

ESSAY WRITING (3): FINDING YOUR 'OWN VOICE' IN ESSAYS

Many essay and exam questions, particularly in the early stages of your course, are framed in a way that tests your knowledge of the main points that underpin a subject. This knowledge can be presented in an objective and clear way in essays. However, as you progress with your studies, you will find that both essay and exam questions will invite you, directly or indirectly, to decide where you stand on a particular issue and to formulate your own point of view.

Some examples of recent exam questions at the School of Management that invite you to take up a position:

- ❑ *"The concept of identity is central to the conceptualisation of one of the most complex and fascinating of human creations, the work organisation". Gioia (1998). Discuss.*
- ❑ Is affirmative action now a legitimate response to past inequalities?
- ❑ It is neither useful nor effective for a manager to punish their employees. Discuss why this might be so, and suggest what alternative strategies could be used instead.

Many students when they enter higher education are confused about a gap they perceive between the conventions of academic writing, and the need to make their **own** points in essays. Some tutors will on one hand encourage students to develop their own ideas, whilst emphasising the need also to cite and refer to the work of experts in the particular subject area. Other tutors will encourage personal opinions, whilst others will not! This apparent confusion can sometimes result in assignments that are an unsuccessful blend of the personal and the academic.

ACADEMIC

To write in an **academic way**: being critical & analytical; using language in a precise and subject-specific way; drawing on, and citing, a range of authors and their arguments to support a particular position, whilst remaining objective about a subject.



PERSONAL

To write in a **personal way**, including using the term 'I', and introducing one's own opinions, ideas and feelings about a subject. Writing where there is a clear relationship between the writer and the subject.

In most written assignments the University will expect you to write your assignment in an academic way. However, your lecturers also want you to develop **your** own opinions and to formulate **your** own arguments. In this way academic knowledge is advanced, as students begin to challenge or develop existing ideas, theories and practices.

There **are** ways of resolving this apparent dilemma and integrating both the personal with the academic in writing for assignments. You can include your own points of view, whilst appearing to remain detached and objective. How do you do that? Read on...

WHY ARE YOU HERE?

University study is a starting point and place for you to begin to find a strong independent voice of your own and to develop your own arguments. To do this however, you will need to read widely and look at a range of perspectives on your chosen subject area. It is only by reading, thinking about what you have read and then connecting this reading to your own experiences, will you begin to find your own voice.

At the same time however, you must keep an open mind and be willing to change if you are convinced of the merits of a new point of view. This aspect of learning is challenging - and difficult - as new ideas can shake your beliefs and leave you feeling insecure and unsettled as you begin to adjust your thinking and behaviour to new ideas.

THE 'HOW', 'WHAT' & 'WHY' QUESTIONS

As mentioned earlier, University is a starting point and place for you to begin to find a strong independent voice of your own. You can begin to develop this independence every time you have to write an assignment that invites you to 'discuss', or 'analyse' or 'criticize' or 'evaluate' a particular topic.

Whenever you see the following words in an essay title you will need to take an analytical approach and you may also need to decide on what your own position or point of view is in relation to the question.

- **Discuss** (this is the most widely used term)
- **Consider**
- **Analyse**
- **Contrast**
- **Criticize**
- **Evaluate**
- **Interpret**
- **Justify**

By the time you come to write an assignment on a particular topic, you would have attended lectures and tutorials, plus read selected texts on the subject in question. From day one of being introduced to the subject you should be continually asking yourself 'how do **I** feel about this subject?' What are **my** instincts or experiences on this? What is **my** position on this subject?

Many students, particularly in the early stages of their studies, are reluctant to do this, as they feel they are there to learn what 'experts' have had to say on a subject. This can result in students producing essays that are accurate summaries of ideas, but which are often merely descriptive and lack any real engagement with the subject. It is certainly true that your lecturers will be looking for evidence that you understand the main ideas that underpin an essay question, and this requires you to summarise these ideas in your own words.

But one of the main purposes of higher education, as mentioned earlier, is to encourage independent and advanced thinking, so you should try, from the start of your studies, to ask yourself the questions above. You should not be afraid to challenge anything that you read – but to challenge using **arguments**, not opinion.

Argument: evaluating and weighing up ideas by considering available evidence (articles, books, reports, statistics etc)

Opinion: a point of view that may be formed without supporting evidence, e.g. based just on instinct or subject experience.

TURNING OPINIONS INTO ARGUMENTS

You can turn your opinions into arguments by researching the subject in question. Look for evidence to support a particular point of view – but also look at any evidence that **contradicts** your own opinions. You need to be aware of the counter-arguments to your own and be willing to keep an open mind about them.

Being aware of counter-arguments will help you to clarify and sharpen your own ideas. You may also decide to change or adapt your opinions in the light of new evidence.

If you do this, you will have taken the first steps to wisdom.

START WITH THE QUESTION OR ESSAY TOPIC

The process of forming your own position and point of view in essays begins with the essay question.

Take one example, earlier given:

- "*The concept of identity is central to the conceptualisation of one of the most complex and fascinating of human creations, the work organisation*". Gioia (1998). Discuss.

You need to start by identifying key words: '*concept of identity*', '*is central to...*' and '*the work organisation*'. You will need to be clear that you understand what is meant by identity **in this particular context**: the work organisation. So you could start, for example, by thinking about the different aspects of identity relevant to work. These could include skills, personality, values, motivation etc. You might also want to think about the cultural dimensions of the question; for example, would the statement apply only in certain cultural/geographical contexts, or is it a statement with universal application.

However, the important thing to note about this essay title is that it contains a premise or proposition: that '*the concept of identity IS CENTRAL to...the work organisation*'. The essay title is therefore inviting you to take up a position:

- **Generally agree** with the premise – although you may want to raise certain exceptions to a general agreement.
 - **Generally disagree** with the premise- although you may want to raise certain exceptions to a general disagreement.
- If you generally agree – why?
- If you generally disagree – why?

The worst thing you could do is to leave the reader feeling that you don't have a position at all! In an essay like this, many students will just talk in descriptive terms about aspects of identity and work without tackling the basic premise of the essay: that identity **IS CENTRAL** to the work organisation.

It would be possible, for example, to argue that it is central, but equally, it could be argued with equal conviction that, albeit important or significant, it is not central to the work organisation in all contexts. There may be, for example, global cultural differences to take into account, or historical or social factors that you might want to discuss in your essay.

By taking up a clearly stated position, your own point of view emerges. You form your own judgements on the values and merits of arguments (often conflicting and contradictory) presented to you. The examples on the following pages illustrate how you can do this.

SELECTING EVIDENCE

As just stated, you can make your own voice heard by adopting a position in an essay that reflects your own response to a particular essay topic, and by the style of writing that you adopt. If we take the following essay title as an example:

'The most effective organisation will be those that build innovation, change and learning into their natural operations'.
Discuss (2000 words).

As stated earlier, before writing such an essay students will need first to think about the proposition in the essay statement and to what extent they agree or disagree with it. The proposition in the statement is that effective organisations **will** be those that build change into their 'natural operations'.

The following are three examples of introductions to essays that reflect how the three students responded to the proposition in the statement.

EXAMPLE 1

'We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form into teams we would be reorganised. We tend to meet any new situation by reorganising, and what a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralization.' (quoted in Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum 1999, p.455)

The above quotation might have been recorded yesterday in any staff canteen in any large organisation. In fact, the Roman author, Petronius, wrote it in 210 BC! Petronius refers to the 'illusion of progress', meaning the images presented to the world outside the organisation, whilst hiding the reality within. This essay will discuss the reasons why organisations try to maintain their competitive advantage by innovating, changing and learning. But it will also emphasise the need for planned organisational change in eight stages to avoid the situation Petronius describes – and is still valid today.

The student uses an ironic quotation by Petronius to gain the interest of the reader and to make a valid point about the need to manage change effectively. The student does not question the proposition, but makes it clear that planned organisation change is necessary to avoid the 'illusion of progress'. This essay could have been taken in any one of a number of different directions; there is no 'right' direction, although tutors are looking for knowledge of issues surrounding organisational change. The student has however, decided to focus on the management of change as a way forward. In an essay constrained by a tight word limit, e.g. 2000 words, it is often necessary to do this.

EXAMPLE 2

This essay supports the proposition in the statement that effective organisations need to maintain their advantage in a competitive environment by innovating, changing and learning from their experiences. It will however, argue that poor communication within organisations going through a process of change can be a major cause of failure or loss of morale among staff involved. It will therefore examine first the need for change and how this is determined and decided within organisations. Second, it will look at the process of organisational change and will present four approaches to planned organisational change. Third, it will take the position that, whilst all four of the approaches to be presented should be integrated, the ‘people-oriented’ approach is particularly important to avoid workers feeling themselves to be victims, rather than advocates, of the changes desired.

This is an example of a traditional but still effective introduction to essay writing: to tell the reader what is coming. The student’s ‘own voice’ (own position) is clear from the first sentence, but the student also promises to qualify this position in the way stated. The style of writing is formal, professional and systematic in its analysis, e.g. ‘*First... Second... Third...*’

EXAMPLE 3

In a fast moving competitive environment it is easy to be swept along by the rhetoric in the essay statement. Words such as ‘*effective organisation*’, ‘*change and learning*’ and ‘*natural operations*’ can woo us to agree; dare us to defy them. However, whilst understanding the context and background to such statements, there is another element to consider. And that is a need, amidst constant change, for continuity and stability in organisations. This essay will argue that what is needed is not just to build ‘*innovation, change and learning*’ into organisations, but to recognise the power and attraction of stability continuity to the organisation’s consumers and customers – and the staff of these organisations.

In this essay the student has decided not just to accept the proposition in the essay statement, but to look for what he or she thinks is missing in

the statement and use this as a starting point. The sentence in the introduction, '*whilst understanding the context and background to such statements*' is quite subtle, as it suggests that the student has a good knowledge of the topic but has a mind of their own and intends to put forward a particular point of view. Such introductions can catch the attention of the reader, as it is likely to be different to approaches taken by most other students.

But is this a risky strategy to take in an essay?

It depends how effectively the student can argue a case to support the position taken. The student would have to demonstrate in the essay that they have a thorough knowledge of the subject and that a subjective personal opinion was not just the only thing being presented. Essays that take an original position, provided that arguments are substantiated with reliable evidence, can gain good marks - see the following comments by two senior lecturers at the School of Management.

Assignment work that is awarded a more of 70+ has first and foremost to specifically answer the question set - and not talk about the issues in the question in general terms. It also needs to show real understanding. This is most likely to come from thorough and detailed critical analysis of relevant ideas and integrating these in discussion this means moving on from 'X says this' and 'Y says that' to an answer that summarizes, compares and contrasts what X and Y say about the issue at hand.

*You are also very likely to get a good mark **if you tell me something new**. By, for example, either going off the reading list to bring in new relevant work, or through use of examples to illustrate and support arguments. Work that offers new integrative models or attempts to synthesize different ideas is also likely to hit the button in this regard. Finally the work needs to be well written - this means thinking about structure and providing clear and meaningful introductions and conclusions. You are likely to need to write and revise a couple of drafts to get this really right. It also means the avoidance of typographical and spelling errors and the consistent use of Harvard referencing throughout.*

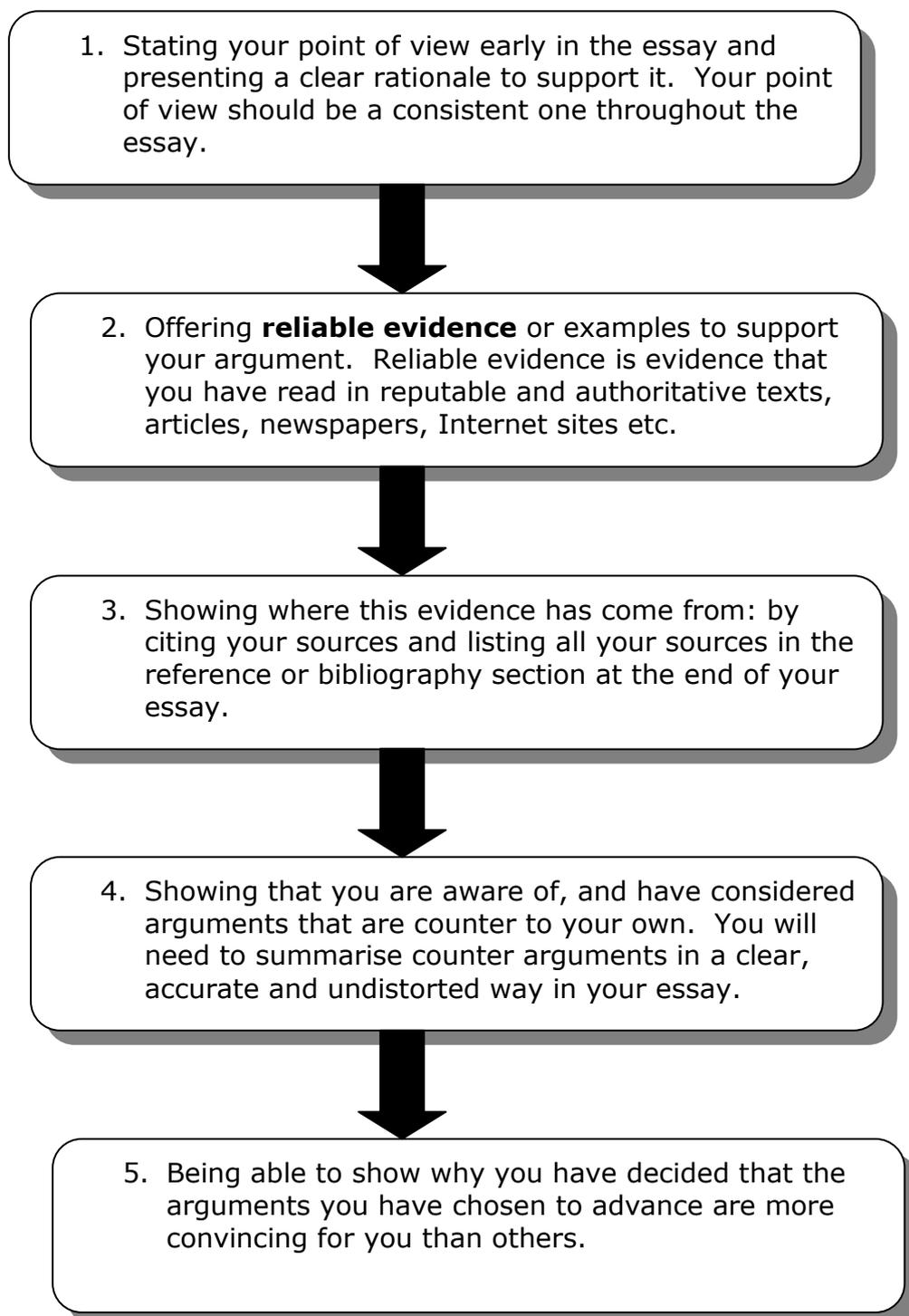
(Dr. David Spicer)

I will still give high marks, even though I may disagree with the conclusions drawn, providing they are well argued and show an understanding of the relevant literature. Unfortunately, however, there is a group of students who give their own views on subjects, because they do not know any of the relevant material, and give their own views because they do not have anything else they can talk about. They invariably fail badly, because their views are naive and misguided. Newton said that if he had seen further it was because he had stood on the shoulders of giants.

(Dr. Peter Wright)

DEVELOPING YOUR ARGUMENTS IN ESSAYS

You can present an argument in an essay by:



You could use the worksheet on the next page to help develop your arguments for essays. This worksheet can help you develop your arguments if you have to write an analytical essay.

The Essay Title:

What is going to be your overall point of view or position in this essay?

Summarize your reasons for taking this view or position (include sources of your evidence to support your position).

1

2

3

4

What are the main opposing arguments to the position you hold that you would need to be aware of/discuss?

THE 'I' WORD IN ASSIGNMENTS

There is a convention in writing for higher education that arguments should be presented in a dispassionate and objective way. One way of doing this is to try and remove the word 'I' from assignments.

But like most established conventions it is subject to the forces of change, and some tutors often now encourage students to include their viewpoints. Some essay titles may invite you to relate theories directly to your own personal experiences - which is an invitation to use the term 'I'.

So, in some assignments you are actually **invited** to present your own perspectives. The following assignment title is one such example:

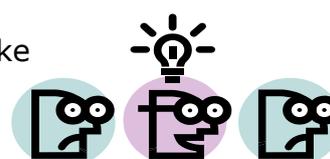
Organisational change can be a difficult process for all concerned. Describe a situation in which you resisted change. Why did you do so? What were the consequences of your resistance?

In an assignment like this you are being asked to do two things:

1. Demonstrate your knowledge of the dynamics of change, particularly organisational change
2. Relate this knowledge to your own personal experiences.

In such an assignment you can usually adopt 'two voices':

| The Detached Observer (objective) | The Active Participant (subjective) |
|--|---|
| <p>You would analyse objectively and discuss the overview ideas and theories of organisational change, e.g. preparing for change; managing change; sources of resistance etc</p> | <p>You would make connections between your own personal experiences and the theories, ideas and practices that you summarise.</p> <p>However, you would need to be objective about your subjective experiences! For example, do you have a greater understanding of your responses to the past situation because of your current knowledge about change?</p> |



So your assignment can be written reflecting these two voices. There is the voice of the 'detached observer' and your own voice: the 'active participant'. However, your own comments will need to be made in a reflective way, and will involve making connections between your own experiences and the theories, ideas and practices that you have been studying.

For example, an assignment of this type might be introduced to the reader, as follows:

This assignment will discuss the nature of innovation and change in organisations and the impact that change can have on the people involved, both inside and outside the organisation. I will connect this discussion to my own experiences when I worked at a large department store in London that was subject to a merger by a larger retail organisation. At the time, I felt the merger was badly managed, in terms of poor communication that preceded and followed the change, and I will be discussing this aspect in relation to how I felt and my observation of the resistance this caused among the staff at the time.

To try and avoid the use of the first person term, 'I' in this situation would be clumsy and unnecessary – and don't forget you have been invited to reflect on your own personal experiences.

However, you would revert to more of a detached and passive voice when switching from the personal to the detached observer, e.g.

Organisational change refers to any transformation in the design or functioning of an organisation. It is likely to happen when an organisation creates or adopts a method of production or working practice that is different in a significant way from the one preceding it.



KEEPING THE OUT OF ASSIGNMENTS

There is a convention in higher education that author's ideas should be discussed in a seemingly detached and objective way; 'seemingly', as the selection of evidence to present in an assignment is often subjective and can reflect the student's own position and preferences.

One way to present ideas in a detached way is to remove the term 'I' from writing at these points in an assignment.

Alternatives can include:

- *It can be argued...*
- *Arguably...*
- *This assignment will present the following point of view...*
- *Some commentators, notably Bloggs (1990) and Jones (1992) have argued...*
- *It may be that...*
- *We can see that...* ('we' in this context refers to anyone who cares to see!)
- *This assignment will attempt to show that...*
- *Perhaps...*
- *One point of view is that ...*
- *Another point of view suggests however, that...*
- *There are two sides to this question. Firstly,...*
- *However, ...*
- *In conclusion it can be argued that...*

See the example essay that follows for ways of doing this.

EXAMPLE ESSAY

This is an example essay that illustrates how a student presents a point of view and reaches a particular conclusion, but does so in a seemingly objective way.

If you look first at the title below, it is the form of a question: '*Job Insecurity in Contemporary Britain: Myth or Reality?*' In other words, is it 'real' or is a 'myth' (an invented story)?

The key words to analyse would be '*Job Insecurity*', and the focus is on Britain, and Britain today. The word '*Reality*' is an important word to think about too, as in a country of 29 million people in the labour market, how easy is it to generalise about 'reality' in this context? The word '*Myth*' is interesting too, as myths were often stories that represented truths or what people felt or believed to be true.

Finally, the invitation to '*discuss*' this statement invites you to look at this topic from a range of perspectives - but also to reach some point of view.

Now read the essay and think about how successful you feel the student has been in 'discussing' this topic and reaching a conclusion. As you read, you could note words or phrases the student uses to present an image of objectivity and 'distance' from the subject.

JOB INSECURITY IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN: MYTH OR REALITY? DISCUSS. (1500 words).

A study of work in contemporary Britain (*Heery & Salmon 2000*) suggested that many workers were fearful of their long-term job security. This essay will examine briefly the key factors that contribute collectively to this apparent sense of insecurity, including fears of losing permanent work contracts to temporary ones, a sense of lack of continuity in the workplace and of rapid changes in society, which all add to feelings of uncertainty about the future among many workers. It will also examine generational differences, as there appear to be differences between younger and older people in their responses to social and work changes.

The Heery and Salmon study found a widespread belief among workforce that companies generally sought ways to save on labour costs by outsourcing work or by increasing the number of temporary work contracts to employees. A fear of losing the relative security of a 'permanent' work contract appears to be a

key issue for many workers in Britain in contributing to an overall sense of work insecurity.

However, it can be difficult to justify statistically this prevailing sense of insecurity. In Britain, the proportion of employees on temporary contracts rose only marginally between 1992 and 1998, from 5.9% to 7.4%, and has since fallen to 7.1% in 2000 (*Office for National Statistics* 2000). Britain, in fact, compares quite favourably against other EU countries in the proportion of workers on temporary contracts, which in Spain, for example, is around 30% of the workforce.

Another factor is a belief highlighted in the Heery & Salmon study that people come and go quickly in jobs today, which creates a sense of lack of continuity and permanence in the workplace. However, again this can be difficult to justify statistically. A survey of job tenure, for example, found that 46% of employees had at least five years' experience with the same employer, and over one in ten had worked for the same employer for 20 years or more. This latter percentage had, in fact, risen from 9% in 1991 (*Office for National Statistics* 2001)

The statistics are irrelevant however, if people still **perceive** and define a situation as insecure. Insecurity becomes 'real' to them - and fear breeds insecurity. Even if you have not been made redundant yourself, you probably know someone who has been. It is a sense of fear that magnifies feelings of insecurity. In the late 1980s, when unemployment reached a peak of three million, Ron Todd of the Transport & General Workers' Union commented, '*we've got three million on the dole and another 23 million scared to death*' (quoted by *Bratton* 1992, p.70). This sense of fear of unemployment has continued well into the 1990s, despite a gradual decline in the numbers on the unemployment register (*Burchell et al* 1999).

To get closer to this sense of fear and resulting insecurity at work, it is important to look beyond labour market statistics to other changes in society that have impacted on people's overall sense of security at work and elsewhere.

Some commentators (in particular, *Sennett* 1998 & *Toynbee* 2003) have argued that the changing recruitment strategies of organisations contribute to this general sense of unease. There has undoubtedly been a trend to ‘externalising’ among companies: contracting out work to others, usually to agencies that in turn recruit temporary workers. Sennett argues that this can lead to increasing social polarisation between ‘employment rich and employment poor’ households, with the former characterised by permanence, and the latter by temporary work, punctuated by periods of unemployment. ‘Employment rich’ households are characterised by occupants who have acquired and developed skills that are currently in demand and which gain a wage and benefits premium in the contemporary labour market. By contrast, ‘employment poor’ households are those where the occupants do not have the skills that command high salaries.

Polly Toynbee has recently argued that unskilled workers are more insecure today than they were thirty years earlier, because of their increasing dependence on temporary agency work, which for unskilled work tends to be paid at minimum wage rates. She argues that despite the introduction of a national minimum wage in the late 1990s, the incomes of the poorest in society are relatively worse than the 1970s, due to the increased costs of essential items of expenditure, including housing costs. Toynbee asserts that agency work can also distort the statistics of unemployment, as many workers who use agencies do not bother to register as unemployed in periods between contracts, because of all the bureaucracy involved. These workers subsequently become ‘invisible’ and their voices are rarely heard (*Toynbee* 2003).

However, a ‘visible’, vociferous articulate and middle-class group has also been affected by a movement toward contracting out on a ‘when needed’ basis, and this has raised the profile of this issue. In particular, white, male, middle management has lost out to this tendency. David Smith argues that ‘insecurity’ suddenly became a ‘fashionable’ story in the mid 1990s, with 2,778 stories appearing in the national press between November 1996 and November 1997. He links this directly with changes in working practices introduced into the

newspaper industries around this time that threatened the security of journalists!
(*Smith 1997*)

Employees are also conscious of widespread changes in social and contractual relationships with their employers. British contracts of employment have not been particularly secure by comparison with other European countries. But arguably British workers have always perceived in the past an underlying social relationship with their employer alongside the legal and contractual relationship. With organisational changes, employers have begun to rely more on the formal relationship and less on the implicit social relationships between worker and employer. This undermines a sense of reciprocity and security that many workers, particularly in administrative posts, enjoyed until the early 1980's.

There would appear to have emerged by the end of the twentieth century two broad approaches to the management of people within organisations (*Handy 1996*). The first adopts the position that competition must force the reduction of costs to survive in the market, and labour costs must be reduced. People are, in this scenario, seen as a resource: part of the process of competition, and generally expendable. The second position, by contrast, recognises people as an important asset in an organisation; an asset to increase profit and productivity by encouraging talent and creativity, which is rewarded. It is the public recognition of these workplace contractual changes that also contributes to a sense of insecurity.

Whether or not you feel insecure at work would appear to depend on a number of variables: the organisation you work for, the skills you have, the job you do. A feeling of general 'insecurity' may depend too, on intangibles like personal levels of optimism and tolerance of change.

So what other aspects of contemporary life and individual responses act as sources for general anxiety? There are gender and age issues to consider. Men, for example, have been steadily losing one important source of their status and security: work. By the mid 1990s, one in four males of working age in the UK was not working in the formal economy (*Hutton 1995*). They were either

registered unemployed, receiving other state benefits, e.g. disability support, or had simply vanished from the labour market. The demise of manual work, particularly in manufacturing, and the growth of service sector employment has reduced opportunities for male labour, but created more opportunities for women, who increasingly becoming the main breadwinners in families.

There would appear to be too, generational responses to social change. The generation that grew up during and immediately after the Second World War, for example, had expectations of the state to help them in a crisis. The Beveridge Plan of 1942 made an explicit commitment to support people through unexpected life changes, 'from the cradle to the grave', thus embodying the ideas of security in the collective consciousness. In the 1940s, through to the end of the 1960s, national security became closely intertwined with personal security. The Redundancy Payment Acts of the 1960s and 70s made explicit a government commitment to individuals to compensate them for redundancy and make it easier for them to change.

However, the generation that grew up in the inter-war years had no such expectations of the state and relied much more on community, trade unions and voluntary organisations to help them in times of difficulty. The current younger generation who have grown up in the late 1970s onward have no expectations of the state providing an all-embracing safety net for them. Many young people subsequently have a different vision of how their security can be achieved, and see gaining a range of key skills as a key to employability, rather than seeking job tenure with one organisation (*The Guardian* 1999).

Risk taking in contemporary society may be, paradoxically, a way of creating security for oneself in five to ten years time. Job-hopping, learning a range of skills, taking an adaptive response and going for new opportunities when they occur may prove the best strategy to cope with change, rather than staying put in one organisation in the hope that things get better.

There has always been change in society, but perhaps it is an aggregate of change in recent years that distinguishes this age from others and makes it hard

to differentiate between all the elements and can lead many, particularly adults in mid life and older to a sense of collective anxiety about the future. This anxiety, with its roots in feelings of insecurity, may be hard to justify in any consistent statistical way, but it is there.

(1553 words)

REFERENCES

- Bratton, J. (1992) *Japanization at Work*, London: MacMillan.
- Burchell, B., Day, D., Hudson, M., Ladipo, D., Mankelow, R., Nolan, J., Reed, H., Wichert, I., and Wilkinson, F. (1999) *Job Insecurity and Work Intensification: Flexibility and the Changing Boundaries of Work*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- The Guardian (1999) *Balancing Work Life and Personal Life*, (6/1/1999) Manchester: Observer Group Newspaper.
- Handy, C. (1996) *Beyond Certainty: the Changing World of Organisations*, London: Arrow Books.
- Heery, E., and Salmon, J., (eds.) (2000) *The Insecure Workforce*, London: Routledge.
- Hutton, W (1995) *The State We're In*, London: Jonathan Cape.
- Office for National Statistics, (2000) *Labour Market Trends*, London: The Stationery Office.
- Office for National Statistics (2001) *Social Trends*, no. 31, p. 88, London: The Stationery Office.
- Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character*, New York: Norton.
- Smith, D. (1997) *Insecurity Versus Labour Market Flexibility*, London: Social Market Foundation.
- Toynbee, P. (2003) *Hard Work: Life in Low-Pay Britain*, London: Bloomsbury.

See comments on next page.

EXAMPLE OF 'KEEPING YOUR DISTANCE', FROM THE ESSAY:

Risk taking in contemporary society may be, paradoxically, a way of creating security for oneself in five to ten years time. Job-hopping, learning a range of skills, taking an adaptive response and going for new opportunities when they occur may prove the best strategy to cope with change, rather than staying put in one organisation in the hope that things get better.

There has always been change in society, but perhaps it is an aggregate of change in recent years that distinguish this age from others and makes it hard to differentiate between all the elements and can lead many, particularly adults in mid life and older to a sense of collective anxiety about the future. This anxiety, with its roots in feelings of insecurity, may be hard to justify in any consistent statistical way, but it is there.

In the concluding paragraph of the essay the student offers a particular point of view. Note however, the way the student presents an apparently objective and cautious stance: the use of words like '*may prove*' (instead of '*will prove*'), and '*perhaps*'. However, the final sentence is unequivocal: '*...but it is there*'. The student is saying, yes, many adults **do** feel a sense of insecurity and anxiety about the future, although it is hard to justify this statistically.

The student could have reached another and very different conclusion by selecting other evidence. This is not really the point; there is no 'absolute truth' and your tutor will be assessing your ability to gain an overview of the subject develop and to cogent arguments to support a particular position.

This student will be judged to what extent he or she has:

- engaged directly with the essay topic and tried to reach a conclusion
- evaluated the topic as well as possible within the tight boundaries of 1500 words
- selected material relevant to the topic and used this, both in context and appropriately, as evidence
- presented a range of arguments and points of view that progressively led to a particular conclusion
- taken due care in the preparation and presentation of the essay: it was well-organised, easy to follow and did not contain too many spelling mistakes or grammatical errors.

Verdict: This is a well-organised assignment that does engage with the essay topic and the student has reached a particular conclusion. It tries to put job insecurity into a wider societal context and attempts to identify generational differences in attitude to the subject. This last point of the essay could have been developed a little further and the student could have drawn on sources other than just one national newspaper, i.e. *The Guardian*, to give greater credibility and emphasis to the argument.

Further Reading

These are all the titles in booklets in the 'Effective Learning' series:

1. *Return to Part-time Study*
2. *Return to Full-time Study*
3. *The First Semester*
4. *Time Management*
5. *Accelerated Learning*
6. *20 Tips for Effective Learning*
7. *Six Steps to Effective Reading*
8. *Effective Note Making*
9. *Effective Writing*
10. *Essay Writing (1) stages of essay writing*
11. *Essay Writing (2) planning and structuring your essays*
12. *Essay Writing (3) finding your own voice in essays*
13. *Essay Writing 4: Ten ways to Liven Your Essays*
14. *References and Bibliographies*
15. *Report Writing*
16. *Pass Your Exams*
17. *Your Assignment Results – and how to improve them*
18. *Presentations*
19. *Group Work*
20. *Introduction to Research and Research Methods*
21. *Foundations of Good Research*
22. *Writing Your Management Project Report or Dissertation*

You can download any of these from the School of Management Homepages: **Resources– Effective Learning** link, or contact the Effective Learning Service, tel. 4320 (internal), Email: M.T.Sedgley@Bradford.ac.uk, or visit room 0.11 Yvette Jacobson Building at the School of Management.

In the School of Management and J.B. Priestley libraries, there is a study skills section at **D371.30281**

Recommended Reading:

Crème, P., and Lea, M.R., (2003) *Writing at University: a guide for students, second edition*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Levin, P. (2004). *Write Great Essays: reading and essay writing for undergraduates and taught postgraduates*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Other Useful Study Skills Guides:

Cottrell, S. (2003) ***The Study Skills Handbook***, London: Palgrave. *(This book Contains lots of bite-sized chunks of advice and information presented in a lively and visually interesting way. This is an excellent general study skills guide for all undergraduate or postgraduate students).*

Giles, K. and Hedge, N. (1998) ***The Manager's Good Study Guide***, Milton Keynes: Open University Press. (*This is a study skills guide written for business studies students and contains advice and information presented in a clear, readable and subject-specific way*).

Other learning material may be available, e.g. videos on effective presentations etc.; please enquire at the School of Management Library Reception desk.

Some Useful Internet Sites:

www.allenandunwin.com/estudy/reportwriting.asp

a website produced by Allen and Unwin publishers on writing for academic purposes, including essay and report writing.

www.support4learning.org.uk/education/key_skills.htm *a good all-round site for study skills advice and information.*

www.bized.ac.uk/ a study support site for business studies students.

© This booklet was written by Colin Neville and should not be reproduced in any other document without the permission of the author:

Last amended February 2006.

If you have any queries please contact Martin Sedgley, Effective Learning Advisor, University of Bradford School of Management.

Telephone: 01274 234320

Email: M.T.Sedgley@Bradford.ac.uk.