CHAPTER 5

Psychological Contract, Organizational Citizenship, and Double Bind

Introduction

The previous chapter charted the exposition of my journey from hope to despair during my long career in the public sector. I articulated the pressure placed on me resulting from the organizational injunction of expecting me to conform to two contradictory paradigms—those of traditional bureaucracy with its attendant emphasis on process and procedure and NPM with its customer-centric and efficiency focus. The public sector workplace of today is very different from the one of several decades ago. While some change must be expected within any environment I have found that the changes to which I have been exposed as a result of the government’s NPM policy represent a considerable departure from the conditions of old.

In this chapter we present some of the theories that are relevant to the issues experienced. In particular we will concentrate on pieces of pertinent theory—psychological contracts, organizational citizenship, and double binds. Psychological contract theory is relevant to this journey because of the perception that the organization changed the rules of the game subsequent to the commencement of my employment and accordingly altered my expectations of my relationship with my employer. Organizational citizenship theory is relevant because of the impact of these changed expectations on my willingness to associate and cooperate with the norms and practices of the organization. Finally, double bind theory is relevant because of my perception of the contradictions involved in my employment scenario and my seeming inability to escape from the situation or communicate about it.
Psychological Contract

Strebel (1993, 1996) defined a personal compact as an agreement between an employee and an organization that describes the reciprocal obligations and mutual commitments that define their relationship.

Personal compacts can be divided into three dimensions:

- formal,
- social, and
- psychological.

The formal contract is usually written and captures the tasks and performance requirements that define the nature of an employee’s work in exchange for a certain level of remuneration. The social contract is unwritten and reflects how an employee gauges an organization’s culture in terms of the match (or mismatch) between stated and actual vision, mission, values, and goals. The psychological contract is also unwritten and addresses elements of mutual expectation and reciprocal commitment that arise from emotions like trust and dependence between employee and employer.

The element of employee engagement often revolves around the perception of mutual benefits for the employee and the organization and is often a determinant of the employee’s commitment to the organization. This mutual benefit forms the basis of organizational citizenship behavior. It often creates anticipation for future forms of mutual benefit based on precedent and acts to build a cooperative relationship between employee and employer (Strebel 1993). Cooperative relationships can assist in building “joint value creation” (p. 398) and when practiced widely throughout the organization, joint value assists in creating a rare synergy between the staff and the organization (Barney 2001) and creates nonsubstitutable characteristics such as imperfect imitability (Barney 1991). This indefinable quality of interpersonal synergy promotes competitive advantage and often determines the extent of organizational citizenship behaviors that employee’s exhibit and can also help to determine the employees’ perceptions of whether there is any discrepancy between the organization’s stated values and its actual practices.

Significantly, organizational synergy theory relates specifically to those organizations that have a requirement for a competitive advantage; in other words, organizations in competition with others in their industry, both privatized public sector organizations and private sector businesses (Barney 1991). Public sector organizations in a natural monopoly setting have less need for a competitive advantage and, although they seek to benchmark themselves at the level of best practice in line with the dictates of NPM policy, the lack of