

### **Suggested lecture/seminar plan for Chapter 3**

- Introduce the session by asking students to consider the way that they themselves use stereotypes. Ask them to consider in which situations they use stereotypes and any situations in which a stereotype has been disconfirmed. Compare their responses with the cognitive information processing view of stereotype formation and maintenance. (10 minutes)
- List the components of an attitude and ask students to think about some of their own attitudes in terms of their behavioural, affective and cognitive components. (10 minutes)
- Pose the following question: "Would a nurse who expressed strong commitment to patient care and NHS values experience cognitive dissonance by engaging in a strike? Why?" Use answers to discuss cognitive dissonance theory. (15 minutes)

#### **THEN EITHER**

- Outline role stress (10 minutes).
- Working in pairs, ask students to list the problems they can envisage in trying to identify and manage role stress in a large organization. Use their answers to provide a critique of the role stress concept (15 minutes).

#### **OR**

- Ask students to make a list of five bases on which individuals can be differentiated one from the other. Ask them to consider whether these differences have implications for the ways that people are treated in society generally and the implications this may have for individuals at work. (15 minutes)
- Discuss the idea that diversity in organizations can be considered as a 'business case'. Ask students to consider the advantages and disadvantages of this position and to think through why it might be difficult to encourage all employees to take the issue of diversity seriously (10 minutes).

#### **OR**

- Define the psychological contract and explain why it is considered important in the management of employee relations (10 minutes).
- Ask students what they consider the reciprocal obligations to be that exist between themselves and the college/university at which they are studying. Use answers to differentiate between relational and transactional psychological contracts, or to discuss psychological contract violation (15 minutes).

### Discussion question guidelines for Chapter 3

#### 1. To what extent does the study of stereotyping help us understand and intervene in work-based conflict?

The answer should focus on the fact that the central assumption underpinning stereotyping is that it is caused by *perceptual error*. From this perspective, conflict is therefore caused by groups of individuals perceiving each other incorrectly. Solving the problem is therefore related to finding the causes of it. The key causal process is thought to be *outgroup homogeneity bias*, which occurs when people identify with one or more in-groups, which they perceive to be distinct from one or more out-groups. One possible intervention in the case of conflict would therefore be to attempt to reduce in-group/out-group formation. There are several ways this could be achieved, such as imposing super-ordinate goals that require collaboration from members of different groups or reducing the salience of in-group identity by placing individuals in different types of group (e.g. a project team composed of in-group/out-group members).

Although stereotyping does offer an intuitively appealing way to understand conflict, it does not seem to explain the *type* of conflict that occurs in organizations very well. Much of the overt conflict that goes on in organizations is inter-personal, between one or two people. Conflict between groups, such as between teams or departments is often more covert and therefore manifested in subtle ways. For example, there is often a conflict of interest between managers on the one hand, and 'workers' on the other. However, this is rarely manifested in 'conflict' as such, often more as disparaging attitudes or 'petty' acts of sabotage or non-cooperation. Theories of power may offer more robust explanations of these situations, though not necessarily tidy solutions.

#### 2. Discuss the ways that organizations might be able to foster job satisfaction and organizational commitment. What benefits are they likely to obtain from doing so?

Answers should deal with the fact that job satisfaction and commitment are attitudes and that they therefore consist of cognitive, affective and behavioural components. Answers should focus on the sorts of factors that might create job satisfaction and commitment which are covered in chapter 3 (pay and conditions and the nature of work). Specific examples should be provided of the types of factor that might be important.

The answer should deal with the issue that there is very little empirical evidence to support the idea that increased job satisfaction or commitment improves individual or organisational performance. However, these are positive feelings for the employee and this may be of indirect benefit to the organization by reducing turnover and absenteeism (though this would be difficult to validate). The ethical aspects of these issues should also be considered. That is, to what extent is it ethical for organizations to promote work as central in the psychological makeup of individuals? What are the real benefits for society in such cases?

### **3. How might a failure to manage diversity or stress lead to problems with the management of the psychological contract?**

Increasingly, employees are coming to believe that organizations are obligated to ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect. Failure to manage either diversity or stress might lead to a situation in which employees experience psychological contract breach. The ethos behind diversity management is that individuals should not be treated any differently on account of their social category, work-style, personality or values. Indeed, it is argued that all such differences can be harnessed by the organization so as to improve effectiveness, efficiency and morale. For example, staff who are bi-lingual can be placed in roles that utilise these skills, benefiting external clients and customers as well as helping the employee to feel valued. However, managing diversity can be very difficult, especially in larger organizations. Perceptions of biased treatment often develop, with some groups believing that they are relatively disadvantaged. For example, white men have complained that they are vilified by diversity management training. On the other hand, failure to secure an expected promotion might lead a minority group member to believe that discrimination was at play. It is impossible to verify who is right in such situations, as these are essentially matters of perspective that are not amenable to being 'proven'. Nonetheless, if people feel they are being treated unfairly, then this one condition that might lead to violation of the psychological contract.

Stress is another experience that employees can find very distressing. There is a lack of consensus about what causes stress and it is, essentially, in the eye of the beholder. Nevertheless, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in the UK have produced some benchmarks that organizations should use to try to ensure that employees are not subject to excessive stress in the workplace (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/standards.htm>).

The difficulty is that "one man's meat is another man's poison" and in managing stress, organizations can never be sure that in doing so, while meeting the needs of some employees, they are violating the psychological contracts of others. For example people differ in what they consider to be excessive workloads. If an individual's workload is reduced due to feelings of stress, this may create feelings of inequity among some colleagues.

### **4. Individual-level explanations enable managers to experience more control over essentially messy, unpredictable and complex situations, stress being a case in point. Discuss.**

Stress, diversity, and the psychological contract are all major concerns for contemporary organizations, and are dominated at a theoretical level, by concepts that locate the causes of these phenomena in the psychology of individuals. Problems with the management of diversity, for example, are seen to reside in 'faulty perceptions', such as stereotypes, or in unhelpful attitudes. Stress is seen to be caused by a lack of fit between how a person perceives their environment and their ability to manage that environment. The psychological contract is understood as the beliefs the employee holds about the reciprocal obligations that exist between him or herself and the organization. Theorising these phenomena in this way means that solutions to problems can also be targeted at the level of individuals. Diversity can be better managed through training (attempting to change attitudes and perceptions). Stress can be managed by providing employees with support (counselling or stress management techniques) and the psychological contract can be managed by improving the quality of communication that occurs between employees and their managers.

While some of these techniques undoubtedly 'work' for some of the organizations who implement them and for some the individuals at whom they are targeted, research suggests that many employees continue to suffer stress, discrimination and psychological contract violation. This is possibly because the processes that influence these phenomena are very complex and not readily manageable (see on-line case for chapter 3).