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The role of the steelworker occupational community in the internalization of industrial *restructuring: the 'layering up' of* collective proximal and distal experiences

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between occupational community and restructuring at a UK steelworks. Through historic and contemporary experiences, restructuring has become an internalized feature of the steelworker identity. Zittoun and Gillespie's (2015b) framework of proximal and distal experiences is adapted to analyse the internalization process. The paper argues that experiential resources associated with restructuring are transmitted via the occupational community, forming a part of a collective memory of workplace change. These experiences relate to the historical precedence of restructuring, the role of trade unions in accepting the inevitability of downsizing, and prior personal and vicarious experiences of redundancy. The findings build on debates around the determinants of an occupational community, highlighting the role of 'marginality' and how experiences of restructuring bind steelworkers to a broader community of fate.

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Introduction

The mass contraction of employment in the UK steel industry has occurred through episodic rounds of industrial restructuring, often resulting in downsizing and redundancies. The decline has prompted a focus on past and ongoing experiences of industrial restructuring, and its effect on displaced workers and their communities. These concerns also reflect an increasing sociological interest in the continued impact of deindustrialization. Such concerns recognise restructuring should not be viewed as an historical episode from the perspective of a post-industrial society but as an enduring contemporary process (Cowie and Heathcott, 2003; Strangleman, 2017; Linkon, 2017).

The strong sense of occupational identity and occupational community amongst steelworkers has played an important role in responding to restructuring (MacKenzie et al, 2006). This paper argues that historic and contemporary experiences have led to the internalization of restructuring within the steelworker identity. Adapting Zittoun and Gillespie's (2015a; 2015b) framework of 'proximal' and 'distal' experiences, the paper explores the process by which experiential resources for individuals coping with restructuring are transmitted via the collective mechanism of the occupational community. In turn, this leads to the normalization of the experience of restructuring amongst steelworkers. Based on a case study of a UK steelworks, SteelCo, the findings demonstrate how experiences of restructuring developed as part of a collective memory of workplace change, related to: the historical precedence of restructuring; the role of trade unions in accepting the immutability of downsizing; and prior personal and vicarious experiences of restructuring.

This paper also contributes to debates around the determinants of an occupational community, suggesting that in certain contexts, such as with restructuring, members may not be determined simply by a traditional affiliation with a particular profession or occupation. Membership of an occupational community may also include those who, whilst ostensibly marginal to traditional definitions of occupational communities, may be bound by a community of fate between different groups of workers. The findings suggest that occupational communities can be extended as a result of the shared histories and experiences of restructuring. This advances debates around the complexity of conceptualising occupational community, drawing on Salaman's (1974) notion of 'marginal' members and more recent studies in the sociology of work (MacKenzie and Marks, 2019).

This paper first reviews debates around the relationship between workers' experiences of restructuring, occupational identity and occupational community, before introducing the concept of internalization as a way of analysing these experiences. The methods section is then presented, before the empirical findings. The paper concludes with an extended discussion of the key contributions from the SteelCo research.

Review of debates

Restructuring has become a cardinal management strategy, routinely rationalised by reference to irresistible forces of globalisation and the deregulation of product and labour markets, with assumptions of improved efficiency and productivity (Mckinley and Lin, 2012). This paper builds on studies within the sociology of work on the normalisation of restructuring as an increasingly prevalent experience for workers (Roberts, 1993; Strangleman, forthcoming).

In the US context, studies of restructuring and the deleterious effects of deindustrialisation have centred on the memory of trade union struggles in cases of plant closure and the strategies employed to cope with the ongoing socio-economic impact (Metzgar, 2000; Linkon and Russo, 2002). In the UK context, MacKenzie et al (2006) demonstrated how displaced steelworkers called on the occupational community as a collective resource for meeting the material challenges of restructuring, rather than facing redundancy as a wholly individualised experience. Taken together, these studies resonate with McBride and Martínez Lucio's (2011) argument that the memory of experiences of organisational change contribute to the development of a collective identity.

Connerton (1989) argues membership of a social group provides a framework for individuals to locate past memories, which facilitates the legitimation of experiences of the present through knowledge of the past. Collective experiences of organisational and industrial change may also result in the creation of 'supportive networks and linkages which allow for humane forms of support and coping strategies in the face of economic restructuring.' (McBride and Martínez Lucio, 2011:801). Such networks may also build on pre-existing collectives, such as occupational communities (MacKenzie et al 2006; MacKenzie and Marks, 2019).

There is an extensive literature dealing with the defining characteristics of occupational communities, and the mutually reinforcing relationship between occupational communities and occupational identities (MacKenzie and Marks, 2019; Strangleman, 2012). Occupational identities are based on solidaristic bonds traditionally formed by shared experiences of the labour process, sometimes associated with obtaining specific skills or competences, and often heightened by dangerous or physically demanding work (Turnbull, 1992; MacKenzie et al, 2017). Occupational communities are made up of those who share an occupational identity and are defined by insider-outsider relationships, which spill over into non-work spheres meaning members often socialise with one another. These communities may also be reinforced by the fact geographical regions are dominated by, and dependant on, particular industries that strengthen the sense of solidarity felt by members (Strangleman, 2001; Brown and Brannen, 1970; Beynon et al, 1991). Other collective identities also contribute to a sense of community, such as membership of a trade union (MacKenzie et al, 2006; McBride and Martínez Lucio, 2011).

An important feature of occupational communities is their role in transmitting shared values, norms and attitudes that reflect the occupational identity (MacKenzie et al, 2006). The diffusion of workplace experiences is typically supplemented by socialisation of members into the community given the interpenetration between work and non-work spheres (Strangleman, 2001; Roberts, 1993). The role of transmission within occupational communities means members view the reactions of colleagues to workplace change with higher legitimacy because of a shared understanding of working life (Salaman, 1974).

A point of departure in this paper from this traditional view of the relationship between occupational identity and occupational community follows Salaman's (1974) notion of marginality. Marginality suggests that access to an occupational community may not always be determined by those with direct experience of similar types of work. The formation of occupational communities may also be underpinned by workers having a wider sense of belonging to the fortunes of an employer or industry. Brown and Brannen's (1970) research into the UK shipbuilding industry similarly highlighted that despite tensions between trade union arrangements of skilled and semi-skilled/unskilled workers, the shared experience of the common manufacture of a product can act as a source of cohesion to overcome these divisions. Access to occupational communities by 'marginals' may then emerge through certain shared workplace experiences, such as workplace change.

The idea of the collective being defined by specific shared experiences echoes the notion of a 'community of fate' (Baehr, 2005). Beahr (2005) depicts communities of fate as a form of social cohesion amongst individuals that emerges from the experiences of crises and leads to a shared familiarity between those affected. Moreover, a community of fate allows groups to recognise a common 'danger', or fate, suggesting they are capable of a collective response that draws purposefully on the range of experiential resources available to that group.

This paper is concerned with the process by which individual experiences of restructuring become a collective experiential resource. Mead's (1932) concept of internalization can be usefully adapted to understanding this process. Internalization is the cognitive process through which an activity or event in the external social environment is experienced by an individual and subsequently becomes an internal, normative aspect of their behaviour (Zittoun and Gillespie, 2015a; 2015b). There is a resonance, then, between an individual's experience of work and the development of such experiences as a normative aspect of their occupational identity. The research presented in this paper suggests this process of internalization can also be applied to collective experiences, within occupational communities.

This paper extends Zittoun and Gillespie's (2015b) understanding of the internalization process at the individual level to the role of the collective as a transmission mechanism for experiential resources. Zittoun and Gillespie (2015b) build on the work of Mead (1932) to argue for an analysis of the 'layering up' of experiences to understand the process through which internalization occurs. The authors outline two types of experiences, proximal and distal. Proximal experiences refer to the immediate social setting in specific emotional or material contexts and relate to people's situated experience of being engaged in one event or activity in a single moment in time. Distal experiences are typically disconnected from the immediate social setting but may include past proximal experiences that intrude into, and influence, the present situation. Central to understanding distal experiences is that individuals transfer knowledge of prior experiences to new contexts, where there is a recognition that the immediate 'here and now' is shaped by distant experiences, memories and events. Distal experiences can also be populated by vicarious experiences through the 'voices of others' including friends, family and colleagues; pertinent in terms of occupational community, given the legitimacy attached the experiences of other members in that group (Salaman, 1974). This is where individuals reflect on how others might perceive a particular event to give meaning to their

own experience. Hence, proximal and distal experiences become integrated as individuals encounter new contexts and thus experiences 'layer up'. An individual's multiple experiences of an event, such as restructuring, accumulate and shape future responses to similar events.

Adapting Zittoun and Gillespie's (2015b) framework helps develop an understanding of how individual experiences of restructuring become internalized as part of the collective and transmitted throughout occupational communities. An analysis of workers' experiences can therefore be understood not just in individual terms but as a way of mobilising experiential resources located in a wider collective memory to cope with restructuring. This paper hence explores the process through which experiences of restructuring have become a feature of the steelworker identity.

Methods and context

SteelCo is a large integrated steelworks that focuses on primary steel production for products used in railway, construction and automobile manufacture. The steelworks employed 4,000 people (roughly 5,000 including contractors), making it a dominant employer in the region and emphasising the extent to which SteelCo is central to social and economic life of the local area.

A case study strategy was adopted to provide an in-depth view of two downsizing processes between 2011-2015. The research involved 59 semi-structured interviews with management representatives, senior full-time trade union officials and workers. Interview data was supplemented by non-participant observation at formal workplace meetings between management and unions, plus informal meetings and social events outside of the workplace. This research design allowed for an extended time spent within the SteelCo community, which established a familiarity with the minutiae of restructuring and a rapport with participants in both work and non-work spheres.

Union gatekeepers helped build the legitimacy needed to recruit participants and the trust necessary when discussing the, often negative, impact of restructuring. A snowball sample approach was adopted and included a range of workers that experienced redundancy in production and engineering roles ('blue' collar jobs) and clerical staff ('white' collar jobs). In all, 30 workers were interviewed. The sample included participants who had moved between

blue and white-collar roles through internal redeployment in previous rounds of restructuring and people who lost their jobs completely.

Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours and were recorded, transcribed and analysed using Nvivo. A primary cycle of coding fractured the data into detailed nodes that recorded participants' experiences of restructuring, before a secondary cycle of coding into nodes that reflected various combinations of 'distal' and 'proximal' experiences (Tracy, 2012). These themes were then categorised into different analytical 'layers' of distal and proximal experiences. Exploring individuals' perspectives of restructuring showed how they were shaped by a knowledge of past events and experiences, populated by voices of others both historical and immediate, transmitted through the collective of the occupational community.

Findings

Steelworkers and occupational community

Working life at SteelCo proved consistent with typical features of an occupational community. The occupational community formed the mechanism through which shared values, norms, practices and attitudes associated with the steelworker identity developed amongst workers. SteelCo was heavily unionised with workers and management describing the importance of trade union membership as a form of employment protection. Participants also stressed that traditions of trade unionism and workplace solidarity were imbued in the social and cultural fabric of the industry. SteelCo's dominance in the local region, in terms of plant size and relatively high numbers employed, meant patterns of community life naturally formed around it. This interplay between industry and geography meant experiences of working life permeated through both work and non-work spheres, indicating a strong community dimension to life at the plant.

The prevalence of the steelworks within work and non-work spheres was demonstrated by production workers Mike and Gary:

> *'Most of the people down my street, even the schoolkids whose dads are all steelworkers, know people who work in the steel industry. It's just so natural round here.'*

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> *'Even when I'm home and not working, you're protective over it (the steelworks)….*when *you see it on the news and that…like it matters more because it is our site, our home* town, our steel, our jobs. It belongs to us.*'*

The attachment to the steelworks was evident from the affection with which participants described their jobs. For workers in steel production and the engineering workshops this was especially acute, whereby the manual, arduous nature of work generated a heightened sense of physical and mental investment in the steelworks. Occupational identity was further illustrated in discussions of the intricacies of steel production, demonstrating a shared understanding of the idiosyncratic technical demands of the labour process. Manual workers had an emotional bond with the steelworks in which producing steel was part of both their occupational and personal identity (MacKenzie et al, 2006). Production workers Simon and Andrew demonstrated the deep connection between the physicality of the steelworks and the impact on their personal lives, despite their redeployment to clerical roles. Even where the potentially negative physical effects were recognised, affection for the steelworks was not diminished:

> *'I just couldn't get up at 4 in the morning and do the early shifts anymore, I was* knackered which is why I went voluntary. It weren*'t for not the love of the job itself or the works, it was shift work, it were taking its toll on my health.'*

> *'I might not be at the coalface anymore as it were, but if you cut me down in the middle* you will see that steelworks, and always will. We put a *lot of our lives into this place'*

An interesting theme to emerge related to the type of worker that constituted the occupational community at SteelCo. Although not sharing the same physical, or dangerous, aspects of the labour process with production workers or engineers, aspects of this occupational identity permeated beyond the traditional group of 'steelworkers'*,* with clerical staff feeling a commensurate sense of belonging to the steelworks. Clerical workers in finance, communications and human resources maintained a close connection with their manual colleagues. The diffusion of experiences of life at the steelworks in both work and non-work spheres meant clerical workers were provided access to a common set of values, norms, practices and attitudes emanating from the steelworker identity. This was demonstrated by Jane and Ewan, who worked in finance and communications:

'When you see the steel going out you still think to yourself, that's our steel, we produced it. There's that pride and passion, though we're not physically producing it we're a cog in the wheel and it's like a family. We're just as important as those out on site doing it.'

'Anyone who has anything to do with the site lives and breathes steel, because you have an understanding of when things go wrong…there's lots of people who know it (steel) so well, from ones making liquid steel to ones sat in a data warehouse.'

The perception of a common bond amongst clerical, production workers and engineers reflects how ostensibly marginal groups may be afforded access to occupational communities (Salaman, 1974). This bond was reinforced by the common experience of workplace change, as groups both traditional and marginal to the occupational community came to internalize the immutability of restructuring. Experiences of restructuring were transmitted throughout the extended occupational community, as the associated negative impact did not discriminate between different types of workers at SteelCo. Both traditional and marginal workers were bound within a community of fate defined by experiences of restructuring. Manual workers and clerical staff shared experiences of restructuring and a knowledge of the decline of the industry, with common access to a set of proximal and distal experiential resources.

The 'layering up' of experiences of restructuring

The relevance of experiences of restructuring to the steelworker identity was recurrent throughout the research. Participants spoke of the social and material impact, and during interviews emphasis was placed on the importance of historic and immediate experiences used to confront restructuring. These accounts reflected combinations of proximal and distal experiences that were transmitted through the conduit of the occupational community and thus 'layered up', facilitating the internalization of restructuring within the steelworker identity.

Historical employment decline

SteelCo's implementation of restructuring was viewed as commonplace by workers given its historical precedence. Management framed restructuring as inevitable and as a necessary response to the parlous economic climate facing the global steel industry. Management

routinely referred to historical economic shifts, associated with deindustrialization and globalization, when justifying restructuring. As described by Mandy, a senior manager:

> *'We've always faced extreme conditions,* steel gets it in the neck when the bottom falls *out the world economy. We're vulnerable in that sense and it's what's forced us on such* a downward spiral.*'*

Redundancies were the consequence of a competitive management strategy to produce less volume and target niche steel markets. The managerial axiom held that restructuring was simply a natural organisational response, with decisions essentially forced upon management. Barry was a senior manager, and highlighted the normalization of restructuring within management rhetoric:

> *'It's something that's second nature to us to be truthful, and people here understand that. We can't stand still otherwise our competitors will pass us and we'll be left behind…making redundancies is fundamentally a part of business* life that you deal *with continually.'*

During interviews workers validated this managerial rhetoric through a recognition of the economic forces that shaped the fate of SteelCo and the wider UK steel industry. References were made to the mass contraction in employment since the mid-1970s and the associated episodic industrial restructuring. Workers acknowledged the implications of external socio-economic processes such as deindustrialization and globalization on the industry as though these were naturally given phenomena. These experiences were not merely personal, but part of broader historical trends. The accepted inevitability based on this knowledge of the past represented a distal experience for workers, serving as a means of understanding management's rationale for restructuring.

Whilst workers did not quote specific figures related to the historical decline in employment, restructuring was viewed as a normative feature of working life at SteelCo and the wider industry. The importance of the occupational community was also evident, as these distal experiences acted as a collective resource for workers to draw upon when rationalising their own immediate redundancy situation. The collective awareness of decline helped workers locate their immediate, proximal redundancy experience at SteelCo within a broader set of

historical restructuring processes and not as purely ahistorical, individualised experiences. Frank and Danielle, each with 25 years' service, illustrated the frequency of restructuring and its increasing acceptance:

> *'Since I started in '79, the steel industry has gone through stage after stage of restructuring. There's always been one as long as I can remember, it's just always there so you get used to it.'*

> *'Everyone just thinks to themselves "oh, here we go again!" and we're back on the steel industry job loss merry go round, it's happened that many times.'*

The economic imperatives of restructuring afforded the managerial rhetoric a legitimacy amongst workers. Nonetheless, workers still lamented the onset of restructuring. The power of its perceived inevitability, supplemented by the managerial rhetoric, meant workers foregrounded a distal experience of the downward trajectory of employment at SteelCo when faced with the immediate situation. The acceptance of this economistic logic was thus a key element in the internalization process.

The role of the trade union

The solidaristic bonds reflected in the role of the union was integral to the steelworker identity. During interviews and observations at social events outside the workplace, workers and union officials celebrated their strong personal and social relationship that accentuated the shared experiences, values and norms of working life at SteelCo. As union official roles were staffed by ex-steelworkers their relationship with workers was wedded to traditional ideas of occupational community, including a shared empathy around the experience of restructuring. There was a symbiotic relationship between the unions and the occupational community that meant workers trusted unions as the safeguards of their interests against managerial prerogative. Workers emphasised that unions' provided support to workers throughout the process, as observed by Gary and Louise:

> *'They're needed because o*f their experience of what steel is about. Some of the union guys are bloody good communicators between the company and the employee too, they *protect us a lot.'*

*'I was getting help from the union, and the guys used to work on the plant so they sort of un*derstand *what we're going through more than someone you never see from HR.'*

Unions at SteelCo had historically engaged in concession bargaining with management, primarily avoiding compulsory redundancies. Instead, unions and management offered voluntary redundancy and early retirement to create vacancies for internal redeployment. The frequency of restructuring at SteelCo meant it became a routine feature of the unions' role. Fred was a senior union official, and highlighted the difficulty in confronting the increasing normalization of restructuring:

> *'With redundancies really our role is the opposite, to fight for jobs....at the same time it's [redundancy] a realistic fact of life unfortunately...unions can't just take the* ostrich approach and stick your head in the sand. Companies face tough economic *times, but a sensible trade union needs to work them [management] and face up to it.'*

As unions were embedded within the occupational community, their historically cooperative approach with management represented a distal experience that workers reflected upon when faced with the immediate, proximal experience of redundancy. In understanding how those who represent their interests, unions, typically responded, workers transferred their knowledge of how unions operated in the past to the present situation. The unions' historical acceptance of the inevitability of restructuring, through concession bargaining as opposed to resisting redundancies, therefore contributed to its normalization within the steelworker identity. Charlie was made redundant and reflected on the unions' acceptance of restructuring:

> *'There's been a possibility of us closing completely in the past, everybody losing their* job. So any militant feelings from the unions are suppressed *as they're happy to go along with it as long as we keep the company open. As long as we've got a job and this company stays open, the unions don't upset the applecart too much.'*

Workers justified unions' acceptance of restructuring with their knowledge of the external economic threats drove the managerial logic. This layering up of experiences was indicative of the process by which proximal and distal experiential resources became integrated to shape workers' dispositions towards restructuring.

Personal and vicarious experiences

Frequent and ongoing restructuring at SteelCo meant many workers had previous experiences of the process. Workers repeatedly referenced personal experiences of redundancy, along with vicarious experiences of friends, family members and colleagues. For workers impacted previously, past experiences of redundancy weighed heavily on their personal and occupational lives. Workers reported a familiarity with the prospective effects, which was illustrative of how such experiences were a feature of working life at SteelCo. John was made redundant three times previously, and described how those experiences intruded into the present situation:

> *'Hopefully there's no next time, but even if it does it's always in the back of your mind, it's happened to us already, so you have to learn to adjust after so long.'*

Workers described actions incorporated into their personal routine to deal with restructuring. For example, participants referred to practical measures such as increased contributions to ISAs as a financial buffer against potential redundancy and registering with external recruitment agencies to remain attentive to employment opportunities in the external labour market. Previous, and directly personal, proximal experiences of restructuring were transferred to the present and mobilised as a distal resource by workers to cope with their more immediate situation.

Workers with prior experiences sought to temper their responses by reflecting upon coping strategies adopted previously. Mark's analogy of restructuring as a school 'bully' typified this, demonstrating a tension between viewing it as unpleasant yet having developed such a familiarity with the process that past experiences were sources of resilience in dealing with the effects:

> *'Because the company has done it so often, you protect yourself to become harder.* Probably like being bullied at school. Or *they [the bullies] get used to it, if you're being* picked on or name calling stuff like that, you become so used to it. So in the future when *people call you names you think to yourself, 'oh sod off I've heard that before, think of a new one'.*

Past experiences of restructuring were crucial in understanding the internalization process. Gemma suffered redundancy four times in 25 years, and highlighted the increasing acceptance amongst those with prior experience:

> *'I've been through it that many times, you* just take it on the chin now. Yeah, the first time *when I was kicked out the workshops I was pulling my hair out and snapping at people… now I tell myself to not get worried about it, if they're gunna do it they're gunna do it.'*

Despite the seemingly individualised, proximal nature of workers' experiences of restructuring, the correspondence between individual accounts and the broader occupational community reinforced experiences as normative aspects of the steelworker identity. Recounting stories from friends, family and colleagues helped those facing redundancy for the first time rationalise their own immediate situation through these vicarious experiences. During interviews participants provided longer, seemingly tangential, anecdotes of colleagues' reactions and responses to restructuring, with great significance afforded to the voices of others. Such stories pointed to another way in which distal experiences of restructuring were mobilised by workers. The integration of personal, proximal experiences of redundancy and vicarious, distal experiences constructed a guiding schema for workers when confronting restructuring (Zittoun and Gillespie, 2015b). The faith placed in relationships with members of the same occupational community thus ascribed legitimacy to these distal experiences (Salaman, 1974). The way occupational community acted as a mechanism for transmitting, accumulating and mobilising experiences of restructuring amongst the workforce proved central to the process of internalization. William was new to SteelCo yet faced redundancy, and described how older colleagues painted a picture of inevitability around restructuring based on past experiences:

> *'The other lads kept telling me that I'd be alright, there's always restructuring here so I* kin*d of knew I'd have to go through it at some point.'*

The transmission of vicarious experiences of restructuring throughout the occupational community was also evident outside the workplace. This reflected the industrial and geographic dynamics of SteelCo along with the role of unions, as experiences of restructuring permeated both work and non-work spheres and across production, engineer and clerical roles. Workers referred to regular conversations about restructuring with friends and family at home, at the school gates, and even in the local butchers. The prevalence of restructuring was observed

through attendance at trade union meetings, social events outside the plant and in the pub after work. Such was the pervasiveness of restructuring as a topic of conversation that informal rules were established to impose limits on discussing it outside the workplace. For example, senior union officials stated it could only be spoken about 'for the first pint' at social events, and after that was forbidden.

Discussions between workers further revealed the use of vicarious experiences as a resource for workers coping with restructuring. Interactions at social events were an opportunity for the transmission of experiences, through sharing stories of redundancy, and reflected solidaristic bonds inherent in the occupational community. Gail and Martin, recalled instances where the solidarity from others inside and outside of work provided a means of support through the process:

> *'It's good to know your workmates ar*e there for you, one [colleague] moved to our *department last time [downsizing] and he's across the corridor from me and lives down my street, so he always let me chew his ear off about what I was going to do.'*

> *'One of the union guys that had been* involved with it [redundancy] a few times, even came up to my wife just to talk about it at an awards evening at the local social club, *which was nice…there's that appreciation for others on the [steel]works.'*

The mobilisation of proximal and distal experiential resources highlighted the significance of workplace memory, specifically associated with restructuring. The memory of past experiences shaped workers' future orientations, where individual accounts of restructuring, both personal and vicarious, took on a collective character as a means for workers to cope with restructuring (McBride and Martínez Lucio, 2011). Workplace memories therefore reflected the layering up of experiences within the occupational community and contributed to the internalizing of the immutability of restructuring within the steelworker identity.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has explored how experiences of restructuring have become an internalized feature of the steelworker identity. The findings highlight that the steelworker occupational community acts as a mechanism through which experiences of restructuring are transmitted amongst

workers, resulting in the internalization of such experiences. Proximal and distal experiences, including personal and vicarious, formed a collective resource for workers when confronting restructuring. The application of Zittoun and Gillespie's (2015b) framework helped identify how different layers of experiences shaped, and continues to shape, the steelworker identity, and aided in analysing the process through which internalization occurs.

Building on McBride and Martínez Lucio (2011) and MacKenzie et al (2006), this paper contends that the sectoral-specific history of SteelCo, as with comparable industries, grants workers a collective memory of workplace change. The recollection of past occupational experiences, as with restructuring, contributed to the formation of the collective character of the occupational community at SteelCo. These findings are also significant for highlighting how restructuring has, as with management practice (Mckinley and Lin, 2012), become a normalised feature of workers' experiences.

The paper further contributes to debates around the determinants of membership of an occupational community (MacKenzie et al, 2019), advancing Salaman's (1974) notion of 'marginality' in a context of restructuring. The SteelCo case thus illuminated how the notion of occupational community extended beyond the traditional view of a 'steelworker'. Traditional views on the formation of occupational identities and in turn occupational communities suggest shared experiences of physically demanding work or an association with a specific technical aspect of a profession act as the basis of that identity and community (MacKenzie et al, 2006; MacKenzie and Marks, 2019). At SteelCo the experience of restructuring did not discriminate between different types of workers; production workers, engineers and clerical staff were bound by a 'community of fate'. Clerical staff were thus equally afforded access to a range of associated experiential resources and maintained a connection to the trajectory of the organisation (MacKenzie and Marks, 2019; Brown and Brannen, 1970). Many workers had also moved between 'blue' and 'white' collar jobs in previous rounds of restructuring, facilitating the cross-pollination of experiences throughout the occupational community.

While white collar workers were marginal to the occupational community (Salaman 1974), there was also a marginality in their relationship to the occupational identity; although not sharing all aspects of the steelworker identity, white collar workers did share some features such as an emotional connection to the production of steel and the internalisation of the

experience of restructuring. Occupational communities continue to be based on the bonds that form around the manual, physical nature of steel production. This paper contends, however, that it is also possible for alternative forms of occupational communities and collectives to emerge around the shared historical resources and experiences of organisational and industrial change (McBride and Martínez Lucio, 2011; MacKenzie et al, 2017).

The extension of Zittoun and Gillespie's framework from an analysis of the individual to the role of the collective demonstrated the process through which experiences of restructuring became internalized as part of the steelworker identity. Analysis of findings highlighted how experiences of restructuring integrate, accumulate and are mobilised by workers as a means of rationalising their own immediate situation. The framework helped develop an understanding of how experiences diffuse throughout the workforce and shape normative characteristics of an occupational community. Layers of experience were evident in the way they pervaded not only the immediate workplace but also in non-work spheres, whereby stories were transmitted throughout the community given the interplay between the SteelCo locality and its industrial dominance in the surrounding region (Strangleman, 2001).

Framing the findings with reference to proximal and distal experiences is a useful analytical device, as it illustrated how ostensibly residual experiences of restructuring are not simply consigned to the past but endure and are transferred to immediate redundancy situations (Strangleman, 2017). The analysis highlighted the interlinking nature of workers' proximal experiences of restructuring and distal experiences, such as a recognition of historical employment decline at SteelCo and vicarious accounts from friends, family and colleagues. Restructuring was not something that occurred in isolation as a purely individualised experience; rather, these experiences were collectively embedded within the occupational community (MacKenzie et al, 2006; Strangleman, 2017; McBride and Martínez Lucio, 2011).

The way experiences of restructuring are internalized within occupational identities is therefore crucial for understanding how workers draw upon different support mechanisms in order to cope with its often profound negative effects. The strong, collective character of occupational communities acts as a mechanism that affords workers a range of accumulated experiential resources, through the interplay between proximal and distal experiences based on individual and collective workplace memories.

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Robert MacKenzie is Professor of Working Life Science at Karlstad Business School, Karlstad University, Sweden. His research focuses on the regulation of employment and the relationship between macro, meso and micro level mechanisms of regulation. His work has sought to link

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Ian Greenwood is Associate Professor in Industrial Relations and HRM at the University of Leeds, Centre for Employment Relations Innovation Change. Research projects connected to industrial restructuring include the evaluation of lifelong learning strategies in the European steel and metal sectors and the potential of partnership-based approaches for furthering workplace learning and employability. He has also researched union learning representatives, team working, trade union activism and renewal including Community Unionism and the contemporary nature of collective bargaining. His current research focuses on industrial restructuring in the steel sector, collective bargaining for restructuring, the social impact of deindustrialization and industrial strategy.