

In the USA revenues for outplacement consultancies have tripled since 1980, with a growth rate of 35% to 40% per year (Piccolino 1988). There has been a similar growth in the UK over the past twelve years with over half of the Times Top 500 using outplacement (Hyde 1984).

Outplacement services now range from individually tailored packages to group programmes. They consist of a variety of elements from basic job finding schemes to more sophisticated programmes, including personal, financial and career counselling (Masterson 1988).

The Literature On Redundancy

There have been many previous studies of redundancy. Reasons for redundancy vary: mergers, company reconstructions, changing market conditions, policy disagreements (Hyde 1984); technological change/functional obsolescence (Genders 1971, Williams and Sneath 1973,). People have been selected for redundancy because of troublemaking and revenge (Williams 1973) organisational fit (Hartley 1978, 1980, Huczynski 1978) incompetence (Genders 1971, Scissons 1980, Williams 1973,). Despite the ambiguity surrounding the criteria for job loss, the notion of inferiority, that the executive is somehow responsible for his redundancy, is pervasive, as shown in the phrases '*shake out*' (Mackay 1972) '*getting rid of dead wood*', '*housekeeping*' (Manchester Centre for Business Research 1972) '*sorting out the sheep from the goats*' (Woods 1975).

The notion that the redundant executive is personally inferior or underdeveloped is reinforced by the assumption that management development can help the individual to avoid redundancy. This emphasis on the individual ignores the organisational and external aspects of job loss, while some management development theories ignore the other contributory factors such as personality and the political aspects of surviving in management hierarchies.

There have been a number of studies which have used data from personality questionnaires to profile redundant executives. Hartley (1978) used the 16PF Form 'C' to test the hypothesis that unemployed executives would conform to a stereotype of failure: being less entrepreneurial, less shrewd and less emotionally stable. She found on the contrary that their self image and self concept were not lower than average and that their personality profile showed them to be more assertive, more conscientious and more self sufficient than the norm. They were more resourceful, had a higher super-ego strength and were more imaginative. However, they also were less outgoing had fewer religious values, less interpersonal tolerance and were less persistent at routine tasks than their counterparts still in employment. Overall, she concluded that organisational factors may be more influential in job loss than the manager's personality per se.

A similar range of issues were examined by Scissons (1980) who concluded that there were significant personality differences, since redundant executives in his sample were less conservative in their values, more independent and critical, less concerned with the opinion of others or with creating a favourable social image than the control group. McLoughlin, Friedson and Murray (1983) also used the 16PF in an attempt to test the assertion that personality profile differences exist between the employed and recently terminated executives. Once again they showed that there were statistically significant differences on eight of the sixteen personality factors, including being markedly more assertive, self-assured, independent minded, stubborn, persevering and self assured, with markedly lower scores on easy going, good natured, softhearted, attentive to people, emotionally expressive than the control group of Cattell's profile of the American Manager.

These findings do not refute the arguments of those who regard redundancy as a consequence of organisational requirements changing. Huczynski (1978) considered 'not fitting into the organisation' as the most common criterion of selection for redundancy, but Fineman (1978) (also using the 16PF) found no indication in the personality of the unemployed sample of poor adjustment or inferiority. Genders (1971) argued that non-situational and non-personality factors such as age and work performance are primarily responsible for redundancy. Even if environment is deemed to be a determinant of survival, the way one conducts oneself in a social situation is partly a function of personality.

The studies quoted above are two sides to the same coin. The assertive, independent, imaginative, but insensitive and self-absorbed executive may not fit into top management's vision of the future competencies required. At times when there are good organisational reasons for redundancy, the choice of who should go may well revolve around the extent to which the person's approach 'fits' the organisational requirements of the future. Team players may be preferred to individualists.

One factor which does seem to recur constantly in the 16PF studies is the 'N Factor' which distinguishes between naivete and shrewdness: those being made redundant being more likely to be genuine, if socially clumsy, as opposed to polished and socially aware, spontaneous and natural instead of calculating. Although different approaches have been adopted in the research studies quoted, the overwhelming conclusion is that although certain personality characteristics may pre-dispose the manager to survive, survival only occurs when the manager's approach matches that of the organisation. This would explain why redundant executives possess the same basic characteristics as those still with organisational careers.

The research quoted above is based on samples which may not be representative of the unemployed population as a whole. For example, Hartley's research draws on a sample of redundant executives enrolled on a management skills training course, sponsored by the Manpower Services Commission. Scissons' sample includes only those made redundant on the stated grounds of corporate reorganisation, amalgamation and behaviour. Frequently those studies have an age bias, as in Morrison's (1976) study of 21 Canadian executives aged over 40 and Ferguson *et al* (1977) likewise used a similar sample with an inherent age bias. However, the evidence from these studies relating to redundant executives does seem to contain a sufficient number of common threads to indicate that there are grounds for seeking the distinctive characteristics of executives who are selected for redundancy. What seemed to be required was a research study which used a wider sample and which was comparable with a group of employed executives.

STUDY 1.

Personality Characteristics of 'Outplaced' Executives

Outplacement is now widely used, especially for more senior executives at a time of enforced job change. An outplacement consultancy therefore, provides a useful framework in which to investigate the personalities and careers of redundant executives. The sample should contain a significant proportion of managers who have spent their careers in large organisations. Although one might expect most of them to be in the upper age bracket in view of their seniority, there is no limitation on age. There are no restrictions on reasons for redundancy, specialists are included, as well as general managers. No sex bias was sought, but it was recognised that it would be difficult to find a significant number of senior female executives who had been made redundant, due to the small number in the senior executive population.

The researchers were offered access to data on redundant executives in order to explore questions about executive personalities and careers by Pauline Hyde and Associates which is a human resource consultancy specialising in career transition and re-employment. This outplacement consultancy offers a non-directive counselling approach to recovery from redundancy and assists in the job search process. Redundant executives are offered career counselling and guidance which includes completion of the 16PF questionnaire.

The sample obtained from Pauline Hyde and Associates was randomly drawn from their records. The sample consisted of 204 executives of whom 3 were female. All had completed the 16PF as a routine part of their career counselling. Testing had been not less than two weeks from the time they were made redundant. The reasons for redundancy were given in 137 cases. The most frequent of these were 'Reorganisation' (34), 'Retrenchment' (24) 'Closure of unit or firm' (21), 'Personality clash' (10), 'End of contract' (10), 'Inadequate Performance' (7).

The average age of this group was 47 years with a range from 32 to 60 years. 25 of them had been managing directors, 55 directors, 37 had been other senior executives and 70 had been executives whose job titles did not suggest special seniority. All the main functional areas such as marketing, finance, production and personnel were found in the sample, and there were 22 technical specialists (Chemist, Design Engineer etc.)

Mean score of redundant executive

The mean scores (using general population norms in Form A) with the standard deviations and the general population percentile for the mean score of the redundant executive group are as shown in Table 1.

Comparisons With Two Other Managerial Populations

We were able to compare the group with two other managerial populations. The first was the 178 Business Executives whose scores are quoted at page 200 of the 1970 Handbook for the 16PF, the second was a population of managerial applicants, to a British electronics manufacturing company. This second population was younger than the research group, and had a higher proportion of design engineers and fewer sales and marketing applicants. However, it covered 855 experienced industrial managers and technical specialists who had passed through the initial (pre-test) screening for more than "run of the mill" managerial appointments and it was considered a reasonable comparative group.

TABLE 1 MEAN SCORE OF REDUNDANT EXECUTIVES

Factor	Description (High Score end)	Mean	Sten	S.D.	Percentile
A	Warmth	6.31		2.06	66th
B	Intelligent	8.39		1.46	92nd
C	Calm	6.00		1.84	60th
E	Assertive	6.77		2.00	74th
F	Cheerful	5.78		1.84	56th
G	Conscientious	6.36		1.68	66th
H	Socially bold	6.52		1.99	70th
I	Sensitive, tender-minded	5.00		2.22	40th
L	Suspicious	4.89		2.08	38th
M	Imaginative, unconventional	7.48		1.84	84th
N	Shrewd, sophisticated	4.26		1.86	26th
O	Self-critical	4.26		1.85	26th
Q1	Radical, free-thinking	5.57		2.05	51st
Q2	Self sufficient	5.78		1.79	56th
Q3	Controlled	5.82		1.94	56th
Q4	Tense, driven	4.81		1.96	37th
Second Order Factors					
	Exvia	6.47		1.77	69th
	Anxiety	4.38		1.65	28th
	Cortertia	6.35		1.87	66th
	Independence	7.04		1.66	78th
	Cool Realism	4.71		2.10	35th
Criterion Indices					
	Creativity	6.93		1.68	76th
	Leadership	6.71		1.50	73rd
	Technical Leadership	8.98		2.10	96th
	Effective Leadership	7.40		2.24	83rd
	Freedom from Accidents	5.11		2.14	40th
	General Job Success at the Professional level	6.26		1.57	65th

The mean scores for the redundant group and the two other populations were used to compute point-biserial correlations to give indications of the ways in which the populations differed. This analysis revealed that although there are some instances in which the differences are in opposite directions, eg. Factors A and Q2, there are striking similarities for the larger correlations.

The redundant executives scored significantly higher for assertive (E) and imaginative (M), and significantly lower for shrewd (N), self-critical (O), and radical (Q1) [significant at the 0.1% level on a two tail test].

Relationships Between Biographical Data And 16PF Measure

16PF scores, when compared with data about reasons for being made redundant, job level, type of job held and length of time to become established in a new post, showed none with statistical significance. When we compared the discriminant function scores (D1 and D2) against the biographical data a similar homogeneity of the redundant executive group was apparent.

Conclusions to the redundant executive personality study

1. There were few significant interfactor correlations between the 16 personality factors which are not normally expected amongst groups of managers.
2. There was no evidence of 'stress' or psychological tension as might be expected amongst a group of redundant managers.
3. Those who had left because of inadequate performance showed the lowest intelligence scores. In examining the reasons for leaving, compared with mean length of time 'unemployed', it is noted that where a personality clash was recorded, the mean of 4.6 months unemployed compared with a mean of 9.4 months, where the manager had 'resigned', and 7.2 months when the redundancy was due to a merger. These managers who left due to personality reasons had higher intelligence scores, and higher warmth scores.
4. An examination of the mean sten of this group shows significant differences from those described in the comparative groups of British managers.

The redundant managers were

- More calm
- More socially bold, uninhibited
- Much more imaginative and unconventional
- Less shrewd, more natural, forthright
- Less self critical
- Less tense, overwrought

The findings show this group's profile to be close to McLoughlin, Friedson and Murray's study (1983). The overall findings support the view that it is those executives whose 'N' factor profile indicates a lack of 'political' skills, who are likely to be made redundant, compared with other executives.

5. In terms of the broader criterion indices, redundant executives were alert, intelligent, independent with good leadership scores and good emotional adjustment. They showed up worse however, on 'cool realism'.

The conclusion may be drawn that as with other studies, the unemployed executive was significantly different from other executives in certain respects. We may conclude they were not 'organisation men' but were more independent minded, conscientious, imaginative and unconventional.

STUDY 2.

Redundant Executives' Experience of Redundancy

Much research has tended to focus on the personality characteristics of the redundant executive and if, as is suggested by the 'N' factor study those selected for redundancy did not 'fit' the social environment of their work place, at the time of their redundancy, we felt it was worth exploring the more dynamic aspects of the job change experience. In particular we wanted to examine the impact of redundancy and outplacement to find out what executives learned from their experiences and to elucidate the effect of the redundancy and outplacement on subsequent career expectations and patterns.

Career Transition

Career has been defined as the sequence of work-role related experiences over time, both objectively viewed and subjectively interpreted by the individual. The psychological factors associated with career have been incorporated in a model by Hall (1986) which is based on the concept of a *psychological success cycle*. Career goals are set and achieved. This provides a sense of self-esteem and enhanced competence which in turn promotes satisfaction, involvement and the setting of new goals. As this cycle is repeated, it is argued, career growth occurs.

Transition periods appear within this sequence, including the small steps within jobs such as the acquisition of new skills and experiences. More serious transitions also occur in terms of changing jobs and job loss. In the event of job loss, the psychological success cycle is broken. For professionals this is often a traumatic event which can consequently have profound psychological effects on the individual.

Recent down turns in the economy have meant that career progression is not as linear or predictable as it was in the past and redundancy has become an increasingly realistic 'fact of life' for many mid-career managers. However, the majority of the literature on careers has focused on transitions from one role to another rather than on the loss of the career role or on the event of redundancy as the precursor to career transition. Many of the psychological aspects of career transition equally apply in the redundancy situation but there is a distinct lack of hard data on mid-career issues and in particular on what those executives who have experienced enforced-job change feel about the experience and what they subsequently do in their careers.

Rapoport (1974) suggests that those in mid-career often experience dissonance to some degree as this is a period in the life-cycle when people move through many reappraisals of their life. He emphasises the concept of crisis and suggests that *"unless there is a sense of crisis - some kind of important turning point then development is much less likely to occur"* (p137). These crises are usually relatively unexpected and unwanted and usually mean some kind of traumatic change for the individual. Redundancy is one event which obviously creates dissonance, precipitates a crisis and leads to a career transition.

Latack and Dozier (1986) argue that a positive aspect of the job loss transition is career growth. Career growth in this context can adopt two definitions. Growth can be achieved through finding a new job which provides **new** opportunities for psychological success or alternatively a new job may provide **more** opportunities for psychological success. Therefore, individuals may re-enter a new psychological success cycle. The whole process of the job change experience - combines many factors which can effect the degree of career growth achieved. Subsequently the manner of the termination, social and family support,

resolution of grief and anger can, depending on age and other factors, influence continued career growth. Latack and Dozier suggest that "*in a normative sense growth has occurred if one can conclude that....the gains outweigh the losses*" (p380)

The present study was designed to explore what happened to executives who had experienced redundancy and passed through the outplacement service. The areas investigated included work-life before and after redundancy, the experience of redundancy and outplacement and career issues.

Methodology

The population comprised the data base of individuals who have undergone outplacement with Pauline Hyde & Associates over the past 10 years. This included 1159 contacts, geographically distributed throughout the UK, with a small number now residing abroad.

The Questionnaire Survey

Due to the geographic spread of individuals a postal questionnaire survey methodology was adopted. An interview schedule was compiled which covered a range of topics including work-life, the experience of redundancy, career and personal details. The questionnaire was piloted in individual face-to-face interviews with nine clients who had been outplaced. The schedule was then reformatted into a self-completion questionnaire which was used in the postal survey of the client data base.

A response rate of 28.4% was achieved in the postal survey (299 responses). The data presented below is an extract from the main points of the questionnaire survey.

Career Issues

The results of this survey revealed that there was a shift in the size of company for whom redundant people worked. A number of individuals worked for large companies before the redundancy (47% worked for companies of 5000+ employees) while more individuals were working for smaller companies (65% were employed in small companies (less than 1000) or were self-employed (23%) after the redundancy. This is a similar result to a previous survey (quoted in Beaudoin 1988) which found that about 20% of all managers who lose their jobs subsequently start their own firms. This movement into smaller companies or self-employment may be an indicator that those managers made redundant are not 'organisation men' as suggested by the N factor study. They may prefer the flexibility and challenge of smaller companies or self employment.

Previous research has shown that older workers are generally less likely to be re-employed (Parnes 1981). In the present sample (average age 46 SD 6.3 at redundancy) all the executives except one had been re-employed and 91% had obtained a position within 12 months of their redundancy. These findings may relate to the fact that most of the sample were of higher intellectual ability and having been helped by the outplacement service were able to find subsequent employment and find it relatively quickly.

The major reasons for redundancy were quoted as rationalization/reorganisation (69.5%). In the present climate this could be accounted for by the tendency for organisations to become flatter and leaner. However, a further 18.5% indicated that the redundancy was due to 'conflicts of personality and internal politics'. The results of the N factor study indicated that many of the redundant managers tended to lack 'political skills' therefore this finding would support the contention that a high proportion of those selected for redundancy are the ones who do not appear to be 'organisation men'.

Almost 39% of our sample indicated that they were not satisfied with the way the redundancy was handled by their employers. The major reasons for dissatisfaction were the insensitivity (often political) of handling the termination (58%) and wrangles over the exit package and pay (29%). In support of the findings of a previous study of redundant executives (Piccolino 1988) which suggested that these individuals often feel angry and betrayed, the overwhelming impression of the redundancy experience in our sample was a sense of alienation, a lack of job security and a lack of loyalty to companies (55%).

Latack and Dozier (1986) suggested that a "*professional approach*" in the handling of redundancy appears to make it a less stressful event. However some organisations, despite considering their employees as important human resources during employment, handle the redundancy in an unprofessional way. For example the decision is often communicated in a way that is inconsistent with the employees perception of status and is felt to be "*downright dehumanising*".

Some of the suggestions proposed by Latack and Dozier (1986) which are defined as a professional approach to the termination may help the individual to maintain self-esteem and re-establish a sense of control. These include giving advance warning and a full explanation of the reason for redundancy, providing a chance to resolve the grief and anger and they stress the importance of re-employment within a relatively short period of time. These all help, it is argued, to ameliorate the adverse effects of the redundancy experience and promote a career growth perspective on the experience.

Within the present sample the spectrum of reactions to the job loss experience ranged from the negative '*disbelief*', '*shock*' and '*loss*' to the very positive and optimistic senses of '*freedom*' and '*challenge*'.

Almost 57% indicated a sense of alienation, loss and expressed a strong lack of loyalty to companies. However, over 12% of the sample saw the experience as a liberating one through which they attained a greater sense of freedom and challenge for the future. Almost 7% indicated an increased desire to remain self-employed in the future and 5.5% perceived the redundancy as an opportunity for self examination and 3% indicated that the experience had no lasting detrimental effects.

The majority of individuals (92%) had held 3 posts or less since the redundancy, however 24% had been made redundant a second time. This may be an indication that they are repeating a similar pattern in their careers and may support the hypothesis that there are personality factors at play, or it may be an indication that there is a certain pressure on individuals who go through the outplacement service to take a post where in some cases they perhaps ought to wait in order to find a more suitable position.

The literature also suggests that when re-employed, older workers are less likely to move to higher status jobs (Zahniser *et al* 1985) and that in general ambition levels do tend to decrease over time (Howard and Bray 1988). The majority of respondents (53%) did not have a career plan before redundancy. However 73% of those who did have some kind of career plan, indicated that their career expectations had changed since redundancy. Of the present sample 34% indicated that they are now in a less senior position or did not expect to attain as high a position as before.

However, a further 25% indicated that they were now more aware of their career potential and 16% stated that they now placed a much greater emphasis on self-employment, therefore the adverse effects of the redundancy experience can be turned into productive career growth opportunities. The redundancy experience had forced a re-evaluation of the individuals' attitude towards work in many cases creating a different balance between work and non-work life.

Conclusions

At the time of the first study reported here, in the mid 1980's researchers were suggesting that redundancy was either a consequence of situational factors such as work performance or of personality characteristics. There is strong evidence from this research that those selected for redundancy had a different personality profile from other executives. The redundant executives were more socially bold, uninhibited, and imaginative but were less shrewd and more natural: perhaps more naive than other managers. Since those studied were more independent minded and unconventional, we may conclude that they were not 'organisation men' in W H Whyte's terms (1957)

Personality and organisation fit models need not be mutually exclusive. If we accept that the social situation is one determinant of success, the way an executive conducts himself or herself in the many different situations faced may well be a key issue in performance. One would expect much behaviour to be strongly influenced by personality. The personality variables identified (especially the 'N' Factor of the 16PF) are most likely to have situational significance at a time when judgements are being made about the capacity of managers to cope with the many organisational problems faced when there is pressure on margins, retrenchment and redundancy.

The idea of a single career path or organisation career is currently being challenged - it is no longer the case where an individual plans or maintains a career path within a single organisation, now people may pursue career journey's and life styles which are quite unique.. The potential for being made redundant is increasingly real in the current economic climate and the results of the follow-up study present evidence that the experience of enforced job change has had a lasting effect on individuals. Careers are dramatically altered by redundancy.

Those executives who are made redundant are often from a population who invest time and money in their career and therefore have a lot of ego involvement in their job. In the event of redundancy it may be difficult to sustain a positive, successful self-image and the impact of redundancy can be quite traumatic.

There are wide variations in the response to redundancy as it is a very multifaceted situation. Some experience it as quite devastating. However many of these individuals are also creative, enthusiastic and entrepreneurial and therefore use the event of redundancy as an experience with a lot of growth potential whether this is in terms of moving into self-employment or achieving the potential for a fulfilling semi-retirement or retirement phase in their lives.

Given that those forced to change jobs are amongst the most imaginative and the most intelligent it is not surprising that the majority found other jobs quickly. With a generally naive approach, even the previous experience of redundancy was no protection against a further redundancy experience for around a quarter of the sample. However, for the majority there would seem to have been some lessons well learned: many are exploiting their considerable talents working for themselves, and for smaller organisations than before. Smaller organisations are likely to be less impersonal and employees may be valued more as individuals.

If those who have suffered an enforced job change are working for smaller organisations, and at a lower level than before where the politics are easier to handle, that does not detract from the contribution they can make. Rather, this is a reflection on the organisations which lost some of their most gifted executives, and which are unable to accommodate the peculiarities of able people within their own notion of 'social fit'. There is an opportunity for further research, particularly longitudinal studies, to discover how the image of oneself, following redundancy, changes, and how these changes influence career choice

and job satisfaction. Our study, it is hoped, will be a useful start point for future researchers who wish to follow the linkage between personality and careers.

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