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Environmental Changes within British Workplaces 1979 - 1997: Their Impact on Management

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam University For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis is an original and authentic piece of work by the author. All secondary sources and data utilised have been fully acknowledged and referenced. This work has not been presented in whole or in part for assessment elsewhere.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my Mum, Judy McCann, who died suddenly in the final stages of this work.

Acknowledgements

The following papers have been drawn, in part, from the thesis

"Industrial Relations Reforms since 1979 and their
Impact on British Corporate Management: A Case
Study of Five Multi-Plant Companies"
British Academy of Management Annual Conference
8-10 September 1997, London

"Employment Legislative 'Reforms' Since 1979 and
their Impact on British Workplace Relations"
International Harassment Network Annual Conference
12-13 May 1999 Preston ISBN 0-9532561-2-X

"Britain's Legislative Employment 'Revolution' since
1979"
Annual Conference of the Irish Academy of Management
9-10 September 1999 Limerick, Ireland

"Lifelong Learning and Human Resource Development:
An Agenda for Economic Prosperity"
4th Annual International Labour Markets Conference
11-12 October 1999 Aberdeen, Scotland

"Pragmatic Capitalism and the Employment Relationship"
3rd European Social Science History Conference
12-15 April 2000 Amsterdam, Netherlands

"'New' Working Practices: British Management's
Trojan Horse?"
18th Annual International Labour Process Conference
25-27 April 2000 Glasgow, Scotland

Abstract

Despite the wealth of research which has been gathered, studied and documented with regard to a range of workplace industrial relations issues it is believed that a comprehensive analysis of the employment relationship has not been conducted for the period 1979 to 1997. Therefore, the thesis aims to add to the body of knowledge by providing an analysis of the changes which occurred within organisations and how these brought about a transformation of the employment relationship in the U.K. It explores two seemingly contrasting viewpoints which debate the extent to which change has occurred in the workplace between 1979 and 1997. The study has asserted that these two theories cannot be directly compared with each other as they are drawn from very different sets of data i.e. the argument which states that radical change occurred in the management of labour was founded on data gathered nationally whereas the opposing stance was based on information drawn from individual workplaces.

The study is, on the whole founded on data gathered from five large multi-site organisations. This is justified as large organisations still employ a majority of the workforce and thus offer an opportunity to examine the impact of the various changes to workplace management at both individual site level as well as national level enabling a comparison to be made of the two opposing viewpoints outlined above.

A pragmatic-critical realist approach which used a case study methodology was adopted throughout the thesis. This enabled the data to be inductively accessed from various sources. It is argued that the methods used complemented each other thus providing a solid framework within which to undertake the study. It should be noted that the research tended to be drawn from qualitative methods which concentrated on interaction between external and internal variables in order to enable an analysis of the data.

The thesis concludes that although change occurred in the working relationship it was not driven by any single factor between 1979 and 1997. It is influenced by a number of factors such as the level of competition, the nature of the business, the geographical location of each site, leadership style, industrial relations legislation and the

employment relationship. It further highlights that unless insecurities and fears of the workforce are addressed by British corporate management employees will be drawn back towards traditional patterns of behaviour thus 'forcing' management to re-examine their styles and practices yet again.

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Section Three: The Analysis

Abbreviations

ACAS	Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service
BACS	Bankers Automated Clearing Services
BIFU	Banking, Insurance and Finance Union
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CBU	Clearing Banks Union
CHAPS	Clearing House Automated Payments System
DTI	Department for Trade and Industry
EFTOPS	Electronic Fund Transfer at the Point of Sale
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMB	General Municipal Union
GB	Great Britain
HRM	Human Resource Management
IRS	Industrial Relations Services
MSF	Manufacturing Science and Finance Union
MP	Member of Parliament
NCB	National Coal Board
NGA	National Graphical Association
NIRC	National Industrial Relations Court
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Oil Producing Economic Countries
P & O	Peninsular and Oriental
RAC	Royal Automobile Club
T & G	Transport and General Workers' Union
TUC	Trade Union Congress
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
UK	United Kingdom
WERS	Workplace Employment Relations Survey
WIRA	Workplace Industrial Relations Survey

Section One

'The Foundations'

"Facts do not simply lie around waiting to be picked up. Facts must be carved out of the continuous web of ongoing reality, must be observed within a specified frame of reference, must be measured with precision, must be observed where they can be related to other relevant facts" (Rosie and Peterson, 1965: 11)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1   Aims and Objectives

"Legislation was the single most important element in Britain's changing fortune"
(Lord David Young 1996, author's own notes)

The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the change which has occurred within the employment relationship during the period 1979 to 1997 and assess its impact on British corporate management. This was seen to be important in order to ascertain the driving force of change within British workplaces and to question the role played by legislation in transforming British employee relations.   The thesis, thus rejects Lord Young's suggestion that industrial relations legislation has lead the way in 'reforming' the employment relationship and that it has enabled management to adjust their behaviour towards their workforces. It further unites two, seemingly opposing viewpoints, which debate the extent to which change is evident in British workplaces. The thesis therefore develops and increases our understanding of industrial relations within the United Kingdom (UK) throughout the period 1979 and 1997.

This information is important as it provides insights into ways in which employment relationships have changed throughout the 1970s, 1980s and the 1990s. It is valuable in that it provides evidence of the relevance and/or strength of the various changes which have impacted on British corporate management during the 1980s and 1990s enabling management, trade unions and the Government to plan future developments in the workplace.

The study will achieve this by redressing the imbalance in the data by 'uniting' two conflicting theoretical debates in the area (Brown 1981; Millward et al 1983; Millward and Stevens 1986; Daniel 1987; Millward et al 1992).   The first one argues that permanent changes have occurred in British industrial relations (Hanson 1994; Kavanagh 1987, 1988; Minford 1988; Crouch 1986; Gamble 1988; Frenkel and Roberts 1992:62,1988). The other argues, that very little change can be identified (Millward et al in 1983, 1986 and to a lesser extent 1992; Gallie, Penn and Rose 1996; Batstone 1984, 1988, Cressey Eldridge, MacInnes 1985 and Rose and Jones 1985).   In order to explore these issues the research will focus on large, British based, multi-site organisations as they will enable an analysis of the data from both a national as well as site level perspective and therefore will provide a more comprehensive basis from where to evaluate the changes in the behaviour of British corporate management.

Thus, the focus of this thesis will be on the extent to which the various changes that have occurred within workplace have been 'driven' by, for example, the political environment, increased competition, the geographical location of the organisation, the changing balance within the employment relationship, the fluctuating fortunes of the trade union movement, management styles and practices, industrial relations legislation and perhaps even society as a whole (Millward, Bryson, Forth 2000:10).   This information is vital to both the British government as well as corporate management in the sense that if, for example, the study concludes that a single variant has had little or no impact on workplace relations and/or management style then perhaps there is a need to reflect on the various parts played by the stakeholders within the employment situation (with respect to issues such as the psychological contract, motivation, employee commitment and loyalty).   Which will, consequently mean that a re-evaluation of managerial styles would become necessary, especially in relation to 'controlling' the workplace.   This would be essential as any change in one of the variables, for example, if trade union membership increased as a result of restructuring or increased management suppression of employees, then the business community could find itself in a situation similar to the one which existed in the 1970s.

If, however, the study concludes that there has been a single 'driver' for change for example industrial legislative reform, and that this has played a significant and permanent part in the changes that occurred within the British employment relationship

(Hanson 1994; Kavanagh 1987, 1988; Minford 1988; Crouch 1986; Gamble 1988; Frenkel and Roberts 1992:62,1988). For example, that it enabled management practices to change, that it weakened the power of the trade unions or that it brought about organisational and national economic growth, then this research will have identified a powerful 'lever' which could be used by the government of the day for economic gain. It could also mean a change in, or a strengthening of political ideology as the trade unions could, perhaps, justifiably be held responsible for Britain's poor economic performance prior to 1979 (Rose 2001:51).

In order to create a firm foundation for the study, information was gathered on the intended, via interview with senior Conservative Ministers and Members of Parliament, and actual impact of various changes which were identified in the literature as well as from an initial exploratory survey. This was followed by in depth interviews with past and present political, governmental and trade union representatives, both at national and local levels as well as management and employees in pilot interviews. This data contributed to the initial focus of the study before being assessed, analysed and grounded in a case study of five multi-plant companies. Specific details of the methodology adopted are given in chapter 3.

1.2   Research Rationale

Despite the wealth of research which has been gathered, studied and documented throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s with regard to a wide range of workplace industrial relations issues these do not provide a comprehensive analysis of employment relations during this period. Nor do they enable a full analysis of industrial relations to take place in the sense that they can be divided into two central arguments (Brown 1981; Millward et al 1983; Millward and Stevens 1986; Daniel 1987; Millward et al 1992). Both arguments have approached the subject from very different angles which results in the data, evidence and analysis becoming fragmented. For example the first argument suggests that the 1980s witnessed a series of changes which "produced dramatic changes in the contours of British industrial relations" (Edwards 1995:4) and that Thatcher 'tamed' the unions (Hanson 1994; Kavanagh 1987, 1988; Minford 1988; Crouch 1986; Gamble 1988; Frenkel and Roberts 1992:62, 1988). The other argument questions whether or not 'dramatic' changes have occurred at all (Millward et al in

Both arguments, although offering a valuable contribution to our understanding, examine British industrial/employment relations or aspects of it throughout the 1980s and 1990s from differing angles or perspectives and are therefore not easily comparable. For example, the first approach focuses on industrial relations from a *national perspective* and overlooks the *local regional workplace*; the latter analyses the area from only a *local regional perspective* thus neglecting *national level* data. It is therefore believed that a comprehensive study, which combines both of the above approaches, is essential before conclusions can be drawn.

In an attempt to redress the research imbalance, the focus will be on 'uniting' these two approaches through an analysis of large British based multi-plant organisations. This will allow an examination of the data from a national as well as plant level and thus will provide an 'all encompassing view' of the changes that have occurred during the period.

Although it is acknowledged that a study which focuses on one section of the workforce has its limitations, it is believed that this is justified in this instance, because these large multi-site organisations employ a large number of individuals at sites located throughout the United Kingdom (UK). As well as offering the opportunity to examine the impact of the employment relationships at individual site level, these large companies also play a significant role in Britain's economy as their corporate decisions not only effect themselves and their competitors but also the nation as a whole (Sisson and Storey 1995:81). It is, therefore, suggested that these organisations offer the opportunity to conduct a combined, national and site level study which will form the framework through which industrial relations and managerial changes can be analysed and evaluated.

1.3 Dominance of Multi-Site Companies

Figure 1.1　　Distribution of Workplaces and Employment, by Workplace size
(Cully, Woodland O'Reilly Dix 1999:15)
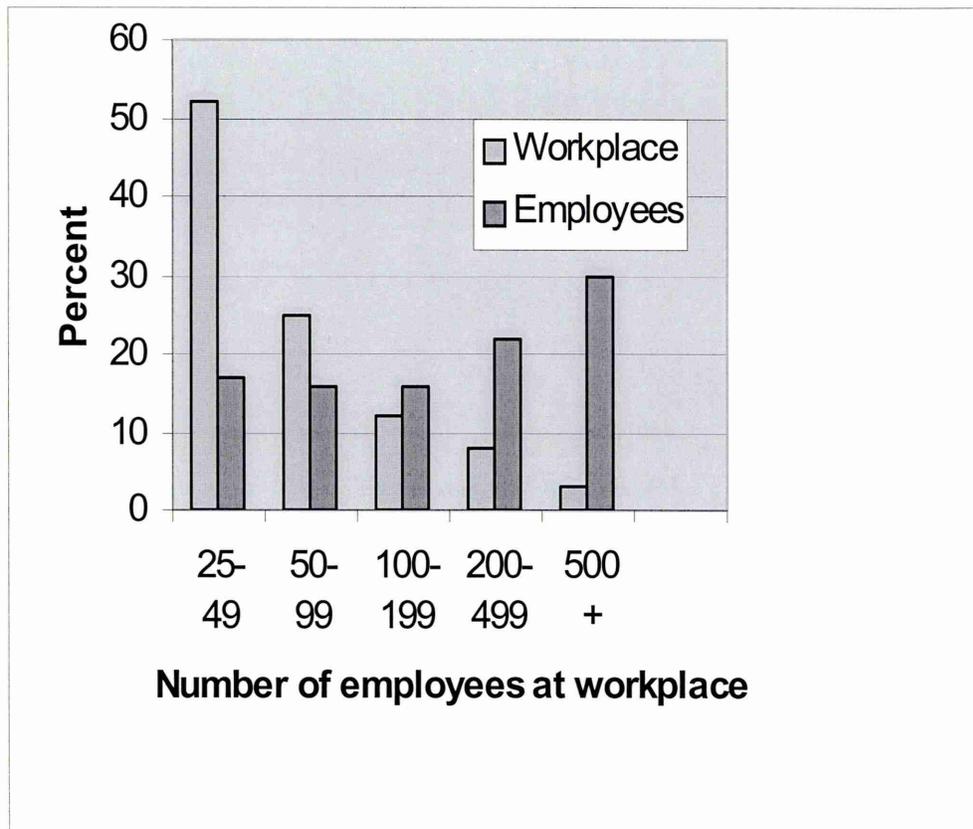
As can be seen from the above, organisations employing more than 500 individuals account for approximately one third of all employees. Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix (1999:16) conclude that "most workplaces [in the UK] were small but more employees worked in larger rather than smaller workplaces". Thus, it is argued that this study is adequately representative of British industry and can be successfully and usefully used to assess changes in management behaviour between 1979 and 1997.

1.4　　Plan of the Thesis

The thesis has been divided into three core sections. The first section provides the basis upon which the study has been built. It highlights and supports the methodological approach which has been adopted as well as reviewing the existing literature in the field.

The second section centres solely on the case study companies. These case studies were used to ground and develop the theory that emerged from the data gathered from the

literature and the initial interviews (cf. chapter 3). Each chapter within section two adopts a life history perspective to gathering much of the case study data from a pragmatic critical realist stance which has adopted a grounded theory approach to the analysis and evaluation of the central themes and categories which emerged from the data in relation to the change each organisation experienced between 1979 and 1997 and how this affected managerial behaviour.

The final section draws together the data that has been gathered, analysed and assessed in relation to the changes experienced between 1979 and 1997 within the case study organisations. It inductively highlights and develops the theory that there was no single driving force for change within British organisations during the period as has been suggested (Hanson 1994; Kavanagh 1987, 1988; Minford 1988; Crouch 1986; Gamble 1988; Frenkel and Roberts 1992:62,1988; Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000:61).

With the election in 1997 and their consolidation of power in 2001, 'New' Labour has taken British workplace relations into another period of change which unfortunately cannot be discussed in depth within this study, however to ignore these changes would be inappropriate. Therefore the thesis will conclude with a brief evaluation of recent changes in industrial relations together with suggesting a possible 'future'.

1.5   Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that there exists, in the current literature, a conflict between two distinct groups of writers: those who believe that radical and irreversible changes have occurred in relation to industrial relations in Britain (Hanson 1994; Kavanagh 1987, 1988; Minford 1988; Crouch 1986; Gamble 1988; Frenkel and Roberts 1992:62,1988) and those who suggest that little has changed (Millward et al in 1983, 1986 and to a lesser extent 1992; Gallie, Penn and Rose 1996; Batstone 1984, 1988, Cressey Eldridge, MacInnes 1985 and Rose and Jones 1985). This conflict of opinion is at the heart of this study.

The changes which have occurred in British workplaces and the impact that this has had on the behaviour of British corporate management will be evaluated by examining secondary and primary data (cf. chapter 3). These will be assessed at both national and local site level through inductively analysing data gathered and by grounding this in

theory. This will support the suggestion that changes which have occurred in employment relations during the period 1979 to 1997, were not fuelled by one single variant.

The following chapter will examine the literature and theories reviewed and analysed during the process of this study and which have enabled the thesis to be built on solid foundations.

Chapter 2

Industrial Relations in Britain

2.1   Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the aims and objectives of the thesis. The present one seeks to support these by providing the theoretical framework on which the study has been constructed. It highlights the main research themes and approaches used by others to explore the subject area. This is necessary because an appreciation of the nature as well as the context of such research enables a comprehension of the present study's findings and recommendations. Analysis of the literature also enables research themes to be identified and thus used to provide the foundations upon which the study will be based. Therefore once these areas have been highlighted they will be explored and evaluated throughout the thesis and will, through analysis, increase our understanding of the changes which have taken place and the effect they have had on corporate management thus developing the present theoretical framework.

However, it should be noted that the chapter is not intended to provide an all-encompassing historical overview of employment relations research in Britain, as this would be neither appropriate, nor attainable, within the confines of the thesis.

The chapter has been divided into a number of sections in order to aid understanding and analysis. The first section begins by giving a brief historical and general overview of the approach taken to industrial relations research in Britain since the 1950s. Without this, the present study could not be adequately contextualised and therefore, its' reliability and trustworthiness would be questionable.

The second section, which is itself subdivided, focuses on research undertaken in the external environment because this is seen to be as a central area of change during the period 1979 to 1997.

The chapter concludes by using the information drawn from the literature to identify a number of key areas of change which it has been suggested had an impact on British management and which consequently were used to form a focus for the study.

2.2 General Overview of Industrial Relations Research in Britain

In 1958, Dunlop put forward a central grand theory which attempted to provide researchers involved in industrial relations a framework within which to conduct their investigations (Salamon 1998:12). He suggested that the industrial relations system was not exclusively part of the economy, but that it was a separate and distinctive subsystem that overlapped both the economic and political decision making infrastructures. The 'Dunlop System' (Figure 2.1) therefore, provided the basis for researchers to interpret and analyse "the widest possible range of industrial relations facts and practices" (Dunlop 1958:vii).

As can be seen from figure 2.1 Dunlop sees the outputs of this system as rules which regulate and control the employment relationship. These rules are shaped and influenced by a range of inputs and processes. For example, he suggests that the environmental context plays a significant part in influencing the behaviour of the various actors.

Figure 2.1   A Simple Model of an Industrial Relations System (adapted from Dunlop 1958)
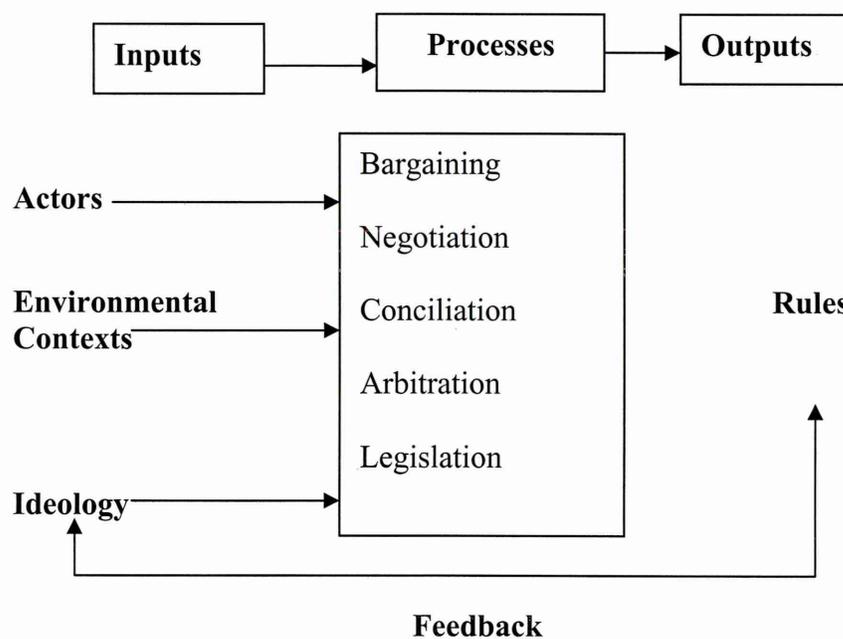
Dunlop's system has over the years, been subject to wide ranging criticism (Banks 1974; Beaumont and Harris 1988:397; Jackson 1982; Rose 2001:40; Leat 2001:29). For example Leat (2001:29) states that the model "lacks analytical rigour" and further that it does not allow analysis and evaluation of industrial relations within its "dynamic context". He adds that it merely enables individuals to describe and/or to organise facts. Despite these criticisms this model has not, to date, been totally abandoned (Salamon 1998:12). Hollinshead and Leat for example used this model as the basis for their comparative study in 1995.

Hyman (1975:11) however, rejects the role of an all-encompassing model which seeks to provide the only framework for subsequent analysis. Winchester (1983:104) also argues that the systems approach fails because it assumes a variety of individual and group interests and centres its research and analysis on an empirical perception of power at the workplace or organisational level. He adds that it "develops a restricted definition of workers' interests and trade union purpose that concentrates … on the institutions and procedures in collective bargaining" and not on the wider mechanisms for the distribution of power and rewards in society.

Although the Dunlop's approach has continued to be important, Martin (1998:85) suggests that the focus of recent industrial relations research has shifted from a specific issue and/or political approach, based on qualitative case study methodology to examining more wide ranging issues via quantitative data collection methods with explicit concern about theoretical underpinnings as well as an increase in international comparative studies (see for example WIRS/WERS[1]).

Perhaps this change in emphasis has been encouraged by the increasing contribution being made by economists to the area of employment relationships (Beaumont, 1991:37). This, Beaumont (1991:37) argues, is because Britain "moved very rapidly from an essentially data-started system … in the mid-1970s to the most data-rich system of all advanced industrialised economies in the 1980s, largely as a result of the funding availability … [for] the 1980, 1984 [and 1990] workplace industrial relations surveys"

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[1] *WIRS/WERS* A time series of workplace surveys. Conducted in 1980, 1984, 1990 and 1998. The first three were referred to as Workplace Industrial Relations Survey however they were designed to meet the changing requirements and changing circumstances of workplace relationships, therefore the most recent survey, Workplace Employment Relations Survey placed less emphasis on formal institutions and more emphasis on management practice (Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000 xiv).

(Daniel and Millward, 1983; Millward and Stevens, 1986; Millward et al 1992). Studies such as these have provided a wealth of raw data which many subsequent studies (including the present one) have benefited from. They have provided the basis for an analysis of among other things the changing management style and practice in Britain.

Martin (1998:85) however, believes that too much reliance is now being placed on quantitative data with British research in this area and suggests that in order to comprehensively examine these changes it is necessary to adopt a broader perspective by including an assessment of the social, economic and political environmental changes which occur. On full investigation this claim does seem valid and thus led this research away from undertaking a quantitative study. Although it has been necessary throughout the study to refer to some of the supporting quantitative data it has formed only part of the information gathering technique a much heavier reliance was made on qualitative data.

This section has outlined the framework within which a majority of industrial relations and managerial research has been undertaken during the last thirty years. It has highlighted that many recent studies in Britain have relied heavily on quantitative rather that qualitative data and thus have restricted their ability to access a comprehensive overview of the area. The present research will therefore adopt a multi-method approach to data gathering, although it will focus on qualitative data from which an inductive approach will be taken while analysing the data.

Reviewing the literature to date has suggested that a pluralistic approach to the thesis would in fact be appropriate due to the diversity and complexity of the area. Pluralism, it is suggested is more inline with contemporary development in society than say the unitarist perspective[2] in that pluralism believes that the organisation is made up of various individuals who are part of a variety of distinct groups. These groups all have their own interests, objectives, loyalties and leaders (Leat 2001:16). This Fox (1973) states gives rise to "a complex of tensions and competing claims which have to be

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[2] The unitarist perspective would argue that people within an organisation operated in a integrated way with a set of common values, interests and objectives. They recognise that the organisation has a single authority and loyalty structure and that is management's. They reject the idea of conflict

"managed" in the interests of maintaining a viable collaborative structure". Conflict is accepted as being both rational and inevitable. The perspective further accepts as legitimate trade union representation as well as management decision making in the sense that the perspective recognises the "right of interest groups to combine and have an effective voice in their own destiny". However Fox (1973) highlights that these interest parties are only able to work together as a fully functioning organisation as long as they have a "common interest in the survival of the whole of which they are parts'".

The following section will outline areas which researchers have argued brought about change in British workplaces between 1979 and 1997. It will examine trade union density and membership; the changes in the structural and compositional of employment; the emergence and development of human resource management (HRM) together with 'new' industrial relations; industrial relations legislative reforms; it will also examine the increasing importance of technology within British workplaces and the impact that have had on the employment relationship.

2.3 Trade Union Membership and Density

The examination of trade union membership and density is of great importance to this study as it has been argued that the decline in both membership and density was the direct result of industrial relations legislation introduced from 1979 to 1997 (Freeman and Pelletier 1990:155; Disney, Gosling, Machin, McCrea 1998; Edwards 1995; Hanson 1994; Kavanagh 1987, 1988; Minford 1988; Crouch 1986; Gable 1988, Frenkel and Roberts 1992:62, 1988; Thatcher 1993:272). It has been further claimed that the reduction in trade union membership and density restructured the balance of 'power' within workplace relations enabling management to reassert their authrority and control of the workforce. It is also believed that the cause and extent to which trade union membership and density has declined since 1979 is important as it has directly influenced political behaviour, management attitudes, styles and practices and consequently workplace relationships. Thus enabling 'new' managerial styles to emerge and develop within British workplaces (Boddy 2002:265).

The following table (Table 2.1) illustrates the extent to which trade union membership and the number of trade unions has declined during the period 1974 to 1997. As can be seen in 1979 there were 453 recognised trade unions within the UK however by 1997 this had declined to 224. Similarly in 1979 there were 13,289 trade union members but

in 1997 this had fallen to 7,801. This supports the claim made by Gallie, Rose and Penn (1996:1) that during the 1980s and 1990s that British trade unionism suffered "its greatest challenge" since the inter-war period through its' loss of membership and 'power'.

It has been suggested that the situation was made worse by the fact that during the latter part of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s trade union membership and power rapidly increased without the appropriate organisational or financial infrastructure which would enable them to adapt to environmental business changes of the 1980s and 1990s (Gallie, Rose and Penn 1996:1; Undy et al 1996:31; Willman 1989). Consequently, in the 1980s the trade union movement saw a decline in their membership numbers, political influence and perhaps their power due to the financial situation which exacerbated their ability to respond to the changing business context (Gallie, Rose and Penn 1996:1; Undy et al 1996:31).

Table 2.1   UK Trade Union Membership, 1974-1997 (Turnbull 1998:112: Rose 2001:144)

Year	Number Of Unions	Total Membership At end of year (000s)	% Change in Membership since previous year
1974		11764	+2.7
1975		12193	+3.6
1976		12386	+3.0
1977		12846	+3.7
1978		13112	+2.1
1979	453	13289	+1.3
1980	438	12947	-2.6
1981	414	12106	-6.5
1982	408	11593	-4.2
1983	394	11236	-3.1
1984	375	10994	-3.2
1985	370	10821	-1.6
1986	335	10539	-2.6
1987	330	10475	-0.6
1988	315	10376	-0.9
1989	309	10158	-2.1
1990	287	9947	-2.1
1991	275	9585	-3.6
1992	268	9048	-5.6
1993	254	8700	-3.8
1994	243	8278	-4.9
1995	238	8089	-2.3
1996	233	7938	-1.9
1997	224	7801	-1.7

In contrast to many theorists, Coates (1994:92-94) rather than 'seeing' the 1960s and 1970s as periods of trade union 'power', sees them as periods of weakness. He highlights that fact that the UK was and remains dominated by privately owned enterprises whose management generally have the unchallenged right to manage. This

he adds constrains the actions and 'power' of trade union and worker groups. He states that the economic system which operates in the UK is a:

> *"... system in which the privileged and the powerful invariably unite to block any power sharing which alone could allow unions and workers to play a ... positive role [in the employment relationship]".*

He suggests that the 1960s and 1970s became seen as periods of trade union power because, at the time, they were seen to be able to redress the imbalance in the power relationship between employer and employee (Coates 1994:93). He adds that many critics of trade unionism failed to see that the competitive position of UK industries had been 'undermined' because the balance of power become too even. In conclusion, he questions whether, in order to improve the competitiveness of the UK's economy under the present system, there is a need for a "greater degree of power *inequality,* a greater freedom of capital to rule and managers to manage that it has actually [has] in its core industries".

A number of studies have investigated trade union density and have provided a cross-sectional perspective. They highlight the differences between membership patterns in different industries, establishments and between individuals[3] as well as the size of the establishment[4] (Elias 1996:179; Guest and Dewe 1988). Guest and Dewe (1988), for example, conclude that the most significant factor influencing trade union membership was the extent to which the union represented the interests of their members in relation to wages, job security and working conditions. However, Elias (1996) added three additional factors that influenced an individual employees' attitude towards trade union membership:

- Promotional prospects based on the respondent's perception of promotional opportunities
- The extent to which the work was considered repetitive.
- The nature of supervision, for example, whether or not a worker was given 'inside' mobility so that they could enjoy periods of time when they were able to move between jobs (without changing employer).

Elias (1996:190) concluded that it was the individual characteristic specifications of employees rather than other variables that have a greater affect on trade union membership.

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[3] Gender, qualifications and work experience all were found to contribute to variations in trade union membership (see Bain and Elias 1985 for further details)

Hollinshead et al (1999:159) highlight that trade union density varies "significantly" between industries, ownership and regional location. They also agree that density is affected by variations in the characteristics of individual employees, for example, gender, ethnic origin, marital status, qualifications and age (see table 2.2).

Table 2.2   Union Density by Individual Characteristics, 1995 (Labour Market Trends, May 1996)

	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
All Employees	32	35	30
Age Group			
Under 20 years	6	6	6
20-29 years	24	24	24
30-39 years	35	37	33
40-49 years	40	45	35
50 years and over	36	40	31
Ethnic Origin			
White	32	35	29
Non-White	31	30	33
Black	41	39	42
Indian	28	30	27
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	18	20	*
Other	29	25	32
Highest Qualification			
Degree or equivalent	40	35	47
Other Higher Education	49	37	58
A-Level or equivalent	32	37	23
GCSE or equivalent	24	27	22
Other	29	35	23
No qualifications	28	34	24
Marital Status			
Single, never married	22	23	22
Married or cohabiting	35	39	32
Divorced/separated	33	39	30
Widowed	33	38	31

* base too low to provide reliable estimate[5]

Table 2.3 illustrates how the employment position of individual employees together with the type of employment contract they have affects trade union density. For example it is clear that a part-time, temporary sales person with no managerial responsibilities is the least likely category to join a trade union.

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[4] In terms of number of employees.
[5] Includes all employees except those in the armed forces.

Table 2.3   Union Density by Individual Characteristics, 1995 (Labour Market Trends, May 1996)

	All (%)	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)
All Employees	32	36	21
Length of Service			
Less than 1 year	13	15	8
1-2 years	17	20	11
2-5 years	24	27	17
5-10 years	37	39	28
10-20 years	50	42	41
20 years or more	60	63	40
Occupational Group			
Managerial/administrators	21	22	17
Professional	52	53	46
Associate/professional/technical	47	45	54
Clerical and secretarial	27	30	19
Craft and related	37	38	13
Personal and protective	29	39	17
Sales	12	13	10
Plant and machine operatives	43	45	20
Other occupations	28	39	18
Managerial Status			
Manager	27	28	25
Foreman or supervisor	42	43	36
No managerial duties	32	38	19
Employment Status			
Permanent	33	37	22
Temporary	21	24	16
Special Working Arrangements			
Flexitime	43	48	25
Job sharing	33	*	33
Term-time working	45	72	25
Annualised hour contract	50	56	30
9 day fortnight/4.5 day week	48	49	*
Work mainly in own home	6	7	5

* Base too low to provide reliable estimate[6]

Table 2.4   Union Density by Workplace Characteristics, 1998 (Rose 2001:159)

Per Cent of Employees in Unions and Staff Associations	
Industry:	
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	12%
Utilities/mining and quarrying	48%
Manufacturing	30%
Construction	21%
Retail, hotels and catering	10%
Transport and communication	42%
Financial/business service	18%
Public administration/education/health	51%
Other services	21%
Total services	30%

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[6] Includes all employees except those in the armed forces.

Table 2.5   Union Density by Region and Occupation: 1998 (Rose 2001:158)

Unionisation in the regions % employees in union and staff associations		Union density by Occupation % employees in unions and and staff associations	
Region or Country:		**Occupation:**	
South East	22%	Managers and administrators	19%
Eastern	23%	Professionals	49%
London	25%	Associate professional/technical	44%
South West	28%	Clerical and secretarial	24%
East Midlands	29%	Craft and related	32%
West Midlands	31%	Personal and protective services	27%
Yorks and Humberside	33%	Sales	11%
North West	35%	Plant and machine operatives	38%
North	40%	Less skilled	27%
Wales	41%		
Scotland	35%		
Great Britain	30%		

From examining the above it is clear that trade union membership and density declined overall during the period 1979 to 1997, however, the relevant research falls into two strands:

- Those who argue that the decline in trade union membership and density is a permanent feature of British industrial relations which has been brought about by compositional changes in the occupational[7] and industrial[8] nature of employment (Waddinton and Whitson 1995).

- Those who believe that the decline is merely part of the 'business cycle'[9] (Bain and Elsheik 1976; Booth 1983; Carruth and Disney 1988; Kelly 1988; Waddington 1992).

It is argued that the fact that two differing strands of analysis have emerged itself questions the validity of the argument that any one factor since 1979 has driven forward the changes which have occurred in the way British corporate management behave.

Criticisms have been made about the ability to compare and contrast some of the research data highlighted above because of the methodology adopted by the respective researchers (Elias 1996:179). This, however, is a general problem throughout most

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[7] The decrease in the blue collar workers along side the increase in white collar employees
[8] The movement from traditionally heavily unionised industrial sectors towards the weakly organised service sector.
[9] Elias (1996:175) suggests that the business cycle explanation is generally put forward when employees 'feel' vulnerable. For example during periods of high inflation when the workforce may become concerned about the impact on their employment and/or their wages, thus seek protection from a trade union. Carruth and Disney (1988) suggested that during the 1980s the business cycle was not favourable for the trade unions, "a combination of persistent unemployment, steady real-wage growth and a Conservative Government".

pieces of social science research and, thus, as long as it is recognised and appreciated the reliability of the knowledge and understanding remains trustworthy.

This section has confirmed the importance of trade union membership and density to this study as it has indicated that decline in these areas were not driven by one single factor and that there was a range of external and informal influences affecting the behaviour of British corporate management.

2.4   Compositional Changes in Employment

This section will look at the compositional changes which have occurred within employment in the United Kingdom (UK). It became increasingly apparent during the study that this area had had a significant impact on trade union membership and density, management style, as well as workplace relationships and management behaviour in general (Millward, Bryson, Forth 2000:38).

MacInnes (1987b) and Green (1992)[10] have argued that the shift in the composition of the workforce, significantly affected trade union membership and density and thus management behaviour. Waddington and Whitston (1995:171) however, highlight that many of these compositional changes were evident prior to 1979 and that trade union membership actually increased *despite* these compositional changes during the 1970s and thus cannot account for the dramatic decline during the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, to enable a full analysis of the impact of these changes, it is important to examine the permanency of them. Further if they prove to be permanent and if so whether or not this will result in the 'disintegration' of British trade unionism as we know it.

Blyton and Turnbull (1998:37) confirm that "important changes have been occurring in the composition and conditions of the labour force in the UK ... the types and location of industries that the labour force is employed in ... and patterns of ownership, organisational structures and inter-organisational linkages found in those industries". They conclude that organisations today operate in a very different environment to the one they did two decades ago.

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[10] Green 1992 argues that the combined compositional changes in the British workforce accounted for 30 per cent of the fall in union density between 1983 and 1989.

2.4.1   The Shift from Manufacturing to the Service Sector of the Economy

As can be seen from table 2.6, in 1981, 6.1 million people in Britain were employed within manufacturing, by 1999 this figure had dropped to 3.9 million, a reduction of 35.2 per cent. However this was matched with an increase in the service sector with a growth from 13.5 million in 1981 to 17.2 million in 1998. The service sector was thus employing 76 per cent of the workforce in 1998 (Farnham 2002:130). The changes which have been experienced within the structure of British industry have affected the distribution of economic activity. For example Farnham (2002:131) has argued that as traditional manufacturing industries have declined in areas such as Scotland, Wales, North East, Lancashire and the Midlands have all seen a fall in employment levels. Between 1979 and 1984 94 per cent of the jobs lost in manufacturing were located in the North however the Midlands suffered during the late 1980s with the collapse of British car manufacturing (Farnham 2002:131). Farnham (2002) also highlights that although not totally confined to the South the expansion of the service sector has been evident more dominantly in the South of England.

However, it is important to note that this 'dramatic' decline in manufacturing was not a uniquely British phenomenon (OECD 1994 a and b). It is also interesting to note that as the manufacturing and production industries declined during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the service sector grew by approximately 2 per cent, again throughout all OECD member states (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:49).

Table 2.6   Changes in Employment in the Manufacturing and Service Industries, 1981 to 1999 (millions) (Salamon 2000:48)

	Male		Female		Total
	Full-time	**Part-time**	**Full-time**	**Part-time**	
Manufacturing					
1981	4.2	0.1	1.4	0.4	6.1
1991	3.2	0.1	1.1	0.3	4.6
1999	2.8	0.1	0.9	0.2	3.9
Change 1981-1999	**-34.7%**	**-5.8%**	**-33.6%**	**-50.6%**	**-35.2%**
Services					
1981	5.5	0.6	3.8	3.3	13.1
1991	5.7	0.9	4.5	4.2	15.3
1999	6.6	1.4	5.3	4.8	18.0
Change 1981-1999	**+20.0%**	**+129.5%**	**+41.3%**	**+45.5%**	**+ 37.5%**

These factors taken together again suggest that changes in British management practices were influenced by a range of variants rather than a single variable.

2.4.2   Growth in the Employment of Females

A second area of change within the composition of the British workforce has been the increase in the number of females (Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000:14; Salamon 2000:42; Cully, Woodland O'Reilly and Dix 1999:143). For example between 1951 and 1999 the level of female employment grew by approximately 4.5 million (62%) while male employment fell by 1.5 million (11%) (Salamon 2000:48). Ellison (1994) predicts that this increase will continue and that by 2006 "women will account for 90 per cent of the expected increase in the UK labour force". However, this is not reflected evenly across the economy, for example, in 1996 women made up 57 per cent of all employees in the service sector (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:51). Suggesting that some of the differences "in the patterns of female employment are due to factors over and above certain industries being 'gendered'" (Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix 1999:24). Gregory and O'Reilly (1996) examined two industrial sectors, banking and retail, in order to examine the impact of women in the workplace. Wajcman (1996) focuses on the role of women managers and the change that they have made to industry. Gregory and O'Reilly during the 1980s and 1990s has reduced the constraints of management while at the same time weakening employees protection. They conclude that this has made part-time employment and financially cheap option for both the banking and retail sectors during the 1980s and 1990s and has encouraged the employment of the more flexible female workforce (Gregory and O'Reilly 1996:225). Wajcman (1996) however concluded that within the five the five multinational companies that were included in his study women were less likely to attain senior managerial positions than men. She concluded that "male definitions of occupational excellence and appropriate promotion attributes discriminate against and discourage women". In fact Wajcman (1996:259) has highlighted that although there has been an increase in female workers during the 1980s and 1990s women are still failing to break through the glass ceiling. However she has stated that this is due to organisational culture which is gendered and consequently stereotyped thus preventing women being viewed as having the leadership skills and qualities needed for senior managerial positions. She concludes that only a few women succeeded in the organisations she examined and this was due to them adopting a male persona and behaviour type (Wajcman 1996:276)

It will therefore be interesting to examine the impact of the increased employment of females with the case study organisations.

2.4.3   Non-Standard Employment[11]

Although the growth of female employees in the workplace was important a much more dramatic change was the increase in the use of non-standard[12] employees such as those who were employed on fixed-term contracts[13], zero-hour contracts[14], annual hour contracts[15] or on a part-time basis[16] (Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix 1999:32).

> *"Official statistical sources show increases over the 1980s and 1990s in the number of people working part-time ... working for an agency, or engaged in some other form of temporary work" (Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix 1999:32).*

In their study, Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix (1999) found that approximately half of the very large organisations operated by employing a majority of non-standard contractual employees. Millward, Bryson and Forth (2000:44) argue that part-time employment contracts[17] are the "most established and widely used form of non-standard employment" within British organisations. They state that the use of part-time employees has increased significantly during the 1990s, for example, they highlight that between 1990 and 1998, " in workplaces in which part-timers accounted for at least one quarter of the workforce" the growth in the use of part-time employees rose from 33 per cent to 49 per cent" (Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000:45). They added that the most significant growth came from newly established workplaces where 27 per cent of them made use of part-time workers compared to 21 per cent of continuing sites.

Allen and Henry (1996:65) suggest that it is industries such as finance that has benefited the most from the growth of a-typical workers. However in their study they examined the movement of staff in low skill sectors to 'new' employment contracts in the south of England. They suggest that employment relations had dramatically changed and that

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[11] The term non-standard employment has been used here as an alternative to 'flexible forms of employment'. This has been done in order to bring the analysis in line with the work of Millward, Bryson and Forth (2000:44) who stated that the term non-standard employment is less value-ladened and that it merely refers to "working arrangements that differ from the traditional full-time, open-ended employment contract.

[12] Standard employment contract refers in this analysis to those employers who employ individuals under a full-time permanent contract with notice periods that apply to both parties.

[13] An individual is employer for a specific period of time.

[14] Employment may be on-going however there is no obligation from the employer to guarantee regularity of hours.

[15] Again employment may be on-going, however, the contract specifies the number of hours to be worked throughout the whole year. The employment times are generally negotiated between the employer and employee and provides flexibility for the employer to respond to periods of increased demand.

[16] For a more detailed analysis of non-standard employment see Casey, Metcalf and Millward 1997

some employees had been "pushed out of secure employment" (1996:66).   They conclude by claiming that what happened in these industries was of a "wider political and economic shift in the nature of employment relations in the UK, a shift which could be said to be leading towards a new employment regime based upon precarious employment" (ibid).

It has been suggested that non-standard employment has been used to increase organisational flexibility (Atkinson 1988).   According to Atkinson (1988) the new 'flexible firm' is made up of core employees who are full-time, have job security and are multi-skilled and peripheral employees who are employed on a-typical contracts. These employees can be 'hired and fired' quickly in response to market fluctuations. Ackroyd and Procter (1998) acknowledge that organisations have sought flexibility but suggest that they adopt functional flexibility for both the core and periphery employees. Rose (2001:55) adds that flexibility is the focus of many organisations however he suggests that some organisations now employ most of their workers on a peripheral basis, "MacDonaldisation". Farnham and Pimlott (1995) have argued that the actions of the Conservative Government since 1979 have compounded the vulnerability of low paid, unskilled workers while strengthening the hand of corporate management.

Millward, Bryson and Forth (2000:45) agree and suggest that this movement towards the utilisation of part-time employees may have had an impact on employment relations. Cully and Woodland (1998) added that part-time employees have a much lower level of trade union membership when compared to full-time workers. Disney, Gosling and Machin (1995) suggest that the consequence of employing part-time workers is made more significant when consideration is given to the fact that part-time workers are less likely to join trade unions and thus restricts the likelihood that recognition rights will be granted to the workforce.   These researchers further highlight the importance of trade union membership and density to the employment relationship and consequently its impact on the way management behaves.

Before moving on to discuss other non-standard forms of employment it is necessary to point out that the majority of part-time employees are women (Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000:45) in fact Blyton and Turnbull state that in 1996 79.7 per cent of all part-

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[17] A part-time employment contract is defined by the WIRS/WERS surveys as one in which an individual is employed for less than 30 hours per week.

time employees were female (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:52). This information when combined with that outlined in the rest of the section supports the suggestion that trade union membership and density directly affected the environment within which British corporate management operate.

Other non-standard forms of employment which occurred during the 1980s and 1990s and which should be mentioned here, as they too have altered the external environment within which British management behave, are the increase in the levels of outsourcing[18], labour-only services[19] and agency workers[20] (Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix 1999:34; Rose 2001:216; Casey, Metcalf and Millward 1997).

The analysis of the available data and literature have suggested that comparability problems could be encountered in relation to assessing the exact degree of change in the use of non-standard employment since 1979.

> *"Although some of the estimates may be subject to a degree of uncertainty, the patterns of change are generally apparent. In particular, the increased use of part-time workers and short fixed-term contracts during the 1990s, together with the increased use of agency temps over the series as a whole, all ... illustrate how the character of jobs and, more particularly, workplaces has developed in recent years" (Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000:48)*

However a much more important factor has been highlighted through this data with regard to this study, that is the change in the level of control and therefore 'power' of the processes which 'guide' workplace relationships. The concept of power is complex and difficult to define and thus continues to be an area of debate (Rose 2001:67). With regard to the employment relationship 'having' power determines organisational control, therefore inequality of power can cause conflict as well as achieving consent. This is an important consideration because the 'power' relationship between manager and the individual responsible for undertaking the task shifted during the 1980s and 1990s in that individual workers became more vulnerable as their employment rights weakened. The concept of power and its value to this study will be returned to later in this chapter.

Before moving on to examine the next area a brief outline of some of the comparative cross European research was thought to be necessary. For example it is acknowledged

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[18] This is where the organisation arranges for specific services to be provided for them. For example catering, cleaning, security and gardening.
[19] Labour-only services are generally provided by "freelance workers or homeworkers or through ... [an] employment agency"

that the use of part-time and non-traditional contract workers was comparatively high in Britain when compared with other European countries (with the exception of Sweden and Norway). However it should be highlighted that all have witnessed a growth in the proportion of part-time employees in their workforces. It should also be noted that there was an increase in the number of part-time workers who were on low pay during the period 1979 to 1991 (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:52). Unfortunately, it has been argued that "over 70 per cent of all part-time employees in the UK earn less than the Council of Europe's decency threshold and 84 per cent of these are women" (Pearson and Quiney 1992:6-7; Rubery 1995:547). It could therefore be suggested that this has weakened the overall power of the workforce within the employment relationship during the period. This brief exploration of workplaces changes indicate that the changes which occurred were not a uniquely British phenomenon therefore backing the suggestion that there was more than one variable which influenced the changes which occurred within British workplaces during the 1980s and 1990s.

2.4.4   Greenfield sites[21]

Alongside the compositional shifts in the workforce the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a 'relocation' of new manufacturing and service sector concerns to 'greenfield' sites in semi-rural areas (Lane 1982; Massey 1988; Sayer and Walker 1992). Massey (1988:61) Sayer and Walker (1992) conclude that there has been a 26 per cent fall in manufacturing employment within the six major industrial locations within the UK with a corresponding increase of 38 per cent in manufacturing employment in rural areas. Again, these changes can be identified in other countries within Europe (Hudson and Sadler 1989; Hoerr 1988).

Hollinshead, Nicholls and Tailby (1999:472) suggest that the popularity of greenfield sites for management was to bring about "full flexibility of personnel". Others however have viewed Greenfield sties as a way of restricting trade union membership while limiting any potential industrial action (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:132). Kessler and Bayliss (1995:197) agree and argue that management on Greenfield sites have been "unwelcoming" towards trade unionism and at times they add they had found senior management "positively hostile".

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[20] Those workers who are employed by a third party.
[21] This is where an organisation has opened a new site on a previously undeveloped location.

Therefore it has been suggested that the growth of greenfield sites has impacted on trade union membership and density as it has encouraged management to reject or restrict trade union presence within their organisations at the same time employees themselves have been found not to be attracted to trade unionism (Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000:86; Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix 1999:238) perhaps because of their perceived loss of power within the employment relationship.

2.5   The expansion of technology within British workplaces

Gennard (1993:70) argues that bargaining power between employers and employees is decided by three central factors: the economic 'health' of the country; the legal framework and the availability and implementation of new technology. The latter impacts on the employment relationship through its impact on the demand for labour as well as on the flexibility and skill of the relevant workforces.

The nature and rate of technical change has increased during the last two decades, in fact, it has been suggested that a 'technical revolution' has been witnessed (Gill 1989; Salamon 1998:513). Edwards (1979) agrees and suggests that employers have consciously built performance and effort standards into the new technology in order to *control* the speed of work and reduce the autonomy of the employees.

Gennard and Judge (1998:60) in order to analyse the impact of new technology on the workforce have identified three perspectives:

- "New technology, because of its impact on traditional skills, acts as both a de-skilling agent and a creator of unemployment.

- New technology is a positive force in that it creates new opportunities for employees who have the chance to learn new skills.

- New technology is seen as the means whereby previously unpleasant or repetitive tasks can be eliminated".

However, it should be noted that the impact of new technology should be industrially contextualised as each industry/organisational needs vary.

Marginson and Sisson (1990) suggest that technological developments have "blurred" the traditional boundaries between manual and non-manual workers and have encouraged flexibility within the workforce. Braveman (1974) however, goes further by arguing that the employment relationship during the twentieth century has been one of management exploitation and degradation of labour by deskilling work through the

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introduction of new technology and thereby reducing the need for a specific workers or group of workers. Gennard and Judge (1998:33) highlight the technical developments which have taken place in communication and state that this has encouraged the emergence of global product markets and resulted in an intensification of competition thus changing the external environment within which management manage. For example, the financial sector has been pressured to adapt and change to new environment created by the introduction of technological advancements. Manwaring (1981) added that this has increased management's control over production and thus their workforces. James (1980) agrees and states that new technology transforms work in a way which makes it much less "amenable to worker control".

Although technical change has meant that certain jobs have been deskilled or have even been eliminated it has also resulted in the creation of new jobs, new skills and has enabled some industrial sectors to become more capital-intensive and in these industries the new technological advancements have strengthened the bargaining power of employees and at the same time weakening that the employer (Rose 2001:281-283; Gennard and Judge 1998:33-34). Ashton and Felstead (1996) have argued that a majority of employees had experienced an increase in the levels of skill that they required to do their job and only nine per cent suggested that the skill level had fallen. This then casts doubt on the strength of the arguments relating to the marginalisation of the workforce as a result of the introduction of new technologies.

To summarise this sub-section it is evident that technological innovation has occurred throughout the whole period under investigation, however, the literature has introduced some contradictory evidence. On the one hand it has been suggested by Braveman in 1974, that the introduction of technology has led to the deskilling of the workforce and an increase in the amount of power and control management have within the workplace. On the other Ashton and Felstead (1996) state that there is little evidence to support the suggestion that deskilling has taken place or that employees have become marginalised as a result.

2.6   Employment Levels Since 1979

"We've got three million on the dole, and another twenty three million scared to death"
Ron Todd, T & G cited in Blyton and Turnbull (1998:56).

Nolan and Walsh (1995:50) state that much of the research undertaken on the employment relationship has been removed from the wider 'picture' and as such has

been analysed as an "autonomous subsystem". They suggest that because the part played by the economy, including the level of employment, within the industrial relations arena has been neglected by academics. Thus, there has been a failure to identify the influence these areas have had on managerial behaviour and on the employment relationship itself. Thus it is suggested that a majority of studies have been unable to anchor their research in 'reality' and consequently, cannot reflect an accurate or complete picture of what is happening within this area (Nolan and Walsh 1995:51). This subsection will therefore, examine levels of employment with the U.K. from 1979 until 1997.

As can be seen from table 2.7 unemployment levels in the UK have been much higher than in the recent past[22]. By the end of the 1970s the average level of unemployment was approximately 5.6 per cent of the British workforce. However, by 1986 this had increased to 11.9 per cent and despite the upturn in the economy during the latter part of the 1980s unemployment levels only decline slowly and by 1996, 6.6 per cent of the workforce remained unemployed[23] (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:54).

Table 2.7   Unemployment rates in the UK, 1945-94 (five year averages) (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:55)

Years	Yearly Average (%)
1945-49	2.1
1950-54	1.7
1955-59	1.7
1960-64	1.9
1965-69	2.1
1970-74	3.1
1975-79	5.6
1980-84	11.1
1985-89	9.7
1990-94	8.7

Restructuring and 'down-sizing'[24] continued throughout the 1990s. Blyton and Turnbull (1998:56) have stated that this has created an environment of fear in that employees are constantly reminded how fragile their position is in the employment relationship. Thus their 'feelings' have a significant impact on the way employees respond in the workplace and on the balance of power within the employment relationship. This was seen to be a key factor which needed thorough analysis within the thesis.

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[22] Direct comparisons, it should be noted, are difficult to calculate due to the many changes that have been introduced to the method used to compiling these figures.

[23] It should be noted that these are the official unemployment figures and that in practice unemployment is much higher. See the Independent on Sunday 13 April 1997, which suggests that the total number of unemployed could be as high as 4 million.

[24] Down-sizing is defined by Cascio (1997) "as the planned elimination of positions or jobs".

The analysis of the literature so far has emphasised the role of 'power' within the employment relationship in that the external environment during the 1980s and 1990s has weakened the employees own perception of power within the employment relationship through their psychological fear of job loss and the economic implications of this on their personal lives. However, what is less clear is the 'actual' loss of employee 'power' in the workplace. For example, if we are to believe Mason (1997) and De Meuse et al (1994), who both suggest that down-sizing has not produced the organisational gains expected, then managerial use of this 'stick' may in fact not be very powerful in relation to the organisations profitability and effectiveness. Thus suggesting that management need to 'harness' the power of the workforce in order to compete in today's workplaces.

2.7   Industrial Relations Legislation

As industrial relations legislation is seen in the literature to play a major part in the changes which have occurred in employment relations and the behaviour of British management it was felt that a comprehensive review should be undertaken.

> *"There is, perhaps, no major country in the world in which the law has played a less significant role in the shaping of industrial relations than in Great Britain and in which today the law and legal profession have less to do with the labour relations" (Kahn-Freund 1954:44).*

The Kahn-Freund (1954) perspective, briefly outlined above, remained dominant throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s (Clegg 1970:344), however by the 1980s the situation had changed. Bain (1983), for example, devoted two chapters of his analysis of industrial relations to his discussion on the role of the law which was later developed by Lewis in 1986 and Dickens and Hall in 1995.

Fosh et al (1994) also analyse Conservative legislative 'reform' in order to establish whether it was ideologically driven or merely responded to various economic or political situations. Marsh (1992) states that Mrs Thatcher's government was pragmatic in that it entered Parliament without a fully formed industrial relations policy. Auerbach (1990) agrees and suggests that the labour law did not follow any clear ideological perspective, that it was a reaction to a number of variables, for example, the economic climate; the perceived 'power' of the trade union movement; inward investment from Japan and America. Dunn and Metcalf argue that the Conservative governments proceeded incrementally, "targets were selected tactically, lines of least resistance followed, opportunities grasped, and holes plugged" (1996:69).

This view, however, is not shared by all theorists, Wedderburn (1989) for example, argued that the Conservative government's objectives and policies from 1979 to 1990 were formulated with regard to a deep rooted ideological goal which was founded on the work of Hayek (Fredman 1992; Hanson and Mather 1988; McCarthy 1987). Hayek suggested that a successful and competitive economy must be a deregulated one as any attempt to manipulate it, either by the state, private monopolies or trade unions would introduce inefficiencies, which would ultimately damage it.

However, Undy et al (1996) stated that the Conservative Government's legislative role was that of an 'enabler' and suggested that the trade unions still occupied a central position from where they were able to make choices in relation to the way they responded to the external environment (Undy et al 1996:4).

Coates (1994:92), however, rejects the idea that trade unions had a free choice in their ability to respond. He argues that they were restricted by the capitalist system which operated within the UK and that they were encouraged to become defensive and obstructionist in order to pursue the interests of the membership.

> *"it is all they were allowed to be in a system which gives managers the right to manage and the owners the right to dispose of their property" (Coates 1994:92).*

The debate between these viewpoints perhaps seems trivial, however, it is important, that they are considered in relation to this present study. Firstly, if we are to believe that the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s acted pragmatically it would seem appropriate that this research should focus on each specific influence/problem and the subsequent reaction to it rather than examining the impact of the ideologically driven Conservative government during the period. If, however, the labour legislation was ideologically based and had been a successful 'tool' in reducing the 'power' of the trade unions while at the same time improving Britain's economic position, then the research should focus on ideology.

This sub-section has again highlighted that the literature fall into two distinct categories. Firstly, Marsh (1992) Dunn and Metcalf (1996) suggest that the Conservative Governments from 1979 to 1997 were a pragmatic response to the external environment within which it operated. Alternatively Webberburn (1989) argues that the Conservative Government's actions were founded on a deep rooted ideological base from where their policies and legislation flowed. It is, therefore, clear that these areas

need to be explored and analysed throughout the research in order to undertake an informed assessment of the impact of industrial relations reforms, 1979 to 1997.

In order to assess the impact of legislative 'reforms' in the area of industrial relations, Dickens and Hall (1995) divided the subject into four main areas of analysis: legal action by employers; union response; implications for collective bargaining; and the incidence of industrial action. Within the first area they examine the extent to which the law has been utilised by employers. They cite a number of large disputes which attracted a great deal of media attention at the time, such as the 1983 dispute between Messenger Newspaper and the national Graphical Association (NGA), the 1984/85 miners' dispute between the National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) and the National Coal Board (NCB); the 1986 News International and print unions dispute; the 1988 problems between P & O Ferries and the National Union of Seamen. Despite this action, Elgar and Simpson (1993a) have stated that the number of employers who were prepared to take legal action throughout the 1980s and early 1990s remained small and those who were prepared to act tended not to pursue their claims once they had been granted an injunction (Evans 1987; Edwards 1995). Thus, does the lack of legal action taken by organisations mean that the legislation has not had an impact on British management? Could it not be that the legislation has proved to be a useful tool in intimidating the workforce in the present economic climate?

The next area of interest focuses on the response of the trade unions to the situation. Again a lot of attention has been given to the large industrial disputes during the 1980s and the 1990s and conclusions have been drawn both in the media and within the academic community that, so far trade unions have not managed to respond positively to the 'new' legislative framework (Undy et al 1996:31). The research undertaken in this area has tended to be subdivided into more specific areas, for example, Brown and Wadhwani (1990) focus on the role which legislation played in relation to trade union restructuring. They argue that the legislation had only had a limited impact on management in that, "it is implausible that employers were stimulated to manage their labour better as a result of the altered legal circumstances of trade unions" (Brown and Wadhwani 1990:31). They conclude that the trade union movement had already been weakened by recession and the increased competition in the 'market place' before the legislation of the 1980s and 1990s began to take effect and that the legislation was not a central concern for the unions. McCarthy (1992:7) supports this and states that the changes in management practice and union behaviour during the 1980s and 1990s owe

more to economic and social changes than to legislation. Dunn and Metcalf (1996) also agree and suggest that the legislation played a limited role in bringing about the changes within workplace relations.

Freeman and Pelletier (1990), however, conclude that the legal environment was responsible for the decline in trade union density and thus, had an important impact on employment relationship. However, Dunn and Metcalf (1996:76) point out that this has not been proven as the impact of industrial relations legislation takes time to influence and affect individual behaviour, a fact not considered by Freeman and Pelletier.

The third area examines the implications for collective bargaining. It is clear that all sectors of the economy have experienced some reduction in coverage of collective bargaining during the 1980s and 1990s (Millward et al 1986, 1992:93-96; Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000:159-160). Changes have occurred in its structure, for example, the emphasis of collective bargaining regulation has moved away from the multi-employer, industry level form of bargaining towards the organisational, single employer or site level in order to respond to variations in organisational situations and needs (Salamon 1998:348); Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000:161). Despite this, collective bargaining in the 1990s remained a dynamic structure which continued to be the "main method of pay determination for almost half the workforce in Britain" (IRS Employment Trends 1992:7) although the strength and effectiveness of collective bargaining varies between industrial sectors as well as organisations.

Another area of importance in this study was an analysis of strike action. Strike activity had been high in the period immediately preceding the election of the Conservative Government in 1979 with an annual average of 12,178 working days lost during the period 1974 to 1979 compared with 4,266 lost in 1981. Edwards (1995) suggests that the reduction in industrial action from 1979 onwards was the result of:

- Economic conditions

- The shift from the traditional manufacturing sector to the service sector

- Industrial relations legislation

- Improvements which were made to consultation and negotiation

- "better industrial relations"

Most of the above areas have already been discussed in this thesis therefore the frequency and cause of industrial action will be focused on here. The frequency and cause of industrial action is an area which has proved to be difficult to analyse as it is hard to isolate the role played by legal developments in this industrial action, from other variables which influenced the employment relationship and/or managerial behaviour.

Despite the research problems caused by the area it was felt that it was important to outline the main studies which have been undertaken as they have contributed to framework upon which this thesis is based.

A survey carried out by Elgar and Simpson (1993a) stated that the legislative reforms have affected trade union members' *desire* to take industrial action although they are sceptical as to the overall importance of the part played by the law. However, they acknowledge that the legislation which was introduced between 1979 and 1993 contributed to the *feeling* that industrial relations was experiencing a shift in the balance of bargaining power at workplace level (Elgar and Simpson 1993b). Brown and Wadhwani (1990), however, claim that their comparative study of international strikes showed that other countries, which had not experienced the legislative reforms introduced by the Conservative Government (1979-1997), showed a much larger decline in days lost through strikes than the UK. McCarthy (1992) agrees and argues that any decline in strike activity (see table 2.7) was more likely to be the result of other variables rather industrial relations legislation. Hepple (1995:312) concludes that unemployment, two recessions since 1979 and tight product market competition have had a greater impact on trade union strength than the legislation.

Table 2.7 Strike Trends in the UK, 1974-2000 (Waddington 2003:225)

YEAR	All industries			Working Days lost per 1,000 workers		
	Strikes (No.)	Workers involved (000s)	Days lost (000s)	Mining energy and water	Manufacturing	Services
1974-79	2,412	1,653	12,178			
1980	1,348	834	11,964	259	1,691	42
1981	1,344	1,513	4,266	374	396	117
1982	1,538	2,103	5,313	649	352	211
1983	1,364	574	3,754	2,212	345	39
1984	1,221	1,464	27,135	38,425	529	114
1985	903	791	6,402	7,518	183	86
1986	1,074	720	1,920	293	220	46
1987	1,016	887	3,546	482	124	181
1988	781	790	3,702	536	339	116
1989	710	727	4,128	165	156	199
1990	630	298	1,903	245	228	44
1991	369	177	761	87	52	30
1992	253	148	528	97	23	24
1993	211	385	649	91	28	31
1994	205	107	278	2	15	13
1995	235	174	415	6	17	20
1996	244	364	1,303	8	24	70
1997	216	130	235	9	21	7
1998	166	93	282	1	8	13
1999	205	141	242	0	14	7
2000	212	183	499	17	13	20

Metcalf (1990), however, suggests that the Conservative industrial relations legislation was very important and that it *directly* reduced the overall number of strikes that took place in Britain during the 1980s and 1990s. Elgar and Simpson (1993a) also state that

the importance of industrial relations reforms cannot be ignored and suggest that the "law has been an important factor favouring employers in the bargaining process and changing union strategy in negotiations".

2.7.1   The Impact of the Legislation on the Trade Union Movement

> *"... on the whole, [it had] been common ground that in [any] dilemma between imposing standards of democracy and protecting union autonomy the law must come down on the side of autonomy" (Kahn-Freund 1983).*

Up until 1979 this had on the whole been the case. The trade union movement had created their own regulations and procedures. They were:

> *"Largely responsible for their internal affairs, including the organisation of union elections and the calling and ending of industrial action: the main source of authority in union affairs was the provisions of the rule book ... the common law also recognised the importance of union autonomy: courts have treated the rule book as the contract of membership and the constitution of the union" (Undy et al 1996:70-71).*

This position changed, briefly between 1971 and 1974 when there was an attempt to introduce a degree of governmental control in the internal affairs of the trade unions by insisting that in order for them to take advantage of legal protection they had to register themselves with a governmental body. This however, was a minor infringement on their autonomy compared with later legislation, in particular that which was introduced between 1983 and 1997, that sought to regulate trade unions' internal procedures and radically restrict their autonomy (Undy et al 1996:147).

Dickens (1989:44) has stated that the aim of this regulation was to discourage collectivist behaviour. Edwards (1995:287) however, argues that the legislation went much further than this in that it extended the rights and protections of union members in relation to their unions in an attempt to reduce the amount of militancy and industrial action. The argument, made by Dickens, reflects the ideological belief that the Conservative Government, 1979 to 1997, was pursuing a policy of individualism with respect to workplace relationships. It also supports those theorists who argue that the balance of power within the employment relationship changed between 1979 and 1997 towards the employer (Elgar and Simpson 1993a and b). For example, the law has been used to encourage the democratisation of the trade union movement as Edwards (1995:288), suggested that this would lead to important external developments, for example, a democratically elected and organised trade union would restrict the amount and kind of industrial action its members were prepared to support.

The legislation appears to have had an impact on the structure and procedures of individual trade unions although it is again difficult to isolate the legal impact from other environmental influences (Undy et al 1996), for example, a number of researchers have stated that trade unions have attempted to conform with the legislation by restructuring and improving their democratic processes (Steele 1990; Martin et al 1991; Smith et al 1993). Smith et al (1993:380) have further suggested that, the legislation may have successfully silenced the active militant minority which appeared to influence trade union behaviour during the 1970s. Dunn and Metcalf (1996:84) however, point out that this is largely dependent on how the terms 'moderation' and 'militancy' are defined and so question just how far the employment legislation has gone in the 1980s and 1990s in promoting the voice of moderate union member. They highlight that participation in trade union ballots has declined and as such questions the democracy of the trade union movement (Dunn and Metcalf 1996:83) as it is suggested that the results of such ballots only reflect the opinions of a militant section of the union who ensure that their ballot slips are returned.

Dunn and Metcalf (1996:84) also argue that the trade union leaders are more selective in the areas they are willing to pursue as ballots are time consuming and costly. Thus, the ballot is seen as a last 'resort' which is only used to reinforce and strengthen their arguments with management by "sending a clear signal of [employee] solidarity to management".

It is perhaps useful to highlight that trade unions themselves have, during the 1980s and 1990s, taken a hard look at their structures and procedures in light of a number of environmental influences. This is important as it suggests that 'something' has changed in the context within which they operate and this has encouraged them to examine their own practices and procedures.

There is a suggestion that trade union leaders have lost touch with the needs of both industry and their membership. Leadbeater (1987:22), for example, argues that trade unions need a strategy, which will enable them to align themselves more clearly with the international competitiveness of business in order to regain their lost membership.

> *"Unless the unions can find a way to engage with the demands for competitiveness, and yet deliver social benefits, they will increasingly lose any sense of purpose or power within the market economy" (Leadbeater 1987:25).*

Edmunds, General Secretary of the General, Municipal and Boilermakers' Union (GMB), stated that, the unions were focusing on issues which were of limited importance to employees and thus restricted their ability to attract new members (cited in Storey et al 1993:67). Roger Lyons (1993) General Secretary of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union (MSF) added "we need to see members as our customers ... we need to reassess what people really want from a union and what will make them join". The TUC has provided advice to its affiliated unions about how to deal with the changing climate of the 1980s and 1990s (Heery 1996:183). However, much of the data available has been gathered from studying 'new' initiatives such as discounts, financial benefits, legal advice etc. (Sapper 1991) rather than on the wider external environment.

Trade union leaders have argued that changes in trade union membership as well as behaviour are demand driven as they are a necessary response to a range of environmental pressures (Heery 1996:190). Gallie (1989), for example, argues that the main reason for the decline during the 1980s and 1990s in trade union membership were the structural changes, which occurred within the workforce rather than the inadequacy of trade unions to meet the needs of its membership. Although, Heery (1996:190), adds that workers have deliberately rejected trade unions during the 1980s and 1990s. It has been suggested that this was because workers only commit financially, by joining trade unions, when they can see a positive benefit for themselves (Gallie 1989; Guest and Dewe 1988; Kerr 1992; Millward 1990; Sapper 1991). Thus the introduction of these new services will have a limited effect on prospective members as many of the 'benefits' offered can be secured outside the trade union movement.

2.8   Workplace Industrial/Employment Relations Surveys

Finally, an analysis of the literature relating to industrial relations in the UK would not be complete without examining both the Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys (WIRS) and the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS). These surveys have provided the data upon which many of the studies, identified within this chapter, have been based, therefore, failure to mention them would be a serious flaw in the present thesis. They have also informed and influenced the methodologies adopted (see chapter 3) and as well as highlighting specific areas where exploration or analysis needed to be undertaken.

The WIRS/WERS series provides data on a large number of organisations throughout Great Britain and offers longitudinal information on institutional arrangements such as

collective bargaining and the advancement of HRM, the role of trade unions and employment practices in general. Edwards (1995:16) claims this data provides a rich and relatively accurate description of what has been happening during the 1980s and 1990s.

This series together with other survey work undertaken during the 1980s and 1990s has been complemented by a wide range of case study research and theoretical speculation, which has assessed and analysed the processes and patterns which have emerged in the employment relationship. For example, Brown has undertaken a number of studies in relation to pay determination (1988, 1991, 1994 and 1995) and the contraction of collective bargaining (1993). He argued that by 1990 collective bargaining in Britain still applied to four out of ten private sector employees however this figure was significantly reduced in relation to multi-employer agreements, which now covered only one in ten employees. Terry has focused on the changing role of the shop steward and has extensively examined their role(s) within the workplace (1978, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1995). Darlington has investigated the relationship between employees and managers in unionised organisations (1994a, 1994b). Whereas Jones (1988) examines the occupational changes associated with flexible automation within the engineering industry.

2.9   The Government

From 1979 onwards, the Conservative Government challenged the traditional role of the state in relation to industrial relations (Farnham and Pimlott 1992). It no longer regarded the title of 'industrial peacekeeper' as part of its role, nor did it see its responsibilities to include the role of 'model employer'. Thatcher, and the later Conservative Governments, made it clear that they believed in individualism, private ownership, free enterprise and unconstrained market competition (Farnham and Pimlott 1992:219). Colling and Ferner (1995) have thus suggested that the reduction in the role of the public sector was the main feature of Thatcherism and that this can be supported by analysing two Government policy areas: 'privatisation' and 'marketisation'. The latter reduced the role of the state, through polices such as 'compulsory competitive tendering, the introduction of an internal market and the use of executive agencies, while the other involved the sale of major public corporations via flotation on the stock exchange (cf. table 2.8).

Table 2.8   The Extent of Privatisation, 1982-1997 (Rose 2001:341)

Year	Enterprise	Employees
1982	National Freight Co.	28,000
1982	Britoil	14,000
1983	Associated British Ports	--
1984	Enterprise Oil	--
1984	British Telecom	250,000
From 1984	British Shipbuilders	--
1986	British Gas Corporation	89,000
1986-1988	National Bus Co. Subsidiaries	30,000
1987	British Airways	36,000
1987	Royal Ordnance Factories	17,000
1987	British Airports Authority	7,000
1988	British Steel	53,000
From 1988	Passenger Transport Executives	8,000
1989	Regional Water Authorities	40,000
1990	Girobank	6,700
1990	Area Electricity Boards and National Grid Company	119,000
1991	National Power and Powergen	26,400
1991	Scottish Power	9,800
1993	N. Ireland Electricity Service	5,000
From 1994	British Coal	15,000
From 1995	British Rail including Railtrack And various Rail Companies	--
From 1996	British Energy	

It has been suggested that the reduction in the role of the state had two central aims. The first was to 'force management to manage' (Colling and Ferner 1995:491) and the second was to enable the government of the day to generate revenue and reduce public sector debt (Black and Upchurch 1999:511). For example, in the peak years 1988-89 and 1992-93 over 15.3 billion pounds was raised through the sale of public corporations. Whatever the aim of the Government at the time, the result was that the managerial style of the organisations together with employment relations included in table 2.8, changed once they entered the private sector.

In their defence, the Conservative Government argued that in order to encourage efficiency in these public sector organisations it was necessary to restructure them. This, they argued, could be achieved more efficiently within the private sector. They highlighted that public sector managers operated in a difficult environment. They argued that on the one hand they experienced a great deal of interference in their management practices and policies from the government of the who affected employment relations as well as managerial behaviour (Thompson and Beaumont 1978; Ferner 1988), while on the other they were restricted by the monopolistic over-powerful public sector unions which affected areas of managerial prerogative (Veljanovski 1987:62-64). Therefore, Colling and Ferner (1999:491) have stated that privatisation and marketisation were introduced in order to encourage and empower managers to

refocus their attention away from other 'actors' within the employment relationship such as employees and trade unions, towards their shareholders, the market and profit.

In order to make the public sector organisations attractive to investors they first had to become profitable. This led to a shift in the managerial styles and culture where performance, objectives and targets were now emphasised (Colling and Ferner 1995:493; Kessler and Bayliss 1995:139; Black and Upchurch 1999:516). This in turn had ramifications for both management and employees in areas such as pay and redundancies. Black and Upchurch (1999:516) suggest that this mirrored changes occurring in the private sector in the wake of the introduction of 'new' managerial techniques such as human resource management and 'Japanisation' of some organisations. Whether this is so, is debatable, however what cannot be disputed is that changes did occur within these privatised organisations and that they directly affected the employment relationship (cf. chapter 9).

As well as impacting on managerial style and organisational culture, privatisation also influenced employment levels, for example, in 1979 there were 1.85 million individuals employed in the public sector, by 1993 this had fallen to 0.46 million (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:138).

It is therefore clear that privatisation and marketisation has transferred large numbers of employees from the public sector into the private sector and in so doing the government has minimised its role as employer and weakened its 'input' in this particular aspect. It has done so while, at the same time, strengthening its influence on other 'input' areas such as, the structural and compositional changes in employment, the economy, legislation and ideology. Further, it removed itself from the 'firing line', in the sense that it can no longer be held legitimately responsible for failing to find pay increases for these employees, thereby depoliticising industrial relations in this sphere (Farnham and Pimlott 1992:225).

The final area of governmental influence which will be briefly outlined in this section is the extent to which the Conservative Government's ideologies from 1979 to 1997 impacted on the economic and social factors within Britain and which in turn affected the general environment in which management, employees and trade unions operated (Salamon 1999:180).

Since the defeat of the Heath Government in 1974, interest had been growing, within the Conservative Party, in the ideological perspectives of the New Right in the U.K. It was based on the belief that the market is more efficient than the State in creating economic and employment stability (Crouch 1979). The State, in the opinion of the 'New Right', restricts initiative, negates choice and encourages dependency (McIlroy (1988:9). These ideologies, Wedderburn (1989:15) suggested, provided Thatcher with the theoretical foundations she needed to support and justify her allegations that excessive State intervention together with the unrestrained power of the trade union movement was responsible for Britain's economic decline (Crouch 1979:118; Lane 1983:186; McIlroy 1991).

> *"When Mrs Thatcher came to power she was already convinced of the correctness of the New Right's ideas and set about attempting to translate them into practical policies" (Johnson, 1990:4)*

Thatcher was supported in these ideas by a number of academics, economists and practitioners, McIlroy (1991:12) for example stated that "trade unionism - or legally inflated undemocratic trade unionism - was a particular barrier to specific initiatives that the Conservatives wished to encourage" such as enterpreneurialism and enterprise. Minford (1985) suggested that trade unions had wielded their monopoly of power, which originated from their legal concessions, to push wages above the market rate hence increasing the wage costs and consequently inflation but engender unemployment and the unequal distribution of income within society. This resulted in a reduction in the efficiency of both individual companies and the British economy as a whole by virtue of the imposition of restrictive working, demarcations etc. (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:156). From this perspective Thatcher claimed that one way to improve economic efficiency and equality while at the same time reducing unemployment was to reduce the ability of the trade unions to raise wages to an unrealistically high level (Minford 1985:104). Hayek (1984:55) added that "the unions [were] destroying the free market through their legalised use of coercion". Thatcher agreed and stated that although the British legislature had sought to protect the emerging trade union movement by providing them with a number of immunities at the beginning of the twentieth century this was now being abused. It was being used to:

> *"Protect restrictive practices and over manning, to underpin strikes and to coerce workers into joining unions and participation in industrial action against their better judgement" (Thatcher 1993:8).*

Thus, Thatcher and her supporters believed that trade unions had been directly responsible for Britain's economic despondency and that the State had 'frozen' British society as well as industry into "its historical structures, locations, technologies and work processes (Martin, Sunley and Willis 1996:100; Sidney and Pollard 1982:106). Sir Keith Joseph (1979:6) concluded that trade unions had "taught workers to resist efficiency, obstruct management, insist on overmanning, resent profit and ignore customers".

The central problem, from this standpoint appeared to be that there was a disproportionate amount of power in the hands of the trade union movement in Britain (Glyn and Harrison 1980:50; Martin, Sunley and Willis 1996:100). Martin, Sunley and Willis (1996:101) have suggested that the trade unions had managed to create a two-tiered mechanism of wage determination. On one level they undertook formal negotiations at national level or at multi-site company level and on the second level they engaged in discussions which were fragmented and less formal at site or plant level. At each level industrial action was used to support wage claims (Martin, Sunley and Willis 1996:101). This type of behaviour was encouraged and protected by "uniquely favourable legislative and regulatory framework" (Martin, Sunley and Willis 1996:101).

Thus, the ideological perspectives of the 'New Right' offered the Conservative Government a theoretical 'solution' to the economic problems of the UK. However in practical terms, perhaps it would be fair to argue that Thatcher merely built on the policies and ideas of previous Conservative and Labour governments with regard to the industrial relations legislation that was subsequently introduced.

> *"Trade unions were controlling everything. Britain was ungovernable [when the Conservatives took office]" (Lord Young, December, 1996, author's own notes).*

Roots (1984:1) however rejects this opinion as a myth. He suggested that industrial relations problems arose within organisations because of the conflict of interests and objectives between management and employees and not as the result of "nasty trade unions" (Roots 1984:1). Roots contended that the unrest of the 1970s and early 1980s was because Britain changed from being a relatively cheap labour economy where inefficiencies were tolerated to one of the most expensive places in the world to manufacture anything (Roots 1984:7).

According to Thatcher the public at this time remained unsure how a Conservative government could 'control' the power of the trade unions. The situation had been, she claimed, aggravated by the various Labour Governments who had 'allowed' "communists and militants" to exploit their positions during the Winter of Discontent, and who had risen to key positions within the trade union movement (Thatcher 1993:98).

> *"The dedicated extremists who plotted to protect their own power base and control 'normal' union members had to be dealt with. Not by a direct attack, as this would cause too many problems and would, of course, attract criticism from the press. The way to deal with them was to place the power into the hands of ordinary trade union members. It was these people and not the Government who would in the end control the extremists." (Lord Young 1996, author's own notes).*

Despite her ideological belief and the electoral support of the British public for the new government, Thatcher realised that she was not in a position to confront the trade union movement at an early stage in her first term in office (Thatcher 1993:28). This did not, however, mean that the Conservative government intended working closely with the unions. In fact, Ridley (1978), Thatcher's ideological 'soul-mate' (Turner 1993:13), argued that the Conservatives would 'take on' the trade unions, however the "battle ground should be on ground chosen by the Tories in a field they think should be won" (Turner, 1993:13).

The economic policy followed by the Conservative governments during the 1980s was laid out by Howe, Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his first budget speech when he outlined a four-point strategy, which he stated would halt Britain's, economic decline. He stressed the need for "higher profitability by means of deregulation and, if possible, without subsidy" (Johnson 1995:178). Subsidies had, he suggested, directly reduced the "net development of industry in the country" (Johnson 1995:178). Howe stated that the Government was no longer willing to "take money from the more efficient to give it to the less efficient" and that "those firms which [were] ... being helped by the taxpayer [would] soon be able to succeed by themselves; but success or failure [would lie] in their own hands" (Johnson 1995:179) and not in the hands of the State.

MacInnes (1987:3) states that the Thatcher government began:

"To 'roll back the frontiers of the state' by abandoning the commitment to full employment (arguing that government attempts to raise employment simply caused inflation), abolishing controls on exchange, incomes and prices, cutting public expenditure and taxation, raising interest rates and cutting the money supply with the aim of reducing inflation ...It introduced legislation designed to curb union power ... it set about introducing market forces to the public sector".

In doing this Riddell (1985:1-2) argues that the Thatcher Government adopted:

"A novel approach. It has tried to change the question. Instead of the Government being regarded as primarily responsible for solving Britain's problems, the onus has shifted to the people."

Howe's first budget, "budget for business" (Thatcher 1993:95) and his second budget on 26 March 1980, indicated that the Thatcher Government intended to transfer from demand-side to supply-side economic policies (Crafts 1988:xvi; Howe 1994:135; Johnson 1995:6) which when combined with monetarism[25] would "sustain the fight against inflation, and help redress the balance of the economy in favour of business and industry" (Johnson 1995:7). Thatcher's dogma in these policies meant that she, together with the Conservative Government at the time, rejected any form of corporatism or tripartism along with the idea of public ownership (Thatcher 1995:574). Hence "economic collectivism" and publicly owned organisations were to give way to economic individualism and the growth of an 'enterprise culture'" (Farnham and Pimlott 1992:53) which it was hoped would influence public attitudes and expectations by persuading management, trade unions and employees that excessively high wage demands could not and would not be financed (Thain 1985:268; Johnson 1991).

However, the Thatcher Government's, attempts to use monetary rather than fiscal policy to control inflation failed to curb demand and 'clashed' with their supply-side policies (Johnson 1991:25). For example, the use of high interest rates to restrain economic growth stunted the supply-side incentives, which had been offered to entice investment in enterprise (Johnson 1991:25). Consequently, macro-economic monetary policy, which had been designed to constrain inflation, actually prevented "real economic growth". The Government shifted its' focus and became more concerned with increasing unemployment levels than with inflation (Johnson 1991:25). This suggested that the short-term anti-inflation policy was in conflict with the supply-side objectives of enhancing the share of national income which went to industry and commerce.

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[25] monetarism sets out to "create and develop the economic conditions which are necessary to achieve rapid growth, low inflation and full employment" (Rose 2001:51).

The overall economic policies of the Conservative Governments during the 1980s and 1990s reinforced the political ideological 'attack' on the trade union movement both directly and indirectly. The supply-side policies were used directly to address the power base of the trade union movement through, for example, a 'step-by-step' programme of trade union reform (Thatcher 1995:575). However the turbulent economic climate (Childs 1995:287-315) together with economic policies such as privatisation and financial deregulation indirectly contributed to a reduction in trade union membership and therefore their monetary strength.

Thatcher claimed that the Conservative Government had 'inherited' a 'sick' economy which had to deal with high levels of unemployment (Thatcher 1993:93), rising inflation (Howe 1994:131), and increasing oil prices from the OPEC countries, as well as struggling with the balance of payments which by 1979 was in a deficit of £661 million (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:38-39). However, by the time the Conservative Party came to power in 1979 the level of unemployment, although at one million, was falling (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:38), the balance of payments showed a surplus in 1978 of £966 million (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:39) and North Sea oil had begun to be produced (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:39). That taken together with the 19.6 per cent decline in manufacturing output between June 1979 and January 1981 (Coates 1991:56) makes it difficult to accept that all the blame for this economic situation can be laid at the feet of either the 1974-79 Labour Government or indeed the trade union movement. In fact a Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) 1983-92 argued, when interviewed, that it was the economic and political policies pursued by earlier governments, including the Conservative ones, which contributed to the problems that the country had to face. He added that these together with poor levels of management had prevented British organisations from adequately to responding to the changing global business environment during the period.

This latter argument is supported by Childs (1995:257) who stated that by the end of the 1970s, in general, British managers were "less … qualified than their West German, American or Japanese rivals" and that "there [were] still far too many directors of British companies who [remained] unqualified in an appropriate field".

Whether because of poor managerial skills, the activities of the Labour Government 1974-79 (McIlroy 1991:8), the result of the Conservative Government's policies during

the early 1980s or indeed as the product of the worldwide recession which occurred at this time (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:39), Britain experienced the worst economic recession since the Second World War with the gross domestic product declining by over 3 per cent between 1979 and 1981 (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:39). The rate of manufacturing output also decreased by 14 per cent during this time while unemployment increased from 1 million in 1979 to approximately 3.1 million by the end of 1982 (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:39).

The solution, the Conservative Government believed, was a "free market [and] strong state" (McIlroy 1991:9). They added that an integrated strategic "economic policy and legal restriction of the unions" was necessary to ensure that union strength would be "sapped" (McIlroy 1991:9) and consequently the markets would be 'free' to efficiently allocate goods, and effectively determine prices and employees wages (McIlroy 1991:10).

In relation to their belief in a strong state, the Conservative government saw the control of money supply as a central economic task (Coates 1991:148). They believed earlier Governments had failed to effectively address this and that this had added to Britain's economic decline as it resulted in excess money in circulation "chasing too few goods and services"; ultimately this had resulted in British products becoming globally uncompetitive (McIlroy 1991:10).

In order to address the problem of money supply the new Conservative Government began tightening its monetary policies by increasing interest rates to 17 per cent in order to encourage investment and limit spending (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:39). It also meant that applying for credit seemed less attractive and more demanding to companies as well as individuals. The increase in the cost of credit forced some British organisations to restructure in order to become more competitive and stave off bankruptcy, jobs were lost and unemployment increased (McIlroy 1991:10-11). However monetarists argue that it was not all 'doom and gloom' because as organisations attempt to survive they restrain wages and reduce excess in the number of personnel which in turn results in a decline in prices and thus inflation is reduced and credit will gradually become more accessible. Once this was achieved, the Conservative Government believed those British companies, "freed from the 'nanny

state' and the blackmail of trade unions" (McIlroy 1991:11) would have the ability to grow and compete effectively on a global level.

As well as using interest rates to control money supply, Thatcher sought to reduce public expenditure (Coates 1991:148-149;Thatcher 1995:571); cut the number of public sector employees; put an end to the state subsidising private sector organisations; restore nationalised companies to the private sector (McIlroy 1991:11) and remove all exchange controls (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:39; Thatcher 1995: 575).

This resulted in high interest rates, the removal of exchange controls and the income from North Sea Oil, the pound's exchange rate against the US dollar rose during this period to an unrealistic level for British exporters (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:39). The outcome was to cause a 14 per cent fall in British manufacturing output between 1979 and 1981 (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:39). Once started this decline was hard to stop; between 1981 and 1991 a further 1.5 million jobs were lost in manufacturing (Salamon 1998:43). This has proved disastrous for British manufacturing organisations as it resulted in plant closure and large scale redundancies (Towers 1993b:20).

In 1981 Mrs Thatcher named the "formidable Norman Tebbit" (Thatcher, 1993:150) as the Secretary of State for Employment.

> *"Norman [Tebbit] understood how trade union reform fitted into our overall strategy" (Thatcher 1993:152).*

And in the words of Geoffrey Howe, Tebbit:

> *"Brought a fresh, more radical approach to the central problem of trade union law reform" (Howe 1994:231).*

Tebbit himself stated that he understood the issues and the problems because he had come from a working class background and had therefore an advantage over some of his colleagues in the Conservative Party.

> *"The ordinary chap in the factory or office block didn't want to be forced out on strike, it cost him money and more often than not it caused domestic problems because he wasn't bringing in a wage packet. There was terrible hardship being caused out there among the ordinary man in the street. I know how that felt, being forced to go out on strike. I know what it felt like to lose money through no fault of my own. I knew what was needed - put the power back into*

the hands of those shop floor workers. I believed then as I do now that if these individuals were not manipulated, if they had the ability to operate how they wanted to operate then they would behave rationally. ...the key to it all is responsibility. If people are given responsibility then they will behave responsibly if not, they won't. ...I know what the ordinary man on the street thinks and I think that has given me a tremendous advantage and it certainly influenced my legislation" (Tebbit 1997, author's own notes).

Tebbits appointment changed the whole nature of the Conservative Cabinet (Lane 1983:183; Johnson 1991: Tebbit 1989; Thatcher, 1993:152) and signalled a clear turning point in the Thatcher administration. Thatcher took the opportunity to surround herself with like-minded individuals (Tebbit 1989; Campbell 1993:728) who would decisively see her policies through (The Times, 14th September 1981).

"If the goals I had set out in Opposition were to be achieved they must be reaffirmed and fought for by a new Cabinet. So it was quite clear to me that a major reshuffle was needed if our economic policy were to continue, and perhaps if I were to remain Prime Minister" (Thatcher 1993:150).

Consequently in September 1981, the approach to industrial relations took a different tack as Tebbit began to implement a far more radical reform policy (Lane 1983:183) or as Gamble has put it a "new legal onslaught on labour" (Gamble 1981).

In contrast to this the CBI, in their pre 1981 budget manifesto, suggested that to succeed in the 1980s management would need to work with trade unions rather than suppress them (The Financial Times March 1981).

Hanson (1994:25) suggested the aim of the Conservative Government at this time was to "bring trade unions back within the law, making them accountable for the actions, without bankrupting them through excessive damages and without trade union leaders being locked up in prison for organising unlawful disputes. The chief remedy was to target trade union funds rather than trade union officials".

"I really didn't want a head on clash with the unions. I wanted a non-confrontational act. I was determined that I was not going to create any martyrs. Trade unionists were not going to prison because of my legislation!"
(Tebbit, 1997, author's own notes)

Tebbit regarded the 1982 Employment Act as:

> *"One of the principal pillars on which the Thatcher Government reforms have*
> *been built" (Tebbit 1988:185)*

And Lane (1983:186) has suggested that it illustrated the desire by the Thatcher Government to "exterminate effective trade unionism". Certainly the removal of trade union immunities (Lane 1983:183) was the most radical part of the entire Conservative Government's legislative reform programme. Some even thought that Tebbit had gone too far and suggested that the Act would be unenforceable (Hanson, 1994:18).

British management was not totally convinced that this Act would prove to be a positive move with regard to the climate of industrial relations in many organisations (Lane 1983). In fact in December 1981 the UK chairman of International Harvesters attacked the Tebbit Bill by stating that:

> *"The gist of [the Bill] ... was that given the recession, industry had quite enough*
> *on its hands without being plunged into industrial relations problems that the*
> *new legislation might provoke" (Lane 1983:184).*

Lane (1983:184) added that management was caught between wanting the "command structures and disciplines of an army" and the realities of the work place, especially the shop floor, which can only be managed with the consent and co-operation of the workforce (Lane 1983:184). However he adds that the Act did give management a 'new' weapon with which to "threaten labour" (Lane 1983:186).

The union's response to the legislation was to formulate a number of principles which would unify the TUC and affiliated unions in order to strengthen their opposition to the Conservative employment legislation (McIlroy 1991:65-67). This was done at a meeting of the executive of the TUC affiliated unions in 1982 and became known as the Wembley Principles[26].

Tebbit stated that this was "a powerful piece of legislation which had an enormous effect on both management and trade unions" (Tebbit 1997, author's own notes). Although he acknowledged that the level of unemployment had 'played' a part:

> *"... If [employees] behaved foolishly they would end up without employment.*
> *... They began to become more aware ... if they took industrial action and*
> *brought the company to its knees they couldn't rely on the government to bail*

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[26] Eight Principles were agreed details of which are set out in McIlroy (199166)

the company out ... they saw that they would loose their jobs". (Tebbit 1997, author's own notes)

Despite the 'success' of this industrial relations legislation the Conservative Government struggled to solve the economic problems, which had emerged during Thatcher's first term of office. The recession for example was not showing any indication that it was about to abate and the unemployment figures were increasing. The economic forecast for 1981/2 showed that the Public Sector Borrowing (PSBR) was much higher than had been expected and 1980 had witnessed the largest decrease in industrial activity since the depression of the 1930s (Childs 1995). Thus the arrival of a 'new' political approach did not result in an immediate quelling of the social and political turmoil of the 1970s. Consequently it is unclear whether Thatcher won the 1983 election because of her 'new' ideological approach, her management of the trade union 'problem' or because of the British victory in the Falkland Islands War.

> *"The war [The Falklands] that followed was the saving of Mrs Thatcher. ...Rescued her from the pit of unprecedented personal unpopularity and invested her with an aura of invincibility which sustained her until 1990." (Campbell 1994:732).*

Or perhaps even as a result of the Labour Party's continued disorganisation and perceived extremist tendencies (Childs 1995:316).

It was within Thatcher's second term of office that perhaps the most important industrial relations event to take place between 1979 and 1997 occurred, the miners' strike. This fundamentally impacted on the industrial relations arena of the 1980s and 1990s and has affected the way British corporate management has dealt with their workforces since. Consequently it is important to spend time examining and analysing in detail the events leading to and surrounding the miners' strike of 1984.

Although the strike was undoubtedly an industrial dispute it was also, as the miners' strike in 1974 was, a political and a personal battle between leader of the Conservative Party and the 'Marxist' president of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill (Gospel and Palmer 1993:215; Childs 1995:319; Thatcher 1993:339; Heathfield 1990; Farnham and Pimlott 1992:309).

> *"We took the view that we were in a class war. ... We were out to defeat Heath ...We had to declare war on them and the only way you could declare war was to attack the vulnerable points ... the power stations, the coke depots, the coal depots, the points of supply ...We wished to paralyse the nation's economy." (Clutterbuck 1980:60)*

Howe (1994:348) maintains that:

> "No attempt was made to conceal the political nature of this [strike] ... it was designed to overthrow the Conservative Government".

Although Tebbit adds that:

> "For the likes of Scargill and his friends, I have not doubt that he believed it was a political strike but this was not so for most of the miners. Their position in the 'pecking' order in relation to the rest of industry was sinking. They felt a true sense of grievance. This was genuine. And I have to admit that for quite a number of years the NCB management wasn't too 'bright'. They have to share some of the responsibility. They were responsible for some of the legitimate complaints that the miners had." (Tebbit 1997 author's own notes).

Thatcher was perhaps partially motivated by the desire to 'teach the miners a lesson', by proving to herself as well as the country and the miners, that the Conservative government, would not be broken by a coal strike (Campbell 1994:737; McIlroy 1991:88).

Thatcher had not 'chosen' to tackle the miners during her first term in office, probably because she did not feel strong enough to do "battle with the NUM" (Letwin 1992:151). This theory was supported when the NUM, lead by Scargill threatened industrial action in order to prevent the closure of a number of pits earlier in her administration and the Thatcher Government retreated after only 36 hours of strike action (Leys 1989:119). Scargill too acknowledged that although the Conservatives had conceded to the trade union movement they had not been defeated and therefore the unions should not be complacent (Priscott 1981).

Thatchers' first four years in office was spent following a practical strategy laid down by Ridley which prepared the Government and country for 'survival' should the NUM decide to take strike action (Hutton 1996:94; Letwin 1992:152; Leys 1989:119). This included an increase in the number of dual fired electricity generating stations (Turner 1993:13), ensuring that coal stocks were kept high and having a contingency plan, should the need arise, for the importation of relatively cheap coal (Hutton 1996:94). However it was not until Ian MacGregor was 'invited' to do to coal what he had 'done' to the steel industry in the early 1980s that it was clear that the Thatcher Government was prepared to 'push through' their industrial policies (Leys 1989:118).

MacGregor's view of business fitted neatly into Thatcher government's ethos. It was quite straightforward, business was about creating profit, not being involved with wider social considerations (Childs, 1995). He had been given the task in the early 1980s of restructuring British Steel in order to make it more profitable and internationally competitive (Thatcher 1993:342). Thatcher now hoped that he would be able to do the same with the coal industry.

The problems between the NUM and the Thatcher administration began to visibly emerge in the autumn of 1983. However full strike action was not taken until the spring of 1984 (Lloyd 1990:608). The immediate cause of the 'trouble' was the National Coal Board's closure of Cortonwood pit in South Yorkshire and the Polmaise pit in Scotland (Lloyd 1990:608). By the 15th March 1984, 140 of the total 174 pits had ceased production. On the 12th April the Leicester executive committee members called for a national ballot of the members to decide if industrial action would be supported. However, Scargill with a legal majority of 13 to 8 (but with 3 abstentions) rejected this (Keesing's 1984; Gospel and Palmer 1993:215). This was perhaps a bad tactical move as it split the NUM and provided the opposition the opportunity to question the miners' solidarity (Lloyd 1990:609, 614). For example Kellner (1985) argued that "contrary to all published polls conducted ... private polls suggested that a national ballot would not have provided a majority for strike action".

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As with any disagreement there were two sides to the argument the first was that of the Coal Board, who favoured the capitalist approach, pursuing profitability in the same way as a private company. The second was that of the NUM and the strikers who rejected this capitalistic managerial approach, which they believed dealt with jobs, employees and even whole communities as unimportant in the pursuit of short term profit (Couch 1995:239; Hyman 1991:202). Although Lloyd (1990:609) has argued that:

> *"... The NUM's leadership aims quickly became more grandiose. They were clearly not just interested in the protection of village communities from the precipitate closure of pits the country still needed".*

During the early stages of the strike the Yorkshire division of the NUM broke the secondary picketing legislation. Injunctions were granted in order to restrain them from picketing beyond their own workplace. However, when these injunctions were ignored, and the NCB refused to pursue the matter further.

The strike although not national continued throughout the rest of 1984 and into 1985, both sides resolutely determined not to 'give in'. However, the government was in a much stronger economic position, the coal supplies were large and imported coal was

relatively cheap. Thus, both time and money were on the Conservatives side, the outcome was inevitable. The victory against the miners was more than a victory against a single union, the NUM was one of Britain's strongest trade union (Undy et al 1996:15) therefore, when it was so decisively defeated by the Conservatives (Howe 1994:112) it sent a clear message to other unions who were contemplating 'taking on' the Thatcher government (Undy et al 1996:18). It also strengthened the role of management, in the sense that British management began to feel less 'afraid' of the power of the unions and began to act more decisively.

> *"The defeat of this strike was a major turning point. New work practices were introduced; though these provoked resentment, workers lacked the willingness and ability to strike over them" (Edwards 1995:451).*

However what was interesting was the fact that although legislation regarding picketing and secondary picketing was in place at the time of the strike it was not enforced by the NCB. Why this should be so is a matter of debate, could it be because the NCB were afraid of the consequences of prosecuting the NUM or was it more fundamental than that in the sense that the NCB believed in nurturing a harmonious relationship between the trade unions, the employees and the management.

Undeterred by the strike the Conservative government wanted to ensure that the trade union movement became more democratic and consequently attempted to ensure that the voice of the 'average' trade union member was heard (Farnham and Pimlott 1992:129; Kessler and Bayliss 1995:238). Thatcher claimed that these members had in the past been 'bullied and intimidated' by the extremists within the union movement in order to manipulate and control their actions (McIlroy 1991:13; Tebbit 1988:153-54; Thatcher 1993) thus the wave of legislation continued introducing secret ballots for issues such as union elections, political activities and industrial action (Farnham and Pimlott 1992:129; Kessler and Bayliss 1995:241; Undy et al 1996:107). Johnson has argued that this had an immediate impact on industrial action as it prevented, in his opinion, the Austin-Rover strike at the end of 1984 and the British Rail drivers' strike in the summer of 1985 as it enabled trade union members to express their personal feelings in confidentiality (Johnson 1991). The 1984 Act also stated that trade union officials should be elected on a regular basis in a democratic and confidential way and added that a secret ballot of members was to be held every ten years in relation to use of the unions funds (Farnham and Pimlott 1992:129; Kessler and Bayliss 1995:188).

In 1985, with unemployment levels running at 11.2 per cent of the workforce, Thatcher appointed Lord Young as her Employment Secretary (Kessler and Bayliss 1993:43). She claimed that he had been brought in because he knew how to "make things happen" that together with his statement that he believed that full employment was still attainable made him an ideal Employment Secretary (Thatcher 1993:421;Young 1985).

> *"I do believe that we [Britain] can get back to a position of full employment. ...*
> *It was essential to curb the power of the unions, full employment is not possible*
> *without the correct balance being struck between management and labour, and*
> *to do that we had to bring the unions under control." (Lord David Young 1996*
> *author's own notes)*

However he argued that before this was possible the Government would have "to change the culture" of trade unions, management and employees (Young December 1996 author's own notes). He stated that one of the main tasks of the Thatcher Government was to defeat, *"the enemy within [trade unions]"* as they:

> *"Were totally responsible for Britain's poor economic performance especially in*
> *the 1970s." (Young December 1996 author's own notes)*

There could be little doubt that the industrial relations arena had changed during the early years of the Thatcher administration. The trade unions had experienced a loss of power during the period through the decline in membership as well as legislative restrictions (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:256) although the permanency of this loss is debatable (see chapter 2). This together with the defeat of the NUM during the miners' strike, the changing employment structure, the industrial sectoral shifts and Britain's economic position (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:38, 43) helped restructure the industrial relations environment of the 1980s and 1990s.

Young believed that rather than focusing on the behaviour of the trade union movement it was necessary to 'free' the supply side of the employment market. In 1985 he introduced the Unfair Dismissal Order which increased from one to two years the period after which a worker could claim unfair dismissal under the 1975 Employment Protection Act (Dickens and Hall 1995:262). This was quickly followed in 1986 by the Wages Act and the Sex Discrimination Act, which again sought to remove unnecessary restrictions on the use of labour.

Lord Young suggested that the actions and legislation of the Conservative Governments were designed to remove restrictions and 'free' the labour market allowing employees to

increase their flexibility to meet the changing employment environment. Although in theory thisdid give the individual employee the freedom to choose, for example, the hours they worked this 'freedom' could only exist, if employers and managers regarded the employment relationship as one of mutual co-operation and harmony and acknowledged that they shared common interests (Farnham and Palmer 1992:4). The employment relationship is, however, similar to any other social relationship, in that it involves both co-operation and conflict. Consequently by removing the legal restrictions on hours, wages and gender, the government had in fact neglected to take human nature into account. In the sense that they had given management a freer hand to make the best use of their employees in order to increase Britain's prosperity. However they had also neglected to take into account the possibility that employees could become vulnerable and therefore open to exploitation from unscrupulous managers. Hyman (1991) has however stated that Thatcher's economic policy was deliberately and consciously constructed to reduce employees' collective strength and confidence.

The second major challenge to the strength of the industrial relations legislation occurred in 1986, when Rupert Murdoch engaged in a 'power' struggle with the trade unions (Elgar and Simpson 1993:75; Hutton 1996:94). The problem for the unions began when Murdoch, who acted fully within legal boundaries, sacked his employees and transferred production to new premises at Wapping (Lloyd 1990:624; Gospel and Palmer 1993: 215; Kessler and Bayliss 1995:84). At the new premises he introduced a legally binding agreement which, among other things, banned industrial action (Lloyd 1990:622-623).

The trade unions were initially were uncertain how to proceed. In the past they would have taken industrial action in the form of picketing and secondary action, this was now illegal. After consideration the NGA and SOGAT initiated illegal industrial action (Lloyd 1990:624). NGA proceeded carefully but SOGAT pushed itself into a legal quagmire. News International reacted and began a number of legal actions against the respective trade unions resulting in SOGAT being fined for contempt of court and having its' assets sequestrated (Elgar and Simpson 1993:93; Kessler and Bayliss 1995:85).

Although this dispute could be used to illustrate to Britain's management, how powerful and effective the new legislation could be Kessler and Bayliss (1995) have suggest that while acknowledging that:

> *"The law against secondary action had played a major part in Murdoch's defeat of the print unions but also of great importance was the common law which enables employers to dismiss strikers for breach of their contract of employment." (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:85-86).*

Breaking the law is not historically unusual for trade unions however, this time upon loosing the legal stance they had taken, SOGAT assured the court that they would in future, operate within the law. It was this industrial dispute that demonstrated to the unions that the traditional framework in which industrial action had been undertaken had changed. In fact McIlroy, has claimed that:

> *"Where Heath had failed in the 1970s, Thatcher had succeeded in the 1980s" (McIlroy 1990:91).*

Although perhaps relatively isolated industrial incidents, these disputes had a much wider impact on the economy as a whole as it encouraged other employers to become more confident and assertive when dealing with their employees while at the same time employees as well as the trade unions began to feel more vulnerable and insecure. It is suggested that it was within this context that British management began to examine their organisation's structures and management styles (Gospel and Palmer 1993:216).

Despite the legislative framework already in place at this time the 'summer of discontent' in 1989 witnessed an increase in industrial militancy which when combined with the use of the legal process to slow down or frustrate official union support, led to a notable rise in the amount of unofficial industrial action (Undy et al (1996:109,131; Auerbach 1990:191). The public sector experienced industrial action in British Rail and the Post Office and there were further disputes in coal mining, on the docks, on the North Sea platforms, at Ford and Jaguar and the London Underground workers (Undy et al 1996:131). In an attempt to resolve the situation by coercion the Thatcher administration suggested that new legislation would be introduced to prevent unofficial industrial action taking place in essential services (Undy et al 1996:131). This however did not occur, perhaps because it was felt that to do so would "produce insuperable practical and political problems" (Undy et al 1996:131).

In November 1990, after a leadership challenge from Michael Heseltine, Mrs Thatcher, was replaced as Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party by John Major.

Major's first task was to quell the unrest that had begun to develop during the final years of the Thatcher administration from both inside (Howe 1994:669-676) and outside his Party (Campbell 1994:787; Howe 1994:670). He had also to consolidate his victory and assert his own authority over the Conservative Party, before he could introduce any either radical or individualised industrial relations policy reforms.

The 1992 Conservative Manifesto said that industrial relations had been transformed since 1979 and that:

> *"[The Conservatives] wish to continue to legislate to enhance further the right of employers, employees, and customers not to have their lives and businesses disrupted by wildcat strikes" (Conservative Central Office 1992)*

The Conservatives won their fourth successive election victory.

Mr Major's first attempt to 'stamp his mark' on industrial relations policy came in 1992 when the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act was passed. This was a small step in comparison to the radical reforms, which had been taken introduced during the 'Thatcher' years. The second and more radical policy initiative was introduced in 1993 as a result of a European Union directive; this was the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act. Hunt replaced Fowler as Secretary of State for Employment in 1993 and it appears that he was keen to continue the process of regulating trade union behaviour which was begun by Thatcher (Undy et al 1996:111). The Act signalled to the country that Major was not about to change the policy direction relating to industrial relations from the one set by Thatcher. This Act built on, rather than changed, the previous Conservative government's reforms

The Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s have claimed that their approach brought about an economic 'miracle' (Nolan 1989:81;Tebbit 1997-own notes). That it has loosened the constraints of the market and allowed competition to 'reverse' Britain's poor economic position. This position has been academically supported by studies, such as those carried out by Crafts (1988) and Metcalf (1988), who argued that there has been a marked recovery, especially on the supply-side, for British industry. In fact Crafts (1988) concludes, "...the present [Conservative] Government's emphasis on the improvement of supply side performance is to be welcomed. To a substantial extent, this should include promoting competition, eliminating restrictive practices, and the distortions arising from government intervention." (Crafts 1988:xviii). Although Crafts supports the Conservative governments' approach, he does acknowledge that they

have failed to adequately address two other major weaknesses within the British economy, lack of employee training and the low level of investment experienced within businesses and industry, especially when compared to other developed industrial economies.

One of the main reasons put forward by the above named academics and the Conservative government, for this economic 'recovery' has been the reformed arena of industrial relations (Nolan 1989:81). Crafts (1988) argued that, before 1979 trade unions and governments, who attempted to accommodate them, had damaged the productivity and competitiveness of the British economy. However, following the Conservative victory in 1979 and the Government's legislative 'attack' on trade unions the situation has improved dramatically. Metcalf (1987) agrees with some of this, although he queries the actual impact of the legislation on the whole British economy. Metcalf (1989) identifies the movement of power within the employer - employee relationship as the main reason for this economic 'miracle'. The dramatic increase in the level of unemployment and the changing structure of employment has enabled power to move towards the employer. Thus, productivity is increasing because of the turbulent and uncertain economic climate which allows employers to plan for the future and ensures that employees now have to work harder to create any sense of either economic or job security (Metcalf 1989:27)

Roots (1984) however states that it was necessary for management to realise in the late 1970s and early 1980s that if they were going to survive in a "very competitive world" they would have to tighten their management techniques and change their attitudes towards their workforce. For example they must recognise that even with "large scale unemployment" they still have to persuade rather than coerce people to do things if they wanted co-operation (Roots 1984:7).

Rose (2001:187) suggests that the main characteristics of the Conservative Governments from 1979 to 1997 were as follows:

- "a resurgence of capitalist values (free enterprise, open markets, deregulation, individualism, privatisation) and abandonment of Keynesian 'mixed economy' economics;
- avid pursuit of monetarist supply-side economics;

- a concerted attempt to weaken the fabric of collective bargaining in order to allow market forces much greater impact on pay and conditions of employment; and

- the gradual dismantling of tripartism".

As a direct result of this philosophical stance a number policies were pursued and legislation introduced. Rose (2001:187) argues that these can be divided into three areas. The first area saw the:

> "introduction of government statutory interventions and legislation to reduce the influence and bargaining power of trade unions; a succession of statutes introduced further legal constraints on the freedom of unions to organise and on their ability to use industrial action in the bargaining process. Secondly, the government used high interest rates and financial control of the public sector, rather than incomes policies, to control inflation which helped to sustain the consistently high levels of unemployment. Thirdly, the government introduced legislation which enabled the privatisation of major nationalised industries and services with important industrial relations consequences".

Crouch (1995:238) concludes that:

> "The post-1979 Conservative governments have had a strong neo-liberal ideology. This has predisposed them: to reject Keynesian demand management and the search for full employment; to oppose policy deals with trade unions that would involve taking action incompatible with neo-liberal principles; and to reject relations with organisations of interest – on both sides of business but especially on the labour side- that interfered with neo-liberal policy priorities".

This section has briefly introduced a number of Government concepts and issues that have influenced the behaviour of British corporate management, as well as the employment relationship as a whole, throughout the period 1979 to 1997.

2.10   Management Styles and Practices

As well as changes already outlined above, research has identified a shift in management styles and practices adopted by British management. In order to examine the extent to which change has occurred it is felt necessary to outline what is meant by the term 'management'. From there it will be possible to examine the nature and extent to which change has occurred within managerial styles and practices and their overall behaviour within British organisations. The section will conclude by highlighting important areas which require further exploration and analysis that have emerged from an examination of this part of the literature in relation to the thesis as a whole.

Therefore, to begin this section an evaluation of the definition of management offered by some theorists will be outlined. These will then be assessed by looking at the way in which these definitions 'fit' the data gathered by researchers in the area.

Mescon, Albert and Khedouri (1985) suggest that the management of individuals is about the processes of:

> *"planning, organising, leading and controlling the efforts of organisation members and of using all organisational resources to achieve stated organisational goals".*

Follett (1941) states that it is about:

> *"getting things done by other people".*

Although to some extent agreeing with the definitions outlined above, Pearce and Robinson (1989) warn that the role and behaviour of management adjusts and alters over a period of time and thus, what is understood by the term changes over time. They therefore offer what they believe to be a 'modern' definition and state that management is:

> *"the process of optimising human, material, and financial contributions for the achievement of organisational goals".*

This definition, according to Hannagan (2002:5) gives the term a more contemporary meaning in that it "moves the idea of the role of the manager into a more dynamic and up-to-date relationship with the organisation" when compared with the 'old-fashioned' ideas which emphasised the "running of an organisation in terms of administration and control". For example, Huczynski and Buchanan (1991:595) define management as a process through which workforce control is maintained.

Watson (2002:471) however takes the concept of management one step further in the sense that he divides it into three specific areas:

> *"As a **function** management is the overall shaping of relationships, understandings and processes within a work organisation to bring about the completion of the tasks undertaken in the organisation's name in such a way that the organisation continues into the future. As an **activity**, management is the bringing about of this 'shaping' and as a **group of people**, management is the set of organisational employees given the official responsibility for fulfilling or carrying out the shaping of relationships, understandings and processes".*

This, Watson (2002:67) argues, simplifies the analysis of the concept as well as assisting our understanding.

The idea of 'controlling' the workforce is not new as it can be traced back through time to feudal times and beyond. However, for the sake of this thesis, consideration of the concepts 'control' and 'power' will begin with Karl Marx.

Karl Marx (McLellan 1977) identifies that within capitalism[27] two distinct social classes can be identified; the bourgeoisie, who own and control the means of production and the proletariat, who sell their labour to the bourgeoisie in order to survive. However, both classes are mutually dependent despite the fact that they have conflicting interests. The

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[27] "An economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange" (McLeod 1990:144)

bourgeoisie aim to maximise profit in order to increase their capital, whereas the proletariat focus on the growth of their working conditions and wages in order to improve their quality of life. Rose (2001:69) supports this by stating that management cannot "depend upon the voluntary and willing co-operation, loyalty and commitment of the workforce" due to the conflict of interests which exists and therefore management "seeks employee compliance through the exercise of control".

Watson (2002:61) agrees that organisations seek to attain and maintain control over their workforces, however, he suggests that this can only be achieved in part. This is "because organisations only exist through human relationships, and human relationships never allow the total control of some people over others. He adds that 'power' rarely goes unchallenged and thus control is generally resisted. Watson (2002:61) further states that control is typically brought about through the 'processes' such as bargaining, negotiating, policies and procedures and thus is agreed within a pluralist environment.

Scientific management was introduced and developed by Taylor during the mid twentieth century[28]. Taylor agreed that the main task of management was the control of their workforces and that they must extract as much effort as possible while paying the minimum amount in order to maintain healthy profit margins. In order to achieve this Taylor believed that work should be divided into smaller component parts as well as deskilling the labour force (Rose 2001:70). Taylor suggested that this would produce higher levels of productivity per employee as individual workers only had to focus on one small task and therefore would become proficient and able to complete the task quickly. The second benefit was that because the employees were less skilled they would be easier to replace and thus wages could be kept low and finally because of the vulnerability of these employees they would become more compliant (Rose 2001:70).

Braverman (1974), in developing the thoughts of Karl Marx, rejected Taylor's scientific management approach in that he states that it encourages managerial control and erodes "craft skill, reduce[s] workers' independence and reduce[s] the importance of their knowledge of the craft. In addition, workers are excluded from decisions about methods and the pace of work … [it] stifles individual development, reduces wages and enhances management status" (Rose 2001:72).

Gospel and Palmer (1993) argue that the most effective way of understanding management style is by analysing this through an ideological perspective. For example Fox (1966) identified two ideological perspectives, unitary[29] and pluralist[30]. Marchington and Parker (1990) state that there are three central differences between these two ideological perspectives in relation to the way management behave towards the workforce. The first influences the way management view trade unions and their role within organisations. The second has implications for the way management see their prerogatives and power in relation to employee involvement and participation in the workplace. The third area is the perceived legitimacy of and the way they respond to conflict within the working environment.

Building on this Purcell (1987) and Purcell and Ahlstrand (1989, 1994) identify two approaches which they call:

- Individualism: "the degree of weight attached to issues such as the welfare of employees and their development" (Leat 2001:290)

- Collectivism: "the extent to which management provide for and embrace employee collective organisation and representation" (Leat 2001:290).

The individualistic approach believes that the employer and the employee can build a balanced relationship between them. They argue that employee motivation, commitment and loyalty is gained through direct communication, opportunities for training and development, performance related pay and other such benefits. Trade unions are rejected by both the employee and the employer as they are seen to be an obstacle which prevents both parties achieving their own goals.

> *"The force of the rhetoric of 'new individualism' is not easily challenged. An emphasis on common goals, flexibility and personal performance which allows individuals to achieve commitment to their job and firm is intuitively attractive. Here, management control is achieved via employee commitment – the ultimate dream of the self-managed workforce. The assumption is that what was previously covered by collective regulation is now both unilaterally determined by the employer and focused on or targeted to each employee. The worker is assumed to have neither the interest not the ability to combine with others, but will strive to maximise his/her own interests which coincide with, or are complementary to, those of the employer" (Kessler and Purcell 1995:31).*

The second approach, collectivism in contrast is the recognition by management and employees that organisations are made up of many diverse interest groups. Within

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[28] For a more details see F. W. Taylor (1947) **Scientific Management** New York, Harper and Row

[29] unitary perspective "the organisation exists in perfect harmony and all conflict, not only industrial relations conflict is both unnecessary and exceptional" (Salamon 1992:31).

[30] Pluralist – the organisation comprises [of] groups of individuals and that these groups have their own aims, interests and leadership. These aims and interests often conflict and compete with those of other groups and give rise to tensions which have to be managed" (Rose 2001:30)

collectivist organisations therefore trade unions and/or employee representatives are recognised as being an essential part of the decision making process (Marchington and Parker 1990; Purcell and Gray 1986).

As can be seen, these two approaches, individualism and collectivism can be seen to 'fit' well with the two ideological perspectives offered by Fox in 1966, unitarism and pluralism. Individualism falls clearly within the unitaristic ideology in that for example, both employee and employers reject the 'interference' of a third party (trade union) in the balanced relationship between them. It is believed that the employment relationship works more productively and efficiently when this approach is adopted. Collectivism on the other hand relates closely to the pluralistic perspective. For example, both the employees and the employers recognise that there are various interest groups within organisations whose best interests are met through employee participation, involvement, negotiation, consultation etc.

The identification of these two ideological positions has encouraged the development, by theorists, of 'ideal' styles of management[31] based on these perspectives. The early models devised to assist understanding of managerial styles were criticised for their static nature thus Purcell and Ahlstrand (1994) developed a new model which incorporates the dimensions of individualism and collectivism and which enables changes in styles to be taken into consideration.

Although offering a framework from which an analysis of corporate management change can be undertaken it is not believed that a full evaluation of these models should be undertaken within this particular study as it will not increase our knowledge or improve understanding of the importance of the legislative reform of industrial relations or their impact on British corporate managerial behaviour. What is essential here is to examine the way in which corporate managerial styles and practices have changed and to analyse the variables which have facilitated this change.

Tom Peters (1987) highlights that management has had to face a number of challenges during the 1970s and 1980s which has brought about 'dramatic' changes in the way management behaves and consequently the employment relationship.

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[31] See for example Fox 1974, Purcell and Sisson (1983), Purcell and Ahlstrand (1994) and Purcell (1987).

Figure 2.3   Traditional Management Function (Hannagan 2002:9)

Strategy

Planning   Innovating   Senior
                                      And   Managers
                                      Risk-Taking   ↑
                                                        Middle
                                                        Managers
                                                        ↑
Organising, Supervising, Controlling   Junior
                                                        Managers
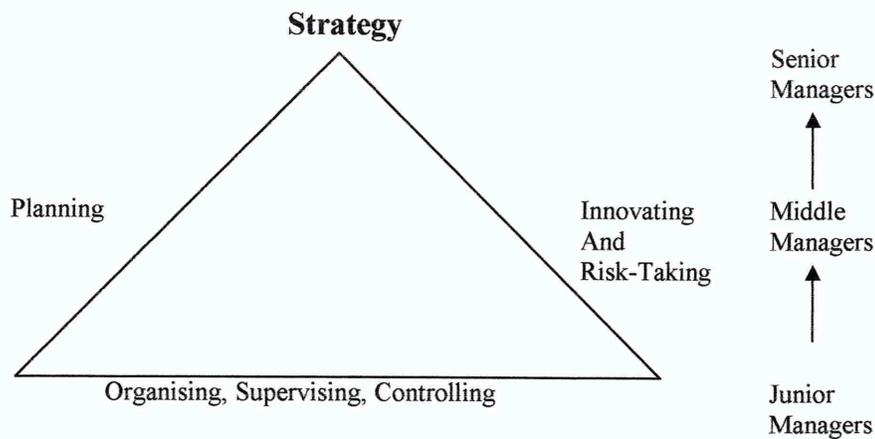
Figure 2.3 is a simplistic illustration of the way management traditionally operate within organisations. Junior managers tended to be responsible for organising, supervising and 'controlling' employees while the middle managers planned, innovated and took limited risks. The role of the senior management however was to make strategic decisions.

In order to evaluate whether or not corporate managerial styles have changed during the last thirty years a number writers have explored key areas of management behaviour from a number of sources and perspectives. For example, research has been undertaken into employee commitment and loyalty (Hirsh, Jackson and Jackson 1995; Dunham, Grube and Castaneda 1994; Meyer 1997; Legge 1995) communication (Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000) flexibility (Atkinson 1984; Atkinson and Meager 1986, 1986b; Pollert 1988, 1991; Hirst and Zeitlin 1989; Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix 1999) partnership, involvement and participation (Guest and Peccei 1998; Claydon 1998; TUC 1999; Kelly 1998; Fisher 1997).

The research claims to have identified a 'new' focus which highlights management's role within the organisation especially with regard to employee relations. This is perhaps due to the realisation that management decisions made at an individual organisational level, affected industrial relations structures, processes and even outcomes at both plant and establishment level (Davis 1987; Marginson, Edwards, Roderick, Purcell and Sissons 1988; Storey 1994; Kessler and Purcell 1995; Edwards 1987; Marchington and Parker 1990).

This 'new' style of management, or it could be argued, employee relations centres on encouraging specific behavioural patterns and attitudes in the workforce (White and

Trevor 1983; Basset 1986; Wickens 1987; Oliver and Wilkinson 1992). For example, many of these practices seek to cultivate a high level of employee commitment, encourage flexibility and adaptability and reject industrial strife (White and Trevor 1983; Ramsay 1991). Within the British context, Grant (1996) argues that 'new' industrial relations attempt to 'get rid' of the 'them v us' attitude of traditional working practices. Noon (1992) however has identified a conflict between the emphasis on employee commitment to the organisations and the lack of commitment and trust shown by the organisations to the workforce. For example, Foley, Maxwell and McGillivray (1999) state:

> *"While employers may require commitment and trust from their employees ... this is not necessarily a reciprocal arrangement... employers do not offer job security; instead the external market is promoted as the dominant force informing and driving ... actions".*

Miller (1996) goes further and states that these 'new' management styles, in particular human resource management (HRM) is 'amoral' in that it becomes "a covert form of employee manipulation dressed up as mutuality" (Fowler 1987). Keenoy and Anthony (1992) conclude that these new management styles and practices have resulted in the blurring of managerial and market accountability. Thus, Foley, Maxwell and McGillvray (1999) suggest that although these new management styles and practices seek to promote harmony, individualism and continuity, in reality they involve change, fragmentation, insecurity and uncertainty.

Foley, Maxwell and McGillivray (1999) conclude that the employment relationship has changed in the UK during the last twenty years, however, the essential differences between employers and employees has remained constant.

In order to conclude this section it is necessary to identify the important areas which need further exploration within the present study in order to comprehensively assess the impact of industrial relations legislation on British corporate management. The section began with the aim of examining the various stakeholders within the employment relationship. However, it became apparent that studies undertaken in this area were going to be difficult to compare and contrast as the various researchers approached the topic from their own paradigm, theoretical position and/or philosophical view point. Therefore, it was clear that it would be necessary to ensure that the present thesis gathered substantial amounts of primary data on the principal stakeholders within the employment relationship in order to validate specific approaches.

Other areas which appeared to be of significance in this section were the concepts of 'power' and 'control'. These terms were used in a majority of the literature which suggested that they had a significant part to play in the way management operate as well as influencing the style which they adopt in order to manage the workforce.

2.11   Continuity or Change?

The analysis of the literature has emphasised the need to examine what various researchers have debated in relation to continuity and change within the employment relationship. Much of what has been reviewed so far suggests that there has been a challenge made to existing patterns of employee relations however Blyton and Turnbull (1998:10) have stated that many of these factors were present during the 1960s and 1970s and that many of the macro studies have failed to demonstrate any marked change in the way management behaves.

The present study will seek to examine a range of factors which have been identified in the literature as bringing about change in management behaviour. It will also seek to bring together interview and case study work which will be integrated with the existing research in order to evaluate the statement that suggests that the 1980s "witnessed dramatic changes in the contours of British Industrial Relations" (Edwards 1995:4; Kavanagh 1987; Kavanagh and Seldon 1988; Minford 1988; Tebbit 1989; Roberts 1988; Skidlesky 1989; Frenkel 1992; Hanson 1994).

This evaluation is at the heart of the study and will offer a valuable contribution to the understanding of the employment relationship during this period.

2.12   Conclusion

From the above, it is clear that each area discussed has had an important impact on the employment relationship and thus on way management behave, however, it is vital that no one of them becomes the sole research area as this would de-value the data. For example, to concentrate only on government ideology and/or policies would detract attention from other environmental influences which may be equal, if not more importance on corporate management behaviour.

The period between 1979 and 1997 has seen the "final death of voluntarism, under which law was essentially an adjunct to an autonomous, self regulated system of industrial relations, and more emphasis on the law as a mechanism in pursuit of

government economic and social objectives ... being seen as a key instrument facilitating labour-market restructuring" (Dickens and Hall 1995). Perhaps this is true, however, it is suggested here that the framework within which industrial relations operates continues to develop alongside the many social, political and economic changes which occur within the UK rather than in isolation. Thus, there is no room for a rigid infrastructure either within industrial relations itself or within the academic studies which attempt to provide the answers to the web of questions which emerge as the situation continually evolves.

The chapter has outlined research which has formed the structural foundations upon which the thesis is built and it has provided the 'guide ropes' which have led the author through a number of complex issues. It has also highlighted the focus of this study by identifying two opposing view points, the first that there were dramatic changes in the way employment relations was managed between 1979 and 1997, this was outlined in research conducted at national level. The second theoretical stance suggests that very little has changed, this was highlighted in research conducted at site and plant level.

In order to conduct an investigation into the extent to which changes in managerial behaviour has been influenced by different variants since 1979 this chapter has highlighted specific areas which require further investigation in order to formulate an opinion. These areas were used, together with some initial data gathering outlined in chapter 4 to formulate the initial questionnaire that was sent out as well as the interview framework used throughout the data gathering period (cf. chapter 3).

In conclusion four key areas of research have been identified as requiring further investigation, these are:

- *The external environment*, for example, the compositional and structural changes which have taken place in the employment relationship in the UK; changes in trade union membership and density; the fluctuating levels of unemployment within Britain throughout the period; the regional location of 'new' industrial sites; the ideologically driven behaviour of the Conservative Government's between 1979 and 1997.

- *Technological advancement*, for example, the extent and impact of deskilling/reskilling on employees through the introduction of new technology.

Whether or not this has resulted in a shift in the balance of power within the employment relationship.

- *Managerial styles and practices,* for example, the extent, the importance and impact of the following on the employment relationship: control and power within the workplace; inward investment, particularly in relation to Japan and America; economic changes such as increases in global competition and finally ideological perspectives, unitary and pluralism, individualism and collectivism.

- *Continuity or change?* For example, in relation to management styles and practices as well as trade union membership and recognition.

The following chapter outlines the epistemological, ontological and methodological approach adopted in the study. These, in part, were identified through the review and reflection of the data gathered in the present chapter as well as the personal preference of the researcher.

Figure 2.4   Areas requiring further exploration and analysis

- The effect of trade union membership and density on the workplace relationship

- Compositional and structural changes in British employment during the period 1979 to 1997

- The Impact of 'Greenfield' sites on employment practices

- The conservative Governments' (1979-1997) influence on the external environmental context within which the employment relationship operates, the impact that their political ideology had on workplace relationships as well as society as a whole and the extent to which they nurtured change to occur through the part they played as a role model employer.

- The impact of, and importance of, control and power within the workplace, including the extent to which this has been influenced by the introduction of new technologies

- Deskilling/reskilling

- Employment levels since 1979 and the effect that this had on employment relations

- The extent to which the trade union movement supported and promoted the introduction of new technologies

- The influence of the Conservative Party's political ideology on the employment relationship

- The impact and importance of, control and power within the workplace by management

- Inward investment, its role in the change of managerial styles and practices in the UK.

- The effect of economic changes on managerial practice eg) increased global competition.

- The extent to which management have changed practices and styles.

- Assess the extent to which trade union membership has changed in relation to:

  o Recognition, de-recognition and partnerships

- The extent to which the Conservative Government pragmatically responded to external environmental factors such as the economic situation, global competition and trade union behaviour.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1   Introduction

The previous chapters introduced the thesis and identified the central theoretical basis for this study. They have identified a number of key themes and issues, which will be explored in the remaining chapters. The purpose of the current chapter is to highlight the epistemological, ontological and methodological approach adopted. It will explain the rationale that has led to the use of an inductive methodology that is grounded within the literature and the adoption and use of a case study to provide the central body of data upon which the research is founded.

Before embarking on the central body of this chapter it is necessary to point-out that there is no simple methodic recipe for undertaking a comprehensive valid piece of research (Harvey 1990:2). This is mainly because individual approaches to epistemology, ontology and methodology are influenced by a range of internal, as well as external environmental factors, such as the area under investigation, the reading that is both available and that has been successfully located, as well as reacting to advice and help which is given by supervisors and colleagues (O'Mahoney 1998:6).

As suggested above the present chapter will to examine the epistemological, ontological and methodological approach, which was adopted during the research. This is believed to be an important part of the thesis as it demonstrates the conflicting theoretical underpinnings of undertaking a piece of research as well as illustrating the 'problems' related to ensuring that it is a valid and reliable study.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. Firstly, it examines the philosophical considerations undertaken in determining just how the thesis should be conducted. Secondly, it will analyse and evaluate the methodological approaches available as well as the one actually adopted, before finally outlining exactly how the data was collected. These sections are then sub-divided in order to increase clarity and understanding as well as strengthening and supporting the study.

It is perhaps important to emphasise that the core discipline which underpins this study lies within the social sciences (Lupton 1971) in the sense that it has deployed insights and analysis from a wide variety of areas such as industrial relations, human resource management, economics, sociology, organisational theory, politics and law. Pugh (1971:9) suggests that management behaviour is dependent on "assumptions about what has happened and conjectures about what will happen; that is to say it rests on theory".

3.2   Epistemological Debate

The epistemological debate is not a new; in fact it has been suggested that it originated in the works of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle (Johnson and Duberley 2000:2). The debate focuses on the 'theory of knowledge' in that it explores and develops ways in which we create and build knowledge and how we come to understand it. Johnson and Duberley (2000:1) argue that:

> *"That how we come to ask particular questions, how we assess the relevance and value of different research methodologies so that we can investigate those questions, how we evaluate the outputs of research, all express and vary according to our underlying epistemological commitments".*

This kind of discussion highlights the need to discover the "'foundations' to which one might cling, frameworks beyond which one must not stray, objects which impose themselves, representations which cannot be gainsaid" (Rorty 1979:315). Neurath (1944), however argues that there are no "incontestable foundations" upon which we can ensure the dependability of our "knowledge of knowledge" "the most we can hope for in considering epistemology is to become more consciously reflexive" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:4). This means that we should attempt to become much more critically reflexive in order to begin to understand our own epistemological stance and thus our own personal methodological perspective. In doing so we may begin to:

> *"Notice and then crticize our own pre-understandings in a more systematic fashion while trying to assess their impact upon how we engage with the social and natural worlds" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:4).*

It is thus, clear that epistemological choices that are made impact on the way we understand and rationalise the world and seek out knowledge, it further "determines the criteria by which justified knowledge is possible". It is therefore important that epistemology adopted within this study is expressed in order to support validity and trustworthiness of the data presented.

> "… *Knowledge and science are the arbitrary outputs of social processes from which no one is exempted – there are no objective ways of discriminating the warranted from the unwarranted – all we have are just different culturally derived ways of knowing the world which vary in their substance and to the extent that they have been accorded social legitimation*" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:7).

Thus epistemology influences the processes through which understanding is developed and what is taken to be warranted knowledge.

In his attempt to explain epistemology, Kuhn (1970) stated that each individual is "trapped" within their own paradigm, which is moulded by the socialisation process that includes their cultural environment, thus no one can claim to stand in a neutral position therefore rejecting the positivist[1] perspective (Johnson and Duberley 2000:72). He adds that "a paradigm cannot be compared or criticized from the standpoint of an alternative paradigm since" (Johnson and Duberely 2000:74) "the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds" (Kuhn 1970:150).

Burrell and Morgan (1979) although acknowledging Kuhn's argument that valid interaction between paradigms is not possible, suggest that "several paradigms, characterised by permanent incommensurability, can exist simultaneously" (Ibid). They add that knowledge can be developed by recognising the existence of a matrix of four different paradigms whose "axes are based upon different metatheoretical assumptions about the nature of social science and the nature of society" (Ibid).

Building on the epistemological debate, outlined above, the present study has adopted what Johnson and Duberley (2000:148) call a "pragmatic-critical realist" perspective. This approach is described as "a synthesis, which emerges from, and attempts to

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[1] Positivism, in relation to management or organisational research, aims to identify universal laws that govern how organisations and/or management operate. Therefore human actions are observed in the same way, as physical elements are from the natural sciences, for example "as a network of causal relations linking aspects of behaviour to context and stimuli in the external environment" this then conditions individuals to react in specific ways (Johnson and Duberley 2000:40).

transcend, positivism's thesis of a foundational-absolute stance and postmodernism's[2] antithesis of chaotic relativism".

This epistemology has not been widely used by researchers interested in management or employment relations in Britain (cf. Chapter 2 p.11). This may, Johnson and Duberley (2000:149) suggest be due to the 'problem' in defining the term realism. Realism is defined in this study as a perspective, which rejects subjectivist ontologies that have been highlighted by much of the postmodernist literature. Thus a commonality for realists is that they are "united by a rejection of the view that the world is created by the minds of human observers" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:149). Trigg (1980:vii) adds that a central characteristic of a realist is the "notion of objectivity". However there is a danger in that without further explanation, realism could be mistaken for positivism this 'mistake' has been made by researchers such as Hammersley (1992:43) Keat and Urry (1982:44) and Burrell and Morgan (1979). To recognise them as one approach restricts the epistemological debate from this view point to one that only sees that knowledge is the outcome of social construction which can only be 'discovered' by using a subjectivist ontology. Thus it is only from the "position that knowledge entails both social construction and the transactions of human knowers with an independent reality where it is possible to discern a very different understanding of realism" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:150).

Critical realism however, has been developed from the "post-Kuhnian" criticism of positivism (Bhaskar 1986:36) and argues that the "truth must be more than the outputs of a language game yet it cannot be absolute" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:151). For example Margolis (1986:283) states that the world of knowledge is not dependant on the cognitive creations of individuals in other words "what reality is and how we have conceived it are different questions since many things are beyond our conceptual and linguistic capacities ... things that cannot be measured or observed via our senses may be still real" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:152). For example an individual might believe in the concept of God however understanding what or who God is could be beyond our conceptual and linguistic ability however this does not mean that God does not exist in reality.

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[2] Postmodernism "abandons the rational and unified subject postulated by much modern theory in favour of a socially and linguistically decentred and fragmented subject" (Best and Kellner 1991:41). For a more in-depth review of postmodernism see Johnson and Duberley (2000).

Unfortunately there is a danger that critical realism becomes self-contradictory in that it has to face two interrelated epistemological problems:

- "… Because critical realists reject the possibility of a theory-neutral observational language how can they then establish the veracity of … epistemically transitive constructions yet simultaneously avoid the articulation of the very 'superidealism'[3] which Bhaskar so vehemently decries?"

- "… If traditional forms of empiricism are untenable since experience cannot provide us with knowledge of intransitive reality, and if science is not to be exclusively self-referential as in postmodernism, how does science involve socially mediated transitive transactions with the 'common referent' – an intransitive reality" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:156).

To overcome these 'problems' critical realism has been combined with pragmatism in order to allow subject-object transactions to be established. Pragmatism, in relation to the approach adopted here will be taken to mean, "social constructions are bounded by the tolerance of external reality, which exists independently of our cognitive processes" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:157).

Johnson and Duberley (2000:158) suggest that pragmatism can be divided into two, which are brought together in their rebuff of positivism. Rorty (1979, 1982, 1998) characterises the first approach in that he states that pragmatism is a social construction from where knowledge emerges from the "language-games of a community of people which is incommensurable with that of other communities and which cannot be judged by the standards of another community" (Rorty 1982:188). The second approach to pragmatism has been termed the "North American ethos". This has been outlined by James (1909) and Dewey (1929) who argue that to have "knowledge is the ability to anticipate the consequences of manipulating things in the world" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:159). Dewey adds that individuals are not passive receptacles of sense-data but are active participants in that people have the ability to critically reflect and learn from experiences and observations. Thus pragmatism from this stance believes

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[3] "In Bhaskar's terms postmodernism would entail *both* epistemic [relativism – that knowledge is always socially constructed] and judgmental relativism [- that there are no grounds for preferring one knowledge claim to another] – 'a superidealism' which conflates the transitive and intransitive so that reality

that knowledge is socially constructed in order to help people solve 'problems' and make sense of information in practical day to day situations (Johnson and Duberley 2000:159).

Bhaskar (1986) suggests that the social world is the direct result of human action, thus there remains the possibility that by changing the way individuals act or react will consequently alter existing relationships. Therefore if social reality is made up of "causal structures it must be possible to intervene and manipulate that structure" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:161).

Sayer (1992:83) concludes that:

> *"The world can only be understood in terms of the available conceptual resources, but the latter do not determine the structure of the world itself. And despite our entrapment within our conceptual schemes, it is still possible to differentiate between more and less practically-adequate beliefs about the material world. Observation is neither theory-neutral nor theory-determined but theory-laden. Truth is neither absolute nor purely conventional and relative".*

Thus, as Johnson and Duberley (2000:162) argue the pivotal point for those supporting the pragmatic-critical realist epistemological approach is that "although language shapes all forms of science this does not mean that nothing exists beyond language. Reality intervenes and puts limits upon the viability of our descriptions and explanations". Therefore from this perspective it is assumed that "external casual regularities exist" and that individual behaviour in everyday life is determined by how people make sense of them and react to them. They add that knowledge is gained from an independent reality, which is accessed by individuals through their ability to reflect upon actions taken and 'learn' from the experiences. This was felt to be of importance for this study as it would be accessing the knowledge and experiences of both management and employees in order to analyse their perceptions of change and its impact on the workplace.

To conclude this section, this study will be undertaken and interpreted from pragmatic-realist perspective that suggests that:

> *"While the truth may well be 'out there' we may never know it in an absolute sense because we lack the necessary cognitive and linguistic means of apprehending it. [However]... from the pragmatic-critical realist stance we can develop, and indeed identify, in a fallible manner, more adequate social constructions or reality by*

becomes an outcome of our variable epistemological engagements and allows the propagation of certain variants of the incommensurability thesis" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:152).

> *demonstrating their variable ability to realise our goals, ends or expectations since our practical activities allow transactions between subject and object" (Johnson and Duberley 2000:163).*

The epistemological and methodological basis for the thesis' early work was to be found in the employment/industrial relations domain. However as the research progressed it was felt that a more pluralistic strategy was needed in order for the study to contribute to the understanding of management change 1979 to 1997. This was believed to be important as it is able to illuminate the subject area from many angles in order to "develop a better understanding of the darkness, the light and the intervening shades" (Worral 2004).

The adoption of this perspective has led to a multi-methodological approach being taken to gather and the analyse data. This multi-methodological approach is unusual in that it is not widely adopted in either management or business research (Gill and Johnson 2002:202). It has been suggested that there are two reasons for this, the first is that using multi-methods is time consuming and costly the second is influenced by academic journals who each have a preference of a specific methodological approach.

However the author believed that a multi-methodological approach would be important as this would allow information to be collected from a variety of sources using contributory methodological techniques. This methodological triangulation, according to Denzin (1970:313) overcomes any bias which is inherent within a single-method approach. Smith (1975:273) adds that:

> *"we are really like blind men led into an arena and asked to identify an entity (say an elephant) by touching one part of that entity (say a leg). Certainly we might make better guesses if we could pool the information of all the blind men, each of whom has touched a different part of the elephant".*

Denzin (1970:297) adds that the use of a multi-methodological approach increases the validity and reliability of data gathered. Hammersely and Arkinson (1983) support this and add that a multi-methodological approach strengthens qualitative research findings through the combination of information sources. Gill and Johnson (1991:129) also recommend a multi-method approach as it adds value to a study in that it supports "the credibility ... by providing an internal cross-checking or monitoring device". Nolan and Walsh (1995:82) further state that a multi-method approach adds value to studies in particular to the area of industrial relations as it allows the combination of analytical

strength as well as research methods to be accessed from a number of disciplines. This, it is argued, would reflect more accurately the nature, characteristics and study of industrial relations as the area incorporates a variety of social science disciplines for example, sociology, organisational theory, politics, law, economics and human resource management.

3.3 Methodology

Based on this perspective, and after consideration of other available methodologies, the case study methodology was identified as offering the framework and 'tools' it was felt necessary to undertake the research. Ghauri and Gronhaug (2002:171) state that case study research is particularly valuable when "the phenomenon under investigation is difficult to study outside its natural setting and also when the concepts and variables under study are difficult to quantify", both situations apply to this thesis.

> *"Case studies can be theoretically exciting and data rich" (Hartley 1999:208).*

Yin (1988:23) defines case study methodology as:

> *"An empirical inquiry that:*
> - *investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when*
> - *the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and which*
> - *multiple sources of evidence are used".*

Hartley (1999:211) states that "the case study is an important method in industrial relations" research as it enables the "complexity of processes of conflict and co-operation … to be described and analysed in ways which have not predetermined what constitutes conflict and co-operation for particular groups" (Batstone et al 1977, 1978; Edwards and Scullion 1982; Flanders 1964; Pollert 1981). It is a methodology, which is "tailor-made for exploring new processes or behaviours" as such it can be used to generate hypotheses as well as constructing theories (Hartley 1999:213). In fact Hartley (1999:213) argues that case studies "have a likelihood of generating new theory, and furthermore, the emergent theory is likely to be testable with constructs that can be measured and hypotheses that can be falsified because the theory-building has largely been inductive". In conclusion Hartley (1999:213) states that case studies are a useful approach when attempting to access or understand behaviour that is sensitive, informal, secret or perhaps illegal.

As already stated, this was thought to be the most appropriate methodology to use in relation to this study as it provided the opportunity to use a range of sources from which

to gather 'evidence' and to enable reflection and analysis (Yin 1988:97) as well as enabling a pragmatic-critical realist perspective to be used. As this epistemological perspective suggests, knowledge is gained through people interacting with each other as well as the external environment and making sense of it through conceptualisation and language, the chosen methodology provides the opportunity to observe, read and speak to individuals in the workplace. For example, Yin (1988:85) and Ghari and Gronhaug (2002:171) state that a successful case study will access a range of sources such as:

- Documentation[4]
- Archival records[5]
- Interviews
- Direct observations
- Participant-observation
- Physical artefacts[6]

He adds that the use of multiple sources of data gathering is the main strength of the case study in that it enables the researcher to examine a broader range of historical, attitudinal and observational issues and therefore develop converging lines of inquiry.

This provides the opportunity for the researcher to triangulate information gathering methods and data analysis as well as being useful in theory development and testing.

It is therefore believed by the author that any "finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate" because it is founded on a number of different sources and methods which measure and analyse the same phenomenon or aspects of it (Yin 1988:97). This, Yin (1988:97) argues, increases the validity and creditability of this methodology.

The case study methodology can be made up of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. However Hartley (1999:209) suggests that it is more usual to see emphasis being placed on a qualitative approach. The methods she highlights as

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[4] "Letters, memoranda, and other communiqués; Agendas, announcements and minutes of meetings, and other written reports of events; administrative documents – proposals, progress reports, and other internal documents; formal studies or evaluations of the same 'site' under study; and news clippings and other articles appearing in the mass media" (Yin 1988:85).

[5] "Service records, such as those showing the number of clients served over a given period of time; organisational records, such as organisational charts and budgets over a period of time; maps and charts of geographical characteristics of a place; lists of names and other relevant commodities; survey data, such as [employee opinion surveys]; and personal records, such as diaries, calendars and telephone listings" (Yin 1988:87).

[6] For example "a technological device, a tool or instrument, a work of art, or some other physical evidence" – is less potentially relevant than other methods in relation to this study.

being available to those undertaking case study research include participant observation, observation, interviews and questionnaires (ibid). Yin (1988) adds that it is important to include an analysis of company documentation and archival reports with these methods. Participant observation is where a researcher takes on a role or a "variety of roles within a case study situation and may actually participate in the events being studied" (Yin 1988:92). Yin (1988:92) states that this has been most "frequently used in anthropological studies … [however it] can be used in more everyday settings, such as an organisation". It is suggested that researchers adopting this method gain "access to events or groups that are otherwise inaccessible to scientific investigation" (ibid). In this way investigators are able to understand 'reality' from the perspective of an 'insider' rather than an external observer (ibid: 93). This method was used by Burawoy (1979) to investigate "how consent to workplace practices is created between workers and supervisors" (Hartley 1999:209).

This method was rejected in this particular study as it was thought to be too time consuming as well as possibly increasing researcher bias thereby reducing the validity of the study when adopting a realist-pragmatic stance (Becker 1958).

Despite rejecting participant observation as a 'tool' for gathering data in this particular project, other methods suggested by Yin (1988) were utilised. For example, a survey questionnaire, direct observation, attendance at works council meetings (if appropriate) interviews, reviewing documentation and archival records were all used to triangulate information and increase the credibility and trustworthiness throughout the study (these will be reviewed later in the chapter).

In practical terms the data was gathered and coded as the analysis began. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that there are three levels of coding used within the grounded approach. These are; open coding, axial coding and selective coding. With regard to this thesis open coding required the researcher to identify some initial categories from the literature. From there the categories were subdivided. Axial coding involves putting the data together in different ways after the initial open coding has taken place. From this a coding paradigm is developed. This identifies a central category, investigates causal conditions for example categories which influence the central category from this specific strategies can be highlighted i.e. the actions and/or

interactions that emerge from the central phenomenon. This in turn enables the context and intervening conditions to be identified and finally the consequences for the phenomenon emerge. The third type of coding is the selective coding which involves the integration of the categories identified during the axial coding. At this stage conditional propositions are presented.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996:30) highlight that coding reduces the data however it also complicates it. Coding it is suggested is mainly heuristic in that it enables the data to be broken down and thought about in 'new' ways (Seidel and Kelle 1995:58). Coffey and Atkinson (1996:30) add that reflection while coding the data can be more important than the "precise procedures and representations that are employed.

Tesch (1990) states qualitative data analysis using whatever means decontextualises information while retaining the meaning before sorting, organising and recontextualising in line with the concepts identified from for example the theoretical frameworks highlighted by other theorists or research questions. Tesch (1990) further suggests that an "organising system for data is based on developing pools of meaning" thus reflecting a grounded theory approach.

3.4 Research Design

The research design:

> *"Guides the investigator in the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting observations. It is a logical model of proof that allows the researcher to draw inferences concerning causal relations among the variables under investigation. The research design also defines the domain of generalizability, that is, whether the obtained interpretations can be generalised to a larger population or to different situations" (Nachmias and Nachmias 1976:77-78).*

At a practical level it is the 'blueprint' of the project.

Yin (1988:70) suggests that, due to the nature of the case study methodology, it is essential that a "case study protocol" is designed at an early stage in the investigation (cf. appendix 1). He argues that this increases the reliability of the work and provides the researcher with a 'framework' on which the study can be built. Yin (1988:70-76) states that this protocol should include:

- An overview of the whole study. This should provide the background information, including the context, perspective, and any theoretical concerns.

This could include the rationale for selecting the companies and sites; the theoretical and/or policy importance of the investigation.

- An outline of field procedures. This would include details of how the researcher is going to gain access to the organisation and to specific individuals; ensuring that there are enough resources to conduct the study; a plan and contact information for asking for help as and when needed and dealing with any unexpected events; a clear schedule of the data collection and the time frame within which this will be completed.

- The questions to be used to gather information. This should also include an indication of who is likely to provide the responses as well as indicating other sources of evidence which may provide answers from different perspectives.

- A guide for the case study report. This encourages the researcher to think through issues and anticipate problems. It will also encourage the collection of "relevant data in the appropriate format" (Yin 1988:76).

Following Yin's (1988) recommendations a project protocol was put together (cf. appendix I). This protocol was useful in that it provided a framework for undertaking the study and for managing the data collected. The overview forced the researcher to think through areas such as the actual nature of the inquiry – just what were the central issues of the study? What was it that was being investigated? It also encouraged a thorough review of the background, political, economic as well as the wider context within which the project was to be located rather than just 'jumping' in feet first. Writing the overview also ensured that a good deal of literature had been reviewed at an early stage in the process.

The time scale was initially a good tool but later had to be adjusted to cope with unanticipated events, which occurred professionally, personally and within the study itself. For example, the General Election of 1997 occurred at a time when interviews with political representatives were sought. It was found to be impossible to gain access to any member of 'New' Labour prior to the General Election.

Another unexpected problem related to gaining access to trade union representatives at local level. It had been anticipated that this group of informants would be fairly easy to access; unfortunately this was not the case. Therefore gathering information from this source took much longer than had first been believed, as access had first to be

negotiated at national level. However, once the researcher had located the 'key' (national level approval) the interviews were arranged quickly and offered a valuable source of information.

The protocol was also invaluable in that once the literature had been read it provided a framework within which the key themes could be reviewed and organised. It enabled the development of interview guidelines, including topic areas which required either conformation or further investigation. This would help the interviewer ensure that the interview provided relevant information on the subject matter (the interviews will be discussed later in this chapter).

Listing the possible sources of information at such an early stage in the project was very useful although it did need reviewing and adapting as the study progressed as information and data suggested that areas had been missed or that specific areas were not as important as was first thought.

Once the protocol had been detailed, resources and support identified, it was then possible to begin the data collection. This, as is outlined in the protocol, began by sending out a survey questionnaire to The Times top 100 companies ranked by number of employees (cf. appendix II) as well as the top five companies from each of the economic sectors identified by The Times.

3.5   Qualitative Data Analysis

It became clear quite early on in the investigation that both practically as well as personal preference qualitative data collecting methods would be used. Yin (1988, 1994) identified two contrasting analytical 'tools', which are commonly used within studies adopting qualitative methods. The first uses a theoretical or descriptive framework to analyse qualitative data (deductive), while the second examines the qualitative data without a fixed theoretical or descriptive framework (inductive).

3.5.1   Deductive

Yin (1994) states that when using the deductive 'tool' the research question or questions and the objectives should form the theoretical propositions upon which the researcher can create a framework in which the data can be gathered and organised. Bryman (1988:81) however questions Yin's approach, and states that, "the prior specification of a theory tends to be disfavoured because of the possibility of introducing a premature closure on the issues to be investigated, as well as the possibility of the theoretical constructs departing excessively from the views of participants in a social setting". In order to formulate a deductive framework it is necessary to identify the central variables, key themes and issues within the research topic as well as the expected relationship between them (Robson 1993; Yin 1994). Thus a deductive framework will be more reliant on previous experience(s) and upon expectations to initially begin and later to direct the analysis of the data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 1997:349).

3.5.2   Inductive

The second type of qualitative analytical analysis is the inductive approach. Within this approach the data is collected and then explored in order to identify common themes and issues which emerge as the study progresses (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Robson 1993; Yin 1994; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 1997). Robson (1993) however, claims that this can be a difficult strategy especially for an inexperienced researcher and that such a strategy is generally time consuming and can be resource intensive (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 1997:349). Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that to under take a successful study using this means of data collection would require the researcher to analyse the data as it is collected and then to develop a conceptual framework which will direct the study. This is called a grounded approach. Strauss and Corbin (1990) outline the main aspects of this:

- ◆ Grounded theory is an inductive approach

- ◆ Theory emerges from the process of data collection and analysis

- ◆ The study does not begin with a defined theoretical framework

- ◆ Relationships are identified between the data

- ◆ Questions and hypotheses can then be tested

The research has adopted an inductive approach in that the theory has emerged from the literature as well as from an analysis of the data as the study has progressed. This is important as Gill and Johnson (2002:40) argue that "explanations of social phenomena are relatively worthless unless they are grounded in observational experience". Miles and Huberman (1984:27) suggest that there are two problems with this approach in its purest form. The first, they argue is that "any researcher, no matter how unstructured or inductive, comes to fieldwork with some orienting ideas, foci and tools". This however is not perceived to be a problem in this study as it has already been acknowledged that the literature and contextual review has provided a theoretical basis from where to begin the project. Thus, the research is not attempting to become a pure ethnographic study. The second problem identified is that the research, because of its semi-structured or unstructured approach can become "sloppy [and] unfocused" (Miles and Huberman 1984:28). In fact they add:

> "The looser the initial design, the less selective the collection of data, everything looks important at the outset to someone waiting for the key constructs or regularities to emerge from the site, and that wait can be a long one" (ibid 28).

The thesis has addressed this criticism in the way in which it has structured the analysis of the data and the development of theory. For example, data gathered in the questionnaire was analysed and reviewed in order to select the case study organisations however, it was also used to distinguish areas of change within the employment relationship and managerial behaviour. Once a substantial amount of information had been collected, coded and evaluated it was then possible to continue to build the theory and to identify areas from where the data was lacking. The study then began to gather data from political figures and national trade union leaders. Reflection was an important part of the process in that when the evaluation had taken place it was necessary to reflect on the data that had already been highlighted in order to compare and contrast this information. Therefore, assessment and evaluation was necessary to assist with the building of the theory and the identification of important areas, which required further investigation.

3.6 The Survey

> *"Surveys place emphasis upon cross-sectional analyses, using standardised measures to compare across situations. They entail the collection of data on a number of respondents or units, usually at a single juncture in time. The aim is generally to collect systemically a body of quantifiable data in respect of a number of variables which can then be examined to discern patterns of association" (Bryman 1992:104 cited in Johnson and Duberley 2000:47)*

Gill and Johnson (1997:78) have suggested that the survey can be utilised by both positivists as well as those that challenge this epistemological stance. As this study falls into the latter epistemological category which Gill and Johnson (1997:78) suggest would use a descriptive rather than an analytical survey. The survey was focused on analysing particular characteristics of a specific population over a period of time. Questions sought for example, information on employee numbers, ownership of the organisation, geographical location, trade union recognition and membership, compositional shifts within the workplace, changes in management styles and practices as well as seeking the respondent's perception of industrial relations and managerial changes within the workplace.

The descriptive survey, therefore, focused on addressing a specific population either at a particular point in time or at varying times in order for comparisons to be made. Although they did not emphasise the control element of survey this approach does attempt to secure a representative sample of the specific population (Gill and Johnson 1991:78). However as Gill and Johnson (1991:78) have argued this does not mean that:

> *"Descriptive surveys are a-theoretical and that prior reviews of the literature are not as important as in the case of an analytical survey ...prior consideration of the relevant theory and literature may be vital in determining what kinds of questions need to be asked".*

Therefore, it is essential to highlight that knowledge and understanding of the literature was essential in proving the information on which to base the survey questions in that it enabled the researcher to defend the study and validate the questions asked and information sought (Gill and Johnson 1997:81).

A descriptive approach was, on the whole, adopted as it is believed to be an effective and quick way of gathering general information about potential case study companies, ensuring that they each met the research criteria as well as providing some quantifiable data (Gill and Johnson 1991:75).

One hundred and thirty four questionnaires were distributed through the post, together with a brief letter introducing the project and the researcher and a prepaid envelop in order to increase the possibility that a reply would be received. The questionnaires were sent to a named individual who was responsible for the management of people within the organisation. The names of these individuals were gained by telephoning each organisation and requesting the name and title of this person. This was felt to be a more effective way of encouraging a response as a particular individual had been identified.

After a period of three weeks a reminding letter was sent to those organisations who had failed to respond to the questionnaire in order to encourage them to reply. Included in this letter of reminder was a new questionnaire and a prepaid reply envelope. Eventually a response rate of sixty-nine per cent was achieved which was believed to be adequate considering that this figure was only just below that gained in the Workplace Industrial Relations Survey in 1980 of seventy-five per cent.

The case study organisations were selected on the basis that they met certain criteria. This criterion was identified through the literature review (cf. chapter 2).

Figure 3.1

Case Study Selection Criteria (cf. protocol appendix I)

- Each company had to be a large multi-site organisation with more than 1,000 employees.
- Their sites were to be located in various geographical locations around the UK.
- Trade union recognition was important.
- Each organisation selected had to operate in a separate economic sector.
- The company must be British owned

Once the initial survey had been conducted, the interview framework established and other sources of data identified it was time to undertake an exploratory study. This was thought to be advantageous for a number of reasons. Firstly, it provided a rich source of data, which helped to develop the 'field questions' and helped to understand the logistics of the research. This was believed to be of increased importance for this particular study as the researcher had not undertaken a project like this before and felt that she needed to 'try out' and test a few practical as well as theoretical issues before

beginning the main case study investigation. Undertaking an exploratory piece of research will allow the researcher to modify their approach, questions or even note taking methods. It can also be used to identify and develop new areas for investigation (Yin 1988:81; Johnson and Briggs 1999:64).

3.7 Initial Exploratory Studies

This particular study undertook three exploratory studies with companies that met the criteria set out in figure 3.1. The first organisation was based in London and was a large multi-national organisation with many sites spread throughout the UK. On returning the questionnaire the director of HR for this organisation invited me to meet him to discuss the issues that had be raised at the end of the questionnaire. The subsequent meeting was valuable as it was possible to 'try out' the interview framework. The meeting/interview raised some interesting points including one particular one relating to the geographical location of certain sites and the impact that this had on management. Although this had been an area already identified as having a possible impact, this director seemed to indicate that it the geographical location was much more important than it had first been thought. This insight was useful as it enabled an adjustment in the interview framework to be made prior to the commencement of the main case study work.

A second exploratory study was undertaken at a large national bank based in Birmingham. Contact was made by the researcher again in response to the comments made on the questionnaire. This time it was the General Manager of the site who agreed to meet with me. He highlighted the difference between the financial sector in the UK's economy and other areas. He stated that it had been the deregulation of the financial sector in the late 1980s that had had a significant impact on the banking sector and had 'forced' the sector to "down-size and restructure". He added that deregulation and the competition it caused had had a greater impact on the way management behaved during the period in question than other changes during the period. This was not identified as a casual factor during the initial literature research therefore it contributed a 'new' insight into the way the financial sector had been affected during the research period in relation to its management practices. As a direct result of this contribution the researcher decided to include a financial institution in the main study as well as locating specific research into the area.

The third study was undertaken within an organisation, which was located within the traditional manufacturing sector in Sheffield. Access was more difficult to gain at this organisation and it took a number of telephone calls and letters for the personnel manager to agree to be interviewed. Later it was revealed that it was the nature of the study that had caused the restricted access to senior management who were "nervous" at the thought of "people investigating trade unions" (study three, personnel manager). Despite the difficulty in accessing the organisation the interview with the personnel manager proceeded without any problems. He was happy to talk about his experiences during the industrial action of the 1970s. He outlined the conflict he had encountered and the militancy of the trade unions at the time. He suggested that the industrial action was not merely undertaken by the strikers but that the whole community became involved. He concluded that it was the "personal feelings of the Conservative Party's leader [Mrs Thatcher] that brought about most of the anti union legislation during the 1980s" he added that she was "power crazed". He did however believe that it had been the industrial relations legislation that had brought about most of the changes in managerial style.

All three studies highlighted the fact that no amount of preparation was likely to take away all the 'surprise' information obtained during an interview. The exploratory case study reports, unlike the main case study report, clearly identified the problems experienced in relation to the research design and the field procedures (Yin 1988:81). Subsequently adjustments were made to the research design, the interview framework, and the field procedures. The researcher also felt more confident as there had been the opportunity to 'try out' the interview experience and reflect on the reactions of those interviewed and the whole experience. Following these alterations and reflections the main data collection commenced.

3.8 The Case Study

The case study data collection was approached in a number of ways, for example semi-structured interviews, observation, attendance at work council meetings, analysis and evaluation of company documentation and archival records were all identified as valuable information sources which when triangulated would form a firm foundation upon which to build the study.

The first step to be taken was to make contact and gain access to each of the case study organisations. Ten organisations were originally chosen, they operated in a variety of economic sectors within the UK economy; two were large financial institutions; one distribution organisation, two breweries; two retail companies; one traditional manufacturing organisation which had experienced privatisation; one large insurance company. Contact was initially made with each of the chosen companies by phone where a request was made for the opportunity to meet with the director of HR, or the most senior person responsible for the management of people within the organisation, to discuss the project. All except the insurance company, at this stage were happy to meet and talk about the subject area. The director of HR for the insurance company refused to accept even the telephone call and thus it was decided that this company was not worth pursuing as access was clearly going to be a problem.

Meetings were arranged with the remaining nine organisations. The value of the interviews with the various HR directors and managers was wide. Some were more than happy to talk at length about their memories of the 1970s and how they had been able to help overcome the industrial strife. As one manager put it:

> *"I was there when the military lorries stormed the picket lines, even the police were afraid, it was more like being at war than a company dispute".*

Reflections such as the one outlined above were interesting and added value to the research through their ability to access the interviewees reality and conceptions (Musson 1998:11). Therefore it provided the opportunity to gain knowledge about "how people experience and make sense of themselves and their environments" (ibid). This point is further emphasised when consideration is given to the fact that a large amount of research is focused on how people understand and make sense of their organisational worlds. Musson (1998:14) suggests that:

> *"Few techniques explicitly acknowledge that individuals come to organisational life with an already constructed set of assumptions, norms and values which will influence the way organisational events are construed and interpreted".*

Listening to these 'life histories' was useful as it enabled the researcher to build a relationship with these 'gate-keepers' that would allow access to the organisation as a whole. The relationship that was developed during the course of the study with these gate-keepers gradually enabled information to be obtained that would not in general have been public nor perhaps would have been available in one-off interviews (Hartley 1999:214). Of course not all of these senior managers recounted their histories in the process of the interview, some were clearly not very interested in the topic but were happy to 'answer questions' for an hour. The variation in the reception given was an interesting insight in itself as it gave an indication about the culture of the organisation by observing and noting the reactions as well as the answers to specific questions. For example one of the topic areas covered in the interview related to the perceived change of trade union influence during the 1980s and 1990s. The manager within the logistics company was more than happy to talk at length about his personal experience during this period of time. Although as he stated that he was "on the other side", he was clearly not against trade union representation. In contrast two of the senior managers spoken to, one from a financial institutions and another from the retail sector, could not see why individual employees would want to belong to a trade union, "they offer nothing to the employee that the organisation can't provide" (HR manager retail company). Although acknowledging that the age of the interviewee could have had an impact on the nature of the response, it was believed that their responses reflected the cultural environment in which they operated.

During the meeting/interview further access to the organisation was discussed. Access was needed to sites in other geographical locations in order to successfully compare and contrast the experiences of each case study organisation. Ability to view company documentation and archival data was also essential in order to analyse the data from a range of perspectives and thus increase the validity of the project. It was also hoped that attendance at a number of works council meetings would be permitted during the study. This proved a problem for some of the companies who were clearly not happy to let a researcher "loose within the organisation" (senior HR manager, financial institution). However, in the end five organisations, to varying degrees, agreed to grant access. These organisations were as follows:

- A large logistics company (Distribution Co)
- A muti-national financial institution (Bank Co)

- A retail organisation (Retial Co)

- A conglomerate of companies that are primarily associated with the production, sale and distribution of beer (Beer Co)

- A traditional manufacturing organisation that experienced privatisation during the 1980s (Aero Co)

3.9   The Interview

Hartley (1999:217) suggests that "theory-building is the key to case study analysis" therefore it was necessary to ensure that an initial framework was developed which can then be "tested against the data gained in the study". This theoretical framework was identified through a study of the literature and the contextual background of the study (cf. chapters 2 and 4). With this in mind and from the basis of the methodological approach adopted it was decided that once the case study organisations had agreed to participate in the study some "'orientation' interviews" (Hartley 1999:218) would be arranged which would allow knowledge to be gained about the history of the organisation as well as how it operated at present. Also it was decided that an organisational chart would be requested. This would, Hartley (1999:218) suggests, identify the principal departments, the work, which the organisation undertook, as well as locating personnel who could add valuable data to the study. Another useful 'tool' would be to ask for a guided tour of the head office and later of the sites to be visited. In this way it may be possible it identify some of the "best (and worst) times and occasions" to visit the sites this will help in the planning of the work (Hartely 1999:218) and will help limit disruption to the company and its personnel.

Once the overview was gained a schedule of interviews and site visits was agreed between researcher and gatekeeper in each of the organisations. It was agreed that this schedule would be flexible enough to adapt to changing situations and unexpected occurrences for either the company or the researcher and it would enable data to be collected in a systematic way.

The interviews were an important data gathering method for this study, as they provided validity as well as value to the research and as such it was essential to spend time deciding on the most appropriate approach. The traditional structure of an interview is that the researcher-respondent relationship is based on a hierarchical framework, in

which the researcher directs the proceedings and extracts information in order to ensure data corruption is limited. The directive approach of the traditionally structured interview highlights the lack of impartiality on behalf of the critical ethnographic interviewer. It is argued that such an interview technique does not provide valid data, in the sense that it presupposes the primacy of the researcher's frame of reference, as well as presuming that there is merely a one-way flow of information. Therefore, the more open-ended, unstructured and relaxed the interview, the greater the opportunity for new issues or information to emerge as both the researcher and the interviewee have the opportunity to clarify points or to 'go off at a tangent' if this is thought to be advantageous.

Yin (1988:89) stated that interviews are the "most important source of case study information" and that open-ended questions were the most commonly used. Open-ended questions allow the interviewee the opportunity to expose their true feelings and opinions on the issue (Grummitt 1980) rather than selecting a response from a proffered list. Such a list may place words into the respondent's mouths, or merely revive dormant feelings and opinions. It is acknowledged that there is still a risk that open-ended questions may also employ subtle direction. However to avoid this, it is necessary for the interviewer to encouraged the interviewee to freely express their opinions relating to the issue without deliberately focusing on any particular topic or issue.

Unfortunately there is the possibility that, by allowing the interviewee to talk freely, without any framework or structure throughout an in-depth interview, focus could be lost and perhaps even time wasted through irrelevant discussion (Robson 1993). This was certainly the case when the interviewee went 'off on a tangent' and the interviewer was unable to bring the discussion 'back on track' within the time frame allowed by the manager concerned (thankfully this only occurred a couple of times).

In order to avoid this problem was necessary to ensure that time was spent considering the nature and the approach to the questioning prior to the interview. For example, it was necessary to identify key interview themes from the literature and develop a loose interview structure which, if necessary, could be supported/re-enforced by probe questions. Probe questions are used to investigate and clarify the interviewee's response

especially in areas, which are believed to be significant to the research (Torrington 1991). The failure to spend time an effort creating and developing appropriate questions and settings could result in the respondent devolving irrelevant information, as already discussed, or merely providing the answers that they 'think' the researcher wants to hear (Easterby-Smith et al 1991:96) in stead of revealing their actual experiences or understandings.

One of the most common criticisms made of qualitative interviews is that analysis based upon qualitative data could easily be distorted by the bias in the researchers' interpretation of that information (Arbnor and Bjerke 1997:241). This could be avoided by gathering other sources of information which will support or contrast that given by the interviewee (Yin 1988:89). Therefore in an attempt to ensure that this did not occur in this study, the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires as well as qualitative data gained from reviewing the documentation and archival records and noting observations were triangulated (Hartley 1999:218). The use of this other data also highlighted a broader aggregate of possible perceptions in specific areas, and conclusions were drawn from the comparison of this data.

Yin (1988:90) concludes that:

> *"Interviews are an essential source of case study evidence, because most case studies are about human affairs. These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation".*

However, Yin (1988:91) adds:

> *"Interviews should always be considered verbal reports... as such they are subject to bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation".*

It is thus important that a comprehensive triangulated method approach is adopted when relying heavily on interview data.

It was decided that the interviews and observations would all be made in shorthand and note form, as it was believed that a tape recorder might hinder some of the interviewees (as well as the interviewer). There is little doubt that a tape recorder provides an accurate copy of words spoken but it fails to note body language etc. Also due to the nature of the research it was felt that a tape recorder would hinder data collection rather than assist it.

In all one hundred and thirty six people were interviewed, generally, for between one and two hours although the five gatekeepers were spoken to, and interviewed, on more than one occasion (cf. table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Interviewees

Position	Number interviewed
Senior Management	15
Middle Management	25
Employees	53
Past and Present	
Trade Union Representatives	21
National Trade Union Leaders	8
Past and Present Politicians	9
ACAS, TUC, CBI	5
Total	136

As well as interviewing key personnel within the case study organisations, interviews were undertaken with senior political figures, the CBI, national trade union leaders, ACAS and the TUC.

The political focus was at first to thought to be an essential part of the research as it assisted in the contextualisation of the study. Unfortunately, although access was gained to senior Conservative MPs, past and present (including Mrs Thatcher, Lord Tebbit and Lord Young) this was not the case with 'New' Labour or the Liberal Party. Therefore the original research design was adapted to accommodate this 'problem' and much of the political influence was taken out of the research.

3.10   Observation

The site visits and the interviews both offered the opportunity to make some direct observations relating to the case study companies. Yin (1988:91) suggests that contact such as this enables the researcher to observe the behaviour and attitudes of individuals within the organisation and that this offers yet another valuable source of evidence within the case study methodology. Observations could be formal such as measuring the times a specific behaviour occurs, or they can be informal in that notes are taken on, for example, the condition of the buildings (this could indicate the wealth and perhaps the culture of the organisation) or body language of the interviewee. Yin (1988:91) adds, "observational evidence is often useful in providing additional information about

the topic being studied" and help the researcher increase their understanding of the "context or the phenomenon being studied".

The field notes were useful and were transcribed at the same time[7] as the interviews and attached to them in the hope that a 'fuller picture' may be gained about each case study organisation

3.11 Documentation and Archival Records

As suggested earlier, organisational documentation and archival records covers a whole range of written material and computer based data and as Yin (1988:85) states is an important component in case study methodology. However due to the amount of documentation that an organisation will keep it is vital that explicit plans are made in order to locate and collect this data.

It is further necessary to highlight that this kind of data is likely to offer a biased account of a particular situation due to its nature i.e. it has been written or recorded for a purpose. Therefore it is necessary to understand that these documents can't be "accepted as literal recordings of events that have taken place" (Yin 1988:86). However it is important that the data is compared and contrasted with other sources to enable the researcher to 'sift' through the 'evidence' and draw conclusions. Yin (1988:86) outlines three ways documentary evidence and archival records should be used within a case study methodology:

- "The documents are helpful in verifying the correct spellings and titles or names of organisations that might have been mentioned in an interview".

- "Documents can provide other specific details to corroborate information from other sources; if the documentary evidence is contradictory rather than corroboratory, the case study investigator has specific reason to inquire further into the topic".

- Inferences can be made from the documents – for example, by observing the pattern of … copies for a specific document, an investigator may begin to raise new questions about communications and networking within an organisation … inferences should be treated only as clues worthy of further investigation rather than as definitive findings"

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[7] This was undertaken as soon as possible following the interview – usually within two hours.

Due to the importance of this data arrangements were made with each of the gatekeepers to access some documentary and archival records. Agreement to examine this information was more readily given in Distribution Co and Beer Co, Bank Co and Retail Co were persuaded after three or four visits to the gate-keeper, Aero Co however proved much more problematic. The initial gatekeeper, who later also restricted access to sites in Scotland without giving an explanation, rejected access to the documentation at Aero Co.

This obstacle was difficult to overcome as it posed a number of ethical problems. Originally access was granted for the research to be undertaken within Aero Co, site visits and interview schedules were agreed. However, six months into the research at Aero Co the initial gate-keeper contacted the researcher and restricted her access to sites in Scotland and some of the documentation requested. At first, it seemed as though a new case study company would be required to replace Aero Co. This would have been unfortunate as Aero Co was thought to be an important component of the study as it was the only company within the study that had experienced privatisation, a factor which appeared to have caused substantial changes in the way management within these organisations operated. As well as this a number of sites had already been visited and interviews conducted whose data on first analysis seemed to providing some very interesting data. Then by chance an opportunity was offered to access the sites directly through another source. An acquaintance, who personally knew the general manager of one of the Glasgow sites, offered to put me in contact with him. After consideration the offer was accepted and the research continued at Aero Co without the knowledge or consent of the initial gatekeeper.

Once this had taken place it was then possible to begin collecting data from the five case study organisations. This part of the research followed a similar pattern to that conducted at the earlier stages, in that, each company was assessed and analysed as the study progressed rather than waiting until the end. In this way it was possible to validate specific findings and to compare and contrast experiences as the thesis progressed.

As each stage of the data gathering, assessment and analysis progressed it provided the study with an increasingly solid body of information that was used to draw the final conclusions and recommendations.

3.12   Conclusion

This chapter has examined a number of theoretical approaches as well as some practical issues that have enabled the selection of an epistemological perspective and a methodology, which were theoretically and practically reliable and valid. It explains how reflection on a priori experiences that has led to this particular study. The study has recognised the preconceptions and ideas of the researcher about the past as well as the present. It is however hoped that these experiences and knowledge could help change, at least in part, the future knowledge and perhaps actions of others.

It has been necessary to outline the epistemological and ontological approach taken as well as highlighting the research methodology adopted in order to identify the methods that would allow the production of a piece of research which is credible as well as enabling an identification and a reflection of the theoretical perspectives. This was essential as without a sound methodological foundation the study could quickly become unreliable and thus invalid.

As highlighted throughout this chapter a pragmatic-critical realist approach has been adopted which used a case study methodology that has enabled data to be inductively accessed from a number of sources. Each method adopted complements rather than contradicts the next and as such has provided a solid framework within which the researcher has been able to undertake the study. However it is important to note that the study has tended to focus more heavily on qualitative methods in that it concentrates on the interaction between the external and internal variables in order to analyse the data. Lincoln and Gubba (1985) have stated that this can result in a well grounded and therefore more credible and reliable theory especially in studies which are concerned with the process or the possibility of change.

The following chapter begins the exploration of both primary and secondary data as well as 'setting the scene' for the thesis.

Section Two

The Case Study

"Development of detailed intensive knowledge about ... a small number of related 'cases'" (Robson 1993:40)

Chapter 4

Distribution Co.

4.1 Introduction

Section one has highlighted that the aims and objectives of this study are to investigate the changes which have occurred within the workplace with a particular focus on the behaviour of British corporate management. It has identified two central, although conflicting arguments from the literature. One arguing that dramatic change has occurred within British workplaces during the period 1979 to 1997 and the second rejecting this theory. It has been suggested that the difference between these two arguments can be located within their research base i.e. that the first argument focused on national level data whereas the second centred on local site level working practices. The present thesis contributes to the knowledge base by combining these two theories through the analysis of data gathered from the five case study organisations at both national and site level. It further seeks to develop understanding in the area of employment relations by adopting a qualitative approach to the collection of data in a field which is at present heavily dominated by quantitative material (cf. Chapter 2 Page 11; Martin 1998:85).

Section two focuses on the case study organisations which were selected at an early stage in the research period. These organisations enabled the exploration of change within the companies selected as well as analysing the adjustments in managerial behaviour during the period in question. As highlighted these companies were selected on the basis of criteria determined from the literature i.e. large multi-plant organisation were taken from different industrial sectors in order to evaluate whether or not the change was universal or whether it was sector specific. The foregoing assisted with the comparison of the data gathered at national and local site level. Another reason for

selecting large organisations was that they employ a larger proportion of the work force (Dix 1999:16) and as such it was believed that if change had occurred within British corporate management's behaviour it would have been identifiable within these organisations. A third criterion for inclusion into the study was that the company should have trade union representation. This was felt to be of importance and in need of further investigation as the literature suggested that the driving force of change had been the adjustment in the role of trade unions within British organisations. As the literature was studied it was concluded that the geographical location of the organisation should be included in the evaluation process as it appeared that differences in management style were dependent on location within the UK. The final criterion was that the organisation was British owned. Although it would perhaps have been of value to examine the impact of foreign owned organisations on the way in which the workforce were managed in the UK it was felt that this would make the study too large to be investigated within the confines of this particular research.

It is important to note again that the pragmatic critical realist approach adopted within this thesis provided the paradigm through which the data was analysed as well as gathered. In particular it was important throughout the study to acknowledge that the understanding of reality and how it is conceived are two different areas because there may be things which are, as yet, beyond conception or even linguistic expression however this does not mean that they do not exist (Johnson and Duberley 2000:152) thus it is a possibility that it may never be possible to know the absolute truth. It is strongly felt that individual behaviour throughout life is shaped by how people 'make sense of' and 'react to' changing environments in the sense that change occurs through the ability to reflect on experiences and to learn from them in order to increase their knowledge base. Due to this belief it was felt that a life history approach to analysing managerial experiences would add value and interest to the study as it allows an examination of the changes that occurred through the reflexivity of different individuals who theorise on past and present experiences in order to give meaning and to predict future actions and behaviour of corporate management.

This method "prioritises individual explanations and interpretations of actions and events, viewing them as lenses through which to access the meaning which human beings attribute to their experience" (Musson 1998:10). It also provides researchers with a 'tool' that allows them to explore the "sense of reality that people have about

their own world" (ibid:11). The data gathered using this method is then interpreted, however, this interpretation ensures that it is a reflection of the individuals perspective "rather than simply that of the researcher" (ibid). Musson (1998:12) adds that:

> *"People are situated within specific historical networks of human relationships and that meanings are generated and decisions taken with reference to that particular living tradition ... [thus] life histories can provide a useful window through which to widen our understanding".*

With these thoughts in mind each case study has used a triangulation of research methods in order to 'paint' a clearer and more defined picture of workplace change throughout the period through the culmination and analysis of data. However, in order to compare and contrast how the different case study organisations have adjusted their management style in response to either internal or external environmental change each relevant chapter has been broken into identical headings which were highlighted as possible 'driving forces' of change (Bloor 1978). This will allow comparisons of the data (Ticehurst and Veal 2000:50):

- Company background
- Increased competition
- Geographical location
- Management style and practice
- Impact of employment legislation
- Trade union recognition and influence
- Organisational culture and structure
- Information technology

All five case studies have offered a different and valuable perspective on how workplace relationships altered between 1979 and 1997 both from their understanding of their specific industrial sector as well as from their unique organisational experiences. They have thus provided a rich pool of data which enabled an exploration of the many facets which emerged throughout the research period. The data gathered will be analysed and evaluated following a grounded theory approach while adopting a 'life history' perspective from a pragmatic critical realist stance.

The conclusions drawn from this study have added value to the area of management research in that it has strengthened data and analysis of change experienced with British workplaces and in particular the behaviour of British corporate management. The following chapters in section two will outline, analyse and evaluate data gathered in

each case study. Section three will then draw this together and draw conclusions as to whether dramatic change has occurred within British organisations with particular attention being paid to the period 1979 to 1997 as well as evaluating the 'driving' force of change within the UK. workplaces.

4.2   Company Background

Distribution Co. began its life as a shipping company in Scotland during the middle part of last century. It has now become arguably, one of Scotland's leading organisations through expansion and diversification of its businesses within the United Kingdom (UK) as well as internationally.

The Company has experienced a large amount of restructuring and change throughout the last two decades. During the 1970s they went through a period of unrest between management and employees, management attributed this to powerful and 'difficult' trade unions. Their businesses, at this time, were highly unionised with well co-ordinated representatives, in fact one site manager in the North East (NE), stated that in looking back to the:

> *"Pre-Thatcher years the company experienced a kind of trench warfare. ...I remember one strike, the drivers had to drive the lorries with wire mesh across their windows to stop them being stoned as the drove through the countryside...The unions had a firm grip on the business and the company was left with little, if any, alternatives. They could not by-pass the unions. If one site was on strike we could not redirect our trucks to another as there would be secondary picketing".*

The same manager however, argued that the some of the trade unions had begun to realise by the end of the 1970s that their more militant actions were actually damaging not only the companies with whom they had a problem, but themselves as well:

> *"I was talking to our trade union official one day in the late 1970s ...he was worried about all the trade union activity and all the trouble and disruption that it was causing especially among the 'ordinary' workers. He predicted ... that this kind of trouble would ensure that there would be a large right wing back lash and that if it happened, the trade unions, had only themselves to blame."*

The human resource director argued that as well as experiencing a 'turbulent' period during the 1970s, Distribution Co, tended to employ 'transitional' workers who used the Company as a kind of 'stop gap' before moving on. However, he suggested that this

did not appear to have caused the company any major 'problems' as the workforce was generally semi skilled. He stated that the Company during this period did not formulate or employ any strategic thinking or planning mainly and argued that this was because the business was growing and "no one was thinking about what would happen when the bubble burst".

Distribution Co. continued to negotiate at both national and local level during most of the 1980s. This was despite the fact that the Company blamed national level agreements for forcing the closure of a number of sites in the north of Scotland and the subsequent loss of jobs:

> *"The distribution costs were too high ... our customers began using local distribution companies. We weren't competitive. The national bargaining had forced us to priced ourselves out of the market." (Personnel Manager)*

By the 1980s, however, the climate within which the company operated was beginning to change (Farnham and Pimlott 1992:53). There was a new government whose policy aims included deregulating the labour market[1] (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:57; Hanson 1994:25) as well as ensuring that the trade union movement became more democratic and accountable to its membership (Letwin 1992:146). The solution, the Conservative Government believed was a "free market [and] strong state" (McIlroy 1991:9). They added that an integrated strategic "economic polity and legal restriction of the unions" was necessary to ensure that union strength would be "sapped" (ibid) and consequently markets would be 'free' to efficiently allocate goods and effectively determine prices and employee wages (ibid:10). Unemployment was increasing as the country entered a period of recession (Johnson 1991:235; Kessler and Bayliss 1995:42-43; Undy et al 1996:18-19; Thatcher 1993:93). The supermarkets, which were one of Distribution Co.'s main clients, were coming under increased pressure from their customers as well as their own industrial competitors. These factors created a new business environment, one in which many companies, including Distribution Co. had to address if they were going to survive.

The Company responded and by 1985 had successfully rationalised itself and identified its key business interests which were encompassed within two main business divisions. The first of these divisions was food services, which included cold storage, food

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[1] Howe, Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his first budget speech outlined a four point strategy which he stated would halt Britain's economic decline. He stressed the need for "higher profitability by means of deregulation and, if possible, without subsidy" (Johnson 1995:78).

processing and distribution. This section of the Company operated within the U K, Europe and the United States. The second area of business was a properties division, which incorporated a number of diverse companies whose operation was restricted to the U.K. However in order for the Company to continue to grow and expand it was thought necessary to 'float' the company on the stock exchange. This now made the Company accountable to shareholders.

The 1990s was a different experience for Distribution Co. Competition increased in a number of areas and the organisation addressed these in a variety of ways. In 1989 the Board, under the leadership of its newly appointed chairman, decided to restructure the Company by dividing it into three core trading areas: distribution, specialist hire, and food services.

4.3   Market Competition

During the 1970s and early 1980s the markets within which Distribution Co. operated were in a highly lucrative position as they had limited competition within the sectors that they operated in. For example, food processing during this period was a new and developing industry which Distribution Co. had managed to become involved in at an early stage and had secured a number of high profile customers. The distribution part of the organisation was also flourishing. The retail market was expanding, new supermarkets were opening in different geographical locations and with them the need to open large central warehouses in order to ensure that shelves were restocked as quickly and efficiently as possible. In the opinion of one senior manager a high level of management skill was not really necessary as the Company was able to make money without really trying. The money was flowing in and the markets within which the divisions operated were flourishing.

> *"Our customers were experiencing a 20% a year growth rate. ... They took us with them. ... They were responsible for our growth." (General Manager, NE, author's own notes).*

> *"There was no strategic planning during the 1980s. No strategic thinking - the business was growing so there was no real concern about these things. No one was thinking about what would happen when the bubble burst - I am not sure anyone expected the honeymoon to end" (Human Resources Director).*

"I think that the company has at last got it right, it's starting to plan and look at ways of bringing in more business. I think that this realisation was forced on them [Distribution Co] because of the take-over bid last year. It shook the very foundations of the Company. We now need to look at how we manage rather than just muddling through" (General Manager, South East Scotland).

However, by the end of the 1980s there was a need to change the way the Company operated and the way management behaved. The profits, which had been so easy to make during the 1980s, began to fall away.

" The company made the mistake of believing that they were responsible for all the growth, that we were a great company which was going to continue to expand and grow. ... When the market began to change [2] there became a need to get hold of all the costs and control them" (Human Relations Manager).

By the mid 1980s competition was intensifying and it became increasingly clear that the Company needed to plan and to develop strategies in order to remain competitive, something which just had not been necessary during the 1970s and the early 1980s. For example, two of their main customers were demanding increasingly higher standards at a lower rates. They were insisting that warehouses, storing their goods, were 'trouble' free and if possible union-free environments, which operated twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. In response Distribution Co. introduced single union deals that stipulated no strike action:

"I was the first person within logistics industry to introduce a single union deal in the UK. This agreement was then adapted and changed to meet the needs of new sites as they opened. We have binding arbitration, a no strike agreement, although, in reality of course, there is not such thing as a no strike agreement - if the workers feel really [upset] then nothing is going to stop them walking out. However, what the agreement says is that if you walk out of the door on strike, you don't come back, you're fired! It was the first logistics site agreement in Britain that had this kind of arbitration. We also wrote huge penalties into the agreement to protect the management. If the work force walked out on strike not only were they sacked but the union also had to pay a large financial penalty, this was our security" (Site General Manager, Scotland).

Distribution Co. therefore, introduced the single union deals as a direct response to increased competition and their customers' requirements.

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[2] The nature of this change was to move away from processed food and its' transportation towards fresh food which needed to be transported quickly from the grower to the supermarket shelves.

To conclude this section it was clear that the intensification of competition had 'driven' much of the change in management behaviour for Distribution Co. during the period.

4.4   Geographical Location

The unions, although agreeing that Distribution Co. was generally a 'good' employer that was prepared to consult and work closely with the various unions, suggested that this was perhaps not due to the paternalistic tendencies of the Company but to the location of many of its sites:

> *"[Distribution Co.] has not really needed to use strong arm tactics with the workforce because, on the whole, their sites are located in depressed areas where the population has problems finding work. ...I have said that the company is not a 'bad' employer therefore, the workers tend to accept their lot. After all it could be much worse if they were out of work altogether or working for someone else and believe me there are some awful employers out their" (North East Regional Officer T & G).*

The geographical location of each site has played a significant role in the attitude of employees to both management and the unions (Martin, Sunley and Wills, 1993, 1994, 1996). For example, one site manager in South Yorkshire stated that his site was situated in an area where the workforce "wouldn't be happy to pack their bags and move in order to find work". He added that the 'community spirit' in this geographical area was very strong in that the people feel close to their families and villages. Martin, Sunley and Wills (1994) add that:

> *"places differ, not only in their economic structures and functions, but also in their inherited cultural, political and social value systems. Local context plays an important role in shaping the existence and persistence of local variations in trade union traditions and industrial relations".*

The manager argued that although the employees at the site were on the whole loyal to him he wondered if this was "real loyalty or whether it is enforced loyalty because they don't want to move away". Whatever the reason, however, on paper the turnover of staff is low and thus in theory the employees at this South Yorkshire site are loyal and content.

Although there is a limited amount of research available in relation to the geographical impact on trade unionism and management behaviour (Massey and Miles 1984; Southall 1988; Massey and Painter 1989; Martin, Sunley and Wills 1993, 1994, 1996).

Work carried out in America by Clark (1989) suggested that, the geographical location and the culture of the local community determined the way in which industrial relations were conducted and that it dictated the context in which, and the type of, restructuring that could be undertaken by the organisation.

Analysis, in this company of trade union membership, loyalty and commitment concluded that it was dependent on the geographical location of the site. This was perhaps due to the industrial relations traditions, which evolved over time within a particular location (Martin, Sunely and Wills 1996:16). For example, the site in Sheffield was located in a traditional industrial area, which had a historical tradition of strong trade unionism through its involvement in industries such as mining and steel.

> *"The level of union membership is high, about 86%, I think. It's a legacy of the geographical area in which the site has been located. The workers have mostly been involved in traditional industries such as steel and mining. Unionism is in their blood." (Site Trade Union Representative, author's own notes)*

This statement was supported by data collected at the Bedworth site. This particular site was built on a greenfield area with little or not traditional unionised industries and as such, appears to have adapted well to the single union agreement which were introduced.

> *"We have really struggled to recruit members at the Bedworth site. I don't know if this is due to the fact that it's a greenfield site and the workers don't think that there is any point in joining a union or whether it's because there is only a limited tradition of unionism in the area." (T&G, National Secretary, author's own notes)*

Therefore, it would seem that the geographical location also played a significant part in the changes that occurred within Distribution Co. during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s.

4.5   Management Style

With regard to management style the research, at an early stage concluded that Distribution Co. fell into one of Weber's (1947) categories, that of a traditional approach. It was argued that Distribution Co., certainly during the early part of the research period had a chairman who dominated the company and who favoured traditional ways of undertaking tasks which was dependent on his reflection on past

experiences in order to influence his decision making. This influenced the way management managed and employees reacted. However as the study progressed it was clear that things were not quite that straight forward in the sense that it was clear that the management style had changed dramatically during the company's growth and development. By the time the research was conducted it was argued that Distribution Co. fell into the category of a sophisticated modern management style. However Purcell and Sisson (1988) sub-divided this category into the 'consulters' and the 'constitutionalists'. Distribution Co. displayed 'consulter' characteristics. This is management that work with trade unions and employers in order to improve their competitive advantage. It was further clear that the organisation showed clear signs of the Shamrock Organisation outlined by Charles Handy in 1989[3]. Handy's model was a useful tool in analysing how Distribution Co. managed its labour force in a changing environment. Each category of employee was easily identifiable throughout all of the different sites. The core professional staff were the engineers, the management and specialist employees who had specific skills and knowledge about the business. These employees were seen as being of importance to the success of the business and as such were generally treated well. They received private medical cover, pensions, cars and training and development. The contract staff were hired to complete tasks which were considered low skill eg) during the latter part of the research period Distribution Co. contracted out the lorry driving to a specialised company thus saving them a huge amount of money and in the opinion of the trade union representative restricting trade union power. The third and final group of employees within Distribution Co. were the flexible workers. These workers were employed on part-time or on a casual basis. Their skills base varied, some were semi-skilled workers while other offered expert advice on a freelance basis.

It is therefore difficult to argue that Distribution Co. had one clear management style throughout the period under investigation.

With this in mind the Company, like many other organisations in Britain during the 1980s and 1990s, found it increasingly necessary to examine not only its communication channels and its relationship with its' employees and trade unions but

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[3] Charles Handy (1989) suggested that many organisations could be represented as a shamrock in that modern organisations have different categories of employees. These different categories are organised, managed and rewarded in a different way. The three leaves represented the professional core, the flexible workers and the contract Employees.

also its general approach to management. This was of particular importance to Distribution Co. as one company director stated:

> "...*Some managers have come out to the dark ages and need to be given a good shake... We have to look at what kind of business we are and we must be honest with ourselves. If we want to screw the unions, lets have it up front and we can hide it in words later, but we must be honest with ourselves. There is no use in having a hidden agenda - it leads to bad management practices. We have to concentrate more on managers' ability than on industrial relations. The management style is very important and I have put together a set of core values, which I look for in a manager. Changes bring serious pressures onto individuals and we must look at management styles carefully - if you go back to the old styles or you don't move forward then the company will go under*"
> (Human Resources Director)

'New' styles of management, which centred on human resources, began to emerge in Britain during the 1980s as a response to globalisation (Lundy and Cowling 1997:1; Storey and Sisson 1995:15). They were based on ideas and practices, which had come from abroad, for example from Japan and America (Storey and Sisson 1995:15). Many organisations, including Distribution Co., were under immense pressure to respond to the changing external environment within which they operated. Companies increasingly needed to look at ways of maintaining their efficiency and market share by becoming more flexible and adaptable (Taoka and Beeman, 1991). In fact, Lundy and Cowling (1997:1-2) have argued that, "at present and in the foreseeable future no business organisation can afford to ignore this [national and] international dimension. Competition has become the name of the game". Porter (1990) states that in order for a company to maintain its competitive advantage it must commit itself to continually looking for ways to improve, innovate, and change. Porter (1990) adds that it is difficult for competitors to copy the individual qualities of the workforce or to a lesser extent technical capabilities and therefore it is important that organisations spend time and money selecting, training and developing their workforce.

By 1990 the Company had, in theory, adopted some of the 'new' human resource management techniques. It had changed the name of its personnel department to that of human resources and to some extent had utilised some HRM policies and practices however there was little evidence that a strategic HRM approach had been adopted.

The management interviewed claimed that, as a result of adopting a HRM approach to management all three divisions of the Company were now able to identify and adapt quickly to their customers' needs. The Company had introduced flexible working practices such as annual hours, shift working, and working seven out of five days in order to enable the sites to operate twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They also consciously increased the number of part-time and temporary staff to cover peak operational times and actively sought to increase the number of women who are employed on these sites.

> *"We have tried hard to bring equality into the company and we have actively tried to accommodate women into our warehouse operations. We have introduced a 9.30-3.30 shift to enable more women to join our team. We find that women in the warehouse bring out the best in the men and the atmosphere is much better when they are around and dare I say more productive. We now have between 10% and 11% in our warehouse."* (Site General Manager, Scotland, author's own notes)

The union agreed that the company had actively sought to increase the number of women within the company however they question whether it is, in practice, part of their efforts to improve it management style. The trade union see it as a way of reducing trade union power within the company and consequently weakening employee 'power' within the workplace (Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000:144).

> *"...They take on women and temps, not because they care about equality, but because they want to increase flexibility and I believe this reduces union membership figures within the company because we, the trade union, aren't able to successfully attract women members"* (T&G NE, author's own notes).

This would be a likely result of such a policy because women along with part-time workers are less likely to join a trade union. It was also evident that the Company not only wanted to reduce union membership, but that it wanted to ensure that no single union was in a dominant position within the organisation.

> *"We, as a company, do not want one union to become too powerful. We do not want one union to control a large number of our sites. We make sure that there is a balance of power"* (Managing Director, author's own notes)

In an interview with the Deputy Divisional Officer of USDAW it became apparent that, although the Company recognised unions they were less committed to working in partnership than they admitted.

"[Distribution Co.] is a funny company in the sense that it seems to support a trade union on the surface but underneath they keep attempting to by pass them. ...I am still puzzled as to the reason that we were asked to become the single union representative on this site. ...I wondered if it could be that they wanted to break the hold of one or two strong unions in case of trouble" (author's own notes).

Along with a significant number of other organisations during the 1980s (Gallie, Penn and Rose 1996:56) Distribution Co. began to open up its internal communication channels. The Company began to move away from communicating with its employees through the trade union towards disseminating information directly to the workforce. One site General Manager suggested that this was a direct attempt to "draw the employee closer to the company's interests and objectives" (Salamon 1998:365). Townley (1994) has argued that communication with employees, throughout the last two decades, had been underpinned in three ways. The first of these was that communication could be seen as a process of education. That it informs the workforce about the organisation and its position within the competitive market place. Secondly, communication is a strategy, which is used to secure commitment from the employees by encouraging feelings of ownership and empowerment. There is of course a third rationale, that this increase in the level and style of communication is an attempt to change the attitudes and beliefs of the workforce by 'painting' management in a favourable light and subverting the role of the trade union towards its members (Fowler 1987; Townley 1994; Miller 1996).

Whatever the intentions of the organisation, research (Gallie, Penn and Rose 1996) has shown that improved communications with the workforce does affect staff loyalty and commitment. For example, in 46 per cent of establishments within Gallie et als (1996) study who had actively sought to improve their channels of communication had found that employees had become more motivated and committed to the company (Gallie, Penn and Rose 1996:57).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Distribution Co., actively encouraged and developed a number of ways of communicating with their employees, for example, through a company paper, team briefings and consultative committees.

"There have been conscious attempts to involve employees. We want to be able to influence the grass roots workforce and communication is the way to do it. The company felt that prior to 1979 there was a political agenda operating

through the trade union which distorted a lot of the information which we were trying to give to the employees. ...We have now developed quite a good level of communication with our workforce. We communicate with the employees on a parallel with the unions. This has allowed us to develop an element of partnership with the trade unions" (Managing Director, author's own notes).

The trade union representatives interviewed agreed that the company had, as part of a number of initiatives, focused attention on improving the level of communication within the company. They supported management's claim that they had attempted to develop a level of partnership with the trade unions. However they were keen to emphasise that the information management released was more often than not biased towards the interests of corporate management (Hussey and Marsh 1982:90) rather than employees in general.

"[Distribution Co] has tried to improve its levels of communication both with us and the workers. Although the information tends to be a bit biased [in favour of the management]. They do talk and consult with us as well as communicating directly with the workers but to be honest, I don't really mind. It saves us money if they are going to pay for all the communication. ...With regard to partnership, well yes, I suppose they are trying to work alongside us ...but only in certain areas and only when they see it benefiting themselves" (trade union representative, T&G North East).

In order to explore different levels and means of communication a number of consultative meetings were attended. The aim of such meetings was to "ensure that there is opportunity for genuine involvement of employees in the activities and plans of the company" (IRS employment trends 529 February 1993:6) and to encourage discussion between management, trade union and employees which are free from any hierarchical management pressures (Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes 1985:97). Within Distribution Co. both union and non-union representatives were chosen to put forward the interests of the workforce.

Despite Distribution Co's stated intention to create a friendly atmosphere between workforce and management this was not achieved at the meetings attended. On the contrary the atmosphere at the meetings was frequently hostile and antagonistic. The conversations were limited and the employee representatives tended to look ill at ease and in some cases bored and uninterested. For example, prior to the commencement of one of these meetings the worker representatives complained among themselves about

the wastage of working time and discussed how they could leave the meeting early. When the General Manager arrived there was a change in the atmosphere and only polite greetings were exchanged. Rather than being a two-way channel for information to flow between the different levels within the site, communication was limited to one-way: management to workforce. On the brief occasion that the employees were 'allowed' to offer their opinions or to express their views and feelings, these were either marginalised or ignored. It should be highlighted that this meeting was not unique as the attitudes and actions of the management were reflected at other consultative meetings attended within this organisation.

Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes (1985:93-95) found that, although the trade union had responded positively when asked to become involved in a joint consultative committee, they remained concerned about the effectiveness of such a committee. Especially, as with Distribution Co, management retained 'control' of the process. The trade union concerned had originally hoped that their participation would give their representatives the chance to demonstrate to other members of the committee the aims, objectives and policies of the trade union which would support and promote the business interests of the company thereby ensuring a better relationship between management, employee and union (Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes 1985:95).

Perhaps some of the dissatisfaction and frustration witnessed by the researcher among the trade union and employee representatives was because control by workers cannot be attained in practice through "participation or involvement with management" with Distribution Co (Scargill 1980:20). Scargill (1980:20) suggested that collective bargaining should continue to be placed at the centre of all employee-management relationships so that employees are able to 'protect' themselves against management. He adds that "limited participation fails to secure workers' power ...[as] it deflects and diverts workers from confronting management and government" (1980:20). Kelly and Hyman (1988) agree and argue that participation and involvement schemes are simply a new, commodified 'tool' used by management to control employees. Foley, Maxwell and McGillivray (1999) add that adoption of such schemes under the guise of 'new' management practices is merely a rebranding of traditional managerial working practices and as such does not engender a harmonious working relationship within the organisation.

The findings in relation to the consultative committees within Distribution Co. as well as those investigated by Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes (1985) appear to contrast with the findings of the survey carried out by IRS Employment Trends (February, 1993) which stated that in general employees "expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the level of employee participation in the consultative process".

4.6   Impact of Employment Legislation

The extent to which change has occurred as a direct result of the legislative reforms in the area of employment relations was not clear.   The management interviewed throughout the research period, were in agreement that the reforms of the Conservative government during the 1980s and 1990s had had some form of positive impact on the way management behaved within the Company although the extent of the change was questioned by some management. However, on further analysis of documentary data together with the evidence they offered it was clear that other external factors had played a more significant role in changing the behaviour of their corporate management.

The management within the distribution section suggested that:

> *"The impact [of legislation] has not been very great, certainly not on the way we manage.   Market pressures have been tremendous. ...Most companies involved in this kind of business have been affected by the competition in the market place. They all have to keep an eye on what the other is doing. They all have to try to make sure that what they are offering is what the customer wants. ...The greatest drive for change [within Distribution Co] has been customer demands. ...Legislation perhaps complemented a lot of what was going on but I don't think that it was the main force of change." (Human Resources Director)*

However, in contrast to the opinions of the management, the employees interviewed suggested that the employment legislation had made an impacted on managerial style. They argued that before the 1980s the trade unions could make management listen to them but now they only listened if they chose to:

> *"Management have certainly got more power now .... You can't just go to the shop-floor steward and make a complaint and expect it to be resolved quickly. They just haven't got the power any more".*

> *"I don't belong to the union anymore, what's the point they don't have any power any more".*

> *"Management seem to be able to change your contract without much consultation these days ... I suppose we should be grateful we've got a job".*

Although it would appear from the above evidence that change occurred employees tended to reflect on the whole 'picture' without attempting to isolate specific variables. Thus it is not clear from interviewing the employees which environmental factor had influenced the shift in managerial and trade union 'power'.

The food services branch of the management argued that, although the 1980s and the 1990s had been a period of change and restructuring, this was the result of the "normal business cycle":

> *"We are in a sector which experiences a cynical business cycle, you know it goes round and round. We travel through peaks and troughs, it's natural ... the employment legislation made very little difference to the way we manage our personnel" (Site General Manager, South East).*

It was felt that as this division together with the generator hire division had maintained its position as market leader, competition was less of a threat than it was in the distribution sector.

One manager in the generator hire sector stated that throughout the 1980s and 1990s they had flourished and had not seen the need to examine the way they managed their business as it was "obviously working". However during last year these latter two sectors of the company became aware that their competitors were closing the gap. This has meant that they have begun to examine working practices alongside the needs of the whole Company in order to work out how to maintain their market share.

To take the Company as a whole it is believed, by the management interviewed that the changes within the economy and the level of competition within the market place were of far greater importance in changing management's perspectives, behaviour and attitudes to the employment relationship than other changes. On the other hand the trade unions, although accepting the increased level of competition and the general instability within the British economy during the last two decades had affected the Company, argue that the employment legislative reforms had had both a direct and indirect impact on the way that the Company managed and behaved towards their employees.

One indirect effect has been the shift in the role of the trade union in policing its membership.

> *"The legislation has forced us into the situation of policing our own members. We can't be seen to be acting contrary to the law and this means that the union officials have to face the members sometimes and become unpopular, really when it hasn't got anything to do with us. ... The workers look to the union officials and see them in the pockets of the managers or at least that's what they think. Our ability to protect the members has diminished over the 1980s. ... We are and are seen to be much less effective"* (T & G Trade Union Representative, South West).

She added that, because it is more difficult for trade unions to take any form of industrial action, it is easier, now, for managers to introduce change than it was during the pre-Thatcher years. This does not mean that the trade union movement is against change, far from it as one National Secretary stated:

> *"Trade Unions and our representatives see the need to change, to meet changing demands. We are not extinct dinosaurs. We are not hostile to change. ... it just means that the trade unions would like some form of consultation process or even partnership before changes were introduced. It just means that the trade union would like some form of consultation process or even partnership before changes are introduced to the workforce ... it makes sense"* (National Spokesman T&G).

Throughout most of the 1990s the Company was divided into three main business areas, logistics, food services and generator rental company. However, as a result of a hostile take-over bid during the middle of 1996 the company's structure was revised. As of 1st October 1997 the company de-merged into two businesses under the control and leadership of two separate board of directors. This would allow each business to give:

> *"Greater 'focus' and shorter lines of communication; each would be closer to its share holders and customers; it would allow for the exercise of more entrepreneurial flair, it would facilitate quicker action – and, by removing the security of cross-subsidy, would allow less 'comfort' and hence sharpen awareness of opportunities and threats"* (Henderson 1993:83)

Alongside this process and, because of the senior management's perceived view that the business needed to be much closer to the City, the logistic section of the business re-located its head office to the South East of England while the de-merged generator hire business remained in Scotland. This resulted in an increased amount of uncertainty

within the workforce as a whole which was apparent from the interviews undertaken within all three core sections of the company and documentary evidence analysed. This appears to have lowered company morale and loyalty (staff opinion survey 1997) and consequently impacting on the psychological contract of a large proportion of employees. The workforce, especially at a middle management level is insecure and de-motivated. For example a Board member, when interviewed said:

> *"We are now too cavalier in our approach to the way we manage people. Look at the Company at present, look at the insecurity that is around. This is not good for our profits or the workforce as a whole."* (Managing Director, author's own notes).

It is believed that there is a general feeling throughout the organisation that it is just a matter of time before the company is taken over by a rival and that numerous jobs would be lost. The corporate management did not appear to be addressing these fears and unrest. The Company had not established a satisfactory way of 'taking the employees with them'.

4.7 Trade Union Recognition and Influence

Although trade unions were recognised in a large proportion of Distribution Co's businesses they were not universally accepted. They had been traditionally recognised in the distribution and the food services divisions and to varying degrees managers within these divisions were happy to work in partnership with them. However, the specialist hire division did not except or recognise trade unionism. Their management, from the outset, rejected any suggestion of recognition but claimed that this was not a result of anti-union feeling. Rather it was because the business was originally a small partnership and as such there was no need for "external interference" in the form of a trade union.

This division of recognition between the specialist hire division and the rest of the organisation suggests that the fundamental corporate belief within Distribution Co. was not, as had been suggested by one senior HR manager, that joint problem solving with employees through trade union representation was the most effective way of managing the workforce. In fact it was felt that management within the specialist hire division actively sought to ensure that there would not be any trade union presence within their division.

The Managing Director stated that the company had developed and grown within a none union culture and now, as one human resource manager argued, they had a "situation where we have a big company with a small family culture". The same manager added that "it's not that we are anti-union" it is because the corporate management believe that they are able to "look after their workers better than any trade union could". Another manager suggested that the workforce "wouldn't benefit from a trade union presence".

However, not all management agreed:

> *"Some senior personnel are very blinked and narrow in their views. They don't examine all their resources. ... Not having unions has caused a number of problems, in my opinion. Yes the management can push changes through with little opposition but it also means that the dinosaurs in the management team do not see the benefits of addressing certain important issues. ...Since I have moved to the company I can see why people join trade unions. I can see that without doubt they can benefit the company by making management sit up and think. They have a lot to offer. I think that the problem today is that too many managers look back to the pre-Thatcher period and think that things will go back to that if they aren't careful. ...The unions have changed; their agenda is different. They need companies to succeed, they want jobs for their members, they have learnt from the past"* (Human Resource Manager).

This opinion is supported by a senior GMB representative who argue that:

> *If a company doesn't compete today then it goes under and our members loose their jobs - who does that help? ...Today I think that the unions are much less keen to enter industrial conflict than they were in the 1970s. ...There is a need for trade unions to understand management but equally there is a need for management to understand the unions, it should be reciprocal"* (GMB Regional Officer, Scotland).

Despite the suggested changes in attitude towards the trade union it was clear that even on sites where trade unions were recognised their treatment was not even. Trade union representatives at a number of locations stated that they had been able to establish a partnership with the management, which would not have been possible during the 1970s. Other representatives, however, have argued that the management has continued to dominate the employment relationship, dictating terms and conditions with little attempt to understand the workers rights or feelings. At one of this Company's new sites the union representative stated that the "[Company] was not workforce friendly".

When asked to expand on the comment the representative outlined a number of areas in which the Company had failed, in his opinion, to give staff the respect and treatment they deserved:

> *"...Another area ...is that most of the workers do not know what shifts they are working until the beginning of the week. This is silly as it doesn't allow time to plan, especially if anyone has child care arrangements to make. The consultative meetings are a waste of time ... the agenda has to be handed to the personnel manager a week prior to the meeting which means the management can prepare all the answers - for-warned is for-armed and we aren't given the same kind of respect. This, together with the fact that the General Manager chairs the meeting, suggests that the only reason the meetings are held at all is so that management can spy on the workforce. They are certainly not caring employers"* (Site Representative, Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW).

During the late 1980s Distribution Co. introduced a decentralisation policy, in which individual sites took responsibility for negotiating and bargaining with the trade unions. The Company stated that this would enable both management and trade unions to become more responsive to customer and employees needs. This, Hill and Pickering (1986) claim was not unusual for a diverse organisation such as Distribution Co. In fact, Rose (2001:331) has suggested that decentralisation of bargaining can help an organisation achieve human resource management objectives, for example "linking pay to productivity on a teamwork basis with team-based bonus systems". He further adds that decentralisation enables management to restructure working practices as well as smoothing the passage for the introduction of technical innovation (ibid). This applied to Distribution Co. who introduced new technology throughout their organisation and restructured working practices at all sites during the 1980s and 1990s.

Although human resource management was adopted in 'name' in the mid 1980s, in practice the transition from theory to practice took a much longer period of time. Further, there is no evidence in the company's records that links changes in working practice through the introduction of a policy of decentralisation to any strategic plan within Distribution Co. In fact, it is argued that the introduction of decentralisation and HRM were pragmatic responses to environmental changes which emerged during the period.

> *"We introduced HRM in the mid-1980s however it was quite new and not all managers throughout the company were aware what it actually meant, either in theory or practice... this resulted in an inconsistency of HRM practices"* (Site General Manager, South East).

This General Manager argued that decentralisation had been introduced to enable management, trade unions and employees to work together in a more "harmonious" way. However the trade union representative at the same site disagreed. He stated that decentralisation together with the introduction of HRM had been made in order to make it more difficult for the union to take industrial action by:

> *"Wooing the employees with false promises of involvement and participation policies with the added incentive of being able to make more money through schemes such as profit related pay".*

He suggested that this opinion was strengthened when an examination of other policies was undertaken, for example the introduction of single union deals, the fact that the Company was choosing to recognise a range of different unions across their various sites rather than one trade union thus weakening the over all power of trade union representation.

To conclude it was clear that the decentralisation of bargaining together with the introduction of HRM has had a dramatic impact on the behaviour of corporate management within Distribution Co.

Another element that appeared to reoccur in the data was the move towards single union deals. The term 'single union deal' was used by a number of organisations during the 1980s and 1990s to describe a package of measures that were generally used on greenfield sites including some or all of the following elements:

> *"Sole bargaining rights for one union; single status for manual and staff employees; a system of employee communication and participation, commonly based on a company council; labour flexibility and the elimination of traditional demarcation; "no-strike" provision; and pendulum arbitration"* (Industrial Relations Review and Report 1993a:3)

This was the case with this Company.

However, it should be noted that although the driving-force to adopt these single union deals was without doubt economic, it is debatable whether such deals could have, successfully, been introduced without a decline in union power within Distribution Co. The Company introduced no-strike deals which were in operation in most of the Company's sites and there were an increasing number of sites which were only recognised a single union.

The Company argued, that these deals enable management to respond quickly to the changing economic environment within which they operate and that they are able to adapt and respond to fluctuating needs of their customers. Distribution Co., along with a number of other companies, suggest that one of the main elements of the single-union package is total flexibility (Industrial Relations Review and Report 1993a:13). A survey carried out in 1993 added that a number of the managers had:

> *"Considered that single-union agreements would help secure greater flexibility from employees and encourage higher levels of commitment, whilst others felt that such deals would promote non-adversarial industrial relations and simplify the bargaining process, as well as contributing to more effective communications" (Industrial Relations Review and Report 1993a:7)*

Lewis (1990) highlighted this argument, when he stated that single union deals conjure:

> *"Up an image of modern and progressive industrial relations, allowing for responsible trade unionism within an institutional framework conducive to efficiency and profitability."*

However, Lewis (1990) also identified an alternative perspective, that such deals were merely a means of subordinating the workforce and weakening the trade union within an organisation. He argued that:

> *"Strike free [was] a transitional stage to union-free"* (Lewis 1990).

Although the level of trade union membership within Distribution Co., has not declined significantly, the company has not experienced any strike action since 1988 when these single union, no strike deals were first introduced. This supports the findings of the IRS Employment Trends single union deal survey (Industrial Relations Review and Report 1993b:10) which stated that only 13 per cent "of the surveyed organisations said that they had been directly involved in industrial action since signing their single union deal". Whether these single union, no strike deals are the main reason for this is unclear. However it is important to highlight at this stage, that it was also a period of high unemployment and economic turbulence which contributed to the feelings of

vulnerability and insecurity which were clearly felt by employees throughout Distribution Co.

In relation to the level of trade union influence, representatives from each of the sites visited were asked whether or not there had been a change in the level of trade union influence since 1979. All of them stated that there had however, the exact reason for this change was less clear. A majority felt that the degree of change was the result of a number of issues such as changing environmental factors; geographical location; whether or not it was a green field site; was there a tradition of unionism within the surrounding communities; the composition of the work force, i.e. ratio of men to women, full to part time workers; the attitude of the management and level of trade union membership.

Some of the older, more established sites were one hundred per cent unionised with strong and active union representation and had on the whole remained that way throughout the 1980s and 1990s. However, one senior manager suggested that there had been a noticeable change in the behaviour and attitudes of some of the more recent trade union representatives.

> *"The trade union reps have changed during the last twenty years. Strikes are for the militant left not the trade unionists of today. ...Perhaps this is because most trade union leaders are now well educated individuals. It makes a difference ...when you have to negotiate with a union, it is much easier to communicate and reason with someone who is your own intellectual equal. It's easier to make them see reason"* (Site General Manager, Scotland).

4.8 Organisational Culture and Structure

Throughout the 1980s the Company continued to flourish, opening new sites in each of its divisions throughout the U.K. The General Manager at one site in the North East suggested that there was a strong 'feel good factor' throughout the whole company and that morale was relatively high. He added that this was in part related to the paternalistic practices of the organisation, "if you worked hard and stayed loyal to the company you would be 'looked after', your job would be secure and you could look forward to promotion" (author's own notes).

> *"[Distribution Co.] was always paternalistic. It was believed that employees should be honoured to be employed by the Company – at least that's what the*

> *old guard [management] thought.   They used to provide free buses, a good*
> *nosebag, free site nurse at some sites.   ... The employees responded well to the*
> *provision of welfare facilities" (Human Resources Director, author's own*
> *notes).*

One of the main unions operating within this Company, the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G), agreed that up until recently Distribution Co treated its employees in a paternalistic fashion:

> *"The work force has always been suspicious of management, perhaps because*
> *they [Distribution Co.] work in a very traditional and highly unionised industry.*
> *However the Company has generally not tried to inflict change on their staff*
> *without consultation with us [the T & G].   [Distribution Co.] is very good at*
> *consulting and negotiating change, I think that they realise that if the business is*
> *to be successful they must take their employees with them.   The last major*
> *change which was introduced, a flexible working programme, took three years*
> *of careful negotiation.   This was good for a number of reasons, firstly, it was*
> *gave us time to carefully go through the proposed changes; secondly, the*
> *workers were given time to think about change and the consequences if they*
> *didn't adopt them.   I think in the end that they realised that the company has to*
> *compete with loads of other companies and this has brought an air of reality*
> *into the negotiations"   (T&G Regional Secretary North East, author's own*
> *notes).*

The data examined in relation to Distribution Co's paternalistic management style during this period supports this statement however, the data suggests that this is not now the case.   The economic climate together with labour market changes within Britain during the 1980s and 1990s (Undy et al 1996:18-25) altered the situation.

> *"Will the company be taken over?   Will the Plc get rid of us?   Are we*
> *competing? Can we become more flexible? Can we perform more efficiently?*
> *These issues have caused a lot of problems for both management and employees.*
> *...Up till now we have sheltered our people, now we can't the pressure from the*
> *market place is too great" (HR Director).*

In response to the changing environment Distribution Co decided to restructure.   The head office personnel were rationalised and decentralised. A tier of administration was removed from the centre and all functions, except key corporate activities such as finance and personnel were transferred to the individual divisions and sites.

> *"It was obviously time for a change. The company at last agreed to get rid of the old vanguard and their old fashioned, out of date, inflexible ideas and they introduced new blood into the business" (Human Resource Director).*

Restructuring was required, in the opinion of one senior manager, to meet the changing needs of the customers as well as the economy (Gennard 1993:71; Gill 1989). The rationalisation process also encouraged the organisation to focus on areas where they had a:

> *"Real demonstrable and maintainable competitive edge" (Chief Executive of Distribution Co. 1996:34 The Story of Distribution Co. London).*

After analysis of a number of reports and consultancy documents it was clear that the aim of the restructuring was to move the business forward and to increase its efficiency and profitability. It was recommended, by a senior manager, that the best way of achieving this was to ensure that the managers on each site 'took' the trade unions as well as their workforce with them rather than acting like macho-managers:

> *"I wanted to bring the trade unions on board and to work with the unions. There was however a number of people in the company who thought that you could just plough through the bodies because they believed that the Thatcher government had done its job well and crushed the unions. However I believe that it is better to control the unions through wooing and charm rather than take them on headfirst. Its much better to be non-confrontational" (Human Resources Director).*

This was not an easy task as the management, employees and the trade unions struggled to adjust to the reality of the Company's changing fortunes. The first attempt to introduce the kind of restructuring that was recommended by the consultants was not successful. In fact the Human Resource Director stated:

> *"It failed. We didn't take the people with us. The company wanted new techniques on line within a six-month period. For the first twelve months or so this worked but as the business gradually became more demanding these techniques cracked under pressure. The managers weren't getting the flexibility they needed from their employees because they didn't really know or care about how to manage individuals. The workers on the shop floor began to rear up and the trouble began. ACAS was brought in to undertake an industrial relations audit and we put together a steering group and got lots of communication going. ...We made the big decision to allow the trade union access to our financial*

> *information in an attempt to let them see that there were real needs to*
> *rationalise and restructure".*

Although Distribution Co claimed that in order to restructure it had to invest in managerial training and development. The evidence suggests this was not occurring. The documentary evidence examined confirmed that the company had continued to promote individuals who had started their working lives as a blue-collar worker to senior positions within the company. For example, the General Manager of one of the Scottish sites had begun life as a wages clerk and another had begun life as a long distance lorry driver for the company. Unfortunately this has not necessarily always been beneficial to the economic success of the company due to the Company's lack of investment in training and development policies. Although Distribution Co's 'Personnel Policy' clearly advocates that:

> *"All training must be focused and tailored to suit our business needs. Whilst we*
> *must use a significant training input from outside the Company, we must also*
> *make the best use of the training resources from within. Therefore, managers at*
> *all levels of the business will be required to offer support on internal training*
> *and development programmes."*

There is only limited evidence of this policy being put into practice.

The failure to ensure that all employees were adequately equipped for their role within the Company has resulted in staff being given positions for which they lack either the skill or experience.

Distribution Co., however, is not alone in this as it has been suggested that British organisations have a "history of chronic under-investment in the training of employees" (Lundy and Cowling 1996:250; Handy 1987; Storey and Sisson 1993). In fact Lundy and Cowling (1996:256) state that a majority of the 2.75 million managers in the U.K. have little if any formal management training or education and highlight that U.K. managers receive "an average of one day's formal training per year ... the majority receive no formal training." The TUC, in response to the Labour Government's Green Paper on lifelong learning, also highlighted the lack of commitment by employers to training within British companies (Personnel Today 1998:3). Ashton and Felstead (1996:250) point-out that some employers leave the market to determine their training and development policies and suggest that, "HRM policies and practices associated with training have taken root in only a few British companies". In fact Finegold and Soskice

(1988) describe Britain as in a 'low skill equilibrium' with a large majority of organisations being run by badly trained managers and employees who in turn produce low quality goods and services. This could be, as Storey and Sisson (1995:38) argue, because:

> "Education, training and development in the United Kingdom ... [has] been massively influenced by the 'voluntaristic' tradition".

The lack of adequate training led to industrial conflict within Distribution Co on a number of sites and created unnecessary tensions within some departments and divisions. One senior manager stated that unqualified personnel had been promoted beyond their capabilities and added that the "old vanguard" who had worked their way up from the shop floor to management and even in one or two cases beyond, had tried to manage in the same way that they had always done despite "dramatic" changes in the external environment. This manager suggested that these individuals didn't have the appropriate managerial or educational skills to adapt to the changing business environment and concluded that:

> "We had to get rid of them, well most of them, and bring in some new blood".

However, there is little evidence that any attempt was made to train and develop management or to replace 'poor' management with better trained personnel throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

With regard to the level of trade union representation during the 1980s and 1990s, the management interviewed stated that the Company's work force did not need the protection of trade unions as they were 'looked after' by the Company throughout the period thus, their influence had decreased. This, according to a number of senior and middle managers, was due to the success of Distribution Co. during the 1980s. One manager claimed that the Company's leadership naively believed that this prosperity would not end and was thus content to allow the employees to share the 'fruits' of their success and to pass the costs on to the customer which had further weakened the 'power' and influence of the trade unions:

> "During the 1980s and 1990s the workers didn't need the unions to provide benefits, they were received benefits directly from the Company. They felt secure and looked after, and by and large this was true" (Site Manager, NE).

> "In the 1980s there was no major battles with the union, the Company was content to go for a 5% pay increase [each year]. The union usually accepted it

knowing that they could make up any short fall in their overtime payments and we [management] didn't mind as we knew that the customer would cover the cost" (Human Relations Manager).

4.9   Information Technology

Information technology has developed considerably between 1979 and 1997 and has in general affected all areas of organisational life but in particular it has had a greater impact on the employment relationship (Rose 2001:281). Rose (2001:281) divides the areas into four parts: the first, he suggests involves informing and automating. Automation, Zuboff (1988) argues updates technology or can replace employees in order to increase the efficiency of processes ensuring continuity and control and ultimately increased profit. While undertaking automation Zuboff (1988:25) information is gathered and thus results in an increased amount of data being available to management as well as employees. To conclude Zuboff (1988) suggests that information technology increased the availability and amount of data that employees can access, keep, utilise and if necessary manipulate in order to improve organisational performance. The second area Rose (2001:282) calls replacement or compensation. This idea is based on the belief that technology can achieve more and more and as this happens people will be required to do less and less. Rose (ibid) argues that from this approach unemployment will increase and individuals will have career paths limited. However he states that "certain compensatory and limiting mechanisms" may be put in place in order to offset the negative aspects. For example he suggests that if the technology does create organisational growth there may be new employment opportunities created.

The third area identified by Rose was "action-centred and intellective skills" (Rose 2001:282). Action-centred skills within the work place are gained by manual workers and are based on their physical abilities. However as organisations become more knowledge based these jobs become redundant. Therefore the introduction of technology changes the skills base of employees required to undertake specific tasks. The fourth and final area highlighted by Rose (2001) he calls "upskilling or downgrading?" Rose (2001:282) bases his argument on the work of Braverman (1974) who suggested that automation would deskill the workforce. Although Rose (2001) accepts that in certain instances deskilling has been a result of information technology it

has also resulted in some upskilling and the need for a broader spectrum of skills within the workforce.

In 1973 Bell suggested that information technology along with a number of other changes within Society would transform the way organisations functioned. He argued that the UK would become an information society which would drive economic growth by improving organisational efficiency while reducing working hours. Toffler (1980) develops this and suggests that information technology will empower individual employees. However this was not what the evidence at Distribution Co showed. The evidence suggested that Distribution Co had used new technologies to deskill and replace employees as suggested by Braverman (1974) within their distribution sites. Ackers et al (1996) state that information technology can be used to increase monitoring and surveillance of employees which was certainly the case within Distribution Co both within the ware houses as well as the various administrative offices through the monitoring of times etc. of emails.

This was highlighted at one of the London distribution sites where new technology was introduced to 'improve performance' and output. The technology was introduced without consultation with either the workforce or the trade union. Both the workforce and the trade union objected to the sweeping changes along with a redundancy package which was offered to employees who no longer served a purpose. The management of Distribution Co refused to enter any form of negotiation and made the entire workforce redundant replacing them with employees who we willing to work with the new technology. At the same time a new non-union agreement was introduced. The trade union representative suggested that this was aggressive management behaviour which could be likened to Ruper Murdoch's action within News International in 1984[4].

Ackers et al (1996) argue that information technology can affect the employment relationship in three ways:
1.   Its ability to "increase direct forms of communication and therefore side-step union channels and networks (Ackers et al 1996:12).
2.   Its potential to "increase monitoring and surveillance of employees" (Ackers et al 1996:12).

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[4] See McIlory 1991:109-110

3.   Its ability to integrate "employees into the company ethos and interests through the use of video and visual communications" (Ackers et al 1996:12).

It was clear from the data gathered that Distribution Co used information technology in all three ways. However it was felt that the management of the organisation tended to use the first two ways on a frequent basis in order to increase their control of the workforce. The third method was used infrequently and tended to be a way of communicating downwards to the employees. The trade union representative at a site in Sheffield argued that:

> "Information technology had been introduced throughout the organisation however it did not appear to have been introduced to make employees lives easier but to constrain and monitor them".

The same representative admitted that information technology had been introduced to management levels as well as the shop floor and that they too were being monitored "but not in the same way".

Management throughout Distribution Co appeared to dislike the introduction of information technology within Distribution Co and there is documentary evidence to suggest that they fought to keep it out. One manager argued that he was much less efficient now he had to "type [his] own reports" because only "senior management now had secretaries".

Therefore to conclude Distribution Co on the whole had not used information technology in a very worker friendly way and instead of improving working life and increasing organisational productivity had increase employee and union suspicion and thus increased resistance to information technology within the organisation.

4.10   Conclusion

Therefore following the analysis of Distribution Co. it was clear that a number of factors had led to the changes which had occurred throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the behaviour of British corporate management and employment relations.

The main 'driving' forces for this change with Distribution Co. were identified as:

- Increased Competition
- Geographical Location
- Management Style

As discussed the geographical location played a significant part in the behaviour of all three of the main actors within Distribution Co., management, trade unions and employees. For example, the geographical location was important to the trade unions as it impacted on their ability to influence site managers during the late 1980s and 1990s. This was because trade union influence was conditional on a number of areas for example, the industrial relations 'culture' of the location either strengthened or weakened the amount of influence and the levels of membership that trade unions had on each specific site.

As discussed increased competition put pressures on Distribution Co. Distribution Co. responded in a number of ways. During the mid 1980s it undertook a major restructuring of the whole of its businesses and divisions. It moved away from its traditional paternalistic approach to the management of their employees and introduced a policy to encourage all managers (including line managers) to adopt human resource management practices.

It also began to discuss the possibility of decentralising all but the key corporate management tasks to site level. There was no evidence from the company's records that a strategic plan had been drawn up (or even discussed) to enable the integration of policies throughout the organisation. Despite this the policy was introduced at the end of the 1980s and it signalled a change in the behaviour and control of corporate management within this organisation. It became clear from an analysis of the evidence that this decentralisation policy had a dramatic impact on the behaviour of corporate management in so far as their ability to control the day to day operation of the sites was limited. They were thus, encouraged to focus on the strategic plans for the business however this was a skill which many of them did not have due to the lack of training and development.

The geographical location was also a factor which influenced management behaviour in that it determined the context and type of restructuring that could be undertaken on each site as this was again reliant on the beliefs and values of the local communities from where Distribution Co drew their workforce. Unemployment was also a central factor in the behaviour of management within Distribution Co. in so far as if unemployment levels were high around the location of a specific site then there was strong evidence to

suggest that management introduced more dramatic changes in the working practices of these sites. It was also evident that it was on these sites that Distribution Co. introduced more new technology at a much faster rate than on sites where unemployment was not an issue. On these sites management consulted and negotiated with both employees and the trade unions in a more democratic fashion and from the data collected, considered their opinions and ideas before the new technology was introduced.

The geographical location also impacted on levels of staff turn-over and absenteeism in that sites located in an area of high unemployment or where traditional industrial relations beliefs and practices were common the rate of staff turn-over and the level of absenteeism was low. This was not thought to be due to the commitment of the staff to the organisation but rather to the fear of loosing their employment or their distaste for moving away from family and friends in order to find new employment. In contrast, sites located in areas where unemployment was not an issue, staff turn-over and absenteeism (particularly the day after pay day) was high.

Alongside this policy of decentralisation Distribution Co. changed the name of the personnel department to department for the management of human resources. It changed the methods of communication, working practices, team working and introduced productivity bonuses at this time. With regard to communication methods Distribution Co. introduced a company newsletter which was circulated to all of the workforce. This newsletter included general company information as well as reporting interesting social news about individual workers. They began team briefings and encouraged workers to talk over areas for concern with their respective line managers. Later, in the mid-1990s Distribution Co., launched the company intranet and introduced joint consultative committees with the intention of increasing the nature and channels of communication with their workforces. The intranet however, experienced a number of early problems as not all employees could access a computer which restricted their ability to locate information such as health and safety policies or current news items. Another problem was that even those who did have access to a computer did not all have the knowledge and ability to benefit from this method of communication.

It also issued a policy stating that all levels of the workforce should be trained and developed in order to improve skills and increase commitment to the organisation.

Despite the introduction of this policy initiative there was little evidence in the company records or in the interviews conducted that any strategic or coherent training and development programme had ever been put in place. In fact, the research discovered that many managers within Distribution Co. had been promoted in line with the length of time they had worked with the Company with no consideration being given to supporting them through managerial training programmes.

There is however, little evidence to indicate that the introduction of human resource management was any more than a paper exercise and a change of departmental name. There certainly is no evidence within Distribution Co. to support the claim that they had introduced a fully coherent strategic human resource management policy.

From the mid-1980s onwards the company began to increase its use of non-standard forms of employment contract. This was undertaken in response to the increased levels of competition in the economic sector within which they operated. As has been noted Distribution Co. used a wide variety of non-standard employees to support their flexibility and improve their outputs (see figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1   **Distribution Co.'s Use of Non-Standard Contracts to Increase Flexibility**
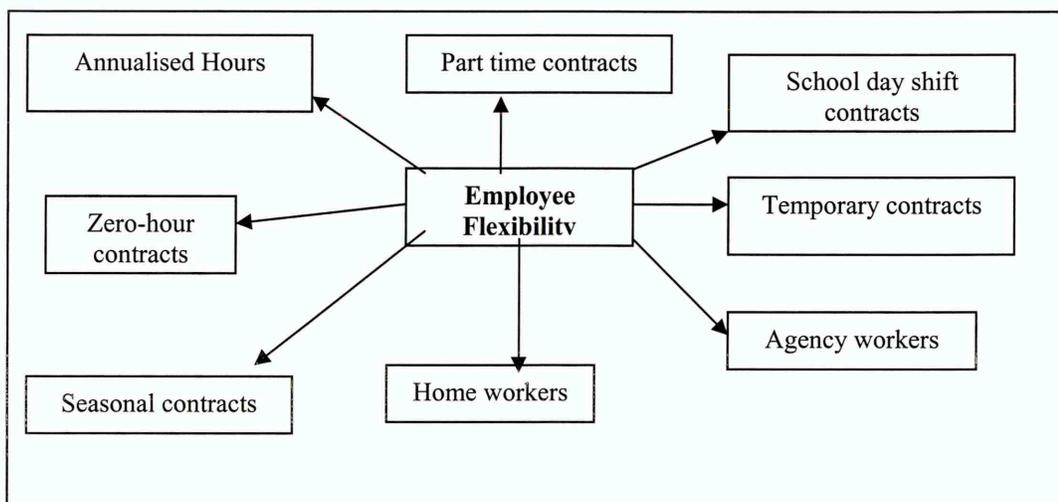
Not all of these 'flexible' non-standard working practices were successful for example; the allowance for some middle and senior managers to work from home during part of

the week was withdrawn with no explanation to the workforce after only six months. Although no documentation could be located to explain this action data from the interviews suggests that corporate management did not like the perceived loss of control over their workers.

The use of agency workers has also been reduced as their popularity expanded within the economic sector their costs increased and it was believed that these workers did not provide value for money in that time had to be spent training them to do the job. Another problem with the agency workers was that as their costs increased more traditional employees felt angry as they were undertaking similar tasks, and had more skills, but they were being paid less than this non-standard workforce.

The other forms of non-standard workers have continued to increase throughout the company as they felt that they enabled the company to respond quickly to changing situations and acted as a role model for some of the more traditional workers who could see no benefit in working flexibly. Therefore, an advantage of using non-standard workers appears to be that they are not as heavily unionised as the full-time more traditional workers and thus, the company notes, is an area of employment that should be encouraged as:

> *"Lower levels of trade union membership means less conflict between employers and employees and greater profitability" (minutes of meeting at head office, March 1993).*

Although it is evident that increased competition did have a significant impact on Distribution Co. this was not generally felt until the late 1980s and thus, many of the changes identified above did not occur until the early part of the 1990s

In conclusion then the aim of this chapter was to introduce Distribution Co. and outline the contextual environment in which it has operated during the 1980s and 1990s using a life history approach to the analysis. This was believed to be important to the study as it was thought that a full analysis of the subject could not be undertaken without having some knowledge of the history and context in which this organisation operated.

It has highlighted key periods of change for Distribution Co. from the perspectives of corporate management, trade unions and employees and has suggested factors which have 'driven' and supported these changes throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The following chapter approaches the analysis for Bank Co. in a similar way to the one adopted here in that it provides the contextual and historical background of the organisation by using a life history approach to the evaluation of the data.

Chapter 5

Bank Co.

5.1   Introduction

Chapter 4 examined Distribution Co. and was subdivided into eight sections. This present chapter will, according to case study tradition, follow an identical pattern (Ticehurst and Veal 2000:50), however, in line with a grounded theory approach it will use the information and data gathered and analysed within Distribution Co. This will allow the evolving theory to be compared, contrasted and tested as the study progressed to enable new theories and data within Bank Co. to be accessed and evaluated effectively.

This chapter will begin by providing an historical perspective of the company before assessing the organisational, managerial and industrial relations experiences throughout the period, it will conclude with a general overview of the organisation.

5.2 Company Background

Bank Co. is a large UK based financial institution, which is primarily engaged in the banking and investment business. It has numerous sites situated throughout the United Kingdom, Europe and the rest of the world. The organisation is also one of the leading providers of co-ordinated global services to multi-national enterprises and financial institutions throughout the world.

The organisation has been a British banking institution for over three hundred years and has therefore experienced a great many changes. It began 'life' as a private banking company, keeping customers gold deposits secure and offering credit to 'worthy' merchants. By the 1890s however, financial institutions such as Bank Co. were 'forced' to restructure in order to meet the changing demands of their customers. They came together with twenty similar businesses to create a new joint-stock bank. From this

point onwards Bank Co. expanded quickly through take-overs and mergers and in 1918 the Company became one of the UK's 'big five' banks. Growth, however, was not restricted to the U.K. and today it has a presence in sixty-four countries.

In order to manage such a large institution it became necessary to divide the organisation into a number of major global businesses each one focusing on the needs of a particular 'set' of customers. For the purpose of this thesis, however, the research has centred on the British based section of the organisation. This was due to a number of factors firstly, to undertake a comprehensive piece of research on the whole of this organisation would have demanded more time, money and analysis than was available. Secondly, access was difficult to obtain within the British based part of the organisation therefore it was felt access to sites in other countries would have proved difficult, if not impossible. Finally, as the study was centred on Britain it was questionable how much analysis and value could be added to the study by extending the research into rest of the world.

Throughout the early part of the research period, the 1980s, Bank Co. continued to dominate the U.K. banking sector. Its working practices remained on the whole unchanged. Employment relations was, according to the evidence, stable. However by the end of the 1980s the Conservative government had deregulated the financial sector which de-stabilised Bank Co. and led to a dramatic change in the way the organisation operated.

5.3   Market Competition

The financial sector of the economy has, since the early 1990s, struggled to remain competitive (Cressy and Scott 1992). This increased competition coincided with the deregulation of the financial sector and the conversion of many of the building societies into banks (Cressey and Scott 1992; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996; Gregory and O'Reilly 1996; Holden 1999). These changes had an impact on Bank Co. which experiencing serious problems at this time and suggestions were made about the possibility of a take-over:

> "...In the early 1990s, we had problems - there was a lot of corridor talk, you know gossip, that we were failing and that perhaps an American company might be looking at a take-over bid. It was then that we realised that there was a need to change" (Manager, West Yorkshire).

This encouraged the company to examine carefully its infrastructure and management practices in order to maintain its market share. The same manager confirmed that Bank Co had felt the competitive pressure from other organisations who had introduced new methods of banking for example, telephone banking and insurance (Gregory and O'Reilly 1996:210; Holden 1999). He suggested that Bank Co's concern during the 1990s had been to identify customer needs as it was seen to be an area where the competitive advantage could be re-established. He highlighted that the organisation had introduced a number of 'new' products in response to competition. However, rather than taking on the whole of Bank Co, these new competitors had targeted specific sections of the business for example, Virgin, who he admits "gave us a real scare" with their on-line bank. It was the 'new' areas of banking that Bank Co believed it was at its most vulnerable. He concluded "we had to change or die; it's the nature of the business we are in".

As a direct result of this increased competition, the company was pressurised to change and adapt to meet the challenges which have been established by its' rivals (Gregory and O'Reilly 1996:223; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996). As such they were forced to invest in new technologies as well as examining 'new' management styles:

> *"We are competing for our internal work as well as our external business. Therefore the justification for all the restructuring is; customer choice, cutting costs and becoming leaner, and increasing the number of services that we offer the customer. ...The new banks have entered into the business fully equipped. Their information technology has been designed to suit them and to meet the needs of the 1990s and beyond, whereas we are having to spend a large amount of money in order to adapt what we have and to keep up with them" (Employee Relations Manager, London).*

This has meant that more emphasis needed to be placed on the efficiency of working practices and employee productivity. The Employee Relations Manager at Head Office stated that Bank Co had managed to "cut out" many unnecessary processes in an attempt to "balance out time and cost against the level of risk". She stated that the Company had actively sought to introduce more automated processes, in areas such as lending for example. She further argued that economies of scale meant that Banking Co. benefited from centralising many of the mundane tasks (Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996) for example, all mortgages were now processed in Leeds. She concluded that on the whole branch staff are not involved in sales and services any more

as it is now all done centrally through specialised departments (Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996).

However, Bank Co was not alone in its fight to protect its market share within the financial sector, Holden (1999) argued that the British bank in his research had also experienced considerable pressure for "radical market changes ... and the implementation of new technologies and work practices". He also highlighted the problems were magnified when the sector was deregulated in the late 1980s. This view was supported by Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson (1996) in their study when they state that "the banking industry has undergone profound change in recent years ... the combination of deregulation and, in particular, the removal of barriers between different types of financial institution, new technology and increasing competition has led to fundamental changes in banking practice" and management behaviour.

Cressey and Scott (1992) suggested that many banks had, in the 1980s, become involved in a number of 'bad' investments and mergers which taken with the down-swing of the economy during the early 1990s caused them enormous problems. For example the property boom in the late 1980s had led to a sharp rise in property prices which outstripped the 'real' value in relation to the rest of the economy so when the bottom fell out of the market the banks and creditors found themselves in negative equity situations (Holden 1999). In the past the situation would have been softened by their lucrative personal business however following the deregulation of the market competition had intensified and this 'cushion' no longer existed (Rose 1980:9; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996). This, Holden (1999) has argued, forced the banking sector from an institutionally rigid structure to a totally commercially orientated business-like industry. "Banking was now a totally competitive industry, virtually world wide" (Wilkinson and Lomax 1989:15; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996).

The change in the company's structure and approach to employment relations has meant that there has been a change in the type of staff employed by Bank Co (Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996). This included the increased use of contract, temporary and part-time staff. This again supports Cressey and Scott's findings (1992:91) as they conclude that there has been a dramatic increase in the recruitment of atypical staff, especially part time female low-grade clerical staff since 1990 throughout the whole

banking sector. Management claims that this has been necessary in order to make the organisation leaner and fitter (Cressey and Scott 1992:95):

> *"We can now raise or lower the staff to meet our work loads and we have the ability to target peak times, something that just wouldn't have been possible if we had to offer everyone a full time permanent job." (Manager, West Yorkshire)*

The union, however, views this approach as "very short termist" in the sense that although this may solve immediate problems for the company, the long term plans may be affected by the lack of motivation and loyalty which these 'types' of employees offer. Cressey and Scott (1992:91) also suggest that employees within these large clearing banks are becoming increasingly discontent and demotivated as they can see the opportunity for promotion declining and their job security diminishing (Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996). This was certainly the case within Bank Co as employees and some managers commented that morale was low and that "there was a lot of whispering in the corridors" (worker A in own notes for Bank Co) about where the organisation was going and how safe their employment was. This is occurring, Cressey and Scott (1992:91) argue, as "banks shed staff, branches close, and a bottleneck thus develops". This was made much worse by Bank Co who, as outlined above, introduced a re-grading exercise which BIFU suggest resulted in pay cuts for some of the workforce while undermining employee commitment and trust in the organisation.

Despite the amount of restructuring which has already been undertaken by the company both management and the unions believe that there is much more to follow. A Senior Operations Manager in the north-east stated that Bank Co was really only in the early stages of restructuring in that at present only the first step of a three step plan had been undertaken. He argued that Bank Co. had spent quite a lot of time and effort ensuring that the infrastructure was carefully in place before it embarked on "much more dramatic changes". Step two of this 'master plan' would see a move towards one or two regional centres and Step three would see the creation of four or five national centres. However he highlighted that this was some way off at present.

The re-organisation, which has already been undertaken, has led to a considerable amount of job losses and a certain amount of management restructuring.

> *"Five years ago, in Birmingham, there were five functional units with an aggregate staff of 520, today there are 380, so far this has been achieved without any compulsory redundancies" (Senior Operations Manager, Midlands).*

Management claims that although desirable, voluntary redundancies are not always possible, for example:

> *"...Three years ago in the South East we had to carry out some compulsory redundancies. We try to re-deploy workers first by releasing temporary, contract and agency staff but this is not always a possibility"* (Employee Relations Manager, London).

The evidence has thus suggested that Bank Co. changed in response to an increase in external competition following the de-regulation of the financial sector at the end of the 1980s. This was then a similar experience to Distribution Co. who had to adjust the way management managed in order to respond to a changing working environment.

5.4   Geographical Location

As the geographical location had played such a major role in the changes in managerial behaviour since 1979 within Distribution Co. (cf. chapter 5) it was decided that a wider geographical range of sites would be visited than planned within Bank Co. As Martin et al (1996:16) argued "different union and workplace traditions have been established in different geographical areas in different historical periods". Once established these locally-based traditions can show a high degree of persistence over a period of time, and in some cases influence the nature of future changes and developments" (Martin, Sunley and Wills 1996:16). In order to investigate this, interviews were sought in London, which was the location of the Company's Head Office, the Midlands, the Northeast, Yorkshire and time was spent within the personnel department of the Birmingham office "getting to know how the organisation operated".

Despite the geographical impact on management style and working practices which were identified by Martin, Sunley and Wills (1996) and experienced by Distribution Co., no evidence of this was found within Bank Co. Employees throughout the whole organisation appeared to share a similar experience in management style, career progression as well as wage structure and benefits. This could be due to the fact that Bank Co., unlike Distribution Co is centrally controlled with terms and conditions being decided at head office between senior management and national level trade union leaders. Thus the geographical location is not considered important as all employment and company issues are decided and experienced nationally.

5.5   Management Style

It cannot be argued that the management style within Bank Co was influenced by the chairperson as had been the case with Distribution Co however it was clear that Bank Co had a hierarchical managerial structure throughout the research period.   This perception was evident from the data gathered from all interviewees within Bank Co and the relevant trade union.   It was also clear that the managerial style adopted within Bank Co fitted with the sophisticated modern category identified by Purcell and Sisson (1983).   Purcell and Sissons (1983) sub-divide the category into two areas, consulters and constitutionalists, Bank Co was clearly aligned with the second area, the constitutionalists.   This category suggests that organisations which have a constitutionalist approach tend to have recognised trade unions for a long period of time and that they have come to accept them as an unwanted but inevitable part of the organisation.   Therefore policies and procedures are aimed at creating an environment of stability and control in which "management prerogatives are defended through highly specific collective agreements. The importance of management control is emphasised with the aim of minimising or neutralising union constraints on both operational (line) and strategic (corporate) management" (Blyton and Turnbull 1994:80).

Although it was clear that management 'controlled' the employment relationship there was evidence within Bank Co to suggest that employees have, throughout the research period, felt an increase in their job insecurity (Denham, Ackers and Travers 1997) and in some cases, it has been clear that they have felt exploited and undervalued.   For example, employees were frequently moved between sites which, in some circumstances this move was twenty or even thirty miles away:

> *"If I have a problem I can deal with it effectively today - I begin by sitting down and communicating with the employee first - but the bottom line is that I can always turn on the screws, for example, if an employee isn't happy with the changes that I introduce, say a change of hours, and starts quoting contracts to me, I can always say 'all right, you continue working those hours, but I am moving you to the other end of the city because those hours are no good to me here.' Usually they see my side of the argument, and it's legal"(Senior Operations Manager, Midlands)*

Another senior operations manager in the north-east argued that the changes have had a tremendous impact on staff expectations.   Career paths he suggests have been eroded and employees can no longer expect a job for life.   This again supports the findings of

Cressey and Scott in 1992 who argue that the future success of banks within the U.K. depends upon how quickly they are able to adjust their infrastructure, reduce their workforce and change their "traditional values, aspirations and institutions" (Cressey and Scott 1992:84-85).

The same manager identified communication as the key to success within any organisation and confirmed that Bank Co had always striven to ensure that it communicated with its employees however he suggested that this was "just-in-time communication". This had added, he stated, to the insecurities felt by the employees within the organisation as on some occasions employees have "panicked" after listening to rumours and gossip which created confusion and unrest all of which could have been prevented by adequate and appropriate levels of communication.

Another senior manager admitted feeling personally insecure about the future:

> "I sometimes wonder just where my place will be within this 'new' structure. I suppose my present job will no longer be required. What then? I'll need a new job. After all the years I have put into this place. Ah well, I suppose it's all in the name of progress!"

This feeling of discontent within the work force supports Geary (1995: 390) who argues that by removing the hierarchical promotional structure within an organisation could induce unrest within the employees who see the chances of promotion slip away from them. Thus, they feel dissatisfied with the company, which in turn reduces morale and perhaps efficiency. Therefore, there is a need to find a balance between the need of a company to increase its flexibility in order to improve its output and the need to retain the commitment of the employees' (Ahlstrand 1990).

A representative from BIFU confirmed that Bank Co had reduced its staff by approximately 20,000 between 1979 and 1997. Although he supported management's view that most job losses had been via voluntary redundancies and early retirement, he stated that there was also quite a lot of "arm twisting" going on. The Union spokesman said that he believed that most of the 'ordinary' employee restructuring had been concluded, however he suggested that:

> "...There were still a number of managers to be got rid of."

Which created uncertainty within the organisation and led to poor employment relations within the organisation.

Although perhaps redundancy is relatively 'new' to the financial sector this is not the case in the rest of the economy. Sunderland (1980) argued that government policy had a direct impact on employer's attitude and action towards reducing their workforce. For example, he stated that government policy in the 1960s was that "although redundancy may involve the private individual in short run adjustment costs, in the long run the resulting redeployment of labour would prove socially beneficial" (Sutherland 1980:23). In the 1970s governmental policy was directed towards preventing redundancies as they recognised "that the cheapest mode of job creation in the short run was job preservation" (Sutherland 1980:23). It could, therefore, be argued that government policy in relation to redundancy was related to the level of unemployment at the time which during the 1970s had reached 5 per cent (Salamon 1998:562).

However, in the 1980s and 1990s the Conservative governments viewed redundancy and the level of unemployment within Britain as the result of wage inflation, caused by trade unions during the 1970s (Young interview 1996), and affected of companies attempting to improve their efficiency and competitiveness especially during a period of recession (Salamon 1998:562). If this was the case then it would explain why during the late 1980s and early 1990s the financial sector began to 'use' redundancies as a way of reducing inefficiencies and at the same time increasingly their competitiveness.

Salamon (1998), however, states that it is to too simplistic to 'blame' redundancies on inefficient management or on trade unions pricing themselves out of work through excessively high wage demands. He argues that the structure of the economy is constantly changing in response to a number of internal and external influences and thus it is inevitable that some redundancies will occur. Salaman (1998:562) highlights four main causes of redundancy:

1. *"Structural decline of older, and generally less efficient or technologically developed, manufacturing industries.*
2. *Decrease in the level of economic activity of an organisation, a single industry or the economy as a whole.*
3. *Technological change requiring less labour to provide a given level of output or service.*
4. *Reorganisation of the work situation to obtain a more efficient use of existing plant and machinery and to reduce costs."*

According to the above Bank Co. have followed a policy of redundancy, which has been caused by points 3 and 4. These redundancies (Salamon 1998:562) caused feelings of insecurity to emerge within the organisation which disrupted the employment relationship. However Bank Co. was not alone in its downsizing, in fact, Cressey and

Scott (1992:88) have argued that the same situation was experienced in other financial institutions during the same period and for the same reasons.

Although this insecurity has not been unusual during the 1980s and 1990s in a great number of industries, it was a new phenomenon within the financial sector where individuals generally had an expectation of a job for life (Cressey and Scott 1992; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996).   Employees who had begun their employment at the age of 16 expected to move up the promotional ladder as they accrued years, rather than expertise, with their employers (Cressey and Scott 1992; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996).   By the middle of the 1990s however, the workforce realised that their positions were no longer safe.   Loyalty to Bank Co. waned and so did motivation and morale:

> *"The employees are definitely less loyal now than they were in 1979, but this cuts both ways. I think that the [Company] is much less loyal to its work force than it was in 1979. Not at the local level, where I think that we all care for each other, but at a higher level, thinks are not good.   ...With regards to morale, I think that it is very volatile within the Group at present. There are a lot of skeletons, which have been hidden away in the past, and they keep jumping out and frightening the staff. The pain and uncertainty that everyone goes through when there is a structural change is intense and our staff have had to go through this change and then change again, but unfortunately it's unavoidable" (Senior Operations Manager, Northeast).*

Another problem that has been highlighted by this restructuring is the ability and skill of the management themselves.   They have had to try to adjust from their traditional macho managerial style and move towards a much more open management approach to their subordinates (Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996) in order to build a harmonious working environment.   They in effect have had to try to 'find' a new management style.   They are expected to be able to stand back and relinquish their traditional directive stance (Storey and Sissons 1995:94) and adopt new styles and practices with little, if any, training or development.   These 'new' managers have been expected to refocus their priorities towards areas such as identifying customer needs, identifying new areas of business (Storey and Sissons 1995:94; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996) improving staff morale and performance in more inventive ways. Bank Co's management have on the whole, found it difficult to adjust to this situation. This appeared to be due to two main areas, the lack of adequate and effective communication between the Board and the management and secondly, appropriate training and development, which in turn increased insecurity within the organisation.

It was therefore clear that employees within Bank Co. felt insecure and vulnerable which in turn put pressure on the employment relationship as well as on the general climate of industrial relations within the organisation.

Communication in relation to the restructuring of an organisation should be planned carefully and sensitively in order to ensure that the change the company requires is achieved with the minimum amount of 'trouble' especially if the information is of a negative nature (Drennan 1988). Time should be taken by the management and/or the board to prepare all employees (Drennan 1988). This did not happened in Bank Co. The recent changes, although planned in advance, had been hurried through in order for the Company to maintain its market share and communication was ad hoc and "last minute". Employees including the middle management were unsure what the final outcome of all the restructuring would be for the company or the implications for themselves for example after the restructuring would they still be employed and if they were under what terms and conditions. This unrest was illustrated late in 1997 when as a direct result of the reorganisation of the company, some of Bank Co.'s employees took industrial action in the form of one-day strikes and general working to rule.

Since 1980 there has been a change in the kind of communication which organisations in general and Bank Co. in particular, have undertaken. On the whole companies have moved away from the disclosure of information to trade unions in the process of collective bargaining towards dissemination of information directly to the workforce (Holden 1999). This change in emphasis was an attempt by organisations to obtain a higher level of employee commitment in securing the companies aims and objectives (Salamon 1998:365). Despite attempts to achieve this within Bank Co. insecurity and all that this entails, remains a very 'real' problem within the workforce.

However, despite the various levels of uncertainty and conflict within the Company during the research period, the management interviewed believed that the developments within the organisation would, in the long term, be for the good of the organisation as a whole. Although, one senior manager stated:

> *"One main point is that we need to take to staff with us. I feel that perhaps things are changing too fast. I, personally, don't have the knowledge of the staff that I used to. I used to know most of my staff individually and I know the problems that they each faced. Today I only know what's happening at a particular moment in time. I think that*

I have lost the close management feel that I used to have with my staff. ... The staff need
some tender loving care, nurturing, if you like. We, as the management, need to point
them in the right direction and give them the training that they require. Perhaps then
we will be able to rebuild some of the loyalty which we have lost."

Bank Co., therefore, needs to address a number of areas of human resource management
if they are going to 'take' their staff with them as the manager above suggests. They
especially need to examine the way in which they communicate with their workforce
and trade union if they are going to rebuild the loyalty and trust which they have lost.

5.6   Impact of Employment Legislation

The Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s have claimed that their
approach to employment legislation brought about an economic 'miracle' (Nolan
1989:81; Tebbit 1997 authors' own notes). That it loosened the constraints of the
market and allowed competition to 'reverse' Britain's poor economic position. In fact
Crafts (1988) argued that before 1979 trade unions and governments who attempted to
accommodate them had damaged the productivity and competitiveness of the British
economy. However following the Conservative victory in 1979 and the governments
legislative 'attack on the trade unions, the situation had dramatically improved.

In relation to Bank Co although they had experienced a great many changes between
1979 and 1997 a senior manager in the North-East stated that only a small percentage of
these changes had been the result of the industrial/employment relations legislation.
The same manager suggested that the de-regulation of the financial sector (Cully,
Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix 1999:220) had had a much more dramatic affect on the
workplace during the 1990s by increasing competition. The human resources manager
based in London agreed in that the increase in competition within the sector had
resulted in the restructuring programme which had impacted on all employees. She
added that change had occurred during the last five years in relation to industrial action
in the sense that employees were now much keener to take industrial action than during
any other period. However, she blamed this on the restructuring, the centralisation of
certain tasks and the downsizing of a number of branches rather than industrial relations
legislation. She added that staff morale was a serious issue for management at the
present time; however, she believed that it was being addressed by corporate
management at present.

Employees spoken to during the research argued that the industrial relations legislation had had an impact on Bank Co. They stated that during the 1990s a number of employees had lost their jobs and many more had had to agree to the introduction of more flexible employment contracts. Many of them didn't feel that this was merely due to the deregulation of the sector. One employee suggested that she now felt quite vulnerable as the company seemed to be more interested in down-sizing and "making money" than taking 'care' of their employees. Another employee added that she was frequently asked to work in branches within the district. She said that she felt unable to complain in case she "lost [her] job". A majority of employees interviewed suggested that this kind of treatment was reinforced by the changes in the industrial relations legislation introduced between 1979 and 1997.

In general' the employees agreed that the trade union had attempted to protect their interests, however, most suggested that the employment legislation had left them "powerless and unable to do much". One employee stated that because the union negotiated at a national level they were perhaps more powerful than other unions in other sectors of the economy whose power had been "reduced through the introduction of site bargaining and single union deals". However, one employee from Yorkshire stated that in his opinion the trade union was weak:

> *"Even the recent industrial action ... appears to be more a token demonstration than a real fight with management ... we all knew it would fail but we just wanted management to know how we felt".*

One trade union representatives spoken to added that although Bank Co. been affected by the decentralisation of the financial sector they had only been able to restructure because the changes in the industrial relations legislation had given them the power to do so. They said that during the 1970s it would not have been possible for restructuring of this kind to be introduced without a considerable amount of consultation with the unions.

However, a trade union representative acknowledged the increase in competition during the 1990s, he stated that this together with other external pressures such as high levels of unemployment had pressurised both management and employees and had increased the level of insecurity felt within the organisation.

Another trade union representative added that some power had been retained by the union because of its ability to negotiate centrally. He said:

> *"At least we get to speak to the 'organ grinder and not the monkey'. We talk to the people who know what is happening throughout the organisation and who plan strategically. I think that this gives us more leverage than if we were confined to negotiating at branch or area level".*

Despite the fact that the management at Bank Co. do not in general believe that the industrial relations legislation impacted on their organisation it is worth considering whether or not the restructuring which has taken place would have been possible without the legislation to support employer's actions.

5.7   Trade Union Recognition and Influence

Trade union recognition and influence was examined within Bank Co and it was clear that there had been a change in the trade union position at all sites visited. The Employee Relations Manager at Head Office stated that there had been change in the relationship between management and the trade union in as much as today the organisation would tend to 'tell' the unions what is going to happen rather that try to negotiate with them (Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996:40). This manager added that the Company would only negotiate where it had to and in areas where there was an agreement to negotiate, generally management "had everything worked out" before hand.

However, unlike the other case study companies the organisational change experienced by the Company had only begun to occur during the 1990s, and again in contrast to the other companies in the thesis, the trade unions had become much more "hostile" during the last decade, as one manager argued:

> *"Industrial relations has a much higher profile today. The resource managers are having to pay more attention to what the unions are saying and I would say that the union is much more aggressive now than it was during even the 1980s" (Senior Operations Manager, Midlands).*

And another stated that traditionally the Company's trade union has been relatively passive considering the dramatic changes which had taken place. Cressey and Scott (1993) and Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson (1996) all found that when compared to other sectors of the economy, banking unions were not as militant. The senior operations manager (Midlands) added that the Banking, Insurance and Finance Union

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(BIFU) have never been an extreme or militant union, however, he believed that, recently they have become much more antagonistic especially when compared to the 1970s and early 1980s. He stated that during the 1970s and early 1980s the union was much more prepared to 'go along' with management. The same manager noted that eight years ago this situation began to change and industrial relations within the organisation began to become much more active and to a certain extent, politicised. He concluded that:

> "I think that the trade union is much more likely to try to wheeled influence now than in
> 1979" (Senior Operations Manager, NE).

This is believed to be, in part, due to the restructuring that has taken place within the organisation which has been exacerbated by the cultural change in the attitude of management. This has left employees feeling insecure and vulnerable, a feeling which previously had not been thought to apply to this organisation (cf. section 6.7).

The management and trade union representatives interviewed, suggested that there had been a change in the perception of industrial relations during the early 1990s within Bank Co. and that this had been encouraged by the major restructuring which the organisation had, and indeed was continuing to undertake.

This supports the findings of Cressey and Scott (1992), Gall (1993), Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson (1996) and Holden (1999) who argue that during the late 1980s and the 1990s considerable change occurred within the banking sector. Industrial action was rare within the banking sector up until the late 1980s (Cressey and Scott 1992:92; Gall 1993; Gregory and O'Reilly 1996:223; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996) this contributed to the relative stability of banks during this period (Cressey and Scott 1992:92). However, since the mid 1980s Cressey and Scott (1992:92) and Gall (1993) claim, the relationship between the management, employees and the trade unions had become increasingly hostile. This, Cressey and Scott (1992) suggest, was due to the fact that the banking sector was entering a period of tension in relation to a "new trend towards unilateralism in collective bargaining" on the part of management.

Cressey and Scott (1992) and Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996) have identified a 'new' approach to industrial relations which was beginning to emerge within the financial sector during the early 1990s. They suggest that management was becoming much harsher in the way that it dealt with the unions as well as their

employees. This had resulted in a deterioration in the relationship between management, the trade unions and staff associations to such an extent that "accumulated staff grievances" have led to threats of industrial action (Cressey and Scott 1992:92). From analysis of documented and verbal data this seems to be due to the increasingly competitive environment in which the banking sector was now operating (Cressey and Scott 1992:92; Gregory and O'Reilly 1996:223).

Gall (1993), however, stated that changes within the large clearing banks were much more radical than suggested by Cressey and Scott, especially in relation to their policies and attitudes towards industrial relations and their workforce. He suggests that they have failed to identify the extent to which 'militant' industrial conflict had emerged latterly within the workforce (Gall 1993). Gall (1993) concludes that the period since 1985 was one of increased union militancy within the whole banking sector and that one of the main banks staff union had voted, for the first time in its history, for industrial action in 1985 (Gall 1993:68), no action was in fact taken as management increased their pay offer. In the same year BIFU recommended that its members should take action as a protest to the inadequate pay offer made by management (Gall 1993:68). Although the BIFU members rejected strike action they voted in favour of an overtime ban (Gall 1993:68) and again management increased their original offer. However, the situation arose again in 1987 and the members of BIFU and the Clearing Banks Union (CBU) voted in favour of an overtime ban and a work to rule (Gall 1993:68). There followed sixteen weeks of action before the situation was resolved (Gall 1993:68). In Cambridge in 1988 Bank Co.'s BIFU members went out on strike for 24 hours in protest over a south-east allowance and in Birmingham Lloyds BIFU members took action over a 'large town allowance' that had just been introduced (Gall 1993:68). Similar action continued to take place throughout the banking sector in 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992 (Gall 1993:69).

Cressey and Scott (1993) in response argued that Gall (1993) failed to understand the nature of their research in as much as they were focusing on the way in which organisational and technological changes and the increasingly important financial constraints were affecting career development within the banks. They state that events during the early 1990s have, in fact, strengthened their original argument as the main clearing banks have continued to reduce the number of staff they employ which has consequently meant a further decline in job security and promotion opportunities

(Cressey and Scott 1993:72; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996). In relation to the suggestion that they have overlooked the militancy of the banking unions, Cressey and Scott, although acknowledging the fact that there has been an increase in industrial action since the mid 1980s state that it "remains negligible compared with most other economic sectors" (Cressey and Scott 1993:73; Gregory and O'Reilly 1996:220) and therefore is not as relevant as Gall (1993) has suggested.

A representative from BIFU confirmed that a change in the relationship between the Union and the Company had occurred. He stated that this had resulted in members being more inclined to vote in favour of and in some cases take industrial action, although he rejected the idea that this equated to an increased militancy within the union. He highlighted that BIFU has lost a large proportion of its membership during the last few years. However he suggested that the 'haemorrhage' of members leaving the union (see Table 6.1) appeared to have stopped and for the first time in six years and that BIFU had secured an agreement with the Company which was above the rate of inflation which he hoped would encourage a growth in trade union membership.

Despite having secured a settlement above the rate of inflation another national representative of BIFU, was quick to emphasise that it had been gained at a price.

> *"The price we have been asked to pay for this has been to accept changes in personnel policies. We have been asked to accept a new dimension, which the Company wants to introduce within the organisation. A levelling out of the management structure and the introduction of new bands. 25,000 staff will have to accept a standstill wage payment for a number of years. We, the union, do not accept this as being reasonable. We have balloted for industrial action against the restructuring and we expect to win, as the troops on the ground floor are very upset about it. I am not saying that we didn't see it coming. It has been happening in other financial institutions [Bank Co] is not an innovator, they are not at the cutting edge of change" (author's own notes).*

Although as can be seen from the table 5.1 apart from 1984, the decline in BIFU membership did not begin until the early 1990s, however, when it did occur it was rapid. A National Secretary of BIFU argued that this was a result of the restructuring and downsizing within the industry and not the result of dissatisfied members.

Table 5.1 (BIFU 1996:12)

BIFU's Membership 1979-1995				
Year	Women	Men	Total	% Change
1979			125,025	
1980	69,112	71,930	141,042	12.8
1981	72,287	75,708	147,995	4.9
1982	72,352	73,369	151,985	2.7
1983	79,312	77,164	156,476	3.0
1984	78,765	75,814	154,579	-1.2
1985	81,819	75,649	157,468	1.9
1986	83,844	74,787	158,631	0.7
1987	89,086	76,753	165,839	4.5
1988	91,719	76,689	168,408	1.5
1989	94,392	76,089	170,481	1.2
1990	93,938	76,163	170,101	0.2
1991	91,619	70,810	162,429	-4.5
1992	87,642	65,920	153,562	-5.5
1993	82,567	61,185	143,752	-6.4
1994	77,548	56,804	134,352	-6.5
1995	72,293	51,247	123,540	-8.0

To conclude this subsection it was evident that on the whole trade union membership within Bank Co. had continued to grow throughout the 1980s and not only had it grown but it had retained its recognition rights and influence. However, as the Company began to restructure in the 1990s the trade unions and their membership became more 'militant' in the sense that they were more prepared to take industrial action during the 1990s. This indicates that the industrial relations legislation introduced between 1979 and 1997 had not restricted the 'power' of the trade union within Bank Co. to influence their membership.

5.8 Organisational Culture and Structure

As with other financial institutions, Bank Co. has a hierarchical structure with a number of managerial levels (Cressey and Scott 1991:84; 1992:94). It operates on formal lines with set procedures for most activities within the business. For example, the industrial relations policy is agreed at Head Office between corporate management and national trade unions and is centrally monitored controlled:

> "The Personnel Department at Head Office in London, decide our overall industrial relations policy. If I want to do something off the wall, I check with Personnel to ensure that it's all right." (Operations Manager, Midlands)

> "We operate entirely centrally. We regularly refer to our staff manual. The staff manual sets out all the procedures, all the things we might need to know, on a personnel level at least. It's all set out very clearly. Every member of staff is provided

with a copy of this and they can refer to it as and when they want to" (Senior

Operations Manager, NE).

This formality and rigidity is reflected in the relationship between Bank Co. and the Banking, Insurance and Finance Union (BIFU), the recognised trade union. This supports the findings of Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes (1985:90) who argue that agreements at Scotbank were made at company level and 'enforced' by the branches. This also appeared to be the case in the organisation's relationship with the trade unions as discussions and 'agreements' were led by the organisation rather than evolving from a partnership or any form of consultation and negotiation with the union.

The following sub-section examines some of the factors which influenced organisational changes within Bank Co.. For example, the recession, the introduction of new technology (Martin Sunley and Willis 1996:62;Cressey and Scott 1992; Cressey and Scott 1993) and the increase in competition (Bank Co. 1997:5) especially from the building societies (Cressey and Scott 1992:85) were major causes of the restructuring of the sector (Salamon 1998:41; Gregory and O'Reilly 1996; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996; Holden 1999).

> *"...It has certainly changed. I think that the conversion from building societies to bank status of some of our competitors has made things more difficult in terms of competitor pressure. ...Our market share is probably about the same as it was in 1979 but we are having to work much harder to maintain it" (Senior Operations Manager, NE, author's own notes).*

Bank Co. agrees that they have looked to their competitors for guidance and admit that they have adopted "similar policies", as they appeared to be working (Bank Co. 1997:5). The Senior Operations Manager in the North East confirmed that Bank Co. in the early 1990s closely examined what was being introduced in other similar organisations and realised that there was a real possibility that they could loose their market share if they did not restructure to meet changing demand. It was, therefore, clear that the organisation had to adjust and change to meet new needs. Bank Co. began to centralise its business operations in order to increase efficiency and costs and thus become more competitive (author's own notes from data examined at Head Office).

This supports the findings of Cressey and Scott (1992) who argue that the tension that occurred within the banking sector was due to the increasingly "sophisticated technology and expanding business opportunities" (Cressey and Scott 1992:84; Gregory

and O'Reilly 1996:222; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson) which at first enabled staff to process the dramatic increase in business while employment continued to expand. However, there followed a second phase in the introduction of information and communications technologies which began in the early 1990s which encouraged and facilitated the introduction of technically based products and services, for example, home banking, smart cards and debit cards (Cressey and Scott 1992:84). This combined with the increased market competition resulted in job losses and constraints were placed on career progression (Doherty et al 1995). This has without doubt impacted on employee relations and consequently customer-employee relationships which ultimately affect the Company's bottom line (Clark 1997).

Bank Co., as with other British financial sector organisations experienced prolonged periods of downsizing and restructuring throughout the research period and has consequently undergone extensive changes to, among other things, managerial structures (Doherty et al 1995; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996). This had perhaps highlighted some problems, which were occurring and could possibly have distorted some of the data obtained due to the feelings of those interviewed. However, it is believed that the data retains its validity in as much as it enabled valuable information and data to be obtained, which, if the situation had been different, would perhaps not have been possible.

According to a Senior Operations Manager in the northeast, the Company experienced a 'culture shift' during the 1990s:

> *"I believe that the culture of the organisation has changed. The management are much more aware of the cost side of the business than before ...previously we concentrated on the generation of income" (Senior Operations Manager, NE, author's own notes).*

Cressey and Scott (1992:93) and Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson (1996) agree that a "major" cultural change was taking place within the main clearing banks. They state that banks have become more commercially orientated and that there is now greater emphasis on efficiency and competition (Cressey and Scott 1992:93; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996). They add that employees within these organisations now have to be responsive and adaptable in order to meet the new and changing demands of the market and suggest that in some cases what is required is a "different staff with different qualities and outlooks" (Cressey and Scott 1992:93) (see figure 5.2) and this was clearly the case within Bank Co.

Figure 5.2   Changes in Bank Culture (Cressey and Scott 1991:84; 1992:94)

Old Model	*New Model*
Paternalistic	Technocratic
Cautious	Performance-oriented
Hierarchical	Flexible
Trustee role	Commercially driven
Staff are cost item	Staff are a resource

Staff requirements

Attention to detail	Sales oriented
Specific specialist roles	Outgoing and adaptable
Loyalty	Educated
Bureaucratic	Competitive
Command oriented	Commitment oriented

This supports the argument of the Employee Relations Manager at Head Office who stated that the Company today needed to be "manned" by staff who had a different set of skills to the ones the present employees had on offer. She further suggested that there had already been a high level of deskilling within the workforce and that fewer staff were now required throughout all sections and levels within the organisation.

The idea behind the restructuring within Bank Co. appears to be the need to increase its flexibility in order to improve efficiency and competitiveness (Gregory and O'Reilly 1996:214). It was believed that the organisation was attempting to reorganise its structure along the lines suggested in the 'flexible firm' model devised by Atkinson (1984, 1985). Atkinson (1984, 1985) argues that for an organisation to have the ability to respond to market changes competitively it needs to introduce and use a number of different types of employee flexibility. He identified three main kinds of flexibility, functional, numerical and financial (Atkinson 1984). Functional flexibility was concerned with the ability of the workforce to carry out a number of different tasks within the company. This kind of flexibility allows traditional job demarcations to be broken down. Numerical flexibility refers to an organisation's ability to adjust quickly to changes in the demand for labour. This would include the use of contractual, part-time and agency workers. Finally, financial flexibility this is used to allow the company to ensure that the money that it is paying its workforce reflects more accurately the present external labour market conditions. It is generally associated with a move away from collective negotiation based on the cost of living and/or an across the board rate

for a specific job towards new pay systems which takes into account local market conditions (Sisson and Storey 1995:87).

Atkinson further states that these 'types' of flexibility can be brought together creating a 'flexible firm' (1983:29):

> *"A new organisational structure, which involves the break-up of the workforce into a series of 'peripheral', therefore numerically flexible, groups of workers clustered around a numerically stable 'core'. The 'core' group performs the organisation's critical firm-specific activities in a functionally flexible manner" (Sissons and Storey 1995:87).*

The periphery workers, who are numerically flexible and thus easily replaceable, shield the core group, usually full-time permanent career employees, from market fluctuations.

In relation to Bank Co., staff opinion surveys carried out on a bi-annual basis suggested that the reorganisation had a negative impact on a majority its employees and had in particularly affected areas such as the psychological contract, employee morale and job security (Cressey and Scott 1992; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996).

Employment within the banking sector has traditionally been relatively secure in that once recruited employees would have expected to spend the rest of their working lives within the same organisation (Cressey and Scott 1992; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996). However, the banking industry has now joined the other sectors of the economy in that it is now vulnerable to downsizing, increasing flexibility and is exposed to job insecurity (Storey and Sisson 1995:80; Salamon 1998:41; Gregory and O'Reilly 1996:222-223; Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996).

5.9   Information Technology

The main banking unions have been warning that technical innovation would mean job losses (BIFU 1982; 1989; CBU 1984). This certainly appears to be the case at present within the financial institutions who appear to be taking full advantage of the information technology to reduce staff numbers while at the same time increasing their profitability (Cressey and Scott 1992:88; Holden 1999). It is suggested that this will increase as job descriptions as well as person specifications for a majority of positions will alter as information technology requirements change (Cressey and Scott 1992:89).

A lot of these changes have, since the early 1990s, been taking place within the infrastructure of the main clearing banks as well as local branches. Cressey and Scott argue that there has been a gradual movement away from traditional branch functions through the development of electronic fund transfer at the point of sale (EFTPOS), home banking and telephone banking (Cressey and Scott 1992:89; Gregory and O'Reilly 1996:210). This, Cressey and Scott (1992:89) argue, will lead to a reduction in paper transactions and the expansion of direct electronic debiting which subsequently will mean a reduction in the need for paper based recording and processing within each branch and will consequently cause further reductions in employee numbers.

This has affected both junior and senior staff (Cressey and Scott 1992:89) within Bank Co. as the organisation has also flattened the management structure by replacing the existing thirteen management grades with seven new levels. This means that there will be a much wider range of jobs within each level than previously thus it will become more difficult to move between levels and consequently, onto the next salary scale therefore restricting career progression.

Cressey and Scott (1992:88) and Anandarajan, Igbaria and Anakwe (2000) suggest that the new technology has affected different sections of each financial organisation at different periods of time. Cressey and Scott (1992:88) have created a model which allows us to examine their suggested pattern of innovation and the impact this has had on staff (cf. figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3

<u>Pattern of Innovation and Staff Impact</u> (Cressey and Scott 1992:88)

Specialised Staff

⇓

- Linked personal Computers
- Automated Credit Rating

All Branch Staff

⇓

- Electronic Funds Transfer all at the Point of Sales
- Home Banking
- Cheque Truncations Immediate and Electronic clearing of cheques not Returned to payer's bank
- Teller Terminals

Back Office Staff

⇓

- Computer Clearing
- Clearing House Automated Payments System (Chaps)
- Bankers Automated Clearing Services (BACS)
- Automatic Tellers

General Clerical Staff

⇓

Mainframe Computer

→   →   →   →   →   →   →   →   →   →   →   →

5.10   Conclusion

The chapter has illustrated that the two cases which have been examined so far, Distribution Co. and Bank Co. differ in relation to the factors which have influenced the way they have managed their workforces throughout the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in the case of Distribution Co. increased competition and geographical location were the most significant influential factors that encouraged Distribution Co. to change the way it operated and the way it managed its workforce. However, if the drivers of change are examined for Bank Co. it is clear that the geographical location did not play a role in the way corporate management have behaved or on the employment relationship in general. What appears to be more significant was the industrial relations legislation between 1979 and 1997 from the perspective of employees and trade unions as well as increased competition which was brought about by the deregulation of the financial market from the perspective of senior management.

Increased competition was found to have 'forced' corporate management to examine the Company's organisational structure and begin a process of restructuring. It is clear that increased competition undertaken in the late 1980s and early 1990s had a significant impact on Bank Co. It effected corporate management, employee and trade union behaviour in varying degrees. To begin with management visualised the restructuring of the organisation as the only way it could continue to compete in an intensifying market place. Unfortunately, the restructuring project was not implemented well in that they failed to 'take their workforce with them'. They adopted a policy of control and command, perhaps because of their previous traditional hierarchical structure, and rather than consulting and negotiating with employees and trade unions they instructed and 'threatened' in order to implement the changes required. This policy has therefore received a great deal of opposition from both the employees and the trade unions and has encouraged the development of a 'them and us' attitude within the workplace.

As a result of the restructuring and the increase in the use of new technology a large number of employees were, deskilled, displaced or made redundant and although the corporate management of Bank Co. suggested that all redundancies had been obtained on a voluntary basis it is evident that a significant number of employees were "pushed". This impacted on the behaviour of many employees. The data found that staff absenteeism increased significantly from 4.7 per cent to 7.9 per cent throughout the organisation during this period which signifies staff dissatisfaction (Cully et al 1999:126) and suggests low moral and lack of commitment and perhaps even the breakdown of the psychological contract.

Increased competition also encouraged management to increase the use of flexible working practices and the employment of non-standard contract workers. The flexible working practices were seen as essential in so far as the Company needed to offer its customers a good, reliant and convenient service in order to remain competitive in an ever competitive market. Part-time staff were brought in to cover busy times at the counters, such as lunch times. Staff were also now expected to keep the organisation open to its customers until five thirty and open on a Saturday morning again to ensure that they remained competitive.

A second factor that employees and union representatives at Bank Co. claimed played a significant part in the way they operated during the 1980s and in particular the 1990s

was the introduction of the industrial relations reforms between 1979 and 1997. For example, evidence was located, which supported the claim made by a number of employees and trade union representatives that the industrial relations legislation introduced between 1979 and 1997 had:

- Reduced the power of the trade unions to protect workers from the "macho-managerial tactics" (an employee).
- Made the workforce vulnerable and insecure (trade union representative).
- Enabled management to introduce flexible working practices which employees were 'forced' to accept in the sense that they feared that if they refused they may well loose their jobs (an employee).
- Allowed corporate management to restructure the organisation with little resistance from either the workforce or trade unions (a trade union representative).
- Made redundancies much easier to achieve (a trade union representative).

Minutes of meetings held between trade unions and corporate management implied that it was management, which set the agenda from the early 1990s, suggesting that there had been a reduction of trade union power and influence. This was supported by data gathered in subsequent interviews which revealed that management had intentionally introduced new methods of communication in order to limit the role of the trade unions within the organisation (previously they had communicated all employment information to the workforce via the trade unions). Management asserted that trade union influence had diminished throughout the 1980s and 1990s and that management could now dictate what areas they consulted and negotiated with the trade unions.

Alongside this, however, there was evidence that the trade unions had retained or perhaps increased their influence within the organisation in that the trade unions became more militant. This was supported by the increase in industrial action which took place within Bank Co. during the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s. This industrial action took various forms, for example, one day strikes, work to rule and a ban on over-time. Although, it has been suggested that this industrial action was small when compared to other economic sectors (Cressy et al 1996) it was an important development in relation to employment relations within the financial sector. In so far as it indicates that banking trade unions together with the workforce they represented were willing and able to take industrial action which changed the behaviour of corporate management.

This conflict between the extent to which the trade unions were able to exert power and influence within Bank Co. and further how much of this had been effected by the industrial relations legislation during the 1980s and early 1990s is interesting in that it

highlights a possible gap between managements' perceptions and the reality of the situation.

In conclusion to chapter 5, it is clear that external environmental factors, such as deregulation of the financial sector and the increased competition it created and the industrial relations reforms between 1979 and 1997, were the 'driving' forces of change for Bank Co. during this period. After consideration and evaluation it is suggested here that the Company's management responded pragmatically to the changing external environment and used the industrial relations legislation during the period as a 'weapon' to intimidate trade unions and control its workforce.

The next chapter follows the same pattern as chapters 4 and 5 in that it will adopt a life history style in order to explain the central factors and issues which have emerged from the data as the study progressed. However, it will also, in line with a grounded theory approach, use the information and data gathered from Distribution Co. and Bank Co. to analyse Retail Co from a pragmatic critical realist stance.

Chapter 6

Retail Co

6.1   Introduction

Chapter 6 will adopt the same framework as chapters 4 and 5 in that it will be subdivided into eight topic areas in order to aid analysis as well as complying with case study traditions (Ticehurst and Veal 2000:50). It will also use the data gathered in chapters 4 and 5 to deepen the understanding of Retail Co in line with the grounded theory approach which has been adopted within this thesis from a pragmatic critical realist perspective.

Again Retail Co was selected as it represented a different economic sector to both Distribution Co and Bank Co and as such offered the opportunity to expand and contrast employment experiences within a range of economic backgrounds.

Chapter 6 will begin by providing an historical perspective of Retail Co before assessing the organisational, managerial and industrial relations experiences of the company between 1979 and 1997. It will conclude with an assessment of the 'driving' forces of change experienced within Retail Co during the period.

6.2   Historical Background

Retail Co is a national retail company and has sites located throughout the Britain their principal activities include the operation of food, clothing, home and leisure superstores and has diversified into property development. Retail Co began life as a dairy company based in Yorkshire.   It has since evolved into a large successful multi-plant establishment through a number of acquisitions and mergers. Despite its success, in the early 1990s this organisation experienced periods of economic turbulence which almost

resulted in its bankruptcy. This was perhaps initially caused by management's over zealous behaviour during the first part of the 1980s when Retail Co. expanded rapidly.

However by the mid 1990s the company had again become a stable and successful organisation and now controls a large market share of the retail industry in Britain (Harvey 2000). Recently the company was itself taken over by a much larger foreign global retailer. Unfortunately it was not possible to analyse the impact that this may have on the culture, employment practices or the morale of individual employees due to the fact that it did not meet the chosen case study criteria.

6.3 Market Competition

Reynolds (1985) suggests that competition in the retail sector increased significantly during the 1970s and early 1980s and thus they "set out to look for ways to improve the status quo in terms of their existing markets and to reduce costs". Cully, Woodland, O'Reilly and Dix (1999:220) agree and suggest that the retailing industry had also been affected by changes in transportation and improvements in global communication.

Retail Co was certainly affected by the increased competition within their industrial sector during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In order to address this they were forced to look at the whole structure of the organisation including areas such as management style, workplace practices and even their senior management. For example in 1992 Retail Co was only hours from bankruptcy (Interviews with senior management) when they recruited a new Chairman who was given the task of "turning the organisation around". However the market place within which Retail Co operated was very competitive this together with the recessions experienced during the late 1980s and early 1990s increased the pressure.

The research claims that Retail Co 'used' this new charismatic leader to address the intense market pressure they were experiencing. The term leadership provides problems for those trying to understand it. Handy (1993:97) suggests that leadership is like "motivation, the search for the definitive solution to the leadership problem has proved to be another endless question for the Holy Grail in organisation theory". It is, therefore, difficult to generalise about the term leadership however for the aims and objectives of this thesis it has been defined as "a relationship through which one person influences the behaviour or actions of other people" (Mullins 1999).

A 'good' leadership with proficient managerial skills has the ability to develop teamwork as well as integrating various levels and groups within the organisation. It should also be able to fuse contrasting cultures together to develop a 'new' corporate identity (Hunt 1992). Belbin (1997:98) suggests that "there is a clear implication that leadership is not part of the job but a quality that can be brought to a job". Lord Sieff (1991) adds that "leadership is vitally important at all levels within the company, from main board to the shop floor. Leadership is the moral and intellectual ability to visualise and work for what is best for the company and its employees ... The most vital thing the leader does is to create team spirit around him and near him". Hunt (1992) concludes that "leadership can be seen ... as an inspirational process".

Leadership is therefore more than just a managerial role it is based on "personal qualities or charisma" (Mullins 1999:256) it involves influencing forms of communication and "use of language, ceremonies, images and rituals and physical environment" (Sims, Fineman, and Gabriel 1993) to change or create a strong company culture.

Retail Co were looking for a leader who would be strong enough to lead them into a more prosperous future, they appointed a new chairman with charisma as well as academic and managerial ability. Balmer and Gray (2000) suggest that bringing in "high calibre personnel can play a prominent role both formally and informally in communicating" the organisations corporate.

The new chairman had been educated at the Harvard training school in America which clearly influenced his leadership style as well as his practical innovations (Employee Relations Director). His American influence was soon noticeable.

> *"He went to one store over there [America] and he noticed that the checkout staff weren't allowed to have a chair to sit on while they were working. Well when he came back he was full of this and he wanted to introduce this in our stores. I objected - well have you seen the ages of some of our checkout staff! However, as usual he had to try it out in one store. There was a strike as a result of this and the chairs were reintroduced." (Employee Relations Director)*

The new chairman was also influenced by human resource management theorists (Guest and Hoque 1996; Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000:54). One senior manager suggested that the new chairman was obviously keen to "try out these new theories on the workforce".

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Although, it has been suggested that the new 'leader' turned the fortunes of the company around and created an organisation with a strong corporate identity, it is proposed that he did this through covertly exploiting the workforce, for example, through to use of 'hard' HRM practices (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:92) and the use of the employment legislation. One middle manager highlighted the fact that peer pressure was applied to the workforce through the use of charts, graphs and figures which were regularly placed on prominent notice boards in the stores these forms of 'communication' identified staff who had for example been absent or late, "staff who let the team down" (store manager, Midlands). Another suggested that the team meetings in the morning only served to tell the employees what they had to achieve during the previous day and that although they were asked to contribute she didn't feel as though her opinion mattered it was merely downward communication.

The thesis claims that the leadership style of the chairman, from the early 1990s, was the main reason for the changes which occurred in the management behaviour within Retail Co.

6.4 Geographical Location

Following case study tradition (Ticehurst and Veal 2000:50) and in order to ensure comparability of data a number of sites in Scotland, the Midlands, Yorkshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire were visited.

It was clear from the evidence gathered that although Retail Co maintained control of the decision making process at Head Office the geographical location of the various sites visited had an impact on the employment relationship. For example the site visited in Warwickshire, although using the policies and procedures prescribed by the Head Office, had difficulty in reducing trade union membership and "interference" (manager in Warwickshire 1997). It was clear from the data that the sites which were situated in more traditional geographical areas had higher trade union representation and management "struggled" to change the organisational structure. Gallie, Penn and Rose (1996:69) however reject the impact of locality on employment relations claiming that their study had found a limited amount of correlation.

Despite this the data examined within Retail Co supported the conclusion of Distribution Co in that the location of the sites had influenced management practice,

trade union behaviour and employee response. Although it should also be highlighted that geographical location only played a part in determining the change in the employment relationship between 1979 and 1997.

6.5 Management Style

Retail Co during the 1980s followed a 'Standard Modern' approach to management in that it recognised and worked with the trade union (Purcell and Sisson 1983). Rose (2001:74) argues that this approach is pragmatic as it responds to the situation in which it finds itself. Thus how important industrial relations are viewed is influenced by the external environment and varies from time to time:

> *"As, by definition, its appearance changes with circumstances" (Legge 1995:39).*

However by the early 1990s the management style had to change and in a similar vein to Distribution Co, was influenced by its leader in the form of its new chairman. At this stage, in comparison with Purcell and Sisson's (1983) work, Retail Co could be classified as a traditionalist employer. The characteristics of a traditionalist employer are that they are hostile to trade union representation and in the opinion of Rose (2001:73) take an exploitative approach to the management of its employees. A traditionalist employer would also support the absolute and legitimate right of a manager to manage. The data collected from Retail Co. supported the claim that Retail Co had followed a traditionalist style which minimised the cost of labour where ever possible by increasing the casual nature of the workforce and increasing the use of A-typical contracts from the early 1990s. For example Retail Co introduced a new shift pattern which included a shift which lasted for three and three-quarter hours. This meant that Retail Co did not have to pay the employees working on these shifts break time. They also introduced a zero hours contract which in effect meant that they had very little obligation to employees on these contracts.

The data collected has indicated that from the early 1990s onwards although HRM had been introduced to the organisation it was a 'hard' rather than 'soft' approach. For example the organisation placed emphasis on maximising employee output while treating them as "something to be used dispassionately and in a calculative, formally rational manner" (Storey and Sisson 1995: 17) rather than emphasising "employee development, group relations and constructive supervision" (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:92). The hard face of HRM thus focuses on the "quantitative, calculative and

business strategic aspects of managing the headcount resource in as 'rational' a way as for any other economic factor" (Storey 1987:6) while the soft version centres on "communication, motivation and leadership" (Blyton and Turnbull 1998).

The hard approach adopted by Retail Co was highlighted in a number of employee interviews and suggests that the confrontational relationship which emerged in the 1990s was the result of employees being treated as resources rather than valued assets or alternatively the company's competitive advantage.

> *"From about the beginning of the 1990s staff were hired and fired according to the extent to which they fulfilled the needs of the business. Shift hours were changed to three and three quarter hours so that breaks did not have to be paid" (employee from the Midlands).*

It was, therefore, concluded that Retail Co., unlike Beer Co. (cf chapter 8), chose not to 'tap' into and utilise its employees as anything other than a production cost which had to be minimised. It was also evident that by the early 1990s senior management within Retail Co was not prepared to work with the recognised trade union.

> *"We felt that we as a company could not move forward with the trade union. They were very stuck in their ways ... we couldn't see any chance of moving forward in partnership ... Our chairman in particular believed that we were being held back by the trade union" (Store Manager, Midlands).*

The GMB, who have recognition rights with the organisation, agree that Retail Co had introduced a number of changes to its management style including communicating directly with employees, but argue that in practice, it was generally one way, from management to the workforce. They felt that the organisation had actively sought to reduce trade union membership in order to exploit the workforce.

> *"...In [Retail Co] basically, you work when they say ... even if you sign a part time contract you have to state the hours you are available to work outside your normal working time and if they want you to come in, you have to, or lose your job. The worker is not compensated for this" (GMB National Secretary Retail).*

Beardwell (1992) supports this when he argues that in some circumstances organisations claiming to practice 'new' industrial relations have sought to use this to reduce trade union influence by introducing single union agreements and 'control' employees. Undy et al (1996:25) also found that the introduction of 'new' management techniques had allowed management to increase their 'power' and consequently reduce that of the trade union.

This company, therefore, is perhaps not an ideal model of, as has been suggested by some management, an organisation committed to its workforce but rather as an organisation which stresses worker compliance to management. If this is the case then, as Kochan (1980:145), suggests employees who are not committed to the company and/or who expect to seek other employment in the near future are not likely to put time and energy into joining or supporting a trade union. This in due course would further weaken the power of the GMB within the organisation.

There is no dispute that Retail Co communicates with its workforce, however, following the interviews with employees and the trade union representatives it is difficult to accept management's opinion that this communication is a way of equalising the power between worker and management (Pedler 1976:105). The only evidence located suggested an increase in managerial authority and control over its workforce

The difference between the terms 'new industrial relations' and 'human resource management' has generally hinged on whether or not an organisation recognises a trade union. For example human resource management has been depicted as focusing on the employees in a non-union, high technology environment while new industrial relations has tended to imply that some form of trade union or workplace representation are recognised by management (Guest and Hoque 1996:11). Guest and Hoque (1996:12) have suggested that the emergence of human resource management was due to the increasingly competitive environment in which companies were operating during the 1980s and 1990s. Emphasis on human resources was further reinforced by Peters and Waterman (1983) who stated that the way to gain the competitive edge was to look carefully at employees, to ensure that you employed the 'right' people for the organisation. This book minimised the role of trade unions and suggested that they did not play a significant part in the main global organisations (Guest and Hoque 1996:12).

Lawler (1992) and Walton (1985) although acknowledging that in some high commitment companies trade unions could have a role to play, they focus their research on non-union organisations (Guest and Hoque 1996:13). Guest and Hoque (1996) argue that the generally accepted perspective of human resource management is that it focuses on an integrative, unitarist organisation, which emphasises commitment to the company, and that membership of a trade union suggests disloyalty. For example is it possible for an employee to be committed and loyal to both the company and a trade union? (Guest

and Dewe 1991). The HRM route, identified above was certainly adopted within Retail Co.. Senior and middle management made it quite clear in their interviews that they did not approve of the trade union and consequently treated staff who belong to the union with a certain amount of suspicion.

> *"I was a trade union member in the 1980s however under the new management I have chosen not to continue to pay my subs ... this is not because I feel that the union has nothing to offer, far from it in fact, but because being a union member at my store means that the management don't treat you right. I keep being asked why I don't just join the Law Club" (Employee, Scotland).*

Of course if, as has been suggested, Retail Co, in the form of the new chairman, was watching and taking note of American business practice this approach would not be viewed as unusual as American companies at this time were committed to reducing trade union presence. Guest and Hoque (1996:13) argue that during the 1980s the United States was seen as the 'role model' for many companies in the United Kingdom. In part encouraged by the close relationship between Thatcher and Reagan at this time, which was, reflected in their joint interest in monetarism and free market economics and their anti-union stance (Guest and Hoque 1996:13).

The influence from America, although favoured by the new chairman, was not welcomed throughout the organisation for example a site manager from Scotland stated that Retail Co was allowing America to influence its infrastructure "too much". She highlighted that the general public in Britain react differently to their American counterparts and that the chairman failed to realise this very basic fact. She warned that although some of the ideas had been 'interesting' caution should be taken, as American management theories might not always fit comfortably with the British workforce and could in fact prove counter productive.

Another reason given by management for a decline in union influence was the result of a change in British society:

> *"The younger people don't see unions as being relevant to their lives. They have grown up in a climate where you don't need to belong to a collective organisation in order to protect your own interests." (Employee Relations Director).*

Rose (1996:93) also found that some of his interviewees believed that the trade union movement today was of little interest to the young and Elias (1996:192) concluded that union membership was connected to the number of years that an employee had spent in the workforce i.e. the longer an employee spent in the workforce the more likely they

were to belong to a trade union. Although, this could in part account for why some employees do not join a trade union it is believed that other factors have, at least, influenced the decline in union membership and thus influence, within this particular company. For example, the economic climate throughout the 1980s and 1990s was, turbulent; the high level of unemployment for most of the period; the political ideologies supported by Thatcher's Conservative Party, if not anti-union then restrictive in relation to the trade union movement (Personnel Today 1998:3). These issues together with the organisational changes, which have occurred encouraged feelings of insecurity and vulnerability within the workforce which to date the union, has not been able to address.

Retail Co. had for a number of years recognised the GMB and was reluctant to build a relationship with any other union, including those who had been introduced to the company as a result of acquisitions and mergers. Although the company was expanding and thus appeared successful it was not a period of harmony within the business, with one senior director claiming that:

> *"There were a lot of dirty tricks being played [by both Management and the Unions] during this period"*

On the whole the Company has been transformed during the 1990s in both its fortunes, in that it was no longer on the verge of bankruptcy, and the way it managed its employees. Despite what would outwardly appear a successful company the middle management and certainly their employees at most sites expressed feelings of "unhappiness" and "insecurity". All management interviewed claimed that morale and loyalty to the company was low.

> *"I think morale in the store is low. Managers don't generally stay here long enough to get things together which doesn't help. The atmosphere is very negative. Our staff turn over together with absenteeism is high throughout the store. ...The employees are very destructive here, for example, we have a real problem with graffiti on the walls; the staff also tend to be aggressive and obstructive rather than helpful and co-operative."*
> *(Store manager Midlands)*

The National Secretary for Retail in the GMB agreed that morale was low and that this was mainly due to the emphasis now being placed on working practices, she stated that:

> *"A lot of pressure has been placed on the workers since 1979. The company is far readier to sack an employee for failing to meet targets such as the number of items scanned during a particular period of time ... The company tends to set its employees*

against each other and that's not good for morale, motivation or for increasing profits."

Bacon (1999:3) suggests that some management practices and HRM strategies within some organisations are aimed at "attitudinal compliance, work intensification and the suppression of any counter-balancing trade union activity". In fact he (Bacon 1999:14) concludes that HRM strategies can be "illusory and discriminatory" and that often disciplinary pressure is applied in an attempt to manipulate employees and enforce "consent and authority" on the workforce. This thesis argues that this was certainly to case within Retail Co.

Although a head office director appeared co-operative to the request by the researcher to visit a number of sites, in reality Retail Co. was obstructive. 'Flimsy' excuses were made which prevented access to some of the requested sites and access was severely limited to employees. However the perseverance and adaptability of the researcher enabled access to be gained to a range of sites from various geographical locations and to a representative number of employees. This was felt to be important as Clark (1989) claimed, that the decline of trade union representation was "inherently geographical and not simply a national phenomenon". It was thus felt that this negative attitude towards the research supported the idea that Retail Co. were not as highly regarded by their employees as they would have liked the researcher to believe. Nor had the chairman completely changed the culture of the organisation from an authoritarian management style to a more lateral one as he claimed. In fact it was evident that the 'new' management styles and practices adopted during the 1990s actually strengthened management control while weakening the employee 'voice' and employee 'power'.

During an interview with a head office company director it was clear that he did not believe that Retail Co. had been influenced by management practices adopted in America and stated that the company had in fact used many Japanese practices:

> *"A Japanese company – open communication increases company loyalty and commitment. The set up certainly seems to have worked for us and the employees need the unions less and less" (Resources Director).*

Again, if Japanese working practices had influenced Retail Co, this would not have been unique. Bassett (1987), Wickens (1987), Roberts (1988b) Salmon and Stewart (1994) and Farnham and Pimlott (1992:85) all suggest that a number of large organisations in the United Kingdom were strongly influenced by Japanese companies

and that it is seen as a way of increasing employee commitment. They further argue that the adoption of these practices has been necessary in order for British companies to survive both the direct challenge from the Japanese organisations and the economic climate of the 1980s and the 1990s (Grant 1996:203). Grant (1996) and Salmon and Stewart (1994) in particular state that it is the Japanese management techniques, which represent the 'new' industrial relations within the U.K. rather than American as, suggested by Guest and Hoque (1996).

Unfortunately this particular piece of research does not allow the subject to be explored in greater depth however, what is clear is that Retail Co was influenced by 'new' management techniques and styles from outside Britain during, in particular, the 1990s.

The interviews suggested that the company experienced a period of radical reorganisation during the late 1980s and 1990s which included the closure of the employee relations department in order to decentralise their activities. This was not well received by, in particular, the employees:

> *"The Employee Relations Department was totally wiped out. People used to be able to phone directly through to me to ask specific questions or to seek my advice. There was direct access, and everyone felt confident that the issue was being dealt with properly" (Employee Relations Director).*

The new chairman considered that a radical reform of the organisation was necessary if it was to survive. He wanted to create a corporate culture, which would unite the various sectors of the organisation. He wanted to encourage commitment and loyalty through initiatives such as team working.

On taking up his position the chairman began by personally interviewing all head office staff

. Once this had been achieved, according to one store manager, he stated that there were:

> *"Too many chiefs and not enough Indians. He got rid of about 25% of the workforce in Head Office. These weren't just clerical jobs, there were managers as well. People who had been working for the Company for years. ...There were too many levels of management - we needed to break down the barriers as well as improving our communication to the stores. He then laid out a three-year recovery programme. We became Britain's fastest growing food and fresh food store. [The new Chairman] came*

in with an open attitude; he wanted everyone to know that he was approachable by anyone at any level within the Company" (Site Manager Midlands).

The chairman further suggested that, senior managers had become too remote from their workforce in that they were inaccessible to their employees as they were "hidden in their large corporate offices". Rose (1996:81) also found that this was a problem that was faced by other organisations and that this in turn led to a reduction in the level of trust between management and the workforce (Rose 1996:81). In order to deal with this "problem" the chairman of Retail Co, introduced a number of far reaching reforms. Offices were to become open plan. Managers had to be seen walking around the building interacting with their employees. A number of managers were made redundant and the infrastructure of the Company was transformed.

This new approach was very different to anything that the Company had experienced before; it was a culture change. The company moved away from a very formal and regimented management style to one which management claimed was much "more liberal and which explicitly adopted new management techniques and styles".

Although these were the stated aims of this new chairman, not all the workforce agreed that this is what was actually intended or what in fact what happen. One senior company director argued that when the new chairman began working for the company "he never wanted anyone to come between him and his staff". The same director stated that the new chairman "strongly disliked" the unions and believed them to be destructive and "bad for business". He added that this new chairman had no respect for the employees in fact he stated that he "trampled over everyone".

"He made the bullets but he made sure someone else fired them so as not to tarnish his whiter than white image (Employee Relations Director).

Open plan offices were introduced and directors as well as employees now had to work in a more open environment. A company director at head office stated that this allowed employees to communicate with management as well as colleagues. It also made the offices much "friendlier" and the staff much more "committed" and loyal. However all employees interviewed at head office claimed that they felt that the open plan offices was merely a way for management to "keep an eye on the workforce" and to "make sure everyone was working and not drinking cups of coffee". On the whole they indicated that they felt that the open plan offices were quite intimidating and pressurised. The

conclusion was that they believed that they were being constantly monitored by employees as well as senior management.

Rose (1996:97) suggests that "accessibility to managers" together with the introduction of 'new' management techniques had perhaps encouraged the indifference which some employees appeared to hold in relation to trade unionism and thus had, weakened trade union influence within this organisation. Beardwell (1996:2) states that human resource management offered companies the opportunity to conduct their industrial relations with a limited amount of "regard for pluralist conceptions of the employment relationship". Which could be true but what about the impact on the workforce?

This subsection concludes that the management style of Retail Co a traditional hierarchical path in that management remained in 'control' and "workers did what they were paid to do" (Director of Human Resources). It is acknowledged that the Company introduced HRM practices during the 1990s however they had adopted a 'hard' approach which in effect meant that employees became more vulnerable as the trade union was marginalised by senior management and management increased their control on the workforce.

6.6 Impact of Employment Legislation

Although it was clear that change had occurred within Retail Co from 1979 to 1997 there was evidence to suggest that they had used the decline in trade union membership, industrial relations legislation and employee insecurity to achieve this. For example, one employee stated that the Company now just "didn't care" about the workforce. Their only concern was profit margins and the market position of the organisation. She added that if the Company "doesn't like you for whatever reason they just get rid of you and the law just doesn't seem to protect you". Another employee said that it was the loss of trade union power that had enabled management to act the way they did.

> *"Back in the '70s the union would have taken care of you, now they just seem to standby and watch ... we can't just down tools and walk out when something happens, we've got to go through the voting process and I think this scares some people ... who knows how you have voted?"*

When asked to clarify what was meant by "scares people" she added that because the ballot paper emphasised that an employee was in breach of contract if they went on strike there was a worry that some workers could loose their jobs. Most of the

management interviewed however felt that the industrial relations legislation had not really affected the organisation. On the whole they argued that the changes which had occurred within Retail Co resulted from the increased pressure of the market place. One manager from the Midlands added that the competition was very intense during the 1990s and the only way to survive was to restructure and become more responsive to the market. He suggested that if the organisation had not done this then the company would have gone bankrupt and the workforce would have all been unemployed. He agreed that some of the policies adopted by management had put increased pressure on certain areas of the workforce but he defended this by stating that there had been a lot of "slack" that needed tightening up.

Another manager from Scotland stated that the decline in trade union membership had been useful to the organisation. He added that today the union plays a much smaller role in the operation of the Company, although he denied that this had been a managerial priority during the 1990s.

A representative from the GMB rejected this and argued that the 1990s had been a period when Retail Co had sought to actively marginalise the unions. He added that site managers had put pressure on their employees not to join the trade union. This pressure was intensified by the economic environment at the time because a high proportion of people working for Retail Co were not skilled and therefore, on the whole, easily replaceable. "They wanted to please the management, not alienate them, they wanted to pay their mortgage and feed their children" (GMB representative).

Although this section has suggested that Retail Co did take advantage of the industrial relations legislation and its affects to 'force' through changes in managerial strategies it was apparent that the driving force of change was internally based in the form of the new chairman. It was clear from all data gathered that policies and procedures changed at his command and that he maintained hierarchical 'control' over his workforce.

6.7 Trade Union Recognition and Influence

The relationship between management and the trade union, the GMB, up until the late 1980s appeared to have been relatively 'good'. The Employee Relations Director stated that at this time he fully appreciated the potential role of the trade unions within the organisation and added that he foresaw an important potential future working

relationship as the trade union had, by the end of the 1980s, become more "realistic" in its views and their overall approach to management. He said that he and the national secretary of the GMB had worked well together. Although he did acknowledge that at times the relationship had not been easy to maintain however they had always been able to 'talk'. He went on to argue that:

> *"Industrial relations are not about how far you can screw the workforce, or at least I don't see it that way. It should be about working with the unions and the workforce".*

The Employee Relations Director added that there was only one instance during this period that the Company considered withdrawing its support from the GMB, this was when they were considering merging with the T & G however, this failed to materialise and the relationship between the Company and the Union continued to be good. Union membership remained high throughout the 1980s, at about 70-80 per cent.

The union agreed that during the 1980s they had been able to talk to the management and that the organisation had continued to encourage and promote union membership throughout the organisation. The GMB representative interviewed in Birmingham highlighted that the atmosphere within the organisation during the 1980s was much more conducive to joining the trade union than at present:

> *"In the mid 1980s our membership was still high about 80 per cent, I think. Today we are down to around 12 per cent."*

He added that in his opinion during the 1980s the organisation had operated as more of a team than they did now:

> *"Employees in the 1980s felt committed to the organisation, today they feel exploited. ...Management ask for their opinions more today but the problem is that they just don't listen. [Retail Co] use various methods of pressurising the workforce far more today than they did in the 1980s".*

By the end of 1989 the retail side of the business the relationship between management and the trade unions were relatively quiescent. This however, was not the case for the distribution sector. The Company was not logistically large enough to be able to deal with the distribution centres which required skilled workers who knew how to pull this massive infrastructure together as well as skilled people who knew how to operate it. The Company along with other leading retailers realised that it would be beneficial to contract out the distribution sites and looked to the likes of Christian Salvesen, Wincanton and Excel to organise and run these centres (Harvey 2000). The Company however, did not want to give trade unions, in particular the T & G the opportunity to expand in this area as they were *"too militant"* (Retail Co's Employee Relations

Director 1997). The Company attempted to 'dissuade' their contractors from entering into agreements with trade unions in their distribution sites.

Eventually the Company was accused of breaching of the 1982 Employment Act by Ron Todd, General Secretary of the T&G, which stated that it was not legally possible to force the contracting company to de-recognise a union or to force a contracting organisation to recognise a specific union. As a result the distribution centres negotiated with different unions and set, within reason, their own terms and conditions. Although this was not ideal for Retail Co they were able to influence the contracting companies to the extent that each distribution centre recognised a different trade union in order to lower the risk of industrial action. The retail sector of the business continued to recognise a single union, the GMB.

Towards the end of the 1980s however, Retail Co had made a couple of unwise investments and was beginning to struggle (Employee Relations Director) in fact one manager stated:

> *"We were hours away from bankruptcy and I mean hours not months or even days."*

It was clear that the problems had to be addressed urgently if the Company was going to survive. A new Chairman was hired to provide a strong leadership and was given the task of creating an organisational culture which would allow the organisation to 'turn around'.

The relationship between Retail Co and the GMB dramatically changed from this point onwards. Most of the data collected both through the interviews as well as company documentation suggested that there had been an aggressive policy to marginalise the trade union during the 1990s as competition increased and the new management took control of the organisation.

Not only was it evident that the chairman was keen to introduce new management techniques and styles it was clear that he also intended to reduce the power of the unions within the organisation through both direct means, i.e. preventing new stores from recognising trade unions for the first six months of operation; and indirectly through introducing a 'Law Club' which was organised by the Company along the lines of an enterprise or company union.

Enterprise unions, which it could be argued the Law Club was, originated in Japan during the post World War II period (Bennett 1997:279). It has been suggested that they emerged as a result of confrontation between management and independent trade unions, for example the one hundred day Nissan strike in 1953 (Bennett 1997:279).

Bennett (1997:279) has also suggested that these enterprise unions have greater flexibility and can adjust to changing circumstances quickly. They further appear to have been successful in attracting and organising white collar as well as blue-collar workers (Bennett 1997:279). Despite these advantages there are a number of disadvantages such as their weak bargaining power in relation to an independent national trade union, which would probably have access to much greater financial support than the enterprise unions. They are further open, due to their very nature, to interference from the employing company (Bennett 1997:279). This was certainly the case for with the Law Club.

The Law Club was introduced into the company about eight years ago as a management response to the threat by the trade union of industrial action:

> *"At that time we [the company] were experiencing some unrest within the workforce. There had been a pay freeze and the employees were unsure of the changes, which were going on. We didn't need industrial action so the Head Office decided to try to prevent any trouble. They thought that if they could introduce a club which offered everything that the union could then our employees would join that rather than the union and we could prevent any action" (Store Personnel Manager, Midlands)*

The Law Club was established and is operated by a number of lawyers chosen by Retail Co and the company's Head Office management team. It deals with areas such as domestic disputes, work help lines, conveyancing, mortgage information as well as more traditional areas covered by the union. It also operates 365 days a year and covered all the family, not just the employee, this together with the low cost of joining, about 20 pence a week, and the fact that membership is actively supported in the stores meant that many of the worker force have joined this in preference to the union.

It was clear from the many interviews carried out that membership of the Law Club was actively promoted and encouraged within all the stores.

> *"Management now have to target reducing union membership. [The Chairman] wants no union recognition. [He] talks about a negotiated agreement of partnership between the Company and the union, but it is anything but. The GMB can't negotiate over pay*

now. There are a lot of issues which the union deal with well and can help the Company. It's a shame that so much damage has been done. ...The way [he] went about it was wrong he brought in changes over night, literally, without consulting anyone. Industrial relations are not about how far you can screw the workforce - or at least I don't see it that way. It should be about management working with the unions and the workforce" (Employee Relations Director).

The union sees the Law Club as a direct attempt to reduce the membership of the GMB and their subsequent representation within the Company:

> *"Union membership has fallen in this store from 90% to 11% since the Law Club was introduced" (GMB, Scotland).*

A senior manager also claimed:

> *"The Law Club has been so popular that we now do not need the protection of the union as we did. It covers all the areas that the GMB does. I think that this is why the union has lost its power and influence".*

From interviews it is possible to argue that the introduction of the Law Club supports the claim made by the GMB that loss of their influence is a result of aggressive senior management, in particular the chairman who was appointed in the early 1990s.

> *"... [The Chairman] is hated by most of his managers. He puts a huge amount of pressure on his managers to get rid of the union - he had one poor manager in fear of loosing his job. He told him that he had to ensure that the GMB didn't get into his new store, if he did then he could expect to be looking for a new job. The poor guy. The union did get in, however in the end he kept his job but the stress that the threat caused was totally unfair" (Employee Relations Director).*

At each site visited, the management admitted that they had experienced a decrease in the influence of trade unions during the late 1980s and 1990s. The reasons given for this decline however, were not consistent with each other. One of the head office directors claimed that this change had been the result of the Company's policy to develop a 'culture of communication and team work'. He stated that each manager must "communicate, communicate, communicate" as this was the "way forward".

6.8 Organisational Culture and Structure

The acquisitions and mergers that took place within Retail Co were seen as positive moves on the part of management. However, evidence suggests that the Company failed to consolidate and acclimatise its 'new' employees adequately. This resulted in a 'clash' of cultures between the established 'parent' company and the newly acquired organisations (Cartwright and Cooper 1995). Employees felt alienated, they lacked job

security and did not feel committed to the organisation (Ibid). In fact Holmes and Rahne (1967) equate the personal adjustment required to that of experiencing a bereavement. Cartwright and Cooper (1995) add that merger failure could be caused by factors such as "continued power struggles at the top, relative partner size, context (i.e. the degree of hostility surrounding the bid) post merger managerial exhaustion and apathy as a result of difficult and protracted negotiations and insensitivity towards grieving and anxious managers/employees". They highlight that a "strategy fit is an essential prerequisite to any organisational marriage". Cartwright and Cooper (1995) outline three different approaches which could be adopted:

- "The acquiring organisation may elect to impose its own culture on its acquisition.
- Seek to integrate the two cultures
- Choose to allow the appendage to maintain a separate and different cultural identity"

They add that if cultural change is necessary management should recognise that it is a "long and difficult process" and could take as long as five years to implement. This is supported by Balmer and Dinnie (1999) who argue that "a long term approach to mergers may lay sounder foundations for the post-merger company than the more frenzied short-term approach familiar to the UK".

This culture 'clash' was also evident in Beer Co (cf Chapter 8) who had also experienced a period of rapid growth which involved acquisitions and mergers. The management teams in both Retail Co and Beer Co were, at the time of writing, attempting to address these problems. Although facing similar problems Retail Co and Beer Co did not address them in the same way. It was therefore believed that these organisations should be examined separately and within their own sectoral environment within this thesis.

To begin it is necessary to look at what is meant by the term corporate 'culture'. Although the idea of organisational culture is not a new phenomenon it has been popularised by Peters and Waterman's (1983) *In Search of Excellence*. It suggested that creating the 'right' corporate culture could have a vital impact on any organisations competitive advantage (Storey and Sisson 1995:184). However this gives rise to a number of questions such as, what is culture? Can it be managed? Can two separate organisations merge not only their assets but also their corporate cultures?

Schien (1985) argues that organisational culture can be divided into three levels:

- Artefacts: These are perhaps the most visible level of an organisations culture. These include the constructed physical and social environment such as physical lay-out, technological output, written and spoken language and the overt behaviour of the workforce

- "Values: Cultural learning reflects someone's original values. Solutions about how to deal with a new task, issue or problem are based on convictions of reality. If the solution works the value can transform into a belief. Values and beliefs become part of the conceptual process by which group members justify actions and behaviour"

- "Basic Underlying Assumptions: When a solution to a problem works repeatedly it comes to be taken for granted. Basic assumptions are unconsciously held learned response. They are implicit assumptions that actually guide behaviour and determine how group members perceive, think and feel about things" (Schien 1985).

Storey and Sisson (1995:185) describe culture as "the way things are routinely done around here". Atkinson (1990) agrees and states that organisational culture is about reflecting the underlying assumptions about the way in which work is undertaken, what is acceptable and what is not. Schein (1984) states that an organisations' culture is the "pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration". McLean and Marshall (1993) add that culture is a "collection of traditions, values, policies, beliefs and attitudes that constitute a pervasive context for everything we do and think in an organisation". Culture is supported within organisations by systems of 'rites and rituals' which should be reflected in management styles and practices and employee behaviour. Cartwright and Cooper (1995) however, argue that "different types of organisational culture nurture particular values, attitudes and styles of work organisation to create psychologically different work environments and forms of psychological contract between employer and employee". Thus implementing the 'right' corporate culture is essential for organisational success (Balmer and Dinnie 1999).

How the term is defined and understood is extremely important because it may effect how the company handles the merger of two or more cultures. The experience could range from being "mildly unpleasant, surprising and novel [to] extremely disturbing for organisational members" (Cartwright and Cooper 1995). Also the extent to which the organisation is described as a unitarist or pluralistic employer will impact on how the situation is handled. For example 'whose' ways of doing things should be adopted -

management or employees or employees together with management? The former suggests that corporate culture or unitarist approach, comes from the 'top' i.e. the Board and the second could be described as a pluralistic corporate culture, which was drawn from the completing interests and objectives of the whole workforce (Storey and Sisson 1995:185; Gospel and Palmer 1993:12).

Storey and Sisson (1995:184) have suggested that the idea of corporate culture has increased in importance during the 1980s and 1990s because it is perceived to promise consensus, flexibility, loyalty and commitment from the workforce (Gospel and Palmer 1993:12-14; Salamon 1998:5-6). Consensus because it brings with it the assumption that both management and employees are united in a common set of values and beliefs (Farnham and Pimlott 1992:4; Gospel and Palmer 1993: 12-14; Hollinshead, Nicholls and Tailby 1999:17-18). Flexibility in that if the company achieves consensus it should be possible to eliminate restrictive practices and thus improve the performance of employees (Farnhman and Pimlott 1992:4-5; Hollinshead, Nicholls and Tailby 1999:17-18). This would again be achieved in the pursuit of shared, management and employees, aims and objectives and thus eliminate job demarcation (Farnhman and Pimlott 1992:4-5; Sisson and Storey 1995:184). Finally commitment together with a strong psychological contract would again be built on a joint vision of employees and managers (Sisson and Storey 1995:185).

The failure to identify problems which were emerging as a result of this cultural 'clash' early enough was highlighted by one senior store manager in West Yorkshire when he suggested that it had almost proved fatal as the company had come within hours of bankruptcy. Another senior board member added that this was mainly due to an ineffective board who had failed to plan strategically as well as 'bad' management and leadership styles and practices. Cartwright and Cooper (1995) add that it is important that management realise that human as well as financial activity is considered prior to the integration of two organisations. For example, they argue that "acquired or merged organisations experience an overall rate of staff turnover in the first two years post merger of at least 30 per cent". The Mercer Management Consulting survey (1997) concluded that "48 per cent of mergers underperform in their industry after three years and that failure to unlock value is often due to poor implementation of mergers". As Retail Co did not prioritise the human factor in its acquisitions and mergers this could

perhaps have resulted in inefficiencies, divided loyalties, poor communication and uncertainty for their employees (Cartwright and Cooper 1995).

It is, therefore, clear that acquisitions and mergers played an important part in the process of change experienced within Retail Co during the 1980s and 1990s. However it is also clear that factors, such as the need to maintain their market share in an increasingly competitive environment drove a high proportion of these mergers and acquisitions. This suggests that increasing competition encouraged the policy of merger and acquisition for Retail Co supporting the findings in Bank Co and Distribution Co.

6.9 Information Technology

Salaman (2000:532) suggests that the 1980s and the 1990s can be referred to as the 'technological revolution'. He states that this 'tag' has been added due to the speed of the change as well as the impact that information has impacted on the employment relationship as well as organisational performance as a whole.

Retail Co was keen to adopt the new technologies from in particular the 1990s in the sense that the data suggests they saw this as a means of increasing productivity at a reduced cost which would allow them to compete more aggressively. They also appeared to be using the new technology to weaken trade union power within the organisation thus supporting Aikin (1984:37) who suggested that new technology is able "to transform jobs in ways which make them inherently less amenable to worker control" as well as trade union influence.

Although there was documentary evidence to suggest that the GMB had attempted to include the introduction of new technologies within the collective agreements this was rejected by management who from the 1990s continually asserted their right to manage in ways they saw fit. Salaman (2000:533) also found that on the whole trade unions were not able to "secure a direct share of any economic benefit for their members" through the introduction of new technologies.

Retail Co introduced new technologies into a number of areas of the business for example the warehouses where stock was monitored; the tills where the number of items scanned per customer/hours was recorded and queues were electronically monitored to ensure the "till operators were working to the best of their ability" (store

manager, Scotland)[1]. Information technology was also introduced to the administrative offices although resistance here was not as aggressive as had been the case in Distribution Co.

On the whole the shop floor employees within Retail Co did not really object to the introduction of new technology mainly due to the fact that they accepted managements argument that it was in place to "help them to become more efficient". It was only the trade union representatives who saw that the technology was being used as a management tool to control and monitor the work force. There was clear documentary evidence in the form of minutes of meetings to support the unions right to be suspicious. In fact some of the data examined outlined new targets which had been identified from the data produced from the new technology for example the number of items to be scanned per hour was included in new performance related pay targets.

Although employees within Retail Co did not appear to 'fear' the introduction of new technologies management certainly increased their control of work place performance through its use. Thereby shifting the balance of power within the workplace while continuing to reduce the power of the trade union.

6.10   Conclusion

In conclusion there is a need to emphasise that Retail Co has, out of all the companies researched, sought to implement a new organisational culture alongside 'new' management practices. It has provided an opportunity to examine the way Retail Co utilised the external climate, including the industrial relations legislation to restructure the organisation.

It is clear from the data gathered that Retail Co was heavily influenced by the leadership style of a single individual, the chairman, who was employed during the early 1990s. His leadership style forced the culture of the organisation to change and 'encouraged' the employees and management to adopt 'new' workplace practices. He personally encouraged structural and organisational changes to take place within the company (cf. figure 6.1) and directly influenced the industrial relations situation at the organisation.

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[1] See Blyton and Turnbull (1998) who argue that there has been an increase in monitoring and timekeeping as well as performance of check-out staff using electronic point of sale devices)

Figure 6.1   The Impact of Leadership on Retail Co.
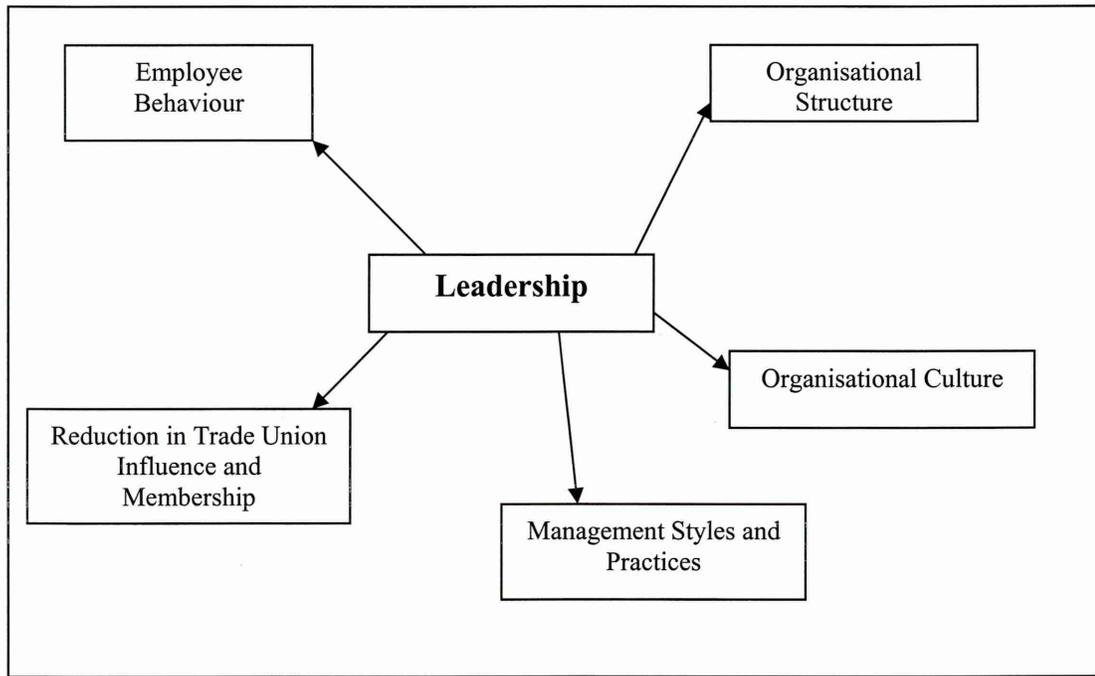
However, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not the leadership style of the new chairman would have been so influential had Retail Co not experienced such rapid expansion followed by a period of aggressive competition during the late 1980s which almost made the Company bankrupt.

Another external environmental factor which appears to have played a leading role in the changes which occurred within Retail Co during the 1980s and 1990s was the impact that changes in industrial relation legislation had on employment policies. The information gathered both from secondary and primary sources support the theory that Retail Co did use the fact that trade unions had been 'weakened' to change organisational structures and introduce 'new' employment practices to their sites (cf. figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2   The Impact of Industrial Relations Legislation on Retail Co
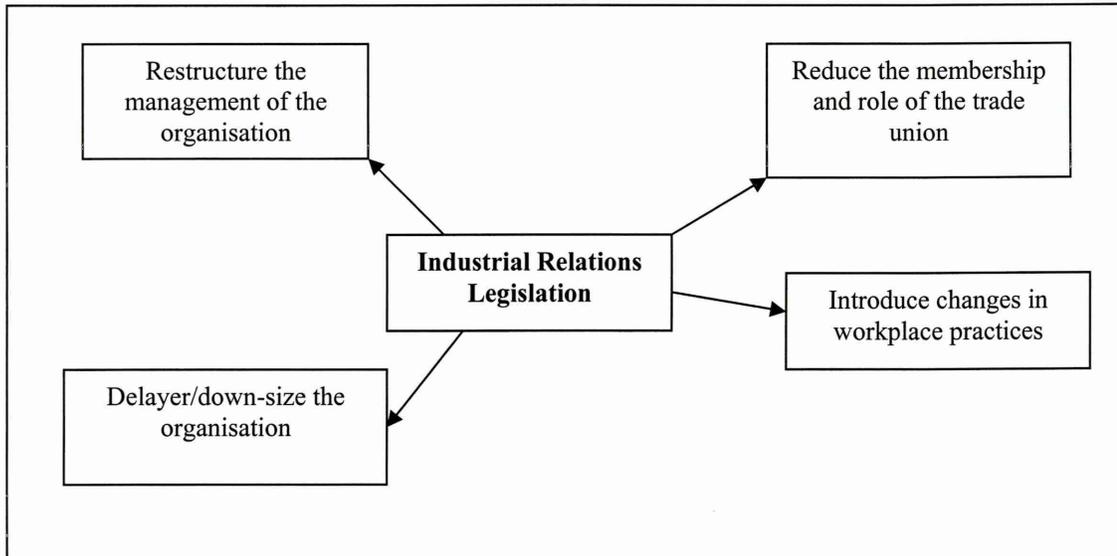
The following chapter will continue to examine the changes which have occurred within British workplaces through an investigation of another multi-plant organisation selected from another economic sector. It will look at whether employment relations have changed 'dramatically' during this period in relation to Beer Co.

Chapter 7

Beer Co

7.1   Introduction

Chapter 7 will follow a similar format to the previous chapters in section two. For example it will be divided into the eight areas highlighted in chapters 4, 5, and 6 in line with case study tradition (Ticehurst and Veal 2000:50). It will also adopt a grounded theory approach by using data gathered from the previous chapters to expand the analysis of changes within Beer Co.

As with the other case study organisations Beer Co was selected on the basis of specific criteria (cf. appendix 1) as well as representing another sector of the British economy. This offered the researcher the opportunity to explore the experiences of a variety of organisations from differing economic backgrounds.

7.2   Historical Background

At the time of the research Beer Co was a conglomerate of companies that were primarily associated with the production, sale and distribution of beer. The company was established during the middle of the eighteenth century and has developed around its core interest. The Head Office of this diverse company is located in Scotland although the key business areas, beer, retail and leisure each had a specialised management team located on specific sites throughout the U.K. The organisation expanded at a steady rate until the 1970s through acquisition and merger.

The 1970s, was a turbulent time with respect to industrial relations in many organisations throughout the UK and Beer Co was no exception. The Personnel and Training Director suggested that the 1970s was very much a 'rule book culture' in as much as if there wasn't a rule to cover a particular situation then one had to be made.

The same director stated that this was not peculiar to this organisation as it was widespread in a number of industries during the 1970s. He added that this industrial unrest had, for Beer Co, 'split' over from the brewing section of the organisation into other sectors of the business even at times when they were not directly connected with the disputed issue.

However, during the late 1970s and early 1980s Beer Co experienced what one site manager describes as a "sea change" with regard to industrial relations. He stated that this was in part due to the election of the Conservative Government in 1979 and the change in political climate and partly because the management of the company realised that there was a need to examine the relationship between the trade unions and the company in order for the company to continue to grow. The management decided that there was a need to change and they, suggested a general manager in Humberside, recognised the advantages, which could be gained by communicating directly with their employees thus by-passing the trade unions.

7.3 Market Competition

From a management perspective Beer Co embarked on a price 'war' with other brewers during the period under investigation. This action was also identified by Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes (1985:107) in their research who argued that this was done to protect the market share of companies in an increasingly competitive environment (Vrontis and Vignali 1999).

During the 1970s and 1980s Beer Co and Cressey et als (1985) case study brewery were badly affected by the rapid expansion of drinks such as wine as well as the increasing cost of beer (Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes 1985:107). However during the 1990s Beer Co managed to adjust to the changing environment and became one of the sectors market leaders.

A General Manager from Nottinghamshire explained that during the 1980s Beer Co together with a few other large breweries owned approximately seventy five percent of all public houses in Britain. The Conservative Government, he added, saw this as a monopoly, which was "against the interests of the public". Therefore in 1989 Lord

Young introduced a framework of legislative 'control' in the form the 'Beer Orders'[1]. Knowles and Howley (2000) explain that prior to 1989 "almost 70 per cent of British pubs were tied houses, owned by the breweries and staffed by their employees or tenants renting from the brewer and stocking only the company's beers". This the monopolies and mergers commission decided was unacceptable and ordered the major breweries to reduce the number of tied houses. This resulted in a major restructuring of the brewing industry as 11,000 pubs were sold (ibid).   This enabled smaller organisations to enter the market and create niches for themselves (ibid).

These beer orders, explained the same manager, limited the number of public houses a brewery could own. For example Beer Co owned approximately two thousand four hundred public houses prior to this legislation, following the 'beer orders' Beer Co was forced to sell four hundred of these establishments. This, one general manager argued, had the opposite effect to the one the Government wanted in that rather than freeing the market, as was hoped, large public house companies purchased these public houses. He added that these large companies do have a monopoly which is so powerful that they are able to make certain "unreasonable" demands on the breweries that restrict the price they purchase the beer while continuing to charge high prices to their customers. He emphasised that this particular piece of legislation made the brewing industry very insecure and in his opinion less competitive:

> *"The beer orders were supposed to free the market, in fact they restricted it. It made the British beer industry less competitive as it restricted their ability to bid for volume as our European counterparts are able to".*

However, Knowles and Howley (2000) conclude that these 'Beer Orders' "revitalised the industry" while allowing the leading four major brewing companies a "stronger hold over the supply of beer than … before the legislation". Despite this assertion Beer Co maintain that the 'Beer Orders', rather than the other changes in the environment had a greater impact on the organisation both in relation to its management style and its industrial relations policies (Edwards and Bunting 1992).

The personnel manager at a site in Yorkshire suggested that the brewing industry, as direct result of the 'Beer Orders' and the resulting increase in competition, had now found itself in a highly competitive market place (Edwards and Bunting 1992; Knowles

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[1] "The Supply of Beer" 1989 **Monopolies and Mergers Commission** HMSO, London resulted in the tied state order legislation

and Howley 2000). Although he argued that the breweries were learning from other industrial sectors such as retail and in particular the supermarkets, how to survive in this 'new' intensively competitive economic climate.

In order to acclimatise to the increased competition, the company undertook a number of changes, which have altered both the nature of the business and its style of management. For example, as a result of the 'Beer Orders' and a merger with another leading brewery, Beer Co had to restructure and reduce employee numbers by approximately one thousand four hundred. The management of the Company stated that most of these job losses were non-compulsory and thus did not cause too much employee unrest. However a trade union representative from Reading disagreed. He argued that although the company had sought voluntary redundancy packages from their employees, if this had not been forth coming management had applied pressure to certain individuals and that "some arm twisting" had taken place. From either perspective however, it introduced a sense of insecurity to employees which was still clearly visible during the research period.

7.4 Geographical Location

As the research progressed it became very clear that the geographical location of sites was important to some organisations. Therefore it was felt necessary to visit a number of sites in order to ensure that the data collected from each of the five companies could be comparable and thus help to validate the research findings (Ticehurst and Veal 2000:50). The research was therefore gathered in Scotland, the Midlands, Yorkshire, Oxfordshire and Lincolnshire. Martin, Sunley and Wills (1996:16-17) emphasise the importance of considering the geographical location in relation to employment relations by arguing that all parties involved in industrial and/or workplace relations make "strategic use of the 'power of place' and 'local context'" in that they attempt to 'play-off' employees in other locations in order to strengthen their own policy aims. This is of particular importance when considering areas such as restructuring, investment, employees terms and conditions and industrial relations.

As the data was collated it became clear that the employment relationship within Beer Co had like that of Distribution Co and Retail Co been significantly influenced by the geographical location of each site. For example the site in Scotland had a very traditional approach to the management of people perhaps due to the fact that the site

was located in an area where strong workplace traditions had been established in the past (Martin, Sunley and Wills 1996:16) and the trade unions had a strong voice. However another site in Lincolnshire was located in a greenfield area the data gathered from this site indicated that there was a very different balance of power within the workplace. For example if the "employees faces didn't fit then management just get rid of them" (trade union representative, Lincolnshire 1996). Further an employee from this site stated that she felt very insecure and was constantly worried about loosing her job. She stressed that although trade unions were recognised she was afraid to join in case management "didn't approve" and she lost her job.

Thus to conclude this section it was evident that the geographical location had played a significant part in the changes which had occurred within Beer Co during the 1980s and the 1990s and to some extent had prevented the integration of the various organisations which had been acquired or merged throughout the period.

7.5 Management Style

The management style identified within Beer Co was that of the 'sophisticated modern' (Purcell and Sisson 1983). However unlike Bank Co they appear to follow the 'consulters' sub-category. Purcell and Sisson (1983) argue that management within this category try to develop a harmonious working relationship with their employees, but more importantly with the trade unions. The aim of management is to build a constructive relationship with the trade unions which will add value to the whole organisation. Management will however seek to improve employee commitment independently from the trade union and are likely to operate schemes such as store options and profit sharing as well as seeking to improve organisational communication channels (Blyton and Turnbull 1994:80). The interviews with management, employees as well as the trade unions indicated that Beer Co, on the whole, fitted this criterion.

There are many ways in which an organisation can communicate with their employees and Beer Co has attempted to utilise a number of these in order to engage and involve their employees. Beer Co, like Retail Co underwent a period of rapid change during the 1980s when they were involved in an increased number of acquisitions and mergers. This caused a number of problems similar to those experienced within Retail Co, however, Beer Co addressed them differently. Instead of changing the whole organisational culture and creating something new, as Retail Co had done, they

attempted to encourage the newly acquired organisations to adopt the existing culture within the parent organisation.

Unfortunately the level of communication throughout the organisation was not consistent and although all divisions agreed that the employees should be the first link in the communication chain this was not the case in practice.

Communication with the trade unions was also uneven and varied during this period. The employee relations manager at head office stated that:

> *"With regard to the beer division we communicate on a formal basis, they [the union] prefer it this way. The leisure division does not recognise trade unions at all so they focus on employee consultative meetings. In all other areas [retail] we communicate on a formal basis with the unions in relation to issues such as redundancies"*

The general feeling from the management interviewed in this company was that there was a need to build up a relationship of trust and communication with their employees. They considered the most effective way of achieving this and of keeping the workforce fully informed of all major changes was through direct communication (Collyer 2000; Balmer and Gray 2000). Although similar to the approach taken by Retail Co it was felt that there was a difference between Retail Co and Beer Co in that while both organisations appeared to be sincere in their stated beliefs there was little evidence that Retail Co attempted to convert these statements into practice. In comparison Beer Co appeared to be actively attempting to implement, build and increase the various levels of communication in order to increase employee loyalty and commitment.

A General Manager from a site in Nottinghamshire stated that the organisation had tried to involve everyone in some form of communication. For example, they operated a company wide newspaper as well as a paper specific to each division within the organisation. The latter is much more informal in structure which although including a company relevant lead story, tend include more personal items. Bennett (1997:72) has suggested that company newspapers establishes a "direct line of communication from the board room to the shop floor". Beer Co's organisation wide newspaper was used to communicate and explain new developments that have or were about to occur. It also attempts to increase loyalty towards the organisation and thus motivate the workforce as well as giving individual employees the chance to contribute to features and/or items of news. Its stated role is to inform employees about general issues such as the share price

and report on how the organisation or a particular division is performing within the wider business or societal environment. It encourages employees to 'learn' more about the organisation that employs them as well as providing a regular means for transmitting information from management to the workforce as a whole. Griffiths (1995) suggested that during the 1990s this method of communication was used to promote flexible working and encourage a harmonious working environment. He stated that the company paper had also been used to reinforce the company culture and convey in a positive form changes which were required in working practices.

An employee relations manager at of one of the Scottish sites said that as well as the newspapers the Company also distributed a number of documents which were posted directly to employees homes. The most recent of which "The Way Ahead", informed employees about the forth coming merger of two breweries in the hope that the workforce would understand the business in greater detail and encourage employee commitment (Collyer 2000; Balmer and Gray 2000). However Bennett (1997:72) argues that this direct communication could also be a way of bypassing or reducing the role and influence of trade unions as well as an attempt to gain support for specific management decisions.

A general manager at a site in the midlands stated that the Company operated a number of team briefings at various levels within the organisation. These team briefings were intended to be a two-way channel for communication. The management interviewed suggested that managers should to be able to explain issues and/or policies to employees. They would also be able to address questions posed by the workforce as well as discussing problems and solutions. This, management stated was another way in which they aimed to increase employee acceptance, loyalty and commitment. Despite attempts to ensure that these forms of communication are put into practice within Beer Co evidence suggests that such meetings are generally, as argued by Salamon (1998:366) a "downward cascade of information" from management to the shop floor.

Within Beer Co team briefings are held on a weekly basis and are formally organised and led by managers or immediate supervisors (Salamon 1998:367). Salamon (1998:367) has argued that team briefings are designed to pass information to the workforce and to encourage employee participation in the decision making process and

thus enhance worker loyalty and commitment. Both Salamon (1998:367) and Richardson (1999:394) suggest that team briefings can be used by some organisations to "strengthen the managerial role of the supervisor or manager" and by some to marginalise the trade union. Hyman and Mason (1995:80) agree and argue that management could be afraid to encourage two-way communication as it may develop into a "consultation forum" and thus question their authority within the organisation.

Many studies have confirmed that 'downward' communication, from management to shop floor, was the most commonly used form of communication within large organisations during the 1990s (Millward et al 1992:166; Storey 1996:283; IRS 1996). The effectiveness of team briefings, however, is dependent on a number of factors (Salamon 1998:367). For example, the regularity and content of the team briefings and even to an increasing extent on the use of peripheral workers, who because of their position, status and thus loyalty to the organisation could reduce the effectiveness of team briefings (Marchington 1989:2; Salamon 1998:367).

The General Manager from Nottingham acknowledged that a high proportion of the organisation's communication was one way, from management to employees, however he stated that senior management was "actively" addressing this. The trade unions spoken to raised a number of doubts about management's genuine intention to increase employee involvement or indeed participation in decision making within the Company. Salamon (1998:372) supported these claims in that he suggests that the expansion of direct forms of employee involvement and participation schemes could be viewed as an attempt by management to undermine the existing representative arrangements and to break down traditional lines of demarcation between groups of workers. This could perhaps reduce the 'power' of the trade unions within the Company (Salamon 1998:372). Bailey (1983:177) agrees and states an increase in direct forms of communication between management and employees is "no more than a subtle way of exploiting the worker to achieve greater production without rewarding him for his efforts". This appears from the employees interviewed to have been the case within Beer Co where as one employee argued "they [management] just use the meetings to tell us what they are doing. Yes, they do ask our opinion but I don't think they really listen".

Table 7.1   Methods other than consultative committees used by management to communicate with or consult employees, 1984 and 1998 (Cully et al 1999:229)

	1984 % of workplaces	1990 % of workplaces	1998 % of workplaces
Systematic use of the management chain	62	60	60
Regular newsletters distributed to all employees	34	41	50
Regular meetings between management and Workforce	34	41	48
Suggestion scheme	25	28	33

It should be noted that Beer Co was using all the methods highlighted in table 9.1 to communicate with their workforce. They actively encouraged and utilised them throughout the organisation however the motivation for this has been debated. A number of human resource managers interviewed stated that the 'improved' communication channels allowed employees to become involved in the decision making process within the organisation and thus made them feel part of the company. Townley (1994:603) on the other hand suggests that such schemes are merely used by employers to determine the views and 'mood' of the workforce and to assess company loyalty. Hyman and Mason (1995:82-88) suggest that if management is to make the most of the information gathered through these communication channels, they should respond and be seen to be responding by the workforce to issues raised by employees. Unfortunately this was not consistently the case in Beer Co during the 1980s and 1990s.

Another way the organisation communicated with its employees was via a number of different forums. The most effective of which was the Chairman's Forum. This particular forum is made up of a range of employees some are appointed, mainly the management (due to lack of volunteers, indicating a lack of commitment) others are elected. The various trade unions were also represented. The Forum is used by the Board to communicate the organisation's successes and failures, to explain, as one Director put it "what is going on in the Company". The meetings, which were held on a six monthly basis, generally focused on the economic performance of the organisation, its sale prospects, costs and Beer Co's marketing strategy. Matters relating to collective bargaining are prohibited as this is outside the remit of the Chairman's Forum. It was

suggested, by one employee that was because "they [management] weren't interested in our opinions".

Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes (1985:112) found that a similar forum had been established within their case study company. Further it operated on much the same lines as the one in Beer Co. The management of both Beer Co and Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes' case study (1985:112-113) believed the role of the Chairman's Forum was to provide an opportunity for senior managers to pass on "high-level company information" to employees. On occasions this information was confidential which meant that a degree of trust had to be established between the various members of the Forum. This appears to have been successful in that an employee relations manager at a site in Scotland suggested that throughout the time he had been employed by the company this confidentiality had not been broken. He argued that this was because the employees who were involved in the Forum "liked having the responsibility of preserving this confidentiality. This opinion was supported by an employee who stated that membership of the forum had made her feel "valuable". She said that all levels of management listened to what she and other employees in the forum had to say. She added that the forum definitely increased her commitment to the company.

Management suggested that the Chairman's Forum improved the relationship with the unions as it involved trade union negotiators directly in company affairs and thus made negotiations outside this Forum less conflictual (Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes 1985:113).

The Personnel and Training Director suggested that the Chairman's Forum had had a huge influence on both employee relations and industrial relations throughout the organisation. A senior head office manager added that this Forum was a 'revolutionary' move by management which had been made in order to address the problems the Company was facing as a result of various acquisitions and mergers and within the area of employee and industrial relations. A European Works Council had recently been introduced and it was hoped that this would in time replace the Chairman's Forum, which although not legally obligatory (Bolger 1998; Fenton-O'Creevy, Wood and Callerot 1998) would, suggested the Group Personnel Planning Officer, bring the organisation into line with European legislation.

The various forms of data collected in relation to Beer Co indicated that management had attempted to change the employment relationship through improved communication channels. It was also clear that Beer Co had actively sought to adjust the way management behaved in order to improve the organisations performance.

The focus on communication was continued through the examination of the introduction of European Works Councils. The structure of the European Works Council is more formal than the Chairman's Forum and according to one senior manager, it reduced the role and influence of the trade unions because they did not have a formal channel through which they could contribute. As a response to this the trade unions changed how they interacted with management in that they became more structured and planned their "action and reaction" more carefully. For example they began meeting before the works council meetings in order to prepare their strategy, they also now ensure that they organise feed back groups to disseminate information quickly to members.

Addison, Siebert, Wagner and Wei (1997) identified a positive relationship between productivity in large firms and the existence of works councils however they suggest that this was generally offset by the higher cost of wages within these organisations and was dependent on the efficiency of implementation. They further examined the relationship between unionisation and the impact of consultative committees in the United Kingdom and suggest that within unionised organisations those that had a consultative committee could expect a lower rate of productivity in contrast to non-union workplaces where the presence of a consultative committee in general was associated with higher productivity (Addison, Siebert, Wagner and Wei 1997). They add that is due to the tendency for consultative committees, in unionised workplaces, to consult on "inappropriate issues" (Addison, Siebert, Wagner and Wei 1997). This was found to be the case in both Distribution Co and Beer Co. Fenton-O'Creevy, Wood and Callerot (1998:9) conclude that "indirect forms of employee involvement (such as works councils) may have moderate positive effects or moderate negative effects on a firms performance depending on firm context and how [such works councils] are implemented"

It has been suggested that in the U. K., where works councils have only recently been introduced, management do not regard them as being an effective method for transferring information to the workforce or as a forum for consultation especially if

compared to countries such as France or Germany (Fenton-O'Creevy, Wood and Callerot 1998:22). A senior manager stated that the Company had introduced a European Works Council to ensure that it remained in 'control' of the council rather than having an predetermined infrastructure forced on them by a European Directive. Fenton-O'Creevy, Wood and Callerot (1998:31) found similar evidence in their study in fact they concluded that "for most companies in our sample, the European Works Council has been seen as badly suited to their circumstances" and that the council tended to be "treated as an isolated institution with no linkage to other aspects of the Human Resources or Industrial Relations processes" of the relevant organisations.

It is interesting to note that Fenton-O'Creevy, Wood and Callerot (1998:) concluded that organisations, within the U. K. where European Works Councils were not used, placed a much greater emphasis on direct forms of communication with employees and/or trade union representatives than their European counterparts (Fenton-O'Creevy, Wood and Callerot 1998:22) especially within large multinational organisations.

The data suggests that although management had improved channels of communication between themselves as well as with their workforce individual employees together with trade union representatives were suspicious about the underlying reasons for this. Some clearly felt that these new or improved channels of communication had been introduced to marginalise the trade union and thus increase employee insecurity rather than transmitting valuable information to them.

7.6 Impact of Employment Legislation

The management interviewed within Beer Co concluded that the industrial relations legislation of the 1980s and 1990s had not had a great impact on their managerial styles or in fact employment relations in general. They all cited the legislation relating the 'beer orders' as having a much greater impact on the organisation.

A manager from North Yorkshire stated that within the brewing section of the organisation, the industrial relations legislation had had a minimal effect. He pointed out that the brewing section was still heavily unionised and that the Company had continued to consult and negotiate with the trade unions. He added that the only change that he had noticed was that when industrial action was being planned management were informed, this he said was a great asset as it enabled the management to minimise

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the impact on the organisation. He concluded that the notice which was required before action could be taken enabled management to negotiate and plan thus usually allowing them to reach an agreement with the unions, thereby preventing industrial action taking place. He said that this made the relationship between the trade unions and management much friendlier.

A trade union representative in Nottingham agreed that the secret ballot had meant that industrial action had been reduced however he pointed out that the union had to be fairly confident of winning the ballot as they were expensive to conduct. Thus the union had sought to reduce the number of issues that were taken forward to a ballot for action.

The other sections of the organisation had either de-recognised the trade union or had never negotiated with them, thus the impact of the industrial relations legislation in these areas had been limited. However a number of employees from these sections of the organisation believed that their 'power' in the employment relationship had been reduced significantly throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

"Management just do what they want these days. They know you'll do what you're told because if you don't they'll just get rid or you".

"We are supposed to work in teams and support each other however the management don't seem to want to support you much. They just want you to work harder and harder".

"Management have just de-recognised the trade union in our division. I feel quite vulnerable now. Who is going to put our interests forward?"

In general, management in the non-union sections of the organisation felt that the absence of a trade union was of benefit to their divisions as they "only get in the way". They also believed that the employment relationship had improved as they now had direct contact with the workforce rather than going through a third party.

One manager from Northampton did acknowledge that the external economic climate had "unsettled" the workforce and had enabled management to restructure. He concluded that the economic impact had had a significant effect on the employment relationship.

Another manager, from Nottingham, added that the governments' defeat of the NUM in the mid-1980s had shown the workforce that disruptive trade unions would not be tolerated. He suggested that this had influenced many of the trade unions and had perhaps reduced the industrial action.

A trade union representative rejected the suggestion that the defeat of the miners union had reduced industrial action in the country. He stated that it was the economic climate during the 1980s and 1990s that had prevented action being taken.

> *"Employees were worried about having a job ... they didn't want to take action in case they were sacked ... they had seen what had happened in Wapping".*

The same representative argued that the inclusion on the ballot form of the sentence warning employees that they could be in breach of their contract if they went on strike worried some employees and probably deterred them from striking.

The evidence examined in relation to the impact of industrial relations legislation on Beer Co suggests that although this legislation together with the general economic climate in the country 'assisted' management in implementing 'new' management styles and practices it was not the 'driving force' behind these changes.

7.7 Trade Union Recognition and Influence

The level of trade union representation varied from site to site and from division to division. The difference appears, at least in part, to do with the history and cultural background of each division. For example the beer section remains heavily unionised with very traditional working practices however the leisure division does not have trade union recognition. This is perhaps not unusual as there were large differences between the various groups of employees and thus it was difficult, both from a management and a trade union perspective, to negotiate a common 'package' which would suit everyone (Cressey, Eldridge and MacInnes 1985:110). This supports Cressey, Elridge and MacInnes (1985:111) who found that differences between groups of employees was accepted by senior management who realised that "as much as they would like to treat each group similarly they knew that status, differentials and suspicions would not allow them to move to a position of equalisation".

It was interesting to note that the company attempted to convey the message that they operated as a 'family' run business however, this was not reflected by information

gathered from the workforce or from other evidence examined at the time. In fact data gathered within the leisure division suggested quite the opposite in that it appeared to be 'controlled' by an authoritarian manager. For example the researcher was denied access to the employees in this sector. This raised questions about exactly how the workforce was treated and put in doubt what the General Manager had said about a caring employer. A middle manager from Nottingham further acknowledged that insecurity existed throughout the whole of the Company and added that this had become more acute during the 1990s following a substantial increase in competition.

Salamon (1998:48-49) suggests that the decline in economic growth and prosperity during the last two decades coupled with government policy and high unemployment rates has undermined workers traditional job security assumptions (Nolan 1987). In fact he stated that high unemployment and the "technological revolution" could bring about severe social change which would be comparable to that caused by the Industrial Revolution, by "removing many people from permanent, secure and adequately paid work" and placing them in an insecure and vulnerable position (Salamon 1998:49).

This insecurity was also clearly evident in conversations with the employees in the brewing division who claimed that they needed the union to protect them against the aggressive style of management (Salamon 1998:97). This appeared to be supported by a site Manager in Yorkshire who stated that management strategies which were directed towards individualising the employment relationship had had a dramatic impact on trade union membership and density on his site. Salamon (1998:97) highlights that insecurity together with the constant fear of redundancy causes many problems for individual employees and consequently the organisation as a whole in that it reduces productivity and lowers moral and commitment. However Felstead et al (1998) concluded that feelings of increased insecurity were largely unfounded during the 1980s and 1990s. This was intensified in Beer Co when it 'took-over' of a second large brewery in the early 1990s and began a restructuring programme without adequate channels of communication (Balmer and Dinnie 1999).

It was evident that it was not only the blue collar workers who were affected by these strategies, all management interviewed identified feelings of insecurity and vulnerability within the organisation (Denham, Ackers and Travers 1997). Salamon (1998:123) has stated that this is not unusual especially if channels of communication have not been

used effectively (Balmer and Dinnie 1999). A middle manager stated that these strategies were, in his opinion, aimed at re-exerting total 'control' over the workforce Following analysis of the data it was felt that Beer Co had actively sought to reduce the 'power' of the trade union within the organisation as a whole while increasing managerial control over working practices. However it is argued that this has been, in part, brought about by the mergers and acquisitions experienced within the organisation during the period and was not a direct result of industrial relations legislation introduced between 1979 and 1997.

The changes which have occurred within Beer Co, have affected all management sectors although the overall impact of this on industrial relations is not clear. This is largely due to the fact that each division and in some cases each site, experienced different levels of trade union recognition. The brewing division for example has remained highly unionised whereas some of the other divisions have experienced a severe decline in union membership. Some of this decline has resulted from a policy introduced during the late 1989s to 'contract out' of some services such as driving, catering and security thus reducing the number of employees directly employed by the Company. This reduced trade union membership, as all these areas were heavily unionised. In other sectors the Company has chosen to directly reduce union influence as they saw it as an "obstacle to productivity". The Retail division is a prime example of this as it decided to de-recognise the trade unions. The de-recognition has been achieved, so management claim, without any noticeable opposition from the workforce who, they argue were satisfied with the protection they are receiving from the Company through their new improved management styles. Whether this is the case or whether the employees feel so vulnerable that they are afraid to fight for the trade union recognition rights is unclear and would require further research and analysis which unfortunately the present study is unable to provide.

The management interviewed within the retail sector provided very little evidence to support their claims of employee voluntary compliance. In fact this division of the organisation actively sought to restrict the researcher's access to employees by only allowing interviews with senior management and certain named members of staff to be conducted as well as limiting movement throughout their sites.

The third area of business interest, the leisure sector, acquired through acquisition of a number of high profile companies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These companies traditionally had not recognised a trade union and it was decided that this should continue because, in the words of the Managing Director:

> *"Our people are our strength and that this is reflected in the wages and benefits packages we provide. I value my employees and we have a divisional minimum wage, which is much higher than any that has been suggested by Europe. ...When in a people business, as we are, we work 52 weeks a year, we look for permanent staff who can work as part of our team - we are an exception in our field of operation. If the people are committed to me then I am to them. ...We need to value our people, they need to be valued ... Because they feel valued and recognise that they are valued then they become proud of the company, they are interested in what happens to it. This is a powerful motivator. In this environment our staff do not need the protection of the unions ... We are a caring employer. We aim to enhance everyone's lives. We aim to allow our employees to evolve if they want to. If an employee wants to go off and do a part time degree then we will 'keep' them until they have completed it. If an individual has the inner drive to enhance their own work situation then we must contribute and it will in turn add to our success."*

However, as with the retail sector, this managing director failed to produce any evidence to support these claims and personally sought to prevent the researcher from gaining access to any of the sites or any of the personnel which highlighted to the researcher how insecure management felt within this sector.

It appears that Beer Co does operate in a paternalistic fashion in that they do attempt to 'take care' of their employees. Even the T & G have stated:

> *"[Beer Co] are very paternalistic. They are not bad employers. They have a kind of decent old school tie attitude, gentlemen if you know what I mean. ...However, there are definitely two cultures in the Company, one traditional one, which is paternalistic, and another came in when they took over [the new company]. ...On the scale of things [Beer Co] is a good employer, the kind we want to encourage"* (National Sec. T&G)

Despite this it is suggested that this only happens when it is in the interests of the organisation. If, for example, management decide that it was going to contract-out a specific job then this is actioned without consultation with the workforce as happened recently when management decided to contract-out the transportation sector of at least one site. The decision was made at board level and a contractor sought and appointed before the relevant trade unions were consulted or any of the employees were

communicated with.   This in practice meant that drivers, who had been earning in excess of twenty thousand pounds a year would see their salaries, if the contractor employed them, reduced in real terms by approximately five thousand pounds.   This managerial decision did lead to a ballot for industrial action, which was successful, at this particular site.   However due to the high levels of unemployment in the geographical area of the site employees were reluctant to go as far as taking strike action as they were afraid of loosing their jobs altogether (trade union representative, Reading).

Despite the hostility between the shop floor union representatives and local management on certain sites, the relationship with the trade union at national level was strong. The need for the Company to adjust and change had meant that the trade union had been able to identify a 'new' role. A national secretary stated that during the 1990s the T & G in particular at national level had made more of an effort to adjust to change rather than challenge it.

> *"We have decided that we can't bury our head in the sand. We can't ignore change.
> ...We need to engage and deal with management if we are going to be successful in
> bringing about change which will be beneficial to our members" (National
> Representative).*

Excluding the leisure sector who have never recognised trade unions, all management interviewed said that they had seen a change in the level of trade union influence during the 1980s and in particular the 1990s.   This was because, explained one senior personnel manager in Northampton, of the change in political climate which encouraged the marginalisation of the unions. This, argued the same manager, supported by the industrial relations legislation, enabled the company to change the relationship it had with its workforce for the better (Crafts 1988) and thus there was less need for trade union representation. The origin and the extent to which this change occurred however depended on the division or in some circumstances the geographical location of the site within Beer Co.

It appears that the beer section, which continued to have a strong traditional manual workforce with traditional working practices and managerial style, experienced the least number of changes and was the most successful section of the organisation in relation to market share throughout the period. On the other hand the relatively new leisure service division which was reliant on large numbers of part-time and seasonal employees

appeared to have experienced widespread organisational change which had resulted in a weakening of the employee 'voice'.

Another reason which management offered during the interviews as to why industrial relations had changed within Beer Co was because trade union representatives at present were better educated and demonstrated a 'new' professionalism. They now had the ability to recognise the 'needs' of capital. This was confirmed by a senior employee relations manager at head office who stated that nowadays:

> *"The industrial relations experts within the company generally have a good relationship with the full time union officials who are usually graduates and therefore of reasonable intelligence. Of course at a local level the relationship is dependent on personalities, the culture of the site etc. For example workers in the North are generally more militant and stubborn than say those down South - unless you are talking about London where they are again quite militant.*

Another manager from Nottingham added that:

> *You must also remember that today trade union officials are today more professional, intelligent and willing to talk - you may not always agree with them but at least there is none of this mindless banging of the table and irresponsible attitude. Unfortunately this does not happen on the shop floor. They still regard the company as the enemy, out to get them and they fight back accordingly. Its pointless trying to talk to them they just don't listen."*

On the whole, financially, Beer Co is adjusting successfully to their expanding market position and there is evidence that they are making an effort to take their employees with them. Indeed according to a recent company opinion survey 83[2] per cent of respondents stated that they experience job satisfaction and 73 per cent stated that Beer Co was a friendly place to work.

Appearances, however, can be deceptive and it was felt that the underlying culture in Beer Co was not one of shared values and beliefs but one of managerial domination and control of a workforce who were clearly employed in an insecure industry in areas where levels of unemployment were high. It is acknowledges that it is natural for instability and insecurity to occur during periods of restructuring and that clearly extensive change has occurred in recent years with Beer Co. This could account for the

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[2] Taken from the 29th Opinion Survey which was carried out by the Personnel Department at the Nottinghamshire site during March and April 1996

negative feelings identified during the research however it was not felt that this could adequately account for all 'macho-management' responses during the research period.

The approach taken to trade union recognition within Beer Co indicated that changes had occurred however it was felt that these changes had been driven by external environmental factors and not internally as with Retail Co.

7.8 Organisational Culture and Structure

In 1995 Beer Co acquired a large brewery which had its own established history, working practices and management style. Although this could not be described in the strictest sense a hostile take over the employees clearly did not regard it as friendly. It increased the feelings of employee insecurity, instability and hostility both within the parent organisation as well as the newly acquired company (Cartwright and Cooper 1995). A majority of the management interviewed suggested that employees including themselves had found it very difficult to adjust. This evidence is supported by Cartwright and Cooper (1995) who state that "loss of identity, lack of information, fear for personal survival, the departure of key personnel and colleagues and family repercussions are characteristic of all mergers and acquisitions".

Throughout the research period Beer Co had not been able to fully integrate the newly acquired acquisition into the parent organisation. It has continued to operate in the way it has done in the past with its own 'rituals and routines', its own tradition of working practices and in its own particular culture.

> *"Culturally [the company] has been very difficulty to draw together. It's not just the geographical location of the various sites its the two cultures. [The new acquisition] had already gone down the route of human resources. They had brought in a consultancy that had suggested breaking the company down into small units. On the other hand you had [the original company] who had quite a traditional history. They had a personnel department and an industrial relations policy. The difference between the titles of the two divisions - human resources and personnel - clearly illustrate the differences we are facing. So far the two companies have continued to operate within their own traditions. This will of course have to change, and we are trying to address this problem" (General Manager, Yorkshire)*

This new acquisition, therefore, has been able to retain most of its management structure and style which has historically been one of conflict between employers, trade unions and employees who continue to operate in a 'them v us' environment. Thus all

efforts by the new parent company to integrate this company within its own infrastructure have been rejected and therefore unsuccessful. Employees, who on the whole feel insecure and vulnerable in this new situation, together with the trade unions, who saw their role and power diminishing, actively opposed all changes. It is suggested that this could be because organisational restructuring and down-sizing threatens the positions and power of employees at all levels within the company (Cartwright and Cooper 1995). This was supported by a number of managers within Beer Co who expressed doubts as to how secure their own positions were within the company never mind their subordinates. However the management from the 'parent' company did appear slightly more confident although the reasons for this was unclear.

> *"We just don't know if we'll have a job in a few years time .... Senior management say all the right things and then we hear that they need to rationalise and get rid of x-many employees and it's not just manual staff, it's us as well" (Manager, Scotland)*

In an attempt to address this problem and increase employee loyalty and commitment to the organisation, Beer Co has actively sought to increase employee participation and involvement for example, the organisation has attempted to attract employee shareholders and actively encourages employee involvement in team meetings and at the Chairman's Forum, as well as through suggestions schemes. This has been further encouraged in Beer Co, as with other establishments in Britain, by favourable legislation (Smith 1986; Poole 1989). A board member stated that employee financial involvement with the organisation would lead to growth in the Company's overall efficiency. This would be achieved by fostering the belief that by joining this scheme individual employees would financially benefit from an increase in the share price and thus it would be in their own self interest to work hard. This would also benefit the organisation by increasing the share price. He added that an additional advantage would be that employees would take a greater interest in the overall performance of the organisation and in the general sectoral commercial environment (Storey 1996:285) and thus become more committed and loyal to the company. Kruse (1996) adds that share ownership and profit sharing were introduced to organisations to encourage an improvement in the performance of the company while decreasing employment conflict.

Storey (1996:285) however points out that the success of schemes such as this are reliant on whether the workforce is able to recognise the link between the increase in

individual employees work and the share price[3] or indeed how much 'perceived' control each employee has over the performance of their work unit. Kruse (1996) adds that some organisations "adopt profit-sharing and employee ownership plans to discourage unionisation" as such schemes encourage "employees to focus on company performance and identify with employers rather than each other".

The focus made by Beer Co on share-ownership arrangements is not unique. For example Millward et al (1992) found that the number of organisations who used either share-ownership or share-option, schemes rose from 23 per cent in their 1984 survey to 32 per cent in 1990 (Millward et al 1992:264). They argue that these schemes were used in both manufacturing and service industries although they note that the largest increase in employee share-ownership were in organisations which had been involved in privatisation (Millward et al 1992:264).

This financial participation package however is not open to all employees as it was limited to core full-time workers. This restriction financial participation did cause some unrest between different categories of employees (Millward et al 1992:265). Senior management however felt that on the whole this scheme had improved staff performance and had in certain areas motivated the workforce. This agrees with the findings of Millward et al (1992:266) who conclude that the financial performance of workplaces which use either profit-sharing or share-ownership schemes was "better" than those which didn't. And contrary to the findings of Gregg and Machin (1988) Beer Co had managed to operationalise the scheme successfully throughout the organisation irrespective of the level of trade union recognition.

The company has therefore undergone quite a radical transformation during the last two decades. In fact one senior member of the group management team stated that in the early 1980s the company was heavily dominated by trade unions with a majority of the employees being lowly paid manual workers. She stated that the organisation had experienced a high level of industrial action, which had more often than not included a strike. She argued that "the culture within the company was hard" and that it had restricted the company's profit margins. As well as this the management, as was the case in Distribution Co, was mainly composed of individuals who had worked their way up

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[3] Baddon et al (1989) argued that in relation to employee share-ownership the financial returns were negligible.

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from the shop floor and had little formal training and development. However by the mid 1980s the climate had begun to change. The Company had begun to expand and had 'taken over' a number of related organisations as well as a "couple" of high profile leisure companies. The nature of the work that was required was clearly changing not only as a result of new technology but also due to an increasing amount of contract work Beer Co was engaging in. According to the employment relations director this had resulted in a number of 'adjustments' in Beer Co's management style.

During the 1980s and to a greater extent the 1990s Beer Co moved from a small 'family-run' business to a large national company with numerous sites located throughout the U. K. The industry as a whole changed (Knowles and Howley 2000). It has seen a reduction in the number of companies which operate in the sector with the result that a small number of companies have a greater concentration of power and dominate the industry (ibid). In order to meet these changing demands and to compete in the increasingly competitive and globally expanding market place it has had to change its structure and management style (Storey 1994:13).

Today, according to the senior management, Beer Co has learnt from past experience and now focuses on customers requirements (Storey 1994:13) as well as on the needs of the employees. This has become necessary in order to "survive" and move the business forward:

> *"At our last integration, 1991, we focused too much on our employees and lost some of our customers. This time we decided to focus on the customers because lets face it without our customers we wouldn't be able to keep the employees that we have"*
> *(Personnel Manager, Nottingham)*

To conclude this section it was evident that Beer Co has changed the way it expects management to behave. It has introduced a number of new initiatives which it was hoped would encourage employee commitment and loyalty as well as uniting the various companies which have merged with or have been taken over by Beer Co. However there was also evidence that the Company had actively sought to reduce the influence of the trade union within the organisation this had consequently had an impact on industrial relations.

7.9 Information Technology

The workplace industrial/employee relations surveys (WIRS/WERS) (Millward et al 2000) have provided the evidence to support the general increase in the use of technology within British organisations. For example in 1984 only 44 per cent of manufacturing companies within the study had adopted microelectronics to improve their performance. However by the 1998 the percentage had increased to 87. The WIRS/WERS surveys highlight that within administrative offices the increase has been even more significant. For example in 1984 only 25 per cent of the sample had word processing available to its workforce however by 1998 this had increased to 90 per cent (Millward et al 2000).

Lewis, Thornhill and Saunders (2003:42) state that the introduction of new technology has transferred some control of work from management to specific work groups or even individuals for example ordering materials for the Just-In-Time (JIT) production process. Evidence within Beer Co did not indicate that management had transferred any of its 'power' to either their work groups or individual employees. However there was a large amount of data suggesting that Beer Co had used the new technology as a way of reducing the workforce as well as cost. It was also evident that Beer Co had used the new technology to increase the monitoring of employees in a similar way as Retail Co. For example the pump repair employees were required to login at the beginning and end of each job in order for the management to record when and how long each repair job had taken as well as how long it too the relevant employee to move from pub to pub. One employee stated that he now felt more closely "watched" by management than at any time previously. He said that it was a bit like working for "big brother from 1984". The distribution drivers also stated that they were monitored much more carefully now however this was a direct result of a change in the law regarding driving and sleeping restrictions.

Within the administrative offices it was argued that management found the use of personal computers together with devices such as emails and mobile phones an improvement to their working lives and in general they believed that they helped them to do their jobs effectively. These findings fit closely with those of Worral and Cooper (1999) who found that 82 per cent of the managers questioned in their study ranked their personnel computer as the most essential tool for undertaking their job. They

added that 72 per cent thought that email was very important and another 53 per cent rated a mobile phone as the most essential tool.

In order to conclude this section it is clear that information technology has had an impact on Beer Co but in general it was felt to be used to increase control of the working environment as well as the workforce rather than a tool to encourage individual employees to become more creative or resourceful.

7.10   Conclusion

To conclude chapter eight it is necessary to emphasise that a number of issues raised here were also identified in the other case study organisations however they were handled in a different way. For example the 'problem' with communication as a tool for increasing commitment and loyalty is a common element throughout all of the case study companies however, each one of them has chosen to employ a different approach to solving it. It is believed that Beer Co had made the most genuine attempt to use their communication channels to "take their workforce with them" (General Manager, Scotland) rather than an instrument of control as was the case with Retail Co. Other common and/or related issues will be assessed and analysed in chapters 10 and 11.

What was evident was that the acquisitions and mergers that were experienced by Beer Co together with the 'beer orders' had encouraged management to examine and change their behaviour and style. Management had attempted to do this throughout the whole organisation however it had met with resistance from both employees and trade unions. These two major events during the 1980s and 1990s had caused a number of managerial problems for the organisation for example in order to continue to compete Beer Co had to consider ways of restructuring their businesses as well as considering the possibility of redundancies.

As well as this Beer Co had to deal with a significant increase in the level of competition in the sector. This has resulted in changes in managerial behaviour, which has consequently altered the employment relationship.

As a result of this increased competition Beer Co utilised a number of tools to improve employee commitment and to encourage acceptance of the changes to both structure and

practice which were needed within the organisation. The evidence has suggested that Beer Co improved and increased its channels of communication with employees and it introduced employee involvement and participation schemes in an attempt to "take the workforce with them". In contrast, however, it began a programme of restructuring and downsizing, which made employees feel vulnerable and insecure.

What was important to Beer Co was the restrictions placed on them through the legislative changes made on the industrial sector they operated in. Also the national economic situation played a role in enabling Beer Co to change its managerial practices and styles for example the high levels of unemployment increased employee insecurity and made all levels of the workforce feel vulnerable which in turn made it easier to introduce changes. The industrial relations legislation did not play a significant part in the changes which occurred however they did have the effect of reducing trade union numbers and influence at a time when these adjustments to employment relations were being implemented and thus provided some support to the changes.

Chapter 8

Aero Co

8.1　Introduction

Aero Co is the final case study company examined within this thesis, it also represents a fifth economic sector the research will analyse. As with the previous four chapters the chapter will be divided into the eight subject areas which have been evaluated throughout the thesis thus ensuring that the research has followed traditional case study methods (Ticehurst and Veal 2000:50). It will adopt a 'life history' perspective which has been approached from a grounded theory methodology. In doing so replicating the system of analysis adopted in each of the other case study companies ensuring, as far as possible, the reliability and validity of the data.

8.2　Historical Perspective

Aero Co's foundations can be traced back to 1884 when one of the founding partners established an electrical and mechanical engineering business. By 1904 he had built his first automobile. Within a year it was said to be the "best car in the world" (http://www.[Aero Co].com/history/history002.htm). In 1906 the company merged with a second company and formed what was to become one of Britain's most famous companies.

Throughout the most of the twentieth century the company expanded through mergers and acquisition however following a period of uncertainty during the 1970s it was taken into State ownership. During the period of State ownership the company separated into two distinct organisations, a car manufacturer and an aerospace company and it is this latter section of the organisation which the researcher will refer to as Aero Co. In 1987 Aero Co was returned to the private sector. These 'dramatic' changes in ownership enabled the company to radically restructure so that by the end of the 1980s the company was able to claim that it had increased its capabilities within the fields of electrical, mechanical and power engineering to such an extent that it was able, in 1995,

expand into the United States. This provided the organisation with a firm base from where it was able to expand its market share. Today Aero Co employs approximately 43,000 employees world-wide, 39,000 of these are located in the U.K. The company also services customers in 135 countries around the world. However for the purpose of comparability and analysis the research within this thesis will be confined to the U.K.

Aero Co has a number of sites located throughout the country. Its' main manufacturing plants are situated in Derbyshire, where the head office is situated and in the County of Avon. In order to ensure the comparability and validity of the study as well as to examine to importance of geographical location five areas of operation were visited in Scotland, the North East of England, the South West, Derbyshire and the Midlands. A number of employees, trade union representatives as well as senior and middle management were interviewed.

Out of all five case study companies Aero Co proved to be the most difficult to access in relation to both management and trade unions. This caused a number of practical and ethical problems during the early stages of the data gathering. However it is believed that the difficulties were worth the challenge as the data gathered provided a valuable contribution to the thesis.

8.3 Market Competition

The management, employees and trade unions on each of the sites explained how they believed that the driving force of all the change had come from the market in which they operate. For example the site manager in the Midlands stated that within the aerospace business the market place has always fluctuated in response to the "rise and fall of the airline industry". He added that the airlines companies have become increasingly price conscious and competitive which has put considerable pressure on Aero Co (Balmer and Gray 2000). Another manager from the south west stated that the defence cuts across the U.K. as well as the rest of the world have also caused economic problems for the organisation (Bishop and Gripaios 1995). For example the end of the 'Cold War' had a negative affect on the market sector in which Aero Co operates. He highlighted that the Royal Airforce contracts were now no longer a foregone conclusion in the sense that they were now all put out to tender (Bishop and Gripaios 1995). He concluded that these issues have all made the organisation much more cost conscious. A senior manager from Scotland agreed and argued that this change in Aero Co's economic

position had to be communicated to the workforce "who had to see that improvements had to be made in overall efficiency". The employee relations manager added that the employees and to some extent the trade union representatives had to realise that there shouldn't be an adversarial relationship between management and the workforce within the organisation and acknowledged that in order for the company to become competitive within its sector this attitude needed to change.

> *"They must realise that we all have to work together to form one team. We are trying very hard to get this message across."*

Communication has therefore become an important management tool within Aero Co. Balmer and Gray (2000) suggest that communication is an integral part of managerial responsibility as it can be used to promote the "reality and uniqueness" of the company and it should identify both the internal and external corporate image and reputation. This is important because "companies with high visibility and strong reputations … have a competitive advantage … because their respected names add value to their products by reducing uncertainty in the minds of their customers" (Balmer and Gray 2000). Balmer and Gray (2000) conclude that "in today's volatile business environmental corporate identity and corporate communications, when viewed and managed from a strategic perspective, can imbue many organisations with a distinct competitive advantage".

As with the other companies in the case study it is clear that increased competition has played an influential part in the behaviour of corporate management during the 1980s and 1990s within Aero Co. It has encouraged an examination of management styles and practices and has brought about the introduction of flexible working arrangements. Although these areas have clearly been discussed at senior management levels radical changes have not been made. The data suggests that this is due to the high level of trade union membership and the process of consultation which has been undertaken during the period.

8.4 Geographical Location

As with the other case studies a number of different geographical areas were included in the research in order to analyse different aspects of economic life within a range of localities. As with Gallie, Rose and Penn's (1996:9) study this approach was adopted because it enabled analysis of both management, unions and employees within a

common setting as well as assessing the implications for the workforce of the geographical location of the site.

It was evident from an early stage that management style within Aero Co was affected by each sites location. The researcher had not anticipated this as it had been felt, following the analysis of Distribution Co that the geographical location was only important in organisations where management had been decentralised. This was not the case with Aero Co. It was clear that although the 'centre' attempted to control the employment relationship throughout the company it was not universally successful. For example the interviews with management and employees on the Scottish sites were influenced by the external location with one manager arguing:

> *"It would be hard to manage without the agreement of trade unions on this site as the surrounding area is heavily unionised and has been for a long time...its what the workforce expect".*

However the employee relations manager in Derby claimed that central control was useful as it ensured that all employees were treated and managed in the same way and that the relationship with the union did not differ between sites. He suggested that trade union influence was the same on each site because of the national bargaining agreement and he rejected the idea that the geographical location had any influence on the way management manage.

Despite this the trade union representative at the Derby site rejected this and argued that the external location including things such as traditional working practices, unemployment, traditional industrial area all had an impact. He highlighted that the sites in Scotland were based in very traditional industrial areas where there were strong family and union ties which had a significant impact on the way the management were able to manage on these sites as well as how employees responded.

Therefore it was clear that the management, trade unions and employees at Aero Co were heavily influenced by the specific location of each site.

8.5 Management Style

The management style within Aero Co was similar to that identified by Purcell and Sisson (1983) as 'sophisticated modern'. In that they recognised and worked with trade unions. On the whole the data collected both from documentation as well as the interviews suggested that Aero Co fell into the category of 'consulter' as they viewed the trade union as being a positive part of the organisational structure. Companies falling into this category tend to be large employers such as ICI or Cadbury-Schwepps (Rose 2001:74). This approach according to Rose (2001:78) means that management consult almost on a partnership level with the trade union while attempting to secure the commitment of individual employees.

It is interesting to note that management style has remained constant despite the fact that the Company has under gone extensive restructuring since 1979 and especially since 1987 when it was re-launched into the private sector. The management argued that the restructuring was necessary to re-assert its own corporate identity as well as to improve productivity and efficiency in order for the company to compete internationally (Balmer and Gray 2000). The national trade union representative agreed to a limited extent with this, however, he stated that the Company has taken advantage of the economic climate with all its insecurities to reduce the number of employees and to introduce flexibility into workplace practices. They increased the number of part time, contract, agency and temporary staff and have actively sought to increase the number of women employed at the sites. He added that the Company did not employ part time staff and female workers because they were more productive workers but because these groups of workers didn't join unions. In this way he argued management were able to reduce worker solidarity and facilitate the introduction of employment flexibility.

This restructuring included contracting out a number of service areas such as security, cleaning and gardening. There has also been a significant increase in the use of short-term and fixed term contract staff, which allowed the business the flexibility to respond to competition. Storey and Sisson (1995:91) however claim that using this approach to create a 'flexible' workforce brings with it its own problems for example this 'type' of worker may be less committed or loyal to the company due to the lack of job security and career prospects. They may therefore require more managerial and supervisory time.

Rationalisation and downsizing has been common throughout many of the privatised industries for example British Steel plc reduced its workforce from 165,000 employees in 1978 to just below 43,000 in 1997. These figures have continued to decline as production levels improved (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:183-184). As with Aero Co the reduction in employees has been linked with changes in the structure of the organisation although unlike British Steel plc this has not resulted in a transformation of the process of collective bargaining within Aero Co (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:184).

The financial pressure, which was applied to these privatised industries, however did result in a review of all management practices. Pay determination for example, moved away from comparability with other organisations towards being decided on the ability of the company to pay alongside the need to recruit and retain staff thus more responsive to the market (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:149). Management argued that they had rejected the idea of introducing human resource management into Aero Co as it was felt that many traditional practices worked well and that the company would not gain by following "new fangled management trends" and thus "throwing the baby out with the bath water". The trade union representatives at all sites rejected this and stated that although acknowledging that the company had not radically changed many of working practices this had been because the trade union had prevented 'unwise' management practices being introduced during the consultation process rather than being a conscious decision made by corporate management.

The management of the company highlighted that they had successfully survived the 1980s that they adjusted to meet the demands being placed on it within the global market place within which it now operates. They also argued that they had 'taken' the workforce with them by continuing to adopt a "considerate" management style. According to an attitude survey conducted by the personnel department morale was relatively high throughout all levels of the workforce. However it should be highlighted that it was not able to verify this information as the personnel manager refused full access to the data gathered by the survey. If correct however, these findings contrast to those found in a number of other studies (Ferner 1991; Ferner and Colling 1991; Nichols and O'Connell Davidson 1991; Ogden 1993).

The personnel manager said that she was happy with the results especially considering the unrest which had been witnessed during the last few years although she stated that

there was still a lot of work left to do "to get it right". If staff morale is as good as the personnel manager stated then it is suggested that there could be a number of explanations. It could for example be due to the belief by employees that the company has 'survived' the recession and that they still have a job which is rewarded by a higher than average salary (Balmer and Gray 2000). Or it could be that they could see that the company is now one of the sectors market leaders and thus their future is secure.

It was clear from the evidence gathered that the Company had been affected by the process of privatisation. However although it was able to introduce more flexible working practices it had not dramatically changed its approach to management. It was hard to validate the exact cause of this however, it is suggested that it was more likely to be the result of a strong well supported trade union than the desire of management to continue traditional working practices.

Training and development was according to the management an important part of working life within Aero Co. There was an abundance of programmes to ensure that "employees attain the highest levels of education, training and skills thus increasing the skill base of the organisation as well as improving employee commitment and loyalty" (Training and Development Manager, Derby). For example a Leadership Programme has recently been developed in conjunction with a London University which is targeted at developing the skills of senior managers. Other courses are also run within the organisation and are available to a wide range of employee levels. This conflicts with the majority of British workplaces which have continuously under provided employee training (Gopsel 1992:156).

Employee training and development is important within Aero Co as they regard it as a way of motivating their workforce as well as increasing commitment to the organisation and developing their production techniques in order to maintain their position as a market leader in their field.

> *"Only if they [training and development decisions] are taken simultaneously with strategic decisions about which products to produce and about techniques with which to produce these products, will training expenditures be efficiently made" (Mayhew 1991:5)*

The employees within Aero Co are perhaps lucky in that training and development is provided by the organisation at a time when this area has been deregulated by the

government and thus left in the hands of the employer or individual workers. On the whole British employer's have been actively discouraged from training and developing their employees because of the turbulent economic situation of many organisations have found themselves in preferring to "poach skilled workers when market conditions demand it" (Hutton 1996:187-92). Stevens and MacKay 1991 conclude that this has resulted in the U.K. being trapped in a "low skill/low quality equilibrium".

Aero Co has, in an attempt to heighten international business awareness, introduced a course which is delivered internationally for example in China and Brazil. This course encourages attendance from customers as well as staff and can thus be seen as part of a relationship building exercise as well as an employee development course. This emphasis on training and development has been widely accepted by the workforce as a positive practice and in 1998 9,000 employees received some kind of information technology training.

This approach to training and development has also been encouraged by the trade unions who see it as a positive advantage for their membership. One site representative in the South West commented that in the past the trade union movement has not always seen training and development as a 'good' thing however today it is essential, "it is what our membership wants…. it's one of the perks of the job as well as being essential for the success of the organisation".

All the data analysed supported the view that training and development were important to the organisation. It was clear that training and development schemes have been used to develop employees throughout the organisation as well as increasing loyalty and commitment however this has not been done at the expense of the relationship with the trade union. It appears that this was at least one area of management style which has been supported by all stakeholders within Aero Co.

8.6 Impact of Employment Legislation

The senior management interviewed from Aero Co said that the industrial relations legislation during the 1980s and 1990s had not really effected the organisation. They suggested that trade union membership had remained high throughout the period and that consultation and negotiation had continued as before.

If anything had changed the head of Employee Relations had stated that the legislation had "empowered" the trade unions as it enabled them to statistically support their "demands" with reference to ballot results. He said that the trade unions quite often called a ballot but that only very occasionally did this result in industrial action being taken as they could apply pressure on management by highlighting the number of employees who supported the various statements.

However a trade union representative from the Midlands rejected the idea that the legislation had strengthened position of the trade unions within the organisation. In fact he suggested that it had taken the power of surprise action away from the workforce and enabled management to plan for any potential disruption. The element of surprise he claimed had, in the past, been a powerful weapon for the trade union.

> *"In the 1970s if we weren't happy with something we called the workforce together within an hour or so and took a vote ... we could be on strike within a couple of hours and this hurt the company ... today we can't do that".*

This was supported by another trade union representative from Scotland who said that he felt that his negotiating power had been dramatically reduced during the 1980s and 1990s.

> *"Management used to listen to me but now they only go through the motions. You know that they will get what they want in the end ... we have very little influence".*

An employee from Derbyshire also stated that in his opinion the workforce were "very vulnerable" at present and would be reluctant to take industrial action because "we might loose our jobs. Particularly working on this site … we haven't got the expertise which protects the technical skilled workers".

Another employee from Scotland added that the workforce wasn't keen to take industrial action because there weren't many job vacancies in the location. He said that the Conservative Government had taken away the protection trade unions offered the workforce. He suggested that this had been done in order for "capitalism to make more money by exploiting the workers".

The trade union representative from the Midlands agreed however he did add that some protection was coming from the European Union and that perhaps that was where future help would come from. He stated that trade union colleagues in Europe had much more

'power' than he did and he felt that European organisations were friendlier to work for as they didn't feel exploited in the same way as British workers.

To conclude however an employee from the technical division stated that he didn't feel vulnerable nor did he think the rest of the workforce did. He said that in his opinion the relationship he had with management was better now than a few years ago. He added that the trade union management and the workforce worked in "partnership".

The management therefore believed that the industrial relations legislation introduced between 1979 and 1997 had had little impact on managerial behaviour however it was felt that the fact that the legislation was in place had changed the way trade unions could respond and had indirectly affected the way management behaved. It is acknowledged that the introduction of the secret ballot has prevented a number of strikes within the organisation due to managerial "back-down" when faced with a high percentage of votes in favour of action suggesting that perhaps the legislation has strengthened the power of the trade unions within Aero Co. However the legislation has taken away the ability to respond instantly it thus enables managers to make provision for any action taken and thereby has weakened the impact of strike action.

8.7 Trade union Recognition and Influence

The workforce is divided into two main groups, the industrial power group, which is the old traditional industrial sector of the company and the second, which focuses on the new and developing technological advancements in the industrial sector. On the whole however the company remains a traditional manufacturing organisation which continues to retain many of its original working practices. Due to the nature of the business and the geographical location of the sites, the workforce also continues to be composed of mainly blue collar white males whose beliefs and attitudes are clearly reflected within the work place. Although the Company has made some positive moves to adjust to the 1990s the workers, management claim, have been slow to accept change within their working practices.

> *"The workforce here, have come from a heavily unionised background. They are very traditional in their approach towards work and management. The have found change quite difficult to cope with, which has meant that we have had to move quite slowly. I think that employees are generally worried about change. It makes them insecure which in turn makes them more reluctant to change" (Head of Employee Relations).*

Another senior manager stated:

> *"This site is very traditional, in part due to the fact that we're Scottish and the Scots are very traditional in the way they do things. ...Everyone has their place and the employees as well as the union like to know the rules of the game ...perhaps this has caused some problems. Some changes are frightening and the 1980s and 1990s have without doubt been a period of considerable change"* (Industrial Relations Manager).

It is interesting to note that unlike the other cases study companies Aero Co has remained heavily unionised, in fact in some 'blue collar' areas of the companythe union claims that it has 100 per cent membership with office or non-manual staff, having a membership of approximately 70 per cent. This figure is high when compared to the aggregated union membership density of 53 per cent of manual workers identified by Millward et al (1992:59) in their comprehensive research into industrial relations throughout the United Kingdom in 1990.

The unions themselves tend divide responsibility along geographic boundaries, for example regional, district and local branches (Martin, Sunley and Wills 1996:15). Martin, Sunley and Wills (1996:15-16) suggest that the various "degrees of autonomy of orientation and operation, of custom and convention" exist within geographical areas and therefore they tend to become 'institutionalise' within the traditions of a particular trade union at a particular location as well as industrial relations practices at specific sites (Farnham and Pimlott 1992). This has, in the case of Aero Co, affected the way that each site negotiates and to a certain extent impacts on the way the business is organised and run. For example, according to a senior manager Aero Co is keen to negotiate at national level and establish a national wage rate, however the trade unions have rejected this on the grounds that it prevents them responding to the needs of the membership in different locations throughout the country.

> *"The company wanted to introduce a national wage rate but this wouldn't be fair on the employees as some areas of the country are more expensive to live in ...the union rejected it [the national wage level]. I think that this has meant that the wages in some parts of the country are much lower than in others."* (Industrial Relations Manager)

This contrasts with the findings of Minford (1985) and Minford and Stone (1991) who suggest that it is the trade unions who pursue nation-wide collective bargaining without any consideration of local conditions. In doing so trade unions push local wages above their market level and thus is the main cause unemployment in specific locations (Martin, Sunley and Wills 1996:18).

> *"Shifts and changes in unionisation, in working practices, collective bargaining, and*
> *industrial relations do not, therefore, necessarily occur uniformly across the country*
> *but are just as likely to be concentrated in, or to emanate from, particular regions"*
> *(Martin, Sunley and Willis 1996:17)*

What is therefore clear from the above is that the geographical location of each site and the subsequent industrial relations policies and practices do form an important part in shaping management policy and practice (Martin, Sunley and Wills 1996:19) this was particularly apparent within Aero Co.

All management interviewed throughout Aero Co suggested that there had been a change in the level of trade union influence since the beginning of the 1980s. However, it was interesting to note that one site manager stated that trade union power and influence had strengthened during the period rather than weakened as suggested in much of the literature (cf. chapter 2). This was due, he explained, to the fact trade unions continued to be highly visible within the Company and played an active role in all aspects of company life. He felt that the economic turbulence including the high levels of unemployment in the country had encouraged employees to maintain their membership in order to protect themselves. The same manager argued that the trade unions had, as has already been suggested by Retail Co and Beer Co, become much more professional in their approach and increasingly better organised. They had, he stated, successfully managed to adjust to the changing business environment and transform their image. They now offered a wide range benefits, which obviously appealed to their members, as membership within Aero Co had remained high.

It is suggested that the fact that union membership has not declined during the Conservative Governments' terms of office has 'forced' management to continue to recognise, communicate, negotiate and work with the trade unions rather than use macho management tactics.

The management at all sites confirmed that it would be:

> *"Unwise to underestimate the trade unions. The Conservatives have not defeated their*
> *power and ability. (Senior Manager, Head Office)*

At the site in the South West, the manager stated that:

> *"There is still a clear perception within this site of what the role of the unions should be*
> *and they tend to hold very traditional values. Demarcation is still very strong here"*
> *(Employee Relations Manager).*

On the sites where management identified a fall in the level of trade union influence this had been attributed to things such as the recession, Government legislation and the political atmosphere in the country, which weakened employee's confidence in the trade union movement as a whole and made the workforce much more compliant to the directions of the management:

> *"The trade union representative was seen as a kind of god on the site. It was a high profile position and the entire workforce and management watched his every move. The unions are now much less powerful and much less political" (Site General Manager, Midlands).*

Another reason which has been offered as an explanation is that the trade unions have been unable to adapt and change quickly in order to meet the changing economic conditions of the 1980s:

> *"Trade unions were not able to deal with the changing situations. They just had to get on with it and survive. They weren't very good at dealing with the changes which were going on in the world around them" (Head of Employee Relations).*

Since the mid 1980s however the recognised trade unions within Aero Co did appear to have changed their approach to both management and their membership. In fact from both the data examined as well as the interviews undertaken it was clear that both the company and the trade union have experienced a change in the type and style of industrial participation and consequently the employment relationship. This, it is believed, has been partly due to the changing global market place in Aero Cos economic sector and the subsequent realisation by all stakeholders that strikes can have a detrimental effect on the organisation and thus on productivity and workforce moral.

According to those interviewed the company 'suffered' in the world recession during the early 1980s (Kessler and Bayliss 1995:39). This it was claimed impacted on all levels within the workforce as well as affecting all sites. It is also clear from the interviews that in general employees experienced periods of uncertainty and insecurity which directly affected employment relations.

> *"We were all just worried. People in the area were all loosing their jobs companies were just letting people go. [Aero Co] appeared to be in some sort of trouble ...they never told us anything. Things have changed a bit now but I don't trust them ...better to listen to the union to see what's happening" (employee, Derbyshire).*

Perhaps because of the poor management style and leadership shown in the 1980s or possibly due to the fact that the company spent a number of years in public ownership

where traditionally trade union membership remained high[1] employees at Aero Co remained loyal to the union throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Farnham and Pimlott 1992:115).

During the late 1990s, Aero Co, according to one employee in Scotland, appeared to have "turned the corner" and began expanding its market share. This change of fortune was reflected in the company's annual reports from about 1994 onwards. This 'turn around' in Aero Co's fortunes led to what the Head of Employee Relations called a "rebirth" of trade unionism within the organisation which has see an increase in the level of industrial turbulence.

It was clear from the data gathered in relation to Aero Co that trade union membership had remained almost unaffected during the 1980s and 1990s. However it was interesting to note that some management had identified a growth in trade union influence within the organisation during the period.

All of the management interviewed stated that they had seen a considerable reduction in the level of industrial action between 1979 and 1994 however each acknowledged that since then the situation had changed.

> *"...[The trade unions] have perceived a period of growth and have decided that prosperity is just around the corner. They want a slice of the action, they want a 'pay-back' for behaving themselves. However, what they don't seem to realise is that large deals don't always convert into profit. ...The Company is coming out of recession and although we are not yet making profits, the trade unions see us winning contracts and expect instant benefits. When these are not forthcoming we have trouble. Last year we experienced a long drawn out over time ban. It was inconvenient for management. ...Last year I would have said that Thatcher had defeated the trade union movement, that major industrial trouble was a thing of the 1970s, but today I couldn't say that"* (Head of Employee Relations, Derbyshire).

According to the data gathered strike activity during the 1990s was caused by dissatisfaction and frustration among the workforce at the companies inadequate wage offers at a time when they appeared to be flourishing globally.

> *"We're getting bigger, more powerful. We're winning business. We're surviving this recession in our industry. We are the third largest company in the market place and we*

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[1] Trade union membership in the public sector is much higher (61%) than in the private sector (21%) see Cully and Woodland 1996:219-220 for full details

are catching up. ...The employees lack trust in the management. This I feel was particularly bad during last year. ...there was an overtime ban over rates of pay – the offer I believe was generous". (General Manager, North East England).

Another senior manager at head office argued that neither the employees nor the trade union understood that it was Aero Co's competitors and customers and not management who had restricted profits and thus wage rises.

The trade unions and many of the employees rejected management's argument that profits, which were estimated to be in excess of seventy million pounds in 1994, would not allow larger pay rises (Derby Evening Telegraph 8th April 1995). Especially when the Company's Annual Report for 1994 showed that the Chairman had received an 18 per cent pay increase and the Chief Executive had received 21 per cent (Derby Evening Telegraph 21st April 1995). These 'fat cat' payments to the directors had been achieved, the trade union representative argued, by cutting labour costs which produced larger profits for the organisation this in turn satisfied the shareholders and enabled excessive performance-related pay to be given to the directors (Blyton and Turnbull 1998). Unfortunately such large pay and benefit settlements are not uncommon among many of the privatised industries[2].

The data examined suggests that Aero Co had experienced industrial unrest during the 1990s as a result of what the workforce and the trade unions identified as "unequal treatment" between the employees and senior management. This dissatisfaction was visible because it is believed that trade union membership remained high and they were thus able to protest in a manner, which encouraged management to listen. However this again was affected by geographical location.

8.8 Organisational Culture and Structure

Decentralisation of authority as well as decision making has been a common feature within the core activities of many of the privatised companies who sought to transform the traditional bureaucratic structures of public sector organisations to more entrepreneurial and flexible forms of working practices (Ferner and Colling 1995:495). Aero Co however has rejected this approach in favour of modernising within existing management frameworks. They have, like Retail Co retained control at the centre over all major decisions. For example all employee policy is established at the centre and

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[2] For further information as well as examples please see Blyton and Turnbull 1998:172-173

cascaded out to the sites, all industrial and most employee 'problems' are dealt with at head office.

The policy of centralisation has also continued to operate throughout their collective bargaining practices for example Aero Co has maintained its' nationalised bargaining with the trade unions and has rejected the introduction of single-table bargaining. This contrasts with many privatised organisations who have sought to decentralise bargaining in order to 'respond' to local needs and change the old bureaucratic management styles to more flexible ones (Colling and Ferner 1995:498-504). Sisson and Marginson (1995:105) however argue that the extent to which a company centralises or decentralises its managerial approaches is dependent on the "degree of integration in production or service provision". They add that organisations who undertake the same function on different sites tend to operate a centralised management policy because of the "gains to be made in standardised operating procedures and/or common purchasing".

Aero Co has also rejected the idea of 'single-table bargaining' in order to promote flexibility, multi-skilling and harmonisation of employment terms and conditions. Senior management claimed that this was due to the fact that they were able to respond effectively within the existing framework because the workforce and all the recognised trade unions were committed to the success of the organisation therefore "strong armed tactics" were not necessary.

The data suggests that Aero Co has maintained many traditional management styles and practices including its central management control of working practices. Further it has continued to negotiate nationally with the trade unions. It is thought that this was mainly because at the time of privatisation trade union membership remained high and rather than unsettle the workforce and possibly profit margins the management decided to work with rather than against the trade unions. Another explanation could be that the high level of trade union membership within Aero Co 'prevented' radical changes being introduced to the structure or managerial style of the organisation.

8.9 Information Technology

Farnham (2002:143) suggests that technology is "the application of knowledge to aid human production". However there are numerous different types of technology used in many different kinds of industries in order to improve efficiency, productivity etc. He highlights that it is generally advances in technology that have enabled major shifts in economic structure for example Farnham (2002) states that although it was fossil fuels which provided the energy source during the industrial revolution it was the new technology that harnessed it to the machines. In a similar way information technology has stimulated post industrial societies. In fact Farnham (2002:144) claims that information technology has "revolutionised every aspect of life" including the workplace. This was certainly the case with Aero Co who took advantage of the advances in technology to improve their production techniques, design and working patterns. One trade union representative highlighted the change Aero Co had experienced in relation to the new technology "at first we [the union] fought the introduction of new technology as we thought it would de-skill or make redundant out members. However we soon realised that they [the members] wanted I so we fought to increase its use and the subsequent training and development to use it".

It was therefore clear that employees at Aero Co saw the new technology as something valuable which enabled them to work more effectively. This supports Manwaring (1981) who suggested that new technology can reduce labour and improve efficiency. Management also viewed the new technology in a positive light in that it enabled the organisation to compete effectively within a highly competitive market. However Manwaring (1981) warned that in adopting new technology management would increase its control of the work. James (1980) added that new technology had reduced the power of the trade unions within British workplaces. However the data studied within Aero Co rejected this as the trade union representative from Derby stated that the position and power of the trade union had not changed since 1979 he further highlighted that trade union membership had remained high throughout the whole period signifying membership satisfaction.

It was also clear from some of the minutes of meetings held between the union and management that the introduction of new technology was subject to collective agreement and that the union had managed to secure an increase in training and development in line with this new technology. This training and development were

seen as a benefit by the workforce within Aero Co who believed that it maintained and improved their employability.

Thus to conclude this section, the new technology was viewed in a positive light by the employers, because it improved their competitive advantage; by employees as it improved their employability and by the union because it benefited their membership.

8.10   Conclusion

Although the Company was co-operative throughout the research period and arranged most of the interviews for the researcher it was felt that they had attempted to prevent access to the Scottish sites. No explanation was given as to why this was however it is suspected that this could have been due to the fact that these sites were based in areas which had a history of militant trade unionism i.e. around Glasgow where there was a strong traditional manufacturing area. Interviews at these geographical locations did portray a different picture to the one the company's Head Office was trying to paint. For example a senior manager in Scotland explained that it was important that the "centre wasn't embarrassed in any way" and that each site had to be "mindful of the affects of their actions". This was of no surprise as the researcher was made aware throughout the data gathering period that an attempt was being made to filter the information which was being supplied as well as limit access to specific sites and certain documentation.

Access was eventually gained to sites in Scotland although not through the company's Head Office but through a mutual friend. The data gathered from these sites was viewed as important to the study as these sites had experienced a decline in industrial action during the 1980s. They claimed to feel "alienated" from the rest of the company and believed that they were treated differently because they were a Scottish site rather than an English one. The General Manager of one of these sites stated that the employees on his site on the whole felt insecure and vulnerable. He added that the morale was very low which interestingly contrasted to the employee opinion survey for the whole organisation. The general feeling among the workforce was that their positions were being undermined and their jobs threatened by the process of rationalisation, which was taking place within the Company as a whole:

> *"Scotland is perceived as being on the periphery. The workforce see the cut backs and think we'll be next. We are Scottish and because of this we'll be disregarded. The*

> *Board tends to test things out on our site. Any new policy changes are tested out here – try it in Scotland first, if it works in Red Clydeside, then it will work anywhere. ...The employees are worried about the closure of this site and the loss of their jobs ...morale is very low" (employee relations manager, Scotland).*

After visiting these three sites it was felt that the feelings of insecurity and vulnerability were, in fact, widely spread throughout all employment levels and that employees genuinely believed that they were being discriminated against:

> *"...What angers us is that workers at [a site in Derbyshire] are being treated differently to workers in [other sites] across the country. ...People are not only facing the threat of job losses, but they are having to cope with a changing working conditions and inequality of treatment" (employee, Glasgow).*

The general feeling was therefore that while certain parts of the company, for example the technological division, were experiencing commercial success through their ability to adapt and change other areas and sections of the workforce, such as the manual employees, continued to feel vulnerable and insecure. These employees were according to the interviews de-motivated and lacked commitment to the organisation and consequently not working as efficiently as possible.

As can be seen from the above Aero Co adjusted and changed some of its working practices in response to increased competition in their field of operation during the 1980s and 1990s. However on the whole Aero Co has retained many of its traditional management practices because it is believed that trade union membership has remained high which has prevented management from being able to "force" change on the workforce. The skill level of the workforce also appears to play a significant part in the ability of management to 'push' through dramatic changes in working practices without the full consent of the employees in that specific sections of Aero Co are heavily dependent on a relatively small number of highly skilled staff who would not be easily or quickly replaceable.

Unlike Retail Co which was also a centrally controlled organisation, Aero Co's management style and industrial relations was influenced by the geographical location of each specific site. This became very clear in the interviews with employees rather than management. The employees in Scotland were in general less motivated and committed to the organisation. Their absenteeism rates and staff turnover levels were higher when compared to English sites in the Midlands, the South West and Derbyshire which supports the opinion that the employment relationship in Scotland had problems

which needed addressing. It is difficult to suggest how these problems could be addressed as all policies and procedures were standardised throughout the organisation Thus it was down to individual managers to create a climate in which the workforce can become more secure and perhaps more productive.

Section Three

The Analysis and Conclusions

"Since Hippocrates first presented 14 classic case studies of disease some 2,300 years ago, science has proceeded along two divergent knowledge paths. One involves formulating a tentative theory of a phenomenon 'writ large', deducting implied empirical consequences, and controlling situational events, in order to observe the validity of empirical deductions. The second path, less frequently used but equally valid, is to reason from individual and naturally occurring but largely uncontrollable observations towards generalizable inductive principles" (Bonoma, 1985: 199).

Chapter 9

Internal and External Change within British Workplaces from 1979 to 1997 and their Impact on Corporate Management

9.1 Introduction

The thesis aimed to identify the 'driving' forces of change within the employment relationship between 1979 and 1997 while assessing the impact that this had on the behaviour of British corporate management. It has added knowledge to the discipline by uniting two seemingly opposing stances namely that dramatic change has occurred within the industrial relations arena and the opposing view that very little has changed in workplaces in the United Kingdom by arguing that each position was taken from a different stance. For example the claim that dramatic change had occurred within the employment relationship was based on research undertaken at national level whereas the data access in order to support the claim that very little has changed was focused on site level information thus it is argued the data cannot easily be compared and contrasted.

The study has added depth to the research base by using a life history approach to collecting some of the data within the case study companies in order to develop the richness of information available from individuals who experienced the changes first hand rather than relying totally on the quantitative data which has dominated much of the recent research into the area. This approach, Musson (1998) argues promotes the individual interpretations and explanations of specific situations or events in order to understand their meanings. This was thought of value as it limited the impact of the researcher on the data in the sense that it was the interviewees who describe and interpreted changes which they saw in the workplace.

The thesis also contributes to the body of knowledge by adopting a pragmatic critical realist epistemological stance in the sense that the study acknowledges that the understanding of reality and how it is conceived are two different spheres as there may be information or data which at present is beyond our conception or even our linguistic expression while at the same time recognising that this does not mean that they do not exist (Johnson and Duberley 2000:152). The study has also used a grounded theory approach to the data analysis in order to build a clearer picture of the workplace throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the case study organisations. As Rose (1982:118) suggests the "process of developing concepts and indicators is the core of the analysis of qualitative data". This is a break from the traditional data gathering and analysis methods of employment relations researchers who have more recently focused on quantitative methodologies. It was felt that the data gathered and analysed in this thesis would contribute to the information already gathered by others as well as illuminating some areas which previous studies had been unable to access due to the sensitive nature of the subject area. It was also thought that this approach would enable the researcher to capture the "complexities in which the action unfolds" (Locke 2001:95) thus allowing a better understanding of the issues. In addition it was felt that it offered a way of assessing mode two management research (Partington 2000) in a way which would move our understanding of the area forward and have practical implications especially with regard to the employment relationship.

Section one of the thesis highlighted the aims and objectives of the research, the literary foundations and the methodology on which the research was based. Section two outlined each of the case study companies which were selected from different economic sectors as well as analysing the rich data collected. Section three draws the data together while assessing the evidence gathered in order to:

- Identify whether or not UK workplaces have undergone the dramatic changes outlined by Hanson (1994) Kavanagh (1987, 1988) Minford (1988) Crouch (1986) Gamble (1988) Frenkel and Roberts (1992, 1988).

  > *"Change is endemic in all societies and social organisations, but the rate of change in the last half of the twentieth century was more rapid and fundamental than in any previous period" (Horton 2002:129).*

- If change has occurred as has been suggested then the thesis will critically evaluate which of the change agents has driven these adjustments in work practices between 1979 and 1997.

In order to achieve this the present chapter will be divided into the seven topic areas identified in the literature and analysed in the case study companies:

- Market competition

- Geographical location

- Management style

- Impact of employment legislation

- Trade union recognition and influence

- Organisational culture and structure

- Information Technology

This will enable an analysis of the experiences of the five case study companies to be undertaken as well as comparing and contrasting the data in order to evaluate the claim that dramatic change has occurred within British workplaces between 1979 and 1997.

9.2 Market Competition

Horton (2002:129) has argued that a transformation has occurred in both international economies and home markets which have put increased pressure on large multi-plant organisations. Water (1995:2) focussed on the international stage and described globalisation as a "social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding". The international market place certainly increased the pressure on Bank Co, Retail Co and Aero Co although it was felt that national competition had had a significant impact on all five of the case study companies. However not all five experienced the increase at the same time or in the same way. It was clear from the data that Retail Co, Beer Co and Aero Co began to feel the increased pressure during the 1980s and into the 1990s where as Distribution Co and Bank Co did not see an increase in market competition until the end of the 1980s and early 1990s.

The nature of the competition varied between the five organisations. For example Bank Co and Beer Co saw an increase in competition as a direct result of Government legislation (Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996; Gregory and O'Reilly 1996; Holden 1999; Cressey and Scott 1992; Knowles and Howley 2000). However this legislation was not related to employment relations but rather industry specific for example Bank Co experienced a de-regulation in the financial sector which saw building societies able to compete directly with the old traditional financial institutions

(Storey, Cressey, Morris and Wilkinson 1996). Beer Co on the other hand saw the Government intervention through the Monopolies Commission who sought to make public houses less monopolistic (Knowles and Howlet 2000). This resulted in Beer Co being forced into selling a number of public houses and finding itself in a situation of vastly increased competition. As has been highlighted in chapter 7 these 'Beer Orders' made the brewing industry as a whole more insecure (Knowles and Howley 2000).

Within both Beer Co and Bank Co the increased competition created insecurity which ultimately 'forced' both companies to re-evaluate their organisational structures as well as management practice (Knowles and Howley 2000; Cressey and Scott 1992). Retail Co and Distribution Co also eventually realised that there as a need for them to restructure in order to survive. Retail Co completely changed their structure as well as their leadership, management style and approach to industrial relations in order to regain its competitive advantage. Distribution Co, although attempting to restructure its managerial style and its relationship with the trade unions were only able to do so in specific geographical locations. This supports the findings of Martin, Sunley and Wills 1993, 1994 and 1996) who argue that the location of sites has played a significant role in the attitude of management, employees and trade unions. In fact they argue that the "local context plays an important role in shaping the existence and persistence of local variations in trade union traditions and industrial relations".

Aero Co, the fifth case study organisation, also experienced increased competition. This however was in relation to the "rise and fall of the airline industry" with respect to the growth of 'cheap' airlines (Balmer and Gray 2000) as well as the ending of the "Cold War" and the subsequent decline in the requirement of the Royal Air force (Bishop and Gripaios 1995).

To conclude this section it was clearly evident that all five case study organisations had experienced a dramatic increase in competition between 1979 and 1997 however it was also clear that Government intervention in specific areas had put extra pressure on both Bank Co and Beer Co which had added pressure on them to restructure in order to remain competitive. The other organisations, Distribution Co., Retail Co. and Aero Co had experienced increased market pressure however this was due to the general change in the global and national market places rather than Government intervention.

The impact on the individual sites visited had all seen some form of change in the employment relationship however the only one which could be described as experiencing 'dramatic' change was Retail Co. While acknowledging this the changes were not universally experienced. This was believed to be due to their geographical location. This will be explored in greater depth in the following section.

9.3   Geographical Location

The importance and relevance of the geographical location came as a surprise to the researcher. In fact although it was included in the initial planning stage there was a need for it to be developed and expanded as the study progressed, including an expansion of the planned site visits within all case study organisations. The data collected on the various sites visited throughout the study suggested that the geographical location of the site had a significant impact on the behaviour of management within four of the case study organisations, Distribution Co., Retail Co., Beer Co and Aero Co. These conclusions also agreed with the findings of Martin, Sunley and Wills (1993, 1994 and 1996) who stated that the geographical location of an organisation had a significant impact on the employment relations. Unfortunately apart from these researchers very little research has been undertaken in the area within this country thus restricting the ability to compare and contrast the findings with a range of individuals. Despite this the geographical location appeared to be an important factor within most of the case study organisations and thus could not be limited.

The data collected from four of the case study organisations, Distribution Co., Retail Co., Beer Co., and Aero Co clearly reinforced the suggestion that geographical location played an important part of any change which occurred within British organisations during the period 1979 to 1997. It is concluded that the geographical location played a significant role in determining the management style, the employment relationship as well as trade union behaviour. It is suggested that this was due to the traditional industrial relations practices in the area and the local culture for example in Yorkshire mining areas the employees were reluctant to move away in order to seek or retain work due to close kinship ties (Clark 1989). This allowed management more power within the employment relationship because of the high unemployment levels throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Martin, Sunley and Wills 1996). A similar situation was discovered within Aero Co in Scotland where the sites were located in old ship building areas of Glasgow where trade unionism was traditionally high and collectivism was clearly

evident within the workforce. Distribution Co. was interesting as it was clear that specific sites were significantly influenced by their geographical locations. For example the site on the outskirts of Edinburgh operated in a more employee conscious way than the site in Sheffield in the sense that management had to manage in a collaborative way in order to maintain its workforce as the ability to "walk out of the door" was much easier due to low unemployment levels. However the management in Sheffield were able to implement their ideas with little resistance from either the trade unions or employees because of the fear of loosing their jobs in an area of high unemployment together with their strong kinship ties (Clark 1989) ensured that staff turn-over was low and industrial action restricted.

Retail Co. and Beer Co. had both operated on most of the sites visited for many years and therefore were heavily influenced by "the way things are done around here". For example Retail Co.'s site in Warwickshire had problems reducing trade union membership due to its traditional union links and its distrust of management (Clark 1989). Beer Co. was slightly different in that different sectors of the organisation were affected management behaviour and trade union response. For example the administrative head quarters of the public house division were able to de-recognise the trade union with little resistance but again this was linked to the location of the divisions head office. The head office was situated in a 'new' town which had very little traditional collective or kinship ties (Martin, Sunley and Wills 1996). The leisure division was also able to operate in a non-union environment in an authoritarian management style due to the casual nature of their workforce and the geographical location of their sites in that they were generally situated in areas where unemployment levels were high and public transportation was difficult to find.

Bank Co. however seemed to be unaffected by the geographical location of the site visited. At first it had been thought to be due to the centralisation of the decision making within Bank Co. however this was dismissed at an early stage of analysis as Aero Co and Retail Co both maintained central decision making and both of these organisations demonstrated geographical variation in employment practices. It has therefore been proposed that the geographical location had a minimum impact on Bank Co. because their staff's expectations were managed in such a way as to expect geographical movements throughout their employment with the organisation

To conclude this section it was evident that the geographical location of each site in Distribution Co., Retail Co., Beer Co., and Aero Co., were significantly influenced by the area each site was located in. However it was also interesting to note that Bank Co although having many sites throughout the UK appeared to be unaffected by the geographical location of the various sites. As suggested this could be due to the fact that most of the employees within Bank Co were required to move around different locations during their careers thus the geographical location had a limited influence on their staff as they did not need to monitor the local environment. Whereas the employees within the other organisations tended to be employed on a specific site rather than being required to move around the country and thus their focus was more clearly on the local area of employment.

It was of interest to see that the significance of the geographical area grew in importance as the study progressed. The amount of influence this had on the employment relationship was a surprise and indicated that perhaps the level of unemployment and historical trade union relationships were more significant in encouraging the changes that have occurred in managerial behaviour than has previously been suggested. As this area of research became more prominent the location of sites became significantly more important to the research and thus a wider range of locations were visited than had been planned at the outset of the study (see table 9.1). The geographical location was seen as an important variable to the change which occurred in the employment relationship in the UK.

Table 9.1   Geographical Location of Sites Visited

Company	Geographical Location of the Site
Distribution Co.	Scotland Yorkshire Humberside Warwickshire
Bank Co.	Scotland Northumberland Yorkshire Warwickshire Hertfordshire
Retail Co.	Scotland Yorkshire Midlands Staffordshire Warwickshire
Beer Co.	Scotland Yorkshire Lincolnshire Midlands Oxfordshire
Aero Co.	Scotland Northumberland Derbyshire Midlands Somerset

9.4 Managerial Style

Legge (1995:31) has suggested that management style is just a "way of doing something". Purcell and Sisson (1983) have examined this and developed five ideal managerial styles, traditionalist, sophisticated paternalist, sophisticated modern and standard modern. These ideals have provided a useful tool in the analysis of the managerial styles within the five case studies. For example the management style within Distribution Co., Bank Co., Beer Co., and Aero Co., all fall into the category of sophisticated modern. However Distribution Co., Beer Co., and Aero Co. can be identified in the sub-category of 'consulter'. That is where management accept and work with the trade unions as well as employees in order to improve workplace practices although Distribution Co., Beer Co., and Aero Co., each had differing levels of commitment to the trade union. For example Beer Co., only worked in 'harmony' with

the trade unions in certain parts of the organisation i.e. the traditional brewery division, distribution division and the distribution division retained collective bargaining rights and maintained relative high membership numbers. Whereas the leisure sector rejected any attempt by the trade unions to gain representation. This was not a surprise finding as Elsheikh and Bain (1980) had suggested that the industry sector played an important role in whether or not trade unions were recognised and it has long been the case that employees working within the leisure sector generally fail to join a trade union. What was surprising however was the fact that the retail division were able to derecognised the trade union during the early 1990s as statistics indicate that derecognition was infrequent in large organisations (Rose 1996).

Distribution Co. was also divided in relation to trade union recognition. For example, the generator hire section did not recognise a trade union for negotiation purposes. Again this was not thought to be unusual due to the nature of the business (Elsheikh and Bain 1980) as well as it being located on a Greenfield site (Lane 1984). Millward, Bryson and Forth (2000:86) claim that trade union recognition is also based on how 'old' the work place is and thus is not surprising that the generator hire sector of the organisation failed to have any negotiating agreements with the trade unions as it was created fairly recently. However the rest of the organisation maintained collective agreements throughout the 1970s and 1980s although new Greenfield sites within this sector limited the recognition to a single union.

Aero Co. however appeared to value the contribution of the trade union and helped to maintain its high membership numbers throughout the entire period. This rejected the findings of Millward, Bryson and Forth (2000:86) who concluded that in an industrial sector which was heavily dominated by males trade union membership had declined dramatically during the late 1980s and 1990s. It was also clear from the data that management appeared to, on the whole, work with the trade unions although there was some evidence that this only occurred where they could not 'push' through managerial decisions (Elsheikh and Bain 1980).

Bank Co. although falling into the category of 'sophisticated modern' was aligned with the constitutionalist division. This suggested that although trade unions were recognised for negotiation purposes they were not really 'wanted' by the organisation.

Thus Bank Co had developed policies and procedures which sought to restrict the power of the trade unions while maintaining management's right to manage at all sites visited.

Retail Co. on the other hand, although beginning the 1980s as having a standard modern approach to management shifted under the leadership of Retail Co's charismatic chairman to that of a traditionalist employer. This suggests that management are hostile to trade union representation as well as taking an exploitative approach to the management of employees (Rose 2001:73).

Each of the five companies appeared to adopt a hard approach to the management of their workforces[1]. However the level and 'power' of the trade union influenced the 'hardness'. For example Beer Co's leisure division was able to treat its employees as resources which could be bought and sold due to their low levels of skill which were easily replaceable. They were also made up of workers who traditionally were not interested in trade union representation, part-time, female and non-manual (Millward, Bryson and Forth 2000; Waddington and Whitson 1995) Whereas employees within Aero Co's technical division were difficult to replace as their skills were highly sought after and thus the company had to soften their managerial approaches in order to motivate and maintain their workforce and were less inclined to pressure the employees to reject the trade union. Retail Co. in a similar fashion to Beer Co employed, on the whole, semi skilled workers who could be quickly replaced thus they were able to adopt hard managerial practices. This was made worse by the fact that Retail Co had aggressively sought to minimise the role and membership numbers of the trade union (Waddington and Whitson 1995) while replacing it with a company owned Law Club.

The evidence demonstrated that all five companies had improved communication channels however they had done so in an ad hoc and pragmatic way. It was also felt that most of the communication between management and employee was downward. Although there was evidence that staff opinion surveys were conducted in all organisations there was little data suggesting that negative outcomes were acted upon. The conclusion was thus that communication relating to commitment etc. was limited as the management were, on the whole uninterested in the opinions of the staff. This seemed strange as all but one of the companies had changed the name of the personnel

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[1] The hard approach to HRM is defined by its quantitative, calculative resource based utilisation of employees.

department to human resource department (Aero Co maintained its traditional title of personnel) and all claimed that their employees were a valuable asset within their mission statements. As suggested there was little evidence to support the statement that human resource management had been fully integrated or adopted in any of the organisations. In fact the evidence suggested that although specific policies had been implemented from the human resource management philosophy they appeared to have been used in a pragmatic way rather than as a strategic integrated policy. Management style on the whole appeared to be heavily influenced by the attitude and skills of individual managers rather than organisational philosophy as such had a piecemeal impact on employee behaviour.

To conclude this section although there is clear evidence that the management style had changed in all five companies during the 1980s and 1990s, apart from Retail Co the change could not have been described as radical, nor had it had the same impact in each geographical location. The study also proposes that changes in management style had not driven change during the period rather it had responded to the need and ability to change from areas such as increased competition and geographical location.

9.5 Impact of Employment Legislation

Another area which researchers and politicians have claimed have brought about change in employment relations in the UK has been the industrial/employment legislation introduced between 1979 and 1997.

> *"Legislation was the single most important element in Britain's changing fortune"*
> *(Lord Young 1996).*

However this view was not supported by all those interviewed within the case study organisations. In fact the only organisation to admit that this legislation had had a significant impact on the way they managed was Distribution Co. who admitted that they had seen a positive impact on the industrial climate following the introduction of this legislation. For example the data examined provided evidence that strike action had decreased during the 1980s and 1990s and management suggested that this was a result of the Conservative party's legislation. They also stated that they had taken advantage of the weakening of the trade unions to introduce single union deals and new management styles. Despite their failure to admit it Retail Co had also explicitedly 'used' the legislation to enable them to create an atmosphere of employee insecurity which had enabled them to reduce union membership and restructure their managerial

style under the leadership of their new anti-union Chairman. This rejects Felstead et al's (1998) claim that the perceptions of insecurity are largely unfounded in British workplaces.

Despite this the evidence suggested that both Bank Co and Beer Co had clearly utilised the Conservatives employment legislation to help them restructure although they both denied this during the interviews. The data collected suggested that new schemes, policies and practices were only implemented following the decline in trade union membership and a weakening of individual employment rights within the country.

Aero Co claimed that in fact the industrial relations legislation had 'empowered' trade unions and thus strengthened the position of employees within the organisation. This was rejected by the trade union representatives as well as employees who felt that their power had declined despite union membership remaining high. It was difficult to ascertain exactly the power base of the trade union as each site was very different for example the sits in Scotland and Coventry were aggressively antagonistic towards management especially if it was felt that they were introducing something with enhanced the power and control of management.

Therefore to conclude it is clear that the industrial relations legislation had had an impact on workplace relationships in the sense it would be difficult to imagine many of the changes in managerial practice being introduced in the 1970s under the existing industrial legislative framework. Blyton and Turnbull (1998) However suggest that it was the Conservatives economic policies which 'damaged' the trade unions more than any of their industrial/employment legislation (Dunn and Metcalf 1996; Edwards 1992; Mayhew 1985). Although the evidence collected does not highlight the legislation as the driving force of change it does suggest it played a supporting role and it is doubtful whether new working practices could have been introduced without its existence.

9.6 Trade Union Recognition and Influence

One of the original criteria specified that the organisations included in the research needed to recognise a trade union. Thus each of the five organisations recognised at least one trade union for negotiation purposes. However not all of these organisations universally recognised them. For example Beer Co. did not recognise the union within the leisure sector and it derecognised the trade union within the retail sector while

arguing that they were no longer required as the workforce was satisfied. Unfortunately the employees and the trade unions rejected this as an explanation and highlighted that the unions had been removed in order to build up the power of the management. Which following a visit to the sites appeared to be the case. Distribution Co also only recognised trade unions within the food services and distribution sector but refused to recognise the union within the generator hire division. Aero Co on the other hand had maintained union recognition and membership throughout the whole period where as Retail Co. although maintaining national level bargaining had actively sought to reduce membership numbers. The final company, Bank Co. had continued to recognise the trade union for negotiation purposes however they had attempted to minimise the impact on managerial decision making by restricting areas which were open for negotiation.

Therefore it was evident that each case study experienced different levels of trade union recognition and consequently influence during the period 1979 to 1997. It is also suggested that the level of trade union recognition and amount of influence they wielded within the employment relationship was based on the geographical location of the site in Distribution Co., Retail Co., Beer Co., and Aero Co. However it did not appear to have the same affect within Bank Co.

Recognition however only played a part in the amount of influence the trade unions had within the organisation. Some of the trade unions claimed that although they had recognition rights they were increasingly being marginalised by management. This was especially true on Greenfield sites where unions had to compete with management in order to gain recognition. This was usually achieved by, for example, signing 'no strike deals'. This then weakened the trade unions in the eyes of the membership and consequently reduced their influence at managerial and employee levels.

Bank Co. unlike the other case study companies argued that the trade union had become more hostile during the 1990s. This was due, one employee argued because "employees had been made to feel more insecure than in previous decades, therefore they sought protection from the union". Aero Co. suggested that although not hostile the unions within the organisation had become more powerful in the sense that they had remained highly visible and played an active role in all aspects of company life. They add that the legislation had helped in that it had provided some form of validity to a trade union

ballot as it could now be seen as a democratic choice rather than an act of extreme trade unionism.

The data showed that Retail Co had used the industrial relations legislation to reduce the power of the trade unions and the strength of their employees. They had done this through coercion and intimidation as well as changing the leadership style and organisation of the company. For example they had added a note to employees on the bottom of the ballot paper outlining the consequences of breaching their employment contracts i.e. they could lose their jobs. This together with the cheaper option of the Company owned Law Club dramatically reduced trade union membership numbers within Retail Co. Thus it was evident that trade union membership had dramatically declined in Retail Co.

Therefore to conclude this section it was evident that the five case studies had been affected by the industrial relations legislation in very different ways. Although as highlighted some of the organisations argued that they had not been influenced by the changes in the legislation this was questionable in that it was doubtful whether some of the organisational changes could have been introduced without the legislation being in place. However it was also evident that the industrial relations legislation was not responsible for driving the change which occurred in workplace relationships as it merely supported the managerial behaviour which was observed. Even in relation to Retail Co the data suggested that although they had made the most use of the industrial relations legislation out of the five case studies they could have achieved change without its use. For example they could have made more use of the high levels of unemployment to intimidate and coerce employees at most of the sites visited within Retail Co.

9.7 Organisational Culture and Structure

The data suggested that all the organisations involved in the study had at some point during the 1980s and 1990s restructured in order to meet increasing competition. It was also evident that the culture within most of the companies had changed, if not universally then certainly in relation to divisions within the organisation. However Aero Co showed very little sign of cultural change in any form. The data gathered suggested that they had maintained their employee, management, trade union relationship virtually unchanged. Management suggested that this was because things

worked well and thus they saw little need to change. The trade unions and employees rejected this saying that it was due to the fact that the trade union had remained relatively powerful through high membership numbers.

Bank Co., Retail Co and Beer Co. were the only three organisations which consciously planned to restructure to meet the changing demands of the market within which they operated. In relation to Retail Co. and Beer Co. some of the restructuring was due to the acquisition and mergers which both organisations had become involved in mainly due to the fact that there was a need to integrate the newly acquired company with the parent company. Bank Co. and Beer Co. also responded to sector specific changes in the legislation which change the structure of the market in which they operate.

The evidence suggested that Distribution Co. had undergone change for example they had decided to decentralise the decision making to the various sites and a tier of administration was removed however the changes made were much more pragmatic than in Bank Co., Retail Co. and Beer Co. They responded to changes in the environment as and when they occurred rather than spending time strategically planning their future development.

The data gathered confirmed the statements made by management that Aero Co. had adjusted to changes in their market sector within their traditional organisational structure while maintaining the culture they had 'grown up' with. The reason for this was investigated and various 'theories' put forward by employees, trade union representatives and management. However the most consistent was that dramatic change had not occurred because of high trade union membership and collective agreements.

It was clear that four of the case study organisations had seen a change at site level as well as national level in their structure. Although most of the, on the whole, maintained their original culture with a few adjustments Aero Co had changed very little during the period. This was surprising considering it was located in a manufacturing sector of the economy. While on the other hand Retail Co. had undergone considerable change in relation to both its structure as well as its culture at site and national level.

9.8 Information Technology

All five case study companies experienced significant change in the use of information technology throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This however was not unexpected considering the findings of the workplace industrial/employee relations surveys (Millward et al 2000) which stated that British organisations in general had increased their use of information technology throughout the period 1980 to 1998. Millward et al (2000:37) found that in large organisations similar to the ones examined in the present study information technology was available to employees throughout most companies by 1998. This was the case within the companies included in the present study. However the organisations had all utilised information technology in different ways. For example Distribution Co., Bank Co., Retail Co., and Beer Co., had used the technology to deskill employees while 'streamlining' their workforce. This supports Braverman's (1974) findings in the sense that he predicted that the new technology would be used by capitalism to exploit its workers by deskilling them and reducing their power within the workplace.

Information technology has also been used to increase monitoring and surveillance within Distribution Co, Retail Co and Beer Co as suggested in research undertaken by Ackers et al (1996) and Blyton and Turnbull (1998). The three organisations had engaged with information technology in order to improve performance and output however it had offered them the opportunity to increase control through its ability to monitor employee behaviour. This again supports the findings of Aikin (1984:37) who argued that information technology had the ability to transfer 'control' of work towards management while reducing trade union influence (Salaman 2000:533) and employee 'power'.

Information technology probably had the most dramatic impact on Bank Co where back office jobs were replaced with information technology in order to increase profitability while reducing staff numbers and consequently the wage bill. These findings were replicated in Cressey and Scott's (1992) research as well as Holden's (1999) study. This suggests that the financial sector as a whole introduced the new technology in order to increase their competitiveness.

Aero Co was the only case study company that appeared to have used the information technology in a positive way. They had harnessed the benefits of it to improve their

production techniques, their designs and working patterns. It had also achieved this with the full support of both the employees as well as trade unions who viewed it as adding to the value of employees. These findings support the work of Manwaring (1981) who stated that information technology would improve efficiency by allowing mundane tasks to be undertaken by technological innovations thus freeing the employees and enabling them to be more creative.

Middle management within Distribution Co and Beer Co however complained rather than improving efficiency the information technology had increased their workloads as they now spent a great deal of time typing and photo copying which consequently had reduced the amount of time available to manage their staff and thus restricted their competitive ability.

In conclusion it appears that the introduction of new technology did impact on the way management managed during the 1980s and 1990s. It did increase the workloads of some management who did not possess adequate computing or typing skills resulting in a reduction in the amount of time they spent managing their workforces. This could have meant that management did not have time to spend implementing 'soft' human resource management practices as they are time consuming and require commitment from all parties. However this could have been overcome by adequate training and development. Secondly, Bank Co., Retail Co. and Beer Co., argued that the introduction of new technology intensified their work as management used it to monitor performance. This then implies that the new technology has been used to increase control of the workforce rather than improving working conditions and empowering employees.

It was felt that the social technological problems do not appear to have been addressed within Distribution Co., Bank Co., and Retail Co., or Beer Co. Management adopted them and expected the workforce to accept them without question and with very little support or training which consequently has had an impact on organisational efficiency.

Although information technology has influenced and encouraged some of the changes in behaviour which have been experienced within UK workplaces they are not considered have had a to have driven the change, but rather they have supported the adjustments which were required

9.9 Conclusion

At the outset of the thesis two conflicting theories were highlighted, one stating that there had been considerable changes made in the employment relationship within the UK as outlined earlier this was drawn from national level data Hanson 1994; Kavanagh 1987, 1988; Minford 1988; Crouch 1986; Gamble 1988; Frenkel and Roberts 1992:62,1988). The second argued that little had altered in the employment relationship and this was based on local and site level research (Millward et al in 1983, 1986 and to a lesser extent 1992; Gallie, Penn and Rose 1996; Batstone 1984, 1988, Cressey Eldridge, MacInnes 1985 and Rose and Jones 1985). The present thesis examined both these two approaches in order to evaluate their validity. The thesis has demonstrated that although change has occurred within all of the organisations in some form it was not 'dramatic' in the sense that management has maintained control of all case study organisations and workplace relationships have on the whole been stable. However it is acknowledged that at national level there has been a more noticeable change in the sense that Distribution Co. Retail Co and Beer Co all decentralised their bargaining during the period 1979 to 1997 this has consequently changed the relationship between senior corporate management and national level trade union representatives while strengthening the local relationships. In fact some management suggested that the decentralisation had improved their relationship with the trade union in that they could negotiate and make decisions much more effectively than when this had been conducted at national level.

It was clear that adjustments in managerial behaviour were influenced by management style, employment legislation, the level of trade union recognition and influence, organisational culture and structure as well as information technology at local and national level however as has been suggested on the whole this was not radical as it tended to maintain the status quo, management remained in firm control of the decision making process while employees followed 'orders' with little input into the process. The change which without doubt has occurred has been the increase in competition which has pressurised all the organisations and has led to changes in other areas of the workplace relationship. The geographical location had also played an important and significant role in just how much change was introduced or to what extent management behaviour was 'allowed' to alter.

Chapter 10

The Future

The previous chapters have examined the extent to which change has occurred within British workplaces during the period 1979 to 1997 and the impact that this has had on the behaviour of British corporate management. The present chapter outlines the research 'gaps' which have been identified in order to strengthen the research in the area.

- *The impact of geographical location on working practices and managerial behaviour* – there is a limited amount of data available which specifically relates to the regional impact on the employment relationship within the UK. Thus it is suggested that further research is undertaken which will expand the knowledge and understanding of the relevance of this to corporate behaviour.

- *It is suggested that a larger study is undertaken which would access a wider range and number of organisations* – this would be useful as it would ensure that the experiences of these five organisations were not unique and would help deepen the understanding of what is occurring within British workplaces.

- *The extent to which change has occurred within small to medium sized organisations* – this information would be useful in order to compare and contrast with the data outlined in this thesis.

- *It would benefit the discipline if an analysis was undertaken of the impact that New Labour has had on the employment relationship together with an evaluation of changes which have occurred from 1997.*

- *The impact of the European Union on the employment relationship* – As the European Union has increasingly been attempting to influence the behaviour of British management it would be useful to analyse and evaluate this in relation to the employment relationship.

The thesis concludes that change has occurred within British workplaces however this has been undertaken at the expense of individual employees as well as the trade union movement. It is suggested that unless the insecurities and fears of the workforce are addressed British employees will increasingly be drawn towards the trade union movement in order to protect themselves against the exploitation which was clearly evident in the case study organisations. In fact it is interesting to note that Millward et al (2000) has argued human resource management practices were far more likely to be found in organisations which recognised a trade union and further that although there was not widespread evidence of organisations implementing an integrated human resource strategy it was more likely to be found in companies which negotiated with trade unions. It is thus suggested that in reality British management continue to dominate the workplace relationship as illustrated in the authoritarian stance of many managers within non-union organisations which was briefly identified within the leisure sector of Beer Co.

If the trade union movement becomes more attractive to employees the 'power' of the union will grow. This growth will be nurtured by the European legislation which is being adopted within the UK (Wood and Moore 2002). These new rights will allow the trade unions to complete their restructuring and increase its membership by only having to 'sell' the advantages to prospective members and not the employing organisation as in the period 1979 to 1997. The only reservation held is that the 'power' of the union could potentially be abused and British industrial relations could see a return to a confrontational relationship which would restrict the competitiveness of the UK in the global market place (Crafts 1988).

On the whole it is suggested that future research in these areas would add empirical data to that presented in this study as well as expanding the overall understanding in the discipline while improving the knowledge base.

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Appendix 1
Research Protocol

Overview of the project:

- **Back-ground information and context:**

  - The political climate change in the UK in 1979 with the election of the Conservative Party led by Mrs Thatcher – this should be fully reviewed and understood as many writers cite this as the 'driving force' of change in managerial behaviour as well as a major cause in trade union 'power' and influence within the workplace and even society as a whole.
    - Also consider the philosophical implications of the Conservative Governments from 1979 to 1997, for management, trade unions, individual employees and society as a whole.
    - A review of the industrial relations legislation should be undertaken – in what ways did it affect the behaviour of British corporate management, trade union action (both nationally as well as locally) and individual employees.

  - By the 1960s it was becoming clear that Keyensian economic theory was failing to offer solutions to the UK's economic 'problems' at this time. An investigation into this area is required as it would perhaps have impacted on government action and consequent change in managerial behaviour.
    - Examine the Labour Government's economic policies especially the period 1974 to 1979.
    - The level of unemployment also needs to be researched and especially in relation to the impact that this had on employee security and thus behaviour.

  - Structural changes in the economic sectors of the UK – the shift from manufacturing to service sector industries. Many studies have highlighted that there has been a movement away from traditional manufacturing industries within the UK's economy towards the service sector (see WIRS/WERS).
    - Need to examine these changes and explore their impact on workplace policies and practices.
    - Should also include an analysis of privatisation.
    - Geographical locations appear to be influencing some managerial behaviour (Martin, Sunley and Wills 1996) - need to assess relevance of site location.

  - The Workplace Industrial/Employment Relations Surveys 1982 to 1998 suggest that the composition of British organisations has changed. There is a need therefore to investigate the extent to which these large multi-site organisations adopted 'new' more flexible working patterns. Explore how these changes have affected the employment relationship from the perspective of both the employer and the employee.

- Note the changes in employment contracts i.e. flexible working arrangements; part time employees, zero hour and annual hour contract employees; agency workers; short term contracts.

- Increased competition in the markets of many organisations, in particular during the 1980s and 1990s, has encouraged organisations to reconsider their working practices as well as down-sizing and restructuring. Data needs to be gathered from organisations from a variety of industrial sectors in order to compare and contrast the overall impact of this competition.

- 'New' management theories have emerged in the UK since the early 1980s – see for example HRM. WIRS/WERS have identified some evidence which suggests that HRM practices are increasingly being used within organisations. This needs to be clarified in the sense that it is necessary to understand the extent to which HRM has been strategically adopted as a 'whole package' rather than a 'pick-and-mix' approach to the management of people.
  - Within this section consideration should be given to areas such as:
    - Employee commitment' loyalty, involvement and participation.
    - Levels and nature of communication within the organisation.
    - The impact of HRM on the role and recognition of trade unions.

- Study rationale for selecting companies and sites used in the research:
  - Questionnaire to be sent out to a range of large organisations in order to:
    1. Gather some data on areas identified above.
    2. Ensure they meet certain specified criteria:
       - Size of organisation – must be large multi-site organisation as it was believed that if industrial relations legislation had impacted on British corporate management it would be evident within these large businesses due to the number of employees.
       - Number and location of the organisations sites – to help explore affect the geographical location had on management style and practices (Gallie, Penn and Rose)
       - Trade union recognition was believed to be important following an analysis of the literature. Some researchers have stated that industrial relations legislation "tamed" the trade unions allowing organisations to regain control of the working environment and manage more effectively than during the 1970s.
       - It was decided that a selection of organisations from different economic sectors would be beneficial to this study in order to explore the changes, if any, in managerial behaviour from different parts of the economy – Did all sectors experience the same amount of change? Was the change brought about by the same variables? Etc.
       - Ownership of the organisation was also important. It was decided that only British owned organisations would be used because

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foreign own companies would, almost certainly, be influenced by the culture and practices of the country of origin.

- **Field Procedures:**

  - Travel and accommodation would be paid for by the University in order to conduct interviews as long as the requests were validated by my director of studies.
  - Postal costs for the distribution of the questionnaire would also be covered by the University.
  - A supervisory team has been allocated as well as a specialist advisor. Contact numbers, both telephone and email, have been exchanged and recorded. Have also identified a number of friends and colleagues who will support and give guidance if necessary.

Schedule for data collection

- Literature review will be undertaken before any data collection is undertaken in order to allow reflection and formulation of information already collected and analysed by others. However this literature review will continue throughout the whole project in order to update information as well as allowing reflection and consideration of perspectives and development of theories.
- Questionnaire to be distributed within first six months of study to allow access etc. to be established with selected organisations. Also will provide some early data which will contribute to the design of the interview framework.
- 6-12 months – data from the questionnaires to be analysed and interview frameworks designed. There will be a number of interview frameworks – one will be focused on political representatives and trade union leaders. A second will be centred on organisations and local trade union representatives and a third will be aimed at employees within the organisations.
- 6-12 months - letters to be sent to key political players, during the 1980s and 1990s, requesting an interview. The political perspective is important to this study and as such it is hoped that at least some of the key political figures of the day would be willing to be interviewed. It is hoped to be able to interview political representatives from the three main parties – Conservative, Labour and Liberal.
- 6-12 months – letters to be sent to key national trade union figures, both past and present. In order to obtain a balanced view it was felt necessary to speak to a range of national trade union representatives.
- 6-12 months – letters to be sent to a number of organisations which meet the specified criteria in order to request the possibility of an interview and access to the organisation.
- 8-18 months – political and national trade union representatives to be interviewed. These interviews will be transcribed and offered back to those interviewed in order to verify content and ensure that the researchers understanding was a true reflection of the interview. The data gathered from these interviews will

hopefully enable the researcher to further develop the interview framework for the organisational, employee and local trade union representative.

- 10-16 months – conduct pilot case study, perhaps using two or three organisations to help to develop relevant questions and identify possible problems with either the method adopted or the questions themselves (Yin 1988:80-81). Also thought to be important as the researcher has never carried out interviews of this nature and thus would offer the opportunity to practice the 'art'.

- 12-18 months – analyse data from pilot case studies and adjust interview frameworks where applicable. Does the data gathered reflect what is happening in the literature? What are the similarities and discrepancies? Is the researcher transcribing the information accurately? Are the observational notes which accompany the interview notes useful? Is it felt that this is an effective way of gathering data?

- 14-20 months – identify case study organisations and confirm that access is possible to key personnel, documentation, archival evidence, a selection of different geographically located sites and if possible to employees at the various sites. Clarify the 'rules' by which the researcher is allowed into the organisation and identify limits on and confidentiality of information, if applicable.

- 18-30 months – conduct the interviews at the case study organisations and interview local level trade unions. These interviews will be transcribed and offered back to those interviewed in order to verify content and ensure that the researchers understanding was a true reflection of the interview. As the work progresses the researcher will need to reflect on the data given and adjust the interview framework if needed. Throughout this period of time it is important to maintain the relationship with the key 'gatekeepers' within the organisation to ensure that the project progresses smoothly.

- 20-36 months – review data gathered. Analyse and evaluate in relation to the literature and the other organisations. Assess with regard to the various political perspectives, in particular the Conservative Government who introduced the industrial relations reforms and encouraged a shift towards individualism.

- 36-42 months – Begin to write up the findings of the project. If there is need to arrange further interviews to clarify points or to interview individuals who were not available earlier in the study. Provide reports to any of the organisations who require this information.

- 42-48 months – Write up thesis. Reflect on information gathered ensure that it is adequately supported in relation to its credibility and reliability.

- 48-54 months – Complete study and submit to University. This time span allows for unanticipated occurances and unforseen circumstances.

- **Sources for answering interview questions**:
  - **Management and local trade union representative**:

    - Director of HR/Personnel, Head of HR/Personnel at site level, site manager, local and site level trade union representative.

  - **Political**:

- Mrs Thatcher, Lord Howe, Lord Tebbit, Lord Young, Lord Prior, Sir Ted Heath, Barbara Castle, Dennis Healey, Lord Callaghan, current Conservative, Labour and Liberal members of parliament.

- National level trade Union:

- Lord Scanlon, Arthur Scargill, current national level trade union leaders, TUC CBI and ACAS representatives.

- **Employee**:

  - A selection of different levels of employee. Middle and line management as well as non-managerial employees.

- **Other sources** that will provide information on the above topics include: Company documentation including company magazines, newsletters, annual accounts; staff satisfaction surveys and minutes of works council meetings.
- Company policies and procedures, organisational records such as charts and budgets if available.
- Any trade union documentation that could perhaps demonstrate that their role/position within the local site has changed.
- Newspaper articles in the local as well as national press.
- Staff turnover figures at each of the sites.
- Level of unemployment in area of each site.

- **Guide for the Case Study Report – it will be divided into three sections**

  Section 1

  - Introduction – outlining what the project is about. Why it is important to undertaken. What it will contribute to our knowledge base. The format of the report.
  - Literature Review – this is needs to be undertaken in the early stages of the research as many of the questions in both the questionnaire and the interview frameworks will be drawn from it (Yin 1988; Hartley 1999). This however could adjust and changed as more data is gathered and analysed. This chapter will also identify a model which will help focus thought and highlight key research themes which will at least initially be the focus of the study,
  - 'Setting the Scene' – this will outline the context within which the employment relationship operates. It will examine the political philosophical influence of, in particular, the Conservative party and the economic approach adopted throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. This historical perspective is needed as it is felt that what happened in the 1970s in industrial relations directly affected the way management manage, the power and role of the trade unions and individual employee perspectives of the workplace and society as a whole.

- The next chapter will outline the epistemological debate, the methodological stance. It will also outline exactly how the study was undertaken and the rationale for that.

Section 2

- This will be sub-divided into five chapters. Each chapter will focus on each of the five case study companies. It will include a historical reflection from the management 'who were there at the time'. It is hoped that a 'life history' technique could also be adopted here in order to build a picture of the history and experiences of each organisation throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Musson (1998:10) suggests that life history methodology "prioritises individual explanations and interpretations of actions and events, viewing them as lenses through which to access the meaning which human beings attribute to their experience". The life history approach sees the process of reflexivity as central to individuals explaining and understanding their past, present and future (ibid).

These chapters will draw together the data gathered on each organisaion and begin the process of analysis and evaluation.

Section 3

- This final section will draw together the five organisations identified in section two and will examine the findings against both each other as well as against the existing literature.
- It will highlight the shift in the knowledge base of the subject and perhaps indicate where management and policy makers need to focus attention if they are to keep their workforces 'with them'.
- It may briefly look at any changes that have occurred in either the political position of the UK or any legal changes which have occurred.
- It will also make recommendations for further reseach

Appendix 2
Changes in Management Behaviour and Employment Relations since 1979

The information that you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and your anonymity will be jealously guarded by the researcher.

Please tick the appropriate box(es):

1.　Approximately, how many people does your organisation employ?

0 -	25	☐
26 -	49	☐
50 -	99	☐
100 -	199	☐
200 -	499	☐
500+		☐

2.　What kind of industrial sector does your organisation, **primarily**, operate in?

Manufacturing	☐	Wholesale	☐
Engineering	☐	Communications	☐
Haulage	☐	Chemicals	☐
Retail	☐	Pharmaceuticals	☐
Extraction	☐	Financial, Banking	☐
Agriculture	☐	Business Services	☐
Leisure	☐	Consumer Services	☐
Catering	☐	Construction	☐
Other			

3.　Is your organisation a subsidiary of a foreign multi-national company?

Yes　☐
No　☐

4.　If your organisation is British owned, in which geographical area is your head office located?

Please specify ....

5.　Is your organisation, **primarily**, based in areas of comparatively high unemployment?

Yes　☐
No　☐

6.　If **yes**, would you say that your organisation is situated in an historically 'traditional' industrial location?

Yes　☐
No　☐

7. Is your organisation, **primarily,** based on:
   1 site   ☐
   2-5 sites   ☐
   6-15 sites   ☐
   16+ sites   ☐

8. Does your organisation recognise trade unions for negotiating purposes?
   Yes   ☐
   No   ☐

9. If **yes,** have the areas in which the organisation negotiates changed since 1979?
   Yes   ☐
   No   ☐

10. If yes, in which areas has this occurred?
    Pay structures   ☐
    Job demarcation   ☐
    Job evaluation   ☐
    Intensity of work   ☐
    Internal labour structure   ☐
    Personnel policies   ☐
    Labour force policies   ☐
    Communication with the
    Workforce   ☐
    Any others, please specify ……………………………………………………………

11. Has your organisation experienced a change in the level of trade union influence since 1979?
    Yes   ☐
    No   ☐

12. Has your organisation experienced any changes in employment behaviour since 1979?
    Yes   ☐
    No   ☐

13. If **yes,** in which employment areas:
    Employee participation and involvement   ☐
    Employee commitment   ☐
    Employee flexibility   ☐
    Employee absenteeism   ☐
    Staff turnover   ☐
    Any other area, please specify …………………………………………………

14. Has your organisation experienced any changes in the methods used by management to communicate general company information and employment issues to the workforce?
    Yes   ☐
    No   ☐

15. If **yes**, in which areas has this occurred in?

	Increase	*Decrease*
Use of chain of management to cascade Information to employees	☐	☐
Regular newsletters distributed to all Employees	☐	☐
Regular team meetings	☐	☐
Other, please specify		

15. Approximately, when did these changes occur?

1	-	5 years ago	☐
6	-	10 years ago	☐
11	-	20 years ago	☐

16. Has your organisation increased or decreased its use of non-standard workers since 1979?

Part time	☐
Sub contractors	☐
Temporary agency workers	☐
Fixed-term contract workers	☐
Freelance workers	☐
Home workers	☐
Zero-hour contract workers	☐

17. Has your organisation experienced any increase in competition within their economic sector since 1979?

Yes	☐
No	☐

18. have the changes in the industrial relations legislation since 1979 had an impact on your organisation?

Yes	☐
No	☐

19. If yes, please specify ....

20. Are there any comments you would like to add to this questionnaire?

....

....

....

....

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. Please return it to Lesley Mearns in the enclosed pre-paid envelop.

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200 -	499	☐
500+		☐

2. What kind of industrial sector does your organisation, **primarily**, operate in?

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Engineering	☐	Communications	☐
Haulage	☐	Chemicals	☐
Retail	☐	Pharmaceuticals	☐
Extraction	☐	Financial, Banking	☐
Agriculture	☐	Business Services	☐
Leisure	☐	Consumer Services	☐
Catering	☐	Construction	☐
Other			

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    Please specify ....

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Yes	☐
No	☐

6. If **yes**, would you say that your organisation is situated in an historically 'traditional' industrial location?

Yes	☐
No	☐

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    Job evaluation   ☐
    Intensity of work   ☐
    Internal labour structure   ☐
    Personnel policies   ☐
    Labour force policies   ☐
    Communication with the
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Regular newsletters distributed to all Employees	☐	☐
Regular team meetings	☐	☐

Other, please specify ....

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6	-	10 years ago	☐
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Freelance workers	☐
Home workers	☐
Zero-hour contract workers	☐

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| Yes | ☐ |
| No | ☐ |

18.   have the changes in the industrial relations legislation since 1979 had an impact on your organisation?

| Yes | ☐ |
| No | ☐ |

19.   If yes, please specify ....

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