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Issues in the Cultural Analysis of Organisations

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ABSTRACT

The focus of the research is a cultural analysis of continuity and change at a heavy engineering plant of a multinational manufacturing corporation from the mid 1960's to the early 1990's.

Substantively, the dissertation offers some views on the diffusion and institutionalisation of models of organisation, of managing, and of progress by exploring the genesis and impact of a particular model of organisation-making and cultural change (that of total quality) in the case-study plant. The fate of this managerial reform is explained with the help of historical and ethnographic data and by constructing an institutional model of the plant's symbolic environment. It is argued that a more complex mapping of culture and cultural change is required than is currently portrayed in the literature so that the relationship between cultural and organisational boundaries becomes part of the research problem rather than an (often implicit) input to the research design.

Concerns about how to model and represent the plant and about which data and voices are to be considered valid constitute the main methodological debates. The dissertation aims to offer some methodological contribution to cultural analysis by providing accounts of three cycles of research activity. It is proposed that movement between these perspectives and their multi-method research practices is a way of juxtaposing micro and macro interpretations of organisation life and acknowledging issues of structure and agency.

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INTRODUCTION

A colleague recently described doing a PhD as

> "like joining a club. You submit your application, outlining your credentials; you have a selection interview and you're then accepted or rejected."

Kuhn (1977) argued that if a community has not developed explicit rules for determining the validity of its practices, and hence for deciding who is to be acknowledged as a practitioner, then values can perform that evaluative function. Such values are embodied in exemplars which function as socially constructed cognitive strategies (Habermas 1972). These cognitive strategies constitute

> shared examples or concrete problem solutions
> unquestioned symbolic generalisations
> ontological models of the collective's world.

This conceptualisation of the research process as essentially about learning the signs, rhetoric and behaviours of a collective or community draws attention to the powerful influence of convention on research practice. If membership of the club is determined by adherence to the community's rules and representations, then articulating those conventions and becoming proficient in their execution are minimal requirements for membership.

The extent to which I have learned the *appropriate* conventions (Alvesson 1993), and the extent to which they are confirmed or confounded in practice, is evidenced in the pages that follow.

The theme of the work is *rules as conventions* and three questions inform the research agenda:

> 1. How are rules evidenced and made visible?
> 2. How do conventions arise to become preferred practice?
> 3. How do conventions change?

These issues are explored in three collectives:

> a. the consultant led world of total quality;
> b. the managerial world, in particular that world at Northfield, a heavy engineering plant manufacturing carbon products;
> c. the world of organisation researchers and theorists, particularly those with something to say about organisation culture.

Discussion of the extent to which the three worlds are tightly integrated or loosely coupled (Weick 1979, Astley 1985) pervades the dissertation since, whilst the three worlds constantly overlap, their interaction might more appropriately be described in terms of collision, collusion and conflict than in terms of correspondence or collaboration.

The substantive focus of the research is a cultural interpretation of the changes and lack

of changes in the Northfield plant over the last 25 years. About the time of my first contact with the plant in 1988, managers had just declared an intention to change the Northfield culture. Providing the model for this process and an image of its potential benefits was a particular brand of Total Quality - the Deming philosophy. A description of the plant managers' implementation strategy is provided in chapter 1.

However, managerial conviction for the new order quickly turned to apathy and the cultural impact of the substantial investment in time and money was marginal if not negative. Seeking an explanation for the failure of managers to change the Northfield culture provided a key impetus for the research.

Other significant influences on the research agenda were my consultancy work in public and private sector service organisations and a funded research project I had undertaken on the implementation of TQ in manufacturing. This work is reported and critiqued in chapter 3 on methodology.

My overwhelming impression from that work was of TQ as a new orthodoxy in organisation theory and in management practice. As described in chapter 1, the conceptual core of TQ is the managing of organisational culture. This was very much the buzz word of the 1980's which saw an explosion in articles published about diagnosing and changing cultures and in consultants' products about how to do it. At the same time, there was very little ethnographic work undertaken to construct managerial perspectives on managing cultural change in general (Kunda 1992) or to document particular experiences of implementing TQ as a culture change process (See Wesley 1988 for an interesting exception). Theoretical conceptualisation and development was therefore sparse at best. Indeed, the whole idea of culture change and its particular manifestation in TQ was either held up to ridicule or denounced as the latest turn in capitalist domination by most respectable organisation theorists (See Silver 1987 for example).

Academic discourse on organisational culture has tended to centre around a single issue - do organisations have cultures or are organisations to be interpreted *as* cultures? The significant difference between these positions (referred to as the "variables" and the "metaphor" perspectives) relates to views on whether culture is susceptible to planned and managed change or whether this notion is a reflection of managerial hubris.

This over simplification of an issue raised by Smircich (1983) exemplifies the loss of complexity which characterises models and ideas which become widely diffused. Models which are widely diffused are fashionable (Abrahamson 1991). They tend to "presented in a neat bright package" and promise rational solutions to well articulated problems through the use of "simple formulas" (Mitroff and Mohrman 1987). Hence, their representation of the world becomes stereotypical and discourse and action informed by their rhetoric increasingly ritualised (See chapter 1).

My initial proposal was therefore to examine and critique the spread of TQ as a new model of organisation and offer an alternative perspective to that dominant in the innovation and organisation change literature which suggests that
> "innovations and the diffusion of innovations will benefit adopters" (Abrahamson 1991 P586).

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Could the adoption of TQ, as a cultural design, be dysfunctional and if so where might an explanation be sought for such a phenomenon? The overwhelming view in the literature is that new or fashionable models of organisation, management, culture change, etc., are incorporated into managers' worlds primarily through processes of individual rational choice. New models are evaluated and chosen by managers as an improvement on current models-in-use. As Abrahamson argues, this leaves out the possibility that dysfunctional models can become widely diffused and does not explain how functional models can fail to become part of a manager's cognitive tool kit.

Consequently, much of the research on the diffusion and adoption of innovative models has been concerned with how to speed up the process; how to make it more efficient/effective and how to get laggards on board more quickly. The dysfunctional and insidious characteristics of widely diffused, fashionable models has received much less academic attention (see Gill and Whittle 1993). Further, explanations couched in the rationalist language of macro economics have been preferred to those that can be provided by structural sociology.

Much management and organisation research concerned with reforms (Brunsson and Olsen 1993, Alvesson 1993), particularly in relation to change brands such as Total Quality, Just-In-Time, World Class Manufacturing, Benchmarking etc., is concerned with making "things" work better rather than suggesting perhaps that they don't work at all or may be harmful to organisation life. A perspective which takes a more structural and sociological viewpoint may be considered counter-cultural, perhaps even anti-managerial, in challenging voluntaristic ideologies of progress and improvement.

An unsympathetic representation of managers may have been the outcome of my research had I followed my original agenda. This was to map the various incarnations and species of TQ in use in several organisations and to identify the extent to which TQ models were consistent and to what extent they contributed to or detracted from planned organisational change. I was specifically interested in the diffusion and speciation (Lumsden and Singh 1990) of TQ models and the degree to which model reification influenced the reported utility of the models for informing action. How managers, consultants and academics model organisation was therefore the focus of the work.

One of my concerns was to offer some view on and evidence of the extent to which models, of organisation, managing and progress were unproblematic and taken-for-granted. This agenda item has been retained and developed but in a way that differs from that originally intended. As much managerial, consultant and academic discourse is conducted metaphorically (Banner 1987, Tinker 1986, Morgan 1986) and often visually, an appreciation of the controlling influence of metaphors as communicative and interpretive rules pervades the research. This led to an analysis of my own metaphorical preferences and approaches to modelling, *as a cultural practice* in an academic world.

Once the Pandora's box of cultural symbolism was opened, the research agenda was rethought with modelling now conceptualised not as *the* focus of the work but as offering a window on world-making, or the construction of culture. This shift in emphasis did not invalidate or marginalise my substantive focus on the implementation of TQ at the Northfield plant since, as I have already mentioned, TQ was lauded as the most successful model of "how to do" culture change currently available. TQ per se had

become a symbol of progress, success and enlightenment.

To execute the new agenda it was essential that I familiarise myself with and make some decisions about the methodological issues and choices relating to the study of culture and culture change. This meant examining conventional wisdom, the "neat bright packages" and "simple formulas" that had developed about organisational culture in the academic world. To gain some perspective on the prevailing orthodoxies in the world of organisation culture theorists and researchers, comparisons were made with academic concerns and agendas from the disciplines of anthropology, literary and cultural studies (Chapter 4).

My reading of these disciplines and my efforts to design a valid and revealing research project in the area of cultural change resulted in methodological issues looming larger and larger. To some extent these remain unresolved - particularly those pertaining to the writing of culture (Marcus and Clifford 1986). The conventions of presenting a PhD in organisation studies at a business school mitigate against the use of narrative and scripted formats. Struggling with representing the many voices I wished to be heard in my text has resulted in a convoluted and sometimes esoteric sentence construction. There is no intention to mystify.

Further, as my assumptions about writing a PhD moved increasingly away from text as documentation toward text as construction and given that some of my data drew on events and conversations that were not informed by a PhD or any other formal research agenda, it was difficult to present an apriori methodological rationale. This emergent quality of thesis design (Schwartzman 1989) carried through into the post-hoc identification of patterns (ibid) in the data from the analysis of field notes, jottings, records of conversations and events and memories. I recognise that whilst validating inductively generated data is perhaps problematic, the validation of memories can only "derive from the reader's experience" (Kunda 1992).

However, many methodological concerns were clarified but this resulted in further changes to the research agenda.

Initially, an ethnographically informed research methodology seemed to offer the best prospects for understanding managers' constructions of TQ and for interpreting organisational culture. The demands of this approach, in terms of time spent observing, interviewing and participating in organisational life, meant that it was unlikely that more than one organisation could be studied thoroughly given the resources available to me. An ethnographically informed study also rendered bizarre ideas about sampling and representativeness across organisations but underlined the significance of more longitudinal and multi-method approaches. The research agenda was therefore refocused to emphasise the methodological issues in reading and writing culture, conclusions about which then informed the substantive study of Northfield's experience of implementing TQ.

Explanations for this experience were sought in the cultural history of the plant and the micro politics of organisation life at Northfield. How to model and represent Northfield culturally became the main focus of the research.

The issue of modelling and representation thus continues to permeate the dissertation.

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With regard to the modelling of organisational culture, I have attempted to evaluate current conventions and I have struggled to question my own assumptions and approaches. This has resulted in three cycles of modelling the Northfield culture - each model constructed arising from different theoretical and methodological assumptions.

The cycles can be described as

(1) a comparative, deductive and "variables" (Eisenhardt 1989) based approach which took an instrumental and planned changed perspective on organisation culture. This type of modelling informed the research undertaken as part of the "Implementing TQ in UK Manufacturing" project, the primary aim of which was to devise a managerial model for planning and implementing cultural change. This cycle, which includes some exploration and analysis of how to conceptualise TQ, can be found in Chapter 1.

(2) a micro, inductive and ethnographically oriented approach which construed culture as a cognitive and intersubjective process of meaning construction. An anthropologically designed approach (Allaire and Firsirotu 1984) which sought to construct Northfield as a small world is modelled in the descriptive text. This can be found throughout the dissertation but a substantial part is located in Chapter 2. Northfield's cultural data is organised as a collection of themes in Chapter 5.

(3) an approach informed by institutional theory which stepped outside the small world and looked for webs of significance in Northfield's symbolic environment (Scott 1987). Key assumptions are that explanation for the   models of organisation, the rules of managing and the conventions of working life that constitute culture should not be sought in universal variables or micro individual and organisational processes but in macro social and political structures. Articulating these super models and practices decentres managers and organisations from the cultural analysis of working life and seeks to explain particular approaches to organisation-making as the outcome of wider institutional influences. Chapter 6 discusses this approach and re-presents the Northfield culture from an institutional perspective

Overall, therefore, the dissertation is structured to reflect changing authorial views, as the introduction of various theoretical and methodological issues raised doubts about the adequacy of the sense made of the data so far.

Chapter 1 is concerned with TQ as a phenomenon, a widepsread and taken for granted model of organisation-making.Its development as a system of signs and as a social movement is explored. Chapter 2 presents much of the empirical data on the case study company, the Northfield Plant of Pitch Products Limited, and begins to offer some rationale for the priviledging of some data over others. Chapter 3 continues the methodological discussion and seeks to justify a shift from an etically informed comparative research methodology to a more ethnographic, emically structured process. The problematic voice of the researcher and issues in constructing text are raised. This leads to a discussion, in Chapter 4, of views on culture in the organisation theory literature and compares these to views from anthropology and cultural studies. Drawing on these multiple sources, a framework for the analysis of Northfiled's substantive data is constructed. Chapter 5 presents the analysis. Chapter 6 seeks to distinguish between

analysis and explanation and suggests a further shift in the handling and construction of the data. An institutional perspective is thought to offer a way of explaining Northfield's experiences of implementing TQ.

The dissertation ends by discussing explanatory adequacy in constructing cultural analyses of organisations and argues for a more complex view of culture and culture change than is currently portrayed in much of the organisation and management literature. By constant vigilance and awareness of the models, metaphors, and language structuring our thinking we can perhaps live less in "secondhand worlds", where cultural media provide "ready made symbols and concepts" (Shanin 1972 P19), and construct innovative rather than recycled models of organisation.

CHAPTER 1. COMING TO AN AWARENESS OF TOTAL QUALITY

Introduction

This chapter describes my first impressions of the Northfield plant, the subject of my case study, and the circumstances of my first meeting with George, a senior Northfield manager. The public rationale for that initial and subsequent contact was a mutual interest in how to implement Total Quality in manufacturing plants. In seeking to understand George's views on this and the conviction with which he held those views, the chapter considers how models and metaphors (visual, oral and textual) can rhetorically seal ways of interpreting, representing and explaining the world of experience and how dialogue can be reduced to the exchange and mutual chanting of symbols. As my interest in models and metaphors developed from several years of contact with "Quality Organisations" and as TQ implementation was the foreground to the case study, the chapter discusses the influence of forms of representation on meaning construction through a consideration of the genealogy of TQ models. The chapter is structured into the following sections:

Section 1	First Impression: Meeting George
Section 2	First Visit to Pitch Products Northfield plant
Section 3	Making Meaning
Section 4	Coming to an Awareness of TQ: conventions in practice
Section 5	Metaphors and Explanations
Section 6	Whose metaphor is it anyway?
Section 7	Autopoeitic and Dissipative influences in the development of the world of TQ
Section 8	Pitch Products and TQ: An institutional perspective?

1.FIRST IMPRESSIONS: MEETING GEORGE

Autumn 1988

A mutual acquaintance invited George (Northfield's TQ Coordinator) to provide the "practice perspective" and asked me to provide a "strategic overview" of "What is TQ?" to the board of Cheap Holiday Accommodation (UK) Ltd. A bizarre event - in which we were both caught in the crossfire between board members over what some thought their customers "really wanted" and what others thought the company "could afford" to give them. This common experience, as victims of what we both saw as an inadequately managed workshop, and our disappointment, that our independently formulated but mutually supporting messages had not been received with the acclaim they obviously deserved, were unexpectedly helpful in creating some pompous empathy between George and myself - as misunderstood prophets in a land of Philistines. The collusive quality of this first meeting was to pervade, and perhaps sustain, our relationship over the next 4 years.

George explained to me how his company, Pitch Products, had started TQ 6 months ago and that he would welcome the opportunity to explain "in detail" what they were trying to do and to hear my comments. He was apparently well connected with several

professional quality organisations and American quality consultants/academics so perhaps we could trade?

2.FIRST VISIT TO PITCH PRODUCT'S NORTHFIELD SITE

Anyone familiar with rooms to be found at the mills of British Steel, the pits of British Coal or those at the operational sites of other large companies in dirty, heavy industries, would recognise Pitch Products conference room. Could its 1960's minimalism, with tan coloured veneered surfaces, hard chairs and lino floors, indicate when the company last invested in management facilities? Are visitors usually brought here? Is the room used very much?

The site slopes and the conference room is almost subterranean - the only daylight entering from a row of small panes along the top of one wall. Its cold, perhaps even damp - but there's plenty of coffee. Another difference between this american-owned company and the offices of similar British companies is the bank of presentation technology, ie. video player, screen, terminal and OHP, at one end of the room.

George's offer to explain "in detail", I discover, means watching a slide show.

George starts his presentation. He explains, at length, the main production processes in the plant (See Chapter 2 "Being There" for more details)), the difficulties with the processes, the pressures on the business, the need to improve performance and how their approach to TQ will provide some solutions. It all seems very well thought out, clearly analysed and articulated, with a structured plan of action. The TQ programme is supported and lead by senior management and builds on several "quality" initiatives: quality circles, statistical process control and team briefings.

George is optimistic about the probability of Pitch Products achieving TQ, although he expects it will take up to 10 years. He describes the plant's TQ agenda in the following way.

During the early 1980's the company faced declining world and domestic markets. This gave rise to 4 strategic imperatives. Northfield has to :
>"reduce the workforce"
>"reduce costs"
>"improve quality"
>"increase market share".

George explains that this amounts to a "management of change programme" for the company, the key goals of which are to:
>"improve communication"
>"increase involvement"
>"increase customer awareness"
>"improve quality".

[The potential for contradiction in the two shopping lists did not appear to be an issue for George.]

Each of the key goals in the management of change programme were already being

realised, George was saying through his slides, in a variety of actions referred to as Northfield's "TQ History".

Communication was being improved through the use of team briefings. Quality circles had been a feature of company practice for some time and were a proven method for increasing employee involvement. Customer awareness was a newer area and was being developed through a house journal, "Customers Matter", and a "poster/coaster" campaign. [This referred to purchased slogans/ cartoons being posted around the site to "encourage" a customer perspective and the presentation of a tea mug and coaster (of undoubted but mysterious significance) to each employee printed with the slogan "customers matter".] Finally, abolishing the bonus scheme and introducing statistical process control would improve product and process quality.

We are now into the second hour of presentation. George is eager to continue his expedition through the stack of acetates sitting on the table - but even more concerned that he should answer any questions or queries as fully as possible. It occurs to me that perhaps George likes an audience. He likes creating slides, if possible with a visual pun, and he enjoys doing a turn.[1] He also seems compelled to re-interpret events in his company, and in others he has visited, according to the Deming doctrine.

There can now be few involved in the theory or practice of management who are not aware of this american statistician/guru, as old as the century and delightfully irreverent[2]. George can of course chant the "14 Points" that describe what a business must do to survive competitively and list the "7 deadly diseases" that stand in way of a quality transformation. But he prefers to refer to these empirically, through examples of their contravention, of bad practice, rather than recounting then conceptually, as hard core rhetoric.

Pitch Products is a multi-national company and George has close contact with Americans in their European HQ and directly with people in the States. He therefore tends to be included in the story telling, one-liners, parables and fables that Americans seem to be particularly partial to. As TQ has recently been adopted as a corporate issue, stories about quality and quality people are now vogue. So, George can recount not only the Deming text, but also the Deming story[3].

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[1] I gradually learned that people at Northfield don't "talk" or "discuss" matters in groups or informal gatherings but most plant communication takes place through pre-planned "presentations" which are "given" to invited audiences. Who is or is not included in the guest list is then analysed for clues about status, value and whether you are in or out. In groups of any longevity, the production of OHP slides, agenda papers, minutes of previous meetings, apologies and absences are all taken very seriously. The result is that meetings tend to be highly scripted with little evidence of impromptu or unanticipated activity occurring.

[2] And now dead

[3] One of George's favourite Deming stories concerns Deming's invitation from the White House to receive a special presidential medal for services to American industry. When the written

I encourage George to stop basking in the warm glow of Demingism by asking him to separate what has been achieved from what is still to be done. The line between reporting on the past and projecting into the future seems to have become blurred. Is George saying that the company is "doing TQ"? If so - what is planned for the future that will also be referred to as TQ? And what does the "TQ History" represent? Events during the last 6 months, 6 years? Were the events labelled as "TQ" at the time of their enactment - or constructed, as such, post hoc?

We return to the prepared presentation. His next slide outlines the "First Steps on the Path to Total Quality" and refers to

> • *A Total Quality Survey of all heads of department to establish perceived position of the company with regards to Total Quality.*

> • *The evaluation and examination of all plant activities and group working, and*

> • *The formation of a Total Quality Steering Committee.*

Paraphrasing Deming, the Steering Committee state that "The task of TQ" is to "eliminate waste, improve customer satisfaction and enhance profitability." These are to be achieved, read the slides, by "instituting changes in People, Structure, and Technology" guided by the twin virtues of "Simplicity and Focus". The presentation ends with George again referring to a Deming conviction - this time the accusation that it is management's responsibility to improve systems of work. A final quote emphasises this point:

> "A leader's main obligation is to secure the faith and respect of those under him. The leader must himself be the finest example of what he would like to see in his followers." Homer Sarasohn Japan 1948

His performance now ended, George morphs back into his slightly cynical and self effacing style, drawing attention to the difficulties and uncertainties of the immediate future and reflecting on his role as interpreter, or interlocutor - or perhaps interloper? He identifies the age profile in the company as the biggest problem to be surmounted. How do you achieve culture change when values, beliefs, practices, relationships are entrenched in the habits of a long serving management and workforce? He clearly excludes himself from being a victim of this common history thanks to the insight afforded by his knowledge of TQ and particularly of Deming's work. His task, in his new role as TQ Co-ordinator, is to help others come to a new understanding of what has until now been acceptable or assumed, so that the failings of the status quo can be rectified. A different reading of what's going on must be made not only plausible but come to be preferred. George referred to this process not such much in terms of

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invitation arrives it turns out that Deming already has another commitment - in his consultancy role to a corporation. He therefore sent his sister along to collect the medal and explain to the president that he had more important things to do - but thanks very much.

missionary conversion but rather as vocational guidance - making available to those who were interested his own hard won knowledge. George firmly believed that the elect were self selecting and that nothing could be done for those who could not, or would not, see.

His low-key but none-the-less evangelical presentation, a re-interpretation of the past in the rhetoric of the present, and his mission, to woo others toward that re-interpretation, hit me, surprised me and continues to surprise me - as I witness this construction again and again in companies and at conferences.

In the past, faith in the wisdom of a privileged position has often proved expensive for, or at best irrelevant to, Northfield organisation members. George sought to distance himself from these false prophets but not by denigrating everything the company had done in the past. New ways were required, a new culture had to be created, but this would be achieved by building on those activities that were indicative and supportive of the desirable future. His message was not one of *change everything at once* but an argument for a shift of emphasis, a refocusing of energies, so that a better future could emerge out of an uncertain present and a difficult past. His task was therefore to remove the dust from people's eyes so that the obvious could become clearly visible. *Volitional* commitment to the "TQ Way" is often cited as a key indicator of successful change and George was currently surveying everyone on the plant to find out how much of the message had percolated so far.

A couple of years later, a production supervisor described this as a "softly softly approach". This was not seen as beneficial for the company or enhancing of management's status, for the effect of downplaying any notion of a radical departure from the status quo was the perception that

> "the [TQ] Steering Committee took a long time to nail its flag to the mast... People didn't know what it was doing." Production Control Supervisor.

Consequently, senior management's desire to "bring it in gently" (Quality Manager) was interpreted as hesitation, incompetence and abdication by those lower down in the hierarchy.

> "Its not driven from the top. I'm not sure what their strategy is." Production Manager

> "What's missing is vision". Engineer

> "There's a lack of direction - management is the problem. No thought is given to the consequences of ideas - either financially or for people involved." Production Process Manager

George's commitment to not coming-on strongly from the top had had the desired effect in creating some dissonance with the existing company culture. But rather than signalling the start of employee involvement and participation, it was widely interpreted as management in disarray, as uncommitted.

The extent to which thinking about and acting to change culture are structured by and hence are artefacts of culture themselves remains a relatively unarticulated issue in management theory and practice (See Ley 1988 for a useful discussion). Unlike

anthropologists and their subjects, management and organisation theorists and their subjects - the various managerial tribes - continue to preserve a position of privilege, an us-and-them approach, toward those who know and can make meaning and those who do not know and cannot make meaning. This is reproduced in, or perhaps mirrors, the relationship between managers and employees. Who is enfranchised into the meaning making process will greatly influence what we know and will structure the context within which questions can be asked for

> "The way in which people perceive a problem, a question, an event determines what they will be able to know about it." Davis 1982 P65 .

The issue of perspective, of which voice dominates explanation, dominates accounts of what is desirable, dominates the interpretation of events and actions, and dominates the construction of meaning for individuals and groups, is a key and an unacknowledged problem in many approaches to managing culture change. The prevailing view would seem to take a subject/object, almost stimulus-response model of meaning-making in which meaning is communicated to rather than constructed by "non-managers". A consequence of the wide-spread acceptance of this model of communication, in which the process is split into prescribed roles of senders and receivers of messages, is that managers are frequently surprised when the meaning intended is not the one constructed by the "receiver". This disparateness is compounded when "unshared" or privileged pasts are presented as rationales for shared futures.

3.MAKING MEANING

Re-writing history from a new and/or previously silenced viewpoint, be it that of the blackman (or woman) in South Africa or the maid "downstairs" in the residence of a British aristocrat[4], is not a novel idea but it is now politically correct in the epidemic of postmodernism currently engulfing writings in a wide range of literatures, including organisation theory. The aim, if not always the result, of such a critical perspective in literature, anthropology, politics, history and other cultural disciplines, is to enfranchise people to speak for themselves by concentrating on

> "local actors' meanings, symbols and values; to place these within a wider political, economic and historic framework; and to prevent such a framework from pressing the material into a particular theory and language (a dominating voice), thus obscuring the ambiguities and variations of the empirical situation and the multiple ways in which it can be accounted for." (Alvesson and Willmott 1992 P454)

This approach, by decentring the privileged interests that structure meaning, claims to "moderate" the "totalising"(ibid) character of conventional accounts of, in this case, management and organisation. Inevitably, it seems, the emancipatory aims of such a critical perspective in organisation theory are perceived to be essentially anti-management (ibid). Unsurprisingly, this has not helped to make the perspective attractive to managers. In discussing how these aims might achieve greater access to and hence impact on mainstream organisation thinking and practice, ie involve managers, Alvesson

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[4] or perhaps the research fellow in a business school?

and Willmott (1992) suggest a scaling down of "the emancipatory project" into a mixture of critical (liberating) and non-critical (managerial) perspectives to achieve "small wins" (P460).

They suggest the use of a rhetorical device, "critical signalling", ie. "using sentences.. that point to particular problems through the use of particular words" (ibid P456), to stimulate critical reflection in the reader and "unsettle existing... dogma" (P455). They believe this may be more supportive of incremental "microemancipation(s)" (P461) than would the continuance of critical theory's current stance of pointing an accusatory finger at (managers') oppressive practices.

Unfortunately, this proposed marketing strategy for re-writing organisation from a critical perspective still leaves management as the villains of the piece - only Alvesson and Willmott's manager-friendly approach casts them as key players in their own demise, in which they can be either enlightened or duped by a convincing argument.

In recommending the advancement of their emancipatory project through "listening, writing and reading" (P432), Alvesson and Willmott fail to appreciate that managing is an essentially oral tradition (see Hannabus 1987) concerned with representing the specifics of practice rather than with applying general concepts and theories. As such, managing is better represented as a contextual and inductive rather than a conceptual and deductive process. Managing is about coping with "What's going on?" and this is achieved through the construction of descriptive and intuitive situated understandings rather than through the "computation" (Thompson and Tuden 1959) of appropriate plans of action from logically evaluated prior frameworks. (See Mintzberg 1973 "The Nature of Managerial Work" and his comments on strategy making in "The Design School Approach" HBR 1990; see also Quinn 1980 on logical incrementalism)

Whilst Alvesson and Willmott have many useful things to say about constructing a local and relevant agenda for "micro-emancipation" rather than continuing to strive for grander "more utopian ideas" (ibid), it seems to me that they remain trapped in two meta-narratives. The first is their silent but pervasive assumption that *their* position of privilege not only confers a right to make theory but also to make meaning for others. (See Hall 1991 for a discussion on who has access to theory making and ownership.) The second narrative is a continued belief in progress and salvation through enlightenment but a continuing exclusion of managers from the ranks of the elect. This makes it impossible for them to see managers as victims too. Until Alvesson and Willmott can emancipate **themselves** from these sources of oppression and seek to understand the "dilemmas and struggles" of managers they will continue to have little to say to the *practice* of managing.

Re-writing organisation from a managerially relevant critical perspective, to "illuminate and challenge the oppressive and self defeating features of modern organisations" (Alvesson and Willmott P 455), would have to speak, therefore, to this oral tradition and enter into the world of practice. Writing about practice from the outside, wherein the dominant voice is that of the theorist, is not enough. It remains alien and remote.

It is the very textual characteristics of managing, of inducting lessons from specific contexts and presenting them orally as tales, stories and metaphors, sufficiently structured to be relevant to specific situations but sufficiently ambiguous to not prescribe

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what should happen in any one situation, that have contributed to the widespread rise in popularity of TQ amongst a diverse managerial population (and perhaps contributes to the contempt in which it is held by many theoreticians).

For many managers the rules governing accounts of organisation have changed. Explanations are now structured in the rhetoric of TQ: customer satisfaction, perceived quality, continuous improvement, process control, empowerment, commitment and culture change. TQ presents a managerially sensitive "interpretive repertoire"[5] It re-writes the history of management and organisation in a way that is simultaneously liberating and affirming to managers. It enfranchises them into the body of the organisation rather than keeping them apart, as overseers and task masters, whilst emphasising their heroic role as guardians of the corporate good and defenders of the managerial faith. (See Gill and Whittle 1993). TQ is exactly that mixture of critical and non-critical perspectives, delivered through a rhetoric that stimulates reflection and unsettles dogma, advocated by Alvesson and Willmott. The difference is that TQ speaks to managers and informs action whilst critical theory does not.

Whilst purveyors of TQ have been criticised for their gullibility in the face of an obvious false ideology (Silver 1987), belief in (and in many cases some demonstration of) the universal good of TQ and its social movement-like character is perhaps worthy of a more sophisticated and engaging explanation than that afforded by a meta-theory of dominant, class based ideologies. Perhaps the broad appeal of TQ to a fragmented and multifarious managerial group can be understood in terms of its capacity to manage meaning for the members of that group and create "community" (Lessem 1990).

Translating his experience of this community making power at an inter-organisational level into a form that was locally relevant and locally appealing for Northfield's managers and employees was George's mission. His aim was to reinterpret past and current company problems through a TQ lens and, by managerial word and deed, to have that reinterpretation inform future company strategy. No consultants would be employed. Managers would be the architects of their own liberation from past practices. Through their exposure to TQ concepts, ideas, and examples, by listening to tapes and presentations, reading TQ articles and books, and by talking to George, they would come to a new awareness of their own roles and of organisation. Their conversion would be translated into sustained communication to the rest of the company that Pitch Products was now working towards TQ. With licence, support and guidance from managers, Northfield employees would achieve many small wins which collectively would result in cultural change.

To appreciate the context and the conviction that influenced the form and the fate of his work, the reader may find some description of the textual history of TQ illuminating. This is discussed in relation to the use of metaphor and analogy as explanatory conventions in managerial discourse, generally, and in discourses about TQ in particular.

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[5] This refers to a "bounded language" (Wetherell and Potter P172), used for "constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena... commonly derived from one or more key metaphors and.. signalled by certain tropes or figures of speech." (ibid) See also Gilbert and Mulkay 1984)

"Although many companies have invested millions in TQM, none doubt the value of the investment. As American Express say 'we continue to invest in total quality because the return is high'...Sometimes, one or two quality improvement projects return all the investment in cost reduction alone... Hewlett Packard saved $540 million from inventory reduction.. Another quality project saved $150 million from accounts receivable." [S. Smith 1990 The Best of TQM Magazine volume 1 P13]

The promise of such mind-boggling goodies has led many managers to seek the total quality grail. A recent A.T.Kearney report suggests 90% of CEO's plan to introduce TQ programmes into their companies. Ingersoll Engineers' survey of UK manufacturing revealed that TQ is the technique CEO's are most likely to adopt in the next 5 years.

This widespread and increasing popularity of TQM does not seem to have been tempered by repeated warnings from gurus, academics, consultants and managers that "the road is long" and that there is no room for passengers. Potential company converts have been urged to "totally commit" to the philosophy of a "customer responsive", "prevention driven", "team culture" to manage their organisation's "never ending journey" to long term competitive advantage. These modern day Cassandras caution that anything less than "total commitment" will inevitably result in failure and humiliation. TQ is a big boys game.

A decade ago, when TQM was almost unknown in the UK, the dragon-slaying tales of american corporate heroes clearly indicated that "zero-defects" was not for the faint hearted. On the conference circuit the "Oo's" and "Ahh's" of managerial audiences echoed in delight and admiration as the statistics of managing quality went under the auctioneer's hammer.

"Reduction in the Cost of Quality. Do I hear 10%? 20%? 50%? Percentage of products defect free. Does anyone bid 75%? ..80%? ..90%? ...95% Numbers of layers in organisation. Down from 8 to 5 ... from 10 to 4 .. 12 to 3..!"

The simultaneous incredulity and envy with which these tales were received quickly gave way to covetousness. Managers were directed by their boards to get hold of some TQ expertise. Newspapers were crowded with advertisements for TQ Directors, Coordinators and Facilitators. Narrating a personal encounter with one of the gurus, or the next best thing -telling of someone else's encounter-, became the latest form of managerial one-upmanship.

In the mid- to late-eighties, the clamour for quality moved up a notch when the governments of the UK and USA each decided that quality improvement was essential for economic survival. The DTI launched the National Quality Campaign and the "Managing into the 90's" initiative, and, in America, the Baldrige Award was established. This saw an explosive growth in the TQ consultancy market. Many managers in first generation TQ companies found very rewarding second careers as consultants to these national programmes, offering their companies' track records as a way of shortening the learning curve for others. Since demand for "TQ expertise" seemed to far outstrip supply at this time, the question of why so many executives came

to be released from their companies was not asked....

Many of the UK's early adopters of TQ were large organisations which almost invariably faced diminishing markets and/or severe "new" competition. TQ was often implemented as a strategy of retrenchment, cost-cutting and overhead reduction achieved by refocusing the business on the customer. Steel, chemical, computer, motor manufacturing and engineering companies were among the first into the TQ market and very soon suppliers to these firms were "being encouraged" to adopt TQ principles. Together with the increasing number of Japanese firms which became established in the UK through the late 1980's, bringing models of supply chain management, single sourcing and simultaneous engineering to UK management, suppliers to old core industries and those wishing to supply to new Japanese companies found themselves with little choice but to adopt TQ or lose supplier status.

The organisational and strategic options for suppliers were reduced even further as many public sector organisations - the NHS, local authorities, central government agencies- started to insist on some formal indication of "quality worthiness" before contracts were entered into. Hence, the question of whether or not to "commit" to quality, totally or not, became academic for many smaller firms and, indeed, for larger ones supplying to a monopoly customer.

Pressures to join the "Quality Revolution" (S.Smith 1986) were therefore very strong and in a decade TQ has changed from being a peep show curiosity to being a fact of life - taken for granted in the managerial world. Today's freaks are those companies and managers not actively engaged in quality improvement activities or those "adopters" still unable to show some dramatic performance improvement from their investment. Quality and common sense have become inseparable and the many proprietary brands of TQ now available from management consultancies and first generation firms overwhelmingly present profiles of the "quality company" as a politically neutral, irrefutably common-sense approach to "good management" (Klein 1990). Companies measure the success of what has come to be described as "TQ Culture Change" by the presence of symbols and artifacts associated with this common sense approach to managing and organisation. (See Whittle et al 1992)

For both promoters and would-be investors, TQ shifted from being another possible, rather vague and not thoroughly understood, way to do business to being essential, the only credible recipe for competitive survival. The following testaments capture this flavour.

> "In the 1980's organisations began to realise that their only way of surviving in business was to pay much greater attention to quality... Quality now encompasses all the ways in which the organisation meets the needs and expectations of its customers, its people, its financial stakeholders and society at large."
> (European Foundation for Quality Management 1993 "Guidelines for Identifying and Addressing Total Quality Issues")

> "..quality improvement is the basic business strategy of the 1990's. No business without it will survive in the global marketplace." (From the Editor, Academy of Management Executive 1992 6(1)P4)

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In many TQ programmes, this messianic certainty saw the subtleties of managing culture change reduced to the substituting of one set of behaviours for another - at least that's how it was represented in texts and at conferences.

Variety in the accounts of company managers who were "doing TQ" and in the prescriptions of management consultants about "how to do TQ" reduced and took on a predictable, ritualistic and deferential air. For example, mention of a guru or two became an essential requirement of any presentation. Precedents were set and echoed in conferences and texts (don't expect any return on investment for 3 years; use consultants for your senior managers; middle management are the main source of resistance; etc...). Certain managerial practices became legitimated and prescribed and were an expected constituent of any TQ presentation. These included reporting on the calculation of the cost of quality, describing the creation of a quality steering group and improvement structure, the representation of organisation as a customer-supplier chain, the celebration of reductions in defect rates and work in progress and proud testimony to the rise in rates of employee participation in improvement groups. McGrath suggests that

> "When technical solutions are not clear, it is easy to see why social conventions and norms are formed. Since no one really knows what to do, experts are referenced, precedents are followed, and practices become legitimated."
> (McGrath 1982 P121)

The norms and conventions that developed structured the form of presentation of these accounts as much as their content. Initially, a primary medium of communication for reporting TQ activity was the conference.

As presenter or "delegate", I have attended 17 one, two or three day conferences over a 5 year period in which TQ was the focus of the conference or constituted one of the main conference streams. I have the proceedings of several other such events. The "Bionic" (M.Pines 1985), anti-intellectual and basic group character of these events I have described elsewhere (Whittle 1988). Here I aim to comment on the social construction of the conference as an institution-building structure (Robb 1992, Abrahamson 1992) that creates unintended doctrine and an insidious world view for participants. Conference rituals play a key role in this process, smoothing uncertainty and obscuring ambiguity, disagreement and conflict amongst conference goers.

5.METAPHORS AND EXPLANATIONS

The depiction of accounts as
> "simple, unintrusive, neutral reflectors of real processes located elsewhere"
> (Wetherall and Potter 1988 P168)
has been superseded in many disciplines by a view of accounts (texts. discourse, representations) as social practice (see for example, the body of work on financial accounting practices in the journal *Accounting, Organisation and Society*). Accounts therefore signal specific domains and communities of meaning since
> "explanations are always fitted to specific occasions" (ibid p182).

From this perspective much current theoretical analysis adopts a manifest and latent function approach to interpreting and explaining the construction of accounts. The aim is to reveal the intended and unintended consequences in giving accounts through the analysis of everyday explanations (Antaki 1988). Hence, the accounts themselves

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become the focus of study, not as more or less accurate explanations of what's real but as something to be explained. I have used the terms "account" and "explanation" interchangeably, so far, both being forms of discourse. However, Antaki imposes two characteristics on explanations that would differentiate them from "any utterance" (ibid P6).These are

> i) that explanations have "the power.. potentially.. to overturn definitions of reality" and
>
> ii) that they are able "to impose the speaker's preferred interpretation of events."

Explanations then "reveal or claim to reveal what is 'really' the case" (ibid P2)

In looking at accounts of organisation constructed in the rhetoric of TQ, I am concerned with publicly expressed explanations vis-a-vis those expressed in more private settings or those remaining confidential and perhaps implicit to individuals. Explanation is therefore construed as

> "existing in the space between the explainer and the audience"

and is

> "the product of joint action based on mutual knowledge" (ibid P13)

Draper (1988) describes how utterances come to be offered by a speaker and accepted by an audience as sensible explanations only if common and prior knowledge is ascribed by the speaker to the audience. Explanations are therefore enfolded in and depend on structures of communication that transcend any one explanation and any one speaker/audience encounter. The rules of explanation hence manifest themselves as rhetorical and symbolic conventions, specific to a community or "disciplinary matrix" (Cooper and Fox 1989) These conventions can be exploited by the speaker to "overturn definitions of reality" and "impose the speakers' preferred interpretation of events" (Antaki 1988). One acknowledged, and some would argue abused, convention in constructing explanation concerns the use of metaphor (See Tinker 1986).

Metaphors have been described as ideas that

> "transmit an entire story visually using only one image" (Sackmann 1989 P468)

The use of metaphor as an explanatory mechanism pervades accounts of TQ. For example, the key British TQ text (TQM Magazine) usually contains half a dozen articles, 2-6 pages long, of advice, case studies and surveys written primarily by managers and consultants using metaphor rich, tabloid, and crusading language. The following extracts are typical:

> "It has taken Western managers nearly two decades to unravel the 'secret' to Japanese TQM success. It has been a difficult oriental puzzle to solve. Beginning in the late 1970's, fact-finding trips to Japan yielded a host of tools, methods and concepts... Each idea found its disciples who thought they had discovered the key to making Western companies more competitive." (R. Chase TQM Mag Dec 1991)

> "The creation of a quality culture is a reasonable enough aspiration. Cultural and other changes need to occur if bureaucratic organisations are to migrate to more flexible and responsive forms that are better able to tap the potential of their

people and deliver value to customers." (C Coulson-Thomas TQM Mag Feb 1992)

Similarly, the European Foundation for Quality Management, a club of presidents, CEO's, and senior managers from European companies who are "committed to TQM", formed to promote and support the development of TQM in European countries, publishes a regular newsletter, again with short reports on specific company activities. These "quality bytes" also rely largely on metaphor to communicate a message. For example:

> "Top management's job is to pilot the transformation of the company system until the flows of processes are effectively under control and the strategy of continuous improvement has firmly taken root inside the company... The soloists may be very talented but they have to play in unison and as a team to produce the right sound of quality." (EFQM "Quality Link" Nov/Dec 1989 P2)

Much of the work on metaphor usage, epitomised by Morgan's work "Images of Organisation" (Morgan 1986), has focused on the **content** of metaphors and how their imagery structures meaning and hence action. So in the examples above, from TQ texts, we had taps gushing people potential, creating flexible organisations rather than the rigid (likely to snap in the breeze) structures it is implied that we now have. Also senior managers are pilots or orchestral conductors, in sole charge, battling against elements and idiosyncrasies to deliver organisation safely into the future. But little attention has been directed towards understanding the use of metaphor as a "convention" (Bicchieri 1988) in its own right and how this form of discourse,

> ".. as a social practice in itself.. with its own practical features and social consequences" (Wetherell and Potter 1988)

structures thinking and action.

Metaphors enable us to temporarily "bracket" or suspend belief and knowledge and perceive a phenomenon from a different point of view - "as if" it had some other signification. (Sassure 1974).

> "A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a term or phrase with a literal meaning is applied to a different context in order to suggest a resemblance, such as 'the head of the family'" (Sackmann 1989 P 465)

Metaphors connect "apparently disparate entities.. to give things names and explain reality" through their ability to "tap and activate all kinds of public and private knowledge" in the audience. (Hannabuss 1987 P35) This facility, of representing the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar, makes metaphors extremely useful communication mechanisms. It also makes them insidious because

> "..it is often forgotten that representation is a necessary part of the 'knowing' process. We do not experience the things of the world directly, but single out certain of their distinctive or differential features which we then perceive as mappings, selecting certain features and excluding others. In this operation we think and act as though signs and symbols give us immediate access to the world, reproducing it as it is without our selective intervention." (R.Cooper 1990

Metaphors can constitute a metalanguage, surreptitiously shaping what is perceived. The metaphor then constitutes a frame, a boundary for the described phenomenon, bringing understanding to the phenomenon by imposing metaphorical order.

> "The frame.. is really an instruction to the viewer [in a metaphorical sense] to attend to what is within the frame and to ignore what is outside it."(R.Cooper 1990 P177).

In this way the phenomenon "becomes conceptually detached from the background or environment and thus takes on a life of its own.."(ibid)

As Cooper points out

> "This has the all important function of diverting attention away from the frame" (ibid P170),

and hence denying an appreciation of the power of the frame to delimit interpretation and understanding by devaluing anything deemed to lie "outside" its boundary.

Krefting and Frost define metaphor as

> "..an explanation of one thing, the topic, in terms of another, the vehicle, where topic and vehicle share some characteristics (the ground) but not others (the tension). Metaphors influence cognitive structures by succinctly 'chunking' and transferring shared characteristics from vehicle to topic without enumerating specifically, thus providing a compact gestalt or coherent whole for the topic." (Krefting and Frost 1985 P158)

This practice of alluding to prior common or accredited knowledge through the use of metaphors is found in many disciplines as the accepted formula for successfully disseminating new ideas. This is particularly so when the topic of discussion is intangible. For example, in accountancy, Hogarth identifies the metaphor of "man the statistician", and finds references to auditors as "general practitioners" and to auditing as "learned biases", "information processing" and "risk analysis". He suggests:

> "Because of the unobservable nature of cognitive processes, the study of judgement makes heavy use of both standards and metaphors. Standards are applied to observable outputs (ie. actual judgements), whereas metaphors are used in the form of "as if" models of the underlying and unobservable judgement processes." (Hogarth 1991 P.277)

Similarly, in psychology,
"Psychological language is primarily metaphorical or analogical ...It is in figurative terms that psychologists generally communicate their major insights and couch their central theoretical messages." (Richards 1991 P206)

I referred to the language of TQ texts as metaphor rich. Clark has suggested that

" a period of metaphor testing is characteristic of the interregnum between the death of a dominant paradigm and the emergence of successor(s)." (Clark 1985 P71)

and Weick, commenting on the demise of the scientific and systems paradigms to explain organisation, noted that in the previous decade

"organisations have been variously portrayed as anarchies, see-saws, space stations, garbage cans, savage tribes, octopoid, market places, and data processing schedules." (Weick 1979 P47)

So it was with TQ, as a new paradigm for explaining and managing organisation, that accounts initially played with a large number of new representational models. But gradually a limited range of metaphors were invoked time and again, the same images appearing in a wide variety of settings. (See table)

A random look through the editorial pages of TQM Magazine found the following metaphors:
1988: business climate; organisation survival; create TQM organisations; TQM road; reap great rewards; quality secrets; driving force of implementation; build quality in; beat the competition; TQM journey.
1989: quality prophets; believers; converted executives; quality will grow; quality champions; heart of quality; inspired thousands;services have failed; tools and techniques; shift in attitudes.
1990: examine training; fundamental mistakes, TQM sets the stage; a revolution in education; dismantling barriers; organisational pyramids; upward movement; narrow focus; bottom-up pressure; mechanism for training.
1991: winners and losers; stalled TQM programmes; barriers to success; lemming-like; TQM founders; TQM yields dividends; accelerating change; transition; knee-jerk reaction; confused employees; kick-start a programme; goals; pioneering company; pitfalls.
1992: clarion call; quality prophets; take on board the message; take up the challenge; heart of the transformation process; hold their own; danger of complacency;losing ground to competitors; quality gospel; discover the benefits; TQM ambassadors; TQM journey.[6]

For presentational purposes the orchestral metaphor is particularly popular and frequently used to convey the message that expertly played solo renditions can be dysfunctional in an ensemble piece. This particular metaphor recently formed the finale of a presentation given by a TQ manager to a group of local, fellow industrialists. The TQ manager had brought his own small casette player. After a verbal presentation thundering home the message that TQ is about group effort, coordination, collaboration

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[6] The use of metaphor in TQ is itself perhaps cyclical (Gill and Whittle 1993). The above examples can be phased as follows: 1988 - TQ the argument for; 1989 - inspiring the converted; 1990 - the secrets of practice; 1991 - coping with problems and discounting failure; 1992 - reviving the mission

etc, he played 5 separate musical extracts, each by a solo instrument, and each described in advance as "perhaps the purchasing/ production/ finance/ personnel/ design department sounds like this". At the end of these solo virtuosos he had superimposed all the pieces onto a single recording and let the audience hear the resulting cacophony. It brought the house down and was elatedly received as the best presentation many had heard for a long time.

No links had to be made by the presenter between the metaphor and the subject of the conversation - cooperative and collaborative working relationships. The metaphor was presented as a "proof" - the Q.E.D. of the presentation. The truth of what the presenter had been saying was now self evident.

The process of and problems associated with model reification (Shanin 1972) are widely acknowledged in the academic world but seem to remain a perpetual occupational hazard for managers. Further, it would appear that, for users and potential users, there is a tendency for the validity of models to increase as their presence in the language and discourse of a population of organisations becomes more pervasive (See Abrahamson 1991).

Perhaps metaphors themselves become conventions, acknowledged as appropriate and accepted as explanatory by the members of a particular community?

Douglas (1986) describes how
> "The favourite analogy generalises everyone's preferred convention." (Douglas 1986 P51)

She continues
> "Individuals as they pick and choose among the analogies from nature those they will give credence to, are also picking and choosing at the same time their allies and opponents and the pattern of their future relations. Constituting their version of nature, they are maintaining the constitution of their society. In short, they are constructing a machine for thinking and decision making on their own behalf. " (ibid P63)

Degot (1982) has critiqued the logic of representation in organisation theory arguing for a perspective in which organisation is seen as representing and arising from models rather than models being interpreted as representations of organisation. (See also Cooper and Fox 1989 P257.) Whilst the idea that models construct rather than reflect experience has a long pedigree, it is not a notion that is widely acknowledged in managerial or even *Organisation Studies* circles where there is little if any discussion of presentation as theatre.

I saw this clearly in John Oakland's "presentation" at Sheffield TQ forum in November 1992 in which the hour comprised an extrapolation of a single diagram, described as representing all types of organisation.

> "I'm arrogant enough to think that the ideas and concepts in TQ (ie. my model of TQ) are applicable equally to hospitals, police forces, manufacturing companies, universities and consultancies." Oakland

Much of the presentation was concerned with explaining the model - as a way of seeing organisation- and much of the discussion and audience participation revolved around questioning and clarifying the model. Once it was agreed that this model was viable/ acceptable - and many anecdotal stories were told of organisations that were constructed according to the model presented - then discussion centred around interventions in "real world" organisations so that they could be refashioned according to this model.

The tautology of the message seems to go unnoticed by the audience, perhaps by the presenter... - that organisation becomes amenable to interventions which arise from or fit the presenter's inscribed model. In this case the model was of a cybernetic variety structuring interventions which were euphemistically referred to as "controlling your business processes", "adding value", "making your processes customer driven". The model is accepted, celebrated, by audience and presenter not because the presenter has discovered the right model for understanding organisation but because the repertoire of presenter and audience is already model based. The "appreciative setting" creates organisation. (Vickers 1965)

Metaphorical models are one of the key integrative mechanisms in the managerial world, simultaneously "highlighting" convergent and "hiding" divergent (Lackoff and Johnson 1980) aspects of a situation and its interpretation. For

> "(T)he generation of metaphor is not an innocent quest of random discovery.."
> (Tinker 1986 P368)

The choice of "metaphorical spectacles" (Dillard and Nehmer 1990), of representation of the world, itself exhibits structuration (Giddens 1984), the enfolding of form in process, the maintenance of structure in action. The epidemic use of metaphor as a not so primitive entity in TQ discourse has hastened the emergence of TQ as an institution in which communication proceeds largely through metaphorical language. Certain metaphors, representations, have then come to be preferred over others and become reified. They have lost their "as if" quality. The capacity to question these representations is then lost.

It was in response to the reification of the metaphors "organisation as machine" and "organisation as organism" that Morgan offered his "treatise on metaphorical thinking" (Morgan 1986 PP17/16) which conceptualised organisation as "complex, ambiguous and paradoxical" . His "intriguing idea" was that

> "Organisations are many things at once!" (ibid P339)

and he advocated metaphor as a way of grasping these multiple, and simultaneous, realities. Morgan developed his idea to suggest that, as well as a way of seeing, metaphors also provide "frameworks for action" (ibid P343). He advocates the replacement of "organisation" with "imaginization" because, he argues, our ways of organising are limited primarily by how we **think** about organisation. In describing his ontological position in terms of a constructed reality achieved through "engagement and co-production" (P382), Morgan believes that different, metaphor generated, "readings" of organisation can lead to the enactment of a wider variety of organisational realities.

However, as others have commented (Tinker 1986) he offers no way of choosing

between metaphors, no way to judge how their appropriateness might be evaluated or hints of what the impact of various choices might be at a macro, institutional level. For it seems that reality beyond the level of the firm as a purposive entity has little meaning for Morgan. Despite describing his perspective as "critical", no meta-perspective or way of thinking about metaphor is attempted. Consequently, the dominant voice of his book is implicitly that of the privileged observer, able to pick and mix metaphors "as one learns to recognise important cues and to uncover crucial insights." (Morgan P337) Reading organisation from a multi-metaphor perspective thus

> "makes explicit a process that is basic to our way of thinking" and "We are invited to do what we do naturally" (p336)

But the appeal of any metaphor, as an apparently universal meaning-making mechanism, may be more socially constructed, bounded and hence limited than Morgan suggests. It seems that a metaphor must fit the "social collectivity" towards which it is directed;

> "a social collectivity whose members share a set of implicit and explicit meanings acquired through innumerable communicative exchanges" (Gowler and Legge 1983). To be acceptable and taken-up by an audience or social group, any old metaphor will not do.

In critiquing Morgan's (1986) "neglect of the social processes that generate and disseminate metaphors" (p363), Tinker argues that
> "Metaphors are never neutral representations of social affairs" but are "used to manipulate the social imagination by reifying social relations." (1986 P378)

Whilst Tinker's critique is itself ideologically tainted with the rhetoric of the left, expounding continued vigilance to further the campaign for "liberation and emancipation" (P378), his main point is worthy of consideration. Tinker attacks Morgan's call for a proliferation of metaphorical thinking on the grounds that

> "..the generation of metaphor is not an innocent quest of random discovery, but is a purposeful and continuing renewal of part of society's ideological apparatus." (P368)

Hence, Morgan's advocacy of an intellectual pluralism, made richer by the diversity of perceptions offered by the use of an infinitely wide range of metaphors, "reifies knowledge production" (p368) and treats the process of knowledge creation as if it was "independent of any social and historical background" (P364). The outcome of this pluralism, this "anarchic proliferation of metaphors" in Tinker's terms (P377), is a naive view that "we are free to institutionalise in any manner we choose". (P364)

As I hope I have made clear in my comments on the critical perspective offered by Alvesson and Willmott, I do not support the notion that all life can be explained by recourse to capitalist plots. However, as, for example the application of the theories of dissipative structures and autopoeisis suggests, insights and explanation can be achieved at the macro level that are not available, that are out of frame, from a micro, entirely voluntarist perspective. Thinking about management and organisation is not separated from other belief systems and the institutionalised practices prevailing in society at any one time. Theorising about, and practising, organisation is therefore socially structured

and historically specific. To understand and influence what are accepted models of organisation and management we must therefore seek some appreciation of their genesis and speciation (See Lumsden and Singh 1990).

From this point of view, metaphors can be conceptualised as condensation symbols or paradigmatic codes for particular knowledge structures which leave unarticulated many of the assumptions and interests enfolded in their imagery (Morgan 1986). Through the development of visual information technology, communication is replacing conversation in organisations as globalisation reduces the previously diverse population of organisations down to a set of one.(Freeman 1977) The institutionalisation of organisation imagery is a powerful force in structuring managerial thinking and practice but is relatively unresearched. Metaphors are the most visible and hence accessible components of these managerial knowledge structures. In seeking an explanation of the popularity of TQ, the use of metaphor is therefore worthy of analysis as an aid to mapping the institutionalisation of this model of organisation.

6.WHOSE METAPHOR IS IT ANYWAY?

In comparing the metaphors invoked by James and Freud, Richards, in concluding that it is Freud "the eternal heretic" who has had the greater impact on the development of psychology as a discipline, observes that

> "Freud's metaphors are carefully constructed and cautiously deployed models or analogies for ideas which are essentially novel to his audience.. the Freudian metaphor works by seeming to augment our present understanding, giving us a novel insight, putting into comprehensible form a complex new idea. Freud never uses imagery recklessly and the role it plays in his expositions is primarily to clarify conceptual novelties and difficulties." (Richards 1991 P.213)

But this content validity of metaphor, drawing on signs and objects already familiar to an audience, whilst necessary, is not sufficient for a metaphor to "strike a chord" and become part of the expressive culture of a group. Metaphors, as new sets of glasses, enable us to become spectators of and commentators on our own customs and practices. But for metaphors to become new conceptual conventions and be used in structuring group members' experiences, they must contribute to action.

In trying to understand the pervasiveness of Freud's metaphors against those of James, Richards suggests that **what** Freud was trying to do goes some way towards explaining the receptivity of the audience to Freud's theory. Freud was not trying only to describe and explain behaviour but he was

> ".. developing a theory for therapeutic ends ...Freud's theory had to generate and justify an actual clinical practice, an intervention in the way people experienced themselves, not merely a reflection of it. Freud's metaphors are part of this process - they offer new ways of experiencing, and his theory is inextricably linked with the techniques (free association, dream analysis, etc.) by which access to his data was to be obtained... To appreciate Freud you had to shift into the analyst's couch as surely as to appreciate Galileo you had to peer through his telescope." (Richards 1991 P214)

To accept Freud's imagery meant you had to accept Freud's practice. The metaphors became meaningful once the shift in perspective, in objectives, advocated by Freud became plausible. Metaphor signals this change rather than creates it. A metaphor is therefore convergent and affirming rather than divergent and questioning. Metaphor is mind focusing, supportive of action already advocated, rather than mind expanding.[7]

This process of offering practitioners insight into their own views and behaviours, as reflective, articulating, agents pervades the managerial world. Managers tend to see themselves as controllers of their own behaviour and controllers of others' behaviour, others being non-managers, passive objects receiving the wisdom of those who know. As such an invitation to enter into the perspective of a privileged observer, through the use of new metaphors, confirms the superiority of the managerial perspective. The metaphor, by feeding this managerial ethnocentrism (Gemmill and Costello 1990 P284), is a uniquely appropriate mechanism for structuring discourse within the managerial community, as it affirms assumptions about the dominance of managerial meaning making in organisations. (Whittle 1988) But whilst we might explain the generic attraction of the metaphor to managerial discourse, how can the prevalence and broad usage of particular metaphors, ie the institutionalisation of some metaphors, be explained?

I have already referred to metaphors as ideas which "..transmit an entire story visually using only one image." (Sackmann 1989 P 468). Taking this quote literally, pictorial representations of organisation, in diagrammatic charts and models, can be described as textual manifestations of metaphor.

> "Metaphors involve entire systems or domains of meanings rather than individual isolated concepts. As such, metaphors are mental pictures which transmit information in a holistic way, thus providing a coherent whole for the topic... The connotative meanings associated with a particular metaphor influence the meanings and *feelings* about a particular situation." (Sackmann 1989 P.466 emphasis added.)

Metaphors are often imbued with moral values and beliefs (Hannabus 1987) particularly when presented in graphic/ visual form in which a whole parable is condensed into one or two images.

In TQ, the inverted triangle, sometimes "flattened", with the CEO supporting the organisation structure like Atlas holding up the world, is a favourite, now almost cliched, representation of organisation. Another more recent pictorial representation is something of a throw back - the organisation as a chain or set of integrated process,

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[7] The argument is similar to that proposed by Davis (1982) where he describes how contexts filter experience. Context is referred to as " a boundary, a frame.. through which all experience is filtered" (p65). In echoing Kuhn's theory of paradigmatic change, Davis goes on to suggest that "Contexts do not shift incrementally [for].. you cannot break out of an inadequate paradigm by working within it" (p77/80). Therefore, the formulation of ideas about how to change contexts, including the use of metaphors is not the first step towards changing those contexts but evidence that the change has already occurred.

dependent on feed-back and system design for its performance.

Some of the more commonly recurring pictorial representations of organisation, management and work life presented at TQ conferences and in company, consultancy and journal publications are reproduced on the following pages.
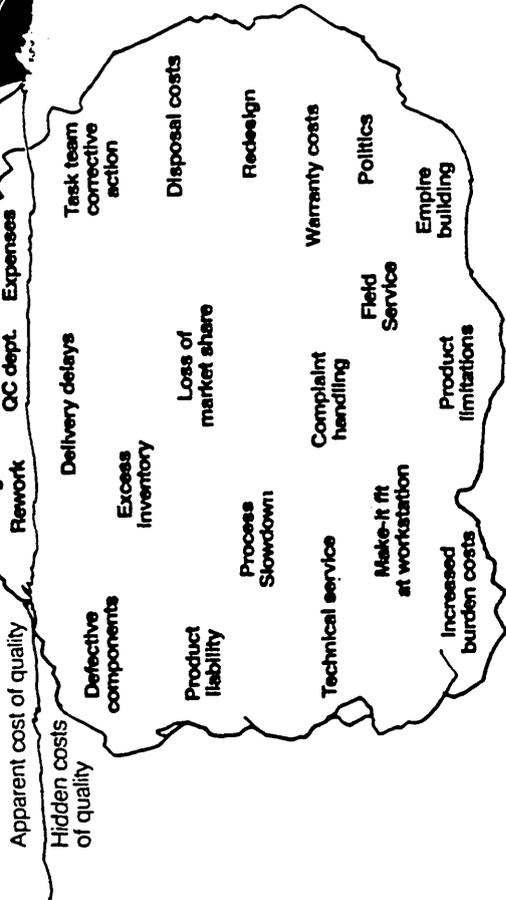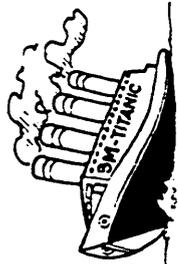
CARELESS WORK COSTS TIME AND MONEY.

HOW DO WE USE THE SALES REVENUE FROM CUSTOMERS?

3

4

A

COST OF QUALITY

Apparent cost of quality

Hidden costs of quality

Quality costs
Scrap   Return goods
Testing costs   Inspection costs
Rework   QC dept.   Expenses

Task team corrective action

Disposal costs

Redesign

Defective components

Delivery delays

Excess Inventory

Loss of market share

Warranty costs

Politics

Product liability

Process Slowdown

Complaint handling

Field Service

Empire building

Technical service

Make-it fit at workstation

Product limitations

Increased burden costs

1

Transistor scrap
$6,000/yr.

- Replacement expediting
- Vendor negotiations
- Engineering buyoffs
- Quality reviews of defective parts
- Over/under schedules due to losses
- Material handling of defective parts
   - Excess RIP-CCI

$250,000/yr.

40/1 iceberg

2

Transportation damage
$200,000/yr.

- Premium air freight
- Travel expenses
- Sales/Service concessions
- Sales productivity
- Excess capacity
- Lost repeat sales

$800,000/yr.

4/1 iceberg

28

B

Have clear objectives and a plan for achieving them

1

"Anyone else's department lost money?"

2

OH B..... HELL..!?

3
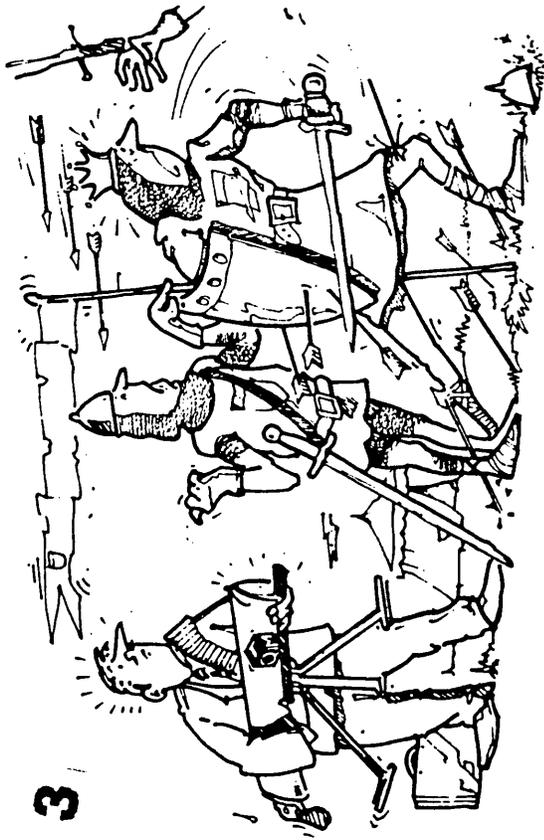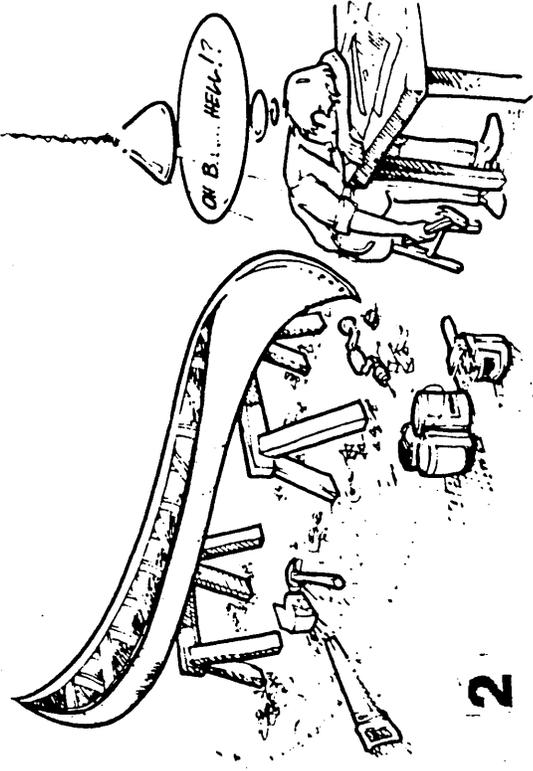
"Don't bother me now – can't you see I'm busy trying to win this battle"

4

READY   FIRE   AIM

C

THE STEPS TO TQM

4

SUPPORT

- IMPLEMENTATION of TQM
- TRAINING for Quality
- TEAM WORK for Quality
- CONTROL of Quality
- CAPABILITY for Quality
- SYSTEM for Quality
- DESIGN for Quality
- PLANNING for Quality
- MEASUREMENT costs of Quality
- ORGANISATION for Quality
- POLICY on Quality
- COMMITMENT to Quality
- UNDERSTANDING Quality

THE ROUTE TO THE QUALITY SUMMIT

3
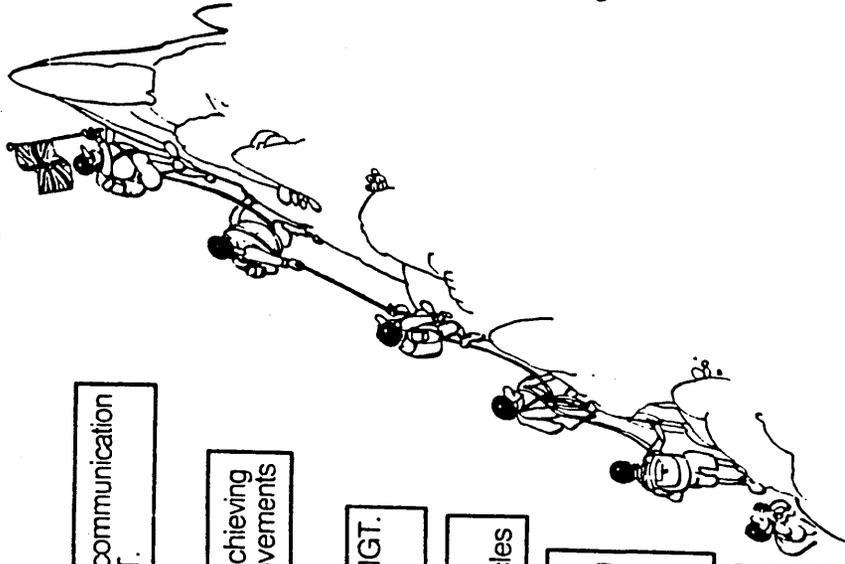
- Effective communication from Q.I.T.
- Projects achieving real improvements
- Positive MGT. approach
- Effective quality circles
- Good prevention activity initiated by MGT.
- Non-supv staff in C.A.T.

SELECTING THE PROJECT TO TACKLE

1

2

Where do we want to be ?

It is no good just explaining what's wrong at the moment. You've got to know what your target is.

The problem is the gap between the two.

Where are we now ?

IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING - YOU'LL END UP SOMEWHERE ELSE.

1.
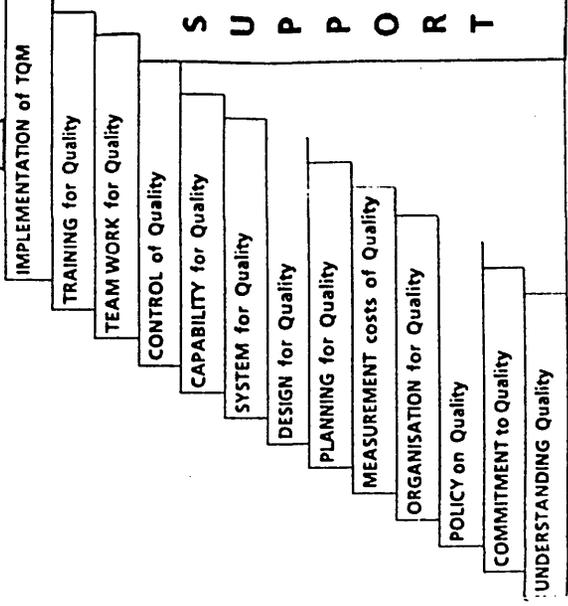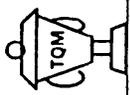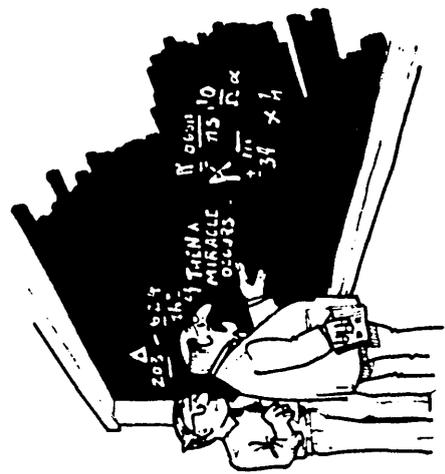
"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

D

1. Define the problem
2. Look for root causes
3. Choose a solution
4. Implement the solution
5. Check that it worked.

2

Without getting the first two steps right we are likely to find ourselves running too fast - and ending up with solutions that don't work at all.

TO SOLVE A PROBLEM : Solve it properly and solve it once and for all.

3

THE FOUR PHASES OF
TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT
IMPLEMENTATION

Phase 4 Review and Relaunch

Phase 3 Intensive Improvement

Phase 2 Management Focus and Commitment

Phase 1 Diagnosis and Preparation

4

THE DEMING CYCLE

Plan — What is needed?

Do — Try out on a small scale

Check — Does it work?

Act — Implement fully
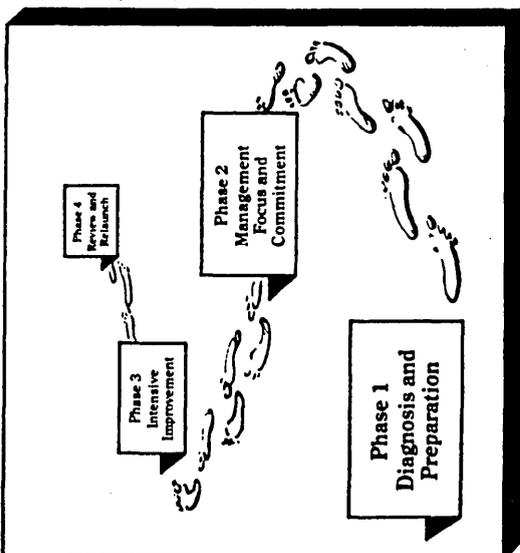
"If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else."

31

MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

1

Total Quality

- Requirements (Values, Mission, Vision, Goals . . .)
- Forecast / Diagnose Plan
- Discuss / Listen
- Decide / Communicate
- Roles & Responsibilities
  - objectives
  - tasks
  - standards
  - accountabilities
- Educate/ Train/ Coach
- Act/ Support
- Monitor Measure Control
- Review/ Recognise

PROCESS

E

2

- Establish Customer Requirements
- Agree Quality Goals
- Analyse Review Current Performance
- Identify Owners, Gaps and Priorities for Action
- Authorise Quality Improvement Plans
- Review implementation of plans against objective
- Ensure gains are held at the new performance levels
- Assess achievement of Quality goals
- Evaluate/ Identify successes and lessons
- Share with the rest of the Business

THE QUALITY TRAINING CIRCLE

3

- QUALITY POLICY
- TRAINING
- ALLOCATE RESPONSIBILITIES
- DEFINE OBJECTIVES
- ESTABLISH TRAINING ORGANISATION
- SPECIFY QUALITY TRAINING NEEDS
- PREPARE PROGRAMMES AND MATERIALS
- IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR
- ASSESS RESULTS
- REVIEW EFFECTIVENESS
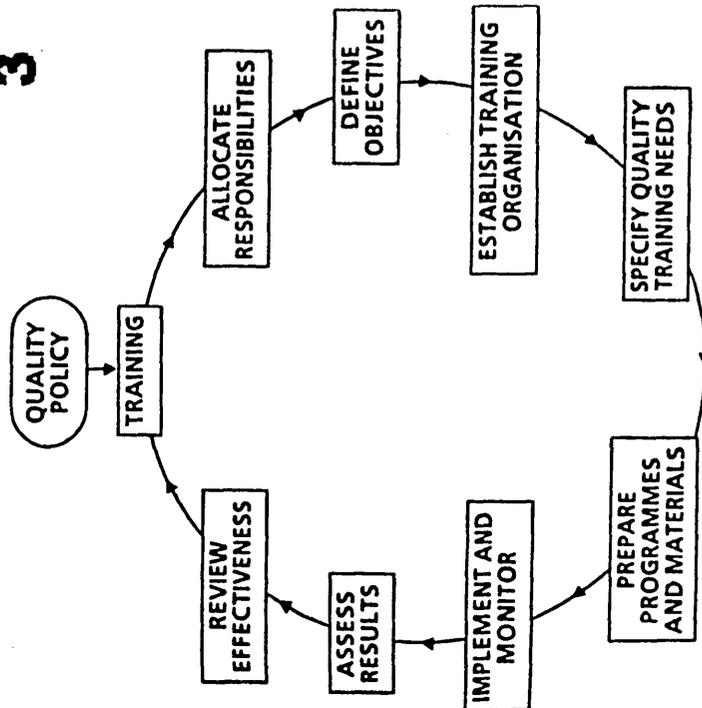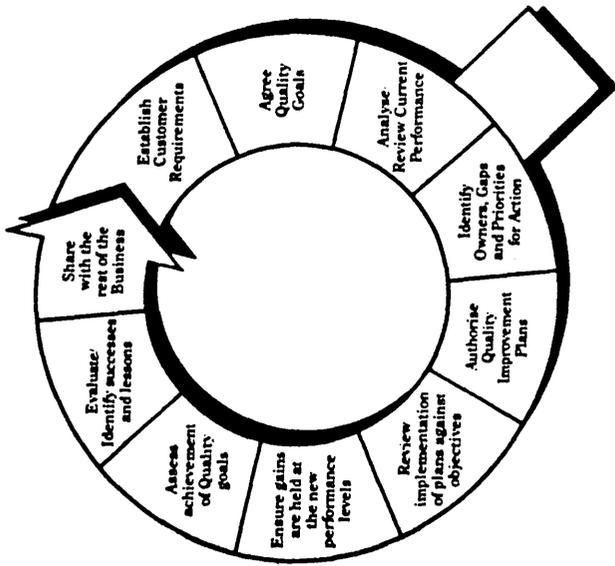
CHART 1

TURNING THE WHEEL OF IMPROVEMENT – CONTINUOUSLY

4

- REVIEW TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR DIAGNOSTIC SKILLS
- DIAGNOSTIC REVIEW PHASE
- SCHEDULE IMPROVEMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION
- REWARD CONTRIBUTORS TO QUALITY IMPROVEMENT
- IMPROVEMENT TO SYSTEM INTRODUCED
- REVIEW TRAINING SCHEDULES
- REVIEW FEEDBACK AND MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS
- PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

F

THE TQM MODEL

MANAGEMENT'S COMMITMENT
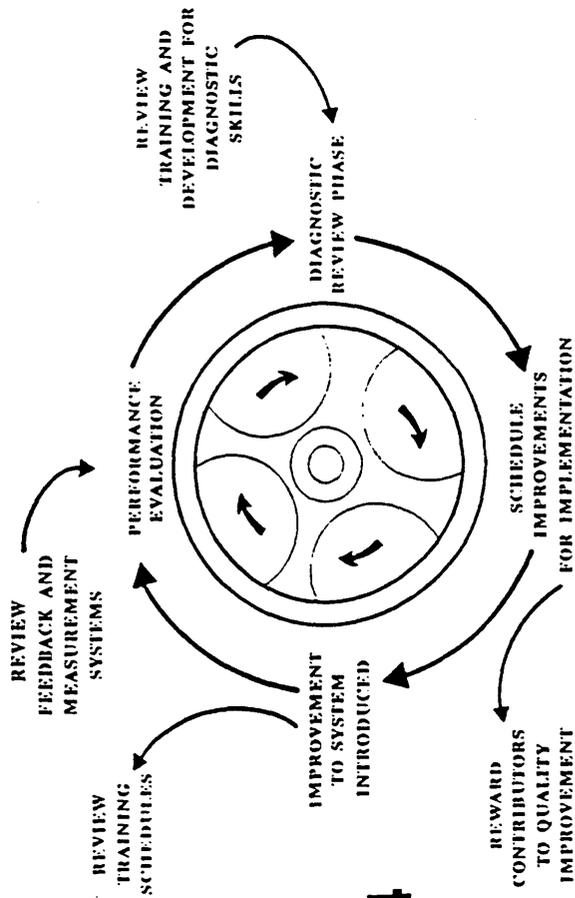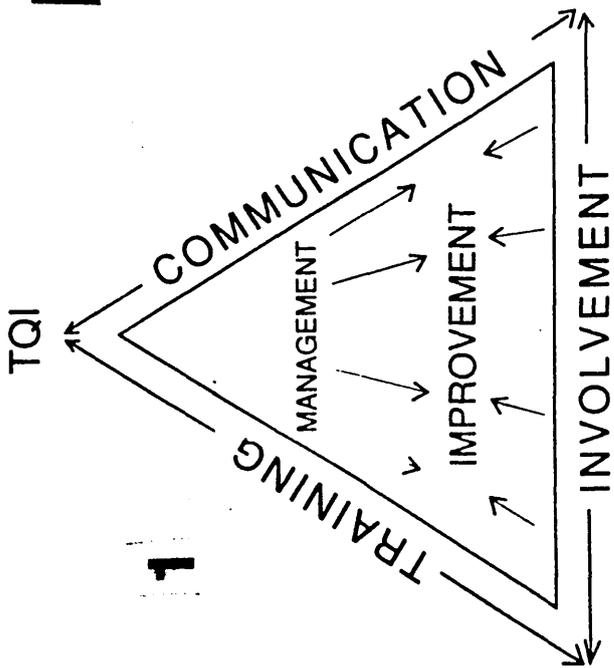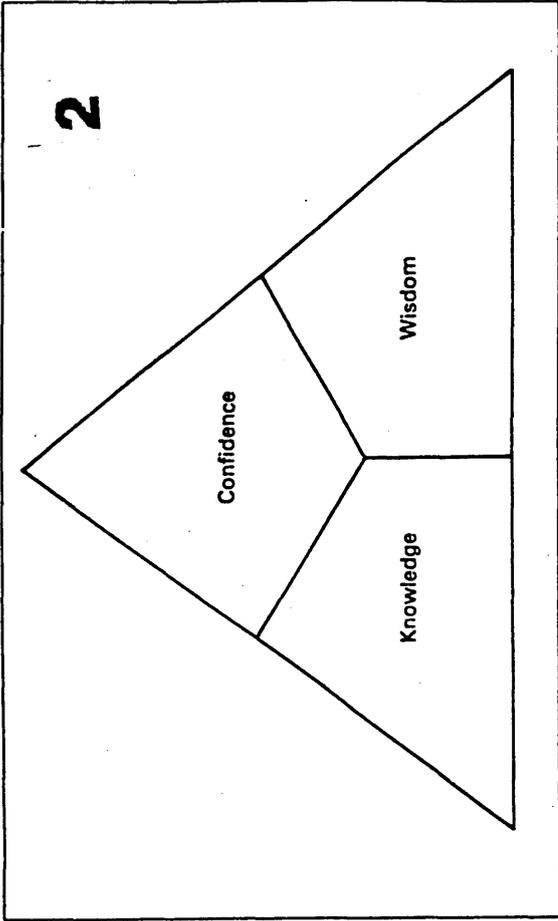
Fig. 1. Professor Tsuda's keys to TQM implementation.

2

Individual

Everyone's responsibility

Good communication

Quality of performance

Quality of performance

Everyone's responsibility

Good communication

Services

Products

Quality!

G

OUR CUSTOMERS

ROVER GROUP

OUR SUPPLIERS

Sales

Production
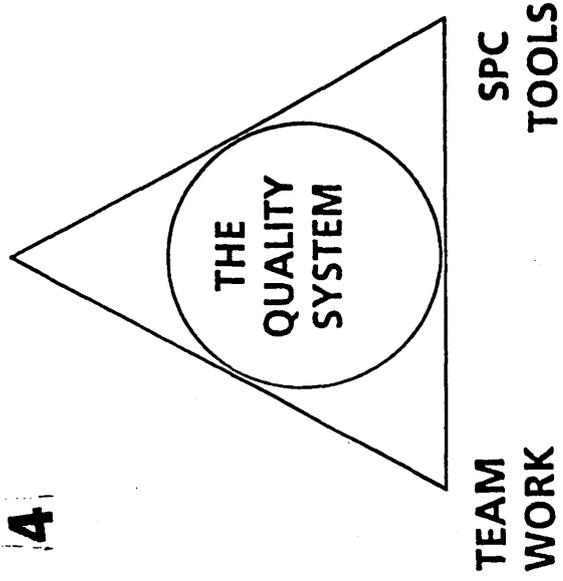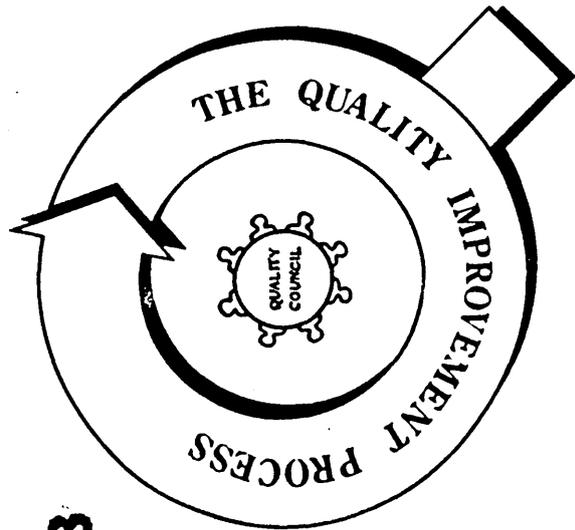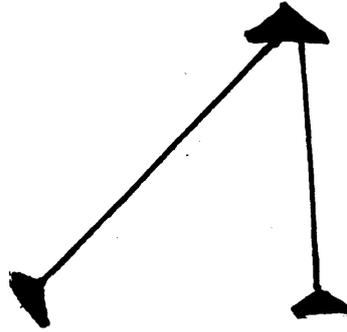
Purchasing
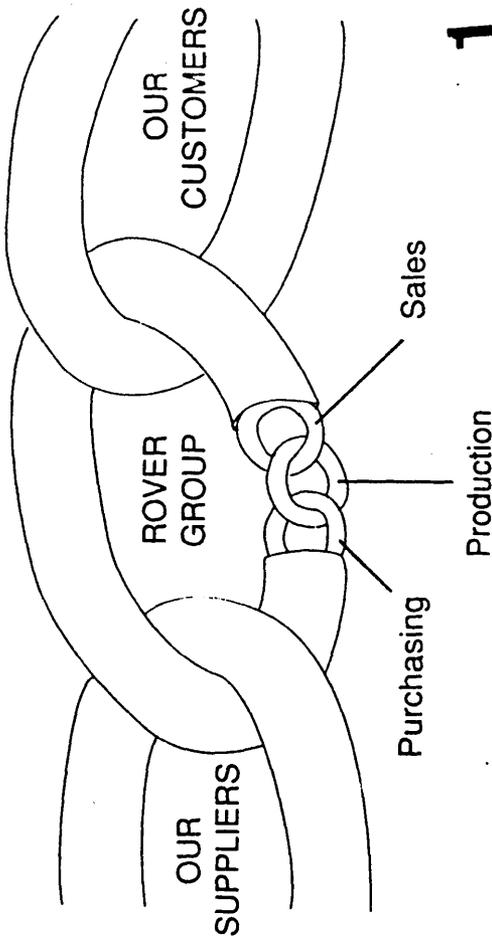
1

It only takes one of us to fail to meet the requirements of OUR customers to make the whole complicated chain fall apart apart and for dissatisfied customers to be the outcome!

DON'T BE THE WEAK LINK IN THE CHAIN
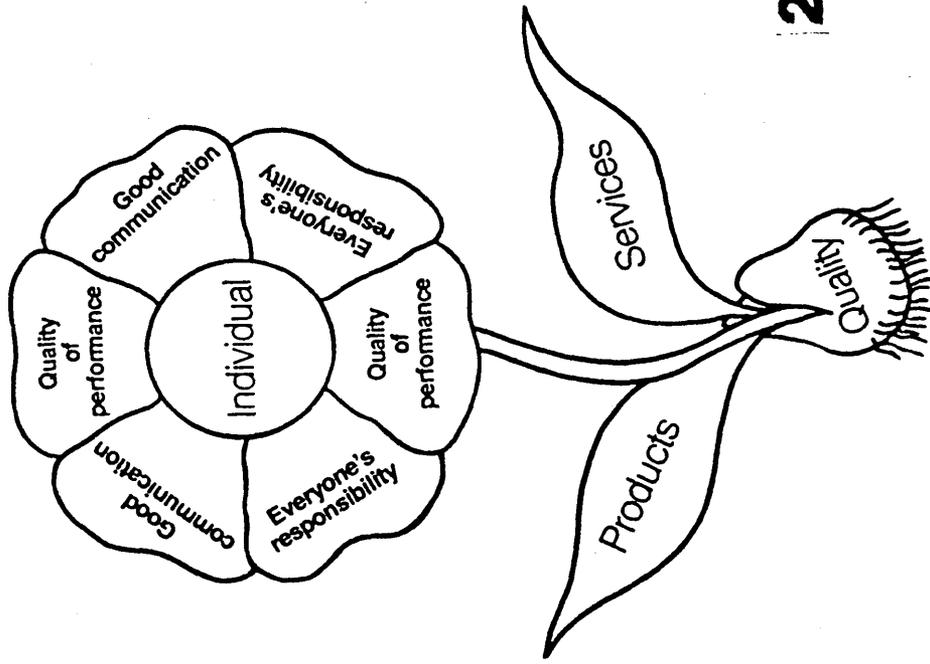
Pages "A" and "B" state the enigma - the puzzle or mystery- that justifies and legitimises the TQ tale that is to follow. In the pictures I have chosen, the enigma is located in unseen dangers (A1, A2), foolishness (A3, A4), ignorance (B1), lack of commonsense (B2), haste (B4) and hubris (B3). Transport, journeys, war, weaponry, and battles are predominant themes in representing the TQ puzzle - that which is to be recognised, understood, explained, and resolved through the use of metaphor.

Page "C" (or perhaps *Page 3* would have been more appropriate since this is one of the few representations that I could find of women occupying centre stage in TQ hieroglyphics and even here it is in a victim role, however) suggests ways out of the enigma. The solutions to the problems presented on pages "A" and "B", the way to be saved from our own follies, ignorance, etc., is to problem-solve! This translates in the page "C" symbols to "find your mountain". Thus, solving the enigma has been metaphorically transformed into *climbing to salvation* and thus taps into our most basic beliefs and convictions that up is good and down is bad.

This association of TQ with upward movement became stylised into the sort of diagram represented in C4 in which the "whole" process of TQ implementation is presented in mountainous, upwardly mobile language with the many at the bottom supporting the few elect in the rarefied atmosphere at the top - a precarious and hard won position.

Problem-solving, as a totem against hubris and failure, appears in another guise in TQ, a series of single steps. On page "D" we again see the idea of a journey, or linear route, but this time its not about setting your sights into the far distance, as captain of a ship, or seeking the mountain top as leader of an expedition. The depictions on page "D" refer to a one-step-at-a-time metaphor, the emphasis being on thoroughness rather than on visionary leaps. This is the more limited horizon typically allocated to those in operational and shop floor (sic) organisational positions. Hence the figures represented in the TQ material as taking these steps tend to be in overalls (D2) or working out the details of problems (D1) rather than setting the problem agenda.

This step-by-step image of problem-solving was gradually represented as circular, as the "review", or "check" stage of the process became synonymous with the desirable idea of *continuous* improvement. The plan-do-check-act cycle (D4), an apparently closed system, was suddenly everywhere and every management, individual and organisation activity bowed to its form (E1, E2, E3). The complexity of the representation then increased and the wheel of TQ itself started to roll as the metaphor sought escape from its static connotations (E4).

The mountains and upward movements of page "C" were stylised into triangles (F1) and several TQM models took this as their core symbol (F2), curiously, or perhaps not curiously, confirming organisational hierarchy in opposition to the widespread inverted triangle rhetoric. Triangular TQ and circular TQ were brought together in several representations - one of which is reproduced in F4, Oakland's TQM model. This representation was adopted by the European Foundation for Quality Management as their official model, to guide research funding, aid the dissemination of good practice and inform the development of a "European Approach" to TQ.

Symbolically, responsibility for climbing mountains, closing circles, fending off wild animals, seeing the unseen and walking on water, is laid firmly at the feet of

individuals. This is the message of the pictorials on page G in which the individual weak link is clearly identified as the source of potential downfall (G1). It is therefore everyone's responsibility to perform well (G2).

One of the recurring models for this superhuman is the detective, particularly Sherlock Holmes. He appears in several videos and company TQ publications - such as those below.

Prevention Not
Detection
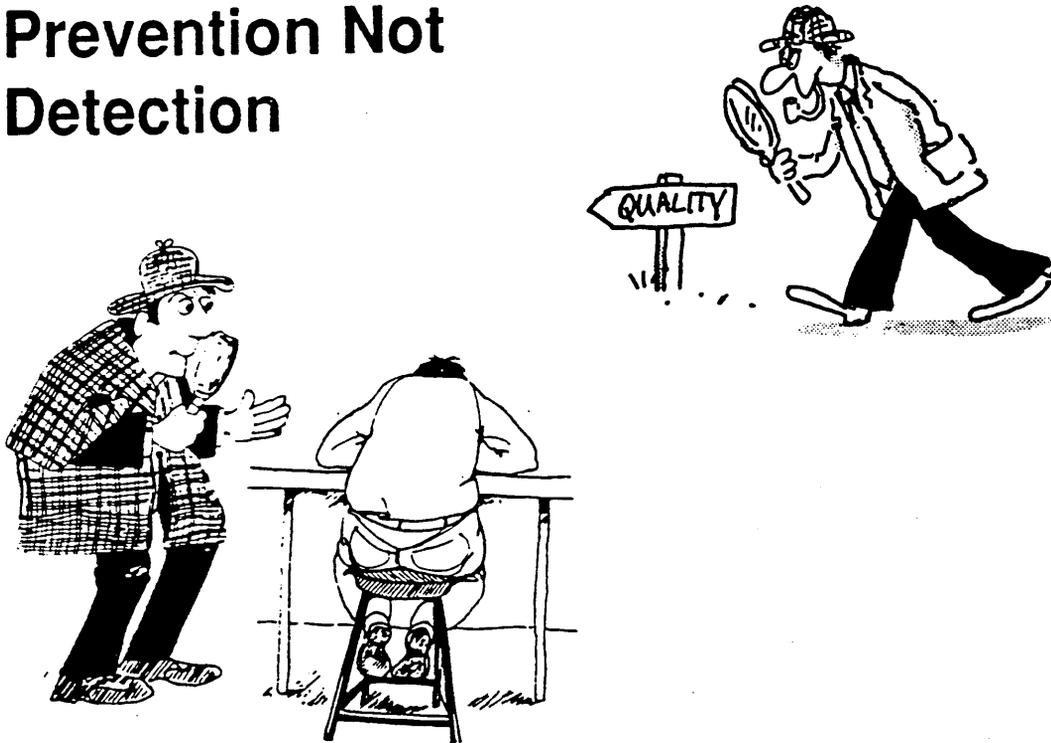
As the embodiment of TQ, what might the prominence of Sherlock Holmes in TQ discourse signal? In discussing ideology, subjectivity and representation, Catherine Belsey (1980) refers to the project of the Sherlock Holmes stories as

> "to dispel magic and mystery, to make everything explicit, accountable, subject to scientific analysis.. Holmes and Watson are both men of science. Holmes, the 'genius',is a scientific conjuror, who insists on disclosing how the trick is done. The stories begin in enigma, mystery, the impossible and conclude with an explanation which makes it clear that logical deduction and scientific method render all mysteries accountable to reason.... Once explained, the reasoning process always appears 'absurdly simple', open to the commonest of common-sense." (P111)

Belsey describes how this structure of enigma followed by resolution or closure echoes the "realist text" - that "process of constructing meaning by reproducing what is familiar" (ibid P47)

Realism is about commonsense, about what is conventional and familiar. Whether referring to art, literature, drama, documentary or TQ discourse,

> "It is intelligible as 'realistic' precisely because it reproduces what we already

In this realist approach to meaning making, familiar cultural codes are invoked and we are invited to make an association between their meaning and the object of our attention (eg. a representation of management, organisation, TQ, success, etc). So cartoons and diagrams are intelligible in particular ways, are successful in evoking managed meaning, not because they reflect an unmediated reality but because

> "we are familiar with the signifying systems from which they are drawn, linguistic, literary and semiotic." (ibid P49)

However, whilst the readability of the realist text or symbol addresses the reader or audience, it does not engage the reader or audience. The easy decoding of symbols, guaranteeing that the audience will grasp "the" message and undertake a "correct reading" in keeping with the author's intentions, relies upon the stereotypical familiarity of the signifiers embodied in the representation - eg. "up is good". A dialogue between audience and presenter is not created, but the presenter *addresses* the audience - structuring meaning and interpreting for the audience. The audience or reader become passive consumers of already known meanings. From this perspective, the pictorial sign renders the reader or audience even more impotent, more subject to rather than the subject of meaning, than does the spoken or written message. The picture message can be grasped at once and it is complete. So viewers of diagrams and pictorial signs become just that - viewers who

> "no longer have to create their own images... the picture is a finished product that rules out the act of imagination" Frutiger P224.

That all images become the same image can be seen plainly in advertising and packaging. Frutiger decries this as it "causes a far reaching impoverishment of the mind's eye" leading to a situation in which the imagination is "schematised or organised" (ibid). This development, the iconisation of representations, is clear in the limited selection of TQ pictorials reproduced a few pages ago. An interesting point here is that

> "The stronger the schematisation becomes, with increasing distancing from straight forward representation of the object, the more dependent it becomes upon explanatory language" Frutiger P230

This was evident in the Oakland presentation described earlier when much of the session was absorbed by selling or making sense of the model.

Common interpretations of representations by multiple readers or audiences therefore arises from prior common interpretive structures or symbolic systems on which the author/presenter can draw. As such, Belsey argues, the construction of meaning in interpreting symbols is not an individual act of creation but "a social fact" (1980 P53), supported and reproduced in the institutions of societies. The meaning of a text, diagram, cartoon or other representation is not therefore generated independently, ahistorically and universally, but is discourse specific, arising from the juxtaposition of apriori signifiers (mountains, journeys and battles) and reproducing codes of meaning within an already existing and taken for granted ideological framework.

Ideology is used here not in a Marxian pejorative and oppressive sense, as the property of one group or class in maintaining its dominance over another group, but as a "necessary condition of action". (Belsey 1980 P57) Belsey quotes Althusser in describing ideology as existing in the obvious;

> "obviousness which we cannot fail to recognise and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out.. That's obvious! That's right! That's real!" (Althusser 1979 quoted in Belsey P57)

Ideology therefore has no creators. It is not a plot but exists necessarily, representing and reproducing the myths and beliefs that enable people to interact, to "be" in the structure of social relations. Hence, ideology can be said "to construct people as subjects" (Belsey P58). A realist ideology constructs the speaker or presenter of symbolic representations, whether in conference, private meeting or in text, as the origin or author of their utterances rather than those utterances being prestructured by institutional frameworks. The denial of language and other sign systems as ideological social facts and their continued representation as nomenclatures, labelling "things" and in the case of pictures representing "things" that exist prior to their labelling, means that signs can be powerful mechanisms for naturalising the way "things are". Through metaphorical association, the juxtaposition of signifiers on that which is to be signified, ideas and constructs, events, problems and solutions

> "may seem to be natural, universal and unalterable when in reality they may be produced by a specific form of social organisation." (Belsey 1980 P42)

The alarmingly entropic consequences of the institutionalisation of appreciative settings is not widely commented on. Metaphors, particularly visual metaphors, when constituting the dominant cognitive structures and guides to thinking,"the preferred analogies" (Kuhn 1977), can be jealous and demanding mistresses.[8] To advise managers to "commit lightly" to metaphorical representations is to deny the formative influence of institution building processes and the affective quality of many metaphorical images.

Clark (1985) argues that metaphorical hegemony in describing the characteristics of organisation produces aphorisms that become taken for granted and for which alternatives are literally unthinkable.[9] This metaphorical hegemony, he continues, gives rise to methodological hegemony in that the validity of what we know and how we know it is structured by the same metaphors. Technologies, methods, tools and techniques thus come to support and affirm certain ways of viewing the world.

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[8] The reader might explore how the implied seductivity of metaphor and the entrapment of the user is lost if "mistress" is replaced by "master".

[9] Clark points out that the antonyms of Weber's rational analytic bureaucracy are terms such as "inefficient", "irrational" and "unpredictable" - hardly viable alternatives to the dominant metaphor. In the same way, alternatives to "continuous improvement", "customer responsive", "team culture", and "prevention driven" do not easily recommend themselves as credible, worth while options.

Explanations of how particular images come to dominate individual and group consciousness are often based on notions of vested interests, and aim to show how

> "hegemonic structures are ... produced and reproduced through the ideological structuring of the sense-making process. Ideology articulates a view of reality which maintains and supports the interests of dominant groups and suppresses those of subordinate groups. In this sense, ideology reifies dominant meaning formations as the natural sensible order of things..." (Mumby 1988 P73)

Whilst being attracted to this notion in arenas in which there are conflicts of interest, it seems that this approach can offer little to help explain or understand the processes by which some metaphors, meaning structures, and social practices became widely legitimated and conventionalised in the managerial world whilst others never make it into the collective consciousness. Whilst oppressive ideological explanations are plausible from a functionalist perspective at the level of the firm, sustaining a view of managerial action as planned, rational and class-based, the phenomenal appeal and up-take of TQ ideas and practices *by the community of managers* surely stretches the imagination of the most ardent supporter of class-based false consciousness as an explanatory device? For it often seems to me that managers, as well as being purveyors, are themselves "consumers" (Sievers 1990 P127) of TQ ideas, as the natural order of things[10].

However, that consumption may be situation specific for there is considerable evidence to suggest that views on management, organisation, and the world of work articulated by managers in public at TQ events are seldom realised back home, in individual firms (See AT Kearney report). That TQ, as a new philosophy for managing and organisation, remains largely a managerial phenomenon, existing in all its majesty only in those arenas populated predominantly by managers (eg consultant sponsored conferences), perhaps requires explanation that casts managers more as subject to rather than in control of this world view?

Robb (1992) offers a way of understanding these events that moves away from the heroes and villains, oppressors and victims of agency and looks for explanation in natural structures. [11]

7. AUTOPOEITIC AND DISSIPATIVE INFLUENCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOTAL QUALITY

The convergence of thinking and of forms of metaphorical representation, the conventionalisation of presentation, and the emergence of methodological hegemony in

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[10] I am aware that, for those for whom the exposure and critique of capitalism remains a life's work, the successful inculcation of false consciousness in this case could be attributed to the agency of management consultants, or of large multinational organisations, constructing their institutional contexts to further the purposes of capitalism.

[11] For background to these ideas see the dialogue between Robb and Mingers in Journal of Systems Practice 1989/1990, also Leifer 1989 and Morgan 1986 Chapter 8.

accounts of TQ, and to a lesser extent in its practice, indicate "circular relations of mutually causal processes" (Robb 1992 P3) which are dissipative of energy and tending towards homogeneity, or the production of entropy. These processes amount to the creation of "an institution" in Robb's terms. Such institutions

> "emerge from human interactions, conversations, [and] ..constrain us in the ways we communicate, converse, believe and act. They tend to grow until they become too complex, because they encounter others of their kind or because they run out of human resource. Those institutions which dissipate the most human lifetime are preferentially selected, and it is this, not their fitness to satisfy human needs, which is the driving principle of their emergence, survival and evolution." (ibid P1)

Drawing on Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures (1984) and on ideas from general systems theory on closed, autopoeitic and hence self-referential systems (Maturana and Valera 1980), Robb conceptualises institutions not as abstractions but as

> "..real world objects, as entities of a natural kind.. subject to natural law." (ibid P1)

Specifically, institutions are conceptualised as ordered, emergent systems, highly differentiated internally, far from equilibrium and entropy producing. The institution as a system is irreducible - it cannot be understood or even perceived from a micro perspective, ie. the viewpoint of its constituent parts. The whole has a logic of its own but this does not derive from centralised control or planning but emerges from the random interactions and behaviours of the constituent system parts.[12] The self-organisation of the parts, entraining "adjacent microscopic interactions"(Robb P3), expands the system. It is therefore a nonsense to refer to the system's environment as separate from the system since the parts enact their environment. There is, therefore, no vantage point independent of or supra to the parts from which to view "the environment". This renders a critical perspective directed towards "micro-emancipations", the liberation of system constituents, epistemologically absurd.

The interaction of the parts and the expansion of the system gives rise to instabilities such that fluctuations in the system as a whole may become critical. In this way, small events become amplified and may have transformational impact on the system, resulting in the spontaneous and unpredictable emergence of a new, more complex (internally

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[12]This has some similarities with Long's concept of community as an *ecology of games* (1958) in which, within the terrain of the local community, a variety of occupational games is played out. Rationality is held to be "a function of the parts rather than the whole" (P251) such that the structures and roles of each individual game "produce unintended but systematically functional results for the ecology" of the community. As Long points out, this is of course the doctrine of market forces. The difference between this notion of institution making and that offered by Robb is that Robb anticipates that the autopoeitic and dissipative character of social institutions will eventually prove to be dysfunctional to industrial and human development as less and less "free" energy is available to create variety.

differentiated), and more entropic macro order. As such, these institutions are

> "in principle unmanageable.. they cannot always be controlled or steered to bring about desired outcomes." (Robb 1992 P1)

Consequently, Robb warns that we may be in danger of losing control over our institutions - becoming objects and victims of their growth, used up as raw material, rather than being masters and architects of their development.

Following Luhman (1986), Robb suggests that in the social world the microscopic constituent or "primitive" entity, analogous to the cell or gas molecule in the physical world, is the *interaction* between individuals - not individuals themselves. Drawing on the work of Pask (1982), he describes this interaction as having two forms: "conversation" and "communication".

Conversation is the transfer of information between autonomous entities. As a form of interaction, conversation makes explicit the differences between individuals' models and understandings of the world, and *makes meaning* through the negotiation of definitions and distinctions. Conversation is therefore about the development of shared definitions and interpretations. These are given signs and may be attributed values such as good/ bad, true/false. Conversation creates order, coping with noise, disturbance, and novelty through differentiation - the production of new meanings, models etc.. Conversation is therefore a variety amplifying mechanism and, because we can converse with ourselves, consciousness making.

Communication is described as "the passing of a message from one to another individual" and this "depends for its success on their being shared meanings already present." (Robb 1992 P4) Communication emerges as conversation becomes redundant. This happens as conversation progressively differentiates, defines, labels and negotiates explanation for all events within the conversation's domain.

> "All that remains is the need for communication to sustain the meanings and elicit actions by uttering the appropriate signs." (ibid P5)[13]

Robb suggests that the processes by which interaction becomes formalised and "collapsed" into a language of common signs is unique to each social system but that
> "In a developed (some might say degenerate) social system, as a result of progressive distinction, abstraction and classification, very few signs are required to portray what was, at root, an enormously rich collection of individual experiences." (ibid P4)

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[13]In "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions", Kuhn's notion of paradigm included exemplars (shared examples of how to solve problems); symbolic generalisations (expressions deployed without question); and models (preferred analogies or ontologies). Following Kuhn, I suggest that if a community has not developed explicit rules for its activities and therefore cannot represent its activities in shared formal signs, then values -embodied in exemplars, symbols and models - implicitly perform that integrative function.

Communication therefore reduces variety and interconnectedness amongst individuals as conversations become truths.(Robb 1992 P6) It is entropic.

The emergence of an institution,

> "a ..coherent system, a network of definitions and distinctions, values and classifications created and sustained recursively by their continued use and elaboration, and embedded in a structure of meanings which has become taken-for-granted" (ibid P6)

involves a shift from conversation to communication as the primary form of interaction amongst the constituent individuals.

Robb's concern is that as institutional models, distinctions, ways of viewing the world take on a life of their own and dominate individual interaction, so they

> "stop people questioning what is already accepted as truth and direct their attention to the expansion of definitions based in those truths. In so doing , they extend their domain of influence by defining and explaining ever more phenomena"(ibid)

The sustaining of the institution then takes over as the main dissipater of human energy - drawing individual interactions into its processes like a black hole, classifying and labelling everything that can be incorporated within its expanding domain.

In this perspective, one of the essential conditions for the emergence of a new entity such as an institution is the availability of "free energy" - to maintain nascent relations amongst parts and to entrain new interactions and develop new relations. As the shift from conversation to communication occurs, increasing numbers of individuals find their "free" time dissipated in attending institution-making activities such as indoctrinating newcomers, policing definitions and classifications, sanctioning deviancy, and rewarding convergence.

This process of institutionalisation (evidenced by a drift from conversation to ritualised and predictable communication; the lack of questioning; reification of models; entrainment of more and more aspects of the world of work into its definitions and classifications) is very evident in TQ. Further, the number of promoted institutional activities has snowballed with several conference organisers, awarding bodies and professional institutes vying for recognition as the authoritative voice on TQ. We are now in a phase in which much of the classification and definition-making has been accomplished and most energy is dissipated in policing, sanctioning and awarding conformance (witness the near obsession with auditing, benchmarking and quantification).

Scott discusses how institutional forces influence organisation structures - suggesting that institutional logics may affect organisations through imposition, authorisation, inducement, acquisition, imprinting, incorporation or by by-passing structures at the level of organisation all together (Scott 1987 PP501-507). I shall return to the detail of these dynamics in chapter 6 when I offer an explanation for the fate of the TQ initiative in Pitch Products' Northfield plant. The key point for the current discussion about the institutional nature of TQ is the challenge institutional theory makes to technical-instrumental concepts of organisation dominant in the organisational literature as a whole and in the TQ literature in particular. To quote Scott

"Institutional theorists have directed attention to the importance of symbolic aspects of organisations and their environments. They reflect and advance a growing awareness that no organisation is just a technical system and that many organisations are not primarily technical systems. All social systems - and hence all organisations - exist in an institutional environment that defines and delimits social reality. And just as with technical environments, institutional environments are multiple, enormous and variable over time. To neglect their presence and power is to ignore significant causal factors shaping organisational structures and practices; to overlook these is to misspecify our causal models." (Scott 1987 P507)

The more time I spent with people in Northfield the less it seemed that what was happening, and not happening, could be explained solely from a firm and/or individual actors' perspective. I have chosen to spend some time in this chapter describing the metaphor dominated nature of discourse and representation in TQ as it seems that this offers insight into the assumptions underpinning TQ as a belief system. Perhaps more pertinently, the diffusion of particular metaphorical representations and their widespread usage can also indicate the extent to which TQ is institutionalised and thus experienced by individuals and groups as an objective reality, and hence needful of explanation at a macro, rather than a firm or individual manager, level.

This chapter has proposed that the institution of TQ is a significant part of the symbolic environment of Pitch Products' Northfield Plant and that its influence can be usefully understood by adopting an institutional, rather than an instrumental or technical, perspective. However, TQ is but one logic in Northfield's symbolic field, the most significant others being that of the market and that of the parent company. The interplay between these institutional forces, recipes, self-contained logics or taken-for-granted

belief systems provides the substantive focus for the dissertation.

So, as with many other managers in different companies, my first meeting with George was overshadowed by the institution of TQ in which most of our discourse could be characterised as predictable communication rather than interesting conversation. It is only when some relationship is created in which conversation can take place that the tale of what is happening moves away from doctrine and rhetoric and becomes engaging. I wasn't interested in "talking TQ", in hearing the descriptions, justifications, and rationales, as neatly packaged and cliched as the Christmas turkey. I was interested in talking *about* TQ - what it meant in Northfield now. But the chances of separating George from his TQ salesman persona were about as likely in 1988 as thinking that Margaret Thatcher could ever be replaced as Prime Minister. George *was* Mr TQ. That's how it was supposed to work, wasn't it? You had to believe...

SPRING 1992

My fourth year of driving past the bakery with steam, noise, people and lorries hissing and spilling out into the road. Onto the brewery - less noise, fewer people, more lorries - and the police vehicle depot - no noise, even fewer people, - to "Pitch Products Ltd" - no steam, no noise, no people, no cars..... but a high wire fence and a vehicle barrier and Brian sitting in the gate house.

In his outpost, with only the frontier comforts of a flask, a 'phone and a heater, Brian is already talking to my contact.
I'm expected -but then I think most people are. No one seems to "drop in" as they are passing. This plant in the Pitch Products group is at the end of the lane - massive chimneys and large sheds, black or grey, no windows.

"Do you know where the office is?" Brian is asking.
"Its near Geoff's - our number two. But perhaps not for much longer..?"

This comment refers to the temporarily labelled "general manager" (previously plant manager) who is "in waiting" but not formally acknowledged as future MD.

"So I understand" I mumble.

How much should I know about this? Is this a proper topic for discussion between visitor and gatekeeper? Is my credibility confirmed or undermined by gossiping?

Clutching my entry visa - "to be displayed at all times and if its not signed by the person authorising your entry, you don't get out"- I drive past the barrier.

No readily accessible front office reception here - its hidden in the middle of the site. The plant is on a hill side so the sheds seem to get larger as you move inwards towards the offices. The visitors' car park is never full or even half full so why do they reserve a space for the MD? And why in the visitors' car park? Its next to a new sign pointing to "The Nature Reserve"...

The reception projects from a new extension to the finance offices. It was built last year when Pitch Product's UK Head Office (referred to as "Fawltey Towers" by plant managers) moved from the centre of town out to the plant, as the empire of the UK MD gradually shrank until it comprised this site alone. At a cost of £200,000 I'm told, some at the plant thought the new extension was an extravagance the company could well afford to do without. But the change of location coincided with the MD's dignification to Borough Industrial Baron, a requirement of which is to entertain many and frequent visitors to your company. Existing reception and catering facilities[1] were not felt to be

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[1]On my one and only visit to the plant canteen, at my request, I was advised to put some overalls **on** before I went for lunch. Very much a canteen "for the hourly paid", it reminded me of a much larger version of the seediest of the 1960 coffee bar with cream, green or orange plastic seating, formica-topped

appropriate for this influx of VIP's and so the new block was built. Unfortunately, you can already feel the carbon dust on the door handles and the furniture and see it deposited in the carvings and badges of the plaques on the wall. The plaques are old and tell of past achievements in quality and safety. The furniture looks tired, plucked from the relative obscurity of back offices, too worn to look good in this harsh public light.

There is a receptionist - but what does she do? Brian usually announces the arrival of visitors directly to the people involved. She's busy with figures and papers but has little contact with myself or other visitors, who wait in the reception area, trying not to sit on the chairs......

Introduction

> "Agents, texts, devices, architectures are all generated in, form part of, and are essential to, the networks of the social ... all should be analysed in the same terms. Accordingly the task .. is to characterise the ways in which materials join together to generate themselves and reproduce institutional and organisational patterns.." Law 1992 P379

I have struggled with this section more than any other. Whilst repeatedly encouraged to "get the description down" I find, perhaps naively, that of course it is impossible to describe without introducing order, emphasis, and meaning. Descriptions employ adjectives and adverbs and convey interpretations of action. Descriptions do not "merely" present statements of what is and what is not.

My struggle has been with what to describe and how to describe it. I have identified some sources for my difficulties:

1. a conviction that "the interpretation of organisation culture must be deeply embedded in the contextual richness of the... social life of organisation members." (Meek 1988 P463)

How, then, can I legitimately bound my description? What is "cultural data"?

2. a conceptualisation of organisation culture as constructed and reconstructed emergently through social interaction. Culture therefore does not exist outside "other" practices of organisational life. We might therefore "start with interaction and assume that interaction is all that there is." (Law 1992 P380)

What, then, constitutes a valid and practicable sample of culture? What is significant?

3. a perspective which prescribes the task of the organisation culture researcher as "an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz 1973 P5).

So what claim to knowledge do my interpretations have and how aware am I of

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tables, raised and splinted at the corners, and a few scattered
groups of people in two's and three's. But there was no juke box,
no comforting coffee smells, no warmth...
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my interpretations as represented in these "descriptive" pages? Writing culture is itself culturally structured. Artefacts have politics (Winner 1980)

I have attempted to address these issues and others in my discussion of methodology in chapter 3. Those who believe description precedes analysis and who may not have read that chapter, may wonder what all the fuss is about. Readers who have chosen to read that chapter first may find this chapter puzzling "realist" (Tsoukas) in comparison. I attempt to provide some rationale for my choices of data and representation in the next couple of pages before launching into description.

This chapter presents for the reader fragments of my experiences of the world of Pitch Products organised to reflect the multiple methods I have employed to try and understand something of what's going on. Multiple methods have been employed and several roles constructed, ranging from academic observer and research interviewer to participant, consultant, and friend. Those roles and the data they generate are here described, not primarily to validate that data by ascribing to notions of "triangulation" (Gill and Johnson 1991) but in order to comment on the paucity of much of the data that is presented in many studies of organisation culture. I believe the flat, unengaging feel of many cultural representations in organisation studies results from the researcher being stuck in one methodological paradigm or other. This tends to result in taken-for-granted solutions to the problems inherent in the relationship between description and explanation. Often the result tends to be a concern for descriptive minutiae with a reluctance to explain what's going on other than in terms of native espoused rationales or imposed researcher rationales about "basic human attributes" (Van Maanen 1975, Young 1989). Alternatively, there is a flight into quantification, the reduction of meaning to statistics bringing its own hubris (Barley et al. 1988). A third *methodologically-thin* approach is to reduce all data to anecdotal evidence supporting some etic grand theory or concept (Gregory 1983 and Pettigrew 1986). Whilst each of these accounts may be considered valid and of interest can they be regarded as cultural accounts? Does their paradigmatic singularity render their data vulnerable to a critique of necessary but not sufficient to represent their subject matter? Or should methodological purity indicate a well designed and executed research process?

As my choice of methods and the sources of data I claim as valid can be described as eclectic, I would like to discuss the issue of incommensurability in research paradigms before inviting the reader to judge their adequacy. This is followed by descriptions of

1. Northfield Plant Ownership History
2. Plant Business and Main Manufacturing Processes
3. Down-sizing

Then come a series of tales (Van Maanen 1988) about three managers at the Northfield plant and some of the meetings and events they were involved in.

4. Tony's Tale
        Innovations Task Group
        Reading Meetings
5. Ken's Tale
        The Communication Meeting
        Ken The Survivor

6. George's Tale
   The Public Event
   George's Rise and Fall: a metaphor for Northfield?

Lastly, a brief chronology of the public image of the plant is presented through interview data and newspaper archive material.

7. Images from the past

Paradigmatic incommensurability and cultural research

In commenting on the formative influence of scientific theorising on the development of theory in organisation studies, Ackroyd notes

> "the exaggerated importance attributed to *general* characterisations of organisations." 1992 P103.

Whitley too has commented on this preference for theoretically broad but managerially irrelevant research outputs when he states that

> "Academics are more concerned to affect colleagues' research strategies and priorities rather than managerial beliefs. This means that detailed knowledge of how organisations function is of less interest than general conclusions about managerial problems which have implications for theoretical issues." Whitley 1988 P50

From this collective approach to researching organisations, which sought to privilege the production of generic classifications over the construction of local knowledge, developed the idea that *approaches* to organisation research could also be classified but this time according to philosophical characteristics. Described as "the paradigm idea", Ackroyd objects that the resulting

> "differences between perspectives on organisation.. are defined elementally, as basic differences, as much by opposition to each other as by other criterion.. Since basic differences are held to be the realm of philosophy, so different paradigms are held to delineate different philosophical positions. By this reasoning, it would seem that organisation studies are made substantially dependent... on metaphysics." (1992 P117)

Ackroyd's main concern with the hegemonic representation of the knowledge structure in organisation studies as comprising philosophically derived "paradigms" is the extent to which that representation exhibits closed system and ahistorical characteristics. Critiquing Burrell and Morgan's 1979 "effective synthesis of diverse approaches to theory within the same general frame" as a timely "way of avoiding the imminent breakup of organisational sociology into dissociated specialisms" (P111), Ackroyd argues that the result of this recognition of the plurality of the field simultaneouly bounded, in perpetuity, the number of different accounts of organisation that are legitimised ie. academically recognised. In Burrell and Morgan's construction of the field, all credible accounts of organisation are claimed to be represented within one of four paradigmatic orientations. Since these orientations were derived from meta-physical

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beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge, any discussion of their empirical and theoretical worth is rendered impotent since

> "Basic beliefs can only be accepted or rejected; they can be neither proven nor falsified." (Guba 1985 P79)

Further, since the taxonomy draws on "fundamental" issues, these are held to be timeless and ever present and hence the bounding of the field is deemed to be accomplished. (Note: Morgan extended his attempts to monopolise organisation studies when he published "Images of Organisation" in 1986, which once again, by reordering what was already there, offered " a repertoire of new ways for understanding organisation" (Book Cover) and in so doing simultaneously delimited the number of metaphors deemed acceptable.(Tinker 1986)

Ackroyd sees this delineation of the field as a political act in which, by

> "clos[ing] down the range of choices to those few.. legitimated by their own academic authority"

and, as Ackroyd observes, Burrell and Morgan clearly identified their work as a contribution to sociology not organisation studies, paradigmists successfully defended their knowledge enclaves, saw-off the "functionalist usurpers", and set limits on the future directions for organisational research and its relationship to practice that would maintain their privilege.

But, as other have argued, in laying out a classification which encompasses the "whole world" of organisation theory, Burrell and Morgan implicitly assume an out of frame perspective. In not articulating or classifying their own approach as within their own purportedly comprehensive classification scheme, the myth of the privileged theoretical position is maintained.

This notion of disembodied (perhaps vacuous) interest flows over into ideas about research practice. Burrell and Morgan's romantic figure of the radical social science academic able to see and say the unseeable and unsayable because of a position untainted by contact with those "doing organisation" remains a powerful archetype, perhaps folk hero, in organisation studies, making repeated appearances at the community's conferences. For this figure, the accepted mode of representation of "managers" is as a strange tribe or species of lesser being, unaware and unconscious of their savagery, into whose worlds the brave, and possibly superior, venture for as short and as controlled a time as possible, to bring back tales of horror, disbelief and, frequently, ridicule.

Many representations of organisation culture continue to be in this crude, colonially anthropological vein in which the representation is specifically for light-hearted academic consumption.(This convention would seem to be particularly well developed at Labour Process Conferences) This some how licenses presenter and audience to laugh at the culture as if watching a TV advert for Smash. My most recent experience of this was a presentation at an organisational culture and symbolism conference(!). The presenter adopted a style mixing the personas of Les Dawson and Billy Connelly to "describe" the culture of a well known airline as experienced in some of their corporate

presentations and operational meetings. Her portrait of her subjects was as alien beings - inferior alien beings at that - absorbed in adolescent ritual and hence fair game.

What are the alternatives to this genre?

The Marvel Comic book style, adopted by many "managerial" writers of the Tom Peters and Robert Townsend fraternity, seems to be equally characturesque and possibly as unhelpful to managers as the work of academic entertainers (See Gill and Whittle 1993). Interestingly, though perhaps unfortunately, some managers, having donned their Batman cloaks of invincibility (often supplied by a bespoke consultancy), are encouraged to wage war on their organisational Joker, Penguin or Cat Woman. These ripping yarns then form the mainstay of many a consultant-sponsored conference turn.

Other descriptions of organisation culture leap in and out of managerial and academic conceptual frameworks juxtaposing managers' statements and theoretical interpretations. The flavour of these works varies. Some limit their descriptions to identifying "dominant cultural modes or thinking" and "bad habits" (Bate 1990 P83 and P95) adopting an evaluative and functional stance in their representations. Others (eg. Wesley 1990) present culture as the human condition in which the resilience and longevity of particular cultural forms and practices are explained from a social-psychological perspective, in affective and ideological terms, but still from an "outsider viewpoint.

A further genre "go native" (Gregory 1983) - or almost - presenting much of the observed cultural world in quotes, trying to catch structure, form and meaning by representing the moment (eg Van Maanen's work on American Police 1975). I refer to this work as "on" the police since whilst seeking interpretive understanding through experiential assimilation of the researched world, there is rarely, if ever, an overt articulation by the researcher to the researched of the project. Collusion, if not cooperation, in the research therefore always proceeds in a conspiratorial, manipulative and secret-agent-like manner in which the agenda of the primary player(s) (those doing research) is thought to be unintelligible to the primary pawn(s) (those doing organisation).

The journalistic feel of much of this ethnographic work falls prey to the same forces that structure news-making. Twenty years ago, Galtung and Ruge (1973) suggested that the designation of something "happening", ie. the recognition of "an event" as worthy of reporting, of representation to others, is psycho-culturally determined. They offered a group of 12 factors that influence the construction of news from the world as experienced. Key amongst these are the influences of

> frequency
> personification and
> negativisation

By frequency is meant "the time span needed for the event to unfold itself and acquire meaning" (ibid P63). They hypothesise that the greater the similarity between the time span of the event and the time span of the medium of representation, the more likely it is that what is observed will be recorded as "a happening" and attributed significance.

Thus they suggest that murders, thefts, riots, crashes, and other dramatic climaxes

become news because they fit into the 24 hour journalistic cycle whereas wars, crime, deprivation, safety and other events that take place over a longer time span are relatively under-represented. The become "contextual", a backdrop for the reporting of action.

A consequence of the influence of time horizons on what is represented is personification. People can act during the reporting time span whilst "structures are more difficult to pin down in time and space" (ibid P66). Hence the world as experienced is represented as comprising single or small groups of subjects, rather than social forces, whose actions lead to the events which are being recorded. Events tend to be represented as *caused by* people rather than "events happening to people or with people as instruments" of wider forces. (ibid P67). Of course, the techniques and technologies available for gathering data themselves push the researcher towards personification and away from structure. For example, audio-visual media encourage interviewing as the telling of personal stories which produce snapshots, sealed in their time capsules, and the video-ing of dramatic/ unusual events conveys an image of the world as unpredictable, having the potential for quantum change and abrupt reversals.

There are a multitude of influences and conventions subsumed under this heading of personification and I can only hint at the impact of these forces on the process of representing culture. One of these forces relates to the idea of a "threshold" through which "the event will have to pass before it will be recorded at all." (ibid P64) The observation here is that the more violent the murder, the more daring the theft, the more anarchic the riot and the more bizarre the crash, the more likely it will be reported.

Galtung and Ruge suggest that in looking for "data", for things to represent, we are more likely to note negatives rather than positives. Negatives refer to events which are perceived as unexpected and/or rare.

> "what is regular and institutionalised, continuing and repetitive at regular and short intervals, does not attract nearly so much attention.. as the unexpected and ad hoc.." (P65)

In this view, negatives are perceived as interruptions to the normal flow of progress. As such, negatives tend to evoke consensual and unambiguous representations whilst positives (the normal and the trivial) tend to be unarticulated and latent and hence retain ambiguity. It is therefore more likely that there will be agreement on the interpretation of negatives (note: public outcries, media obsessions, etc) - seen as punctuation points in an ongoing and ambiguous stream of experiences - whilst representations of the world in longer term, normal, ever present "positives" are seen as unnewsworthy and/or subject to multiple interpretations.

By definition, the unexpected has a short time horizon and tends to encapsulate a discrete series of events. It is therefore more amenable to research and funding procedures and meets the requirements for drama and personification which grab the attention.

A look in the management and organisation studies journals will confirm the seductiveness of these forces in structuring representations of organisation. This thesis struggles against these forces and may therefore invite criticism of the "what happened?" variety. Seeking simultaneously to minimally satisfy the conventions of newsworthiness

and to construct plausible explanation, I have chosen to represent my experience of Pitch Products as a collection of scenarios or "cultural scenes" (Dyer and Wilkins 1991) in which immediate, long and short time frames are laid onto actions, events, patterns and reflections as the key sources of data.

I have not therefore set out to sample "artefacts", "rites", "symbols", "behaviours", "language", etc as *variables* of culture but have conceptualised my data gathering as gaining access to stages and actors, listening for scripts and locating direction. (Smircich 1983) The various cultural scenes which then are then played out are not required to be thematic or organisationally integrated in any way and the "sharing" of assumptions, values, behaviours and perceptions can problematised, a matter for empirical investigation and conceptual interpretation. Indeed, some of these cultural scenes occured away from the plant altogether and members of the Northfield site were not physically present. (See "1C" and "3C" on the following matrix). It was in these *culturally marginal* (Wuthnow 1984) scenes that my tacit interpretations and assumptions became explicit by articulating them to others - and hearing their articulations in return.

> "tacit knowledge and the willingness to ask questions and observe around it greatly amplify the understandings of the serious inqurer... as tacit knowledge may frame designs as it emerges, shaping the questions of importance to researchers." (Lincoln 1985 P145)

The matrix below (Chart 1) attempts to order these snatches of experience.

Chart 1	OUTSIDER ← MODES OF ENGAGEMENT → GOING NATIVE		
UNIT OF ANALYSIS	1. GATHERING ACCOUNTS	2.OBSERVING PATTERNS	3.PARTICIPATING IN "CULTURE".
A. DATA ABOUT PEOPLE "DOING" CULTURE	1. Formal "research" interviews with supervisors and managers for TQ research project. 2.Informal conversations.	1.all interactions with personnel, on and off site.	1.Lunch meetings with Tony, George, Ken. 2.Co-presenter with George at third party events 3.QWL meeting hosted by Northfield
B. DATA ABOUT IN COMPANY EVENTS & ROUTINES as exhibiting "THE PATTERN OR STRUCTURE OF CULTURE"	1.TQ research interviews 2.Formal and informal discussions with plant managers 3.Company texts reporting plans practices, personnel and events.	A.Meetings 1.Innovation task group 2.Hosting QWL event 3.Explaining team working training B.Contexts 1.physical settings such as canteen, site, & other symbolic artefacts plus experience of access, interests, rituals. [this is usual focus of cultural data gathering?]	1.Innovations task group - process consultation. 2.QWL meeting - supporter, helper, presenter & critic.
C. DATA ABOUT COMPANY PRESENTATION IN THE WORLD. "WRITING & REPRESENTING CULTURE"	1.current and archive press reports on company 2.Discussions with/ comments by third parties about company 3.MBA tutor to George	External events at which Pitch Prods members were present: 1.Industrial Baron of the Borough event. 2.QWL events at other companies and at researcher's university.	Speaking about/ representing Pitch Prods at conferences in academic discussions as an example of... a case of.....? where no members of Pitch Products present.

1. Northfield Plant Ownership History

Pitch Products Northfield plant sits on a site of several acres on the north west industrial fringe of the city of Northfield. The plant's history starts with English Electrodes formed in 1915 by 6 local steel producers. They acquired a plant in Withernby. In 1935 the American company, Universal Chemical Corporation, took a 60% share in English Electrodes, the last of the original shareholders selling their remaining stock to Universal Chemical Corporation in 1975. By 1980 the Northfield plant was part of the carbon products division of the company.

On the present site, "A Factory" was developed in 1942 by the Ministry of Supply to build electrodes during the war. "B" and "C" Factories were added in the mid-1950's and early 1960's, and "D Plant" was built on the site of the Gas Board football ground in the 1970's and expanded in the early 1980's as a machine shop. At the same time, the original Withernby plant was sold.

In 1990 the carbon products division was divested from Universal Chemical Corporation group and renamed "Pitch Products Ltd" ,a subsidiary of the newly formed American parent company Universal Carbon Inc. (UCI). Universal Chemical Corporation, as parent company, maintains responsibility for overall direction and policy on health, safety and the environment, but each business now has autonomy to respond to its own market needs. At this time, the Northfield plant became one of 14 UCI plants worldwide, 6 in Europe, expected to integrate into a single business unit in carbon products markets.

In November 1990 UCI was party to a 50/50 merger deal with a Japanese conglomerate, under the same UCI chairman. The Japanese merger was seen as beneficial to carbon products as it accessed the markets of the far east by offering marketing expertise and the possibilities of utilising some of UCI's existing spare manufacturing capacity. For the Japanese it was thought by local plant managers that the merger gave access to European markets and fitted the Japanese vertical integration strategy.

To date, December 1992, the merger seems to have had no impact on the operational strategy of the company as far as the local plant is concerned. However, it is usual practice for the Japanese to pursue a policy of non-interference for approximately 2 years (witness Rover and ICL) and then start to introduce changes.

This change of ownership and the restructuring that preceded it, split the carbon products plants into 2 geographic regions - West (the Americas) and East (essentially Europe and South Africa). Most of the company's debt burden, generated by a combination of special dividend payments to escape a takeover bid in the mid-1980's and the fall-out problems of a massive chemical disaster, was retained by the East region ie Europe. This was resented by Northfield site managers as it seemed to confirm their (for them undeserved) "poor relation" status in the company. For the parent company, Europe was always a "problem" for

> "If we have a weakness, we see ourselves as being primarily a North American company" said Robin Cameron, Universal Chemical's CEO (Financial Times 1990)

The failure of UCI to create a global corporate identity and to treat national operational

managers equitably rather than as secondary to US managers, was to be a significant influence on the fortunes of the Northfield plant.

2. Plant Business and Manufacturing Processes

The plant manufactures carbon products for a range of industrial applications:
- electrodes for electric arc furnaces for steel and similar metals industries;
- sleeves for nuclear fuel rods;
- speciality products for the electro-chemical industries.

Never a low cost producer, the plant, under the direction of UCC, has invested in developing innovative process technologies to pursue a strategy of high quality and reliability. Costs of raw materials are low, much of the cost stack being accounted for by the energy demands of the manufacturing process and the variability of yields. Innovation has therefore been directed towards reducing energy demands by changing the manufacturing process and towards improving control of the process to reduce waste.

Electrodes are the company's bread and butter, accounting for 90% of the business in 1990, and manufactured in 4 stages over a period of several months. (Through-put time for the larger electrodes, can be up to 7 months.) These stages are:

Forming
Baking
Graphitising
Machining.

In the **forming** stage, coke is dried and weighed, mixed with pitch and heated. This mixture is then cooled and extruded through a hydraulic press which automatically cuts the material to programmed lengths. Electrodes are produced in many sizes, up to 600 cms diameter and 2400 cms length. The hydraulic press was only introduced in 1989 - replacing a massive hammer which caused noisy and uncomfortable working conditions, making the whole department vibrate. This in turn interfered with new electronic control equipment -particularly the raw material weighers - potentially causing quality problems and scrap. The hammer was also prone to metal fatigue and the vibration caused feed conveyors to break down - losing production and increasing maintenance costs.

When they have been carefully cooled, the "green" electrodes are inspected before being stored to wait the next stage. At this point the relative added value is low and inventory does not have to take place in precise conditions so large numbers of infant electrodes (which are actually black) are stored around the site, stacked on end like fossilised tree trunks. About the only traffic regularly visible on the site are the fork lift trucks, trundling down the narrow roads between the processing sheds, carrying two or three of these green stock electrodes.

Apart from the delivery of coke and tar into their separate bins at the start of the process, forming is computer controlled - from the weighing and drying of coke to the operation of the extrusion press. Extrusion itself is now subject to statistical process control and attention is turning to reducing die change-over times through the use of SMED techniques.

Baking involves heating the young electrodes according to preplanned temperatures (up to 850 degrees C) and firing times to burn off the "volatiles" ie the non-carbon constituents of pitch and coke. This process forms a block of amorphous carbon that is strong but porous, as baking leaves spaces between the carbon particles. The baking stage therefore also involves impregnation of the electrodes, under pressure, with pitch followed by reheating and the burning-off of unwanted material. Some high performance products can require three impregnations, with "skinning and ending" of the electrodes and up to four days rebaking between each one.

Baking takes place in several types of furnace depending on the size and grade of electrode being manufactured. The largest furnaces are set below ground in the site's wartime "A" block building - a warehouse-size brick construction, dusty and dirty, and now only partly in use. The rain has penetrated some of the many holes in the blackened metal roof and mixes with tar to form slippery ponds on the floor. Furnaces are newly bricked and demolished for each baking, which is typically 8 weeks, and there are bricks, packing material and lumps of cooled tar lying in mounds looking like very long, very large plundered graves.

Smaller pit furnaces have a cycle time of 6 weeks. Baking renders the electrodes relatively plastic and therefore they must be surrounded by packing material (coke) to avoid their distortion and to absorb some of the volatiles. This is a costly technique both in time and expertise as the mix of product sizes and thickness of the packing material impacts on the heat distribution in the furnace and can lead to uneven and therefore defective baking. The smaller pit furnaces can be converted to utilise a new baking process which requires that the electrodes are loaded individually into stainless steel cans or "saggars" which are packed individually with fine metallurgical coke. This reduces the firing time from 6 weeks to 17 days (average) and produces a much better quality product.

"Saggar baking", as a third method is known, takes place in above ground furnaces into which are wheeled bogies loaded with cannistered electrodes. This technology is gradually replacing traditional pit-bottom baking. These "carbottom" furnaces ,housed in the relatively new "D" plant, were designed in the 1980's specifically for larger electrodes. However, they now have to cope with all sizes of product as pressure has built to improve the use of resources - particularly energy. Carbottoms have a baking cycle of only 12 days.

Baking time has traditionally been related to the required specification of the electrode. The more the carbon structure is required to be homogeneous, the longer and more carefully controlled the baking process needs to be. Nuclear industry graphite, for example, has very long firing times. As customers in the steel and other metals industries have sought to bring their manufacturing processes under control, so they have demanded more precise and predictable performance from Pitch Products' electrodes. This has pushed up energy costs and hence focused managers' attention on reducing consumption. One of the plant's main concerns is that the hot gases produced in burning-off the volatiles are not recoverable. "We're just pushing money up the chimney" Plant Manager. This aggrevates the cost burden of their relative old plant. Newer plants in the company, such as the French plant at Calais, are able to recycle their energy and thus reduce their cost base.

The third stage in the manufacture of electrodes is the **graphitising** process in which carbon is transformed into crystalline graphite at temperatures of about 3000 degrees C. This is achieved in 2 types of electric furnace - older "Conventional" furnaces which cope with tightly packed, smaller size product, and "E" type furnaces in which larger electrodes are laid end to end and the current passed directly through them. The variety of product produced at the plant used to be much greater than it is now and packing the graphitising furnaces was a skilled job -the heights, sections and proximities of the various pieces all influencing the process. "Capability stocking" was something learned on the job and monitored in detail as it affected not only the quality of product but also the firing yields. As some customers have been "lost for ever", as manufacturing plants have shut down, so Pitch Products is producing for fewer larger customers and hence the range of electrodes demanded has also reduced.

As business has focused on the production of larger electrodes the "E" type furnaces have assumed more and more of the capacity. Turn around time for the "E" type process is a week whilst, in the conventional furnaces, graphitising takes approximately four weeks. This difference is due in part to the much shorter furnace firing times (10 hours in "E" types against three and a half days in conventional furnaces) but also due to the mechanisation of the process. Conventional furnaces are unloaded by hand and this means waiting for the temperature of the electrodes to drop so that men can get near. This accounts for 20 days out of the total processing time. "E" types are unloaded by crane and therefore are not subject to this constraint. The packing material, to reduce heat loss and prevent the product from burning, is also loaded into the "E" types by crane - which is again faster but also much less dusty.

The benefits of these changes in process technology are faster throughput, more reliable processing, better quality product, lower energy costs and a healthier working environment. Northfield has therefore been able to produce not only more, but also better for less. The problem is that this has been taking place in the context of shrinking markets. So, in 1973, the graphitising department was firing an average of 20 furnaces a month. By 1984 this was down to 7 furnaces a month. The impact has been felt on the shop floor where a workforce of 88 men and 16 supervisors has been cut to just 17 men.

Machining is the last stage in the electrode manufacturing process and itself involves three process:

       turning - to achieve a smooth surface and the correct and   u n i f o r m diameter;

         end-facing - squaring off the ends to the right length   and angle;

         threading - in which screw ends are attached to the electrodes so that they can be fitted together in arc furnaces.

This takes place in a newer machine shop which is now about 50% automated. Before automation, three employees could machine 13 electrodes a shift. The technology can now machine 200 electrodes a shift. The electrodes roll down from the storage bay to be grabbed by mechanical arms which position, turn and end them. Thundering along these rollers like torpedoes, they are manually lifted onto stands, threaded, and the screw ends attached. This means there is still a lot of dust in the air and the floor is slippery with fine graphite. It's incredibly noisy.

The plant also has a nuclear finishing shop (refurbished in 1989 as a dust-free area with a view to attracting more clean- condition machining in the future) and a speciality machine shop in which one off carbon products are produced for a wide variety of customers.

3. Down-sizing

My first contact with Northfield was in 1988 and came after several years of contraction at the plant. I found the lean and mean philosophy well understood amongst people working there with general acceptance that there was no alternative to the on-going strategy of reducing numbers employed to improve margins.

As a euphemism for decline, "downsizing" with its perhaps erroneous suggestions of planning and order amongst chaos and desperation, is evident from many of the plant's statistics.

For example,

(1) as part of the carbon products division, the plant's contribution to total gross sales of the Universal Chemicals group declined from 60% in the 1970's to 4% by late 1980's.

(2) environmental problems of the mid 1980's saw the value of shares dive by 50% - a position from which they have never really recovered. (Financial Times ibid)

(3) over capacity in the industry - arising from the shrinkage in steel and other metals processing industries - is visible in the number of furnaces in operation at the local plant - a reduction from 20 a month in 1973 to 7 a month in 1984. Since then, the furnace technology in the graphitising process has been developed such that gross furnace volume has been reduced further whilst simultaneously improving throughput time. This has been achieved by designing small furnaces and re-specifying the processing. Total output has dropped from 25,000 tons to 12,000 tons.

"Its been retreat right down the line." Plant Maintenance Manager.

(4) there has been continuous loss of employment, at plant and corporate level, over the last 15 years. For example, in the graphitising process mentioned above, there has been a reduction in those directly employed on the process at the plant from 88 men in 1970's to 17 men in 1983.

Some of this has been the result of investment in automated and computer controlled manufacturing technology. So, for example, electrodes need screws and sockets fitted to them at the end of the process so that they can be joined together to feed an electric arc furnace. Three machine operators could fit 13 electrodes with screws and sockets per shift. The machine that now performs that task can fit 200 electrodes a shift.[So much for reducing capacity]

Some loss of jobs has arisen from the many restructurings that have taken place as the company has sought a viable form to remain competitive. At corporate level,for example, the Geneva office, comprising divisional- and later business- functional heads, disappeared in Nov. 1990, as the Japanese merger was announced. Those Americans

amongst this multinational group were redeployed. Most of the Europeans were made redundant or retired "early". [This reinforced internal views about the American identity of the company.] Total employment at the plant has gone from 1200 to just over 200 by the end of 1992. Much of this has been experienced as waves of redundancies. The latest top down directive involved 25% of the workforce being made redundant between November 1990 and July 1991.

These changes and the reduction in operations had not been passively accepted by Northfield managers or the parent company.

From 1983 to 1986, a series of changes were initiated in response to shrinking markets - a consequence of the recession and steel industry rationalisation.

(a) Statistical Process Control (SPC) was introduced throughout the Corporation, a directive from Pitch Global in the States. The company had to verify the quality of electrodes to US steel suppliers. This was a knock-on from Ford who wanted assured and demonstrated reliability of products supplied to them. Statistically controlling the process of manufacture of those products, including verification that electrodes would perform only within tolerance limits, was one way to achieve this.

After 10 years buried in production, George (my first contact with Northfield, mentioned in chapter 1) found his expertise was suddenly very much in demand. £32,000 was spent at the plant on direct statistical process control training, much of it under his control.

(b) Pitch Global had a record of successful technology and process development which had helped maintain its price leadership in the market place. The early 1980's saw continued investment in manufacturing processes through automation and computerisation but this time in an attempt to improve process control as well as productivity.

(c) At the same time a planned programme of voluntary redundancies was implemented as a major contract came to an end. This was seized as an opportunity for restructuring operating activities.

(d) The operation of advanced technology, a move towards integrated group working and a shift away from "doing" to monitoring and controlling jobs, all aimed at improving the quality of the product shipped to customers, was thought to require new supervisory skills reinforced by a consolidated rate rather than a direct bonus payment system. All supervisory managers and foremen were therefore dispatched on a 3 day training course in leadership skills with David Hutchins Consultants. This led to the introduction of Quality Circles at the plant and the training of a facilitator.

(e) This had been preceded by a series of Cranfield Institute run "away weekends" for UK plant managers on Belbin type management team development.

(f) The industrial society set up a team-briefing structure.

By 1988, investment in manufacturing technology was proceeding, as were redundancies. The skill and working structure continued to change. Increasing numbers of "temporary" operators plugged the gaps in the workforce and although always "first out" when redundancies were announced, managers started to voice their preference for some of these newcomers over some of the "die-hards" remaining in the company. It was explained to me that existing trade union agreements and continued support for collective bargaining amongst the workforce prevented managers from acting on this issue at this time.

But whilst the plant continued to attract corporate investment for its technology, many of the initiatives were in difficulty.

Team briefings had become ritualised firstly as "mini-meetings", with department managers giving "mini-presentations" to their peers, and secondly as an annual mass meeting where the plant manager would outline the business plan for the coming year - and almost inevitably state the number of redundancies involved.

Management team development was, it seems, approached as "entertainment" and "a bit of a holiday", the benefits of which remain uncertain, the impact of which is forgotten.

Quality circles had fizzled out. The facilitator "He did 90% of the work and wrote all the presentation scripts" apparently ran the programme "like God looking down", identifying problems and orchestrating their solution. Failure to get the "shop floor" actively involved in problem solving and innovation is an issue that is mentioned frequently in the plant. Sometimes it is explained away, as here, by the reluctance or fear of managers to let go. At other times the nature of the business itself is said to be unconducive.

> "Quality circles faded away quickly, We're a heavy process, capital intensive industry, There's not a lot of ground level innovation can go on. It's better driven by management. In an assembly type industry I could see it working, the problems are there in front of you. But when problems are cross functional it has to be driven by management." Production Controller.

Perhaps recognising this, by 1988 the plant manager had set-up several very specific task groups to look at problems he and other senior managers deemed significant. The development of baking technology was one such area as it was the longest sub-process, requiring large amounts of energy and tying up capacity for long periods of time. Another such project was to look at energy use per se.

One task force which was slightly different from the others was the Innovations Task Group. In working with this group over a period of 6 months some understanding emerged of the ephemeral quality of many of the changes that had occurred in the plant and their origins. Of particular interest was the over-whelming impact of the plant manager on the change (and lack of change) agenda.

4. Tony's Tale

Tony has worked for the company all his working life. He began at the Withernby Plant, until it was closed, and then, apart from 1 year in the USA on an administration job, has

continued to work in production on this local Pitch Products site. Gradually moving through the production structure to assistant plant manager, plant manager and now plant M.D., he is perceived by managers and operators as an authority on most, if not all, production processes. Many people cannot conceive of a situation in which his opinion does not hold sway.(See organisation structure charts, numbers 2 and 3, for formal managerial lines of authority)

Chart 2: Northfield Plant:Corporate Structure

United Chemical Corporation

- Chemicals and Plastics Division
- Gas Division
- Graphite Division
  - European Head-Office at Geneva
    - Spain
    - France
    - etc
    - UK MD. Harold James UK HRM (Ken)
      - Northfield Plant Manager (Tony)
        - Plant TQ Coordinator (George)

In 1990 this division was divested and became Pitch Products Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of a newly created corporation, Universal Carbon Inc. In November 1990 this became 50% Japanese owned.

Chart 3:Northfield Plant Structure Before and After UK Headoffice Move from Fawlty Towers in 1990

Before

```
MD UK Business                   European
Harold James                     Headoffice
                                 Geneva
     │                              ┆
     │     UK Business              ┆
     │     Finance                  ┆
     │     Director                 ┆
     │          │                   ┆
     │     HRM UK Business          ┆
     │     (Ken)                    ┆
     │                              ┆
 Northfield Plant                   ┆
 Manager (Tony)                     │
     │                        Plant TQ
     │                        Coordinator
     │                        (George)
     │                              │
 Assistant Plant    Sales and
 Manager            Marketing Manager
     │                   │
 Production & Technical Staff and Employees
```

After

```
                              Retiring
                              UK MD
                              Harold James
                                  │
                         Plant General Manager
                         (Tony)
                                  │
                         Assistant Plant
                         Manager
                                  │
Plant HRM    IT    Plant Finance    Sales and
(Ken)              Director          Marketing
                                     Manager
                                        │
TQ          Health    Personnel      Sales Engineer
Coordinator and       Manager
(George)    Safety
            Manager

Production   Quality   Purchasing   Production
                                    Control
```

A blond, athletic Romanesque figure, cautious and calculating, perhaps reminiscent of a young George Bush, Tony is in his mid 40's. Whilst many managers on the plant were willing to engage in gossip about their peers and criticise their bosses, Tony could not be persuaded to engage in "small-talk". Nor was there much of the almost confessional style adopted by other Pitch employees about what was going wrong in the company, or telling stories about the mistakes they had made, or how the bungling of the parent organisation always sold them short. Conversations with Tony, whilst lasting up to three hours, tend to feel like a fencing match in which, whilst the ritual of the engagement continues the interaction, possible moves and styles of engagement are carefully scripted and any attempts to move away from the script are foiled. Its therefore difficult to see behind the mask, apart from when he is/agrees to be cornered and has to make a recovery. The tone of our conversations is "sporting" and I find myself, for a time, in the role of behavioural coach to Tony, offering observations, explanations, evaluations of events and meetings and demystifying "personality clashes", in return for his interpretations of the same events. Little personal or company history enters the conversations. For example, when asked about how TQ had been started in the plant, he reached for a file which chronologically logged meetings and events, read through it, put it back and then returned to discussing what was going on now and what would possibly be happening in the future. Reminiscing about and reinterpreting what had gone before does not seem to interest him.

Described by a reportee as someone who "..doesn't like people who ask awkward questions or who disagree with him", my images of Tony oscillated between seeing him as having the conversational flair of a cold fish to being fascinated by him as a corporate Machievalli. The game of "When will the shutters come down?" was always in evidence in our discussions but I was never sure who was the cat and who the mouse....

Tony explains that his priorities are largely determined by the parent company in that 30% to 40% of the plant's production is scheduled through an centralised ordering procedure in Geneva over which he has little control and even less trust. But whilst Tony complains that the day to day running of the plant is highly constrained, rather than supported, by the corporate structure, he seems to accept this as a fact of life and is very much a company man, "ours is not to reason why....".

The attachment of managers to the company would appear to reciprocated for, even though the company has undergone massive changes in the last 10 years, most of the company M.D.'s are still in place. The parent company likes the title " M.D." and product and market group heads, and now individual plant managers as the company grows smaller, are all managing directors. It is unknown for an M.D. to be appointed from outside. Consequently, most M.D.'s have 20 years service and some older ones are heading for 30 years (particularly the Italian M.D.'s for some reason).

It was explained to me that
> "Once you get to M.D. level, even in plants, your position is secure. Tony now knows he's secure - he can stop trying. Even if the plant closes he knows he will get another position with the company somewhere - or an excellent package. I've seen Tony change from his days as assistant plant manager. He was careful to perform then. But his data gathering days ended when he became plant manager.. He's behaved 'til he's got where he is. Now he doesn't have to try any

more. He surrounds himself now with people who agree with him. That's not leading..."

This disappointment at Tony's failure to use his now powerful position to lead the plant in a new direction was expressed by George. He felt that, because Tony's own survival was now assured, the performance of the plant had assumed less significance. George described Tony now as "a caretaker", selling out to the status quo. What had happened to the guy of 3/4 years ago who had wanted to turn the plant around and was willing to play with new ideas and to try new methods?

One of those new ideas was the Innovations Task Group.

The following data is generated from observing several sessions of this group in action, undertaking a questionnaire survey on the purpose of and practice in the group, presenting a feedback and discussion meeting with group members and having a 2 hour discussion with the plant manger interpreting the information.

The methods chosen combined to create something between an ethnographic and a clinical approach (Schein 1987). Whilst seeking to understand the subject's world through observation and conceptual clarification (meaning mapping), this was not seen as an end in itself - nor was it seen as sufficient to gain understanding. Entering into a "challenging dialogue" with people, by offering explanations/ suggestions and alternative viewpoints, exposed misconceptions and unchallengeable assumptions both on the part of the researcher and the researched. This "if you think you understand something, try prodding it" approach goes further than grounded theory which, whilst seeking to verify its conceptual fit with the subject's world, never requires the researcher to try and use the schemas developed. This makes explanatory collusion between researcher and researched a very real possibility. One way to overcome this "false consciousness", this neat and comfortable "group think" is to test out whether the researched *and the researcher* can carry the explanation through into a guide for action.

The Innovation Task Group

The innovation task group was set up in response to the parent company's request for plants to bid for new product development money. Identifying new product opportunities and bringing them to market had always been the responsibility of the parent. Particular sales and marketing expertise was acknowledged at plant level but historically this had been very much confined to specification and customisation activities to secure and expand markets once identified corporately. Restructuring had devolved much of this responsibility to the businesses and even plants within businesses who now sometimes found themselves competing against each other in some markets.

Getting "up to speed" in reading the broader strategic trends and in identifying opportunities in their market places was a problem for Northfield. Strategy had always been a technological issue - the continuous development of better products and improved manufacturing processes to maintain product performance and cost leadership. Targeting products and markets had been someone else's job. Now Northfield managers had to develop their own business strategy and it was almost a case of "Does anyone have any ideas?".

At its inception, the Innovations Task Force held a brainstorming session to generate possible project investigation areas. Of those selected, only two were specifically concerned with product innovation - others focused on energy reduction (energy consumption is the biggest item in the manufacturing cost stack) and various manufacturing process improvement activities.

Membership of the group of 8 people, plus Tony, was dominated by engineers and production people, with Head of IT and an inoffensive young woman from accounting making up the numbers. The rationale for the inclusion of the latter two individuals was that the functions they represented would be essential if any new product activity was to be considered seriously. Neither of them lasted more than 6 months. That IT and Accounting were expected to contribute to process improvement in manufacturing but that neither of those functions could apparently bring projects of concern to themselves to the discussion table, only hastened the departure of those outside the production area. This was a particularly sore point for the guy from IT who exasperatedly tried to draw attention to the "revolutionary change" his department had undergone in the last 2 years and the business impact that might have,,,,

Information systems (IS) is a separate department in the plant's structure and the interface between IS and its internal customer production departments has not been without incident. The well-known problem of IS not perceiving themselves as providing a service to customer-led activities but as installing expert systems prevails here. Most of the IS staff are not production specialists and hence have little understanding and therefore low credibility with their production colleagues. But perhaps more significantly, IS until recently, was based in Fawlty Towers, the city centre head offices of the UK company. When this was vacated IS moved onto the production site and these "outsiders" were perceived by those on the site as

> "spending large amounts of money whilst our own work mates are being made redundant." Quality Control Foreman

The overt purpose of the innovations task force, that is new product development, was overlayed with ideas about fast-tracking. I was told that membership of the group was therefore restricted to "young recruits" who had joined the company in the last 3 years and who "showed potential". Evaluation of this last characteristic Tony described as a "95% intuitive process based on how well they are performing at work". Two of the group were therefore involved in "team leader" training and would be

> "expected to lead joint production/ maintenance teams in the near future." Tony.

Asked why other group members were not involved in this training Tony explained how

> "Ian has already worked for the company for 6 years (part of that time in the USA) and is already a production department manager;

> Phil is assistant QA manager to engineering and therefore half way to being a department manager;

> And Terry, although employed in the last 2 years, is well established in marketing and marketing won't let me have him for that sort of thing." Tony.

(This suggested that team leadership was perceived as something that only production people required - or perhaps that only they were worth investing in?)

Of the remaining members, Richard was already head of IT and hence "beyond the target group" and Sarah from accounts was not mentioned. This seemed to leave two "young new recruits" - Martin, electrical engineer, and Malcolm, industrial engineer,- to be "fast-tracked".

Watching the interactions in these meetings it seemed that the innovation agenda was being severely constrained by the fast-track agenda. It became increasingly clear that "fast-track" meant "more quickly inducted into Northfield" and that whilst that included acquiring business, product, process and operational knowledge, it was also very much about learning how Northfield managers behave. During these meetings Tony looked to Ian and Phil to steer the discussion on substantive and technical issues of product development, investment costs, and time scales, and looked to Terry to provide market appraisal. It was Tony who then summed up, put decision-making into a company context, identified and repeatedly stated the expectations of the parent company and took decisions. The role of group members was to inform - not to decide. His complete domination of the meeting never wavered. He only had to look at Ian for Ian to check his report or proposal.

Demarcations were carried into the meeting - production staff in blue dust smocks; technical support staff in white; marketing and IT in suits; Sarah in short skirt and T-shirt

In one meeting, Martin began calling Tony by his first name and jokingly challenging his decisions. This may have been for my benefit but, in discussing the dynamics with the group in Tony's absence, Martin described himself as "the group clown". Younger group members smiled and tittered. Ian looked concerned and Richard bored - waiting for the moment to pass, as surely it must. (Sarah had resigned her membership by this point.)

Tony exchanged verbals with Martin for a few minutes, began calling him "Mister" Anderson and then put him in his (much lower status) place by referring to his adolescent tastes - his red spectacles, his spikily cropped hair, his suede shoes. Business resumed and Martin did not refer to Tony by name in the rest of the meeting - or subsequent meetings. Jokes and smart remarks, also, were now left to Tony and Martin was encouraged to direct his energies into a "task force sub-group" to help with his energy consumption reduction project.

George, the TQ Coordinator and my initial contact, attended these task group meeting in the role of very silent secretary - barely contributing to the conversation other than to refer to past minutes, procedures and protocols. It was his task to write and distribute minutes and to gather data which might run across functional or specialist areas. His pointedly deferential behaviour towards Tony and his concern for the proper conduct of the meeting was almost fussy. The propriety of the meeting was all. Tony and "young recruits" did not seem to notice.

Asked about the benefits of belonging to the group, all those involved in production

believed that their proximity to the plant manager via Task Group meetings gave them "an advantage" in the promotion stakes. When asked whether they perceived the climate of the group to be primarily serious or playful (on which the group was equally split), three members added that it was also "competitive" - a forum in which there would be winners and losers.

In separate discussions with Tony and with group members, being "company minded" was identified as a significant characteristic for "getting on" in the company. The full list of characteristics identified by members of the group, using an unstructured questionnaire and group discussion, is produced in Table 1. I showed the list to Tony and asked if he felt it profiled the ideal characteristics for a manager in Northfield. Tony thought it was a "pretty complete" set if "generator of ideas/ free thinker was added".

CHARACTERISTICS ESSENTIAL FOR MANAGERIAL CAREER PROGRESSION IN NORTHFIELD PLANT

You need to be.....

Adaptable
Aggressive
Willing to push peers & superiors
Ambitious
Company-minded
Intelligent
Knowledgeable
Able to build on ideas
Able to bounce back from disappointments

(Listed in order of decreasing incidence)

I suggested to Tony that the characteristics identified by the group probably reflected his characteristics as the dominant figure. Was he aware of himself as a role model? "Yes." Did he think the list described himself and was he happy with it?

"Yes - but any manager would be happy with that list."

Tony was successfully cloning himself.

In discussion with group members, verbal criticism centred on how the group was managed. Some frustration was expressed, by Ian, the most senior member, as well as younger members, that whilst they were "given a hearing" their views contributed little to any decisions that were made. Members resented being "steered" towards outcomes that had already been decided or were preferred by the chairman ie. Tony. At the same time, there was some reluctance to accept any more personal responsibility in the company because it was felt that Tony was undoubtedly the most knowledgable person on site. But, as someone said,

"If innovation task group meetings consist of reports to the chair and the chair then takes decisions - what's the point of meeting as a group? Why don't we just send in written reports and Tony can then take the decisions on his own?"

Following on from this, six members said they were unsure of the group's purpose and of how their performance in the group was being evaluated - something they were sure was happening.

I raised the matter of the Innovations Task Group as a participatory charade with Tony.

"Yes, I've had some of the projects we've developed up my sleeve for years. Providing those projects are good for the business and the best solutions to the problems we have, I think that's OK."

He continued
"I **am** the best informed and most experienced in that group so its difficult to imagine how an opinion contrary to mine would stand up."

He explained that it had been important in the last six months to submit some new product bids to head office in the States. As it happened, Northfield's proposals had been turned down.

"So perhaps they weren't as important as I'd thought. Perhaps we could've taken longer to come to some decisions about the projects and let the members of the group make some mistakes along the way. Last year I didn't think we had time for that. Perhaps I could afford to take that risk now..."

This was unlikely given that he said the significance of (and his interest in?) the Innovations Task Group had dropped a lot since last year, now that the deadline for capital projects submissions was passed. There were now other priorities -the team working initiative and negotiating new redundancy conditions being two of them. The group didn't meet for another three months. After that, individual project teams arranged their own meetings.

Innovation Task Group meetings were held in the conference room. I have already referred to its faded austerity. The setting underlined the formal quality of the meetings and the focus on task. The meeting could have been convened in Tony's office - it was quite large, had a table and chairs and was slightly, though not much, more personal. But it wasn't. The meeting could have taken place at lunch-time or tea or coffee could have been available. But it wasn't. The meeting could have been used to explore, develop and model different managerial styles, an organisational venture group. But it wasn't. Innovation Task Group meetings confirmed Northfield concerns with status, patronage and companyism and reinforced the assumption that managing is something you pick-up by learning the rules from those already doing it.

Reading Meetings

Meetings are everyday accomplishments, usually taken-for-granted and construed (by participants and researchers) instrumentally as tools for getting things done rather than as expressions of collective interpretations. (Schwartzman 1993) But

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"..routines and forms like meetings and stories.. provide researchers with important information about the social structure and culture of organisations.. Individuals.. use meetings to read and/or see their place in particular social systems." (Schwartzman 1993 38-41)

Everyday interactions, particularly those deemed routine and well patterned, reveal, at the micro-level

"much of the machinery for the workings of social structure." (McDermott and Roth 1978 quoted ibid P37)

Cultural and social structures are "bred into" (Ranson Hinings and Greenwood 1980) meetings and other everyday organisational events as institutionalised practices which often are not voiced on the planning and design agenda. Endorsing the view that that which is most obvious is most worthy of a researcher's attention, I offer two further, somewhat shorter, accounts of meetings in the Northfield plant of Pitch Products as windows on how organisation is accomplished. With these cultural scenes, I have coupled some sketches of the key figure.

Tony, the plant manager and future MD, has already been introduced through the above notes on the Innovations Task group. Ken, human resource manager, makes his entry next via some observations on a "communications meeting". George, my first encounter with Pitch Products and the star of an earlier scene when he presented his TQ slide show, appears again when Northfield hosts a meeting of managers from local companies to discuss quality and change.

5. Ken's Tale

The Communication Meeting

A group of Northfield managers, at plant and departmental level, had been meeting at a local training college to explore the introduction of a proposed production team-leader role. In trying to achieve continuous process improvement, employee involvement and improved throughput performance, plant managers had decided that the existing separation of production and maintenance activities was not helpful. A team-based structure, combining production and preventative maintenance under a single supervisor and supported by a core specialist maintenance team, would be a more appropriate design. Major breakdown and maintenance work would be contracted out.

The training college had been contracted to facilitate the design and implementation of this new structure. The college trainer involved was known to Ken, the Personnel Manager and chief architect of these changes in structure, via amateur football and industry training board events on the subject of NVQ's. The college proposal seemed to offer expertise at low cost - an irresistible combination, with the added bonus that training was something Ken could count and control.

I was invited by Tony, on the spur of the moment, "to sit in" on a briefing session to those departmental managers not included in the training college programme.

Nine people are seated haphazardly, looking at a screen. We were once again in the

conference room. Outside, it was a fine day in September. Inside, the blinds were down and Ken's tones were hushed.

With the use of an slide (reproduced below), he was explaining how plant management and some departmental managers had met for several days at the college to

---

• **Look at the Team Leader Role**

• **Evaluate Existing Stock of Supervisors and Assess Potential Shortfall in Developable Talent**

• **Identify Hurdles to the Introduction of a Team Structure**

      existing pay and skill grades
      pay bargaining
      inflexible employment contracts
      redundancy agreement
      long tenure of aging workforce

• **Set out a Timetable for Action**

Ken went on to describe how a profile of the ideal team leader had been established and that this was a mixture of personality traits and trainable skills. He made the point that this ideal was a "mythical creature", unlikely to exist in reality, but that the profile would form the basis of training and development work. The Team Leader, then, should be craft trained (ie. have some technical expertise) and have specific supervisory skills (yet to be determined). In evaluating current supervisors, Ken noted that not all were craft trained and "very few" (apparently none) had received "focused supervisory training".

Of the existing 17 supervisors, "not all are seen as developable". As the total number of new supervisory (ie. Team Leader) roles is expected to be 21, Ken said the shortfall would be made up through external recruitment and that this in itself would help to bring about some change.

The aim was to move to a "pay for skill" structure at the plant. The new Team Leaders would identify the skill requirements for their work areas and encourage their operators, through pay enhancement, to train to meet "skill shortfalls".

Ken's presentation seemed to have arrived at a natural break.

Those present had listened quietly, perhaps stonily, to this preview of the new order. As far as I could tell, they had been excluded from the design process and were now

presented with a *fait accompli*. The predictable ensued...

"This sounds fine in **theory**....." said the baking department manager, sitting next to me.

"When are you expecting to have your nervous breakdown?" accused someone from the other side of the room - it was still gloomy.

Ken did not reply. His response was a well practised smile which terminated the interaction. He continued with the slides - going into more detail about the "hurdles to introduction" of the new team structure.

He would like to change to an annual hours contract, to remove overtime and lay off-problems. Operators could then be required to work when there was work and stop at home in slack periods. Many companies were moving in this direction - it was about time Pitch Products caught up.

The tone of the presentation became more direct. The redundancy agreement's principle of "last in, first out" would have to go. Established a dozen or more years ago and confirmed during the plant redundancies of the 1980's, it now constituted "a major obstacle to change".

"We've got some really good temporary workers out there at the moment. They're the ones who'd have to go first. We want to try and find some way of keeping them..."

Earlier incredulity and sarcasm had turned to hostility and suspicion. The silence of the audience grew more intense. There were no nods of agreement. No signs of engagement.

An "ambitious" timetable had been designed to achieve this team-based, multi-skilled structure. (Ken showed a gantt chart with very short timescales, a few weeks in most cases, for very big changes.) It was already "behind schedule", Ken was saying, as he had been unable to make sufficient inroads into some of the "hurdles" to make the employment changes required. Indeed,

"the plan is still confidential" (ie. operators have not been informed) "and will remain so until some of the more thorny negotiations" (ie. redundancy agreement and pay bargaining) have been carried out."

"If these hurdles can be overcome, then a major communications exercise will be required with mass meetings, briefing groups, leaflets and posters, to get the message across."

Ken then described how "the plan" had not been sold upwards yet - to the MD. He said this depended on a reasonable and persuasive cost-benefit analysis being devised and that this might be very difficult as he thought many of the benefits of the changes were "not easily quantifiable." In fact

"Most of this is an act of faith."

People left the room in silence - evidently not converted.

Ken The Survivor

Ken's arrival from Fawltey Towers, the now disappeared UK Head Office where he had been Human Resources Manager in the old divisional structure, meant "a portfolio had to be created for him". Prior to this, the plant manager (Tony Geoffries) had run the plant operation through a small group comprising himself, Frank the assistant plant manager/ head of production, and the sales manager. The UK finance director split his time between the plant and Fawltey Towers, as did Ken, the human resource manager. The new plant management team now comprised Tony, Phillip (finance), the assistant plant manager (production), and Ken. Marketing and sales had reported in directly to the Divisional MD and their interests were felt to be represented through the plant MD (same person) in the new structure (see Organisation Structure diagrams presented earlier).

The UK MD, also previously based at Fawltey Towers and now occupying part of the new reception block. was known at the plant as a "visitor", hence car parking arrangements. "He has little interest in or knowledge of the plant but still has the final say in lots of decisions." Dept Manager. The MD now heads up the plant management team -though his presence and contributions are erratic. These "head office cuckoos" were seen to be displacing other long established managers at the plant. How this was coped with, the choices that were made, and are still being made, and what explanations were offered probably gave the greatest insights into Northfield's history, culture and possibilities for the future.

Ken is a Vicar of Bray figure, a survivor of court changes.... A traditional personnel manager, weaned on fire fighting, collective pay-bargaining, demarcation disputes, and preservation of the status quo, his views about "Operators" are very much as a cost to be reduced and/or a collection of skills to be deployed. People come to work to be paid. All behaviour is purposive; all relationships instrumental. Everyone has their price. What can we trade?

The 1992 restructuring at local level has seen management staff being made compulsorily redundant for the first time in the plant's history. With the move from Fawltey Towers, the management group has been reshuffled twice in as many years. (See organisation charts) The explanation for the latest changes, according to Ken Peters, lies in the plant being "top heavy".

"By the end of this year we'll only have about 150 weekly paid on site with about 60 salaried/managerial staff. We can't justify that so some had to go."

In early 1992, as the "weekly paid" were reducing in numbers, the plant's sole remaining UK competitor went out of business. Ken almost became excited. Pitch Products has 45-50% of the UK domestic steel furnace carbon anode market. The competitor had 25% with the remaining 25% supplied by several small specialist companies.

"It is essential that we grab as much of that 25% as possible to make up for the continuing chaos and loss of business in the international market." Ken Peters.
This presented a problem. Sales had been headed by the MD - although it seems he contributed nothing at all in practice. There was not therefore a senior manager responsible for sales and marketing. There are sales managers (electrodes and speciality

products) and a sales engineer, due to retire, each already stretched in the number of customers they try to see.

The company advertised for a replacement sales engineer, with customer industries experience, who would be able to get on with the job almost immediately - otherwise the market opportunity would be lost.

The job was advertised twice, with above industry average salary and conditions - but they had "no one suitable" apply.
Ken's explanation for this is

1. the company does not have a good public image.
2. nor does it have a good record of market performance. Its future is therefore relatively uncertain and is not seen as a safe bet by potential applicants.

The idea of a new appointment was dropped and the situation resolved by playing a well known company game, "musical chairs". Frank Johnson, the assistant plant manager and currently head of production with extensive product and customer knowledge, had been in marketing some years ago. He was therefore "moved" to "job-share" with the senior sales manager. Also, the sales engineer was asked to put-off his retirement for some months.

> "Its not an arrangement that can last long. There's a personality clash and you can't have the assistant plant manager reporting in through the sales manager - which is effectively what's happened. Something will have to change soon. I don't know what the structure will look like next year. Its present unsatisfactory state is partly because we had to look inside to see who we had to do the marketing job, but also - there wasn't enough work to justify me and the assistant plant manager both retaining our present roles.

> "We already have production managers - although reduced from 4 to 2 recently- and the introduction of integrated production and maintenance teams has reduced the layers in the production structure. Tony (the plant manager) was a production manager - is there any need for another production expert?

> "On the other hand, Frank could more easily have taken over my job than I could his. Human resources could have been absorbed into his existing role. He's had a lot to do with job design and work structuring anyway. Also, the health and safety and personnel managers reporting to me can be left to get on with the job so his lack of expertise wouldn't have been a problem.... " Ken Peters

The implications of these remarks for the security and value of his own position seemed to by-pass Ken. The focus, almost the raison d'etre, for Ken since being relocated to the plant has been the Team Working initiative. (See above under Communications event.) He feels this provides justification enough for continuing to occupy his current position - particularly since it was so hard won. The loser in this battle was George, my key contact and amongst those leaving in the plant's first experience of enforced *managerial* redundancies. Until Ken's arrival he was the plant TQ coordinator

6. George's Tale

The Public Event

Northfield was to host the next meeting of a group of local industrialists, primarily of a personnel/ HRM orientation, who came together to promote good practice in employee involvement and quality of working life. This had developed into an interest in the implementation of TQ in general and hence some company TQ directors, production and quality managers had joined the group. Some of these were Northfield customers. At each event a volunteer to host the next meeting was called for by the administrator/ convenor - a civil servant from a DTI agency.

The form of the event had become standardised to

- mid-morning welcome, coffee and introduction
- presentation by host company on good practices,
  progress to date and advice to the less experienced
- lunch
- plant tour
- late afternoon departure - with goodies/samples if possible.[2]

I had been invited to join the group at George's instigation, probably as the tame academic. Publicly I was to try and bring some reflection, conceptualisation and advice to the mass of detail and apparent company idiosyncrasies which, I understand, made it difficult for individuals to extract any transferable lessons from what they were told.(It was assumed there were some.)

The event was to take place in the training room. This was of classroom proportions, technologically well equipped but familiarly bleak. It was in the middle of the site, hidden between "B" and "C" blocks and hence not visible from reception. George had organised a chain of helpers to direct people to car parks, along alley ways, across yards, round corners and up the steel staircase of the training block.

A cold, wet day yet George's face ran with perspiration. Not a fit man and probably carrying 3 stone or more over his ideal weight, he was very anxious that everything went smoothly. As Northfield's TQ Coordinator, he had been making references to the plant's well established TQ programme at the group's meetings. It was imperative that visible evidence of customer-friendliness and quality management now materialise.

There were no hiccoughs. The right number of institutional green cups had arrived. George was having to pour as well as supervise the welcome. The excess of duties seemed to be taken as a sign of non-demarcated working rather than lack of resources.

It was a good turnout - about 25 managers.

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[2] The best samples had been offered a couple of events ago on a visit to the local jelly baby factory

Tony formally welcomed the visitors. George showed a video of the company and the plant and once again did his slide show. The presentation was dominated by references to the plant's products and processes - people only appearing as members of "task forces". Tony answered all the questions, adopting an experienced, objective and technical tone. There was no bad news, no confessions. It was all a matter of commitment and conviction. Then Tony asked for my comments.

In summary, I spoke for approximately 10 minutes along the theme of "so far so good - but you seem to be ignoring a,b,c." Tony did not take up the challenge but side stepped any interaction by making a joke about psychoanalysis and having to be careful in my presence.

Lunch was followed by George taking only 5 curious souls on a plant tour. He was determined to show us "the works" and to encourage anyone we met, on the extruder, in control rooms, in the machine shop, to speak to us. It took three hours. Very cold, very wet and very dirty we returned our helmets, goggles and smocks and left - without any goodies.

George's Rise and Fall: A metaphor for Northfield?

George started his career with Pitch Products as an industrial engineer in the early 1970's. The management style at that time is now widely described as "autocratic" and attributed to the military background of most of the senior people in the company and at the plant.

"Some of the social functions were like army reunions."

George is a professional networker, inside and outside the company, being a key figure in the British Deming Assn, the NCVQ, and many other bodies. He does not think of himself as "management". His title of TQ *coordinator* was carefully chosen to signify his commitment to the Deming philosophy, which he hoped would be Northfield's and Pitch Products' salvation. (For readers who may be unfamiliar with Deming's work, his liturgy comprising 14 points and 6 deadly diseases, see Deming 1986)

George's industrial engineering background, his championing of the mid 1980's statistical process control programme, and his close personal links with company personnel in the States (which meant that training and presentation material and reports of American experimentation with Deming and other guru approaches to performance improvement were made available to George very quickly) made his choice as TQ coordinator almost unchallengeable.

Acquiring an office in the conference room block, in the corridor below the offices of the plant manager and the finance manager, but across the site road from the production shops, George set out to change the plant culture.

Training, surveys, communication, measurement and analysis all followed. However, there was no formal, top down programme. In keeping with Deming's views, George encouraged individual managers to introduce the use of tools and techniques within their departments and to coach their reportees in looking for improvement opportunities, in understanding their customer's requirements and in taking responsibility for the quality

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of their work.

The plant's product arena, its role as supplier to the nuclear industry, and the technological basis of its expertise, meant that many production workers were already familiar with quality systems, standards and procedures. Obtaining BS5750 registration was therefore perceived as relatively easy and in fact BSI inspectors were described as

"easily led". (Quality manager)

Over a 3 year period, very few problems were experienced with quality systems relating to production processes. Marketing developed software for cataloguing and analysing customer requirements.

"Customers think its the best thing since sliced bread."

Problems with suppliers of raw materials decreased dramatically when a policy document "Partners in Quality" was produced.

"We sit down with major suppliers.. to discuss the state of raw materials...We have very few problems now. 5 years ago we would never discuss our processes with anyone. it was confidential.. But now we know we can't work in a box."

Material contamination is now down 5 fold to 1%. Other successes included
"scrap rates lowered by a quarter";
"maintenance (measured in machine downtime)improved from worst of European plants to equal best";
"excellent product quality; rarely do production processess need changing";
"production scheduling is better and graphitising costs are down"
"relationships are better - more cooperative. we have fewer IR problems"

George circulated and then orbited around the growing UK TQ and specifically Deming community. He seemed to be on note-swapping terms with academics, managers, industry representatives, and consultants. He always had some interesting article, video, gossip or statistics to share - in exchange for some comments and observations on what he was trying to do at the plant. Good humoured and courteous, he seemed determined to succeed and was quietly confident that he would - given continuing support and sufficient time.

Then Fawltey Towers arrived on site.

As I have already mentioned, this label referred to the head offices of the UK parent company which was located in Northfield city centre. As the UK operation shrank down to the Northfield site alone, the UK MD, the HR manager, the Finance Director, and IT services were relocated onto the plant.

At the same time, although there had been these substantial product and process improvements arising from the TQ initative, George could not reconcile the rhetoric of Pitch Products as a quality company with the (increasing) redundancies. Whilst health and safety and environmental protection were always on the TQ agenda, that agenda was

almost completely dominated by production and process concerns, exhibiting very much a "PTQ" approach (Whittle et al. 1992) to their change activities. Little attention and energy were directed to towards applying TQ to improving the working environment, to changing leadership and management styles, enhancing rewards and recognition, or encouraging education and development. People, particularly at operational level, remained pairs of hands.

In chapter 1 referred to George's conviction that modelling the future by behaving as if the culture was already changed (see for example Davis 1982) was the only way to bring about that change. As his image of a Quality company and a Quality style of management was constructed from Deming's views of the world, George's personal integrity became very important to him. It was difficult to "drive out fear" whilst people were being made redundant... The arrival of Ken Peters from Fawltey Towers, whilst perhaps eventually the primary reason for George's own redundancy, allowed George to split (Klein 1980) these two agendas of TQ and down-sizing.

Not making his acquaintance until he was already TQ Coordinator, I have no idea whether George's current concern for integrity was a change or not. However, during the many meetings we had in his office, and on the frequent occasions we would bump into one another at conferences and other events, the constant theme of his conversations was of "keeping promises", "honouring commitments", or "walking the talk" as he informed me was the latest Americanism. One aspect of this jumble seemed to be about not securing personal gain at the expense of others.

George describes Ken as
> "the sort of person who'd wait all night in the corridor, holding a glass of water, if the boss asked him to. Entirely reliable. He's made himself useful to the MD by doing whatever was asked. If there was a function or some event the MD had been invited to -he'd send Ken, the front man. Now he's doing the same sort of thing with Tony... . Ken's stayed whilst others have gone because he'll tow the line."

Ken outranked George. On his arrival from Fawltey Towers, Ken had been given a large office next to Tony's. They were of a similar age; both direct graduate entry; both "sporty". Ken was a footballer but, unlike Tony, he had more than a touch of the locker room about him.

Ken also outmanoeuvred George.
> "When he came from Fawltey Towers he said to me - I've got to make a job for myself. We work on the Hay system and to keep your position on the points you need so many people reporting to you. Well, Ken had lost his with the move - so to keep his points he decided he'd have the health and safety manager, the personnel officer and me reporting to him!" George

This was how George found himself outside the plant senior management group, his actions now reported to the group through Ken. But Ken wasn't a TQ believer - nor was he a production man. But he was undoubtedly a company man. His position of lieutenant rested on unswerving loyalty - to whomever his boss happened to be and providing that the boss's career was moving in the right direction. (There was a rumour that Ken's boss at headoffice had left abruptly, just before the move to the plant, because

of a "personality clash" with the MD about HR practices in Pitch Products. Ken had stepped into the empty shoes and the clash was no longer a problem.) But Ken was not only a "gofer". He was also quite practised at the role of henchman. Making people, particularly "operators", redundant was not a problem for Ken. It was about ratios and overhead and margins and productivity.

His relatively recent arrival at the plant with no historical relationships with any site members made his task easier. But, unlike George, he also took steps to maintain his distance.

> "He doesn't get close to people. He barely leaves this block. I don't think I've ever seen him in the works. I think if you're in personnel you need to be recognised and have contact - but Ken isn't like that. One of the operators came up to the office the other day and bumped into me and said - Are you Mr. Peters, only I heard he'd got a beard." George

George too considered himself a company man. In common with many others at the plant, he has worked for Pitch Products for 20 years. (Average length of service at the plant in 1991 was 19 years.) Apart from 1 year in the States, all that time had been at the Northfield plant. Working his way through the ranks of the industrial engineers, George had eventually arrived in the plant management team with his appointment as TQ coordinator. With Ken's appearance, he was still TQ coordinator - but without membership of the management group. He attended now only by invitation.

George was bitter - and disbelieving. How could something as critical as the TQ effort be put into the hands of someone who hadn't the faintest idea about Deming, statistical process control (spc), pareto diagrammes, customers, quality systems, etc etc. and who was so lacking in any personal integrity? George would not cooperate. If TQ was now a subsection of human resource management it was obviously doomed to failure. He would continue with his technical work - training people in spc etc. - and maintain his administration of improvement groups, cost of quality calculations, publication of house journals etc. But Ken could take responsibility for the programme as a whole. The result was the multi-skilling/team working training and restructuring already mentioned.

George saw his role in Pitch Products very much as that of the "fool" (Kets de Vries 1990), guarding against the hubris and blind conviction that seems to accompany unchallenged authority. As such, he always thought of himself as having one foot outside the management team[3] - but was still shocked and injured, though not surprised, when the other foot was pushed out and he became a victim of the 1992 redundancies.

George's status in the management group seemed to change over the 4 years 1988-1992 from star performer and font of knowledge, respected and liked, to something nearer

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[3]His insistence on referring to these 4 people as the management "group" rather than "team" because of their conflicting priorities which required the arbitration of the plant manager, as then was, was perhaps tolerated rather than appreciated. Commenting on the process of what is happening, when that process is management, is not recognised as a legitimate or useful activity in the plant.

traitor, not to be trusted or entrusted. (See Randall 1987 for an interesting discussion on these dynamics)

He explains his redundancy as arising from
> a. his persistent criticism of the current "strategy" or lack it in the company's quality programme;
>
> b. his accusation of senior management hypocracy in spending on new facitites for "show" whilst making people redundant;
>
> c. the need to create portfolios for some of the corporate staff who have descended on the plant from head-office.
>
> d. the demise in the perceived value of his approach to introducing change and a return, as he sees it, to an inward looking, defensive and cost driven approach.

"We've put the clock back 10 years."

7. Images from the Past

George was unusual in considering the present an improvement on the plant's past. Many people I spoke to compared the present unfavourably against past practices.

For example, the current view of management is as a lay practice - something anyone can pick up as they're doing their real job. One maintenance manager described plant managers as
> "insufficiently professional because we select people who come up through the ranks. Its not the best way."

He then suggested that the problem of poor management was compounded by "keeping the wrong people" and that this was because senior managers "haven't got the bottle to sort it out."

This situation was contrasted with the idea of management at the plant in the 1960's when
> "Pitch Products saw management as a profession and taught people to be generalists .."

Descriptions of the plant at that time certainly seem to be a world away from how life in the plant is currently perceived.

Plant employees numbered over a thousand in the 1960's. In 1965, for example, 1100 people worked at the Northfield site - much of the growth in numbers occurring since 1960. A report in the local press at the time attributed this "rapid growth" to

> "a philosophy of acceptance of new ideas and developments rather than satisfaction with what has and is being done". Northfield Chronicle Sept. 23 1965

The report continues

> "Progress within the firm is made possible by a defined policy which seeks wherever possible to promote existing employees to the higher positions. This

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has tended to produce a well structured organisation in which a sense of company-mindedness is readily apparent...."

Emphasising employment opportunities at the plant, the paper describes how

"Graduates in chemistry, physics, all branches of engineering, and metallurgy are required. Professional appointments also occur in finance, accounting, industrial relations and personnel."

Turning to the production workers, the representation of Pitch Products as a high-tech and progressive employer continues:

"Any employee who wishes to study can get assistance... Extensive technical training and day release are provided. All fitters and inspectors are trained for 6 to 8 weeks in the company's specially designed training centre."

The report projects a company ethos in which it is suggested that through hard work, commitment, and the acquisition of knowledge, it is possible to gain reward and improvement. For example,

"Furnacemen are recruited from labourers in the furnace department who know the graphitising process.. For all company employees there is a system of annual assessment that ensures an individual's performance is appraised and his abilities developed."

This image of Pitch Products as a benevolent, rewarding and exciting company to work for, to become attached to, to become part of, continued throughout the 1970's. Here was a multinational which could offer employment opportunities and conditions far better then those provided by local employers, was concerned to do "good works" and be public-spirited in its support of education projects and charities, and which was at the forefront of technology.

However, this image was not to last - as can be seen from the following extracts of the Northfield Chronicle.

September 23 1965
Special Supplement on English Electrodes' (later Pitch Products) golden jubilee year.
"In the war, the supply of electrodes for steel making was critical and once moremanagement & workers rallied to meet the needs of the country... Northfield has seen the development of the largest and most modern graphite plant in Europe... The rapid growth over the past few years results from a philosophy of acceptance of new ideas and develop-ments rather than with satisfaction with what has been done ... Graphite is a vital if largely unseen factor in many aspects of modern technology...even the Titan 2 rocket powering the Gemini spacecraft has graphite in the nozzle."

January 23 1979
"Top company to move its HQ to Northfield. - The UK subsidiary of one of the top US multinationals is to move its British HQ from London to Northfield... and employ about 100 in its new city centre offices.. the 1st big business clients in the building and further recog-nition of Northfield as a commercial and manage-ment centre. The move will mean a merger of HQ operations of Universal Chemicals & English Electrodes. The move also brings Dr. Harold James back to Northfield. He was MD of Eng.Elect. before becoming MD of Universal Chemicals UK."

January 23 1979
"United Chemicals is celebrating its move to the city by donating an advanced laboratory of sophisticated equipment to the university.. Believed to be worth £100,000.. it is the first in a northern university."

July 7 1980
"a Northfield based company has won a premier safety award thanks to close cooperation between management & workers. Universal Chemicals has been presented with the RoSPA trophy for its outstanding safety performance."

December 5 1980
"An injection of government cash has saved more than 100 jobs at the Northfield plant of a multi-national firm and warded off the threat of even more redundancies....A 3 day working week was introduced.. as a alternative to making even more people redundant .. 'It's difficult to be optimistic in the short term but we anti-cipate things should be looking up by the end of 1981' said a company spokesman"

December 6 1980
"Angry residents claim fumes smells and dust are emitted from Pitch Product's Northfield plant where a one and a half million pound anti-pollution programme is drawing to an end. The environment group claim the factory's 8 year clean-up programme has done little to improve the environment."

June 10 1981
"A row over shift patterns led to a strike by about 25 electricians at Pitch Products.. The problem arose because of a reduction in manpower since the new shifts were agreed last year... which meant electricians having to work what was virtually compulsory overtime..... the dispute flared up after an electrician was disciplined for taking a third shift off after having already worked 2 shifts.

April 14 1983
"More than 250 jobs are to disappear at the big Northfield plant of Pitch Products, as it cuts to meet the big recession in steel - its largest customer.. graphite electrodes are essential fittings for electric steel plants, but 24 such furnaces have closed in Britain since 1979.Others are operating at low levels ... Dr. Harold James, MD of Pitch Products,said he could see little chance of the electrode business ... reaching past levels of orders. Universal Chemicals would remain in business and continue to invest in the Northfield plant, he said.

Changes in the company's market place as a result of the world wide recession of the late 1970's and early 1980's, coupled with the plant's aging technology and problems with the UK steel industry, resulted in difficult trading conditions and the loss of jobs. Faith in the company as the primary socio-economic provider was perhaps shaken in those groups in the plant's community which suddenly found themselves to be disposable. Hence, the eruption of management/ union conflict where previously there had existed paternalism and bargaining, was probably not surprising - particularly given the highly unionised geographical area in which the plant was located.

However, Pitch Products, as part of Universal Chemicals, had to contend with another dramatic change in the early 1980's which was unique to the company.

In reviewing a book on the events, several years later, John Jermier, University of West Florida, describes what happened as

"the worst industrial accident in history"

The book, written from a political organisation perspective by a native of the disaster area, describes how the chemical plant in question [not the Northfield site], low in profitability and of little strategic importance to Universal, had received few resources or management attention (in terms of regulation, control, audits of compliance with procedures, etc.) for several years. Paraphrasing, the reviewer describes how

"the human social system had disintegrated to the point where low morale, high turnover, understaffing, labour-management conflict, and poor training contributed to carelessness in operations and routine violations of safety rules."
Jermier P326

The book's author attributes the horrifying extent of the local communities' vulnerability to the effects of the escaping gas (3,000 dead, 200,000 injured) to the lack of physical (water, energy, roads, communications) and social (civil defense, public health and other regulatory institutions) infrastructure. The plant was located in a "third world " country and the implication of the book is that lesser standards of control, care, cash and conscience were deemed applicable by Universal than would have been the case in a "developed" country.

The author claims that the extent to which the company emphasises monetary values over social and moral responsibility is indicated by

- the refusal of Universal to shut down the plant
- its refusal to compensate victims for any more than the amount for which it was directly insured
- its defense for this amount, against a claim by the host country's government, on the grounds that life is "cheaper" in developing countries

The acrimony, blame, and denial that followed the disaster, with little relief or help for the victims, is seen as the result of an unwillingness by Universal to compromise and enter into any joint actions with the government.

Jermier points out that,

"the disastrous consequences of combining state-of-the-art production systems and ancient traditions"

are prolonged as the company continues to rely on

"narrow frames of reference."

The significance of these events for Northfield were soon apparent and continued for years as the disaster remained in the headlines.

Northfield Chronicle DECEMBER 12 1984

"Police moved into the city centre offices of Universal Chemicals this afternoon after protesters barricaded themselves in. The Northfield offices are the UK HQ of the firm at the centre of the chemicals disaster in [country x] which killed thousands and blinded thousands more... The occupation.. ended peacefully.. a company spokesman said 'The products which were the cause of the injuries.. are not handled or sold by Universal Chemicals in the UK and we can't see the relevance of the occupation."

Northfield Chronicle December 2 1988

"A picket is to held at the Northfield HQ of United Chemicals to mark the 4th anniversary of the disaster.The town hall will be flying the flag of [country x] at half mast & calling on the company to make a swift settlement."

The fallen from grace/ untouchable/ pariah flavour of the reporting was echoed in international press accounts of the parent company as extracted below.

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The Global March 1990 "Universal Chemicals, battered through the 1980's by recession, the UCOL disaster, the forced sale of some of its best businesses...has decided against another restructuring..The company said its 2 key criteria were strengthening its core businesses and increasing shareholder value."	*The Global* January 15 1992 Universal Chemicals (Overseas) Ltd.(UCOL) became a pariah overnight after the disaster which killed more than 3,000 people and injured 200,000.. In spite of 7 years public UCOL bashing, the [products] continue to sell as briskly as ever..growth was inspite of a directive -never officially stated- banning UCOL advertisements on all govt. controlled media in [country x] [Also].. money became tight for the company, with banks wary of lending to a concern which did not know what liabilities would arise from the disaster.with these problems, UCOL needed to take on additional talented managers, but because of its image recruitment was extremely difficult... 'We survived & we are back in business' CEO Mr.G says.
The Global January 28 1992 "Universal Chemicals suffered a $28m loss in 1991 compared with a $308m profit in 1990 ...First quarter earnings were reduced by the serious disruption caused by an explosion that killed several workers..at a chemicals plant... Universal Chemical's chairman said the company had accelerated its cost-cutting."	*The Global* May 1st 1992 "The [local] assets of UCOL.. have been ordered to be seized by a magistrate.. following the failure of its employees to appear in court in connection with the disaster in 1984... The magistrate has already ordered that arrest warrants be issued for [Mr Z] the former chairman of Universal Chemicals for failing to appear in court & extradition proceedings are now in progress."

The events described here are depicted chronologically in Chart 4 together with the main data sources.

Chart 4:Research Data Time Line

Company Events

1915	1935	1942	1950's	1960's	1979	1980-83	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994

English Electrodes Established

Aquired by Universal Chemicals

Ministry funding for war effort

Plant is largest & most modern in Europe

HQ move to Northfield. Company fund university research to £100,000

Strikes, redundancies & pollution problems

Corporate chemical disaster

Managers try several consultants' techniques.

TQ programme commences

Headoffice move onto plant site

Tony becomes MD & George is made redundant

Research Data

Newspaper Archives

Newspaper Archives
Company Reports
Academic Articles
Interview Accounts
Reminiscences

Personal Contact
Interviews
Observations
Conversations
Participations
Company Reports
News Papers

Conclusion

At this time in its history, Pitch Products' Northfield plant can be described as experiencing a collapse of order, a challenge to and undermining of its cultural knowledge, of what is taken for granted; of what informs action, allocates responsibilities, status and rewards, and what and who constructs corporate identity (Lyles and Schwenk 1992). However, whilst seeking "native views" (Gregory 1983) on these matters was considered to be particularly informative in understanding Northfield's malaise and managers inability to reframe their views of the world and regenerate the plant's performance, such data was not felt to be sufficient for understanding the continuance of control despite mounting disorder. Somehow, the *painful impact* (Golding 1991) of a decade of decay had not become overwhelming. Northfield continued to be managed...even though most benchmarks had been turned upside down.

In exploring how managers continued to make-sense of what was happening and act *as if* they had choice, had control, it seemed that the models and images they used could not be described as of entirely their own construction. To what extent did media generated images, the comments and rationales of individual and corporate significant others and the aphorisms of salvationary management philosophies help to constitute these native views, providing ready made explanations for how to make sense of and act in, Northfield? Trying to recognise and tease out these rituals, *the artful practices* (ibid), by which sense-making was accomplished through the evocation of symbols "beyond dispute",meant reading meetings (that most artful of managerial practices), events and personas more tacitly, not solely from the knowing subject's point if view.

This chapter has attempted to locate and describe some of those artful practices and start to identify the legitimation routines invoked by individuals and groups to maintain control and construct meaning.

CHAPTER 3. RIGOUR AND RELEVANCE: CONVENTIONS IN RESEARCH PRACTICE

Introduction

This chapter recounts the methodological issues that informed and arose from the empirical agenda in the research process.

The empirical sources I draw on are:

(1) 4 years and on-going contact primarily with senior managers in the UK plant (Northfield) of an American owned multi-national, in which my relationship with 2 of those managers has shifted from that of researcher to one of confidante/ friend.

(2) attending a series of presentations by plant managers to a variety of audiences within and outside the plant.

(3) process consultation to a small group of potential fast-trackers, reporting to the plant manager.

(4) a series of semi-structured interviews with management and supervisory staff on the implementation of TQ in the plant as part of an Science and Engineeering Research Council funded research project.

(5) the use of current and archive company and newspaper reports.

The company, Pitch Products, and the particular plant, Northfield, have restructured many times. Individuals have come and many more have gone. Technology has changed dramatically and the product profile has been reshaped. But in many areas, history keeps repeating itself. Familiar patterns of behaviour and predictable decision outcomes abound.

The question I've tried to address is - after a decade of investment and given all the models, theories, consultancy and academic advice, and industrial contacts available to the management of this plant - why have so few of the alternatives presented been taken on board? The "management culture", as I have described it, remains largely untouched.

In management and organisation theory culture is conceptualised paradigmatically, as "assumptions" (Schein 1984) that are off the agenda; a "framework" (Checkland 1981) or "way of life" (Wittgenstein 1953) made visible by what is taken for granted and evidenced "where doubting stops" (Phillips 1973). Given that much managerial rhetoric in the Pitch Products plant espoused commitment to cultural change, the research was directed towards explaining the apparent cultural stability reported by plant managers. I was also puzzled by the way managers spoke of company culture and, particularly shop-floor, working practices as separate domains and how their stories and anecdotes, as signifiers of culture, were confessionally constructed, almost as laments.

The research was therefore designed to elicit some understanding of the term "culture" for managers in Pitch Products and develop an appreciation of their construction of their

culture change agenda and its enactment. In the course of the work the crude, if not misleading, oversimplification of prevailing conceptualisations of culture as "the way we do things around here" became increasingly apparent. To use Weick's phrase, the culture concept

> "*like a Trojan horse*, has preceded.. theory into the various strongholds of organisation studies" (1990 P220)

because everyone "knows" about culture (Smircich 1983). Indeed, Alvesson suggests that culture "is a word for the lazy" (1993 P3). With culture so underspecified, I found the prospect of "blissful clarity" very appealing.

The research was "nested" (Van Maanen 1988, P8) in an existing project aimed at improving the implementation of TQ in manufacturing companies and in a prior non-research relationship with 2 plant managers (see Chart 5).

Chart 5: Research Data Time Line

Company Events

Year	Event
1915	English Electrodes Established
1935	Aquired by Universal Chemicals
1942	Ministry funding for war effort
1950's	Plant is largest & most modern in Europe
1960's	
1979	HQ move to Northfield. Company fund university research to £100,000
1980-83	Strikes, redundancies & pollution problems
1984	Corproate chemical disaster
1986	Managers try several consultants' techniques.
1988	TQ programme commences
1990	Headoffice move onto plant site
1992	Tony becomes MD & George is made redundant
1994	

Period covered by Research Project into the Implementation of TQ

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Whilst the research opportunity was therefore fortuitous (ibid), it was also puzzle driven, arising from the inability of current wisdom to explain what was going on, or not going on, at the Pitch Products plant. As such, the research can be characterised as an "heuristic case study" (Mitchell 1983 P 196) "deliberately chosen to develop theory" (ibid). This type of case study is described by Eckstein as

> "used to stimulate the imagination towards discerning important general problems and possible theoretical solutions..[which] are deliberately sought out." (1975 P104)

As such it differs from a purely empirical case study in that it is informed by theoretical concerns. Similarly, it has no pretensions to be a bona fide ethnographic study since it is problem driven, not limiting itself to describing practice but ultimately seeking to inform that practice by constructing an explanatory framework.[1] However, it draws on ethnographic methods, in that it employs

> "..the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one's own experience in the world of these others" (Van Maanen 1988 preface)

By developing "intensive, contextually sensitive.. descriptions of concrete situations" (Pondy 1978), the research sought an explanation, not only an understanding, of culture in Pitch Products in order to build theory and to inform practice. As such, the research is not confined to arm chair theorising but neither does it seek to go native.[2]

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[1]Hammersley, 1992, suggests that ethnographic research emphasises description, not theory, in that "while there is no shortage of promising theoretical ideas in ethnographic [..] work, there are few examples of explicit and sustained attempts at theorising." P39. The result of this, he concludes, is that such "research is not an effective way of changing the world (not in any direct and immediate way at least)" P141. I found that the tension between emically and etically constructed descriptions-of-what-happened and explanations-of-why-they-happened a source of energy for the research project. I would therefore tend to argue that modelling subjects' explanations of the world is an essential precondition for changing those worlds. If, as Hammersley suggests, much ethnographic research has been directed towards description, this in itself cannot be used as evidence that such a research method is intrinsically non-interventionist. Explanation for the use to which ethnographic data is put should perhaps be sought in the paradigmatic rules of the academic community within which the research is conducted rather than at the level of method per se (Fielding and Fielding 1986).

[2] Geertz critiques this notion of going native as "the myth of the chameleon fieldworker, perfectly self attuned to his exotic surroundings, a walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience and cosmopolitanism." (1983 P56) Gadamer also raises this issue, cautioning against reproducing subjects' mental maps as "research". Through the concept of universal hermeneutics, those common but separate interpretive contexts of researcher and researched, Gadamer argues that the objectives of research are

I am aware that

> "To turn away from trying to explain social phenomena by weaving them into grand textures of cause and effect to trying to explain them by placing them in local frames of awareness is to exchange a set of well charted difficulties for a set of largely uncharted ones." (Geertz 1983 P6)

Methodological issues are discussed throughout the dissertation as the research focus itself shifted from a concern for capturing culture to one of how to do cultural research. A rational for the "collection" and admissibility of the empirical data and a justification for my particular approach to its analysis is provided in chapters 4 and 5. The dilemmas and difficulties of representation pervade much of the text.

This chapter tells of my encounter with some of those difficulties. It is structured around a discussion of "the case study" as a method for building theory from empirical research; although, like the practice that produced this discussion, it sometimes resorts to "AHFA" - Ad Hoc Fumbling Around (Rock 1988 p100) - to progress the project.

The chapter is in 3 sections:

Part 1 considers some advice recently offered to researchers using a case study approach on how to design their research practice to ensure its **rigour.**

Part 2 considers **representation and rhetoric** in research outputs and offers a post-hoc reconstruction of the research process that informs this account of Pitch Products.

In **Part 3**, the **realised** research practice is described as representativeness gives way to **relevance.** Issues involved in pursuing an increasingly ethnographic approach are discussed.

Part 1: Rigour in Case Study Research.

The relationship of empirical research to theory is an on-going and possibly interminable issue in organisation and management studies, raising questions of ontology and epistemology; presentation and representation; culture, convention and control. In very different ways, two recent publications[3], have sought to "open a window" on this relationship, to "demystify" and "inspire" future research (Frost and Stablein 1992 book cover) and to provide a "roadmap" (Eisenhardt 1989 P532) for moving between empirical data and theory.

I have chosen to use these two particular texts to interpret and perhaps validate my own research because both take as their unit of analysis the *case study*. Whilst other "how to" texts are available on case study research (eg Yin 1989), the authorial voice often tends towards the anonymous and the text can be described as of the "thin description"

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to produce new understandings "that are not reducible to the prejudices of either of the interactants". (Quoted in Mumby 1988 P138)

[3]Frost and Stablein (eds) 1992 "Doing Exemplary Research"
Eisenhardt 1989 "Building Theory from Case Study Research"

variety - surely a loss when the aim is to offer insights into rich picture making?

As she herself acknowledges, whilst the journal article medium of Eisenhardt's work restricts the richness of the data she offers largely to the anecdotal, both the Frost & Stablein and the Eisenhardt works are in the business of telling tales for incremental theory building.[4] However, whilst Eisenhardt takes as the case focus the organisation and/or subjects studied by the researcher(s), Frost and Stablein identify "the research journey" and the experiences and reflections of researchers as their empirical data. This splitting of task (Eisenhardt) and process (Frost and Stablein) and the extent to which the voice of the researcher is present in or excluded from the research text (the output), to be heard only in a separate commentary if at all, is at the heart of the positivist/interpretivist debate in organisation and management studies.

This chapter explores that debate by attempting some appreciation of case study research. I begin with some thoughts and observations on the Frost and Stablein/Eisenhardt works.

LESSONS FROM FROST AND STABLEIN

In their self proclaimed work "Doing Exemplary Research", Frost and Stablein define research as

"the application of techniques, tools and methods..[which]. can.. be separated from the context and content of their use..[and] .. can be learned and appropriated by any serious scholar." Frost and Stablein 1992 P2.

To this end, the book is structured around 7 chapters, each an account of doing research, from which the reader is to glean lessons in good research practice. Each chapter comprises recollections by the researchers on the origins and their experiences of the research process together with expert commentaries upon their practice and its results.

The purpose of their book is to "provide an effective primer on the new methods in the field" so contributing to the "further rationalisation of organisational research" by "increasing objectivity" (P2). This is to be achieved by providing readers with "exemplars" of "good research processes" thus divesting "elite subgroups who now control knowledge of these research weapons" of some of their power. (P3). The focus is exclusively on empirical research "the application of techniques, tools and methods" (P2) since Frost and Stablein see "conceptual or theoretical research as reasonably distinct from empirical research" (P4).The selection of research "exemplars" was achieved by asking a nominated audience of past editors of "major relevant journals" and scholars "whose judgement on research quality [was] respected" P5 to identify "articles and journals.. that were examples of outstanding research method and design in the field of organisation studies."

The book describes an approach to researching "exemplary research" that can be

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[4] It is interesting that whilst Frost and Stablein have defined their phenomenon as exemplary **journal** articles, they have chosen another, perhaps less conventionalised, medium (the book) in which to explore the form.

characterised as a traditional open survey in which articles were included initially in the research sample according to the number of citations received.

Through the use of researcher inductive categories ("what made for interesting, important and instructive exemplary research" P6), occurrences of the phenomenon were identified (ie.exemplars of research practice as particular articles in particular journals).

Frost and Stablein go on to describe how they sought "to represent the diversity that is organisational studies" by getting some "range of representation", in the selected journal articles. The dimensions governing that representativeness led to a range of articles in which;

(a) the research was tightly specified in advance or the research unfolded
(b) the research could be described as primarily quantitative and other research which was primarily quantitative and or a mixture
(c) research authored by newcomers to the field or established personalities
(d) research which arose opportunistically or which was part of an planned strategy
(e) the research either described, generated or tested theory
(f) both male and female researchers were represented
(g) the research was undertaken by individuals or groups.

Unfortunately, no explanation is offered for the selection of these criteria. They also report how they "discovered" that "well written papers stood out" and hence determined that "the quality of writing" was the one dimension on which they would not seek variety. Again, no description of how well written papers manifest themselves nor of how this concept influenced the selection process is offered.

In bounding their field of inquiry, the articles selected by Frost and Stablein were limited to those falling within the prescribed "citation domain".

The constructed citation domain included research:
1. concerned only with the field of organisation studies.
2. that was empirical work.
3. published in the 1980's - no earlier.
4. published in the form of journal articles.

In presenting rationales for these decisions, (see pages 4-5), Frost and Stablein refrain from any discussion of their impact on the validity of their own research activity or the prejudicial impact on research methodologies outside or under-represented in the domain they have constructed. One research form outside the prescribed citation domain is that of ethnography.

"There are no ethnographies in this book." P5

To their credit (sic), Frost and Stablein include a comment by Van Maanen that

"..good ethnographic.. studies don't neatly fit journal requirements - at least organisational ones." P5

But they remain undeterred.

"..many areas of organisational research and several important methodologies are not represented in this selection."
"Our domain definition would not allow it." P5.

Whilst I can accept that the inclusion of all methodological approaches in a book such as this is neither advisable nor probably possible, the exclusion of ethnographic work from their definition of "exemplary research" seems to me bizarre when Frost and Stablein are demonstrably concerned with the "et cetera" (Garfinkel 1967) of doing research.

In producing a book they describe as "interesting, provocative and sometimes surprising" (P290), the authors choose to record

> "..thoughts, reflections and emotions of researchers engaged in the process of doing exemplary research.. [to].. capture the flavour of that work". P270

Self evidently, this practice of
> ".representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one's own experience in the world of these others." (Van Maanen 1988 preface)

is essentially an ethnographic project. Although, to some extent, Frost and Stablein's research approach is similar to that of "verandah anthropologists" (ibid P16) in inviting natives (researchers) to recount their culture in the comfortable surroundings of the anthropologists' (editors) villa, as "complete-research members", studying groups "in which they have prior membership" (Adler and Adler 1993 P35) many of the requirements for a bona fide ethnographic approach seem to be met. They are:

> "a lengthy period of intimate study and residence in a given social setting... the acquired knowledge of the always special language spoken in this setting, first hand participation in some of the activities that take place there, and.. intensive work with a few informants drawn from the setting." (Van Maanen 1982 Pp 103-4)

For Frost and Stablein to opt for an ethnographically informed representation of doing exemplary research whilst at the same time excluding this form from their sample of what constitutes such research, seems perverse. Are "organisational research" and "researching organisational research" demanding of different approaches to inquiry? The issue is never explicitly addressed. Whilst authors of the selected exemplar articles provide reflections on the greatness of their works and, invariably adulatory, commentaries are printed from "scholars who are familiar with the study and who have expertise in the topic" (Frost and Stablein, Preface) no one, it seems, casts a critical eye over the book itself. The editors mandate the selected articles/authors to "speak for themselves", supported by texts from nominated admirers. The impact of this "invisible college" (Crane 1972) is to create a powerful statement on how to get on in the research game by buying into conventional wisdom.

By not submitting their "inscribed end product"(Cooper and Fox 1989) to cultural and historical analysis, the contribution of "Doing Exemplary Research" is located very much in the sphere of "normal science"(Kuhn 1970) rather than in the business of paradigmatic change. In seeking to "challenge and expand the frontiers" of what is known about empirical research by providing access to research tools, techniques and

methods, the authors, it seems, do not aim to challenge research **methodology**[5], ie. the paradigmatic philosophies that frame the questions that are raised about what is exemplary empirical research. So that whilst flesh is placed on many of the bare bone of research practice, the result is, I find, disappointing. Few skeletons have been rattled.

In concluding that they are not sure "how to proceed empirically in a brave, new, pre-, multi-, or post-paradigm organisational 'science'" Frost and Stablein ask "Where do we go from here?" P208. The question lies unanswered as the babble of descriptive but "established" voices in the book creates an "anything goes as long as its not too different" camp of reflections on organisation research.[6]

Consequently, their demystification of the exemplary research process is about acknowledging and refining claimed existing practices. Description, discussion and analysis hence take place leaving the prescribed puzzle solving conventions unassailed. This "normal science" positioning is further evidenced in the explicit description Frost and Stablein give of the role of empirical research in theory making.

> "Research, in our opinion, is only possible in so far as it builds on, or responds to, the existing body of research. Research is exemplary only insofar as it motivates further building or reaction." (P288)

No room for paradigm busting here.

In this way, whilst apparently focusing on phenomenological aspects of doing research and using a post-modern representational form (ie more narrative than scientific report), the work of Frost and Stablein echoes the aims and acknowledged positivist model of case study research and knowledge construction (linear, cumulative and etically framed) also extolled by Eisenhardt.

It is to a consideration of that model that I now turn. It is discussed in relation to the "planned" (Mintzberg 1978) agenda of my own research.

EISENHARDT: REALISING YOUR PLANNED CASE STUDY STRATEGY

In referencing Burrell and Morgan 1979; Evered and Louis 1981; Morgan, Frost and Pondy 1983; Ouchi and Wilkins 1985; Sanday 1979; Schein 1988; Smircich 1983 and Van Maanen 1979 and 1988, Dyer and Wilkins (1991) refer to

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[5]The difference between methods, tools, techniques and methodology in research is discussed later, particularly in relation to soft systems models

[6]See the correspondence between Martin Parker and Haridimos Tsoukas in Organisation Studies 13(1) and 13(4) 1992 for a discussion on responsibility in narratives, the politics of truth and the lack of acknowledgement in post modernist accounts of the role of institutions in constructing (accounts of) human action. This leads both Parker and Tsoukas to ask what is research and theory for - but to aid intervention and change? this critical awareness is missing from much of the Frost and Stablein text.

"a decade of strong and repeated calls for more qualitative, contextual and interesting research." P613.

Their observation comes as a comment on the "failure" to respond to those calls of the research approach proposed by Eisenhardt (1989) in her paper on "Building theory from Case Study Research". Particularly, they express concern that her "positivist" (ibid P546) method which results in "thin description" (Dyer & Wilkins P618) might become "the standard", whereby "the theoretical progress of the field of management may suffer."(ibid P613).

I do not intend to reproduce the dialogue between Eisenhardt and Dyer & Wilkins here, though as an exercise in deconstruction and discourse analysis it might be valuable in itself, illustrating the pedigree-obsessed, sometimes ritualistic, and frequently laboriously rhetorical nature of much that passes for methodologial debate in management and organisation theory. [7]

However, the critical areas identified by Dyer and Wilkins as distinguishing their own, unlabelled, case study research strategy from Eisenhardt's define-and-test, "case(s) study", approach would seem to enfold many issues that concerned me in trying to make sense of Pitch Products and of my own research practices.

These critical areas are described as
> "(a) the in-depth study of a single case (context) versus the study of multiple cases (contexts), (b) deep versus surface description, and (c) the telling of good stories versus the creating of good constructs." Dyer and Wilkins 1991 P613

As with Frost and Stablein, the focus of the debate is again on the relationship between theory and data.

The discussion that follows looks at the issues raised in these apparent dichotomies by describing the research strategy that was planned against the strategy that was "realised" (Mintzberg 1978) in trying to make sense of Pitch Products. The initial deductive, hypothesis-testing, approach to Pitch Product's case data is shown to match closely with the road map for theorising from case study research articulated by Eisenhardt. As this planned strategy gave way to, or perhaps was nested in, an unintended research agenda, the emergent research strategy was realised as more inductive, ethnographic and local. Whether "the case" led "the approach" or the approach structured the case remains to some extent unresolved.

Getting Started (i) Theory Building

Eisenhardt describes her approach to case study research as

> "a positivist view.... That is, the process is directed toward the development of testable hypotheses and theory which are generalisable across settings." (1989 P546)

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[7](See Smircich, Callas and Morgan 1992 for a lament on the seemingly inevitable autopoeitic structuration of theoretical discourse in organisation and management theory.)

It is specifically directed towards theory building and comprises the following stages.

Eisenhardt's Stages for Building Theory from Case Study Research.

1. Getting started: defining the research question.
2. Selection of Cases.
3. Crafting instruments and data collection methods.
4. Entering the field: data collection/data analysis.
5. Analysing within-case data
6. Searching for cross-case patterns.
7. Shaping hypotheses: the theory/data relationship.
8. Enfolding literature: validation/generalisation.
9. Closure: empirical and theoretical saturation.
10. Outputs: may be concepts conceptual framework, propositions or mid-range theory.

In Chapter 1, I described how my relationship with some people in Pitch Products started not as one of researcher and researched but as fellow student, presenter and bringer of the TQ message. It is therefore difficult to identify where and if companionship and mutual interest ends and research begins - if indeed they are separable. However, some aspects of my research at Northfield conform to this comparative design. The following pages describe the research agenda that structured this more formal and conventional researcher role.

Some months after first meeting George and, in the interim period, several other Pitch Products employees I was appointed to a research council funded fellowship to research "TQ: A Managerial Perspective". As stated in the grant proposal, the aim was to

> "establish some conceptual and operational consensus on TQ implementation by seeking an answer to the question 'What should companies be doing when pursuing TQ'"

and to

> "produce a specification for a practical and effective implementation methodology".

The research sought to achieve these aims by

> "identifying those approaches to implementation that have succeeded and under what conditions"

and by

> "pinpointing critical management and organisational changes that need to be made and the ways they have been achieved." (ibid)

In developing earlier work (eg Foster and Whittle 1989), the research proposal referred

to both a "paradigm shift" and a "change in culture" as requisites for the implementation of TQ. The research was therefore designed to focus on data (such as managerial assumptions, styles, customs and practices) which might indicate the occurrence of paradigmatic and cultural changes associated with the implementation process. Cases were chosen in which managers attributed successful TQ implementation to cultural change.

The methods to be used were observation, participant observation, interviewing (using open and semi-structured agendas), the chronological cataloguing of archive and current company documentation, and searching a broad range of literature -some particularly pertaining to TQ but much from organisation and management theory, particularly from within an OD and soft systems perspective.

Adopting a "heuristic", "case study" approach to "examine, in depth, companies' experiences of implementing TQ", the research sought to "carryout all case studies simultaneously" to "facilitate cross fertilisation of ideas between cases" .

Unknowingly, therefore, the research was clearly located as an example of the approach to theory building described by Eisenhardt 1989.

Specifically, the TQ research project echoed Eisenhardt's design in the following ways:

1. there was "An initial definition of the research question, in at least broad terms.." and some "a priori specification of constructs" (P536) as described above.

2. cases were " chosen to replicate previous cases" (ie. research was directed towards those companies identified as "best practice" implementors of TQ by the UK manufacturing community) and to "extend emergent theory" (P537) (a key research interest was in companies in which the TQ programme was described in terms of "cultural change", a loosely defined concept at that time).

3. a policy of "triangulation" was pursued by
(a) incorporating several data collection methods
(b) employing a team approach to field work in which individuals were "assigned to cover some sites, but not others."
(c) default, in that,through the constraints of time and other commitments, one member of the research team remained "out of the field" on this research project but quickly adopted a role of sceptic and "devil's advocate". (P538)

4. there was extensive and deliberate "overlap of data analysis with data collection". Research team meetings and "cross examinations", conference appearances and in-company presentations led to "the addition of cases to probe particular themes" (P539)

5. considerable "within-case analysis" was undertaken to stave off the danger of "death by data asphyxiation". In particular, "narrative description", "tabular displays and graphs" and "sequence analysis to organise longitudinal data" (P540) were deployed and presented publicly, to managers and

academics, throughout the research process.

6. "cross-case" (P540) patterns were sought to identify similarities and differences in
(a) context (size of company, sector,market situation etc),
(b) approach to TQ implementation (eg. DIY or consultancy led, championed by line or support company personnel, utilising different clusters of tools and techniques)
(c) nature of cultural change achieved (eg.symbolic, behavioural, attitudinal).

7. measures were developed for constructs (models of TQ implementation, models of culture and culture change) and hypotheses (of the relationships between these models) were explored through "replication, that is, .. treating a series of cases as a series of experiments with each case serving to confirm or disconfirm the hypotheses".(P542)

8. comparison of the emerging theory with accepted wisdom in the TQ literature led to the identification of "gaps" in that literature particularly in relation to models of culture, process issues in change management and the role of senior management in TQ implementation. By conceptualising TQ implementation in such a way as to draw on these existing literatures, the development of "a theory with stronger internal validity, wider generalisability, and higher conceptual level" (P544) was made possible.

9. the number of cases studied in depth was 7, one of these having 3 "mini-cases" contained within it. This fits Eisenhardt's recommendation for "between 4 and 10 cases" usually working well to generate theory of sufficient "complexity" whilst maintaining "empirical grounding". In testing the theory outside this group of cases we invariably found that we were "observing phenomena seen before"; ie. "theoretical saturation" (P545) had been reached.

10. the outputs of the research were
(a) "concepts" (a three type classification of approaches to TQ implementation and a fourth meta-approach. See Whittle 1992)
(b) "a conceptual framework" (describing the relationship between the approaches and culture change. see Whittle et al 1992) and
(c) "mid-range theory" (P545). Eisenhardt does not provide a conceptual definition of "mid-range" but describes such theories as "likely to be **testable, novel and empirically valid."** Whilst "lacking the sweep of 'grand' theory... They are essentially theories about specific phenomena." (P547)

The "A-ha!" response (**novel**) by managers and academics to presentations of the theory resulting from the research activity described above, the ease of operationalisation (**empirically valid**) and use of the theory's constructs and frameworks as diagnostics (**testable**) in companies, would seem to indicate that the research outputs could collectively be described as constituting a mid-range theory, in Eisenhardt's terms. The resultant theory is then about a specific phenomena - in this case "TQ:the implementation of". As such, the search for and analysis of data, together with conceptual, construct and hypothesis development tended to be bounded by *researcher*

definitions of the "phenomenon".

Those definitions were constructed using
- (a) empirical data ie. reports, texts and observations of what managers did/said they did when implementing TQ. General categories of "implementation recipes", which eventually comprised a typology of TQ activities, were then inducted from the data by drawing on
- (b)
    - i. Quinn's competing values framework (1988)
    - ii Burrell and Morgan's 4 box typology of approaches to sociological enquiry (1979).
    - iii Checkland's soft systems methodology (1981)
    - iv Culture change literature, particularly Schein (1985),Davis (1982) and Smircich (1983).

The inducted implementation recipes were found to be generalisable to companies outside the research sample since managerial conceptualisations of the phenomenon consistently reiterated the characteristics of the categories. In drawing on literature from the philosophy of the sciences and social sciences and from organisation culture, the recipes were conceptualised as "paradigmatic" and having "root metaphors". Theoretical progress was made when implementing TQ as culture change was conceptualised as involving some inter-relationship between the three identified implementation paradigms.

Whilst work continued to map that relationship, by focusing on what happened/happens when companies change their paradigmatic recipes and how they change those recipes, further testing and confirmation of the generalisability of the paradigms was sought. This was carried out by auditing the TQ programmes of companies that had not been party to the original empirical/inductive work. The research had therefore now moved into a deductive mode - the testing of hypotheses about which practices, people, problems and expected outcomes would be mutually associated and configure around the paradigmatic recipes.

Getting Started: (ii) Theory testing

It was at this stage that Pitch Products Northfield plant became formally involved in the research project - as a site for testing theoretical hypotheses. The main concerns at this time were

- a) to establish whether the constructs, derived from empirical and literary sources, were "robust" (McGrath et al. 1982)
- b) to evaluate the explanatory and predictive status of the embryonic theory. In a nutshell, this sought to explain TQ implementation failure (manifest as little change in organisation culture) as arising from the inability of an organisation's management team to utilise all 3 recipes.[8]

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[8]Exploring the reasons why some organisation management teams became trapped in particular TQ recipes, or "mindsets" as they became known, was beyond the remit of the research and it was felt perhaps not something to be tackled within the existing research agenda. The ways in which boundaries develop around

c) to further describe the artefacts (language, actions, key players etc) of each recipe so that, as part of the research remit to design an implementation methodology, diagnostic tools could be developed to audit the significance and dominance of each paradigm in particular companies.

The selection of Pitch Products as a site for theory (or at least hypothesis) testing rather than as a site for theory building indicates two significant research assumptions:

1 that there was little to learn at Pitch Products ie. the generalisability of what was happening there was of limited interest to a wider managerial audience because the case did not provide "lessons" for success (See Rose 1991). The assumption here is that knowledge about a phenomenon is gained from robust examples of that phenomenon and not failed examples. It was assumed, therefore, that the "currency" (Bonoma 1985[9]) of the research would depend to a great extent on its claim to draw on benchmark organisations (not a label synonymous with Pitch Products) rather than the experiences of various Bloggs and Sons Ltd. The credibility, relevance, and validity of the research hence turned on identifying cases as "good practice" **for a managerial audience**, rather than on demonstrating conformance to specific methodological conventions to satisfy an academic audience.

2. it was thought that the Pitch Products case did not demonstrate a "full set" of variables to be identified, analysed and conceptualised. Hence any findings could not lead to reconceptualisations/ theory building nor provide guides to action. At most, the Pitch Products case should confirm hypotheses constructed elsewhere and perhaps indicate what **not** to do when implementing TQ.

Supporting Eisenhardt's view, a key assumption of the TQ Implementation research project was that organisations can be considered exemplars of commonly recurring situations. "Cases" thus become gerunds or vessels carrying the hallmarks of a "general type", the characteristics of that general type being defined by the researcher. For research aimed at guiding practice, as this was, it is further assumed that learning from a particular situation is transferable to other situations.

A "jigsaw" or "road map" were metaphors frequently used by researchers to describe the implicit model of the phenomena (Implementing TQ) being researched. As such, generalisable exemplars of the phenomenon were held

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practice, and I include research projects is, I believe, a crucial but relatively unexplored aspect of the theory development process. I return to this issue later in discussing "explanation".

[9] Bonoma 1985 suggests a trade off in management research between "currency" (the generalisability of results arising from external and ecological validity) and "data integrity" (research characteristics that affect bias such as internal and statistical validity and reliability). So lab research offers high data integrity and case research offers high currency.

to have all the pieces of the jigsaw or have access to the complete map. A gap model thus effectively explained the non-robust, failed or deviant exemplars. In this way, the phenomenon was tightly bounded by the researcher's conceptualisations. Hence any explanations of variance in the phenomenon was sought within those boundaries.

The above assumptions concern the issues of (1) explanation and (2) representativeness in case study research and theory building and beg the questions "explanatory for whom?" and "representative of what?". Representativeness is addressed in the following section along with textual issues about conventions in research practice. The use of models and metaphors for explanation in theory building as already been discussed and is considered again later in the dissertation.

Part 2: Relevance and Representation: Phenomena and Understanding in Case Studies.

The next section recounts how my knowledge of Pitch Products Northfield plant and my personal contact with some members of that company, led to dissatisfaction with the typification *allocated to them* in the TQ research project described above. Whilst useful at the level of asking questions, the outputs of the research, as "novel, testable and empirically valid" to follow the Eisenhardt model, did not seem to explain what was going on at the plant. Uncomfortably, I felt that "the phenomenon" was represented from a researcher perspective. As concepts and hypotheses became more tightly defined, I was increasingly aware of having to preface conversations with managers in Pitch Products by a description of what was being researched and how some of the everyday terms they use were being used differently in the research project. The terms did not differ in denoting different things so much as referring to greater or lesser inclusive categories of activities, ideas, behaviours etc.. This difference in categorisation or concept bounding was particularly reflected in their use, vis-a-vis the researcher's interpretation, of the term "Total Quality".

Given that the Northfield plant was formally included in the sample at the deductive stage of the research process , the distinction between **emic** categories ("units of meaning drawn from the culture bearers themselves") and **etic** categories (" which may have meaning for researchers but need not have meaning for the people of the specific culture under study" Gladwin 1989 P9) was not explored since the hypothesis testing stage had been reached. Whilst in the theory building stage, great emphasis was placed on constructing a concept of TQ that reflected mangers' understandings, the grounded concepts and hypotheses induced in that stage were then applied to cases outside the original "good practice" sample without regard for context sensitivity.

The issue raised here is whether the phenomenon, in this case Total Quality implementation, can be assumed to be generic across differing contexts. The research sample indicated that successful TQ implementors defined their world through a TQ lens. It seemed that all company activity was described in terms of quality management activities. I have already mentioned how Northfield managers moved abruptly between talking about TQ implementation to discussing other managerial domains. (See Chapter 2). This suggests that managers' interpretation of TQ at Northfield was of a different conceptual order from that prevailing in benchmark companies.   It was not a core interpretive device, a generative metaphor, a key construct, a "causal variable".

It could be observed, of course, that the reason for Northfield managers' disenchantment

with their TQ performance stems directly from its low key conceptualisation. But this tautology does not help explain why TQ, as conceptualised in many companies, was not a formative influence in Northfield. The presenting research agenda now seemed to be to explain the significance of TQ in Northfield. If the research project's now taken-for-granted definition of the phenomenon (TQ implementation) was not relevant to Northfield's context, could the theory generated by the research offer any "explanation" of that phenomenon?

Gill and Johnson describe Eisenhardt's blueprint for building theory from case study research as essentially similar to the inductive approach designed by Bloor (1976/78). Bloor sought to overcome "the" criticism often lodged against inductive methods ie. that they generate necessary but not sufficient conditions for the phenomena to be explained. This criticism arises because it is thought induction

> "fails to analyse situations in which the phenomena do not occur." (Gill and Johnson 1991 P117)

Bloor's solution was to introduce a quasi experimental approach to inductive case study work by "controlling" for commonality and deviancy of phenomenon characteristics across cases (Eisenhardt's cross- and within-case comparisons). In this way, variance in the phenomenon can be explained by reference to the unique "sufficient" conditions of any particular case.

Similarly, claims to the generalisability of "the findings" to populations greater than those cases studied are usually made by coping with the issue of representativeness through some form of theoretical sampling technique (Pettigrew 1985) or by limiting inductive case study work to the exploratory stages of a research process in which constructs and categories are subsequently quantified and surveyed

Discussion about the relationship between the specific and the general, the local and the universal, are usually conducted under the heading of "methods" - a branch of epistemology. Advice to the researcher appears to be - concern yourself with **how** you are going to study something, how you know what you know, and "the phenomenon" will take care of itself.

Leaving aside, for a moment, the question of attributing causation to particular contextual features of a case, it seems to me that a critical issue not addressed in the case study literature is that of the initial definition of the phenomenon - its ontology. If the validity of case studies is to be judged on their representativeness, since "The principle criticism of case studies in research is that they are unrepresentative." (Smith 1989), of what must they be deemed representative ? What is the unit of analysis? What is being studied? This issue is considered further with respect to cultural analysis in chapter 4.

For Eisenhardt, Miles and Huberman and Bloor it is "the phenomenon". Described by Miles and Huberman as a "bounded context" (1984), the phenomenon is conventionally defined at the beginning of the research process. Representativeness then becomes a matter of identifying other similar contexts, or phenomenon habitats, which might vary in specifiable and observable ways and of conceptualising the common denominators in and the variance producing attributes of each context. Several species of the

phenomenon can then be distinguished and explained ecologically. Through triangulation of method, sampling control and quantitative testing, the constructs, hypotheses and theories produced are held to be typical and hence valid.

But from the perspective of Cooper and Fox (1989), this quasi experimental, statistically informed approach to "the problem" of representativeness is part of the "subtly sustained myth" of objective organisational research (P255). They suggest that through a "socially constructed rhetoric" of "interpretive rules", a community of scholars/managers/scientists will agree to "suspend belief" and inscribe their research process as if there is a discoverable world "out there" waiting to be classified. The outputs of the research process, the "inscribed end products" (Cooper and Fox ibid) are then presumed to be isomorphic with the phenomena they claim to represent as "all the intermediary steps which made their production possible are forgotten."(Latour and Woolgar 1979 P51) In this way, argue Cooper and Fox, the outputs of research activity - descriptions, constructs, theories - shift from representing phenomena to *being* phenomena. The interpretive, "as if" quality of the research process is lost as the virtual reality of the constructed phenomenon takes on a life of its own.

In the process of constructing this rhetoric of interpretive rules, Cooper and Fox refer to a "point of stabilisation" in which statements **of** the phenomenon become statements **about** the phenomenon. So research statements become reflections of a pre-existing reality, a reality waiting to be labelled.

Perhaps their key point, which shows some similarities with Argyris' and Schon's differentiation between espoused theories and theories in use, is that it is in the public domain, or "front of stage" in Goffman's terms, that the rhetoric of valid practice is sustained whilst practitioners (researchers) simultaneously distance themselves from their own myth making.
The myth of valid practice (eg representative case study research), argue Cooper and Fox, is sustained through discourse - ie "the mode of representation of an activity" or "reported practice".

In organisation case study research this is almost invariably the article, book, or conference paper describing the acceptable face of this activity through its own socially constructed rhetoric.

As an example of the simultaneous sustaining and denying of the myth of research practice, Cooper and Fox reproduce a "scientific proto-joke' pinned to a lab notice board and reported in an article by Mulkay and Gilbert 1982.

WHAT HE WROTE.....	WHAT HE MEANT.....
It has long been known that.	I haven't bothered to look up the reference
While it has not been possible to provide definite answers to these questions.	The experiment didn't work out, but I figured I at least could get a publication out of it.
The W-PO system was chosen as especially suitable.	The fellow in the next lab already had some prepared.
Three of the sample were chosen for detailed study.	The results on the others didn't make sense and were ignored.
accidentally stained during mounting.	Dropped on the floor.
Handled with extreme care throughout the experiment.	Not dropped on the floor.
Typical results are shown.	The best results are shown ie. those that fit the dogma.
Agreement with the predicted curve is: excellent good satisfactory fair.	fair poor doubtful imaginary
Correct within an order of magnitude.	Wrong
Of great theoretical and practical importance.	Interesting to me.
It is suggested that... It appears that... It is believed that...	I think.
It is generally believed that..	A couple of other guys think so too.
The most reliable results are those obtained by Jones..	He was my graduate student.
Fascinating work..	Work by a member of our group.
Of doubtful significance..	Work by someone else.

Here we can see how rhetorical conventions belie the reality of practice. Representations of the phenomenon, and hence the drawing of inferences and conclusions from those representations, are derived from a socially constructed consensus that guarantees and prescribes what is to be considered valid. So, myth or not, the issue of representativeness influences whether evidence and hence hypotheses, theories and

explanations arising from that evidence are valid.

However, representativeness, as achieved through good sampling practice ie the following of prescribed methods, whilst at least rhetorically deemed to be necessary, does not itself seem to be sufficient to guarantee the status of theories as explanations. Smith argues that representativeness is "..a spurious basis for claiming validity" (1989 P56) and that rather than relying on statistical inference, we are more likely to rely on logical inference. Similarly, Mitchell, in referring to "the essential point about the basis of making inferences from case material", states that

> "the extrapolation is in fact based on the validity of the analysis rather than the representativeness of the events." (1983 P190)

In discussing the difference between logical and statistical inference Mitchell (1983) refers to statistical inference as

> "the process by which the analyst draws conclusions about the existence of two or more characteristics in some wider population from some sample of that population to which the observer has access."

Logical inference he describes as
> "the process by which the analyst draws conclusions about the essential linkage between two or more characteristics in terms of some systematic explanatory schema - some set of theoretical propositions." (PP 199-200)

Mitchell argues that in debates about drawing inferences from case study research, there is continued confusion about the demonstration of coexistence of features or variables in a population and the supposition that those features are logically related.

The divide derives from different conceptual positions. Using statistical inference, the phenomenon under investigation is empirically prescribed in advance and the characteristics common to all examples of the phenomenon in the sample are then "enumerated". (Znaniecki 1934 P222) Logical inference proceeds by intensive study of a case, or cases, the data from which is analysed and classes of phenomena are then induced through empirical saturation. Whilst theory building from statistical inference is based on representativeness demonstrated through "generality" (Znaniecki 1934 P251) (ie the identification of common features in all sampled cases), theory building from a logical perspective claims validity by identifying the essential features of particular cases and generalising them to a wider population.

The difference between the approaches is aptly demonstrated in recent research into the predictors of success for candidates in US presidential elections. The research, which demonstrated that candidates were more likely to be elected if their surname ended in a few specific consonants, was not acknowledged as valid for explaining the success of the latest election,although it did fit the theory, because it was not **plausible.**

However, both approaches to inference-making are subject to Bloor's critique of inductive approaches per se, ie. that they are capable of deriving necessary but not necessarily sufficient conditions to demonstrate an **explanatory** relationship between classes of data.

Induction, as a path to knowledge creation, belongs to the tradition of grand empiricism or "grand facts" to use Pondy's term (Pondy 1978 P69), when, by "being there" (Van Maanen 1988), researchers induct constructs and thick descriptions and, by analysis, produce empirical generalisations. Pondy refers to grand facts ("intensive, contextually sensitive case descriptions" P69), and thick descriptions interchangeably, leaving the term "middle range facts" to refer to the empirical generalisations not fully contextualised. These middle range facts or empirical generalisations become, according to Pondy, grand facts or thick descriptions when they are placed into "empirical context" (Pondy P69).

Pondy then suggests a cumulative process whereby middle range facts are accumulated into middle range theories and then through testing and shaping are raised to the more abstracted level of grand theories. The deduction of testable theories and hypotheses derived from grand theory enables the induction of further middle range facts and thick descriptions. This "circle of inquiry" is produced in Fig 1.

Figure 1. The Circle of Inquiry: Theory and Facts

Adapted from Pondy 1978 P70

109
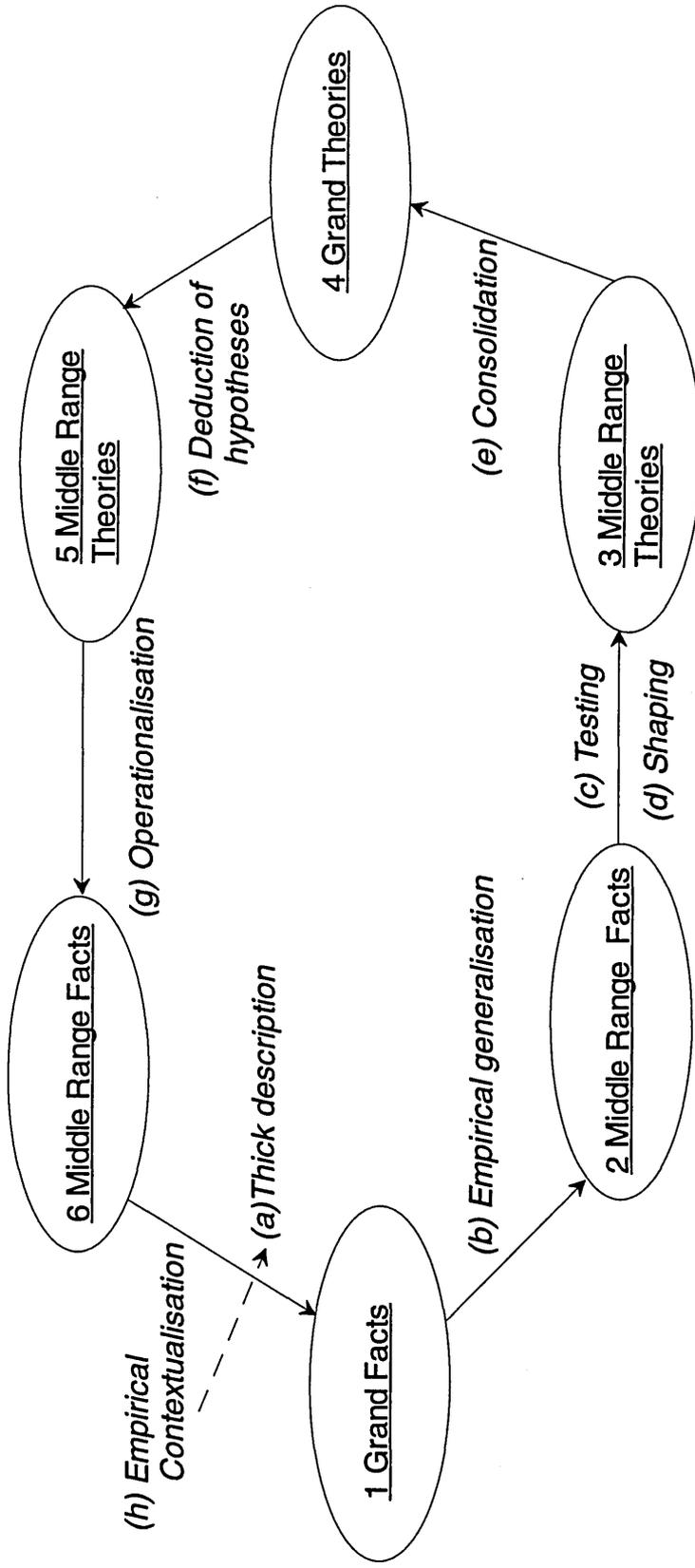
Gilfillan (1978) takes issue with Pondy's conceptualisation of Geertz's "thick decription" as synonymous with contextualised or grand facts. Gilfillan doubts

> "that many thick descriptions are generated by aggregating empirical generalisations... Rather they are usually collected separately, and using separate research methods, of which ethnography.. and some organisational case studies are examples... Thus I think it makes great sense to deal with thick descriptions not as inevitably part of a single great circle of inquiry, but rather as separable, with unique relationships to a variety of aspects of inquiry." (1978 P80)

Gilfillan ends his commentary by confessing some uncertainty as to the relationship between thick description and empirical generalisations. He suggests, however, that in seeking to build theory from empirical research, the relationships between empirical generalisations, middle range theories and grand theories in theory building are not the same as the relationships that exist between thick descriptions, root metaphors and paradigms. They are of a different type of inquiry.

Fig.2 reproduces Gilfillan's map of these inter-relationships.

Figure 2. Gilfillan's Revised Circle of Inquiry

Grand Theory

Root Metaphors, Paradigms (etc.)

Middle Range Theory

Problem Solutions

Empirical Generalisations (not "middle" range facts)

Research Methods

Problem Solutions

Descriptions (not grand facts)

XV, VIb, X, VIb, VIIc, VIa, V, VIIb, Ib, Ia,II, III, IVa, Ib, IVb, IVb, XII, XIII, XIV, VIIa, X

Key to numbering of processes
Ia Selection of data
IVa Shaping of theory (induction)
VIb Concretisation
X Assuring or belief supporting

Ib Selection of methods
IVb Shaping of theory (limitation)
VIIa Problem solving (tinkering)
XII Empirically sensitising

II (Re)interpretation of existing data
V Consolidation of theory
VIIb Problem solving (engineering)
XIII Abstracting (inducting from one/few cases)

III Verification of theory
VIa Derivation (deductive)
VIIc Problem solving (insight)
XIV Grand Inductive Leaping
XV Inclusion

The following diagrams (Figures 3(a) and 3(b)) aim to illustrate how my own research process shifted from the horizontal to the verticle axis of Gillfillan's map as thick description took over from grand facts. This shift reconceptualised the research away from the investigation of "a phenomenon" (TQ implementation) to

> "some understanding of the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs and so forth, used by members of the written-about group" (Van Maanen 1988 P13)

The group in this case are members of Pitch Products Northfield plant. This maintained the purpose of the inquiry ie. that of developing middle range theory to inform practice and was not restricted to representing, descriptively, one culture in a form intelligible to another.

Figure 3(a) The Process of Inquiry Stage 1: Researching The Implementation of TQ

Phenomenon-based Root metaphor: "TQ"

Grand Theory of paradigmatic culture change of which TQ implementation is a contextualised example.

(8) Deduced novel conceptual framework

(5)Deductions from grand theory

(4) Consolidation of theory by locating MRT in culture, strategy & sociology of knowledge literatures.

Middle Range Theory (MRT): Explanations of What's happening in TQ implementation

TQM2 implementation methodology: an engineering solution to problems identified in the MRT.

(1) Sensitised inquiry to particular empirical data

(7) Empirical confirmation of MRT

(6) Selection of further cases eg. Northfield

(3)Deductive reinterpretation of data

(2) Shaping of theory thro'induction

(8) Induced empirically valid & tested explanations & hypotheses.

Search for Empirical Generalisations "Doing TQ"

(1) Choice of methods informed approach to inquiry & hence data collection & analysis.

Research methods -informed by comparative case-study methodological perspective.

Numbers refer to chronological stages in the inquiry process

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Figure 3(b) The Process of Inquiry Stage 2: Understanding the Northfield Plant

Root Metaphor (A)
TQ 'a phenomenon'

sensitised inquiry

Root Metaphor (B)
Northfield 'a culture'

Idiographic
Ethnographic
Thick description

**Data not 'collected'
by formal research**

*Refocus
object of
study*

Northfield data set (B)

sensitised inquiry

LACK OF FIT

Local theory

Northfield data set (A)

Search for
Empirical
Generalisations
"Doing TQ"

Northfield as a validating case

Middle Range
Theory: Explanations
of what happens in
Implementing TQ

shaped theory

*Questionning
of methods(A)
and MRT*

*Rethink
methods*

Research Methods (A)
informed by comparative
case study perspective

Research Methods (B)
informed by ethnographic
perspective

We only get answers to the questions we ask? Looking at the piles of notes and company files that surround me, it seems that I often get answers to questions I don't ask. Drowning in data is a well recognised "problem" in case study and possibly most other research processes and researchers are advised on how to order, code and analyse their data to avoid being overwhelmed. In the previous sections, I have tried to describe how

> "a critical benchmark in any project will have been passed when one begins to recognise what questions should be asked." (Rock p107).

Informing any research agenda will be researchers' views about what constitues valid research. This in turn is constructed from evaluations of stakeholder interests in the research. (Easterby-Smith et al. 1991) The extent to which various stakeholders are represented in the process, how and by whom, bounds the research into particular methodological forms. Current wisom holds that these forms are paradigmatic (Burrell and Morgan 1979, Checkland 1981, Kuhn 1977) and hence mutually exclusive. Whilst much has been written about cross-paradigm research and meta-theory perspectives (eg. Gioia and Petrie 1990) empirical research continues to demonstrate that

> "..the facts to be explained and the very notion of explanation itself are paradigm dependent." Phillips 1973 P108

Hence Kuhn argued that the facts against which theories can be falsified are also paradigm dependent.Consequently, paradigm shifts do not arise from falsification but from a "conversion experience" Kuhn 1962 P157. We therefore tend to find that the decision to have confidence in a new perspective "..can only be made on faith" Kuhn 1962 p157 Phillips therefore advocates that

> "Because method in a sense enslaves us.. [and].. is antithetical to the openess of experience." (P164)

then the

> "abandonment of method may be a necessary condition for improving our knowledge" (Phillips 1973 P151).

In agreeing with Marcus that

> "the criteria for judging a good account have never been settled and are changing." (Marcus 1986 P9)

it does seem, however, that much of the discussion on the evaluation of explanations remains fixed around the verification/falsification dimension. (Popper 1961, Bacharach 1989) The validity of accounts then continues to be evaluated by the methods used to produce them and the extent to which those methods can be deemed scientific. Whilst this "specifies the cultural unity of the observers" (Maturana and Variola 1974 P464) it cannot be said to bring us any closer to a "true" representation of reality.

Explanations have their "fads and fashions" (Abrahamson 1991, Meyer and Rowan 1977, Gill and Whittle 1993) being subject to socially constructed conventions in the same way that the role of researcher is historically prescribed. These conventions change overtime and often relate more to myth then to practice. So

"In popular imagery the ethnographer has shifted from a sympathetic, authoritative observer (best incarnated, perhaps, by Margaret Mead) to [an] unflattering figure... Indeed the negative portrait has sometimes hardened into caricature - the ambitious social scientist making off with tribal lore and giving nothing in return, imposing crude portraits on subtle peoples, or (most recently) serving as dupe for sophisticated informants. Such portraits are about as realistic as the earlier heroic versions of participant-observation." (Marcus 1986 P9)

In anthropology, the colonial view of ethnographic fieldwork, described in terms of,

"the stranger stepping into a culturally alien community to become, for a time and in an unpredictable way, an active part of the face to face relationships in that community." (Van Maanen 1988 P9)

is fading as the privileged position of the observer is decentred. In management and organisation research this critical awareness is still awaited - not I think to be supplied by the current fashion for post-modern deconstruction, an aberration as far removed from the concerns and everyday life of managers in organisations as it is possible to imagine. (See Alvesson and Willmott 1992 for the start of a critique. Also Parker 1992)

Whilst Lofland (quoted in Hammersley 1992) and others offer criteria for evaluating ethnographic work (namely that there should be a novel, elaborated and eventful conceptual framework, rich in empirical material, to generate reader interest) and Marcus elaborates the institutional contextual influences (See Box 1) in doing ethnography, there appears to be very little, empirically derived, advice available on managing the role between researchers and their subjects. (The management consultancy literature, particularly that concerned with OD, does have useful things to say with regard to this role.)

Box 1:The Construction of Ethnography

Marcus describes how "Ethnographic writing is determined in at least 6 ways:

1) contextually (it draws from and creates meaningful social milieux)
2) rhetorically (it uses and is used by expressive conventions)
3) institutionally (one writes within and against specific traditions, disciplines and audiences)
4) generically (an ethnography is usually distinguishable from a novel or travel account)
5) politically (the authority to represent cultural realities is unequally shared and at times contested)
6) historically (all the above conventions and constraints are changing). These determinations govern the inscription of coherent ethnographic fictions."
(1986 P6)

Researchers may be advised to "suspend belief", to "enter into the world of their informants" or to distinguish between the research and the "human" dimensions of their role. But what does this mean in practice? Does it inform the constant struggle - to engage or not to engage?

Commonly, ethnographically informed research involves some description of the context under study from the informants' perspective. These "first order constructs" (Van Maanen 1988 P38) may include interpretations used by organisation members to account for the descriptions they give. The extent to which these accounts are granted the status of explanation or are themselves construed as data, from which "second order concepts" (ibid) are derived by the researcher "to explain the patterning of the first order data" (ibid P40), differentiates the use of ethnographic *methods* (a configuration of tools and techniques (Welke 1981) in inquiry from a research project framed by an ethnographic *methodology*.

The difference between method and methodology is clearly drawn by Welke and is represented in the following diagram.

Method and Methodology (Welke 1981)
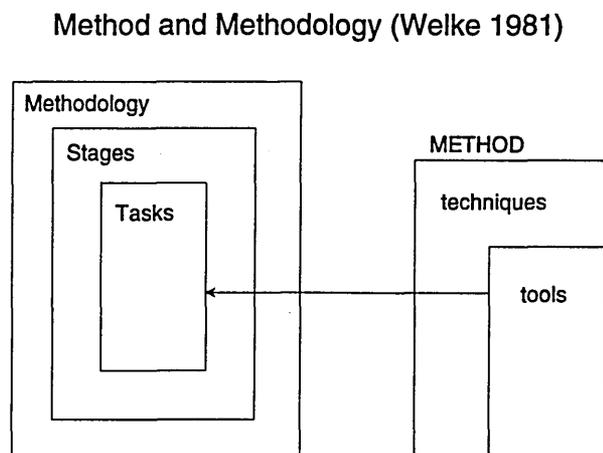
The difference between ethnographic methodology and ethnographic methods stems from granting emic, first order concepts, the status of explanation (methodology) as opposed to account (methods). Second order concepts, as "interpretations of interpretations" are "relevant primarily to the culture of the researcher, not of the researched." (Van Maanen 1988 P41) and hence lead to the construction of explanations from the researcher's point of view to satisfy a particular research audience. From this perspective, more time in the field immersed in the subjects' form of life does not necessarily lead to better data and hence better theory since, as I have discussed, the validity of the research derives from the logic of the analysis rather than from any intrinsic representativeness of the data. I believe the issue of whom the researcher perceives to be the research audience is perhaps the strongest influence on the methodological position adopted when generating theory from ethnographic data. Satisfying the validity criteria for various research or subject communities amenable to such data demands specific and differentiated researcher roles.

A recent attempt to discuss "Membership roles in field research" is provided by Adler and Adler (1984) Adopting a phenomenological perspective on ethnographic fieldwork they offer a typology of membership roles as peripheral, active or complete.

"Peripheral-member researchers participate as insiders in the activities of the group they are studying but refrain from engaging in the most central activities."

In active membership roles
".. researchers participate in the core activities in much the same way as members, yet they hold back from committing themselves to the goals and values of members."

"Complete-member researchers study their topics from the perspective of full members by either selecting groups to study in which they have prior membership or by converting to membership in those groups." (Adler and Adler 1984 P35)

The term "member-researcher" stems from a methodological perspective in which researchers see themselves as their major research instrument. Adler and Adler question the practical possibilities of meeting the research role demands required by the ethnomethodological community to "disengage[..] from family, job and friends" (Mehan and Wood 1975 P229) in order to avoid unacceptable influence on the research setting. They also wish to obviate the worst ethnocentric excesses of the purely observer role without requiring researchers to become their subjects. The member researcher role enables researcher's to experience the perspective of members by "repeatedly dealing with the practical problems members face." (Adler and Adler 1984 P34)

The peripheral member role probably most closely reflects my relationship with members of the Northfield plant. The role is described as being

"with but not 'part of' or 'like' the group" (ibid P37)
and that
"This distance is especially critical to researchers who do not want to be drawn into closer membership roles, yet whose potential similarity to their subjects leaves them vulnerable to such recruitment."(ibid)

Two forms of this role are offered by Adler and Adler. The first is essentially "social" and involves being in the same crowd, networking, attending the same functions, meeting informally, etc.. The second is that of constructing a viable member role *as researcher* "accepted by and affiliated with the group." (ibid P38)

Opportunities to develop member-researcher roles can arise through contact with an organisation gatekeeper. Adler and Adler describe how access to the research situation can be achieved through the sponsorship of such a member. Alternatively, researchers are advised to draw on "their personal familiarity and/or friendships with subjects." (ibid)
to access contacts and data that might remain elusive when approached from a traditional researcher perspective. Both forms are present in the description I have given of my contact with Northfield personnel.

The problems with such a role are many - perhaps not least of which are the ethical problems involved. (see Gill and Johnson 1991 for discussion of ethics in ethnography) As regards data interpretation, there is the continuing problem of never fully grasping the nuances of meaning that could be gained from fuller membership. Perversely, there is always "the danger" of being drawn into a more committed role and finding one's

epistemological position compromised if not negated as "out of guilt, obligation or friendship" (Adler & Adler 1984 P40) researchers are "enticed" into an active role in the research context.

A further problem I experienced in fashioning a member role was that of the changing roles and relationships within the management group I was studying. This meant my role often had to be redefined and politically maneuvered so as not to rise and fall with the fate of any specific informant.[10]

The approach I have therefore adopted towards ethnographic data is one that recognises that

"No one reads from a neutral position." (Marcus 1986 P18)
However, this is not a plea for the reader to excuse inevitable bias but aims to highlight the predicament facing researchers drawing on ethnographic data ie. that we are

"..always caught up in the invention, not the representation, of cultures." (Marcus 1986 P2.)

This issue is especially pronounced when

"ethnographic reports appear as retrospective accounts of a distinct period in a researcher's life not marked off at the time as fieldwork." (Van Maanen 1988 P9)

Clearly, the dangers of historical reconstruction are pertinent to the account I am presenting when some of the data used were not structured with this research output in mind. I have tried to present an argument that identifies the key influence this data has had on enabling an understanding of what was happening at Northfield to be achieved.

Part 4: The Inscribed End Product or "Writing Up"

I had thought that perhaps these comments should be in an appendix or note rather than in the main body of the text for they concern the text rather then "doing research". What does this have to do with methodology?

Much of what is written on methods in organisation and management research is limited to data collection and analysis. Drawing on Checkland, Welke, Kuhn and others, I have presented a view of methods as enfolded in frameworks of assumptions and belief. Methods are the visible tip of the methodological ice-berg. Consuming most of the land surface of that ice-berg are the end products of a research activity - the reports, articles, books or videos. These become the research long after the conference and seminar turns fade.

Any consideration of methodology should therefore also consider what has framed the

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[10] Gradual awareness of politicking as a way of life and as essential to remaining accepted as a peripheral member of the company led to an understanding of the culture of Pitch Products in a way that, I believe, would not have emerged had a more distant role been adopted.

representations of the research.

As there is rhetoric in giving accounts of managerial practice, the exposure of which helps to explain how meaning is constructed in organisation, so there is a rhetoric in doing dissertations. The characterisation of writing as post "data gathering", as coming towards "the end", of the research process and as being an essentially mechanical rather than a creative process is not sustained in practice. Many of my masters students and PhD candidate friends have commented that it is the "writing-up" that causes most pain, consumes the most time, and is the most unpredictable aspect of the research process. Could this be because writing-up is dissertation making par excellence? Perhaps "writing-up torment" is the implicit, but often unacknowledged, recognition that appropriateness of structure and form are the key dimensions for research evaluation and approval - for these make content? It is perhaps anxiety about the uncertainty of the structural rules, doubts about wishing to play the game in the way prescribed and having thoughts about alternative, experimental structures, that inhibits some students from putting pen to paper. Dissertations are texts. They not more or less true representations of "phenomena", they are phenomena.

A relatively ignored stage of the research process, apart from obsessive attention to detailing references and prescriptions about maximum and minimum yardage, "writing-up" can perhaps be conceptualised as a form of the research approach advocated by Morgan (1983) and Schon (1983) ie that of reflective conversation.
In trying to make sense of the data and its analysis for the reader, I find I continuously "engage in reflective conversations" (Schon 1983 P265) about my interpretations of situations. In describing this reflective activity in managers, Schon relates how

> "They surface and question their intuitive understandings: and in order to test their new interpretations, they undertake on the spot experiments. Not infrequently, their experiments yield surprising results that cause them to reformulate their questions. " (ibid P265)

This "process of conjecture testing" (Weick 1989 P525) is recommended by Weick as a way of mimicking the testing of theory experimentally. He argues that the validity of assumptions now enfolded in the data and its analysis (in pre writing-up form) can be tested by evaluating those assumptions against specific and on-going conjectures or "thought trials". To be judged "plausible" and given house-room as alternative interpretations of presenting situation(s), conjectures should give rise to the observation "that's interesting". Other possible observations("that's absurd", "that's irrelevant", "that's obvious") are not deemed to provide such potentially useful avenues for mental experimentation.

One of the sub-sets of "that's interesting " is the response "that's believable" (P527). Weick states that

> "many problems that spur theory construction originate in some form of narrative" (P527)

and that to judge a conjecture believable it should strengthen one of 5 proto-typical elements that contribute to narrative explanation, and hence theory-building. They are
             protagonists

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a predicament

attempts to resolve the predicament

outcomes of such attempts

reactions of protagonist(s) to situation.

Sections of this dissertation are presented as narrative, sometimes purely descriptive but more often reflective in which

"The writer's voice pervades and situates the analysis, and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced." (Marcus 1986 p12.)

Therefore a key protagonist in this narrative representation of the research process is the researcher and the predicaments to be resolved in that process are researcher constructed. The resolution of research predicaments entails an agenda separate from those substantive predicaments that arise from the focus of the research.

Commenting on the recent interest in writing as **the** activity of ethnographers and therefore worthy of analysis and deconstruction, Marcus observes

"The fact that it has not until recently been portrayed or seriously discussed reflects the persistence of an ideology claiming transparency of representation and immediacy of experience. Writing reduced to method: keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, "writing up" results." (Marcus 1986 P2)

As a consequence, the "literary" quality of academic texts tends to be viewed as decorative, a presentation device to make the contents more attractive. sometimes the literary skills of the author are derided as being more concerned with form than content. However, I believe this supports the naive view that message can be separated from medium.

"Literary processes - metaphor, figuration, narrative - affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered, from the first jotted 'observations', to the completed book, to the ways these configurations 'make sense' in determined acts of reading." (Marcus 1986 P4.)

So this dissertation, which started as a process of data gathering, observing and description and which changed to one of personal interaction, conversation with subjects and reflections on research practice, possibly "disturbs" (Marcus) the prevailing subject/object balance. A key limitation of this position is that any representation, any tale, becomes just that "inherently partial - committed and incomplete" (Marcus 1986 P7)

The practice in cultural ethnography of presenting the story as a collection of glimpses or fragments structurally enables the text to signal its incompleteness without suggesting it is a cursory or unserious attempt to understand what is going on. As such, this dissertation is not, therefore, an attempt to add to the stock of knowledge in organisation theory by plugging a gap in the prescribed field of practice as much as another voice suggesting that gaps are inherent in the process of knowing. Encouraging a more narrative approach to research in organisations, by acknowledging the validity, the reality, of partial accounts and moving away from the rhetoric of telling "the whole story", will, I believe, produce more managerially interesting and (therefore?) more theoretically valid work than is generated by continuing concerns to ape what is thought

to be good scientific practice.

> "Culture from this perspective, is less a discovery than a construction within which the method and the methodology are inseparable. 'Being there' remains consequential.... but it is now regarded as far more problematic than in the past.... how to translate this intimate experience into a piece of writing that is neither pat (formulistic) nor pointless (atheoretical) has become a most disturbing question for fieldworkers" (Van Maanen 1988 P12)

In attempting to avoid the Sirens of realism, it is all too easy to wreck the research process on the rocks of fantasy or the *shores of solipsism*.One possible strategy, for avoiding a retreat entirely into critical self-reflection, is to look at how one's conceptual conclusions compare to those of other authors engaged in research in apparently the same substantive area. This is the agenda of Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: Organisation and Culture

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the theory of organisation culture and focuses on prevailing conceptualisations of culture in the organisational literature. Many issues and debates have already been discussed in chapter 3, on methodology. Here I look at some of the models of culture currently on offer and at classifications of ways of modelling organisation culture. The chapter concludes by arriving at a specification or shopping list of cultural data and a schema for organising and analysing that data. This is utilised in chapter 5 in making sense of the data generated from the case study.

The chapter structure is as follows:

1. Theory and Practice: What are models of organisation culture for?
2. Researching Culture: A cultural studies approach
3. Issues in Cultural Analysis: An organisation studies perspective
4. The World of Organisation Culture
   a) Classifying styles of reasoning
   b) Modes of representation and inquiry
5. Four Perspectives on Organisational Culture
   a) The Smircich perspective
   b) The perspective of Allaire and Firsirotu
   c) Schein's views
   d) Martin and Meyerson's three perspectives?
6. A Framework for Analysing Northfield's Cultural Data
7. Conclusion

As current thinking about organisation culture is itself conceptualised as cultural, the inscribed end-products of a specific thought world (Douglas 1986), I have included some ideas about culture and the possibilities for and purposes of cultural analysis from another academic community - that of cultural studies - in order to reveal some of the logocentric characteristics of the study of culture within organisation theory. Specifically, the "anthropological kitsch" (Linstead and Grafton-Small 1992) that has come to dominate research and representation in this area is denounced as maintaining the subject-object divide between theorists and those "doing organisation". This in turn influences the types of models and the nature and utility of theory arising from research practice.

The chapter begins with some discussion of the relationship between theory and practice and looks at possible rationales for researching organisational culture.

1.Theory and Practice: What are models of organisation culture for?

Several writers have drawn attention to the problematic relationship between organisation theory and their experiences in organisation.(eg. Mintzberg 1975, Dermer and Lucas 1986)

For example, in describing his increasing disillusion with
    "the omnipotent fantasies which now characterise organisational development

(OD) and the largely phoney managerialist principles upon which the field is based",

Sievers (1990) declares that he has found many of the cognitive maps and models provided by mainstream management and organisation theory to be "inventions and not discoveries" (P126). He continues

> "Some of these inventions appear to be mere defences against a more complex reality. Although they are proclaimed as scientific truths, the majority of them seem to mirror the taken-for-granted fictions and myths of managers *and* social scientists... Despite the claim of a recent publisher's advertisement that a management text is no place for fairy tales (..) I have increasingly learned to read them as such - the more so in recent times when the search for excellence has taken on the characteristics of soap opera or musical." (ibid)

South Pacific may have been in Smircich's mind when she berated organisational researchers for colluding with managers in having
> "taken on managers' problems and beliefs and defined them as our own. Despite a rhetoric of objectivity in conducting research, the problems we select for study and the issues we identify as important are largely those that come to us from the concerns of the managerial class. For the most part we uncritically adopt the values, purposes and language of top managers. It is as if an anthropologist were to arrive at a South Sea Island and proceed to launch investigations to help the high priest overcome bad kharma." (Smircich 1983a P62)

Smircich concludes this outburst of indignation by suggesting that, before theorists offer advice and prescriptions on how to manage situations, specifically here on how to manage culture, we should begin by getting off the roundabout and asking "What's going on?". Should organisation research be directed towards the construction of better theories and practices to aid and abet the status quo or should research aim to question and change the existing order? Should (can) organisation research be interventionist at all?

Adopting a contrary perspective and far from worrying about the too cosy relationship between practitioners and researchers, Astley (1984) refers to the "discipline" of management as
> "an area for the interchange of theoretical ideas uncoupled from their base in managerial practice."(P261)

In the same vein, Whitley (1984) describes as "inevitable" the
> "separation of management research from the day to day concerns of managers",
a situation he believes is "unlikely to change" (P346).

His conclusion is based on an analysis of a number of contextual factors, including the multiplicity of audiences for the outputs of management research (or, to use Whitley's more ambiguous term, management "studies"). Taking a resource-dependence perspective on the development of management studies as a "distinct knowledge producing organisation", Whitley points out that control over access to research funding in the areas of management and organisation was (is?) relatively low and hence research was not subject to the paradigmatic constraints evident in many other disciplines.

Management studies has therefore developed as a

"fragmented adhocracy.. characterised by a high degree of task uncertainty and a low degree of coordination of research procedures and strategies between researchers and research sites" P 341.

He sees the field's "ambiguous" (p346) orientation towards managerial concerns as an inevitable outcome, a fact of life.

The fragmented state of the field and indeed difficulties in bounding "the field" are issues taken up in Burgoyne's recent paper to the British Academy of Management (Burgoyne 1992). In seeking to inform thinking about the policy and practice of funded management research, the paper asks

"What is management research?"

Burgoyne maps a three dimensional space which, he proposes, can account for "much of the variety of research styles in the management field" (ibid P8). The dimensions of the field are reproduced below:

Constructivist assumptions

Realist assumptions

Collaborative research

Unilateral research

Discovery ←——————→ Invention
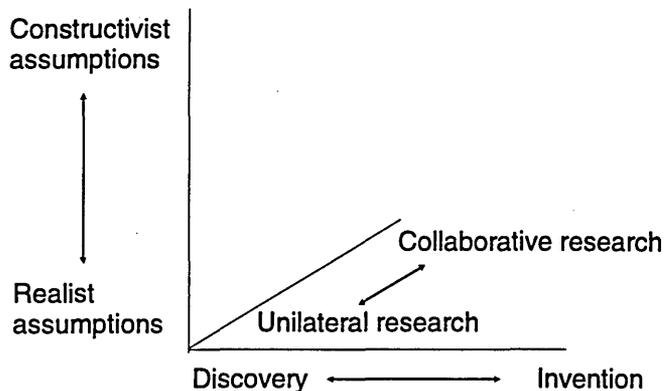
Burgoyne refers to the three dimensions of his model as differences in orientation and suggests that these possibly account for some of the "problems of compatibility" between research positions. Whilst acknowledging that the preferred stereo-type for management research is to be found in the realist/discovery oriented/ unilateral corner of his map, he advocates a shift towards a more action-research "research style". He argues that there "may" be a place for more collaborative and invention oriented management research which could lead to a "synthesis of the realist and constructionist orientations" (ibid P10).

The goal of this pluralistic tolerance is in fact to encourage

"mutual respect, understanding and dialogue.. between the different communities engaged in knowledge production and consumption.. (and to) move to a more integrated approach to management research" (ibid P13).

This desire to overcome the

"..substantial disagreement among contributors.. (to organisational research)... on

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such matters as the boundaries of the field of inquiry, the most pressing problems for study, and the relative usefulness of different research methods or theoretical systems.. " (Vroom 1967 Foreward x)

is nothing new, as this quote from 25 years ago demonstrates. Neither it seems has opinion about the root cause of this fragmentation changed very much when Vroom, at that time, diagnosed "institutional" and "disciplinary insularity" as the main reasons for
"redundancy in research output and inadequate coordination among the various approaches" (ibid).

Similarly lamenting the irrelevance of much research activity to the everyday lives and problems of people in organisations, and echoing Vroom's comment on redundancy of output, Handy, more recently, described the study of organisations as comprising a body of work characterised by
"..ponderous confirmation of the obvious and weighty investigation of trivia" (1986 Introduction).
The result, he suggests, is that organisations remain
"only patchily efficient." (ibid)

Tom Burns, writing in the same publication as Vroom, proposes a basic dichotomy between research concerned with the question "What is it?" and research addressing "How does it work?", this later question having as its aim the improvement of organisation performance.

Referring to organisation theory's roots in sociology (Hinings 1988), Burns argues that most research on behaviour in organisations is preoccupied with the first question. "What is it?". He conceptualises this activity as an essentially critical task directed towards questioning assumptions, general knowledge, truth claims and meaning constructions. He suggests that this questioning approach arises from "doubt", itself premised on the researcher's access to alternative and multiple perspectives or understandings. According to Burns, the process of researching "What is it?" then proceeds in an analogical way, iterating between the questions "What is it like?" and "What is it not like?". However, he argues, this comparative approach, with its reliance in the social sciences on analogy and metaphor, can only lead to taxonomies and classifications rather than explanations.(Whetton 1989) In consequence, organisation theory literature, like that of sociology,

"is littered with the debris of ruined typologies that serve now only as battlegrounds for that academic street-fighting that so often passes for academic discussion." (Burns 1967 P119)

For Burns, the remedy in progressing our understanding of organisation and the validity of theoretical work is not to abandon attempts to devise robust organisational typologies and shift to the question "How does it work?", but to devise comparable measures or "categories of relevance" (ibid P137) that can be operationalised across many different organisational and research settings. To progress this project, he suggests,

"The appropriate paradigm is a thesaurus."(ibid P127)

This idea, that answers to problems and dilemmas will be

"revealed if only the right verbal formulas can be found" (Hannabus 1986 35), is a recurring theme in management and organisation theory. The promise of a linguistically informed meta-perspective as a solution to the problematic of paradigm proliferation and incommensurability in organisation research has been debated at some length in recent years (Gioia and Pitre 1990). The discussion has been particularly lively in regard to the topic organisation culture in respect of which the questions "What is it?" and "How does it work?" continue to be asked - but by distinct and often mutually antagonistic research communities. The debate increasingly focuses on definitional and semantic issues (Barley 1988, Linstead and Grafton-Small 1992).

This chapter aims to enter into those discussions - both about what culture is **and** how it works - as a window on current wider debates about the aims of research, the relationship of theory to practice and the politics of knowledge production. As organisation studies has discovered culture comparatively recently, I would first like to present some ideas on studying culture from a tradition having a much longer history of debating some of the issues.

2.Researching Culture: A Cultural Studies Approach

My observations are drawn from the book of the conference "Cultural Studies Now and in the Future" which happened at the University of Illinois, I understand, in 1990. According to the book, "Cultural Studies" Grossberg et al. (eds) 1992, 900 people attended the conference which included presenters from several disciplinary backgrounds - speech communications, criticism and interpretive theory, english, anthropology, sociology, art, and religion.

The conference and the book were a response to "the explosion of interest in cultural studies" and sought

> "to identify the dimensions of cultural studies and its varied effects, to discuss cultural studies in relation to its intellectual history, its varying definitions, its current affiliations and affinities and diverse objects of study, and its possible futures." Nelson et al. 1992 P1

It seems that the conference and hence the book are premised on a view, perhaps even a mission, that cultural studies is "antidisciplinary" (ibid P2), drawing

> "from whatever fields are necessary to produce the knowledge required for a particular project" (ibid)

This comfort with contingency and the capacity to resist ring-fencing the field's knowledge base is captured in a reference to cultural studies as "an alchemy for producing useful knowledge" in which "codification might halt its ability to bring about reactions." (ibid).

Methodologically, therefore, cultural studies is described as being "ambiguous" and
"a bricolage.. that is pragmatic, strategic and self-reflective." (ibid).

Nelson et al. continue
"The choice of research practices depends on the questions that are asked, and

the questions depend on their context."(ibid)

Therefore, because the significance of questions and the possibilities for providing answers are context dependent, no methodology can be preferred apriori.

However, whilst cultural studies is represented as
> " a diverse and often contentious enterprise, encompassing different positions and trajectories in specific contexts, addressing many questions, .. and shaping itself within different institutions and locations" (ibid P3)

it is also argued that cultural studies cannot be

> "just anything".

An initial definition of cultural studies therefore suggests that it is

> "an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and sometimes counter-disciplinary field.. It is typically interpretive and evaluative in its methodologies.. and argues that all forms of cultural production need to be studied in relation to other cultural practices and to social and historical structures..." P4

This still begs the question - what is left out, if anything? What is peculiarly cultural about cultural studies?

The conference organisers respond that cultural studies is concerned not with any particular set of cultural practices but with

> "how different discourses and social and cultural domains are articulated together, how they can both restrict and stimulate one another.." Nelson et al P 17

Also, the term cultural studies

> "now functions as a term of convenience for a fairly dispersed array of theoretical and political positions,which, however widely divergent they might be in other respects, share a commitment to examining cultural practices from the point of view of their intrication with, and within, relations of power.... Viewed in this light, cultural studies comprises less a specific theoretical and political tradition or discipline than a gravitational field in which a number of intellectual traditions have found a provisional rendez-vous."" Bennett 1992 P33

Nelson et al. describe how the force of this gravitational field has resulted in a cultural studies boom - perhaps a matter for cultural analysis in itself. This has seen many hopefuls re-labelling what they are already doing to crawl onto the culture bandwagon, itself made possible by the development of an acknowledged rhetoric, or cultural studies *Newspeak (Orwell 1984).*

It seems that much of the rhetoric emanates from British academics for, in an article warning of the installation of *British* cultural studies as an orthodoxy, Turner argues that a once interrogative and critical enterprise is in danger of becoming pedagogic and universalistic. His concern arises not from the inadequacies or vagaries of British cultural studies per se, but from his contention that cultural studies itself is culturally

specific. Hence the export and adoption of European (particularly British) cultural theory into a non-European (in his case Australian) context leads to

> "the submersion of difference..the glossing-over of oppositions" Turner 1992 P649.

The danger here, says Turner, is that concepts and definitions, culturally specific categories of analysis, are laid onto novel political and national contexts which are then interpreted according to the received wisdom enfolded in the dominant British constructions. The naturalisation of this anglocentrism in cultural studies (epitomised by "the privileging of class over race", the functionalism accorded to subcultures, and the high culture/low culture split perpetuated through romantic notions of "the people" and "popular culture") is apparently leading to a homogenised global-speak, in which essentially British issues and solutions, ie. ways of seeing the world, are deemed to be generic.

Turner demonstrates this cognitive colonialism through the idea of "Keywords", apparently a book of some significance in the cultural studies world. He points out that the very identification of such words is the result of culturally specific processes of interpretation. Hence their export to different contexts suppresses the possibility for difference in those contexts.

McRobbie is also concerned that as cultural studies is becoming just another discipline it is becoming "much purer and less colourful" (P722) such that its potential for informing intervention and action is much reduced. She argues that retaining the "messy" character of cultural studies -in accommodating an amalgam of several different disciplines and conflicting theoretical orientations - will be its salvation. For it is this "disciplinary looseness" that gives practitioners license to try things out and to interrogate, and have interrogated, their own practices.

Unfortunately, one consequence of this reflective process can be that navel gazing and interpretations of interpretations of interpretations become the agenda. People and action then disappear from disciplinary discourse and practice as subjects exist only as "textual or discursive identities" (ibid P730) and the discipline's main project comes to be that of producing texts for audience consumption. To re-engage, McRobbie proposes an ethnographic methodology so that agents can replace subjects.

Cultural studies then is

> "a mode of study which is engaged and which seeks not the truth, but knowledge and understanding as a practical and material means of communicating with and helping to empower subordinate groups and movements." McRobbie 1992 P721

Many of these issues are pertinent to debates about the study of organisation cultures but they tend to remain implicit. Specifically, the following issues shadow many discussions and, because they are not well articulated, insidiously inform research agendas:

    the purpose of cultural research
    the appropriateness of methodologies
    how to bound the field

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choices about the validity and currency of data
what is the unit of analysis
authority of representation
textual conventions
relationship to other social and cultural domains

Contrast this agenda in cultural studies, this discourse, this particular "discipline's" mode of inquiry with what's going on in the study of organisation in general and of organisation culture in particular.

3.Issues in Cultural Analysis: An Organisation Studies Perspective

"The processes of cultural change are, in reality, *a grey area* (Greiner 1982)... It is difficult to ... illuminate the grey area of cultural change unless we examine the specific psychological and social processes through which an organisation acquires its values and become an **institution**... The analysis of these processes has been rather neglected in the literature." Gagliardi 1986 P119-120 [emphasis added]

Implicit within any text on organisation culture is a model of organisation (Smircich 1983). In the quote above, the model invoked casts organisation as a output of individual and collective value creating processes which stabilise and ossify into an enduring, supra individual structure - an institution. Culture is then conceptualised as something that organisations, *as institutions,* exhibit and hence its essential characteristics are stability, inertia, longevity, and homogeneity of structures. In this view, culture is described in terms of identity and, like any institution, maintenance of identity becomes the primary strategic concern. From this perspective, the key issues in managing organisation culture are how to resist reification and overcome inertia so that long established values or modes of engagement with the world and their corresponding practices might be changed.

In thinking about organisation, Hassard points out that

"Organisation has no implicit meaning of its own .. it exists only through the socially sanctioned occasions of its use - it does not determine action." Hassard 1990 P102

However, texts on organisation culture are frequently premised on some definition of organisation as if debates about the representation of organisation can be suspended or bracketed so we can get on with the business of understanding and managing culture.

But

"an account of any reality derives its rationality not from its direct correspondence with some objective world, but from the ability of its hearers (readers) to make sense of that account in the context of the socially organised occasion of its use" Silverman and Jones 1973 P63-64 quoted in Hassard 1990

I mentioned in chapter 1 how communication can be interpreted as the sustaining of already shared meanings. (see discussion on Robb's concept of institution.) Communication emerges as conversation is replaced by signs; signs which collapse

variety and prohibit discussion of differences.

In discourse on culture, signs such as "organisation", particularly when used implicitly, can be seen as "gambits of compliance" (Bittner). By invoking particular representations of organisation writers can ensure that

> "certain accepted rules of behaviour are inferred simply by using the term"
> Bittner quoted in Hassard 1990 P104

For Bittner, competent organisation actors employ concepts as mechanisms for producing order and control. It seems that within the discourse on organisation culture, authors use a similar technique to curtail discussion and debate. All too often we are invited to accept an unsubstantiated representation of organisation as a prelude to the presentation of some model of organisation (as) culture.

So, in a paper looking at
> "The implications for the concept of culture in organisational settings and future research on this topic",
Sackmann slips in, almost as an aside,
> "Given that organisations are purposive..."(Sackmann 1991 P140)

Whilst "Culture may be an idea whose time has come" (Smircich 1983 P339), this seems to have been at the expense of "organisation" whose time must have passed for there is very little concern in the discourse on organisational culture with this half of the concept. It has become almost non-problematic, synonymous with the legal or economic definition of the firm or a distinct sub-unit of the firm such as a plant or geographical site. Even in Smircich's paper, whilst organisation is constructed in various ways - as "social instruments", "adaptive organisms, "manifestations of unconscious processes" etc, the representation of those constructions is as identical and complete circles - suggesting the boundary and form of the phenomenon "organisation" are given and constant. As I will discuss later in arguing for a more open systems and institutional model of organisational culture, this neglectful and unproblematic treatment of organisation has encouraged a stereotypically anthropological conceptualisation of organisations as *small worlds* by those constructing cultural models.

Acceptance by an audience of the writer's prescriptions on how to manage and/or change culture depends on the willingness of the audience to suspend belief about their organisational experiences, their understanding of organisation, and agreeing to represent organisation "as if" it is the object rhetorically constructed by the writer. Key mechanisms in persuading audiences to reinterpret their realities are symbolic concepts and metaphors that are

> "over-laden and undergirt with complex layers of axiological meaning"
> Hannabuss 1986 P35

By drawing on

> "mental models of management and human behaviour which tap deep symbolic and mythical elements in the human character" ibid

audiences are invited into the world constructed by the writer/presenter.

Take the following example:

> "Managers have a core set of beliefs and assumptions which are specific and relevant to the organisation in which they work and which are learned over time... (and) held relatively commonly by the managers. This has been variously called ideational culture, a mind set, an interpretive scheme. a recipe, or the term used here, a paradigm."(Johnson 1992 P290)

The stage is thus set for a homogeneous, manager designed, content-contingent conceptualisation of culture which exhibits the paradigmatic characteristics of closed system exclusivity and entropy. Organisation members, specifically managers, become "paradigm dopes", as their creation, "the paradigm", wrings from them all potential for independent or novel action.

This conception of culture as paradigm combines (a) the image of the teddy bear transitional object - with managers clinging to the paradigm, thus:

> "Faced with pressures for change, managers are likely to deal with the situation in ways which are in line with the paradigm.. In other words they will attempt to minimise the extent to which they are faced with ambiguity and uncertainty by looking for that which is familiar." (ibid P33)

with (b) the image of paradigm as a Frankenstein-like monster that eventually consumes its maker(s).

> "Challenges to the legitimacy of..(the) paradigm are... likely to be disturbing because they attack those beliefs which are central to managerial life ... Managers are likely to discount evidence contrary to the paradigm but readily absorb that which is in line with the paradigm" (ibid)

These representations of culture create heroic and paternal roles for culture changers, tapping the symbolic and mythical elements referred to above. They also simplify, reify, and caricature culture.

The influence that implicit representations of organisation have on works about organisation culture, is a central concern of the research undertaken by Barley et al. (1988). The researchers reviewed and analysed texts on organisational culture published over a nine year period to try and identify whether

(1) there were any differences between academic and practitioner concerns with culture and
(2) whether these concerns were converging or diverging.

The research approach mapped the pragmatic context within which culture was discussed in two linguistic communities - the practitioner and the academic. Pragmatics is the study of how the connotations of words are shaped by the contexts of their usage. Barley et al., as a contribution to the theory/practice debate, are particularly interested in whether academic and practitioner discourses on organisational culture have influenced each other. This process itself is conceptualised as one of acculturation

whereby

> "the beliefs and practices of one community diffuse across the boundaries of another and subsequently alter the second community's practices and interpretations. (Barley et al 1988 P27)

In their article, culture is referred to as

> "primarily a cognitive and hence a linguistic phenomenon"(ibid).

Barley et al. mapped the correspondence between/ differentiation of the linguistic cultures of academics and practitioners in their discourses on organisation culture by inducting 22 indicators of "discursive context", or perhaps "concerns", about culture from 192 articles published in previously labelled managerial and academic publications, written between 1975 and 1984. Convergence or divergence of the perspectives taken in discourse on organisational culture by the two subcultures was then plotted. They conclude that

> "The data strongly suggest that those who wrote for practitioners and academics initially conceptualised organisational culture differently. Over time, however, academics appear to have moved towards the practitioners' point of view, while the latter appear to be little influenced by the former." (Barley et al. 1988 P24)

Practitioner Concerns

In their discourse on organisational culture, practitioners depict culture as an adjunct to or supplementary strategy for maintaining control over, and hence improving, organisational performance when specific economic and organisational contingencies prevail and when accepted forms of control prove inadequate. These concerns remained constant over the period covered by the research and are reproduced below.

In their discourse on organisational culture, practitioner directed texts expressed the following concerns:
Concern with rational organising strategies (references to structure, bureaucracy, functions)
Concern with exercising and losing control through and over others.
Concern with environmental uncertainty (escalating rates of change in technologies, government activity, demographics, financial instability, etc)
Concern with new competition (particularly Japanese) and unfamiliar management practices(again primarily Japanese).
Concern with gaining/losing control over/through the culture.
Concern with culture's role in enhancing social integration.
Concern with the impact of culture on organisational performance.

Academic concerns

Barley et al comment that initially the concerns in this subculture show far less

commonality than those exhibited in practitioner discourse on organisational culture. This "plethora of discursive frames" (P43) is explained in terms of the multiplicity of paradigms informing academic thinking about organisational culture.

> "Consequently, it was impossible to extract for the academic speech community a model that even remotely resembled a causal framework." (P44)

However, they claim that certain global themes were continuously invoked in these texts in the early academic literature on organisational culture. These themes are listed below.

Themes expressed in academic texts on organisational culture
Concern with culture as an alternative paradigm for understanding organisation rather than managing organisation.
Concern with culture as a source of social integration but not for the purpose of improving corporate performance.
Concern with culture as a *non-volitional* source of social control, for "while culture might control people, it was almost unthinkable that people might control culture." P44

Different images of organisation inform these two literatures. Arising from an American managerial perspective dominated by a social-psychology paradigm, practitioner directed texts reify organisation into an instrument for purposive action - the key concern with culture is then its contribution to managerial control. Academic texts, emerging from a tradition of cultural anthropology, adopt an organisations-as-cultures approach, treating anything smacking of intervention with suspicion and disdain. The key concern from this perspective is in understanding how we cope with culture. For whilst culture may be socially enabling - at the same time we are all victims.

However, these differences about organisational imagery and hence concerns with culture soon disappeared. For, whilst practitioner discourse has exhibited the same concerns with organisational culture over time, academic discourse, according to Barley et al., gradually

> "placed more emphasis on the economic value of controlling culture and on rational control and differentiation." (P52)

Hence, academic concerns and representations of organisational culture moved towards those of practitioners.

Barley et al. offer a variety of hypotheses to account for this increasingly instrumental conceptualisation of culture in the academic literature. The first is that functionalism, originally itself challenged by the more interpretive and symbolic approach to understanding organisation offered by the term "culture", simply reasserted itself and encouraged the recasting of culture as just another variable in the pursuance of organisation goals. The continuing hegemony of an instrumental and purposive representation of organisation, within other areas of organisation theory and much of

the discourse on practice, gradually entrained thinking about organisational culture within its sphere of influence. Correspondingly, the possibility that academics are in the pocket of the managerial class is considered as a possible explanation. From this perspective, it is argued, academic concerns are mere expressions of the interests of that class and hence a shift in academic concerns towards those of the managerial class is to be expected. Lastly, Barley et al suggest that the change in conceptualisation of culture in academic texts might not represent a conversion of the anthropological eye into a managerial one, but that the shift in fact reflects the massive growth in writings *by new writers* in this area (of culture management) in the early to mid 1980's.

This influx of newcomers, and the fact that they were able to find access to the published discourse on organisational culture in the academic world, may suggest some decline in the control exercised by the "invisible colleges" (Crane 1972) that constitute that world. This raises the question of how this change in authorial structure has influenced theoretical discourse on organisational culture and has this had any impact on the world of practice? do researchers and doers of organisation culture now speak the same language?

Whitley 1988 subdivides the field of management research into four types of knowledge domain: manager generated, consultant generated, academic generated and something he calls "principles". This refers to

> "popular writing about how to manage people, how to succeed in business, how to plan organisations., etc." P49

He distinguishes "principles" from other research outputs by their simultaneous public but maverick nature; their claim to reveal general truths, principles and common-sense which are not derived from or contribute to any "publicly recognised" research activity. The *popular acclaim* of these books (why is this a term of derision amongst academics?), these products of the Heathrow School of Organisation Theory to quote Burrell's revealing remark, probably has much to do with the fact that they are not tied to the conventions of funded academic research and hence their textual form is not esoteric. Their commonsense language then lays them open to charges of recycling commonsense! But they do derive, surely from "publicly recognised" research - that of managing itself. To repeat and paraphrase McRobbie's point, the voice of the agent pervades these "how to" books whilst subjects (or sometimes even respondents) still inhabit most academic works.

Few critics see the conventions governing the forms of representation of management research as a key problem in enhancing its appeal to practitioners, arguing instead for a change of content within accepted forms. The dominant form for gaining and maintaining academic credibility is the journal article, itself subject to an intensely prescribed format. The insidious nature of the conventions of text construction were commented upon recently by Gareth Morgan in a special addition of the Academy of Management Review (17/3 1992) on new directions or paradigms in writing organisation. Morgan's comment was that most of the articles submitted, and all those eventually selected for publication, complied with the prevailing conventional format of abstract, introduction, conceptual location and historical derivation, data, argument, discussion and conclusion followed by rivers of references, including as many as possible by the author(s) of the text.

The problem with this particular conventionalised format, with the significance it attaches to demonstrating the historical pedigree of what is being said, is the way the development of thinking and ideas is forced into an incremental and cumulative mould, echoing the development of knowledge in scientific disciplines. This leaves the voice of those with a relatively weak position in the academic power structure unheard. This includes not only young and/or original researchers who have not already published extensively but also managers themselves.

Textualisation, the transition from an oral medium to a written one, is described as "the heart of the ethnographic enterprise" (Marcus 1984 P264).

Texts are not structured by chance but

> "employ quite specific techniques.. in order to establish their appropriateness in the place where they are read.. and therefore need to be understood as invoking particular audiences with specific trainings and dispositions." Mercer 1988 P63

As management is increasingly conceptualised as an "oral tradition" (Hannabus 1986) this process of textualisation is also at the heart management research but, but unlike the flood of awareness that has gripped anthropology and to a lesser extent the field of financial accounting, it goes largely unrecognised as problematic. I find this bewildering since, given the constraints imposed by the tyranny of the journal article, one might have expected textualisation to be **more** of an issue in management and organisation research. The proliferation of "subversive forms", such as pamphlets, working papers, cheap paper-backs, etc. might be expected.

Whilst some heretical academics have published in literally novel form (eg.Popplewell 1990, Goldrat 1986 in the UK), and there are some conference working papers that do the rounds, there is not much of an underground in academic texts on organisation and management in the UK. The threat to accepted forms of representation comes largely from the voice of consultants.

The emergence of the video as a significant medium for communicating the messages of researchers (and consultants increasingly describe themselves in this way) to researched (managers) has far reaching consequences for the status of academic research on management and organisation. Like novels, videos either tend to tell a single story, of a company, an event or process, or else they provide several short stories, in the form of anecdotal case histories, to breathe life into some idea/concept or theory.

If it can be accepted that all representations are
> "constructed truths.. made possible by powerful lies of exclusion and rhetoric.. inherently partial - committed and incomplete." Marcus 1986 P7

then I suggest that novels and videos perhaps present themselves more honestly as
> "true fictions.. in the sense of something made up or fashioned" (ibid P6)

than do many academic conference and journal representations.

This is not to suggest that these endeavours are anything but serious in their efforts nor anything other than hopeful of influencing audiences' ideas and practices. What is suggested is that the very forms of the novel and the video, structured as collections of glimpses or fragments of experience, perhaps make more explicit to the audience *and*

to the author the incompleteness of the story. The story is not presented as the whole story but as one among many possibles. The authority of the author/presenter does not therefore drown or obscure that of the audience and hence perhaps the audience can engage with or enter into some discourse about the presentation and the representation more easily than is the case with an hermetically sealed academic journal article. Such consumable forms of representation enable author and reader to "commit lightly" to the images constructed and perhaps help to avoid the modernist pressures for closure and having "the last word" (Calas and Smircich 1992 P248) so often evident in books and journal articles.

It perhaps possible to distinguish between assumptions about knowledge as represented in academic organisation texts vis-a-vis that represented in management novels and videos by borrowing a tale from Marcus. He describes

> "the Cree hunter who (the story goes) came to Montreal to testify in court concerning the fate of his hunting lands in the new James Bay hydroelectric scheme. He would describe his way of life. But when administered the oath he hesitated. 'I'm not sure I can tell the whole truth.. I can only tell what I know.'"
> Marcus 1986 P8

In relating, in some detail, the research undertaken by Barley et al. and emphasising the text based world of organisational culture discourse, I hope to make the point that an understanding of current and historical approaches to the study and conceptualisation of organisational culture should include an appreciation of the social and political dynamics that structure the genesis, differentiation, proliferation and demise of representations *of organisation* and an appreciation of the different communities or "thought worlds" (Douglas 1986) whose interests are served by those representations. For

> "organisation theories are neither the product of immaculate conception nor reducible to ideological conspiracies. They are rather constitutive of differing configurations of interests, symbolic resources through which a sense of commonality is recognised and constructed." (Perry 1992 P85)

To grasp what is being said about organisation culture, by whom, and to what effect, I intend to offer some comments on the "cosmology" (Goffman 1975) of organisation culture as a system of knowledge. In keeping with Goffman's contention that

> "the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture, especially in so far as understandings emerge concerning principal classes of schemata, the relations of these classes to one another, and the sum total of forces and agents that these interpretive designs acknowledge to be loose in the world." Goffman 1975 P27

the discussion seeks to identify these primary frameworks to address the question "What's going on" in the world of organisation culture rather than provide, at this stage in the text, a robust definition of "What is organisation culture?". For the moment, therefore, I want to pursue the idea that organisation culture is the *thought world* constituted by discourse on organisation culture - and hence is itself culturally determinate. (Hofstede 1976)

Douglas derives her views on thought worlds from Fleck's (1939) concept of "thought collective". This is referred to as a collection of true believers who constitute a social group that has "moral density".(Douglas 1986 P14.) This is akin to Durkheim's understanding of organic solidarity in which groups of individuals come to think alike by internalising their idea of the social order and sacralising it. A thought world produces its own representations of the world of experience which then structure perceptions, cognition and inquiry itself. A thought world thus becomes reality-defining by producing a stock of knowledge which itself confirms the validity of the "shared symbolic universe and the classifications of nature" (ibid P13). Individuals are bound to the collective to the extent that self is constituted through the collective's social order.

This idea of the social construction of knowledge has more in common with Berger and Luckmann's views on knowledge as affective artefact than with Kuhn's more prosaic concept of knowledge as consensus or convention. Douglas' point is that, as individuals, we are continually engaged by offers from institutions or thought worlds to do our thinking for us and institutional knowledge structures can be very persuasive being entangled, as they usually are, in webs of moral and political significance. She asks, therefore, whether it is possible to escape from "our own collective representations" and "resist the classifying pressures of our institutions"? (Douglas 1986 P99) Her conclusion resurrects Durkheim's views on the supra individual nature of social order. We become that which we are labelled by labelling ourselves and we confirm the reality of apriori classifications by acting as if those classifications are real.

How then, she asks, might we break out of this closed system of given classifications and emotionally ladened knowledge, particularly since

> "Any institution ..starts to control the memory of its members; it causes then to forget experiences incompatible with its righteous image, and it brings to their minds events which sustain the view of nature that is complementary to itself. It provides the categories of their thought, sets the terms for self knowledge, and fixes identities." Douglas P112

Douglas suggests

> "A classification of classificatory styles would be a good first step towards thinking systematically about distinctive styles of reasoning. It would be a challenge to our own institutionalised thought style." P108 Douglas

It is to this task I now turn.

4(a) Classifying styles of reasoning

Before locating writing-on and hence knowledge-about organisational culture on any particular map, the structure of map itself must be designed and defended.

Going back to Durkheim, and probably beyond, organisations have been classified as exhibiting mechanistic and organic solidarity, displaying weak and strong cultures, with autocratic and democratic, male and female, and customer-focused and company-

focused traits, attitudes and practices. But what are useful, significant, interesting, dimensions to map in the world of organisational culture? Any attempt to map styles of reasoning in the literature on organisation culture must articulate reasoning about what? What is the most useful unit or level of analysis? Whilst many texts seek to classify the character, content, structures or dynamics of organisation cultures fewer have attempted a classification of modes of inquiring into organisation culture. (Exceptions are for example Smircich 1983 and Allaire and Firsirotu 1984)

The decision about what to map is like that facing school children noting down which cars come down the road. They can map whether they are red or black, 1.1L or 2.0 GLX's. Does this analysis give any clue as to whether blackness or engine size are critical influences or significant categories for accounting for what cars there are? Does it help us to understand "cars"? There might ensue many debates about the best way to measure blackness or the significance of choosing black and red over blue and white. But what does this tell us? It may allow us to predict how many black cars will probably come down the road in a given time period; or which red cars tend to be associated with what engine size on this road. But what does this data enable us to do? How might it inform action?

That of course can only be answered in regard to what interest we have in the object of our inquiry. An understanding of what influences which cars are on the road may require some appreciation that some are Fords and some BMW's and that different cars are accessible to different sectors of the population. Perhaps the preponderance of Peugot's has something to do with that companies recent sales and marketing promotion? The sudden increase in small cars might signal school leaving time whilst the overwhelming number of Nissans can be explained by the location and timing of the observation; shift change time just down the road from the Nissan factory.
But perhaps classifying the cars and explaining their patterns of incidence and change is not what we are interested in. Perhaps we want to demonstrate that there are just too many cars - whatever they are...

The orientations we have to our objects and subjects of study, what data we admit as relevant evidence in our inquiries and what we consider we need to know to arrive at an explanation become configured as "third order controls" (Perrow 1979) or "cognitive strategies" (Habermas 1972) that guide not only what we know but also how we come to know it. This notion of a bounded rationality, of a bag of "[C]ognitive components such as assumptions, beliefs, values or perspectives" (Sackmann 1991 P140) constitute the prevailing conceptualisation of culture in the organisation theory literature.

Sackmann stays with this prevailing view in defining culture as "sets of commonly held cognitions" (ibid). She describes these as

> "sets of categories that guide perception and thinking ...(and) help people to construct and understand reality." (Sackmann 1991 P34)

As these cognitive strategies and the practices that embody them constitute the substance of organisational culture research and theory, so the form and structure of theoretical models and research practice is similarly informed by cognitive frameworks which institutionalise "ways of knowing". These processes of sense making and the forces that structure them but also the possibilities for emancipation from those forces are central

concerns in the work of Jurgen Habermas (1972). For Habermas, the selective transformation of experience into data is accomplished by 3 modes of inquiry; (1)the technical, (2) the practical and (3) the critical. Each mode is concerned with a specific domain of interest viz.

1. an interest in the mastery of nature and the control of events; ie. an interest in work, task, performance and instrumental relationships.
2. an interest in intersubjectivity and communication; ie an interest in meaning, interpretations, social relations and affective relationships;
3. an interest in emancipation and subjectivity; ie. an interest in self, knowledge, and the institutional structures and power relationships that sustain the other two modes of inquiry.

These interests constitute "imperatives" of the human species and thus are not to be regretted, resented or argued away but acknowledged. Thus the technical mode of inquiry is concerned with our interest in predicting and controlling events in the natural environment and arises from our historical and ongoing confrontation with nature. The practical mode of inquiry is directed toward the achievement of a framework of shared meanings and values and is concerned with maintaining the intersubjective interpretation of intentions, values, goals and reasons themselves. The critical mode seeks the release of knowledge from interest. This conceptual catharsis, with its "emancipation-through-enlightenment" heritage, can be brought about through self-reflection and an appreciation of the ways in which individual thought is institutionally and hence systematically ideologically pre-structured.

At this point the reader may well be asking why Habermas should be brought into a discussion about organisational culture. What does his classification of modes of inquiry and cognitive interests have to offer?

Habermas was a student of the Frankfurt School - a group of critical theorists intent on overcoming the disciplinary divides in the social sciences and seeking to avoid the dogmatism of theories such as Marxism. The original multi-disciplinary membership of the Frankfurt Institute included

Hochheimer	(philosopher/sociologist)
Adorno	(Philosopher/sociologist)
Pollock	(economist)
Fromm	(psychoanalyst/psychologist)
Neumann	(political scientist)
Marcuse	(philosopher/social theorist)

The group sought to unite the analysis and critique of social structures with action to achieve emancipation from them by revaling their origins in oppressive ideologies - scientific and political (Geuss 1981).

Habermas continues to be marginalised in British organisation theory. Most recently a rather patronising and perhaps not unexpectedly pompous offering describes Habermas as

"the last modernist ... he represents one last chance for the discipline.... as we currently understand it." Burrell 1994 P1.

Indicting Habermas for trying (!) to be "both social scientist and philosopher" (ibid P16), Burrell re-serves this role for his own work recentring the world around what social scientists (or is it what philosophers) have to say. (Burrell's interchangeable use of "social scientist" and "organisation theorist" would be a matter of dispute and the cause of some offence in certain circles.) Habermas is thus cast as the leading exponent of a redundant cause. (Whose into emancipation now?)

Alvesson and Willmott (1992) have utilised Habermasian ideas of cognitive strategies in an unsuccessful attempt to remarket their version of what seems an increasingly quaint and obsolete view of the world - critical theory. Unfortunately, they succeed only in reproducing their own agendas, as I commented in chapter 1.

Habermas was concerned with the formation and the disintegration of the 'public sphere", that forum where issues and differences can be discussed and debated, without recourse to dogma or protocol. He argued that as large private companies and state institutions come to dominate the lives of individuals, so the public sphere is restricted, compressed and rendered impotent. He argued that this reflects and has been made possible by changes in the dominant form of rationality in our society. The legitimation of modern society rests on its commitment to progress through science and technology - a technological or purposive-rational rationality- which objectifies the world and tests ideas primarily against criteria of control. So political decision making loses its chief concern - that of the relationship of the individual to society - and is directed almost entirely towards the solution of technical "problems" to enhance the functioning of a given system.

Habermas does not argue against technical reason and does not decry the resulting empirical-analytic knowledge as subversive, oppressive or alienating. With his German Marxian heritage, he acknowledges it as an expression of the human condition. However, he is concerned that technical reason, in his view, now constitutes the only type of knowledge that guides action.

> "Any theory that relates to practices other than by extending and rationalising our control over natural and social processes stands convicted of ideology. The social potential of theory is reduced to the power of technical control. Its potential for enlightened actions, in the historical meaning of the term, disappears." Habermas quoted in McCarthy 1984 P7 (This corresponds to Feyerabend's point that the potentials of other rationalities remain inaccessible because we remain *stuck in the mud* of a single logic.)

To recapture a concern with "practice" - or how individuals might relate to and understand each other and the state - requires the

> "removal of obstacles to communication, leading not to the better functioning of the social system but to the creation of conditions for unrestricted discussion and democratic resolution of practical issues." Thompson and Held 1982 P6

For Habermas such historical and hermeneutic knowledge, arising from the pursuit of intersubjective understanding, is possible through ordinary, rather than scientific, language if such discourse is unrestrained by the productive interests of technical rationality.

The dominance of technical rationality means decisions become "depoliticised" or separated from their value base as they can be evaluated from only one perspective. This separation of the discourse on values (the political domain of what is practicable, desirable and worthwhile) from the discussion on production (what is possible and efficient) sees

> "new technical capacities erupt without preparation into existing forms of life activity and conduct" Habermas 1970 P59

This is a key issue in Habermas' work and concerns the relationship between values (the political) and techniques (the possible) in sustaining rationalities. For, if values are not enacted, perhaps because appropriate techniques are unavailable or even unimaginable, they may die out. Conversely, new techniques and methods may give rise to new contexts which are unexplored and unimagined by existing values. Do traditional values then yield to new rationalities in support of new productive possibilities or are those possibilities "constrained" by old values? And how might we decide whether we should rejoice in or deplore these developments? Can and should the possible be controlled by the desirable - and from whose perspective?

For Habermas this is the domain of the critical social sciences whose emancipatory interest is directed towards exposing the frameworks

> "in which action and communication are systematically distorted by the exercise of power and repression." Thompson and Held 1982 P8

Habermas was strongly influenced by Freud's concern to reveal the "unrecognised dependencies" of our actions, through self reflection, as the route to emancipation. So by "comprehending the context of its own genesis, the self formative process of which it itself is the outcome", (McCarthy P80) critical consciousness can disclose the institutional and non-transparent frameworks of knowledge. (However, Habermas was also aware that *knowing thyself* could also be "false consciousness" subject to the same forces of power and ideology as other modes of inquiry.)

Habermas' efforts to outline a critical science were founded on a belief that awareness of the institutional structure of knowledge can lead to its transcendence. For, whilst work, producing technical knowledge, and communication, with its construction of interpretive understanding, are regarded as invariant, ideology, in the form of systematically distorted knowledge, is not invariant and hence can potentially be transcended.

These matters of immanence and transcendence, what is changeable and can be changed and what is essence and enduring; what comprises knowledge and whether it is explicit or tacit, shared or owned, and used to liberate or control, inform much discussion on organisation culture. Habermas did not judge the knowledge produced by the three modes of inquiry to be superior in any way, one to the other, but sees them as supplementary. His theory of cognitive interests sought to reinstate "forgotten" rationalities (particularly the more "anthropological" subjective and intersubjective orientations as distinct from the technical - see Tsoukas 1992 P62) as credible guides to action rather than to replace the hegemony of one rationality by another. In Habermas' classification of reasoning styles, any particular knowledge domain thus

arises primarily from one or a combination of three generic interests. These interests then become translated or configured into cognitive strategies and knowledge structures. The domination of inquiry by the technical mode, Habermas felt, was a cause for concern because it prematurely closed debate about the change agenda, constraining social change to the application of techniques to improve the existing social and political status quo in order to further control instrumental relationships.

It is within this Habermasian framework of "modes of inquiry", or cognitive engagements with the world, with their resulting interests in

1. the control of work (corresponding to the idea of a functional corporate culture),
2. the achievement of collective understanding (evidenced in conceptualisations of organisations as small worlds), and
3. the role of institutional power (a perspective not well represented but seen in spurts of marxist, critical theory and structurationist inspired works on organisation culture),

that I wish to discuss some of the work on organisation culture in the management and organisation theory literature. (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992 P189, following Harre, proposes a similar framework for portraying organisational life - the practical, the expressive or symbolic, and the political order).

I share some of the same aims as Habermas, particularly those concerning the reinstatement of forgotten rationalities. In my case the agenda is to reinstate the institutional perspective in organisation culture theory to balance the anthropologically informed rationality which currently prevails. Awareness of how my knowledge is structured and informed by institutionalised frameworks is essential to this project and thus shares the Habermasian concern for critical self-reflection. However, I part company with Habermas in his conviction that the institutional structure of knowledge can be transcended. I believe it can, and is being, *transformed* but that this change concerns the transformation of one institutional logic into another (Scott 1986). Hence I must agree with Habermas' idea of progress as "utopian" (Burrell 1994) and, of course, modernist but I do not think this negates the utility of his ideas for exploring and classifying ways of thinking about a particular world and for revealing the institutional frameworks which privilege some representations, and hence knowledge, over others (Geuss 1981).

The next section offers an appreciation of the selective and partial character of current representations of organisational culture as a way of understanding the continuing "paradigm debate" (Ackroyd 1992) about culture in organisation theory. Drawing on Martin and Meyerson's concept of cultural ambiguity (1986, 1988), a more complex model of organisational culture is constructed which problematises the prevailing conceptualisation of culture in organisation theory as "sets of commonly held cognitions" (Sackmann 1991, Schein 1985, Argyris 1989, Smircich 1983) or more colloquially *the way we do things around here* (Deal and Kennedy 1982). Then in the following chapter I return to the case study to seek an empirical answer to the following questions:

a) Which, if any, cognitions are commonly held?

b) To what extent are they common ie. shared?

c) How stable is this pattern or distribution of common   cognitions over time and place?

d) What sustains and changes these cognitions?

e) To what extent are cognitions expressed verbally and explicitly consonant with those implied implicitly in actions, structures and arefacts?

4(b) Modes of Representation and Inquiry

G Hartman (1980) contends that critical discourse should aspire to the status of the literature that is the object of criticism. I understand by this that texts purporting to comment on and represent some form of life should have the requisite variety, interpreted here to mean complexity, of form and perspective, to discuss and represent that which is being discussed and represented.

The point can be made, perhaps, by reference to a child's description of poetry as

"writing with big spaces all round the edge of the page".

Whilst no one can argue with the reality of this representation it does raise questions about whether the representation is salient, or even interesting. This inevitably can only be discussed with respect to whose perspective is represented in the text and, perhaps more significantly, for whom the text is constructed. For example, Alvesson's reference to the triviality of much research in organisational culture as "coffee-drinking studies" (1985) possibly still stands (see Frost et al (eds) 1991). To distinguish trivia from non-trivia, Alvesson advocates that research should "proceed from what is significant for organisational members in their working life." (ibid P110)

It is perhaps the case that academic representations of organisation culture tell us more about the academic world than the managerial. The stereo-typical representation of managers as a rather simplistic, symbol-drenched tribe, exhibiting a more or less common consciousness and hence enacting locally varying strains of universal practices, may have more to do with the projections of academics than with anything that is meaningful to "academics'" subjects. Writing culture is itself "alive with culture" (Hofstede 1993 P81) and hence subject to, perhaps demanding of, interpretation and analysis like any other topic within the field (Marcus and Clifford 1986). But is there a field of study, a discipline, a domain of interest that can be credibly identified as "organisation culture" ?

Whilst some, in representing organisation culture as an organisational phenomenon, suggest not (Alvesson 1986, Loveridge 1991) I have chosen to conceptualise organisational culture in terms of its socially organised discourse. As such, my aim is to "raise awareness and choices about paradigmatic and epistemological alternatives" in representing organisational culture. Understanding current organisational culture research and theory, therefore, is initially seen anthropologically, as "puzzle work" requiring explanation (Lundberg 1991 P360). Why do we have the models (or as I will argue the lack of models) that we have? What are the cognitive strategies which systematically reproduce the small world of organisation culture theory ? What impact do current representations of organisational culture have on practice, or practice on representations?

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"the proliferation of research on organisational culture has continued unabated..[but] [o]rganisational culture researchers do not agree about what culture is or why it should be studied. They do not study the same phenomena. They do not approach the phenomena they do study from the same theoretical, epistemological or methodological point of view. It ..[is]. therefore difficult to clarify what has been learned..." (P Frost et al 1991 Introduction P7)

Given this analysis, who should be included in my discussion of the world of organisation culture? Whose voice merits representation and why?

In trying to cope with the complexity and apparent diversity of viewpoints and subject matter, I have attempted to circumvent if not surmount this problem by discussing three existing classifications of texts on organisational culture. The authoritative status of these classifications is indicated by their use in informing empirical work and the extent to which referencing them has become a convention. The classifications are those offered by Smircich, Allaire and Firsirotu, and Martin and Meyerson. I also wish to include a particular model of organisational culture in my discussion since I feel the pervasiveness of its influence cannot be ignored. This is Schein's depth model. Its popularity and entry into academic common consciousness was recently signalled to me yet again when I attended a job interview for an Organisation Studies lectureship. Four of the five candidates chose the Schein model to structure their compulsory lecturette on "How to analyse the culture of an organisation".

However, whilst much work on organisational culture claims validity by referencing these texts, in comparison with the discourse and work undertaken in anthropology and cultural studies, for example, the intellectual sophistication of these classic texts tends to remind me of Leith's comments below.

> *"Once you accept the basic principles of Blackadder (BBC1) you find it funny. The principles are these: upper-class people are all stupid; upper-class men are all closet homosexuals; life is based on the fact that the poor spend their time being bullied by closet homosexuals of low intelligence; people think about going to the lavatory all the time.*
> *The writers are clever enough to realise that strong, crude ideas like these work brilliantly if they are treated with enough sophistication. Many of the jokes, therefore, are teased out in gradations over several minutes.."*
> William Leith TV Critic writing in The Guardian 1992

In the following pages I briefly describe the perspective(s) of four works and look at some of their problematic assumptions. Practices and ideas that I have found useful in conducting a cultural analysis are identified. The chapter ends with some observations on how an apparent diversity of views on how to analyse organisational culture subsumes a single dominant concept of culture as small-world.

5. Four perspectives on Organisational Culture:
the works of

(a) Smircich
(b) Allaire and Firsirotu

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(c) Schein

(d) Martin and Meyerson

(a) The Smircich Perspective

In her frequently quoted paper, Smircich (1983) classified anthropological approaches to the study of culture and their corresponding conceptualisations of organisation into 2 distinct perspectives: culture "as a critical variable and culture as a root metaphor." (P339) The classification is well known and a detailed reproduction of Smircich's rationale is not required. However, since whether one is a supporter of the organisations-have-cultures or the apparently contrary organisations-are-cultures perspectives is a matter of professional credibility in some academic worlds, the genesis of this division is of some interest. The following descriptions paraphrase Smircich's five "modes of inquiry" that follow, she argues, from different conceptualisations of culture and organisation.

a. *Cross-cultural or comparative management mode*
Culture is constructed as an independent variable, imported by individuals into the organisational arena from national and international host cultures. Culture is only conceptualised vaguely, as a collection of practices, attitudes and beliefs which inform and hence can explain organisational life. Much of the research from this perspective has been concerned to compare working practices, managerial styles and performance across cultures. The work of Ouchi 1981, Pasquale and Athos 1981 and Hofstede 1979 in trying to explain why some national cultures apparently out perform others exemplar this approach.

b. *Corporate culture mode*
In addition to producing goods and services, organisations also produce cultures. Culture is therefore a dependent variable. Culture is conceptualised as shared values and beliefs, the normative and social glue that binds together the 7 "S's" of organisation life. Culture is therefore something that an organisation needs, or has to have, to avoid disintegration and decay; to maintain community. Culture is functional - and the stronger the culture, the more functional it is. Research from this perspective, typified by Jacques 1952, Harrison 1972, Peters and Waterman 1982, looks for affective rituals, symbols, practices, and artefacts as evidence of a single, shared world view.

c. *Organisational cognition mode*
This view of organisational culture as paradigmatic, a "master contract" or "set of rules" which informs members thinking and actions, is the first of Smircich's categories to be allocated to the organisations-are-cultures camp. Research is concerned with interpreting frames of reference (Schall 1983, Eden 1993), differentiating between espoused rules and those in actual use (Argyris and Schon 1974), and revealing organisational paradigms (Gerry Johnson 1992, Bate 1990). Culture is referred to as a filter, a way of seeing which is shared and, like paradigms in the sense of weltanshaaung (Kuhn 1972), not amenable to change through planned, rational action. Culture change is therefore explained traumatically or the result of changes in powerful rules-makers.

d. *Organisational symbolism* mode
Whereas the previous perspective viewed culture almost ideologically, as providing rule-like solutions to the problems of integration and performance, this perspective locates

culture in the web of shared meanings organisation members construct in their interaction. Research focuses on identifying what members value, what is significant to them, in the accomplishment of everyday organisational life. Organisation culture is thus conceptualised as a dynamic structure, comprising symbols which are to be read (S Turner 1983) deciphered (Van Maanen 1973) and interpreted (Geertz 1983). The idea of organisation becomes problematic in this tradition for boundaries may be fluid and changing. Also the idea of *organisational* culture is questioned as multiple and contradictory symbolic universes are contemplated. Through the idea of the management of meaning, this perspective is the closest Smircich gets to a political reading of culture, although she never articulates it as such.

e.The Organisational unconscious mode
Drawing on Bion 1961 and Levi-Stauss 1963, culture and organisation are constucted as artefacts of the mind - expressions of deep and universal structures over which members have little control. All organisations can therefore be classified within a limited number of knowable categories in which only the surface symbols may exhibit some variation. These archetypes arise as projections of powerful leaders (Kets de Vries and Miller 1986) or from basic characteristics of the human psyche (Mitroff 1983) or concerns for identity (B Turner 1971).

At the time of her writing Smircich declared that there were "few organisational analysts" pursuing a structuralist or psychodynamic perspective exploring organisational deep structure. This does not inhibit the inclusion of this perspective in her classification. Consequently, I find her footnote to the classification revealing:

> "These themes.. exemplify the continued interest of organisation theorists in the problem of order. Themes that would flow from a Marxist or radical structuralist orientation are not shown here. They are much less well developed within organisation and management theory because their fundamental problematic concerns questions of dominance and radical change." (1983 P342)

In describing how the culture concept informs us about organisation, Smircich also asks

> "What aspects [of organisation] are less likely to be attended to because we link the terms organisation and culture?" (ibid P339)

Her exclusion of any representatives from the political or institutional perspectives seem to make that abundantly clear. Indeed, I suggest that the more culture is used exclusively as a "root metaphor", as something an organisation "is", then the less likely are issues of power, domination, self and institutions to figure in its discourse. This is because thinking of organisations "as if" they are cultures emphasises longevity, homogeneity, identity, socialisation and community ie. an anthropologically informed, small world view of organisational culture is promoted. Denied are instrumentality, privilege and domination.

But perhaps to relate to organisations metaphorically is, at best, bizarre. To treat all metaphors as if they have the same ontological status, ie. non, is even more bizarre. For

> "..culture is not merely a metaphor for describing organisations or other cultural groups. Cultures exist; they are naturally occurring real systems of thought,

feeling, and behaviour that inevitably result from sustained human interaction."
(Trice and Beyer 1993 P21)

Also, research into rituals and other forms of symbolic behaviour
"..should not assume from the outset that ritual expresses and sanctifies the established order. it may do this but ritual may also be a mechanism for maintaining one group in power despite the will of others.." (Meek 1988 P468)

Further, whilst organisations may not *be* machines or organisms and hence these metaphors have no ontological status, organisations can *be* institutions of domination, exploitation, oppression and repression. To treat these representations as similarly metaphorical is to deny the reality of organisation life for all but the most powerful.

The prevalence of the organisations-are-cultures perspective in academic discourse has led to a working definition of culture which is almost entirely ideational - based on the cognitive and symbolic modes of inquiry as classified by Smircich and hence concerned with cognitive maps, interpretive schema, frameworks, paradigms and the affective, symbolic imagery, beliefs and practices associated with them. Her exclusion of marxist and other historical materialist perspectives, her disdain for functionalist and macro institutional perspectives and her naivety about psychodynamic structuralist perspectives has, I believe, influenced the low profile afforded to the reading of organisational cultures from these perspectives in the last decade. (There are of course some notable exceptions, eg. Riley 1983; Westley 1989)

For example, in five recently published books on organisational culture
* Czarniawska-Joerges 1992 Exploring Complex Organisations: A Cultural Perspective;
* Trice and Beyer 1993 The Cultures of Work Organisations
* Sackmann 1991 Cultural Knowledge in Organisations
* Alvesson and Berg 1992 Corporate Culture and Organisational Symbolism
* Frost et al.(eds) 1991 Reframing Organisational Culture

power is discussed in one, and is represented as something *individuals* have, akin to influence and interpersonal or group dynamics, in two more. References to Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Braverman, Perrow, and Scott are few and far between, if they appear at all, whilst Giddens, who does merit slightly more attention, is only invoked as a fuzzy solution to some structure/agency tangle.

In outlining her approach to the study of culture, Smircich argues that rather than researching organisational culture, researchers should "engage in cultural analysis of organisational life"(Smircich 1983a P65). Smiricich posits that this would shift

"our attention.. to the realms of meaning and interpretation, and we would see that we have much in common with disciplines in the humanities such as history, rhetoric, literature, and literary criticism... To know organisations in terms of their symbolic nature implies a dramatically different form and purpose for organisational research.. It also means a different way of understanding ourselves." (1983a P 58)

From my reading of the world of cultural studies, it would seem that organisation

research still has far to go in this regard.

Smircich contends that such a cultural analysis of organisation life would direct us to
"study social significance - how things, events, and interactions become meaningful. Studying culture means studying 'world making'." Smircich 1983 P63.

This requires the examination of
"not only organisation but also the cosmology and metaphorical conventions underlying language and action... [for].. we cannot know how ..[a] social organisation work[s] without knowing the world that serves as its context." Smircich 1983 P65

This essentially ideational anthropological perspective (Allaire and Firsirotu 1984) requires us to understand the cultures of organisations
"as symbolically constituted and sustained within a wider pattern of significance... studying organisations can mean studying 'organisation making'." ibid P66

At this point, Smircich asks
"Can organisational analysts become organisational anthropologists. Can we stand back from organisations and see them... not only as places where we gather to get work done, but as symbolic expressions, as displays of meaning..." (ibid P 66)

It is at this point that I find Smircich's anthropological perspective (definitely *anthropological kitsch* - Linstead and Grafton-Small 1992) difficult to swallow.

The exotic, colonial model of anthropology that Smircich advocates in seeking a "sense of wonder, awe, skepticism, incredulity and passion" about organisation (ibid P66) is but one model for understanding meaning construction and world making and, as I have discussed in the chapter on methodology, a somewhat debased model at that (Van Maanen 1988). To continue to interpret organisations as inhabited by strange tribes whose members constitute anthropological communities (be they symbolically, economically or politically structured) invites the representation and analysis of organisation culture as "community". This carries with it with the problems already identified above of characterising culture as enduring, homogeneous, identity giving and the product of socialisation. It also limits the potential roles of researchers to those which do not engage with the culture of interest but which are primarily concerned with observation and comparison ie. roles of official visitor or temporary (secret) interloper. (Adler and Adler 1984)

Further, by offering her approach as a critical response to representations of organisation life "as a concrete process" in which, through "social engineering or social physics" , social scientists and management consultants aim to help managers improve organisational effectiveness, Smircich confuses how **managers** may interpret and construct organisation life with the representations and constructions of some academics and consultants.

Two questions arise from this:

(1) What is the evidence for speaking about managers collectively - as a tribe,

community or disciplinary matrix, having a single world view and being stereotyped as occupying a "reality as concrete process" ontological position?

(2) If we assume for a moment that managers do in fact constitute such a group and do believe that organisation life is about reacting and adapting to "concrete forces", then is this not world-making on a grand scale and should we not be interested in it, as organisational anthropologists, per se?

By casting managers as non-reflective, cultural neanderthals, creatures of the moment, ruled by superstitous beliefs about environmental demons, technological gods, and the unspoken terrors of the shop floor, Smircich has disenfranchised the managerial voice from the discourse on organisational culture. In so doing, she perpetuates the myth of the privileged academic.

In spite of this, and I find somewhat surprisingly, Smircich offers a laudable set of prescription for how to undertake a cultural analysis of organisational life. She recommends that researchers

(a) *focus on symbols not culture* (symbols being "objects, acts, concepts or linguistic formations" (Cohen 1976 P67)) because symbols are observable and verifiable whilst culture exists in the head...

(b) undertake a *dialectical, not linear form of analysis* because symbols serve interests. Any study of organisation life must include some analysis of the power order as well as the symbolic order.

(c) include *psychodynamic dimensions*, to reveal unconscious motivation and other non-rational frameworks for understanding how meaning and hence organisation are constructed.

(d) use *metaphors of theatre, drama, text* rather then machine or organism to capture the experience of organisation.

(e) should ask what is the *purpose* of the research. Research in organisations is not neutral - so whose interests are served by the form of representation we adopt?

Although, I have argued, Smircich's representation of the old "concrete" approach to the study of organisational culture is founded on a romantic (Gergen 1992) argument projected onto an invented managerial community, its influence has been to preclude, in perpetuity, the emancipation of managers into the world of organisation culture studies. Managers are now permanently in the fish bowl; don't expect them to be philosophical about the water.

Further, in our compulsion for dichotomous thinking, Smircich's stereotypes, reduced to whether organisations "have" cultures (an ontology attributed to control-driven managers) or whether organisations "are" cultures (the province of worthy-scholars-motivated-by-enlightenment), have come to represent the basic theme in much academic discourse on organisational culture. (My experience is that this debate seems to have little currency with those doing organisation.) The perspectives are deemed to be paradigmatic and hence mutually exclusive. As empathy with the latter position (organisations are cultures) is held to preclude the possibility of planned intervention to manage cultural change (Meek 1988 P464), right-on (read non-interventionist)academics

and (read naively-interventionist) managers have come to be located in opposing camps. The result of this has been the ever widening gap between academics who write for other academics and neo- (or perhaps some might say pseudo-) academics who write for a "managerial" audience. Few successfully straddle the divide. These academic communities tend to be very tribalistic and may more properly be the subject of Smircich's dichotomous typology than the organisations originally intended.

It seems to me that Smircich's obvious request, that in order to do organisation research from a cultural perspective we (organisation researchers) should see "ourselves as subjects" and reflect on our own world-making, has been lost. Whilst her plea for an anthropological rather than a mechanistic approach to understanding organisation life has been heard and acted upon, the form this has taken has not meant a paradigmatic change in the way we research organisation culture.

Perhaps this should not be surprising for as Smircich herself observed
> "When a new idea or word comes to our attention, we see it from the standpoint of our own position." (1983 P57)

Unfortunately, it seems that the main legacy of Smircich's playing cupid to the concepts of organisation and culture has been to give verandah anthropology (Van Mannen 1988) a new lease of life. Not only has an ontologically outdated and methodologically embarrassing anthropological model of doing cultural research been sold to organisation researchers but the stereotype of organisation (as small world) embedded in the imported concept of culture has gone relatively unnoticed.

Further, whilst the small world image of organisation which informs much of her critique of functionalist and systems derived organisation theory implicitly enfolds directives about what is cultural data (eg symbols, language), and the objective of research ("studying world making"), little is to be found on what such a project might produce that would distinguish it from a sub branch of anthropology. Smircich does not offer an explicit model of culture or a methodology (in spite of the prescriptions listed above) to undertake cultural "analysis". In arguing that cultural analysis should seek
> "to explore different ways of seeing.. the process of culturing.. - that is producing and reproducing social reality in ways that are liberating, inhibiting, puzzling, boring or exciting... [so that] There are no authoritative conclusions."
> 1983a P72

seems very close to a cultural analysis of organisations amounting to

"just anything".

Smircich's concern to liberate organisations from their predominantly functional and instrumental conceptualisation resulted in her negation and denial of those characteristics. Whilst we may construct and celebrate interpretations of organisation as expressive cultural forms, to obscure the historical and political dimensions of organisation making is to misinterpret "what's going on". Smircich's agenda may be seen as naive for whilst we can construct indefinite readings of organisation and indulge in ever more fanciful and reflexive language games, these will have little influence on organisation making. Realities that are boring, puzzling or oppressive cannot be changed by seeing them differently. Smircich's ideational ontology is not helpful in a materialist world (Adler and Borys 1993).

One of the limitations of the perspective advocated by Smircich, being overwhelmingly biased towards a symbolic-ideational and privileged view of culture, is remarked upon by Allaire and Firsirotu.

(b) The Perspective of Allaire and Firsirotu

Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) also provide a typology of ways of thinking about culture from the world of anthropology and seek to relate this typology to the (then) "emerging notions of organisational culture found explicitly or implicitly in the management and organisation literature." P193

The key dimension of their classification divides those writers who conceptualise culture as essentially a behavioural phenomenon from those who construct it as an ideational phenomenon. This leads to two further distinctions:

    (1) those anthropologists for whom culture is a constituent of "mind" and those for whom it is a product of "mind"

    (2) those anthropologists who focus on static or "synchronic" characteristics of cultures and those who focus on diachronic or processes of culture change.

These dimensions result in an 8 fold typology of ways of thinking about culture in the anthropological literature. Allaire and Firsirotu then argue that the implicit assumptions about culture structuring their typology also inform thinking about organisational culture in the management and organisation literature. They classify writings on organisational culture using the same "schools of thought". They conclude that

    "These different concepts of culture lead to divergent and mutually exclusive notions of what culture in organisations might signify and portend." Allaire and Firsirotu 1984 P210

The key assumptions and concerns of the 8 approaches are sketched below, split into Allaire and Firsirotu's two major classifications: organisations as socio-cultural systems and organisation cultures as systems of ideas.

A. Organisations as sociocultural systems

i. *The Functionalist School*
Derived from Malinowski's view that organisations are cultural products serving the universal human needs of their members, culture is conceptualised as functional when it enables the whole spectrum of human needs to be met and dysfunctional when it does not. The human relations school (Mayo 1933) and models of self-actualising man (Maslow 1943, McGregor 1960, Argyris 1982) are part of this perspective.

ii. *The Structural-Functionalist School*
Organisations are again cultural products but this time as subsystems of a larger societal social system. The purposive character of organisations this time arises from the need for congruence with that social environment (Parsons 1960), congruence not only of goals, activities and values, but also congruence of rationalising myths and legitimating

symbols and forms (Meyer and Rowan 1977). The particular history of an organisation can influence the emergence and development of these institutional cultural forms (Perrow 1979).

iii. *The Historical Diffusionist School*

Allaire and Firsirotu state that "no direct equivalent" to this school is found in the management and organsation literature on organisation culture. It is a perspective that conceptualises organisations, as cultural forms, as products of specific historical periods and ones that may become "out of time", belonging to a past age and out of fashion (Rumelt 1974). In organisation theory, recent work on the diffusion of innovation (Abrahamson and Fombrun 1992) seems to echo these views.

iv. *The Ecological Adaptationist School*

Culture is a contingency factor, along with technology, structure, etc, that influences the chances of an organisation's survival in its socio-cultural environment. That environment does not dictate culture, as in the previous approach, for other factors can influence an organisation's values, beliefs and meaning systems. Organisations can therefore be subcultures at variance with their environmental culture. The extent to which this is functional is a matter for local and historical analysis but waves or populations of normative cultural forms are often described. (Burns and Stalker 1961, Thompson 1967, Emery and Trist 1973, Pugh et al. 1969, Hannan and Freeman 1977)

B. Organisation Cultures as Systems of Ideas

v. *The Cognitive School*

Culture is a functional set of cognitions, or system of knowledge, organised to enable one to act in a specific setting. Organisations are the artefacts of these shared cognitions which are learned over time and become encoded into maps, procedural guides, rules, roles, language etc. (Argyris and Schon 1978). These shared world views can also comprise myths and memories that close off the cognitive world from the possibility of change (Hedberg 1979).

vi. *The Structuralist School*

Organisations, as cultural products and artefacts, are to be considered as clues to the universal unconscious forces that structure human thinking and consciousness. That particular manifestations may vary due to "contextual factors" only strengthens the search for universal patterns, relationships, and forms. Work on the managerial mind (Mintzberg 1976) on cognitive styles (Mitroff 1984) and later on basic group dynamics (Kets de Vries and Miller 1984), all class specific organisational forms, structures and processes as local manifestations of generic human characteristics.

vii. *The Mutual Equivalence School*

Organisations are sites for the pursuit of individual interests in which individuals invest their values, behaviours and rhetoric instrumentally, that is to the extent that becoming part of a collective furthers those self interests (Turner 1971). However, this rational behaviour can become institutionalised (Perrow 1979) such that instrumental behaviour becomes intrinsically rewarding and constitutive of self. Action becomes structure. (The organisation theory literature holds this instrumental view of collectivity in some disdain, as lacking in commitment, as dysfunctional and something to be rectified. Often, overcoming instrumentality is seen as a precursor to the achievement of

organisation as collective. (See earlier discussion in chapter 1 on TQ and Robb's ideas about institutions.)

viii. *The Symbolic School*

Organisations are webs of significance (Geertz 1983), or meaning structures in which various values, norms, roles, interpretations and expectations are shared to differing degrees. Allaire and Firsirotu classify institutionalists as part of this school. They cast organisational life as largely given, arising from history and set in structure (Selznick 1957, Pettigrew 1979). Also included are phenomenological symbolists who describe organisation as constructed through continuously changing enactment in which definitions and values are confirmed or denied (Berger and Luckmann 1967)

Allaire and Firsirotu's stated aims are (1) to produce a typology of schools of thought from cultural anthropology, (2) to relate these to emerging perspectives in organisational culture, (3) and propose an integrative concept of organisational culture as a useful metaphor for studying the processes of change in organisation. Whilst they appear to have successfully accomplished the first two, the last objective is less well executed. The "model" they propose, constructs organisation as comprising

    (1) a social/formal, structural/ instrumental system,
    (2) an ideational/symbolic or cultural system,
    (3) individual actors with their idiosyncratic needs and cognitions, and
    (4) an environment of social, historical and technological contingencies.

The "model" is reproduced in a simplified form below.

The Main Constituents of Allaire and Firsirotu's Model of Organisation Culture.		
SOCIETY The wider social, political and cultural system	HISTORY Organisation's genesis, history, and transformations	CONTINGENCY Organisation technology and industry economics
THE CULTURAL SYSTEM Myths, values and ideology evidenced in rituals and ceremonies, language, stories and physical symbols artefacts	INDIVIDUAL ACTOR: PERSONALITY AND COGNITIONS Comprises values, knowledge, needs, motives, roles, expectations.	THE SOCIO-STRUCTURAL SYSTEM Formal Structures policies/processes & strategies, including goals, style, selection, training, reward, authority, power structure and control mechanisms.

As a shopping list of what data might be collected in mapping a culture, I find Allaire and Firsirotu's proposal very useful. It does not, however, comprise a model (Shanin 1975, McGrath 1982).I will be elaborating further on the nature and uses of models in the last chapter. Whilst (on the original) there are arrows connecting boxes of variables, no attempt is made to offer any explanation of the relations between these variables. Also, no rationale is available on why, for example, technology is reduced to a contingency, having the same causal status as society and history in its influence on ideas and practices. Further, operational problems are envisaged in trying to use the "model" for in describing the cultural system as separate from practice the possibility of practices having symbolic significance is denied. Lastly, whose myths, values, and symbols, objectives and practices are these if individual's knowledge, beliefs and behaviours are classified separately? Their disembodied status smacks of reification. It is therefore predictable that power and politics do not figure in Allaire and Firsirotu's cultural scheme other then as formal practices. Culture as the symbolic management of meaning, institutionalised in structure, is excluded from the "model". As with Smircich, their review and integration of the organisational culture literature tends to be apolitical and largely free of references to work and the instrumentality of organisation. It is the social and ideational dimensions that are emphasised.

Having conceptually, if not ontologically, separated these dimensions, Allaire and Firsirotu state that "in very few cases" (they claim an exception is Handy 1976) does the "problematic relationship" between ideational and social-structural aspects of organisational culture receive any explicit attention in the literature - much of the literature referring to organisation as a sociocultural system which postulates "harmony. consonance and isomorphism" (ibid P195) between the two aspects.

> "The M/O literature is remarkably silent as to the modes of integration of actors and culture in an organisational setting." P210

This linking of action to structure and the mapping of what is immanent and what changes is a key issue in understanding the events at Pitch Products' Northfield plant. It is discussed in Chapter 5 and draws on the ideas of Adler and Borys (1993) on materialist and idealist reductionism. It is ideational reductionism which informs Schein's model of organisation culture.

(c) Schein's views

Schein (1985) echoes the assumption of Levi-Strauss in believing that all cultures share the same basic concerns. But, unlike Levi-Strauss, Schein stated that he had succeeded in discovering those universal concerns from his study of five communities in the south west of America. Schein's claim is that this study, of immigrant and Native Indian communities, revealed a set of universal values in terms of which all cultures can be described. The set is:

1. humanity's relationship to its environment
2. the nature of reality, time and space
3. the nature of human nature
4. the nature of human activity
5. the nature of human relationships

Transferring these concerns into an organisational context, Schein suggested the

following questions should be deployed to help reveal an organisation's culture.

(1) Does the organisation attempt to dominate, find a niche, harmonise or submit to its environment?
(2) What are the basic notions in the organisation about time, space and how truth is determined?
(3) What does it mean to be human?
(4) What is the right thing for humans to do given the above responses?
(5) What is the right way for people to relate to one another, how should they distribute power, and in what way should people cooperate and compete?

This list provides an opening to start the investigation of organisational culture. However, its derivation from research on community culture, inevitably emphasising characteristics of longevity, high integration and widespread sharing of beliefs, means a particularly homogeneous, stable and impervious to planned intervention model of organisation culture emerges once again.

Schein contends that organisations are artefacts of leadership and that the culture of an organisation comprises basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of the organisation that are *reflected* in observed behaviours, group norms, espoused values, operating philosophies, rules of the game, physical layout and affective climate(1985 P6). Such assumptions and beliefs are
"learned responses to a group's problems of survival in its external environment and its problems of internal integration" (ibid).

However, unlike many other writers, Schein then problematises the idea of group or organisation and reserves the use of the term culture for

"a given set of people [who] have shared a significant number of important experiences in the process of solving external and internal problems... to have led to a shared view, and this shared view.. to have worked for long enough to have come to be taken for granted and dropped out of awareness... Culture.. is therefore to be found only where there is a *definable* group with a significant history." (1985 P7)

Schein, against conventional wisdom and the organisations-are-cultures camp, then states that the existence of organisational culture is a matter for empirical investigation in each company.

Schein's model of culture as comprising layers of artefacts, values and basic assumptions is well known and is not reproduced here. However, it is interesting to note that technology is reduced to the level of artefact. Technology is then not held to be a formative influence on organisational culture but an effect or consequence of cultural beliefs.

Values are concerned with "what ought to be", normative prescriptions about organsation, Through habituation and socialisation these can become imbued with moral and affective characteristics and become unavailable to reality testing and change. Values can therefore either represent "rationalisations or aspirations for the future" (Schein 1985a P17) and as such are only "espoused values", or they can articulate and

help reveal underlying assumptions.

Schein equates basic assumptions with theories-in-use (Argyris 1974)
"that guide behaviour, that tell group members how to perceive, think about and feel about things [and that] .. have become so taken for granted that one finds little variation within a cultural unit." (Schein 1985a P18)

Whilst many values can be consciously articulated and thus potentially changed, basic assumptions are "nonconfrontable and nondebatable". They constitute irrefutable hypotheses about reality.

In order to understand a culture, Schein advises researching the external and internal problems faced and solved by the cultural group over its history. These can be described as those concerned with task or work and those concerned with social relations and group dynamics. They are summarised as follows:

External Survival, Work or Task Concerns	Internal Integration or Group Dynamics Concerns
Why does the organisation exist? What is its mission?	To what extent are language and conceptual categories shared?
What goals are articulated?	How are organisation members selected, socialised and identified and organisation boundaries drawn?
What structures and processes have developed to accomplish those goals?	How are scarce resources such as power, authority, status, property, allocated?
How is success measured, monitored and controlled?	What affective style permeates relationships between people?
How are changes made to dysfunctional structures and processes?	What are the criteria for dispensing rewards and punishments?
	What superstitions, totems, rituals, ideologies and religious practices help members cope with uncertainty change and disaster?

Schein contends that groups learn patterned responses to these problems through two mechanisms:
"anxiety and pain reduction - the social trauma model- and positive reward and reinforcement - the success model" (1985a P24).
The essence of the first mechanism is that whatever actions, changes, or resolution is deemed to have saved the group from disaster or decay, is learned as the way to avoid future life threatening situations. Whatever is learned in this way can become compulsive and invoked to ward off any evil, imagined or real. Learning based on success is a very similar mechanism and subject to the same attribution effects. Schein, however, contends that this mode of learning is susceptible to reality testing such that the group will "give up" beliefs and practices that do not work. I think the difference

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between these two mechanisms is not very clear cut and indeed change, the giving up of learned practices, may have more to do with whether the group perceives itself to be the perpetrators or the victims of their fate. (see Banner 1986)

In mapping the culture, these learned responses to group issues of survival and integration, Schein argues that these issues will be manifest in different forms depending on the stage of development of the organisation - where it is in the cycle of birth, maturity and death or transformation.

In formulating such a complex and developmental model, Schein extols researchers
1. To not over simplify culture - it is more than what you see on the surface
2. To not forget how culture is learned and how hard it is to change
3. To not limit thinking about culture to human relations
4. To not assume a stronger culture is a better culture.

In terms of identifying sources of data, providing a comprehensive list of analytic and classificatory questions to ask and offering a rationale as why these techniques and models are valid, Schein's approach to the analysis and interpretation of organisation culture is probably the best developed and articulated methodologically of any (Hatch 1993).

Its limitations, particularly in its reliance on human personality and physical development as a metaphor for organisation, means that culture can be ascribed to only a very limited type of organisational group or more probably to sub-groups. Perhaps this is useful. It seems to have been forgotten.

Trice and Beyer (1993) identify some further shortcomings of Schein's model (P42).

1. Schein's "rarified plane" of basic assumptions is not very relevant to the everyday concerns of organisation members.
2. The logical, orderly list of assumptions is unlikely to match the way cultural beliefs are actually bundled together or cope with the emotion, ambiguity and contradiction often revealed in cultural analyses.
3. Schein relegates the role of symbolism in culture to surface artefacts and thus diverges from much anthropological work on culture which locates form and symbolism at the centre of culture development.

This last point is the most significant. It is a criticism of many conceptualisations of organisation culture and underpins much of my critique of current cultural organisation research.

Trice and Beyer also suggest that Schein's own assumptions are not made clear - particularly his methodological orientation. Schein's approach combines etic and emic approaches to understanding culture. He applies universally his list of categories developed outside the culture of interest yet advocates emic methods of prolonged exposure, contact and interpretation to explore how organisations fit those categories. They say his rationale for such an approach is still awaited - yet it seems to me all research must be of this nature unless the analyst is a native and using models from the native culture to analyse the data. For whilst I agree that the data should be collected emically, analysis, unless it is to merely reproduce the cultural interpretations of

organisation members (an impossible task anyway), must be etically informed. This is not to say that those analyst constructed categories cannot be sensitive, grounded, and indeed negotiated with organisation members.

I have already discussed emic/etic issues in the research methods chapter and will return to a consideration of emically and etically generated data and analysis in my description of an institutional model of organisational culture. Moving between emically and etically generated categories informs Martin and Meyerson's typology of organisational cultures and cultural research, to which I now turn.

(d) Martin and Meyerson's Three Perspectives?

Over the last 5 or so years, Martin and Meyerson have developed a typology of organisational culture incorporating the integration perspective, the differentiation perspective and the fragmentation perspective (1986). From an ontologically realist perspective, describing organisation cultures as *being* integrated, *being* differentiated or *being* fragmented, Martin and Meyerson have gradually redefined their typology so that it is now concerned with paradigms for *researching* organisation culture. They offer their typology as a contribution to the development of a "universally acceptable approach to the study of culture." (1988 P93). This is much needed, they feel, because

> "One culture researcher's assumptions are, to a researcher from another paradigm, evidence of epistemological naivety, methodological sloppiness, or inexcusable political bias. Such disagreements make... researchers .. unable to engage in constructive discourse.." (Martin and Meyerson 1988 P94)

They suggest that what is needed is
> "some metaframework that permits *insightful understandings* about fundamental differences" (ibid P95 emphasis added).

Drawing on their three paradigm model for researching organisational culture, they construct a framework from what organisational culture researchers "actually study", claiming that the three cultural manifestations most frequently studied are practices, artifacts and content themes.

Practices: Martin and Meyerson sub-divide practices into "formal" and "informal" groupings and largely conform to the structure/ dynamics split found in early organisation theory.

Artefacts: Schein's concept of artefact is deconstructed into (1)stories, (2)rituals and ceremonies, (3)jargon, language and humour, and (4) physical arrangements and dress.

Content Themes: These are referred to as interpretive classifications and draw on the notion of deep structure. Content themes are described as assumptions about the material world or as deeply held values and beliefs about people, things, explanations, etc..

Martin and Meyerson advocate that their framework is applicable to researchers of culture as well as to the cultures being researched and they use the framework to demonstrate how different interpretations of the same culture can be achieved depending on whether the researcher adopts a perspective of cultural integration, differentiation or

ambiguity.

They make the important point that different content themes (ie. different assumptions, values and beliefs) may be pertinent to and disclosed to different audiences. When recording cultural data it is therefore essential to map the various artefacts and practices with respect to specific organisational audiences. A relatively crude, but significant, division is suggested between cultural data to be consumed by organisation members and that meant for external audiences.

The value of the framework, in addition to clearly demonstrating that reading culture is a multi-perspective practice, lies in its revealing of consistencies and contradictions between what is espoused and what is practised. It also captures inconsistencies and conflicts within and between espoused rhetorics themselves thus shifting the concept of "hypocracy"(See Brunsson 1985) or "competing values" (See Quinn 1988) away from the abnormal towards the normal end of the behaviour spectrum.

These dis-aggregative qualities of the framework are probably its most useful and enable multiple and dissonant viewpoints to be represented simultaneously. To this extent, Martin and Meyerson seem to have constructed a soft systems model of organisation culture (Checkland 1981).

Hence the framework can be used to map the perspectives of specific groups or subsets of an organisation with respect to different issues or *root definitions* and, Martin and Meyerson suggest, trace the evolution of specific cultural perspectives by constructing several frameworks overtime.

I have found the framework helpful in trying to make sense of the mass of data generated about Pitch Products. However, I do not feel the framework goes quite far enough. Rather than maintaining the 3 models of culture and cultural research (integrated, differentiated and fragmented) as separate ontologies, why not fully embrace the position of ambiguity whereby

> "..any cultural manifestation is an equivocal stimulus, open to multiple interpretations, not clearly consistent or inconsistent with other .. nor fully understood by researchers or cultural members." Martin and Meyerson 1988 P115

The implications of recognising ambiguity are that

> "A culture ..cannot be characterised as harmonious or as conflictual. Instead, individuals share some viewpoints, disagree about some, and are ignorant of or indifferent to others. Consensus, dissensus, and confusion exist, making it difficult to draw cultural and sub-cultural boundaries." (ibid P117)

This seems to much more closely reflect my experience of researching culture in Pitch Products than any conscious shifting of perspective from integrationist to differentiationist, etc.. In adopting an ambiguous perspective the idea of culture is problematised and the extent to which any beliefs, values, practices and meanings are shared becomes a matter for empirical inquiry. Such an approach hence asks the question "Is the idea of *organisational* culture relevant to this context? If so, to what

I agree with Martin and Meyerson that culture must include practice and not be concerned solely with ideas and beliefs. Organisation life has material and instrumental dimensions which dynamically arise from and structure power relationships. To deny the presence of this historical social order is to push culture into the realms of wishful thinking and fantasy. A mapping of a symbolic field should therefore incorporate what people "do" since it is through "doing" or engagement that artifacts, practices and ideas become symbolically and specifically significant (Giddens 1979, Riley 1983).

Further, recognition of practice as not only the manifestation of culture as an ideational system but as culture per se frees the concept from its entrapment in notions of belief and community. As organisation members, we can act "as if" we believe this or that, "as if" we share some values or interpret events in a particular way. But this apparent commonality, this seeming sharing of values, beliefs and behaviours, can be interpreted as learning to abide by the expectations of powerful others, as learning to play by the rules, or as complying with conventions. It is in this sense that the idea of "culture as a metaphor for understanding organisation" (Smircich 1983) is most useful and most difficult. Many researchers seem to look for community (integration paradigm) or communities (differentiation paradigm) when describing organisation culture. The "as if" is lost and with it the possibility for conceptualising culture not as fractured or weak or divided but as of the moment - enacted in specific circumstances for specific purposes for particular others.

Conceptualising organisations "as if" they are cultures, whilst stating the obvious, is fundamental in liberating the cultural analysis of organisation from the anthropological stereotype currently dominating research in this area. The compulsion to borrow uncritically from ethnographic anthropology has been termed "the folklorist trap" (Berg and Faucheux 1982) and results in the representation of managers and other organisation groups inappropriately in tribe-like stereotypes. As the representation of organisation as machine or as person has become untenable, so representing organisation as community or small world must also be questioned. Organisations are not classic, romantic, closed, anthropological communities. They are also. perhaps primarily, goal-rational, political and material systems which are nested in and perhaps governed by social, and increasingly global, institutions.

If cultural data is interpreted not as evidence of commitment to community but rather as commitment to and/or compliance with a legitimated social order through which the organisational self is constituted (Douglas 1986), then research attention shifts from the content or pattern of the cultural cloth to seeking an understanding of how the cloth is woven and by whom. Understanding and interpreting culture then becomes a matter of revealing "deep structure", but in the sense of articulating patterns of legitimation (Giddens 1979) rather than diagnosing purely psychodynamic assumptions (Schein 1985, Bion 1961, Menzies 1960, Kets de Vries 1986) or collating descriptions of common (or divergent) behaviours and disclosed cognitions (see, for example, Peters and Waterman 1982, Deal and Kennedy 1982, Pascal and Athos 1981, Sackmann 1992)

This perspective of conceptualising culture "as if" meanings are shared (Becker 1982, Gregory 1983) opens the concept of organisational culture to interpretation as an instrument of domination by powerful groups and individuals for

"knowledge practices are equally power practices." (Jacques 1992 P600)

6. A Framework for Analysing Northfield's Cultural Data

It is with these ideas in mind, whereby culture is conceptualised phenomenologically and seeks to avoid the folklorist trap by empirically problematising the construction of cultural patterns, that I have organised some of my data from Pitch Products' Northfield plant. Using the conceptual categories suggested by Martin and Meyerson, an approach not unsimilar to that of analytic induction (Znaniecki 1934, Bloor 1976) was pursued, with the essential difference that explanatory hypotheses did not preceed data collection.

The most difficult task was that of identifying appropriate meta-themes so as to encompass as much significant cultural data as possible without abstracting to a level of generalisation that renders the particular context unrecognisable. I have inducted the themes of:

(1) managing
(2) who and what is valued
(3) the membership game:rules of play, and
(4) relating to the world outside the gate
(see Fig 4 following)

The omnipresent influence of Schein is plainly apparent, but so too is that of Goffman (1959, 1975) and Long (1958). As the subjects of my inquiry are managers, these themes comfortably sit with those that could be expected from a symbolic interactionist perspective concerned with self, significant others, the nature of interaction and the processes of socialisation into a world view or thought world (Silverman 1970, Van Maanen 1979, Louis 1983, Barley 1983). From this perspective, understanding organisation culture is about interpreting "frames of reference" or definitions of the situation (Wilkins and Dyer 1988, Checkland 1981) rather than solely cataloging specific practices or pronouncing on the functionality of core beliefs.

Figure 4. A framework for analysing the cultural data at Pitch Products' Northfield Plant.

CONTENT THEMES -------->	1.Managing	2.who is valued?	3.Rules of membership or Playing the game	4.Relating to the world outside.
Expressed internally				
Expressed externally				
Manifest in formal practices				
Manifest in informal practices				
Symbolised in: 1.Rituals				
2.Language				
3.Physical Attributes				

I do not claim that these themes have any general applicability or relevance to other organisations or other researchers. They seem to make sense for this researcher, asking particular questions about a single organisation, when construing culture as a symbolic field and seeking to organise and analyse emically generated data.

Those familiar with the Martin and Meyerson framework may notice that their category "stories" is missing from my application. In mapping the data I was surprised to find I had heard not one story, in my hours of conversation, in the form in which "story" is usually represented in the literature. ie. as celebratory and heroic tales of founders, or as catastrophe stories and fables with a moral imperative (Hummel 1991). There were of course accounts of events but these were usually of failure, derision, and a mismatching of expectations and experience. Also, the choice of eventful accounts changed from person to person. I found no evidence of organisation wide stories. I have therefore removed the category "story" from my application of the framework since it did not appear to be a relevant classification for ordering symbolic interpretations in Pitch Products Northfield Plant.

This perhaps suggests that the **incidence** of stories can itself be a useful variable, as indicative perhaps of the degree of integration and homogeneity of organisation culture, of its clan-like quality (Ouchi 1980) - or of its absence.

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The absence of story telling is perhaps also indicative of the low level of *symbolic competence* (Alvesson and Berg 1992) of managers at Northfield. I shall return to this matter later.

In addition to the thematic data organised in the framework, I also have included a section specifically on technology in the Pitch Products plant - how people accomplish work through artefacts, processes and techniques, to extend the relatively lengthy description of the production process already given in an earlier chapter. I have argued that work, instrumental and purposive activity, is often not considered a valid or key dimension of organisational life to sample when researching culture. Organisation culture researchers have tended to be more interested in "folklore" (Jones 1991), those anecdotes about ceremonies, celebrations, rites, rituals, games, proverbs, sayings, jargon, nicknames, myths, jokes, personal appearances and decor that help construct a rich picture of organisation life. Whilst I agree that these are all sense making activities and worthy of research attention, to argue, for example, that all rituals are equally salient to the understanding of organisation culture is perhaps phenomenologically excessive. As the doing of work consumes so much of organisation life it seems reasonable, initially, to study those ceremonies, symbols games etc. relating to work activities and then include folklore which arises primarily from social events or individual actions (Jones ibid). Imagine the long wall mining studies without the details of coal production!

7.Conclusion

In 1983 culture was hailed as a new idea

> "redirecting our attention away from some of the commonly accepted "important things" (such as structure or technology) and toward the (until now) less-frequently examined elements raised to importance by the new metaphor (such as shared understandings, norms and values)."(Jelinek et al. 1983 P331)

We have now lost control of this trope (Pinder and Bourgeois 1982). Worse still.. To some extent the study of organisation culture has become sacrilised so that the main concern of much of its discourse is "to defend all the classifications and theories that uphold the institution." (Douglas ibid)

Reviewing one of the earlier books on organisational culture and symbolism (Pondy et al. 1983), Turner describes how

> "we find a collection of writings which merely take the idea of culture and symbolism as they appear in a variety of current social science frameworks and transfer them across to the arena of the organisation." 1986 P106

Grabbing ideas, or more often concepts in the form of metaphors, is a common and systematic practice in organisation theory - and endemic to management practice. Describing and often explaining something "as if" it is similar to something familiar, usually something in common experience, enables the metaphorical term, because of its very ambiguity, to pass into common usage, accommodating in its imprecision a wide variety of meanings and interpretations. However, the political and ideological baggage integral to the term is usually not deconstructed. Hence much of the literature is silent, if not oblivious, to the pragmatics of "organisation culture" as issues of epistemology

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are ousted by lust for method. We therefore find the terms "interest", "self", "politics" and "power" rarely used in discourse on organisational culture. In fact, given the explosion of writing on the subject, the critical eye of self reflection remains curiously closed. (Habermas 1972)

In this section I have argued that the dominant frame for the analysis of organisational culture demonstrates:

1. a concern for thoughts over practices;
2. a focus on the social aspects of organisational life to the detriment of the instrumental or task and technologically structured aspects; and,
3. a naive and redundant anthropological model of organsation as community or small world, which largely ignores the role and influence of power, politics and institutional forces in structuring organisational webs of significance.

In exploring cultural analysis in another discipline and recounting the work of Smircich, I have concluded that an appropriate cognitive research strategy is to construct a cultural analysis of organisation rather than seek the analysis of organisation culture.

Also from a reading of Smircich's work, I have heeded the significance of researching symbols rather than looking for cultural data per se and of using metaphors of the theatre and drama rather than of machines and organisms to capture experience and imagery.

The data collection map provided by Allaire and Firsirotu has provided a rationale for much of my field work and highlighted areas where I should collect and construct new data. Their article also revealed the very sterotypical and simplistic model of doing culture research that organisation studies has constructed from the wide variety of perspectives represented in anthropology.

Schein sharpened my thinking about culture as a property of a collective, not of individuals, and gave me license, along with Meyerson and Martin, to view culture as something to be established empirically rather than theoretically apriori. Schein also gave support to the view that culture is about signification. It is not about values and artefacts but about irrefutable hypotheses about reality. Whilst Schein's model has several problem - encouraging a static and conservative perspective on organisation - his concern for revealing deep structure and the durability of that structure as the essence of culture requires that cultural analysis has a strong historical component. It may be that archaeology rather than anthropology has something to say to organisation theory (See Foucault 1970). Further, Schein's separation of the instrumentality and performativity of learned ways and beliefs from their affective and emotional significance recognises two Habermasian cognitive strategies simultaneously without reducing one to the other or without having to choose between them. (The interrelationship between instrumentality and symbolism in Schein's model has recently been articulated and extended by Hatch 1993).

Lastly, Martin and Meyerson's three fold typology of culture and cultural research has been useful in exploring the time, place, and audience specific nature of any cultural theme and any cultural analysis. Their work queries whether the boundaries of

organisation and culture are coterminous.

Methodologically I have proposed an ethnographically informed cultural analysis which, it is argued in this chapter, also seeks to observe work practices, as well as construct interpretations of interpretations, and which looks to structural and political influences on cultural webs of significance. In so doing I am perhaps proposing an unfashionable approach to researching culture since I am aware of the views that

1. "Some social scientists will do any mad thing rather than study man at first hand in their natural settings" (Homans 1962 P259).
   Observing, or even participating in, inter-action does not have *street cred* in a post-modern academic world concerned essentially with deconstructing and reconstructing existing constructions rather than creating new ones (Gilbert Adair Sunday Times 1993).

2. Technology and work are organisational sunset concepts - or at least the province primarily of technicians such as occupational psychologists. Organisation is now all about the universals of commitment, empowerment and self actualisation. What is produced and how are deemed incidental to an understanding of organisation.

3. "The political aspect is sometimes perceived as imposed on organisations by conflict-minded researchers" (Czarniawska-Joerges 1991 P290). Conflict is passe. Conflict is modernity. Institutions are crumbling....

I therefore find that my approach to researching, analysing and interpreting culture in the Northfield plant of Pitch Products may in some ways itself be counter-cultural, or at least not supportive of some conventional wisdoms. I appeal to the reader's sense of "disciplinary looseness" (McRobbie 1992).

I have arrived at a view that, perhaps not surprisingly, concurs to some extent with that of Geertz whereby an appreciation of organisational culture proceeds through the identification of the "webs of significance" which organisation members spin and the analysis and representation of those webs such that they can become known to others not privy to the organisation or the research process per se.

The reader may be aware that this still begs the questions of what to look at, who to speak to, what activities to become involved in, how long to hang around, what documentation to scour and how far back to go when doing cultural research.

Taking a relatively structuralist position, I believe some webs of significance, particularly the thicker, more twisted threads, go back a very long way. Understanding current beliefs and practices may require tracing these strands through various incarnations, repressions and celebrations, through various cultural phases or epochs, to gain some appreciation of their resilience and latency. Researching organisation from a cultural perspective should not be confined, therefore, to looking at what is - but should include trying to ascertain what was. Ideally this should be achieved through *long*, longitudinal studies over decades. In addition, and possibly alternatively, such a perspective can be simulated to some extent through the analysis of archive material - particularly including, if possible, any data pertaining to how organisation was

perceived/experienced/represented from a non-member perspective. Newspaper cuttings are an obvious source and have been utilised in chapter 2. The reason for this is that webs of significance are not spun solely by members of an organisation. They are nested in, derivative of and in dynamic relationship with the economic, political, and social symbolic structures of their host cultures. Understanding the perceptions and projections of an organisation members' "significant others" can reveal how members' beliefs and practices configure to cope with or change those perceptions.

But this only results in description and many approaches to cultural analysis stop here. They present descriptive models rather than seek explanation. Explanation requires the inter-relating of variables and data as opposed to merely gathering them (McGrath 1982, Whetton 1988).

> "Even after we have listed and articulated the major values of an organisation, we may still feel that we are dealing with a list that does not quite hang together. Often such lists.. are not patterned, sometimes they are even mutually contradictory, sometimes they are incongruent with observed behaviour.." (Schein 1985 P17)

In reviewing the work of Berger, Douglas, Foucault and Habermas, Wuthnow et al (1984) conclude that a primary task of cultural analysis is

> "to identify recurring features, distinctions, and underlying patterns which give form and substance to culture." (P255)

In supporting this agenda, my concern is to structure Northfield's cultural data and then seek some explanation as to why the culture is so structured.

The following chapter structures the data using the grid developed from Martin and Meyerson's framework, and draws on earlier descriptive data (see chapter 2). This is followed by an attempt to move beyond descriptive analysis and search for explanation - of why those particular themes occur and of the contradictions within the cultural themes and practices. This moves the analysis to the institutional level and more explicitly queries assumptions about the conceptualisation of organisation in organisation culture theory.

I am aware that

> "Like so much bric-a-brac, .. proto-typical theories lie around, ready to be pressed into service to promote the thinker's deepest concerns or simply to be leaned on whenever energy for independent classificatory work runs out." Douglas 1987 P66

I do not think that my selection of the Martin and Meyerson classificatory framework, as a way of organising some of the data on Pitch Products' Northfield Plant, is the result of a drop in energy, as I hope my rationale has made clear. But I am perhaps coming quite close to Levi-Strauss' concept of *Briccolage* in which the thinker is caricatured as "bodger" - a maker of one thing into another.

The following 4 charts classify some of the data about Pitch Products under the 4 general themes identified in the last chapter :

> managing
> who and what is valued
> relating to the world outside the gate
> the membership game: rules of play

The data is constructed from observations, conversations, interviews and current company documents during the period 1988-1992.

Applying the Martin and Meyerson structure, various forms of the theme are presented as aphorisms (Wilkins 1983) and split into those views expressed internally and those meant for external consumption. These aphorisms have been given an identifying letter (A,B,C,etc). Data relating to each internal and external form of the general theme is then presented under the headings of practices (formal and informal) and artefacts (rituals, language and physical surroundings).

The purpose of the classification is

1. to identify which, if any, of the forms of the general themes dominate the world of Pitch Products Northfield;
2. to establish the extent of any inconsistencies between themes expressed internally and externally;
3. to evaluate to what extent themes expressed to a single audience may be ambiguous or contradictory.

This will allow some descriptive classification of Northfield in terms of Martin and Meyerson's unitary, differentiated and fragmented taxonomy and reveal, in Schein's terms, the basic assumptions that inform action at the Northfield plant.

THEME 1		MANAGING
INTERNAL THEME	A	Managers are creators & guardians of the company
	B	"A manager's job is to manage, not to be liked"
	C	Managers are culpable;cannot separate a manager's performance from that of his subordinates.
	D	Managers have a privileged perspective. Don't have to explain to juniors/ operators.Uncertainty can be functional
EXTERNAL THEME	E	"Managers should role model behaviour,be visible"
	F	We know about *practice* - real management
	G	"We try to manage through participation & consultation"
FORMAL PRACTICES	A/C	If a department performs badly, its the manager's fault.
	D/E	A manager must chair all work/task groups.
	D	Information is power & in short supply.
	F	Trainees from "Third World" countries are encouraged to come to Northfield to learn how to manage.
INFORMAL PRACTICES	A/E	Being company-minded, ie taking cues from superiors, is an essential part of the socialisation process and a test of an individual's management potential.
	B/D	Managerial style is Machiavellian - people are "steered" towards the preferences of the most senior manager present.
	C	"You've got to avoid being responsible for a "cock-up".
ArtefactS RITUALS	A/D	"I was chairing 9 or 10 groups at one time. & E It got very hairy." Senior manager
	B/D	Our manager goes walkabout & laughs & jokes &E with the shop floor but then he comes down hard. I think he blows hot & cold deliberately. It keeps them guessing."
	D	"Our MD will sometimes come to meetings, sometimes not. Maybe he'll take the chair,maybe he won't. Sometimes he leaves half way thro' & comes back later. The plant manager doesn't know if he's in charge or not."
LANGUAGE	A	Managers describe themselves as "firm but fair" with distinctly parental overtones.
	B	Humour & inter-hierarchy contact is ritualised & cynical.
	E	Managers told to "lead from the front".
	F	Management as a distinct practice is almost absent from the language. eg there is no reference to managerial activity in the TQ agenda
PHYSICAL ENTITIES	A/C	The plant has not performed well - so managers deny themselves comfortable offices and canteen etc.
	B/D	Fawltey Towers move saw new offices & reception built - signalling a splitting of reward from performance and status from responsibility - managers are no longer considered culpable (C).

NOTES:

All the themes apart from (G), interestingly the only reference to the world of TQ to survive even in rhetoric about managing, are enacted in practice and evidenced in

artefacts. Themes (A) to (D) can be interpreted as mutually reinforcing a managerial orientation to the world in which managers are cast almost as the "elect" (Weber 1930). Again echoing Weber, this privilege brings with it a duty to enhance the company's worth, an obligation to protect and care for that worth and for those who are not privileged, and managerial culpability, or self-blame, for failure. This generic definition of managing changed with the arrival of Fawltey Towers staff when an almost "plundering and looting/ everyone for themselves" image of managing emerged.

Theme (E) is particularly complex in that, for an external audience, *role modelling behaviour* and *being visible* was interpreted in the rhetoric of TQ. It was therefore about showing commitment by speaking the language, leading improvement projects, contacting customers, using tools and techniques etc., and encouraging decision-making by information not by prejudice. As I described in my work with the MD and his Innovations Task Group, to an internal managerial audience, modelling behaviour was about cloning current management styles, thinking and very political practices. It was about becoming a company man not about becoming a quality company.

THEME 2		WHO AND WHAT IS VALUED
INTERNAL THEMES	A	Some are more valued than others. Knowledge & value are deemed to increase with status.
	B	Everyone on the plant is valuable & this should be reflected in harmonised employment conditions
	C	The most valuable group of people are production managers
	D	Women are of incidental value.They can only provide care & service.
EXTERNAL THEMES	E	We are a TQ company & therefore everyone should be a manager, then we would all be valuable
	F	Identity is collective - there is no place for elites or star performers.
	G	We were good in the past.
	H	TQ will make us good again through product and technological excellence.(See task and technology data, later)
FORMAL PRACTICES	A	Status is indicated by hierarchical position & is achieved by serving time and rising through the ranks - becoming a company man.
	A	Until 1992 all redundancies were of operators.
	A	Knowledge can enhance status - up to a point. Operators can be "improved" by their managers through training & multi-skilling.
	F	There are few if any individual symbols of recognition or reward.
INFORMAL PRACTICES	A	Senior managers are involved in almost all decision making - especially about money.
	A	"There are still people here who won't lower themselves to talk to shopfloor people".
	A/C	Promotion & career development depends on sponsorship by an influential patron. Sponsorship is in short supply. Some lose.
	A	Headoffice cuckoos push out plant managers.
ARTEFACTS RITUALS	A/C	To be in the presence of the plant manager for long/frequent periods indicates favoured status.
LANGUAGE	A	References to "weekly paid" v "salaried staff" & managers v operators;
	C	Reference to HQ as Fawltey Towers indicates low status of admin relative to operations
	A/C	"For the last 4/5 years we've concentrated on product quality,then external customer, then processes.Maybe employees are next?"
PHYSICAL ENTITIES	A	Offices near to MD allocated to lieutenants
	A	"Blue coats are best" blue overalls worn by all prodn staff - from supervisors to MD.
	G	Faded glory of plaques on reception wall

NOTES:
Theme (A) subsumes theme (C) so that who is valued increases with formal hierarchical

position and to the extent that role is concerned with production. Highest value, status and inferred knowledge are therefore attributed to plant production managers. Theme (A) supports the dominant image of managing and managers as privileged, described in the previous list. The potency of theme (D), I would argue, is confirmed by the low numbers of women employees at the plant, the trivial status afforded to those there were, and the absence of representations of women in the company's publications, other than in catering and secretarial roles. How this influenced my own role and perceptions of Northfield I am unsure.

Whilst theme (B) was espoused, being mentioned several times in interviews and as part of Ken Peter's rhetoric in providing a rationale for his team working changes (see chapter 2), it was barely evidenced in practice, apart from a few TQ slogans on chipped cups and stained table mats in the conference and training rooms and the *internal supply chain* posters in George's office. Similarly, theme (E) was espoused by managers in presentations to external audiences but not practised. The shift towards a single status managerial culture was described as requiring devolved decision-making, training in managerial and supervisory skills, communication of strategic information and the imparting to department heads and supervisory staff of "business sense" . The evidence was that

1. devolved decision making manifested itself as the collection of data on products and processes which was submitted to management
2. no managerial training was provided
3. briefing groups and mass meetings had faded away
4. no one seemed to know business sense actually meant.

Theme (F) was confirmed in the absence of any names plates on doors, of name tags on overalls or hats, or of any other personalising or decorative features. In conversation, people were referred to by their formal roles, "the MD", "senior engineer", "forming supervisor" etc, rather than in person. Recognition rewards were deeply frowned upon - either financial or symbolic. George had convinced Tony to invite to dinner the first improvement group to have their suggestions implemented. This apparently had been a very awkward event, several of those being "recognised" regarding it as a test of endurance rather than a reward. After the event, head office had suggested that the whole idea was inappropriate.

Theme (G) and (H) were very prominent in the corporate rhetoric. For example, a company annual report describes how

"..we enter the new year with our eyes on the company we're becoming, not the company we've been, fitted for the future, with the best chance for many years of performing up to our potential" MD

This new beginning was often described as a return to the past, a refocusing on technical excellence, core competence and efficient production. This was the attraction of TQ not as a way of creating a new culture but as a way of reviving an old one.

THEME 3		THE MEMBERSHIP GAME: RULES OF PLAY
INTERNAL THEMES	A B C	"Sometimes the ends justify the means." "We say one thing and do another." "We start to do something and then we don't follow it through... We are full of good intentions.."
EXTERNAL THEMES	D E	"We are all one team pulling together" (diversity is not valued).Individual performances do not earn credits. TQ philosophy compliantly described as "Everyone doing the right thing right first time and looking to do the right thing better next time."
FORMAL PRACTICES	C D	Many initiatives have waned or disappeared, eg. quality circles, team briefings, mass meetings, new product innovations, multiskillling, statistical control, TQ. Team working is obsessionally pursued - there are teams and task forces for everything that can measured and counted.
INFORMAL PRACTICES	B/E	Expulsion from the senior management "club", in some cases to the point of "redundancy", is associated with "speaking your mind", "acting with integrity" rather than compliance and not playing the language game.
ARTEFACTS RITUAL	A B	Senior managers use the legitimation of "participative" groups to dominate the agenda. Participation in task groups, problem solving groups, etc are widely referred to as "a game" - a ritual of conformance.. outside of which the real work gets done. Rhetoric and practice are clearly separated.
LANGUAGE	D D	Brand of TQ that was adopted (Deming/Joiner) is consonant with rhetoric of single community & the denial of conflict and multiple perspectives. TQ Hse journal constantly describes how "All departments are pulling together.."
PHYSICAL ENTITIES	B	Managers state there is "No money" and make people redundant - but then build new offices.

NOTES:
Themes (D) and (E) express myths about what people remember of the company in the 1960's and early 1970's. From interviews and archive material, it seems that the plant was perceived and managed as a single community with a clear technology driven strategy that was successful. "One team pulling together", theme (D), continually introducing incremental improvements from the bottom up,theme (E), restates this lost community in currently acceptable language - that of TQ.

The rules of play amongst managers at the Northfield plant were basically schizophrenic (Kets de Vries and Miller 1987). Words and actions seldom coincide. The rhetoric of "all one team pulling together", of ownership and involvement, of commitment to long term strategy, salvationary innovations and solutions belied the reality of manoeuvring, politicking and manipulation that constituted the game in play, theme (A).

Kets de Vries and Miller describe the schizoid organisation as one in which

"top executives discourage interaction because of a fear of involvement.. [p]erhaps because of past disappointments.. they believe most contacts may end painfully for them." (P38)

This theme of not seeing things through, theme (C), and of saying one thing and doing another theme, (B), resulted in initiative mania during the mid 1980's and a view of senior managers, by department heads and first line supervisors, as vacillating, uncommitted, and abdicatory. This same view was expressed by senior plant managers about head office staff. The lack of clear direction and the ambiguous, perhaps vacuous, signals emanating from the top can see the organisation

"become a political battlefield... for games men who try to win favour from the unresponsive leader" (ibid).

However, coupled with this proliferation of half finished, half-hearted projects and strategies, there was a clear message at the Northfield plant that to step out of line - what ever that might be - would not be tolerated. Outspoken and direct criticism of managers or the company or any other shows of disloyalty were regarded as evidence of relinquishing membership. The journey from leader of the cause to renegade could be swift - as George discovered.

THEME 4	RELATING TO THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE GATE	
INTERNAL THEMES	A	We are fearful of & obedient to our parent company. Disobedience is punished by neglect or abandonment...Obedience is rewarded.
	B	We cannot trust the world. We are still cast out. We have secrets..
	C	We do not welcome visitors, strangers...
EXTERNAL THEMES	D	We are a prestigious & influential multi-national.The future is planned & we are part of that plan.
	E	"We are looking for,and winning, new business. The past is behind us."
	F	"To stay in business we must be open.We can't work in a black box. Secrecy is out."
	G	"To stay in business we must compete on quality. If quality goes down - we go down."
FORMAL PRACTICES	A	"Budget allocations are unpredictable - seem to depend on managers' personal influence & whims rather than plant performance."
	A	Yearly budget cycle dictated & decided by parent company. No negotiation, stoic acceptance.
	B	Difficulty in recruiting senior managers.
	D	Formal links with education/industry/ government R&D/training/occupational groups.
	D	From 1990, plant jointly owned by Japanese.
INFORMAL PRACTICES	A	"Need to satisfy headoffice means impromptu decisions & people being told what their priorities are."
	A	Senior managers assured of lifetime employment
	G	Customers put price ahead of quality - we have to cut our cost base to be competitive.
ArtefactS	D/E	MD accepted as Civic Industrial Baron 1992
	D/E	300 VIP's entertained in "high style" amidst redundancies
RITUALS	D	MD still has monthly "divisional" meetings even though division no longer exists.
LANGUAGE	B/E	Name change in 1990. House journal carries the title *What's in a Name?*
	D	House jnls full of analysis of world markets, global trends and economic crises
	E	Lots of headlines in Hse journals 1988-1992 such as *Good News for us, Bad News for Japan* and *Into 1989 with Confidence* and "*we enter the year with our eyes on the company we're becoming, not the company we've been*".
PHYSICAL ENTITIES	B/C	Site layout & location,hostile reception, no directional signs,security passes.
	D	Senior managers have expensive company cars, 1st class travel and lots of it.

Themes (A) and (D) exhibit two sides of a single theme - being part of a multinational

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corporation. Perhaps predictably, this dominated Northfield's relations with the world and possibly most relations within the plant. It was a two edged sword. It offered comfort, freedom from responsibility and decision making, industrial status and financial security. It also meant that the plant was known as the parent was known. This was not particularly helpful since the 1984 disaster and its subsequent publicity. Also, given the plant's poor performance, managers feared that the parent may abandon the plant at any time. This heightened anxieties about pleasing the parent company. In 1990, the 50% Japanese buy-in simultaneously confirmed the plant's international status and underlined the fragility of its patronage.

The appoint of the MD to a civic position, etc., seemed to indicate that Northfield had managed to escape from the past and be reinstated in the local industrial community. However, much of the language and the hostility and anonymity of the physical surroundings suggested that people still thought of themselves as "cast out", theme (B). Hence they did not trust or want visitors, theme (C). However, to external audiences there was a rhetoric of openness, theme (F), and some customers and suppliers were encouraged to visit the plant to be informed of what previously would have been considered confidential details on production performance etc.. The symbolic significance of these "visits from outside" is demonstrated in the flooding of the quarterly house journal by pictures of almost anyone who had stepped through the plant gates (usually posed against a pile of electrodes, the visitor being indistinguishable from previous visitors having donned safety hat, goggles, and overalls).

The complexity of the openness-secrecy theme increases when events such as Ken Peter's presentation on team working is considered. Typically, some people were in the know and others not. How decisions about enfranchisement were taken I never really understood - but it possibly had something to do with who posed a threat or who could sabotage the latest project. I did not find I was purposefully excluded from anything other than my request to talk to people involved/ sit in on some of the training events for the team working initiative at the local training college. This was gently denied on the grounds that I might intimidate the trainer! This explanation is plausible (Weick 1989). However, Ken's reluctance to reality test the project by providing access to an observer is also a possibility.

Given this classification, which themes can be identified as most pervasive, realised in practice and recursively organising everyday organisational life (Giddens 1976, Riley 1983) and which themes exist primarily as rhetoric, espoused but not enacted?

From the empirical data it would seem that the following themes are most significant for understanding action, ie. what's happening, at Northfield. They can perhaps be thought of as the rules of organisation-making at Northfield.

Enacted Rules of Organisation-Making at Northfield

Theme 1: Managing

    A   Managers are creators & guardians of the company
    B   "A manager's job is to manage, not to be liked"
    C   Managers are culpable;cannot separate a manager's performance from that of his subordinates.

D   Managers have a privileged perspective. Don't have to explain to juniors/ operators.Uncertainty can be functional

Theme 2: Who and What is Valued

A   Some are more valued than others. Knowledge & value are deemed to increase with status.
C   The most valuable group of people are production managers
D   Women are of incidental value.They can only provide care & service.
F   Identity is collective - there is no place for elites or star performers.

Theme 3: The Membership Game: Rules of Play

B   "We say one thing and do another."
C   "We start to do something and then we don't follow it through... We are full of good intentions.."
D   "We are all one team pulling together" (diversity is not valued).Individual performances do not earn credits.

Theme 4:Relating to the World Outside the Gate

A   We are fearful of & obedient to our parent company. Disobedience is punished by neglect or abandonment...Obedience is rewarded.
B   We cannot trust the world. We are still cast out. We have secrets..
D   We are a prestigious & influential multi-national.The future is planned & we are part of that plan.
E   "We are looking for,and winning, new business. The past is behind us."

Whilst perhaps equally significant to understanding what organisation-making means at Northfield, the following themes should perhaps be referred to as rhetorical since there was little, if any, evidence of their existence in structures and practices.

Rhetorical themes at Northfield

Theme 1: Managing

G   We try to manage through participation and consultation.

Theme 2: Who and what is valued

B   Everyone on the plant is valuable and this should be reflected in harmonised employment conditions.
E   We are a TQ company and therefore everyone should be a manager, then we would all be valuable.

Theme 3: The Membership game:Rules of play

E   We comply with the TQ philosophy whereby everyone is doing the right thing first and looking to do the right thing better next time

F To stay in business we must be open. We can't work in a black box. Secrecy is out.

G To stay in business we must compete on quality. If quality goes down, we go down.

Two themes were concerned not so much with organisation-making but with images of the plant as a collective identity. Whilst they do not constitute rules, because of their "high seriousness" (Kluckhohn 1942 P47) and the way in which their content is "placed beyond doubt and freed from argument" (Trice and Beyer 1993 P105), neither are they easily categorised as rhetoric. The two themes can perhaps better be described as myths. The themes are part of the *who and what is valued* grouping and are:

G We were good in the past.

H TQ will make us good again, through product and technological excellence.

Much of the content of these myths centres on the plant's technology. This has not been addressed specifically so far in the discussion on cultural theme. The following brief section highlights the significance of technological matters in the accomplishment of organisation at Northfield.

Task and Technology

I argued in the last chapter for the inclusion of task and technology as significant dimensions in the representation and understanding of organisation culture in Pitch Products Northfield plant. This section provides a brief perspective on those dimensions. (The reader is reminded that a description of the production process is provided in chapter 2 "Being There")

Technology is itself a difficult term its usage and development showing similarities with that of "culture". I do not intend to enter the *what is technology* debate. My use of the term follows the characterisation provided by McGinn

McGinn suggests technology is a human activity along with science, art, religion and sports. He characterises it by 8 features.

1. technology is concerned with the material rather than ideational outcomes and involves the making or transformation of material products.
2. technology is fabricative ie. it involves creating something that would not occur naturally. Hence agricultural activities are not technological.
3. technology involves purpose - not in the sense of applying technology to existing ends, but creating ends themselves. Technology creates its own agendas.
4. technology is a resource-based, resource-expending activity utilising materials, information, people and other technologies.
5. technology is knowledge, implicit and scientific, of how to do things.
6. technology involves methods, their purposive and non-arbitrary development and the capacity to evaluate their appropriateness.
7. technology generates and operates within a sociocultural-environmental context, reflecting and structuring that context. The world is a socio-

technical one.

8. technology has profound connections to the practitioner's mindset - it is an expressive as well as a cognitive activity and the practitioner's disposition towards work, self identity, the beauty of artefacts, social responsibilities and what is right and good will influence the nature of technology. The form, meaning, and significance of technology is therefore culturally specific.

I therefore intend to use task to refer to *what* is done, whilst technology is deemed to refer to *how* things are done. The integration, differentiation and control of what is done and how it is done is referred to as *structure* (Miles 1980).

The company can be described as having (quite literally) a task culture (Handy 1986) in which concern for people is an outcome or by-product of a concern for doing a good job. There are many examples of people taking second place to "the job" and much of the plant's rationale for change and investment is couched in the language of technical or task improvement rather than of benefits to employees. For example, every week hundreds of tons of coke are crushed at the start of the process and this results in mountains of dust - even though dust extractors work full time. It was not until 1989 that a mechanical sweeper was acquired to sweep the yard and floor in the forming department in place of the seven men, armed with brushes and shovels, who used to spend 2 hours each week on the job. In the plant's house journal, the benefits of the investment in this technology are described as follows:

> "the sweeper.. can quickly buff up the ground floor while the rest of the team carry on working, thus reducing costs and creating a cleaner looking department."

There was no mention of relief from a terrible job for those doing the work. This failure to sell the benefits of the change to employees again indicates managers' low concern for symbolic management. (The fact that changes were almost always equated with redundancy could also have influenced the presentation.)

The symbolic significance of technology and product is further evidenced by a look through the pages of the plant's house journals.

Every other edition of the quarterly produced house journal "Customers Matter", devotes approximately 20% of its copy to a "How it works" feature in which the finer points of ladle furnace technology, the electric arc furnace, the blast furnace, etc. are recounted from the perspective of Pitch Product's and Northfield's contribution. A mixture of information about where products are used combined with low key propaganda about the significance of the plant's products and hence the importance of doing a good job, details of technological investment, and reports on product and process improvements, the journal has nothing to say about managers, managing or organisational changes.

However this concern for improving the job by improving the technology takes place within a highly segmented functional and line/support structure so that production tends to be optimised within departments and tasks but not integrated across processes. For example, developments in information technology have been significant in changing and bringing under control production processes. This has occurred piecemeal in particular

production enclaves and has not involved specialists from the company's IT department. There is also low lateral integration across functions as these exhibit enormous power differences - production being at the top of the pile. Even within the production function people tend to stay in their own area of the process as their essential knowledge and experience builds up. It means lots of small cultures. This has been changing as more knowledge is made explicit through technological change and computerised controls. (Zuboff 1985)

This lack of an organisational perspective underlines assumptions about managing in the plant. It is seen, as are human processes generally, as a non-agenda item. It is commonsense, to be learned on the job and not requiring specialist training or expertise.

For example, as part of the TQ changes, the use of task groups had become wide spread but no training has been provided as to how these might work and no internal facilitation was available. Management was seen as reluctant to employ consultants to coach middle line staff into their new roles.

> "There'll be no consultants. Northfield is self sufficient. That's the culture."
> Production Department Manager L.

However, the plant had had consultants on the production and process side - eg. for installing MRP and in applying JIT principles. They have also engaged an academic consultancy to improve profitability through Critical Success Factor identification.

Managing is to some extent a distraction from work and is to be "suffered" as expressed by this Foreman,s comment
> "We're not spending enough time managing- mostly its technical work - because its more interesting I suppose."

This view is reinforced in the following document distributed to all employees towards the beginning of the TQ programme. It aims to get over the message about internal customers and work flow.

INTERNAL CUSTOMERS MATTER TOO

What is a Customer?

Our most important customers are those buying graphite from us and we must continue in our efforts to provide them with the goods and services they expect. But besides these traditional customers, we all have our own customers - our **internal customers.**
Some are very obvious:
• *Baking is a customer of Forming* • *Graphitising is a customer of Baking* • *Machining is a customer of Graphitising* • *and Shipping is a customer of Machining.*

But we all, as departments or individuals, have less obvious customers who we provide with goods, services or information

• *We are all customers of welfare for clean overalls.*
• *Production departments are customers of maintenance, transport and quality control.*
• *Maintenance and engineering are customers of purchasing.*
• *Accounts are customers of and suppliers to most departments.*

If we are to continue to make progress towards being a low-cost, high-quality supplier of graphite, we must extend our standard of service to our internal "customers" as well as to external ones. As a first step we can all ask:

Who are my major internal customers?
Am I giving them what they want every time?
Is it right the first time? Is what I do making their job easier or more difficult?

For example: Is stock marked up right?
Is stock on the right pallet?
Is that report in on time?
Can I improve on what I give them?

Most of us are internal customers. We should ask ourselves
Is my internal supplier giving *me* what I *want* right first time, every time?

If not, complain about it - don't accept second best, that makes your job harder and our goal of total Quality more difficult to reach.

. . . . **NORTHFIELD A QUALITY COMPANY**

(Emphasis in original)

The document affirms the operational focus and functional structure of the plant and

suggests responsibility for remedial action for internal customer problems lies with individuals who should "complain". The absence of any reference to a role for management in improving internal customer relations, through structural change or role modelling for example, or recognition of the possibility that managers may themselves have internal customers continues to cast managerial activity as production and technology focused as distinct from people and organisation, focused.

However, this managerial concern for operations can be explained, to some extent, by the lack of technical knowledge at operator level. As a result of downsizing and the shrinking market, no apprentices had been trained in the last 15 years.

> "But we have to spend more time on the technical side because skills are lacking on the shop floor. ..We need more young people" Senior Engineer

Couple this with the fact that

> "Its a very stable work force - and a bit parochial There's not much movement within the plant or to outside companies." Department Manager

and it can be seen how managing personnel might be a low priority. Most of the people there would know the place inside out. New employees at operator level were essentially employed as pairs of hands - often on casual or temporary contracts.

But many were not happy with this situation

> "We need to direct energy down onto the shop floor. Things get lost between the department manager and the foreman. Many foremen are of the old school - information stops with them. Department Managers don't push things down either - because they think they know and nobody else needs to or because they don't want the pain of trying to push things down." Production Dept. Manager

Handy describes "task" organisations, where getting the job done is all important, as controlled primarily through individual and occupational/professional expertise and skill. Technical competence is all important and as long as the job turns out right, management is happy. Management control is exercised through the

> "allocation of projects, people and resources." (Handy 1986 P194)

This seems to describe how an R&D driven Northfield plant functioned in the 1960's and early 1970's, with some remnants surviving into the 1990's. However, as Handy points out, this description is more applicable to periods of stability and munificence than to periods of recession and retrenchment.

> " ..when resources are not available to all who can justify their need for them, when money and people have to be rationed, top management begins to feel the need to control methods as well as results. Alternatively team leaders begin to compete, using political influence, for available resources. In either case, morale in the workgroups declines and the job becomes less satisfying in itself, so that individuals begin to change their psychological contract and to reveal their individual objectives. This new state of affairs necessitates rules and procedures or exchange methods of influence, and the use of position or resource power by the managers to get the work done. In short, the task culture changes to a role or power culture..." (ibid)

I have quoted Handy at some length as he alludes to the fundamental issue in understanding the culture at Northfield -that of the contract between individual and

organisation. Whilst a focus on task is often assumed to be the most pragmatic, least baggage-carrying, and hence most "functional" of managerial styles, it can have a flip side, as Handy makes clear. How to explain the transformation of Northfield from a successful task driven organisation to one which operates within a context of structural and functional divisions, parochialism, inter-group hostility and defensiveness, a technology-focused management which exercises control through political processes, and which is relatively impervious to the numerous change programmes in its recent history is now the main research issue.

Conclusion

From this analysis of Northfield's cultural themes I could perhaps conclude that efforts to change the Northfield culture by adopting a TQ model of organising did not succeed because TQ existed only as an espoused view of organisation making. It did not become structurated into company praxis. However, this is tautologically unsatisfactory and begs the question as to why TQ was not enacted in many managerial and organisation practices but comprised the plant's primary espoused external image.

The thematic data was constructed using predominantly ethnographic methods. I agree with Hammersley (1992) that ethnographies no not explain - though for different reasons. Hammersley attacks inductivist approaches per se arguing that "voyeuristic" thick descriptions of "context" are thought by ethnographers to be synonymous with explanation. Whilst some cultural analyses may be subject to this criticism, I have tried to distinguish the construction of thick descriptions from the amassing of grand facts (See chapter 3). I think perhaps Hammersley confuses the two.

It still remains that I support his view that ethnographic data tends not to explain but to constitute that which is to be explained. The value of ethnographic methods lies in their making possible the articulation of individuals' sense-making frameworks - how people perceive, judge and believe their world to be. However, ethnographic data does not provide an explanation for these perceptions, beliefs, etc..

I have argued that culture is a collective phenomenon and that for data to be admissible within a cultural analysis there must be some indication that thought processes are enacted and realised in social interaction and made visible in organisational structures, practices and symbols.

This chapter has mapped the empirical evidence that would indicate the pervasiveness of particular cultural themes in the Northfield plant. What has emerged is a set of images of the Northfield world, presented as aphorisms, that inform the enactment of that world. How to explain the occurance of this set of themes and why some themes are more pervasive than others is the focus of the next chapter.

"If formal organisations are perceived not as instruments but as institutions in environments which are also institutionalised, what implications does this have for [managers'] freedom of action?" (Brunsson and Olsen 1993 P4)

In organising and analysing my data about the Northfield plant of Pitch Products, the extent to which it is possible to refer to *organisational* culture has been problematised and made an empirical matter. From the construction of the empirical data it is suggested that some cognitive themes are organisationally diffused and manifest in all cultural forms - rhetoric, practice,symbols and physical environment, whilst other themes exist predominantly in representations of the plant and company to external constituencies or within particular plant groups - such as that group of individuals previously at headoffice or those involved in production. The culture could therefore be described as fragmented in many ways but some themes are more pervasive than others. How might the greater salience or potency of some themes be accounted for? Further, how have apparently contradictory themes developed? Where and how do themes originate and become perpetuated? Can any *explanation* be offered for what has been described?

It is argued that institutional theory can contribute to such an explanation. An institutional model for explaining current themes in Northfield's culture, their resilience and their transformation is constructed. The chapter ends with some thoughts on the conceptualisation of culture and organisation and how assumptions about organisational boundaries constrain cultural research and theory building.

The chapter is structured as follows:

1. An Institutional Perspective.
2. Explaining Northfield: an Institutional Perspective on Cultural Analysis.
3. Thinking about Culture and Organisation: Explanations and Models.

1.An Institutional Perspective

This section aims to draws together the sometime fuzzy points made so far and hopefully, in the tradition of a detective novel, reveal that, whilst perhaps not explicitly articulated, the plot has been present all along.

The section starts with a brief overview of some ideas in institutional theory and progresses on to how these ideas gradually informed the research process and my understanding of the world of organisational culture, models and change. An explanation of cultural change and stability in the Northfield Plant of Pitch Products is then offered using insights from institutional theory.

To what extent are organisational characteristics a matter of rational choice, the embodiment of vested interests, the result of ecological forces, or the outcome of emergent and/ or unconscious processes? What is the most appropriate perspective on

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organisation life to help us understand why organisations (do not) change? What are the relationships between individuals, organisations and societies and how should our responses to this question inform our thinking about the first two issues (Fombrun 1986)?

These questions inform basic debates in organisation and management studies around voluntarism and determinism, stability and change and the appropriate unit of analysis - individual, local collective or society (Astley and Van de Ven 1983, Burrell and Morgan 1979, Morgan 1986). However, whilst some argue that paradigmatic incommensurability arises from the mutual exclusivity of responses to the above questions (Burrell and Morgan 1979, Jackson and Carter 1991), others (eg. Gioia and Pitre 1990) seek "metatheoretical frameworks" to overcome the "compartmentalisation" (Astley and Van de Ven 1983) and "hermenticism" (Hassard 1988) arising from divergent theoretical perspectives. Still others adopt a pluralist (Reed 1985) or a pragmatic (Aldrich 1992) posture suggesting differences in perspective can be and are accommodated through negotiation with respect to particular research questions, theoretical issues and contexts.

I believe that an institutional perspective, currently relatively neglected and underdeveloped in organisation theory, can to some extent avoid the downsides of some of the above positions - namely

1. the ossification of organisation studies into isolated paradigmatic worlds if the incommensurability perspective is upheld (Willmott 1993) or
2. the apolitical drift back to functionalism which may await the reintegration of disparate epistemologies and ontologies (Jackson and Carter 1991).

Institutional theory offers a medium for creating a loose amalgam from these distinct perspectives.

What is Institutional Theory?

There are many classifications of theories of organisational form. Fombrun (1986) offer functionalist sociology, political theory and symbolic interactionism as generic modelling perspectives. Aldrich (1992) prefers the labels "the ecological approach", "the institutional approach", and the "interpretive approach". Reed (1985), following a Habermasian classification of modes of inquiry, opts for the technical, the political and the critical as the three major perspectives informing management and organisation theorising. Functionalist, interpretivist and radical (humanist and structuralist) also comprise the main divisions in Burrell and Morgan's 1979 framework, whilst Astley and Van de Ven (1983) prefer natural selection, collective action, systems structural and strategic choice as their four prevailing theoretical orientations for explaining organisational form.

This last typology is of particular interest to cultural analyses since is incorporates a micro and a macro dimension and thus explicitly articulates the issue of the appropriate unit of analysis. Can organisations be thought of as islands, whereby the cultural analysis of organisation can be legitimated as the study, in whatever tradition, of many individual small worlds, or are organisations themselves to be conceptualised artefactually, as "institutionalised manifestations.. of the wider society" (Astley and Van

de Ven 1983 P245)? This interpretation renders the bounding of any cultural analysis more problematic.

Astley and Van de Ven's classification is reproduced below together with the key concepts structuring the models of organisation arising from each perspective.

MACRO LEVEL ANALYSIS

Deterministic Orientation	Voluntaristic Orientation

Schools taking a Natural selection view are:
1.popn ecologists
2.econ historians
 	
Key ideas =
*environmental
  selection
*natural evolution of
 economies,
industries
  & organisations
*niching
*competition for
 environmental
resources
	Schools taking a Collective action view are:
	1.social ecologists
	2.social planning theorists
	3.institutional theorists
	Key ideas =
	*environmental regulation
	*negotiated social
	 rules/frameworks
	*political control alliance
	 building
	*domination of
	 social/institutional
	 environment

Schools taking a System structural view are:
1.systems theory
2.structural
  functionalism
3.contingency
  theory
Key ideas =
*fit to environment
*adaptation to
 exogenous changes
*effectiveness
*organisational goals
	Schools taking a Strategic choice view are:
	1.exchange theory
	2.(symbolic)
	  interaction
	3.phenomenology
	4.ethnomethodology
	Key ideas=
	*organisational
	  ambiguity
	*environmental
	  enactment
	*vested interests
	*power/leadership
	*meaning constructn

MICRO LEVEL ANALYSIS

Pervading these views and classifications is a conceptualisation of and an approach to researching organisational structure and form "as if it were static". This encourages a focus "on its sources at one point in time" (Tolbert and Zucker 1983 P25). The above classifications identify different ways of accounting for and construing those sources of organisational form. They can all be subsumed under two main categories: whether the sources of influence on structural form are seen as internal to an organisation or as external (ie environmental). A third category combines internal and external sourcing

(See table below).

Perspectives which see the sources of organisational form as:		
Internal to Organisation	**External to Organisation**	**A Combination**
interpretive	ecological	institutional
technical	systems structural	political
strategic choice	functionalist	critical
	critical	collective action
	natural selection	radical

(Adapted from Tolbert and Zucker 1983)

In adopting an institutional perspective, I intend to explain the form and structure of the culture in the Northfield plant in terms of both organisational and environmental influences. I have chosen to focus on an institutional framework as I believe this is a much neglected perspective in organisation theory. Current pro-agency bias may be understandable but I believe its unabated and relatively unchallenged continuance is indefensible as an approach to organisational cultural analysis (Alvesson 1993). Institutional theory offers a valuable counterpoint to the excessive voluntarism found in many current models of change. (Pursing this agenda again raises the problem of antonyms to fashionable metaphors. Presumably the opposite of desirable planned change is undesirable, unplanned inertia?)

Weber, Durkheim and Goffman made it acceptable to think of organisations as institutions and the various metaphors of closed systems (bureaucracies, psychic prisons, social facts, theatrical scripts, etc.)have revisited this image of organisation as worlds sealed-in. The idea of institution is therefore commonly invoked to represent the most static, most resistant to change, most embedded of organisational forms and structures and the pervasiveness of this image can perhaps partly explain its current lack of appeal in a world of macho management, global politicking and the theology of the market.

This definition by Brunsson and Olsen is typical.

> "Organisations can be said to be institutionalised insofar as their behaviour is determined by culturally conditioned rules which manifest themselves in certain routines for action and give meaning to those actions. They reflect relatively stable values, interests, opinions, expectations and resources." (1993 P4)

Many organisation theorists and practitioners give credence to this representation of organisation and increasingly managerial and theoretical efforts are directed at overcoming the institutionalised characteristics described above as "change becomes the only reality". The metaphor of institution is not therefore fashionable at the moment. No one manages, or possibly researches, an institution. But whilst models to escape from or avoid institutionalising processes within organisations at least have currency (as the

fate awaiting those who do not heed the advice of the latest gurus), very few think of organisational *environments* as institutional.

Tolbert and Zucker define institutionalisation as
> "..the process through which components of formal structure become widely accepted as both appropriate and necessary, and serve to *legitimate* organisations."(1983 P25 emphasis added)

It is this process of legitimation in which I am particularly interested. I have already discussed the development of the world of TQ as an institution-making process, the core of which is the unplanned emergence of taken-for-granted conventions - ways of thinking about and representing organisational worlds. Following Robb's work, as diverse ideas, images and practices become conventionalised, a rich field of ideas and practices are reduced to a "very few signs" (Robb 1992 P4). These signs, which invoke a common textual and visual but above all a metaphorical language which both presupposes and imposes shared understanding between authors and audiences, become unquestioned representations of organisational worlds. But they are not static. Through "progressive distinction, abstraction and classification" (ibid) more and more aspects of the world of work - and in the case of TQ of community and government - become entrained within the institution's world view. The institution thus diffuses throughout many social and cognitive domains (Trist 1983, Abrahamson and Fombrun 1992) and becomes reified - part of "the environment" to which organisation members respond.

Scott has been writing about the institutionalised and symbolic nature of organisational environments for some years. In 1983 he observed that
> "Although there is now consensus on the importance of the environment [compared to technology , etc], there is little agreement about how the environment is to be conceived or which of its features are most salient.." (Scott 1983 P14)

Like organisations, organisational environments are very often, perhaps more often, reified and, as I discussed earlier, much energy and many models are consumed trying to classify and analyse what's out there. Organisations must compete in the market place, take a bigger share of the trade, anticipate future events, etc., etc.. But

> "*Institutional* environments are broadly defined as including the rules and belief systems as well as the relational networks [of customers, suppliers, competitors, financiers etc] that arise in the broader societal context." (Scott ibid)

Significant elements in this system of rules and beliefs are "rational myths". They are rational in that they "identify specific social purposes" and then offer prescribed methods in the form of rules by which these purposes might be achieved. These beliefs are also myths because their efficacy depends upon "the fact that they are widely shared" and that they are "promulgated" by mystics - a few who "have been granted the right to determine such matters". An institutional environment hence in part constitutes a "normative climate within which formal organisations are expected to flourish."(Scott ibid)

Brunsson and Olsen suggest that conceptualising an environment as institutional does not necessarily imply that organisation makers agree to or are consensed on

environmental rules.

> "Seeing organisations as having institutional environments means emphasising that many of the rules in individual organisations are part of a wider rule-system in society. There are many norms for how organisations should behave that are not formulated or controlled within the local, individual organisations but are produced on a more general level.." (Brunsson and Olsen 1993 P4. See also March and Olsen 1989, 1984)

These norms, or *macro cultures* (Abrahamson and Fombrun 1992), are created outside any one organisation and may apply to a large set or population of organisations - but this does not mean that organisation members necessarily perceive them as alien or imposed. This is because people often share norms which cross corporate boundaries - as is the case with occupational, professional, and industrial groups, etc.. This is the situation with "the community of managers" (or organisation theorists for that matter). These norms prescribe to some extent the choice of possible, legitimated organisational forms and changes that can be adopted since

> "It is difficult to propose reform ideas that are generally considered as unfashionable, unfair, irrational or inefficient." (Brunsson and Olsen 1993 P8)

In this way
> "Organisations are judged by the use they make of the structures, processes and ideologies which significant groups in their environment consider to be rational, efficient, reasonable, fair, natural or up to date. "(Brunsson and Olsen 1993 P6. See also Meyer & Scott 1983)

This reinterpretation of organisational environments as essentially symbolic and institutional changes the boundaries of what to research in undertaking a cultural analysis of organisation and offers a different perspective for understanding the significance of TQ to the Northfield plant. An explanation and model of culture in which the webs of significance are partly spun outside the plant is required for,

> "The idea of the institutionalised environment, characterised by significant long-term trends and short-term fluctuations in fashion, provides an alternative or complement to the rational perspective... Attempted reforms can then be regarded as part of a cultural struggle for norms, world views, symbols and legitimacy." (Brunsson and Olsen P11)

This struggle for legitimacy between competing cultural views is at the core of an institutional perspective (Pettigrew 1979). Part of its concern is with the relationship between individual and collective action (Commons 1950). Its premise is that

> "Individuals are not self-sufficient, independent entities, and society is not the summation of individual members." (Van de Ven 1993 P141)

Similarly
> "Organisations increasingly do not exist and compete as autonomous units but as members of larger systems ie environments are organised." Scott 1987

Institutional analysis views individual and collective action as regulated by norms,

customs and laws which simultaneously constrain, liberate and expand the potential for individual action by bringing order and security of expectations. This is achieved by the establishment of "working rules" (Commons 1950). The organisation or patterning of working rules constitutes an institution. However, Commons, unlike more determinist institutionalists such as Berger and Luckmann for example, argues that rules, norms and expectations can be changed through individual volition or will. There is some element of choice in rule-taking and rule-making. In this regard Commons' views differ from much institutional theory which tends to commit the same sin as other stucturalist perspectives in reducing agents, in this case, to the status of institutional dopes.

Commons rejects the notion of institutional development as a natural process and instead ascribes institutional development to the historical resolution of conflict between differing, if not conflicting, powerful individuals and interest groups. The development of institutions is therefore seen as purposive and political. Hence, a key task in institutional theory is some analysis of how power relationships govern the construction of working rules in collectivities in organisations. Again, this is significant for the cultural analysis of organisation as it offers the possibility of acknowledging a multiplicity of competing preferred forms of organising without imposing any particular assumptions about the nature of those competing preferences through the a priori concepts of interest groups, classes, subcultures or other researcher projections.

Cultural analysis informed by institutional theory would therefore direct attention towards revealing the processes through which

> "components of formal structure become widely accepted as both appropriate and necessary, and serve to *legitimate* organisations."(Tolbert and Zucker 1983 P25 emphasis added)

and the extent to which these legitimations arise from and are constitutive of rational myths.

How is institutional analysis undertaken?

Scott (1983 P167) lists the following issues as requiring resolution in undertaking an institutional analysis of organisations and their environments:

a.   What are the bondaries of the system we are looking at. Should they be
            the interorganisational field (Aldrich 1978)
            the interorganisational network (Benson 1975)
            the industry system (Hirsch 1972)
            the societal sector (Scott and Meyer 1982) or
            the organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983)?
b.   What elements comprise the system? Scott proposes three classes
            *network elements:*ie relational connections between organisations such as shared participants.
            cultural elements: comprising both normative and cognitive belief systems relevant to the system of organisations
            *historical elements:*which refer to past events,relations, and perceptions relevant to understanding the present and the future of the system
c.   At what level is the analysis to be undertaken? Should description and

explanation focus on
>   single organisations?
>   discrete sets of organisations?
>   on national populations?
>   or on global populations?

Organisational Culture is a complex symbolic field that is historically, interorganisationally and societally structured. It comprises relational networks (intra and inter organisational) which are cognitive (ways of seeing, images) normative (prescriptive rules, solutions, methods) and physical (meetings, events, conferences, publications, communications between individuals and between groups). As such, an institutional perspective would move between and incorporate as many of the above choices as is considered viable and informative of the research agenda. As that agenda is redefined so different choices will be made.

Substantively, Scott argues that the sort of questions that might be asked about organisations and their symbolic environments from an institutional perspective would be similar to those asked about more conventionally conceptualised techno-competitive environments ie:

>   How uncertain or predictable is the symbolic environment?
>   How simple or complex is it?
>   Is it basically consensed, conflicting or fragmented?

Scott proposes that

When the institutional environment is classed as:	Then organisations in that environment can be expected to exhibit:
(a) complex (b) conflicting (c) complex & conflicting (d) unified and centralised (e) created over several distinct epochs	(a) complex internal structure (b) multiple boundary units & large admin cf prodn nos. (c) greater variety of form. (d) smaller variety of form. (e) greater variety of form.

The continuing tension (and possibly unresolved dilemma) in institutional theory, possibly in organisation theory and certainly in this dissertation, is the extent to which we (or powerful interests) design our working rules, our contingent and ideological frameworks, and the extent to which they design us. Revealing the relationships between these two forces helps to explain the pattern of cultural themes described at Northfield.

My summary of the work of Barley et al. (1986) (See chapter 4) described how early practitioner texts conceptualised culture as a form of control which offered an alternative to the prevailing rational instrumental model. There was therefore emphasis on "strong cultures" as functional. Simultaneously, early academic texts "consciously sought to eschew functionalism in favour of interpretive approaches to culture" (Barley et al. 1986 P43). Within this interpretive approach a multiplicity of perspectives emerged. They reflected the many schools of thought in anthropology which informed work in organisational culture. These have been outlined in the discussion of Allaire and Firsirotu's classification.

What has happened since Barly et al.'s work is that the convergence they identified between managerial and academic works has proceeded a pace. Much work on organisational culture now seems to incorporate a bag of ideas from the systems functionalism, strategic choice and population ecology perspectives. Environmentally determined prescriptions for organisational performance and survival have hence come to dominate the culture literature. The learning organisation, liberation management, time based competition, world class manufacturing and total quality are a few of the many recipes originating from an environmental fit/ population ecology view of the world coupled with a contrary belief in volitional change through the persona of the CEO as saviour (Gill and Whittle 1994).

Leadership, moulding organisation in the image of the powerful, has come to represent the antithesis to natural obsolescence and systems closure. Within the strategic choice perspective, much cultural research is leader focused - exploring the meanings, concerns and more usually the intents of this constituency. Such research tends to report on why and how cultures are/ can be changed to overcome the debilitating forces of environmental change and resource scarcity. As such, the strategic choice perspective has come to have an increasingly narrow concern with regard to organisational culture. Corporate symbols, imagery, and communications (and how they can be manipulated to re-engineer organisation) have become the main focus of attention. Appreciation of the phenomenological ambiguity of organisation and insight into the enacted nature of

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organisational life, so characteristic of work in other disciplines (eg anthropology and cultural studies), has been lost to a great extent (Alvesson 1993).

Given that research in organisational culture is dominated by assumptions about omniscient environmental forces and heroic individual leaders, research and theory building tend to be heavily loaded towards the following views:

> *certainty, rather than ambiguity,* through the reification of organisation environment and progress,

> *a realist ontology (*environment is out there, language and symbols and research discover and reflect reality)

> *the pursuit of control and predictability* rather than the acknowledgement of chance and uniqueness

> *an empirical/positivist research methodology* (we collect rather than construct data; we seek causal explanations rather than offer plausible accounts.)

> celebration of the planned rationality of the individual rather than recognition of the unplanned irrationality of the collective

These views characterise a problem solving approach to the study of organisational culture (how can the phenomena be bound, measured, managed, improved and re-created and how can we account for "its" durability, persistence, universality etc.) and an approach rooted in an essentially psychological concept of the individual. This concept starts with the assumption that individuals "need to belong", that organisational life is meaningful and that work is a, if not *the* most, significant element of self identity. The work culture can therefore be conceptualised as a relatively discreet and closed world in which, through symbolic manipulation, leaders can make meaning for followers. Reflecting this perspective, research becomes an instrumental activity devoted to observing and recording this meaning making, transcribing the actions of most successful meaning makers, evidenced through their organisation's competitive performance out there in the environment, into generic models and theories to be consumed by other meaning makers.

What is missing from, or at least very much under-represented in, current debates about organisation and culture is an appreciation of collective action that is not bound by an implicit concept of organisation nor informed by psychological assumptions about why individuals act collectively. Institutional theory can provide such an appreciation.

What might this offer? An institutional perspective can offer insights into where ideas come from and how they gain currency, how they are legitimated and adopted by organisation makers, not because they are intrinsically useful or environmentally imperative but because they are legitimated. It can also reveal how change can be coerced by powerful constituencies and how the diffusion of ways of thinking about organisation may have nothing to do with their efficacy or functionality (Abrahamson 1991, Abrahamson and Fombrun 1992, Brunsson and Olsen 1993) An institutional perspective tends to portray innovations, new models and practices, not as heroic and salvational creations but as themselves regulated, the cultural products of particular

times and places. An institutional perspective decentres leaders, individual acts and intended strategies and constructs organisation as nested in

> "Cultural environments..[which] emerge in a primarily unintended fashion" Abrahamson and Fombrun 1992 P175)

Such a perspective does not study cultures but collectives -more or less ephemeral groupings of individuals which may be time, place and activity specific. Cultures, in the anthropological sense of small worlds, thus become epiphenomena to be explained rather than phenomena which explain.

It could be argued that conceptualising culture as a symbolic field, coalescing around people, practices and artefacts which shift over time and are themselves nested in other symbolic fields, detracts from the utility of culture as a discrete analytic concept. I think this is indeed the case. However, this is not a novel idea as the extent to which the concept of culture is so "stretched" so as to be unhelpful in constructing research questions or in delineating domains of inquiry is already acknowledged. (Ozigweh 1989). I suggest that rather than continue the academic search for ways of bounding the concept (eg. by agreeing some universal definition and/or operationalisation of the term) so as to delimit the field and/or overcome hermeticism in research practice (Sackmann 1991, Morgan 1986, Hassard 1988) perhaps the metaphorical utility of "culture" should be fully recognised and not reified as an explanatory variable.

From an institutional perspective, then, culture *change* is not perceived in terms of discrete episodes of organisational history, resulting primarily from planned reforms and interventions (Brunsson and Olsen 1993). Instead it is conceptualised as a continuing and phenomenological process in which the puzzle to be explained is why some models diffuse (are selected as represetnations of the world) and others do not.

An institutional perspective, in casting both organisation *and* environment not as "out there" but as enacted, as socially and politically constructed, makes strategic choice a matter of choice between *legitimated models* of the world (and between modellers of the world) rather than choice about designing different organisational forms to meet different, objective contingencies. These choices may not be explicit but, depending on the extent of the institutionalisation of models of organisation, may seem commonsensical and the only possible options. Such is the case for many managers in choosing whether or not to "go for quality". Alternatively, depending on the relative power of various organisation-making constituencies, formal members of corporate organisations may find themselves the unwilling victims (adopters) of models of organisation invented elsewhere. Living in such a second hand world permeates the culture of the Northfield plant.

From an institutional perspective,describing the ways in which and the extent to which coerced or legitimated practices and beliefs (in the Weberian sense) become sacred practices and beliefs, reified and inviolable (in the Durkheimian sense), is the business of organisational culture research. To some extent these processes can be explained as the realisation of intentions by powerful players able to manipulate agendas, images and representations for their own ends. But explanation also resides in the unintended consequences, the unforeseeable and uncontrollable outcomes of collective activity (Abrahamson and Fombrun 1992).

Rendering these processes accessible to inquiry requires a longitudinal and crafted approach to the study of organisation and culture rather than the "ahistorical, aprocessual and acontextual" approach which Pettigrew claims dominates organisation research and which he condemns (1985 P112). Such an approach is in keeping with the methodological position advocated in this dissertation and informs the model I have constructed to explain the culture of the Northfield plant.

2.Explaining Northfield: an institutional perspective on culture

Earlier, I discussed the various cognitive strategies deployed in the discourse on organisation culture as classified by Smircich, Allaire and Firsirotu and Martin and Meyerson. Whilst Smircich's classification assumes paradigmatic incommensurability between her major classificatory groups, Allaire and Firsirotu take a more eclectic position and mix the various schools of thought "to propose an integrative concept" (1984 P193) in which culture is both a constitutent variable of organisation and a way of interpreting organisation.

Martin and Meyerson advocate a multiperspective position arguing that
> "any cultural perspective contains elements that can be understood only when all three perspectives are used." (Frost et al. 1991 P157)
since
> "Any single perspective can only tell part of the story" (P160)

However, unlike Smircich's advocacy of a unitary symbolic perspective and Allaire and Firsirotu's integrationist strategy, Martin and Meyerson argue against choosing between perspectives or resolving the "oppositions" in their three perspectives and unifying them into "some grand.. synthesis" on the grounds that this would undermine the perspectives' "integrity" and mutual incompatibility. This echoes the concerns of researchers in the world of cultural studies who also argue for a maintenance of diversity. (See Chapter 4).

I find that whilst the argument for interpreting organisational culture *simultaneously* as unitary, differentiated and ambiguous or fragmented is entirely warranted it is also bizarre for it is my view that only in the discourse on culture are these viewpoints assumed to be mutually exclusive. For it is primarily in the academic world that the iron cages of particular schools of thought operate (Crane 1972). The managerial world can cope with, indeed possibly assumes, a fragmented and political reality. So Martin and Meyerson's three perspectives may be more useful in revealing the prejudices and culture of organisation researchers than in saying anything new or interesting about organising and managing.

As to their contribution to understanding "organisation making", to some extent their three perspectives mirror a life-cycle model of organisation culture, each perspective being more pertinent to the interpretation of culture during specific epochs in an organisation's history (Schein 1985). However, unlike Schein, no organic determinism is implied in the Martin and Meyerson model. I have used their three perspectives to describe the changing identity of Pitch Products' Northfield Plant. (FIGURE 5)

Figure 5: The Changing Identity of Pitch Products' Northfield Plant

1960's	1970's	1980's	1988-90	1991-92

Universal Chemical Corporation / Northfield plant

Universal Chemical Corporation / management | unions

management | unions

TQ

Plant is a key operating unit of UCC & has a unitary and corporate culture.

Plant is still key operating unit but culture is now differentiated.

Plant no longer a key unit. Culture now differentiated between plant & parent as well as within plant.

Attempts to re-establish a unitary plant culture thro'TQ. Plant divested from parent and 50% interest sold to Japanese.

Move of head-office to plant & further redundancies fragments culture.

Through interviews with long term employees of the plant and the analysis of archive material, the image that emerges of the Northfield plant in the 1960's, the earliest date for which I could acquire any records, is of a unitary operational community, closely integrated and identifying entirely with its owners, the multinational Universal Chemical Corporation.The plant culture can be described as wholly institutionalised, the local "working rules" (Commons 1950), "routines and belief systems" (Brunsson and Olsen 1993) reflecting almost entirely the "rational myths" (Scott 1987) of the parent company, which were both "legitimated" by (ibid) and constitutive of wider societal norms or "macro cultures" (Abrahamson and Fombrun 1992).

Records of that time indicate corporate growth, market expansion, high relative levels of pay and conditions of service, expectations of a job for life, low levels of unionisation, opportunities for skill development and promotion, a patriarchal, progressive and commercially aware management, and a world wide reputation for technological excellence. A local newspaper article from 1965 describes how

> *"Progress within the firm is made possible by a defined policy which seeks wherever possible to promote existing employees to high positions. This has tended to produce a well-knit and structured organisation in which a sense of company mindedness is readily apparent."*

In the mid to late 1970's the plant was still a key operating unit within the corporation but UK inflation made its cost base less viable. In Martin and Meyerson's terms the plant culture became differentiated as the managerial and the, now unionised, employee groups held differing views about the distribution of pay and rewards, and decision-making priorities. However, this took place within a corporate structure in which company wide policies and practices regulated pay bargaining, demarcation etc.. That the Northfield plant was still very much part of a well regarded multinational company was reinforced by the move of the company's European HQ to prestigious offices in the centre of Northfield and the endowing of a research laboratory at the local university.

The symbolic environment, comprising those "ideologies which significant groups.. consider to be rational.. reasonable.. natural, or up to date" (Brunsson and Olsen 1993 P8), was becoming less institutionalised as the monopolistic position of the parent company was challenged by other perspectives. Supplementary views of the world emerged (Commons 1950) as a unionised workforce articulated their interests and sought to defend newly constructed agendas.

By the beginning of the 1980's the trading situation for the Northfield plant was changing dramatically as its lead edge technology was superseded by new generation equipment and there was excess capacity in its markets as a result of the recession in the steel industry. As in many mature manufacturing industries at this time, retrenchment and cost cutting became primary managerial concerns. Northfield's role in the corporate plan became that of preventing other manufacturers from entering the UK market rather than contributing much to the corporation's balance sheet. Consequently, it operated almost as an overhead and hence there was little incentive for the American parent to invest. The plant wasn't abandoned but it certainly wasn't receiving the praise and attention managers had been used to. Other plants, other managers, were now stars. At Northfield, headoffice managers were increasingly seen to represent the plant's American, and somewhat instrumental, owners. Decisions which might be painful at

local level were dutifully justified in terms of their corporate benefits - including the first 250 redundancies. The plant was quickly becoming part of Universal Chemical's past rather than a contributor to its future. It no longer featured in the corporation's glossy marketing brochures. As a plant foreman explained to me -

> "we stopped thinking of ourselves as UCC first and Northfield second and turned it around."

The identity of the plant as separate from the parent, and to some extent abandoned by the parent, created a symbolic vacuum, a void, experienced by Northfield managers as a loss of role or place in the Corporation's scheme of things. Differences in interests between different groups in the plant and differences in groups' and individuals' images of their organisation came very much to the fore at this time. The search for an alternative "mission" - a legitimating rationale - became a managerial precipitin.

During the mid 1980's I have described how plant managers experimented with many initiatives (quality circles, briefing groups etc) in an unsuccessful attempt to improve the plant's financial performance through a motivation to work strategy (Carter and Jackson 1993). These were the forerunners of the adoption of a TQ programme in 1988 which, as I also have described, was proclaimed as the plant's salvation, a return to the hay days of the 1960's and 1970's. The plant managers' entrepreneurialism in getting hold of and creating a UCC friendly version of TQ was well received by the plant's European Divisional headoffice. There was therefore, during the two or so years 1988-90, at least the outward representation of the plant as a united group, reintegrated through the implementation of a TQ philosophy. The model's imagery was adopted corporately and Northfield managers found themselves recounting tales of their all-pulling-in-one-direction-plant to local and international managerial audiences. Rehabilitation to their previously high ranking position in the corporate body seemed distinctly possible. But all this collapsed in 1990 when a corporate restructuring divested 50% of the Northfield plant to Japanese interests and the UK headoffice at Fawltey Towers moved onto the Northfield site and was expected to run the show.

By 1991, further redundancies, the awkward presence of Fawltey Towers managers, the absentee influence of the new Japanese owners, and a continuing decline in corporate financial and strategic significance combined to fragment the plant culture into many and shifting configurations.

Schein describes organisation culture as "the outcome of group learning" a process which involves

> "shared problem definition and a shared recognition that something invented works and continues to work" (1985 P183-4).

Practices, procedures, assumptions and artifacts which are perceived to "work" become imbued with symbolic and affective significance. They are totemised (Durkheim 1915) ie. they become

> "a collective representation of the company's unity [and].. serve to generate group identification, promote respect and admiration for the group and its representatives, and provide a source of explanation for the qualities associated

with the company" (Stern 1988 P281-2)

Drawing on Radcliffe-Brown's concept of ritual attitude, Stern explains how

> "Focusing on a single object of attention curtails the natural propensity to reflect on negative aspects of company life and keeps employees' focus on the positive." (ibid)

Over fifteen years, the Northfield plant saw its totems, the objects representing company values, disappear. The issue of "who are we" became paramount as company products and technology, company status and influence, and the plant as a group, lost their affective symbolism and became part of a lost history. Their symbolic environment became less and less institutional.

But this decay of company identity was not a linear process. Northfield managers are not to be cast as victims of immutable environmental forces. The introduction and enthusiasm for TQ can be interpreted as an attempt to recapture the unitary culture of the past when the plant was a collective and part of a larger corporate family.

Figure 6 presents Northfield's cultural themes configured (Miller and Friesen 1984) into five epochal "gestalts". Configuration is a concept usually applied to identifiable generic relationships between strategy, structure and environment (Miller and Friesen 1984, Mintzberg 1979, Miles and Snow 1978). Such configurations are conceptualised as

> "composed of tightly independent and mutually supportive elements such that the importance of each element can best be understood by making reference to the whole configuration." (Miller and Friesen 1984 P1)

Miller teamed up with Kets de Vries in 1987 to link organisational configurations, comprising "strategy, structure, decision-making and organisational culture", to "psychodynamic neurotic configurations of the top executives" (P6), and offer a typology of "sick organisations". These are described as exhibiting "thematically related" characteristics of poor performance and of collective and/or projective neurosis - modelled as the paranoid, compulsive, dramatic, depressive and schizoid firm. The empirical base for the typology is a classification of those cyclical "clusters of behaviour that remain relatively stable over time" which both create and confirm "shared fantasies" (ibid P21). These fantasies

> "deal with the firm's origin, development, hardships encountered, and rites of passage, covering all intra- and extra-organisational relationships." (ibid)

I have discussed the limitations of this view of organisation as a projective artefact of the powerful in reviewing Schein's work. Also, Kets de Vries and Miller themselves describe their typology as "speculative", a cross most inductively generated models have to bear. The utility of their work for me lies not so much in the classification of organisations as depressive, dramatic, etc. but in the linking of events, structures and meanings, both in individual relationships within formal organisation boundaries and collectively in relationships with significant others. *The Neurotic Organisation* thus attempts to relate micro and macro levels of organisational life by drawing on empirical data (observable behaviour, histories and critical events) and theoretical frameworks (the

organisation design and psychoanalytic literature). The approach thus seems to combine anthropological structuralist and symbolist concerns for the pursuit of deep analysis and shared meanings, with functionalist concerns for organisational behaviour, performance and the satisfaction of "needs", healthy or compulsive (Allaire and Firsirotu 1984).

At the core of Kets de Vries and Miller's classification are generic shared fantasies, for example the stereotypical paranoid fantasy of "Everybody's out to get us". They argue that by revealing the dominant organisational fantasy it is possible to "predict" many characteristics of that organisation. This is the essence of the configuration argument, that an underlying theme will be manifest in and account for many facets of organisation life. I remain doubtful as to the validity of a handful of generic organisational types as a universal classification. This seems to be prematurely deductive. However, that organisations, as collectives, develop these shared fantasies and images of themselves and that these infuse many if not all dimensions of organisational life, I have found useful in modelling Northfield's cultural themes at an organisational level. Figure 6 characterises significant internal and external events and relationships and suggests the dominant collective fantasies associated with them.

Figure 6:Thematic Configurations in Northfield's Cultural History

Ends justify means
1991-1992

The plant is divided. Managers are the company. Decisions are needed ..but what? Return to the early 1980's.

We can be great again
1988-1990

TQ
Change: language events technology and act "as if" back in 1960's.

Historical Corporate remedies now invoked at plant level

We are victims of others' acts. We are bad.
1984-1987

Plant cannot perform. Everyone is hostile.Closure & secrecy are functional. Performance must improve..

Affective images of a corporate past are invoked at plant level.

We are under threat.
1970's & early 80's

Us & Them industrial relations.
High cost base, shrinking market
Pollution and redundancy problems

We are masters, successful in our world.
1960's

Prestigious Hitech,Multinational.
Competitive in munificient environment.
Unitary corporate culture.
Progressive and dutiful management.

The schematic postulates that moving from beliefs about being masters in their world (1960's) to perceiving themselves as victims of others world-making (1984-87) can be interpreted as a psychodynamic cycle, partly projected and partly reality based. This starts to repeat itself in 1988 as the collective fantasy becomes that of "We can be great again". This returning to past glory, a golden age, will be delivered by becoming a total quality company. However, the sense of euphoric salvation provided by this self reinvention and evidenced in the take-up of many quality practices, is soon shattered as real world events intervene. The plant is sold to foreign owners and the collective is intruded upon by Fawltey Towers staff. Again historical patterns of behaviour repeat themselves in 1991-92 as control and decision-making follow corporate prescriptions and the identity of the plant, indeed this time the very existence of the plant, is threatened. Since then the third fantasy, "We are victims, we are bad", has again resurfaced as the plant faces inevitable closure.

Historical webs of significance are not extinguished easily - if at all. Schein proposes that

> "Any issue is capable of resurfacing and dominating the group's attention at any stage." (Schein 1985 P164.)

I support this view but would add that some themes and practices are more likely to resurface than others and that this depends on their symbolic significance *in the past*.

It is not therefore helpful to think of the changes at the Northfield plant as uni-directional or the result of significant single events, causes or context. Instead

> "Group life is better represented by a paradoxical model, in which opposites and conflicts are perpetually present, than by a conflict resolution model in which conflicts are worked through to a final solution." (Schein 1985 P164)

I have defined culture as a symbolic field and suggested that, whilst the symbolic field that constitutes Northfield's culture is deeply penetrated by the social, political, economic and managerial cultures in which it is nested, Northfield has a unique and identifiable symbolic field arising from its history. An organisation is a clustering of images and symbols, of representations of what is significant, through which organisation members constitute themselves.

I have presented the artefacts and values of Pitch Products' Northfield plant as lists of themes. I now wish to propose the general frames, those

> "more generic and.. more tacit assumptions that people hold about the organisation as a whole" (Wilkins and Dyer 1988 P524)

which constitute the deep structure of the plant's culture.

These assumptions concern
> "basic social contract or exchange relationships between between individuals or groups and the organisation... The basic question addressed by a general frame is, Why should I (or our small group) be part of the whole and contribute to it?" (Wilkins and Dyer 1988 P524)

In the literature these exchange relationships have been conceptualised as those of the market, the bureaucracy and the clan (Ouchi 1980), and interpreted as arising from dependence and anxiety management (Menzies 1960, Bion 1961, Schein 1985), as characteristics of community and identity (Kanter 1977, Van Maanen 1975, Geertz 1973), and as purely instrumental and economic interests (Jones 19).

To interpret these frames it is helpful to consider the plant's cultural history, from the 1960's to 1992, in terms of configurations of themes which can be identified as archetypes or general frames (Mitroff 1983, Greenwood and Hinings 1988, Miller and Friesen 1984, Kets de Vries and Miller 1987, Wilkins and Dyer 1988). They are represented in Figure 7.

Figure 7: The Two Archetypes or General Frames informing Northfield's Culture.

General Frame (1)

Plant's inception

Gradual and Permanent Development of General Frame (1)

Abrupt & temporary re-emergence of Frame

TQ

1940's-50's   1960's-70's   Early 1980's   1988-90   1991-
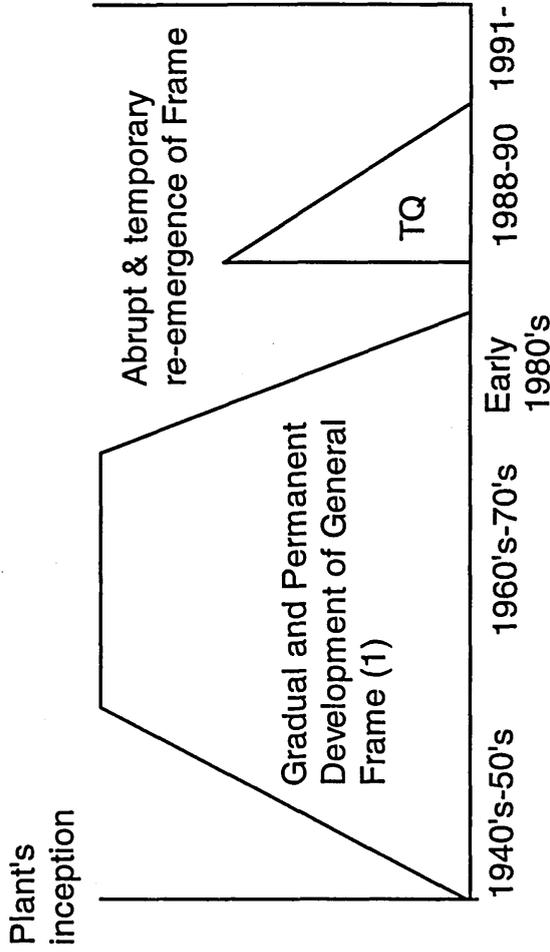
Themes configured to create general frame (1)
"We are a successful, technology-led, multinational; respected in the industrial world with a progressive and dutiful mangement. Skill and commitment are rewarded The world is ours..."

Adapted from McCain and McCleary 1979

General Frame (2)

Abrupt development and constant reinforcement of General Frame (2)

1984
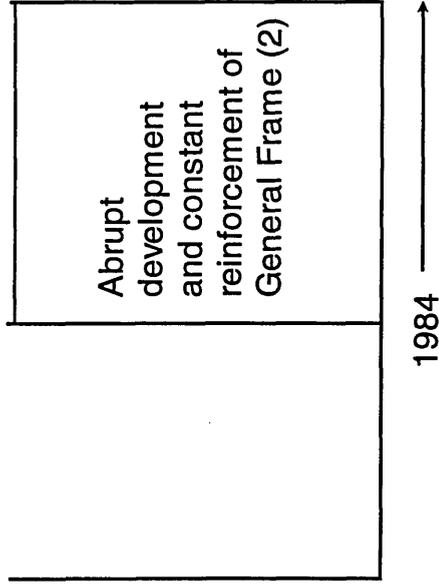
Themes configured to create general frame (2)
"We are not in control. We are victims. We are bad. We are unsure how to improve ourselves. We don't know what constitues progress or what we stand for. Who can we depend on? Who is one of us? Some must be sacrificed. How do we choose?"

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Wilkins and Dyer state that the "unit of analysis" for the sharing of general frames is specific for every organisation and cannot be assumed to be company wide. (ie. frames may be shared at the level of organisation, group, department, occupation or other collective). They also suggest that general frames may vary with organisation production and reporting cycles - more participative and reciprocal relationships being the reference point in slack periods, with authoritarian and punitive frameworks informing relationships during times of organisational stress. This regression from relatively adult relationships into parent-child type relationships, both within the management group and between senior and middle managers, seems to describe the shifts in frame that occurred in Pitch Products. Suddenly, in 1988, everything was TQ with its improvement teams, communications briefings, house journals and other relatively divergent participatory techniques. Again, with George's demise and Ken's rise, participation took on a more tasky, directed and appointed form as team working was engineered from the top in pursuit of unrealistically optimistic outcomes.

I have interpreted much of my data in terms of a series of tensions arising from the coexistence of the two archetypes or general frames in Figure 7. Drawing on ideas from Bion 1959, Jacques 1955 and later Kets de Vries and Miller 1987, behaviour in groups can be described as arising from individual and interpersonal concerns with emotional survival and task accomplishment. The extent to which group or individual, task or fantasy concerns predominate at anytime, can result in very different collective solutions to the problems apparently facing the group.

I have already mentioned that Pitch Products senior managers seem to demonstrate a low level of symbolic competence - an inability and/or unwillingness to manage the plant's symbolic environment to their (or their group's) advantage. However, I would argue, managers cannot abdicate their role to "make meaning" (Peters and Waterman 1984). If the symbolic environment is not designed and managed, it will be constructed by default. It will escape from action.

I have suggested that Pitch Products senior managers can perhaps be described as primarily "task oriented" rather than oriented towards "group building and maintenance" (Benn and Sheats 1948 - quoted in Schein 1985 P170). Getting the job done and hence product and technology had become totemised. When much of their symbolic world was in disarray,

> "By focusing on these concrete manifestations..(managers were) able to keep alive company values, maintain unified goals, and derive meaning and purpose from their employment." Stern 1988 P282

This shrinking of collectivity, of the idea of organisation making, to the technical and instrumental sphere, created a vacuum in the management of social and political relations at the plant. The idea of "organisation domain" (Trist 1983), those acts of appreciation (Vickers 1965) which become shared and institutionalised into cognitive structures which provide identity, purpose, problems, puzzles and solutions, offers some explanation for Northfield's retreat into instrumentality (Handy 1986). The gradual undermining and collapse of Northfield's "extended social field" meant that the symbolic environment became increasingly "turbulent" (Trist 1983) and unstructured.

"This means that no shared appreciation.. emerged. There is no clear identity. Action

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may be paralysed or proceed in different directions... Bewilderment results which leads to withdrawal and privatisation.." Trist 1983 P279

This turbulence can be described as the fragmenting of Northfield managers' symbolic environment into competing and in some ways conflicting *institutional logics* (Scott 1987).

Institutional logics comprise
> (i) sets of "differentiated and specialised cognitive and normative systems"
> (ii) and "patterned human activities that tend to arise and persist" (Scott 1987 P500)

Scott likens these logics to "repertoires" which are available to but which do not deterministically influence the activities of individuals and organisations. They are conceptually similar to Schutz's common-sense typifications which also are not restricted to the cognitive realm but become recursively embedded in action (Brewer 1988). Cognitions become "objectified" over time and are subject to typification, stereotyping and idealisation. These categories preconstitute the world and as they have the status of "commonsense" they are experienced as "givens" (Schutz 1982, Giddens 1982). The empirical world is then experienced or made sense of through the various typifications employed. As I discussed earlier in relation to the use of metaphors and visual models in TQ, vocabularies, labels and images used to describe what is experienced come to constitute that experience (Cicourel 1972). Likewise, activities and practices informed by and associated with these typifications, themselves become institutionalised, unknowingly and unintentionally, into a range of recipes, rules and prescriptions. These are experienced as commonsense knowledge, as constraints on how experience might be structured (Giddens 1984), but not as determining the structuring of experience (Brewer 1988).

How are these typiifcations, these institutional logics or commonsense views of the world, made available to individuals and how do they influence collective practices?

Scott proposed a number of mechanisms by which environmental logics can influence organisational belief and behavioural structures. These are

By External Imposition: This occurs when structures and rhetorics are imposed on organisation collectives coercively, eg by a change in the law (Dimaggio and Powell 1983) or through the exercise of authority (eg. changes in professional practice regulations).

By Normative Authorization: This differs from the above mechanism in that under normative authorization organisational collectives/ individuals are not compelled to adopt or comply with particular external logics - but see it in their interests to do so. For example, headoffice encouragement (possibly symbolic and financial) for operating units to adopt, maintain, or extend certain practices and rhetorics can legitimate the prevalence of those logics over others. The issue here is that there will almost certainly be "multiple possible sources of authorization" (Scott 1987 P502). Choosing between different stakeholder logics can be thought of as the primary managerial task.

By Inducement: Agencies and groups are often not in a position to impose or authorise

the adoption or maintenance of particular structural and behavioural logics on organisational collectives. However, such agencies may be able to provide "strong inducements" for their repertoires to prevail, at least temporarily, for logics which are induced are thought to be less robust and less long lived than those adopted by other mechanisms. Scott mentions the influence of funding body requirements on organisational structure and practice in which forms and behaviours can neither be imposed nor are intrinsically to be preferred - but are necessary if the agencies' benefits are to accrue to the organisation collective. Meyer and Rowan's work also highlighted the symbolic nature of such structural compliance. Scott makes the point that "inducement strategies create increased organisational isomorphism (structural similarity)" as collectives compete for scarce resources/ rewards /recognitions (1987 P503).

By Acquisition: Individuals often acquire different logics or repertoires by choice. New and/or different models are adopted because they are seen as better in some way (Scott 1987, Abrahamson 1991, Gill and Whittle 1993). Whilst Scott expects logics acquired in this may to be "less superficial" in terms of their impact on organisational form, perhaps some account should be taken of whether the acquisition occurs early in the repertoire's life cycle (Gill and Whittle 1993) and is interpreted as the outcome of rational choice or whether the acquisition comes late in the life cycle of the model and can perhaps be described as a following of fashion (Abrahamson 1991). These may be significant factors in the longevity and impact of an acquired logic on a organisational collective's existing logics.

By Imprinting: Imprinting is
> "the process by which new organisational forms acquire characteristics at the time of their founding that they tend to retain into the future." (Scott 1987 P 505)

This relatively closed system view of how particular logics are adopted and prevail is probably the most criticised and least accepted variant of institutional theory. It postulates a process in which, once created, we become imprisoned in our logics, our taken-for-granteds, precisely because they are taken-for-granted. Our socially constructed realities become social facts (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Collective repertoires are hence conceptualised as historically specific phenomenon, largely impermeable, other than in ephemeral and superficial ways, to post-natal influences.

By Incorporation: Not all structural and behavioural characteristics of organisational collectives are planned or intended. Dynamic systems inherently evolve to create unintended consequences (Robb 1992, Mintzberg, Brewer 1988). These processes can be thought of as functionally adaptive (Burns and Stalker 1961, Lawrence and Lorsch 1967), psychoanalytically compulsive (Kets de Vries and Miller 1984) or as politically exploitative (Dalton 1959, Clegg 1981). Thus the incorporation or embedding of logics into structures and behaviours may occur in a piece-meal, fragmented and unarticulated fashion. Conflicting and contradictory "sub-logics" may develop within the organisational collective - among particular groups or in particular contexts.

Each of these mechanisms can be invoked to explain cultural changes at Northfield. I have found it useful to think of the institutional logics influencing mangers in Northfield in terms of a force field or dissonance model - those logics that differ from current views of the world and those that confirm the status quo. The logics and their influence

Figure 8: MECHANISMS BY WHICH INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS HAVE INFLUENCED NORTHFIELD'S CULTURAL THEMES

FORCES FOR STABILITY

By Normative Authorisation:
Historical dependence on and subjugation of individual and plant agendas to corporate interests cast independent and entrepreneuria activity as irrational, counter cultural and subversive. Managers and corporate stakeholders were also habituated to expectations of poor plant performance makin dramatic changes unthinkable....

By Imprinting:
The boy-to-man service record of most managers and the decades of learning how to politick made a challenge to companyis unthinkable. Calculated obedience was a way of life from the plant's origins.

By Incorporation:
Overtime, multiple and fragmented sub-logic had developed in different functional, status, and geographical groups. This variety of rationalities made reintegration into a single new logic almost fanciful .

Cultural Themes

FORCES FOR CHANGE

By External Imposition:
The realities of a shrinking market, loss of investor confidence and the collapse in share price post 1984 imposed a new trading logic on plant over which it had little control.

By Inducement:
The appearance of new competitors together with the influence of the DTI's Quality campaign of the mid 1980's encouraged Northfield to adopt customer-led rhetoric and practices.

By Aquisition:
Individuals became converts to JIT, TQ, Downsizing, Quality Circles, SPC, Team Working etc, etc as ways of organisation-making through their trade & professional institutions, through consultancy, publications, videos and conferences.

Adapted from Scott 1987

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Whilst these forces are presented in the diagram as influencing "world-making" at Northfield simultaneously, their impact was of course felt at different times and over different time periods. Particularly, the influence of those logics which challenged conventional thinking ("Forces for change" in the diagram) was apparent in discrete and specific periods of the plant's history, whilst the logics which buttressed prevailing models and beliefs were far more pervasive and insidious in their impact - as might be expected. The logics supporting conventional thinking were therefore more structural than event-based and, as I discussed earlier, these would tend to be under reported in many accounts of organisation form and fate, constituting the background but not the substance of "what happened".

Looking at specific events that have been significant in undermining or confirming prevailing logics at Northfield, it would seem reasonable to conclude that since the late 1970's, Northfield's symbolic environment has become increasingly turbulent. The 1960' was a time of collective identity. A time of concern for task and a concern for group or organisation as a community. Since then, the culture of Pitch Products can be interpreted as showing an almost continuous decline in its concern for people and a constantly increasing, perhaps almost obsessive, concern for task and production. Diagrammatically, the institutional forces influencing Northfield's cultural themes are split not only into changing and constraining forces but are also split into logics concerned with task and market differentiation and those concerned with social processes and integration.

Several "critical incidents" or "marker events" (Schein 1985) influenced these dual concerns so that members of Pitch Products constructed new understandings of who belonged, in what capacity and how to think about the world outside. These events were primarily:

> 1. *The changing trading situation* which cast Pitch Products as a sunset rather than a hi-tech sunrise plant. Redundancies were ordered and the "single community" was suddenly gone. Some members were now more valuable than others. Who was expendable?

> 2. *The 1984 disaster* which dramatised and exaggerated the momentum (Miller and Friesen 1984) of declining confidence and esteem in which the plant was held and in which plant managers held themselves. The disaster changed the role of Universal Chemicals, and by association that of Northfield, from upright and progressive member of the industrial community to villain. The track record of the past was suddenly gone. Northfield managers and employees found that, in the public mind, you're only as good as your response to the last disaster. They were then faced with the situation that if the past counted for nothing, how should they now present themselves to the world? An image beyond question was required. One already sanctioned by the industrial and political community. One that was also collective - a TQ company?

> 3. *The invasion of the plant by Fawltey Towers personnel.* This saw political repossession of management by headoffice and a return to the style and priorities of a decade earlier. If organisations are perceived as artefacts of powerful leaders (Schein 1983, Kets de Vries and Miller 1984), the possibility for fundamental change was now gone. You can't change culture without changing the power structure and the dynamics of legitimation (Giddens 1982).

Twenty five years of change, and stability, in the Northfield Plant of Pitch Products can therefore perhaps be represented as distinct webs of significance; the configuring of themes into two persistent and contradictory general frames which reflected the profound changes in the plant's symbolic environment betwen the 1960's and the 1990's (See Figure 7).

Whilst the late 1970's and early 1980's had seen a gradual decline in plant performance and a polarisation of relations between management and unions, the company was still prestigious, powerful and politically correct. Probably very few employees would have had any doubts about their membership of the organisation. Post 1984 this situation changed. The immutable Universal Chemicals became a pariah. Outside the plant, identifying yourself as a company man became something less than comfortable. Adopting a low profile seemed to be the sensible course of action.

The drop in public presence between the almost publicity seeking days of the 1960's and 1970's to the publicity avoiding days of the late 1980's seemed to be considerable. During the first 6 months or so of my contact with Pitch Products I was continually surprised at how few local academics and industrialists knew anything about the plant or the company - until I mentioned the 1984 disaster. The plant therefore seemed to have an image derived from people's projections of what they knew and imagined of Universal's handling of the explosion. Very little other data about the plant appears to have entered the public arena between 1984 and 1988. Plant management entered a sort of purdah... yet simultaneously was searching for release in the many consultant offerings that were tasted at that time - David Hutchins Quality Control Circles, The Industrial Society's briefing groups etc. (see chapter 2). As I have already described, Total Quality was eventually hailed as the plant's salvation. Unfortunately, but perhaps predictably, this did not last.

TQ: an aborted excursion

In developing the configuration perspective, Greenwood and Hinings might characterise Northfield's TQ phase as an "aborted excursion" in which aspects of the culture became "detached from the ordering assumptions of the prevailing interpretive scheme" (1988 P305) The prevailing interpretive sceme or architype at the time TQ was introduced was general frame (2) (see Figure 7).

General frames or interpretive schemes are coupled to "associated structural arrangements" which together describe a *design archetype*. This is conceptualised as
> "a set of ideas, beliefs and values that shape prevailing conceptions of what an organisation should be doing, of how it should be doing it and how it should be judged, combined with structures and processes that serve to implement and reinforce those ideas." (ibid P295)

Design archetypes are influenced and then buttressed by the vested interests and power relationships that are intertwined with particular archetypes. (ibid)

The notion of design archetype is based on the idea of coherence between elements of organisation; specifically here, between environment, structure and strategy. This follows the basic premise of contingency theory. However, Weick has suggested that strategy and culture are conceptually interchangeable and that environments are enacted -

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organisations looming large in their own landscapes (Weick 1979). It is this view that Greenwood and Hinings adopt; not one in which organisations adapt to pregiven and objective environments but one in which environment itself is an artefact of cognitive and affective assumptions. Organisation making is thus seen as

> "derivative of underlying beliefs and ideas...and interpretive schemes contain beliefs and values about domain, organisational form and criteria for performance" (Greenwood and Hinings 1988 P299)

Greenwood and Hinings propose the concept of organisational design archetype as a way of furthering theoretical development in organisation studies by rediscovering classification. Drawing on Mintzberg (1979) and Miller and Friesen (1984), they argue that there are a limited number of design configurations and that empirical classification of these types and of movement between them, will spur theory development.

Whilst I am not convinced that there are a few types of organisation into which all others can be classified, particularly if the basis of classification is interpretive schema or general frame, I have found their ideas on movement between types helpful in explaining stability and change at Northfield. Of particular interest are the hypotheses that

1. Design types prevail - there is inertia.
2. Design types are in momentum - undergoing continuous but incremental change
3. All elements of a design type are not equally significant to organisation members. Hence some elements can be redesigned without much impact or change in the underlying interpretive scheme. There can be visible and extensive changes within an archetype.
4. A change of design archetype means a change in high impact (Kanter 1984) elements ie. those patterns of organisation life which embody values and cognitions central to the general frame.

I agree with Greenwood and Hinings that identifying which elements of organisation can be described as having high impact is an empirical matter, the outcome of specific historical, technological and ideological influences. However, I do not see this dissertation as the first stage towards a classification of design types.

I have undertaken a single case study and therefore cannot make any claims to empirical classification. I have argued that to understand what's going on at Northfield, emic categories are far more useful than etic ones. Indeed, to classify interpretive schemas and general frames into types of organisation seems to me to aid little in appreciating and explaining events in a particular setting. The problems of demonstrating that members' views and interpretations coincide with those of a particular type seem insurmountable and erring toward a mechanistic and deterministic perspective on organisation making.

But it does appear reasonable to classify *patterns of change* in archetypes - not in terms of the content or themes of the generic frame, but in terms of the scope, the speed and the unequivocal nature of the change process.

I have therefore classified Northfield's TQ era as an *aborted excursion* within Greenwood and Hinings' typology of configurative coupling and decoupling. (1988 P305) This is described as a change in which there is "temporary fraying" of coherence between interpretive frame and organisational form. This loss of coherence is signalled by the introduction of embryonic structures and symbols of an experimental archetype. The generic frame thus becomes ambiguous.

Two explanations are proffered for the introduction of these experimental practices. The first rationalises changes in organisation practice as arising from the pursuit of efficient and effective task execution. (Hinings 1988) The second interprets structure and pattern as symbolic and understands change as the maintenance of legitimacy. (Meyer and Rowan 1977)

At Northfield both explanations are appropriate in explaining the short-lived love affair with TQ. Firstly, becoming a TQ company held out the promise of legitimation and hence re-entry into the industrial community from which Northfield had been summarily excluded. Secondly, as task became the last remnant of collectivity at the plant, any belief system which put task performance first was immediately consonant with Northfield's cultural obsession and simultaneously left the more ambiguous and divisive aspects of the general frame in the background. However, it was this very limiting of the experimentation largely to the execution of task alone that resulted in the archetype change being temporary and eventually aborted. It did not bite into the high impact elements of the prevailing general frame. In Northfield's case these were (1) a continuing belief in the plant as an operating arm of a multinational company and hence not in control of its fortunes and (2) the continuous demonstration, against the TQ rhetoric, that some members of the organisation were more powerful and more valuable than others. The move to the plant of headoffice staff from Fawltey Towers hastened the end of the excursions and a return to general frame (2).

In summary, Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) list the following processes as tending to sustain the primacy of an existing frame:
1. hiring young recruits with little or no prior organisational experience;
2. promoting from within;
3. inducing members to stay by offering relatively high wages/ security/ status.
4. formalising interactions with the outside world through a few appointed and reliable lieutenants or gatekeepers.

They argue that the predominant frame is likely to be questioned when
1. The opposite of the above takes place
2. when the company' success is not attributed to its recent history and hence is not codified into stories (Nystrom and Starbuck 1984).
3. When the general frame does not echo societal values and morals and the organisation is not perceived as operating responsibly by its members
4. When organisation members have little involvement in and hence ownership of significant policy and practice decisions which support the frame (Kanter 1977).
5. When the frame is complex and difficult to understand as the articulation of the frame becomes incoherent, variations and omissions take place.

The history of Northfield can be described as shifting between these groups of practices

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and the archetypal images informing them.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an institutional analysis to explain the cultural themes at Pitch Products Northfield plant. It suggested that such a perspective can overcome the hermeticism of prevailing models of cultural analysis either as the instrumental constructions of managers or as anthropological small worlds. However, such an analysis is seen as supplementing rather than replacing "management-centric" and "local-culture" views (Alvesson 1993 P92). The task of organisational cultural research is to explain how organisation is accomplished. An institutional perspective provides a neglected slant on this puzzle and offers a way of relating macro and micro issues within the same conceptual space.

I have argued that the cultural analysis of organisation has been unduly bound by the use of implicit and uncritical conceptualisations of organisation. I have suggested that what is *organisational* about culture is a matter for empirical research and should not be assumed apriori. Models of culture, with all their differences, tend to have in common an assumption that the boundary of the phenomenon "culture" is coterminous with the legal, corporate, or physical organisation boundary and hence look for the origins of and explanations for cultural themes within that boundary. This research has shown that alternative images appropriate to the cultural analysis of organisation may be those of thought collectives, cognitive communities and institutions.

Reconceptualising organisation as itself symbolically constructed and nested simultaneously in many different fields of significance, makes members' images of their organisation a key output of the research agenda rather than a researcher input to that agenda. Researching organisation-making then becomes conceptualised as articulating the mundane and on-going, though perhaps fractured, processes of meaning construction as well as cataloguing key events and happenings (Gregory 1983, Alvesson 1993).

Scott's taxonomy of mechanisms by which institutional logics influence organisation modelling demonstrated how some cultural themes can reside outside the formal organisation boundary and be imported, fully formed, into managers' repertoires and agendas. To use Alvesson's phrase, there may be considerable *cultural traffic*.

Taking this idea a little further, it seems to suggest that organisation is only possible because individuals inhabit the same or similar primary institutional domains which give rise to broad consensus on roles, goals, methods, measurements, and ethics and that this domain is not necessarily equivalent to formal organisation. Scott argues that organisation is not the appropriate unit of analysis to describe collective repertoires and explain and map logics. Higher order units are required - those currently referred to as environmental. So collective understandings, shared meanings, institutional logics and repertoires do not develop

> "from relating to others within the same organisational unit, but from participating in the same institutional environment, from sharing the same [environmental] culture." (Meyer, Scott and Deal 1981 P160)

The implications for research practice are that this requires attention to the content of cognitive, normative and behavioural systems (the usual agenda, with differing degrees of emphasis, for much work on organisation culture) *plus* analysis at the level of the macro or societal culture showing how logics at this level are framing the development of and choices about logics at the organisation and individual levels of analysis. (Scott 1987)

The research agenda is thus reframed to address not only which beliefs and practices are adopted by which (types of) organisation but to identify the institutional domain within which the organisation and individuals of interest are located and to explain how some logics in that domain come to prevail over others. (Friedland and Alford 1987)

This very open systems view of organisation perhaps raises the question of the extent

to which institutional domains can be manipulated and managed to change organisational forms "en mass"? The current changes in the health service and the "demise" in the coal industry might be viewed as examples of such manipulation. Further, is it possible, from this perspective, to imagine that an organisational collective could maintain or construct a logic that was anti-thetical to the institutional environment? This is perhaps an empirical question which might best be informed by a resouce dependence perspective (Jones 1984). However, I can think of family and privately owned firms which, not being subject to the institutional logic of the stock market for example, have the freedom to sustain and experiment with a variety of organisational forms, a freedom that is not readily available to PLC's and public sector organisations.

An institutional approach to organisational cultural analysis challenges the anthropological stereotype of culture as small world. Explanation for beliefs, practices, accounts and structural forms is sought outside formal organisation boundaries. But is such explanation to be preferred to instrumental/functional or small world views? This section explores what might constitute an adequate explanation of the content and configuration of Northfield's cultural themes. The section offers (1) some criteria for constructing a model (2) a rationale for the form of explanation I provide.

(1) What is a model?

Model building is fraught with difficulty (Rivett 1980) so why try and construct one?

Shanin describes how

> "The basic function of theoretical models...is their use as the major bridge between the language of theory and that of empirically collected data.." (1972 P9)

He continues

> "Theoretical models can be defined as closed systems which provide a *meaningfully selective* and symbolic representation of reality... [The] selection of properties in a model presupposes both some underlying theory of the nature of the reality studied and an explicit definition of the study's purpose.." (ibid, emphasis added).

In looking for ways to explain Northfield's cultural themes and the significance of TQ in the plant's history and fortunes, I have considered, constructed and consigned to the waste bin many models - particularly those of the 2x2 variety. This particular form has been condemned recently as the primary output of a decade of

> "paradigmatic pluralism in organisation theorising... based on a [totalising] binary logic (Calas and Smircich 1992).

Although his discussion is concerned with theoretical models, Shanin urges us to recognise the insidious influence models of all kinds have on the way think and act, arguing that we live in "second-hand worlds.. of ready made symbols and concepts" (ibid P19). Shanin's warning, that mass communications and institutionalised socialisation processes make the control of human consciousness through the manipulation of symbolic representations ever more likely, has been one of the themes of this dissertation. However, he also suggests that

"At the same time, the main scholarly elites of model producers retreat step by step into a world of their own creation, the complexity of which makes for a seclusion greater than that of a Trappist monastery." (ibid)

This withdrawing from the world - particularly that of organisation practice - seems to capture the curent trend in organisation studies, as represented in the journal of that name. Whilst visual and hence relatively accessible models were never freely distributed amongst its pages, the obscurity and lack of form of the almost exclusively verbal (and it seems to me embarassingly tortuous) models it now contains hints at a model-making agenda that has nothing to do with informing practice. Indeed, the idea of model-making itself would probably be denied.

I have already confessed that my model building is second hand - borrowing from institutional theory and other sources. My view of the nature of the reality I am representing is articulated throughout this dissertation. To use conventional classifications, it can be pigeon-holed as an amalgam, or paratactic aggregate (Feyerabend 1975), of ethnomethodological, symbolic interactionist and structuralist schools of thought. Their alliance arises from an attempt to address and show the relationships between, and the variety of accounts possible from, different levels of analysis, part-whole, micro-macro and individual-society, and over varying time periods (Poole and Van de Ven 1989. See also Gioia and Pitrie 1990).

The purpose of the study is to demonstrate completion of the research programme "to the required standard" (Sheffield Hallam University publication *Research Degrees Guidelines*) for the award of a PhD. As such my readers will be theorists rather than practitioners and hence the models I have constructed aim to contribute to theory building rather than directly to practice. I am not entirely happy with this somewhat artificial division and have attempted, where I could, to reveal my thinking to the subjects of my research. I have also used the models, anonymously, in several managerial workshops were they have been received as intelligible, meaningful and revealing. (See Jacques 1992 for discussion on agenda setting in theory building and criteria for evaluating "good work").

So what are the criteria for building theoretically valid models?

Clark 1985 states 3 aims in model building:
> (1) the model should be a heuristic device - seeking not only to answer existing questions but also to pose questions not yet asked. (ie. it should be engaging and thought provoking).
> (2) the model should be operational, providing explanation at a level of understanding to inform action (ie. it should pass the "So what?" test. In this case the action is concerned primarily with theory-building rather than organisational practice)
> (3) the model should be parsimonious, accommodating as many pertinent issues and relationships as possible within its boundaries (ie. the model should be sufficiently complex to model that which is being modelled without incorporating redundancy of form or content).

The models I have constructed to
> (1) describe and explain the content and configuration of the cultural themes at

Northfield and

(2) explain how my conceptualisations and hence my modelling of Northfield has changed

aspire to these characteristics of being a heuristic, of being actionable and parsimonious. It is for the reader to judge whether they succeed.

(2) What is explanation?

Reconceptualisations of organisation, away from sealed organisms to notions of loosely coupled (Weick 1976) and reticular (Dunsire 1978) models embedded in multiple webs of significance, have seen new ways of thinking about stability and change. Simple linear causality has become problematic. Notions of reciprocity and mutual adjustment and a research focus on realised rather than intended strategies seem better able to cope with the ambiguity of what's going on. Further, universal principles and generic models seem less and less relevant to explaining (and acting in) particular situations. Contextualised recipes, local knowledge and reflexive methodologies (Lincoln 1985) increasingly acknowledge the constructed and fragmentary nature of organisation.

But where does this leave explanation? What are the alternatives to positivist *explanation*, to universal causality?

"Just anything?"

Guba states that
"Although objectivity is an illusion, the alternative is not subjectivity but perspective." (Guba 1985 P87)

I argued methodologically that my research sought an embodied (Jacques 1992) reading of "cultural data" with the aim of constructing a narrative about what's happening in Northfield. Theoretically, my agenda gradually became to critique prevailing small-world theoretical conceptualisations of organisational cultural analysis and to decentre assumptions about the managerial authorship of organisation-making by revealing the etic and institutional character of ways of thinking about and managing organisation. Managers do not make organisation so much as consume models of organisation-making which may or may not be enacted within the local context (Brunsson and Olsen 1993).

With this perspective, explanation is better described as the provision of "plausible inferences" rather than the presentation of proven causalities (Guba 1985). The purpose of inquiry becomes not generalisation but idiographic "working hypotheses" (ibid) which can be tested locally. Consequently, prediction and control are abandoned, if not refuted, as ultimate objectives since it is recognised that, with human activity,

"Prediction is always difficult - especially about the future." (source unknown)

As such, "some understanding", post hoc and value-ladened at that (Guba 1985 Smircich 1983a), replaces the search for truth and the final word (Burrell 1994) as the objective of research and theory building.

If plausibility is the benchmark of an acceptable explanation then the theorist must persuade the reader of the authority and authenticity of the account presented (Jeffcut

1994). In more positivist accounts these problems of validity are satisfied through an appeal to and demonstration of methodological rigour.

As I discussed in my methodology chapter, in more ethnographic accounts (Linstead 1993), these concerns for authorship and authority spring from a focus on representation as constitutive of, rather than as re-presentative of, reality. Here, meaning is not extracted from data (Agar 1986) and the theorist is not disembodied - viewing *the phenomenon* from "above" or "outside" for

> "the phenomenon is an observer's construct"
> (Guba 1985 P86).

The theorist is thus part of the representation, part of the text, part of the reality constructed. This ontological position of course brings its own hubris - as in more solipsist views when reality is held to reside in the representation, in the theorist. A proposed remedy for this form of logocentrism is to search wider than the boundaries initially imposed by the theorist in researching the phenomenon, for understanding is not concentrated in convenient "research pockets" (Guba ibid) that are isomorphic with theoretical (even postmodern ethnographic) frameworks.

This "searching wider than the initial boundaries" is what I have attempted to do

> (1) in seeking to explain the relevance and meaning of TQ to managers at the Northfield plant and then
> (2) in writing the culture of that plant.

This is in keeping with Smircich's advice to focus on symbols, not culture, for culture exists in the head - of the researcher, not the subjects.

My realised research strategy has therefore been to construct a plausible explanation for my understanding of what was happening at the Northfield plant by successive questioning of my own conceptual frameworks and those of the people whose actions and history I am seeking to explain. This investigation of "prejudice" (Gadamer 1975), those commonsensical and conventional constructions by which we make sense of the world, I have labelled critical cultural analysis (Geuss 1981). This activity focuses on understanding how representations come about and how they are maintained by locating micro-perspectives in a wider social context. Consideration of these macro-structural and historical influences on individual and organisational "definition of problems, perception of events and formulation of responses" can reveal the "purposive irrationality of organisational behaviour" (Deertz and Kersten 1983 PP 154-155). The focus is on explanation at the level of deep structure as well as surface form with particular interest in the relationship between these "levels". An appreciation of the deep structure of research practice in organisation theory, those social structures which constitute "a preconscious foundation for action and interpretation" (ibid P 159), has been a prerequisite for undertaking the project.

(3) Time frames and conceptual boundaries

Perhaps the most significant realisation has concerned the taken for granted concept of organisation used in the study of culture. The appropriateness of formal organisation boundaries for defining cultural boundaries and structures has gone largely unchallenged in the literature. Whilst it has become acceptable to conceptualise culture as traits,

beliefs, behaviours and to refer to these as constituents of but not constituting culture (Trice and Beyer 1992), the symbolic field or set of elements that constitute culture have still been perceived as bound within *an* organisation. Conversely, conceptualising culture as subsuming any one formal organisation or as cutting across several formal organisation boundaries has had very little theoretical air time.

The following diagram (Figure 9), adapted from Pennings' (1985) classification of work on corporate strategy theory, describes some relationships between the concept of organisation and the concept of culture in organisational research and offers some methodological and theoretical issues arising from each combination.

Figure 9. Researching Organisational Culture: a "unit-of-analysis" Classification

	Apriori or etic time frame		Phenomenological or emic time frame	
	A Culture = Organisation	**B** Culture does not = Organisation	**C** Culture = Organisation	**D** Culture does not = Organisation
	(Organisation / Culture)		(Analysis over time)	(a) (b) (Analysis over time)
	Concept of Culture follows (often implicit) concept of Organisation	Concept of Culture disaggregated from but bound by concept of organisation	Concept of Culture follows anthropological concept of organisation - as evolving social or ideational structure.	Culture does not "reside in" organisation boundaries are problematic and may (a) cut across or (b) subsume organisatic
	Research leads to descriptive taxonomies based on key organisational features: eg structure (mech/organic) or style (auto/particp) or strategy(TQ/cost-based)	Research focuses on content of culture & yields audit of cultural traits, beliefs & practices which may or may not be shared. Assumptions about what is cultural often remain implicit	Longitudinal research of "organisations as cultures" results in predominant small world, anthropological view of organisational culture. Rationale for bounding the time frame is often implicit.	Research decentres organisation as core of cultural analysis and conceptualises environment as symbolically significant.. Bounding and complexityof research agenda become increasingly problematic. Emic and etic frameworks can blur.

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Each option, being founded on different assumptions about what is being researched and the design of the research process, gives rise to different ideas about what constitutes an explanation. The options are constituted by choices about two meta issues:

i) The Time Frame

Is the research time frame prescribed apriori(sometimes implicitly or not at all) or is the research framework fluid, with variable beginning and ending points which emerge in situ?

ii) Culture and Organisation

Are the boundaries of culture assumed to be synonymous with organisation (interpreted implicitly as plant, corporation, group etc.) or are cultural boundaries problematic - constituting aspects of organisation (eg. beliefs or practices) which reside either within or outside explicit organisation boundaries?

Juxtaposing these choices gives the four stereotypical research designs represented in the diagram.

Design A: A priori time frame and organisation-is-culture

This design tends to view organisation and culture as coterminous. Culture is conceptualised configurationally (Miller and Friesen 1984) so that if some indices or characteristics of organisation can be classified other characteristics of any particular organisation culture can be deducted. The most well known examples of this design are the Burns and Stalker classification of organic and mechanistic organisations or the Mckinsey 7"S" model. The design yields snapshot, ahistorical descriptions of "cultures" that can be compared across different organisations. There is usually an instrumental/functionalist orientation to the work (autocratic cultures are more suitable for coping with forced and radical change, participatory cultures for sustained improvement in predictable environments etc.). Little if anything is usually offered in the way of explaining the genesis or fate of the cultural types. Contingency is the answer to most questions. A fundamental problem for the researcher and theorist is the choice of variable(s) on which the classification or configurations is based. On what basis can structure, style, strategy, etc claim to predict other organisation characteristics - and to what extent can these be said to be "cultural"?

Design B: A priori timeframe and organisation-is-not-culture.

Events, critical incidents, stories, sagas, decision-making styles, rites, rituals and symbols, are the raw cultural material of this design. However, whilst they are perceived as key features of organisation they are simultaneously perceived as only part of or a sub-system of organisation. Organisation has aspects which are not part of this design's cultural analysis. A problem for this design is therefore what to include and what to exclude in the definition of culture. Which are dependent and independent variables? What is culturally significant and culturally trivial (Alvesson 1993, Trice and Beyer 1992)? Who is to be identified

as a witness to or carrier of cultural traits? The centre stage that managers are assumed to occupy in cultural analyses is a criticism that can often be levied at this design. Bate's analysis of British Rail exhibits some of the characteristics of this design (focusing almost exclusively on ideational dimensions such as whether the BR culture is punishment centred, authority centred, issue centred, confronting etc..) - and some of the problems (the exclusion of work and technology and other materialist aspects from the discussion and the extent to which thinking about and talking about culture is culture. Adler and Borys (1993) describe how research which defines its subject of inquiry in wholly ideational or symbolic terms (or indeed research which defines its subject matter solely in terms of practice and physical entities) is subject to reductionist fallacies. Whilst this design can therefore offer insights into ways of representing and understanding organisation culturally, the choice of variables, concepts, events and witnesses often reflects the interests of the researcher more than the interests of the researched.

Design C: fluid timeframe and organisation-is-culture.

Drawing on anthropological stereotypes, Smircich's aphorism that organisations should be researched "as if" they are cultures typifies this design. Choice of what constitutes cultural data (symbols, practices, stories, artefacts etc) varies widely and is often eclectic. However, the "logic " of the culture (Starbuck 1985) is almost invariably assumed to be contained by an organisational boundary - either site, company, building, and less often a demographically bounded unit. The rational for this boundary is rarely explored but justified by analogy with research into tribes and customs. With its anthropological leanings, the research agenda in this design type can be directed to a multiplicity of outcomes, from primarily descriptive travelogues about what being a member of organisation X is like, to ethnographic studies constructing rich pictures (Van Maanen 1989,) and "deep structure" analyses of the Levi-Stauss variety seeking universal (Schein 1984) and sometimes unconscious (Kets de Vries and Miller 1984) structural explanations for cultural characteristics. The research design is more likely to be longitudinal and hence explanations and models have historical and developmental dimensions. However, the small world imagery condemns much research in this vein to the production of claustrophobic and stagnant models of culture in which agency has little place. Subjects tend to be cast as cultural dopes and victims of unconscious processes.

Design D: fluid timeframe and organisation-is-not-culture.

This research design problematises the notion of culture and could perhaps be better described as an approach directed towards the cultural analysis of organisation rather than a design to analyse organisation culture. How to bound the research timeframe and the definition of what is cultural are grappled with during the research process and may be resolved empirically (Pettigrew 1979, 1985) or theoretically (Gregory 1983). Apriori and commonsense definitions of organisation are not thought to provide any answers for, as Weick (1990) puts it, it may be more appropriate to consider organisation as something that we continually construct or "do" rather than as something that groups and individuals "have" or "are". The boundaries of organisation are as slippery as the

boundaries of culture. The issue then is who are the doers and can these individuals be referred to collectively in any way? If so, what is the nature of that collectivity and how does this inform cultural analysis? Similarly, is the doing planned, conscious and coordinated or emergent, non-conscious and chaotic? With this perspective it becomes difficult to sustain the term organisation as a taken-for-granted concept bounding events, cognitions, material changes, attitudes,practices or whatever else we choose to define as cultural. The concept of organisation and its role in and relevance to cultural analysis thus becomes an issue for the research process rather than an input to that process[1]. Considering existing work, Pettigrew's "contextualist analysis" (1985) probably comes closest to this design. He describes the essence of this approach as providing clearly delineated but theoretically and empirically connected sets of analysis which are linked hierarchically and over time. The key task of such an analysis is that of

"tracking interactions between levels over time" (Pettigrew 1985 P288).

Hierarchical sets of analysis is a reference to the micro-macro continuum in organisational research. Understanding how the micro and macro levels are "inextricably linked" (ibid P281) is one of Pettigrew's main concerns and he models their relationship in terms of the content, process and context of whichever aspect of organisational life is the focus of study.

To map the content or descriptive surface of culture, to proceed to an interpretation of the processes by which organisation members construct meaning and subjectivity and then to
"ascertain why a particular meaning system exists by examining the conditions ..[of] .its social construction"

is a research agenda for the cultural analysis of organisation advocated by Deertz and Kersten (1983 P160). They offer this multiple approach as a way for the researcher to achieve some distance from the research and so conduct, in Alvesson's phrase, "eye-opening studies" (1993 P49).

The classifications A-D portray my shifts in thinking about and conceptualising culture and organisation and how to research them. These shifts have been mapped to some

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[1] Alvesson (1993) has come to a similar conclusion in which he argues (following Hofstede 1985)that the influence on specific organisations of the *great culture* such be acknowledged and the closed-systems image of organisational culture thus questioned. However, his conceptualisation of the great culture draws on etic structural terms such as nation, class, profession etc. rather than on emic symbolic terms such as is suggested by Scott's notion of the *symbolic environment*. Rather than imposing collective structure on the *great culture* and then researching the cultural characteristics of those collectivities (as a nation, class etc) as Alvesson advocates, I prefer a more ethnographically informed approach which starts with subjects' models of the world and looks to establish empirically whether these are constituted collectively.

extent in the chapter on methodology. Missing from the diagram is any representation of an authorial view. The text of this dissertation constitutes that view as it attempts to relate how I reconceptualised the idea of cultural analysis (moving from A to D in the diagram) influenced by empirical data, methodological issues and theoretical frameworks.

Increasing awareness of an authorial voice, itself culturally constituted by the world of organisation theory, has made ever more complex the disentangling of what is being researched from the methods, techniques and philosophical assumptions invoked in doing the research. In trying to question and reveal that which I have taken for granted, both in the research process and in constructing a form, model or text, to represent that process, ontological, methodological and epistemological issues have become indistinguishable. I believe this is inevitable and legitimate in any cultural analysis that has critical aspirations. The main danger lies in reducing research to representation, visual or literary, as if organisation studies is solely, or even primarily, a textual undertaking (Linstead 1993).

Antaki describes how
> "Explanations, unlike mere assertions in a stream of discourse, reveal or claim to reveal what *really* is the case...the explanatory context offers information about the episode which, unlike information exchanged in other more neutral contexts, promises to reorient the framing of the event and the participants' places within it" (Antaki 1988 P2)

Antaki suggests that a problem with this revelatory characteristic of explanation is the implied "ineptitude, ignorance and incompetence" of people's understandings in the "pre-explanation" stage. This is often coped with by the separation of research agendas (we were looking at different things); by the claim to privileged, different, or better information because of different, better methods; or by reference to those "mufflings" (Goffman 1975), those unexplained rationalities, of timing, chance and luck that fortuitously influence the research process. In this way the myth of consensed and cumulative research practice in the social sciences is maintained through the denial of the idiosyncratic practices, opportunities and experiences of researchers and the unique "contexts" in which we work.

I do not claim my explanation states what *really* happened. There are many other ways of describing and explaining my experiences of Pitch Products Northfield plant than the one presented here. Also, my perspective is a very partial one, bounded largely by the three managers whose "tales" I recount. However I have consciously sought other perspectives - company archive accounts, newspaper articles, public and private events, the views of conference audiences and other company employees - not to test out or triangulate the data from the central characters but as other perspectives on what's happening. It is through the juxtaposing of these perspectives, at once different but complementary (Jeffcut 1994) that I have tried to "reorient the framing of these events" and therefore acknowledge revelatory pretension.

However, explanation has much in common with metaphor, metaphor of course often being invoked in place of explanation. Like metaphor, explanation is only sensible against a background of "silently agreed knowledge" (Antaki 1988 P12) and made possible through the commonality of everyday language (Draper 1988, Wittgenstein

1953). Theorists make substantial assumptions about what readers will already know and rely on that prior common and taken-for-granted knowledge to guarantee the acceptability of the explanation offered. In this way, explanation can itself be seen as socially constructed and having nothing to do with "causality, reason or accounts." (Draper 1988 P15)

I support Shanin's view (1972) that explanation derives primarily from epistemology (that which we find acceptable) not ontology (the evidence we have).

The explanation I have provided therefore relies on the reader's acquaintance with, if not knowledge of, institutional theory and claims authority and authenticity partly rhetorically, through the narrative construction, and partly through the accepted explanatory status of institutional theory. For anti-institutional readers this may be problematic.

(4) Conclusion

I have a presented an account of culture and cultural change as not only a matter of negotiation, planning, managing and rational adaptation to the world but as a political and psychodynamic process in which some themes (multiple and possibly conflicting) become configured into practices, rhetoric and behaviour to the exclusion of others. Efforts to manage culture by importing ready made and paradigmatic themes (the TQ aphorisms of *the customer is king, zero-defects, and employee empowerment* being examples of such themes) which constitute instant thought-worlds, offering prescribed and plausible practices, labels, identities and priorities, can be rewarded initially by changes in many planable activities because such themes speak to many aspects of organisational life. That is the essence of their appeal. However, such models of how to do organisation may also be short-lived and their overall influence marginal, having little enduring impact on an organisation's cultural web. A ready-to-wear model of culture, such as TQ, whilst perhaps presenting a complete and entirely legitimated way of engaging with the world, cannot be substituted for a complex, learned, and invented here way of life. A home grown culture (which all cultures are) will not be amenable to change by critique or by sporadic lunges, managerial or not, at specific practices and symbols and rationales.

Culture cannot be managed by changing *recipes*. The metaphor, with its suggestions of explicit knowledge and informed choice, is inappropriate to understanding the construction of culture. A more telling analogy would perhaps be to consider changing eating habits and of course body shapes...but that another issue. What is "sensible", "obvious", "the only option" is itself culturally constructed. The study of culture should therefore focus primarily on the processes and artefacts (the models) of sense-making (Jelinek et al. 1983). I have argued that this should include the study of the sense-making processes of researchers as well as those of the researched and that constructing an understanding of both interpretive worlds can benefit from their conceptualisation as institutionalised knowledge structures. However, trying to be reflective about one's own fishbowl without leaping irretrievably out of the water is difficult.

Jacques offers three strategies for this sort of reflective inquiry:

> (a) study our own dominant culture historically

(b) study marginalised groups within the dominant culture

(c) study other contemporary cultures" (1992 P588)

Supporting these ideas as ways of making conscious the "collection of social identities which condition ones' ability to interpret social experience" (ibid) I have tried to

(a) study the world of organisation culture, as discourse;

(b) study marginalised groups in that world - particularly structuralists, but also ethnographers and political sociologists;

(c) study other contemporary approaches to studying culture -those of cultural studies and of anthropology.

I have chosen to pivot the discussion around understanding the culture of a single plant in a multinational company. Here too I have interpreted the dominant sense-making processes and artefacts of the plant's managers by studying those groups who are or become marginalised in that world and by studying other contemporary cultures, specifically that of the parent company and that culture which is prescribed by the world of Total Quality. The aim has been to problematise or question the commonsense practice of knowledge construction in the domains of researcher and researched and produce an "embodied" reading from both perspectives rather than a "view from nowhere" (Jacques 1992 P595).

This has brought its own difficulties since by adopting the view that

"Each culture will be a product both of a unique past and a process of interpreting the past, ...to learn how culture change actually occurs we must apprehend the general and specific frames of the particular culture and observe how people interpret such events and respond to their interpretations....[T]he possibility of becoming lost in the complexity.. is very great." (Wilkins and Dyer 1988 P530-1)

I have attempted to structure my struggle through the various frameworks I have constructed methodologically. The methods used and their epistemological limitations has resulted in three representations of Northfield's culture. These are

(1) a rational-instrumental and managerial analysis, resulting from the comparative and etically structured approach which characterised my contact with Northfield managers as collaborators to a formal research project on the implementation of TQ in UK manufacturing plants. Organisation-making, the stuff of cultural analysis (Smircich 1983), is here attributed to managerial actions with organisational others, committedly or compliantly, living in worlds created by an enfranchised few. In this representation, managers are deemed to be masters of their organisations.

(2) an ethnographic and interpretive analysis which drew on my personal contact and relationships with plant personnel and on some of the informal observations and events to which I either had access to or participated in. An anthropologically informed research agenda aimed to construct and interpret subjects' understandings of their situations, empirically establish the extent to which those understandings were shared amongst members of Northfield's managerial community, and the degree to which understandings were rhetorical or embedded in practice. The model which developed from this approach

portrayed culture as a complex, historical and emergent construction in which meaning escapes from intentions and actions. It suggested that managers are as much victims of their cultures as they are masters.

(3) a critical structural analysis which sought legitimations in Northfield's symbolic environment for the themes identified by the previous frameworks. The interpretive analysis identified many of Northfield's cultural themes and images as authored outside the plant community. The continuing powerful influence of the parent plant and the way in which Head Office staff were able to reimpose a partially frayed archetype on plant managers (Greenwood and Hinings 1988), frustrating some attempts to break away from an aquired image of dependence, exploitation and dysfunctional managerial practices, was explained in terms of the various institutional forces, or logics, constituting Northfield's institutional environment. It suggested that both the cultural problems and cultural solutions identified by Northfield managers and the fragmented nature of the plant's cultural themes, cannot be explained by bounding the concept of culture by formal plant or organisation boundaries. Bounding and defining the cultural field of an organisation, as a symbolic and collective phenomenon, is an output of research activity and not an apriori input to the process. What is significant in the symbolic environment cannot be assumed or imposed. From this perspective managers can perhaps be seen as the consumers of cultural ideas, images and models constructed by others.

I do not argue for the prevalence of one representation over the others. Each offers a cultural perspective. However, where many works on the cultural analysis of organisation fall short is in pursuing one of these approaches to the exclusion of the others. This tends to result in accounts of organisational culture which are either overly voluntaristic (if a rational-instrumentalist position is adopted) or potentially voyeuristic (if cultural analysis is construed as telling tales about strange tribes). Of course, if the only imagery informing cultural analysis is a critical one, then organisation life runs the risk of, for example, being reduced to the interplay of competing economic or ideological forces (as in many accounts emanating from the labour process and neo-marxist schools of thinking) or a continuous struggle between the forces of the conscious and the unconscious (as in much psychoanalytic theory).

Grand narratives are taking a battering at the moment. Explanations invoking deep structures, indeed explanations themselves, are perceived as "totalising" and "oppressive" and hence critical theory is judged at present to be "mostly passé" (Mestrovic 1993 P51). I believe an empirical and inductive approach to the mapping of institutional environments for specific organisational groups obviates some of the more reductionist tendencies of critical structural analysis identified above. I support Fielding's view that

"The macro need not appear as a layer of social reality on top of micro episodes" (1988 P12)

and that macro structures are

"lodged within micro-episodes and result(..) from the structuring and practices of agents. The episodes are situated social encounters which are partly structured by past definitions and yet always contingent on reinterpretation" (ibid P12-13)

Revealing the historical rules of definition and the rules for novel interpretation is the crux of cultural analysis. This renders the juxtaposition of the macro and micro levels of organisational life, the dimensions of structure and agency,unavoidable. It is this sociological perennial that has informed and confounded much of my thinking . It also perhaps demonstrates the extent to which this dissertation is itself a cultural product echoing

"the trend in the 1990's [which] is to find linkages between micro and macro social theories". (Mestrovic 1993 P90).

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