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**From Security to Opportunity?:  
Precarious Employment Among Managers and  
Supervisors in New Zealand**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the phenomenon of job security, insecurity and the ability to maintain continuity of employment. Assumptions regarding the nature of work are being altered by globalization, organizational flexibility and increased power for management in relation to labour. Furthermore, the move from welfarism to neo-liberal prescriptions of governance in New Zealand since 1984 has created challenges for individuals who are required to become self-reliant and responsible.

The experiences of eight informants in management and supervisory roles are reviewed here, providing an 'insiders' point of view on change in the workplace in the ethnographic tradition. The research is guided by the governmentality theory of Nikolas Rose, and Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of contemporary insecurity. Contextual influences on the employment environment in New Zealand are outlined.

Findings are discussed in relation to the following themes. It has been argued that *job insecurity* is endemic at all levels within organizations and can no longer be expected as part of the employment relationship. *Employment continuity* requires *reflexivity* of knowledge, as well as the constant questioning of the assumptions upon which the foundations of work are based. The central argument of the thesis is that employability requires an acknowledgement of the rigours associated with increasingly contingent work and an awareness of norms and strategies that are needed to assist all those currently involved in the hazards of working life, those excluded from it, and those who will join it. The development of a semblance of personal autonomy is required in order for 'freedom' to provide opportunities rather than insecurity, fear and exclusion.

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