

## **Jaques. E. (1917 -)**

Elliott Jaques was born on 18 January 1917 in Toronto where he obtained a BA and an MA before going to Johns Hopkins Medical School. He served as a major in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps in the WW2, completed a PhD at Harvard before moving to the United Kingdom and becoming a founding member of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London. He became a psychoanalyst in 1951 and set up an Institute of Organisation and Social Studies at Brunel University (Bioss) in the UK in 1970. Since 1985 he has lived in the USA where is visiting Research Professor in management studies at George Washington University, Washington DC.

His understanding of human nature, his highly empirical approach, and his wish to put social science on a proper scientific footing are grounded in medicine, psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Soon after the war he and his colleagues began what was to become a thirty-year project with the Glacier Metal Company in the UK. He has worked extensively in the USA, Australia and Canada and his work has had a significant impact on the US Military. Jaques' models were further codified with his colleagues in Bioss and his ideas continue to be elaborated and applied through its work in private, public, religious and military organisations across the world.

Jaques is a prolific writer of books and articles about his key concept of “requisite organisation” – one in which people can work and be together in ways all feel to be fair. The title of his first book *The Changing Culture of a Factory* (1951) was one of the earliest uses of “culture” in reference to the workplace. The essence of his early thinking was distilled in *Measurement of Responsibility* (1956), the profound insights of this early work were elaborated into a system for designing, managing and leading ‘felt-fair’ organizations – for example, *Requisite Organisation* (1997).

In collaboration with colleagues at the Tavistock Jaques developed ‘social analysis’ - an approach to understanding the life of an organisation through attentive listening and analytical feedback. Consultants offered analyses, made no recommendations and never arrogated to themselves the responsibilities of the people in the organization who had initiated the study. At the heart of the process lay ‘listening to the music behind the words’ with acute sensitivity to every aspect of what each person said and to every hint of what could, with encouragement, be articulated (Rowbottom 1977).

This attentive listening created a climate in which people could voice the subtleties of experience they lived but had not articulated - the tacit knowledge of which Polanyi speaks. They found themselves able to say how they felt about the process of their work, about the decisions they were called upon to make and the anxiety of waiting to see how they turned out, about the reward they felt would be fair for the level of responsibility they were asked to carry, about their working relationships with others and how they felt about the fairness of their working conditions.

Jaques' approach to people, work and the design of organizations are best understood in the light of his belief that people working together should be treated as people. From this

it follows that organizations should be designed in such a way as to provide conditions that induce confidence, trust and competence and remove those that produce anxiety, confusion and incompetence. In a requisite organisation people work together in ways that strengthen bonds of mutual trust and fairness, enhance imagination and innovation, and reduce suspicion and mistrust; the organisation achieves its purposes and contributes to the health of the wider society. 'Anti-requisite' organizations support autocratic coercion and destructive anxiety, and thus inhibit creativity. Although they may appear to be effective for some years, they eventually flounder.

When he originally communicated his ideas about the nature of work and of people, they were not fully heard. Fifty years later changes in the environment and in society have created a more receptive climate. In particular, globalization and the growth of knowledge work have helped to focus attention on the economic value of what people treated as individuals bring to work and on the conditions that encourage them and make the most of their contribution.

A key idea is Jaques' 1956 definition of work as 'the exercise of discretion within prescribed limits to reach a goal within a stated completion time'. The contemporary phrase for 'exercising discretion' is to 'make the call' – to choose a course of action when one does not fall out of analysis. From his attentive listening and his psychoanalytic understanding Jaques came to see that the discretionary content of work has a special feel for people because it is about the fine judgements they make when they do not and cannot know what to do. As Jaques put it, this is a 'sphere of psychological activity which, although extremely familiar, remains...ill-defined. There is no satisfactory....language for it. We speak about judgement, intuition, nous..... We cannot put into words what it is that we are taking into account in doing what we are doing, and in that sense we do not know that what we are doing will get us where we want to go, will achieve the result we want to achieve. We judge that it will, we think it will, but we are not sure and only time will tell' (Jaques 1988: page 156).

If this discretionary content is not bounded, there can be no coherence in the work people do together and an individual could be completely overwhelmed by expectations. It is the manager's responsibility to 'prescribe' limits - the objectively set rules in the form of policies (written and unwritten), procedures, physical controls which must be obeyed. By defining the field, these limits free the person to use his or her discretion in coping with uncertainties, vicissitudes, unknowns as they feel towards the wisest way of forwarding the work for which they are responsible (Jaques 1956, Evans 1979).

Characteristic of Jaques is his sensitivity to how it feels to adhere to prescribed limits: the person is responding to choices someone else has made and can assess and control their contribution by reference to objective standards. Appraisal and control of how we exercise our discretion has no immediate reference external to ourselves; we can evaluate it only through reference to intuitively sensed internal standards until completion time when the effect of our decisions can be externally reviewed.

Completion time when the quality of decisions is revealed is an important aspect of Jaques' thinking. Throughout his writing (especially *The Form of Time* 1982) he drew attention to the significance of time and uncertainty for human behaviour and to the anxiety of waiting to see the fruits of one's decision-making. The external corollary of this individual anxiety is the manager waiting for sufficient feedback to be confident that each of the people working to him or her is making decisions that are robust over time. In some projects this reassurance is forthcoming in weeks, on others it may be five years before the quality of the decision-making can be evaluated. As Jaques gathered more and more evidence of the span of time that had to elapse before the quality of decisions could be seen, he realized that there was a consistent pattern. Decisions about some kinds of work could be evaluated in three months; decisions about other kinds needed a year; some – especially when there was improvement involved – could not be evaluated before two years had passed; some – where completely new ways of approaching production, customers, a market had to be developed – required five years to completion time. Yet others – where a new combination of product, process, research, technology, markets had to come into being – could not be evaluated for ten years. Beyond that global institutions made decisions about changes, critical masses of capital, people and positioning where fruits could not be seen for twenty or more years.

He used this evidence to construct a framework of levels of complexity of work in which authority is distributed and managers can be held to account in ways they feel to be fair.

Despite the pace of change and decisions fifty years later and the pressure for quick completion, these time scales remain robust as measures of the evolving life and complexity of an organisation.

Another significant contribution to the requisite organisation in which people are more likely to be creative and responsible is Jaques' hypothesis that the capacity in each individual to use their judgement to make decisions grows over time at broadly predictable rates. His hypothesis arose from extensive studies of earning progression of individuals that yielded an array of curves similar in structure to the curves generated by mathematical studies of growing organisms.

As Jaques realized that people made consistent links between their earnings, their responsibilities, and exercising discretion, it occurred to him that the progression curves might also reflect a consistent pattern of growth in the capacity to exercise discretion - 'capability'. This hypothesis has been systematically tested over the last twenty five years in longitudinal studies of 'capability' in a wide range of organizations and cultures in developed and developing economies. These studies demonstrate that capability does grow at broadly predictable rates and that, if each individual is to use it to the full, this growth must be paced with growth in responsibility. To be prevented from working at full capacity by being asked to carry too much or too little responsibility is constricting, degrading and finally persecuting. The studies make it clear that there are no differences in distribution of capability with regard to gender, race or educational opportunity (Stamp 1986).

Much of Jaques' thinking has become common currency in organizations - 'discretion', 'judgement calls' and 'time-horizons' are widely used. 'Flattening' of organizations more often than not leads to a pattern of levels as defined by him, and when 'downsizing' removes a level of work that is necessary, it soon creeps back in. Interest in 'empowering' people at work is an attempt to gain access to the discretionary energy of people. In a requisite organization each person will be 'empowered' to use their discretion within a framework of prescribed limits: one of the fundamental tenets of such an organization being that each person is able to use his or her capability to exercise discretion to the full both as it is and as it grows.

Research into the cognitive unconscious (Reber 1993) provides support for Jaques' emphasis on the direct connection between the processes involved in work and unconscious mental activity.

'Industrial society...has overvalued ...the critical, the conscious, the verbal, the brain...everything to do with knowledge.... It has lost its ability sufficiently to value and to feel secure in relying upon the other side of the human equation - the side that contains intuition, judgement, flowing unverballed sense, the feel of the situation, the deeper sense of simply understanding what is right and wrong or fair or just, the sense of the reasonable, the ability to sit back and reflect and remember and to feel a part of one's past and present, and to identify with other human beings, to feel empathy and sensitivity...what Keats has called "negative capability" ..... being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after facts and reason' (Jaques 1982).

GILLIAN STAMP

BRUNEL INSTITUTE OF ORGANISATION AND SOCIAL STUDIES (BIOSS)

December 2000.

## **Bibliography**

- Jaques, E. (1951) *The Changing Culture of a Factory*, Tavistock Publications, London
- Jaques, E. (1956) *Measurement of Responsibility*, Tavistock Publications, London.
- Jaques, E. (1961) *Equitable Payment*, Heinemann Educational Books, London.
- Jaques, E. and Brown W, (1965) *Glacier Project Papers*, Heinemann, London.
- Jaques, E. (1976) *A General Theory of Bureaucracy*, Heinemann, London.
- Jaques, E. Gibson, R. and Isaac, J. (1978) *Levels of Abstraction in Logic and Human Action: A Theory of Discontinuity in the Structure of Mathematical Logic, Psychological Behaviour and Social Organization*, Heinemann, London.
- Jaques, E. (1982) *The Form of Time*, Crane Russak and Co. Inc. US; Heinemann Educational Books, London.
- Jaques, E. (1990) *Creativity and Work*, International Universities Press.
- Jaques, E. and Clement S. (1991) *Executive Leadership*, Cason Hall and Co. Publishers.
- Jaques, E. and Cason K. (1994) *Human Capability*, Falls Church: Cason Hall and Co. Publishers
- Jaques, E. (1997) *Requisite Organization: A Total System for Effective Managerial Organization and Managerial Leadership for the 21st Century*, Cason Hall and Co. Publishers.
- Evans, J. (1979) *The Management of Human Capacity*, MCB Publications, UK.
- Reber, A. (1993) *Implicit Learning and Tacit Knowledge: An Essay on the Cognitive Unconscious*, Oxford University Press.
- Stamp, G. (1992) *Day of Judgement - in Festschrift for Elliott Jaques*, Cason Hall and Co. Publishers.
- Stamp, G. and Stamp, C. (1993) *Well-being at Work: Aligning Purposes, People, Strategies and Structures*, The International Journal of Career Management, Vol.5, No.3, MCB University Press.