

**On Reading Lines in Shifting Sands:
making organisational culture relevant**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of
The Australian National University**

Garth Murray Britton

May 2007

Declaration

I, Garth Murray Britton, hereby declare that, except where otherwise acknowledged in the customary manner, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, this work is my own, and has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

Garth Murray Britton

Acknowledgment

The list of those to be thanked in producing this dissertation would necessarily be too long to reasonably include in it, and I will therefore not try to be exhaustive. However, in addition to the acknowledgements made to former colleagues and associates and to those who participated in the fieldwork described in the pages which follow, I would like to specifically highlight at this point my gratitude to my supervisors, and particularly my Principal supervisor, for their support and guidance during this research. The challenges that a project like this presents for a rather more than mature-aged student with little academic background in the previous 25 years are of a very different kind to those usually encountered by either student or supervisor, and I am grateful, in addition to the professional guidance I received, for the good humour, common-sense, and flexibility that has been shown me as I have progressed through it.

Of course, any journey as long and intense as the one which has led me here is at least as demanding on the family as the voyager. There is very little I can say which recognises sufficiently how much I have valued their ongoing support and understanding – and their ability to achieve their own successes despite my sometimes distracted presence (or absence). Thanks isn't enough – but it is very much meant!

Abstract

Despite the ubiquity of the term ‘organisational culture’ in both popular and scholarly management literature, it remains an ambiguous concept, whose practical application is recognised as being far from universally successful. Models which seem to be preferred by practitioners are often criticised as being static or mechanistic, while more dynamic scholarly approaches tend to discount the possibility of deliberately influencing organisations at the cultural level. This dissertation, instead of focussing on culture as some sort of objective or unchanging attribute of an organisation, treats it as a phenomenon emerging from social interaction and individual sense-making. It draws on, and extends, George Kelly’s Personal Construct Psychology to build a framework for understanding the production of meaning by individuals in their social context, and how this contributes to the establishment of the collective boundaries between which cultural effects are observed. This framework is applied to the case of a business school attached to a large university, which is first absorbed into its Commerce Faculty, and then dissolved into a new Department, as the overall university structure is modified. Grounded Theory methodology is used to develop an approach to the description of the cultural interaction and changes that occur, and to generate theory that goes some way to explaining how and why they do. The theory gives insight into how latent cultural distinctions become, or are made, salient and the different means by which divisions may be resolved or superseded, sometimes resulting in conflict. Implications are explored for the management of organisations undergoing change, particularly where this involves merging or restructuring organisational units, and for the training and development of managers who are to be involved in such activities.

At a theoretical level, building on a constructivist and processual ontological base, the dissertation makes contributions to the understanding of behaviour in organisations and draws on pragmatic epistemologies such as those advanced by George Herbert Mead. It brings concepts from psychology, sociology and management disciplines to bear on the problem of cultural interaction, and suggests that integrating them in this way may enhance their value in this context.

By focussing on culture as a phenomenon produced at the interface of collective constructions, the dissertation proposes that it be viewed as fundamentally dynamic – once eloquently described as ‘multiple cross-cutting contexts’ – but, nevertheless, explains how it may be recognised more through its apparent intractability than its

fluidity. Whilst rejecting managerialist approaches which would suggest that culture and, through it, people, can be manipulated at will to reliably produce desired effects, the dissertation suggests ways in which insight into cultural interactions might be generated for those who are participating in them, and options developed to influence these interactions that might otherwise not have been available. It therefore has potentially valuable implications for management practice.

A Note about the Author

I embarked on this research with a practical rather than academic intent, from the standpoint of a long time manager. Of Australian origin, I have spent most of the last 20 years working as a manager in a large Swiss multi-national company, initially in marketing, then in general management positions with both national and international scope. During this time, I have lived in Switzerland, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, and France, worked extensively throughout Asia, Europe and the Middle East, and been involved in, and in some cases responsible for, several acquisition projects and change initiatives. This background, together with the fact that my undergraduate degree was in Linguistics and Anthropology, probably goes some way to explaining my interest in cultural and cross-cultural phenomena, and my belief in the central importance of language and communication.

However, much more importantly, my experience of international management has informed my position in countless ways throughout this work, even where I have not been able to make direct reference to it. Certainly, having lived the ambiguities and frustrations of managing across cultures, and making most of the mistakes and some of the successes possible along the way, has made me rather sceptical of management dogma, whether it originates in academia or the boardroom, a perspective which I am sure can be detected in the following pages. I do not in any sense, however, intend this scepticism to be read as criticism of the countless people with whom I have worked, or the organisations we belonged to. On the contrary, it has been my privilege to work with and learn from colleagues who have displayed the highest standards of professionalism and ethics, in a corporate environment which demanded nothing less.

If I am critical of anything in what follows, it is of judgements made from a safe distance, where time and selective attention have been able to work their clarifying magic. Ultimately, my greatest satisfaction will be if this work helps people who do not have that luxury, who must make the best of mess and mayhem, to make a little more sense out of it.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Motivations and Directions	1
Chapter 2: Looking at Organisations	9
2.1: Directions in ‘Organisational Culture’	9
2.1.1: Weber (1864-1920) and Taylor (1856-1915)	10
2.1.1.1: Rationality and its Consequences	10
2.1.1.2: Scientific Management	13
2.1.2: Human Relations Movement	15
2.1.2.1: Talcott Parsons (1902-1979).....	17
2.1.2.2: Chester Barnard (1886-1961)	18
2.1.3: Influences – Anthropology	18
2.1.4: Influences – Psychology	20
2.1.5: Systems Thinking and its Development	21
2.1.6: New Approaches to Rationality	26
2.1.7: Organisational Culture Reinvented.....	31
2.1.8: Edgar Schein	34
2.1.9: Introducing Dynamism	35
2.1.10: Boundaries and Identity	38
2.2: Themes and Issues	39
2.2.1: Three Fundamental Assumptions	40
2.2.1.1: The Nature of Causes.....	40
2.2.1.2: The Relationship of the Individual and the Collective	43
2.2.1.3: The Nature of Reality – and how we know it.....	44
2.2.2: The Writer’s Perspective.....	45
2.2.2.1: Audience	45
2.2.2.2: Temporal Perspective.....	46

2.3: Conclusion	47
Chapter 3: Conceptual Foundations and Research Objectives	49
3.1: Fundamental Propositions.....	49
3.2: Choice of Perspective	49
3.3: Personal Construct Theory.....	51
3.4: From Personal to Social.....	56
3.4.1: Intersubjective Production of Meaning.....	57
3.4.2: Social ‘Objects’	59
3.4.3: Emergent Patterns and Autopoiesis	61
3.4.4: Subject, Object and Context	63
3.4.5: Power and Construal	66
3.5: From Culture to Organisational Culture	69
3.6: From Organisational Culture to Organisational Change	74
3.7: Research Objective	79
3.8: Implications.....	81
3.8.1: Nature of Theory.....	83
3.8.2: Constructs Define Cultures	85
Chapter 4: Overview of Methodology	87
4.1: Grounded Theory.....	87
4.1.1: Background	87
4.1.1.1: The Discovery of Grounded Theory	87
4.1.1.2: Strauss and Corbin	90
4.1.2: Choosing Grounded Theory.....	92
4.2: Eliciting Constructs.....	95
4.2.1: Site	97
4.2.2: Interviews.....	98
4.2.3: Analysis.....	101

4.2.3.1: Segmentation.....	101
4.2.3.2: First Stage Coding.....	101
4.2.3.2.1 Conventions	101
4.2.3.3: Second Stage Coding – Relationship Building.....	102
4.2.3.4: Third Stage Coding.....	103
4.2.3.5: Treatment of non-recorded interviews.....	106
4.2.3.6: Focus: the speaker.....	106
4.2.3.7: Focus: collective processes	107
4.2.4: Consolidation	108
4.2.5: Evolution of the method.....	113
4.3: Generating Theory	117
Chapter 5: Results – the Descriptive Level.....	121
5.1: Research Context	121
5.2: The Story – Structural.....	123
5.3: The Story – Political	128
5.4: The Story – Constructural.....	136
5.4.1: Regularisation	136
5.4.2: Interregnum.....	142
5.4.3: Integration	144
Chapter 6: Explaining the cultural aspects of interaction	148
6.1: Cultural Configurations	149
6.1.1: Nature of the Cultural Configuration.....	150
6.1.2: Types of Cultural Configuration.....	151
6.1.3: Dimensions of Cultural Configurations.....	152
6.1.4: Properties of Cultural Configurations.....	154
6.1.4.1: Power Differences.....	154
6.1.4.2: Centrality.....	154

6.1.4.3: Boundary Definition	154
6.2: Resolution Work	155
6.2.1: Types of Resolution Work	155
6.2.1.1: Reframing	155
6.2.1.2: Judging and Policing.....	156
6.2.1.3: Modelling and Influencing.....	156
6.3: Relationships.....	157
6.3.1: Considerations around Coercion.....	159
6.3.2: ‘Defining Constructs’	160
6.3.3: Reframing and Centrality.....	162
6.3.4: Reframing and Ambiguity	164
6.3.5: Reframing and History.....	165
6.4: Change	165
6.5: Evaluation	170
6.5.1: Descriptive Relevance	171
6.5.2: Goal Relevance	175
6.5.2.1: Intentional/Planned Change.....	176
6.5.3: Operational Validity and Nonobviousness	179
6.5.4: Timeliness.....	181
Chapter 7: Three Critiques.....	184
7.1: Critique 1 – Macro and Micro	184
7.1.1: The Nature of the Cultural Configuration.....	185
7.1.2: Identity, or the Construction of the Self.....	187
7.1.3: Concepts of Time	190
7.1.4: Narrative	193
7.1.4.1: Context and Constructs	195
7.1.5: Discourse Theory	198

7.1.5.1: Positioning the Research.....	200
7.1.5.1.1 ‘Theoretical/empirical research’	201
7.1.5.1.2 ‘Discourse as pattern/change’	202
7.1.5.1.3 ‘Monomodal/multimodal’ discourse and ‘Cognition/practice views of discourse’	203
7.1.5.1.4 ‘Critique/pragmatic analysis’	205
7.2: Critique 2 – Structure, Agency and Power	206
7.2.1: Empirical Observations.....	206
7.2.2: Theoretical Connections	210
7.2.2.1: Making Space for Agency	210
7.2.2.2: Relating Agency and Structure	213
7.2.2.3: Power	216
7.3: Two Clarifications	220
7.3.1: Reframing	220
7.3.2: Competing and Conflicting Configurations.....	224
7.4: Critique 3 – Misunderstanding the Nature of Culture.....	227
Chapter 8: Practical Implications	233
8.1: Influencing Culture	233
8.1.1: Focus on building the future rather than diagnosing the past	234
8.1.2: Focus on the specifics of the situation, and don’t be driven by general theory.	235
8.1.3: Don’t assume which boundaries matter – find out	237
8.1.4: On reframing	238
8.2: Planning and Control	241
8.2.1: Change isn’t planning	241
8.2.2: Alignment has costs	242
8.2.3: Paradoxes and Leadership.....	243

8.2.3.1: Reintroducing leadership (and managers) to organisations	245
8.3: Education and Development	246
8.3.1: Critical Thinking and Managers	248
8.3.2: Experiential learning and coaching	249
8.3.3: Closer integration of research and practice	250
8.4: A Concrete Example	252

Table of Figures

Figure 1: An Idealized Ecological Model of Autobiographical Remembering (Barclay 1996: 98)	65
Figure 2: Simplified and fictionalised example of individual construct system	105
Figure 3: Schematic representation of shared and distinguishing constructs derived from pilot phase	111
Figure 4: Construct Map - Regularisation	137
Figure 5: Construct Map - Post-integration	144
Figure 6: Typology of Cultural Configurations	153
Figure 7: Model of Cultural Interactions	168

Chapter 1: Motivations and Directions

It is impossible to discuss the modern organisation without reference to at least three themes – the fundamental role of the manager in achieving success or failure for the organisation; the externally imposed imperative of change; and the recognition that success demands, in addition to the ‘hard’ skills of management, an ability to deal with ‘soft’ or ‘people’ issues, particularly by aligning the organisation’s ‘culture’ with its objectives and environment.

Managerialism – ‘in which managerial expertise is viewed as the high priest/chief interpreter of rationality’ (Alvesson and Willmott 1992: p. 436) – is founded on the unthinking acceptance of the assumption that there is a certain objectively validated body of knowledge, skills and analytical techniques that can be taught to managers for their exclusive use in achieving superior performance for ‘their’ organisations. It has been intimately associated with the rise of the business school, and particularly the Master of Business Administration degree¹, which has for a long time been seen as an – or, on occasions, the – identifying mark of the élite manager, someone who has the capacity to absorb the latest devolution of managerial knowledge, and be ‘fast-tracked’ through her² career, leading her organisation to ‘success’. Its recent dominance is often associated with societal changes that became evident during the Thatcher-Reagan years, in particular the increasingly broad acceptance, at least across the developed world, of liberal economic ideas of free competition and individual performance:

‘... the marketizing reforms of the Thatcher Reagan 80s, combined with the economic and cultural threat of Japan provided fertile ground for a form of description and prescription that privileged entrepreneurial values and elevated managers into heroes’ (Parker 2000: p. 10).

¹ This is not intended in any way to belittle the MBA degree, if only because the author holds one.

² For the sake of simplicity and readability, I have adopted the convention of alternating the use of male and female forms of pronouns between sentences, where they do not refer to a specific individual.

Accordingly, the modern manager is not only often presented as a member of an élite with superior innate capacities and exceptional specialised skills, but also as a major player in creating prosperity for society as a whole.

The rise of Managerialism has been accompanied by an increase in the power and status of management (particularly the CEO) and, simultaneously, increasing concerns about the validity of the assumption that management and societal interests (particularly those of shareholders) coincide. As both a practice and a doctrine, Managerialism provides a normative model of 'best practice' and a justification for management to exert greater power within organisations. The increasingly prominent role of management has been further justified by seldom questioned perceptions that the modern world is increasingly complex, and is changing faster than was the case in earlier, simpler times. Such perceptions, whether valid or not, serve to support the claim that managers must be increasingly capable and better trained, and that improving management performance and quality is a pre-requisite to organisational success – in effect, that the organisation depends on its manager(s), but much less, if at all, on the rest of its staff. Organisations, following this line of thought, are seen as essentially stable (or static) and requiring the exertion of some form of external power to change – again creating a privileged role for the skilled manager.

There is a paradox inherent in such a view: that change and adaptation are on the one hand inevitable and common but, on the other hand, that organisations and their members are essentially conservative and slow to adapt. Indeed, much of the popular (and a good deal of the academic) literature suggests that the fundamental issue of change management is the management of 'resistance' to change – the irrational (because maladaptive) reluctance to accept management's determination of what changes to make and how to implement them. Such views draw again on the managerialist idea that management is uniquely equipped, and empowered, to detect changes in the environment and determine what adaptations they imply for the organisation. Of course, once this role is accepted, managers are also entitled to expect that these plans should be implemented by any rational participant in the process.

Modern managers have been extensively sensitised to the occurrence of such 'irrationalities'. Firstly, they can draw on the ideas of the Human Relations movement about the role of individual personality and needs in determining organisational

behaviour, and the associated technology that makes it possible to modify irrational conduct and make individuals amenable to change by adjusting organisational conditions. Secondly, the advent of 'organisational culture', which is usually seen to have begun with the colossal success of Peters' and Waterman's 'In Search of Excellence' (1982), has reserved a positive role, if not for irrational behaviour, for the 'softer' levers to be pulled in achieving organisational success. In the managerialist world, 'organisational culture' offered a means to grasp, and bring under control, aspects of organisational operations which had hitherto been elusive or outside the domain of management, in the realm of the individual and his or her psychology and free will.

For this reason 'organisational culture' lies at the heart of modern management, to such an extent that it has been described as '...the ascendant "managerial ideology"' (Pfeffer 1997: p. 102). Furthermore, organisational culture is inextricably linked to organisational change and change management. Not only is it manipulated to ensure the success of changes imposed as adaptation to external conditions, it becomes itself an object of scrutiny and adjustment. Peters and Waterman provide a typical formulation: 'Top performers create a broad uplifting shared culture – a coherent framework within which charged up people search for appropriate adaptation' (1982: p. 51).

The type of culture prevailing in an organisation is seen as evidence of managerial performance, alongside 'hard' measures such as growth and profit, and sanctions may be exacted when things go wrong – consider the National Australia Bank's experience with exchange trading losses, which resulted in the reassignment of the Director responsible for Culture at the time. When an organisation fails, 'culture change' is frequently undertaken – witness the reaction to the Australian Commonwealth Ombudsman's 'Report of Inquiry into the Circumstances of the Vivian Alvarez Matter', which involved an enforced and urgent 'culture change' programme being imposed upon the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. A consulting industry has been established to assist in 'diagnosing' culture and prescribing programmes to change (or perhaps cure) it. Libraries of books have been written for the benefit of the manager who wishes to understand culture (usually as part of a change initiative), or the researcher hoping to contribute to the scientific body of knowledge about it – to the extent that there appears to be a certain satiety or boredom developing

around the topic, as both practitioners and academics look for more exciting vehicles to demonstrate their virtuosity.

Against this background, another study of organisational culture may seem unlikely to produce much novelty, or expand the already far distant horizons of knowledge about the subject. However, before the relentless search for the next great management tool moves on, a note of alarm should be raised. It is widely claimed that 70% of mergers and acquisitions 'fail', due to difficulties associated with culture. Furthermore, one of the most distinguished scholars in the area has stated that '...intellectual disputes ...have made it nearly impossible to write a cumulative history of "what we have learned so far about cultures in organizations"' (Martin 2002). Indeed, there is significant doubt as to the practical value of existing approaches to organisational culture, which have been described as 'an amalgam of mythologizing and mystification couched in marketable quasi-anthropological language. In addition, cultural explanations for success or failure are vague and untestable' (Parker 2000: p. 25). Perhaps even more worrying, from a practitioner's viewpoint: 'There is simply no compelling evidence here that organizational culture – whatever it might be – is related to profitability, efficiency, job satisfaction, and so on' (p. 17). Finally, even Tom Peters seems to have abandoned the concept – in an article entitled 'Tom Peters' True Confessions', he admits that:

'1. He had no idea what he was doing when he wrote the book. 2. He faked the data. 3. The book did not go far enough against all of the Management 101-style conventional thinking that was running American businesses back in 1981. 4. He owes it all to Mark van Eeghen and the Oakland Raiders. 5. He would never write that book today because he is not interested in excellence, he is interested in interesting' (2001).

Was 'organisational culture' a phase through which management passed, another fad to be discarded with Management by Objectives? Is there nothing more constructive to say about it?

This project arose from a desire to understand the way 'organisational culture' interacts with changes in organisations, in terms that would be useful to people involved in those changes. This focus reflects the author's past experience of, and dissatisfaction with, the

approaches to organisational culture with which he has come into contact as a practitioner, particularly as they apply in conditions of radical change (e.g., mergers and acquisitions, major restructuring). Three specific weaknesses seem to be common, all related to a fundamental lack of dynamism:

- a tendency to produce backward looking descriptions of organisations as static structures upon which change must be imposed, when my experience suggests that maintaining stability is often just as important an issue. This also manifests itself as a preoccupation with initial and final states, with little guidance offered as to how to move from one to the other, or recognition of the constantly evolving nature of organisations, where no stable state is ever finally achieved;
- a lack of insight into how ‘cultures’ and ‘subcultures’ interact with each other, come together to form new units, or fail to integrate at all; and
- a tendency to treat the organisation in isolation, without providing any means for understanding behaviour in its broader social context.

The problems are elegantly summed up by Martin’s observation that ‘Organizational scholars often study cultures of organizations as if they were clearly delineated tiles in a mosaic, isolated from each other, frozen in time, with clearly defined boundaries’ (2002: p. 317). As such, ‘studies of cultures in organizations have not adequately reflected the rapidly changing environment of contemporary organizations...in which clear, stable boundaries between one culture and another may seldom exist’ (Martin 2002: p. 318). Moreover, many existing approaches demand large-scale, intrusive and often time-consuming diagnostic activity or surveys, making them difficult to apply in precisely the situations where organisational culture would seem to have its greatest impact – when previously unconnected groups are forced to interact, or when fundamental changes are imposed on existing relationships. The underlying purpose of this research has been to develop a dynamic approach to understanding organisational culture which is more relevant and applicable to such situations.

In undertaking such a project, I am clearly making a statement that there remains something of value to be learnt in the field. I also hope to give some support to Lewin’s aphorism that ‘There’s nothing so practical as good theory’. I have spent most of my

adult life as a practicing manager, and have no intention of repudiating my past, either by seeking to delink theory from its practical implications or by treating management as if it were a fundamentally negative or immoral activity. Indeed, I will suggest that Managerialism has acted as a significant impediment to the practice of management, following Ghoshal's assessment that 'bad management theories are, at present, destroying good management practices' (2005: p. 86). Instead, I will propose a new way of looking at organisational interaction which, I believe, has significant potential to assist managers (but not only them!) in their everyday pursuits. I will also touch on the implications of this approach for some broader, but nonetheless practical, related issues, such as the education, development and evaluation of managers.

I entered this research with no pre-existing hypothesis or tightly defined research question. My professional experience had left me more than a little sceptical about the approaches to organisational culture proposed in practitioner-oriented journals and books, and on offer from consultants. Not only, it seemed to me, was it less than credible that they might deliver what they promised, but I was not at all sure that what they promised was needed, or even positive. Moreover, the term 'organisational culture' seemed to me to have become so widely applied and so little questioned that much of its meaning had been lost. My first concern, then, was to map out some of the broad themes of thinking about organisations and organisational culture, and position and develop my own views in relation to them. The key themes of this investigation are presented in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I then focus on organisational culture, trying to clarify how it might be understood and observed in a way that is consistent with my fundamental assumptions, but which defines the area of interest in sufficiently concrete terms to phrase a meaningful research question. In particular, I build on some of the concepts of Personal Construct Theory (Kelly 1955) to establish a framework for understanding organisational culture as an effect of individuals making meaning in a specific social context, defining group boundaries according to shared and differing understandings of that context.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 are mainly involved in establishing the broad foundations of my understanding of the area; Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are empirically focussed. Chapter 4 develops the methodological approach, in particular how shared and differing meanings might be identified, and how they relate to the relevant groups between which cultural

interactions occur. It also explains how Grounded Theory is applied to generate theory in a disciplined fashion, to 'discover' a way of understanding what was observed in field. Fieldwork was carried out over an 18 month period between March 2005 and September 2006, in a business school attached to a large university, which was first of all integrated into the Commerce Faculty structure, then dissolved into a new Department and Division, as the overall university structure was modified. Chapter 5 describes what occurred, from two perspectives; structural changes, and the evolving political context in which they were set. It then presents a description of the same events in terms of changes in meaning-making processes. Chapter 6 presents an emerging theory about how these changes, and the behaviour associated with them, might be explained. An analytical concept encapsulating the relationships between the groups and their ways of seeing the world is proposed, with relevant contextual properties, as a means for understanding the nature of the specific interaction. The fundamental relevance of the proposed theory is examined in terms of Thomas and Tymon's 'Necessary Properties of Relevant Research' (1982).

Chapter 7 confronts the theoretical proposals of the analysis with some of the other important theoretical approaches in the area, clarifying and extending parts of it, and suggesting directions for further research, as well as identifying what the new theory contributes to the field. Chapter 8 explores the implications of this work for practitioners, seeking to show how the new approach resolves some of the issues raised at the beginning of this study.

I undertook this research hoping to discover better ways for practitioners to understand the interaction between people in different organisations and organisational units, ways that treat them, in line with my experience, as rich, dynamic and human, rather than sterile and mechanistic. In doing so, I am challenging rigid, dehumanised models of diagnosis and planning, in favour of approaches that recognise these processes as context-dependent, constantly evolving, and the product of human interaction at all levels, not something within the purview of management alone to 'control' or direct. I hoped, nevertheless, to identify ways that these processes could be influenced by those involved in them, to give participants the means to make more innovative and constructive contributions to what is going on. I did so in the full awareness that the obverse of such an approach would demand a more challenging, challenged and engaged participant – something I consider to be worth striving for on principle. On a

larger scale, I hoped that a wider understanding of organisations in the terms I propose would reduce the ‘unintended consequences’ of change and organisational culture initiatives, and contribute to more pragmatic and flexible approaches to setting goals and ‘managing the processes’ of such initiatives.

In many ways, this research must be seen as a personal journey of discovery – although in the main, of course, I have merely discovered fragments of what has been left behind by others who have passed the same way before me. I hope to have communicated not only the excitement inherent in such an adventure, but some of the frustration and challenge that I experienced along the way. For that reason, I have not sanitised the account by removing all references to false turns or difficulties, but have rather treated these as important steps in achieving learning. There is also an element of creation involved in such a project, something I have tried to control and direct by the use of a well defined over-arching Grounded Theory methodology, but which is nevertheless the essence of whatever is original in the outcomes, and so not to be hidden. I hope to have produced something which, in Anderson *et al*'s (2001) terms, would be seen as ‘Pragmatic Science’ – high on both relevance and rigour, rather than falling into one of the other boxes (Pedantic, Puerile or Popularist Science) that await the researcher if either or both rigour and relevance are not delivered.

Chapter 2: Looking at Organisations

2.1: Directions in ‘Organisational Culture’

In Chapter 1, I have suggested that Managerialism, and the concepts of organisational culture and change management, can be seen as aspects of a single underlying discourse which reflects a specific historical and social context. The assertion that managers have the central role in charting a course for ‘their’ organisations in times of turbulent change is both political, in that it justifies a higher status and authority for management within the organisation, and constitutive, in that flowing from it is a demand for a technology that assists the manager to fulfil this role, and an institutional infrastructure that teaches and elaborates that technology. It is a statement which, furthermore, assumes that there is value in preserving and promoting organisations, and therefore stakes out a societal or moral role for management and organisations as constructive entities, worthy of respect and prestige. The concepts of ‘change management’ and ‘organisational culture’ are important elements in the managerial technology project, in that the first addresses both the manager’s need to initiate and control change to ensure adaptation to external conditions, and is supportive of managerial prerogative and status, while the second brings the social aspect of the organisation into the domain of management control, and enables, drives or obstructs the first.

The aim of this work is not to defend this particular (and certainly personal) formulation of the current state of part of organisational studies and management practice, but to pursue a project which reframes the concept of ‘organisational culture’ in a way which is more productive for those who use it. This is done in the full awareness that the work might be seen by some as supporting the managerial institution, as a technological innovation that supports the political aims of both the managerial élite, and the broader societal forces that are linked with it. To such criticisms, I can only answer that I believe a better understanding of the way we exist in organisations stands to benefit all those who participate in them, and is therefore both subversive and conservative.

Furthermore, I believe that it is only through the constant confrontation of differing perspectives and interests that new ideas and meanings may be created and that we may

develop individually and collectively – just such a productive confrontation as I wish to stimulate with this work.

In this Chapter, I survey the major ideas that gave rise to and surround the modern usage of ‘organisational culture’, as a means of clarifying some assumptions that I believe are central to the way organisations are understood. My intent is neither to produce a comprehensive description of such a vast terrain, nor to nominate heroes and villains by taking sides in past debates. Much less do I aim to definitively cover the history of the emergence of ‘organisational culture’ – even if this were possible, it would inevitably be in good part repetitive for most readers. Instead, I will focus on the development of some key streams of thought through selectively tracing some of the main works in the area, presented chronologically, then isolating themes that seem to me to unite and divide the field.

2.1.1: Weber (1864-1920) and Taylor (1856-1915)

The popular perception of ‘organisational culture’ is that it emerged with the publication of Peters’ and Waterman’s *In Search of Excellence* (1982), largely as a reaction to the failure of earlier management theories, which had proved unable to deal with the challenges of modern, global management and turbulent conditions. Taylor’s Scientific Management, and Weber’s Bureaucracy, both of which are presented as rigid, dehumanised, and inflexible theories which have been superseded by more sophisticated new approaches, would usually be placed foremost amongst these obsolete artefacts of management technology. However, looking a little more closely at these early theorists suggests they were dealing with a number of issues that remain relevant today.

2.1.1.1: Rationality and its Consequences

There can be no doubt about the pervasiveness of ‘rationality’ as a value in Western society in general, and management thinking in particular:

‘No set of beliefs has so permeated modern organizations and their environments as the ideologies of rationality and science. The traditional management literature “provides legitimacy for the position that management action is intendedly rational, that there is a science of administration, that leadership can be both learned and important, and that [organizational]

structures can be rationally designed to achieve specific ends (Pfeffer 1981: p. 15)'' (Trice and Beyer 1993: p. 63).

In '*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*' (1968b), Max Weber presented rationality as a defining cultural value of Western society. He maintained that it has achieved this importance because the Calvinist doctrine of pre-destination was applied in a specific historical context, which 'produced a new type of person. The presence of this new type – rationalistic, individualistic, self-examining, conscience-driven, and work-sanctifying – facilitated the process by which capitalist economic conduct and the rational organization of work displaced traditional modes of economic conduct' (Turner and Factor 1998).

Weber developed these ideas further in his studies of bureaucracy as an 'ideal type', which he saw as developing out of the application of the Western value of rationality in organisations. According to Weber, bureaucracy depends on a 'legal/rational' type of authority, which is characterised by the impersonal, predictable application of rules, irrespective of social position. He distinguishes 'legal/rational' authority from 'charismatic' and 'traditional' types of authority, both of which are based on the personal power of an individual with, respectively, specific personal qualities, or the authorisation of tradition or history (Weber 1947; 1968a).

Although Weber presented bureaucracy as the most advanced and stable form of organisation, he recognized that 'charismatic' leadership provides an avenue for bringing about change in bureaucracies in times of crisis. Charismatic leadership arises when four particular conditions occur together: the appearance of a candidate with exceptional personal qualities; a time of social crisis; a vision of how that crisis could be resolved through a radical break with the past; and a set of followers who believe in the vision because of the powers they attribute to the leader (Trice and Beyer 1993: p. 259). Because it centres on a particular individual, however, charismatic leadership comes to an end with that individual's passing, to be followed by consolidation into a new bureaucracy.

If working out rationality in the organisation leads to the development of bureaucracy based on impartial legal/rational authority, it also implies the depersonalisation of power and relationships within the organisation. In a very real sense, the individual in a

bureaucracy is suppressed in favour of the collective organisation, which manifests rationality. Thus, the position of the individual is different in a bureaucracy than under charismatic or traditional forms of authority, which are essentially personal. The bureaucratic form is primarily task, rule and outcome oriented – individuals may be substituted for each other in the interests of maintaining the organisation.

A second aspect of bureaucracy *à la* Weber is its basic opposition to change; or, perhaps better put, the way it would ideally subsume change into an unchanging system of rules. Bureaucracy, as theorised by Weber, continues to elaborate ‘rationality’ in an ever-broadening variety of contexts, becoming progressively more efficient, and reducing to an ever-decreasing minimum the number of situations for which rule-based behaviour is not defined. Crisis, when it arises, indicates a failure of bureaucracy, and is dealt with by reversion to another type of authority, based on personal leadership (and personal ‘followership’), which resolves the threat facing the organisation and then passes into a new bureaucracy.

The need for change to be undertaken outside bureaucracy, rather than being generated within it, also reflects the difficulty bureaucracy faces in establishing its own goals. Jaques (1976), in a later development of the theory of bureaucracies, proposes a strict separation between an ‘association’, as ‘... a group of individuals with a common goal who have come together and formed themselves into an institution with explicit rules and regulations governing membership’ (p. 48), and a bureaucracy, which is ‘a secondary and dependent’ institution established by an ‘employing body’, an association, on whose behalf it does work (p. 49). By establishing this division between the objective-setting association, within which people relate freely in the context of their varying, and often conflicting interests, and the bureaucracy, within which individual effort is devoted, and subordinated, to the achievement of the objective set for it, Jaques is able to elaborate a theory which allows rationality to function unfettered by politics within the bureaucracy, and which permits him to advance objectively determined prescriptions for forms of governance, spans of control, and remuneration differentials (amongst other things).

The issue of the dominance of rationalism and its implications in organisations remains, I will claim, a fundamental interest of organisational studies. Nevertheless, Weber’s treatment of bureaucracy is often contrasted with ‘modern’ thinking, as if it were a

prescription for better organisations that has now been outmoded. Such a view seems to be based on a misinterpretation of Weber. Since he contextualised rationality as the historical product of specific social and religious conditions and processes, it is probable that he did not see it as a ‘universal’ in any final sense, but rather as a key cultural element of a particular phase in the development of a particular society. Indeed, other parts of his work make it clear that he believed different contexts produce different forms of social organisation:

‘...different religious traditions create characteristically different “economic ethics” or modes of thinking morally about the economic world. Most of these modes precluded the development from within the society of modern capitalism of the Western kind, which Weber took to be based on the rational organization of labour’ (Turner and Factor 1998).

Parker states that ‘...the bureaucratic ideal type is not a prescriptive category, but a heuristic device for gaining some purchase on some peculiarly modern forms of conduct’ (2000: pp. 29-30). Thus, Weber’s exposition of ‘bureaucracy’ is not to be seen as a proposal for the implementation of an ideal form of organisation, but as the examination of a social form that manifests Western society’s deeply held belief in rationality.

2.1.1.2: Scientific Management

At around the same time as Weber was writing in Germany, in the USA Henry Ford was developing mass production technologies and Frederick W. Taylor was developing the theory of ‘Scientific Management’ (1911) for which he is known. Despite coming from wealthy background, Taylor started his working life as an apprentice machinist in a factory, and later qualified as a mechanical engineer through night study. Perhaps unsurprisingly with such a background, Taylor’s work was resolutely practical in focus, and written for the benefit of managers. It can therefore be contrasted with Weber’s approach, which was philosophical, economic and sociological, and intended for an intellectual and political audience. Taylor’s work claimed its motivation as being to ‘reduce waste’, or eliminate inefficiency, by ‘...systematic management, rather than searching for some unusual or extraordinary man’ (p. 7). Taylor eventually became a professor at the first business school, the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth

College, founded in 1900, and so can also be linked to the emergence of the graduate business school and specialist management education.

Collins (1998) cites Burnes (2001) as discerning three key principles in Taylor's work:

- 'Organizations are rational entities
- Organizations should be designed scientifically
- People are rational, economic actors' (p. 11).

This clearly places 'Taylorism' in the Western tradition of rationality. However, whereas Weber was preoccupied with describing bureaucracy as a social form that expressed rationality, Taylor interpreted rationality as efficiency, and charged the manager with realising it systematically, so that reliance on special personal qualities was no longer required. In approaching it this way, Taylor also created a new type of leader, not clearly visible in Weber: the manager, whose power stemmed from his skill in writing the rules to be followed by the rest of the organisation. According to Taylor, management power is accepted by the rest of the organisation because it is exerted in support of a rational shared pursuit of economic gain, which is unquestioned as the main interest of all who are involved.

Taylor's approach to organising involved breaking tasks down into smaller components, which were then assigned to specialised operators. Amongst the most important specialisations he advocated was the distinction between the role of managers, who plan work, and employees, who execute it. This may be related to one of the key foundations of managerial authority: the manager's special, rare, skills. Particularly when taken in the context of Taylor's involvement in management education, such a position appears to be a first step towards establishing management as an élite, possessing a body of scientifically validated knowledge, which uniquely equips them to lead their organisations. Scientific Management can thus be seen as legitimating both the division of labour and the authority of management because it is ultimately in the best interests of all concerned – in effect, providing an ideology and a technology for management in the modern industrialising world.

For all these reasons, it is possible to place Scientific Management at the very heart of the modern phenomenon of Managerialism – a phenomenon which is certainly far from

spent – and therefore to see it as still being in tune with today’s approaches in at least some respects. It is also clearly visible in some modern forms of organisation, such as the increasingly popular call-centre, with its strict regulation of handling times and use of highly-developed scripting tools. Furthermore, it is hard to accept either that Taylor was as completely uninterested in the ‘human’ side of managing as has often been portrayed, or that the ‘modern’ approaches to which Scientific Management has been so negatively compared have themselves shed the dead weight of depersonalisation.

Firstly, Scientific Management can only work if the employee benefits as well as the employer. Taylor assumed a fundamental community of (economic) interest between employer and employee, which led him to advocate the training and development of employees, the matching of employees to tasks, and the offering of financial reward for maintaining discipline in performing those tasks in the authorised fashion.

Secondly, I question whether Scientific Management is, in the context of other management theories, uniquely depersonalising or mechanistic. It seems possible to treat both these effects as inevitable consequences of making rationality the central principle of organising – and it seems that rationality remains the pre-eminent value in much management thinking, in keeping with broader society. Moreover, it could be argued that because Managerialism in general, and Scientific Management in particular, nominate the manager as the sole intelligent actor in the organisation, they are both inherently depersonalising. Hence, I see the supposed break between Taylor’s Scientific Management and today’s management theories as being much less marked than is often implied.

2.1.2: Human Relations Movement

During the 1930s, the Human Relations movement which sprang up around the Harvard Business School brought together some of the main figures in the development of modern sociology, including Talcott Parsons, Elton Mayo, Robert Merton, George Homans, Fritz Roethlisberger and Chester Barnard (Burrell 1996: p. 642). This movement essentially added two insights to Scientific Management: firstly, that organisations have informal, as well as formal structures; and, secondly, that workers are emotional and social beings, with lives outside the work environment, who might act irrationally because of these influences (Parker 2000: p. 32).

It seems that the Human Relations movement was influenced by the Italian economist and sociologist, Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), amongst others, including Weber and Durkheim (Parker 2000: p. 32) – indeed Homans co-authored an introduction to Pareto’s sociology (Homans and Curtis 1934). Pareto believed that ‘history consists essentially of a succession of élites whereby those with superior ability in the prevailing lower strata at any time challenge, and eventually overcome, the existing elite in the topmost stratum and replace them as the ruling minority’ (University of Melbourne 2002). He also theorised that human action is fundamentally irrational, and

‘...can be neatly reduced to residue and derivation. People act on the basis of non-logical sentiments (residues) and invent justifications for them afterwards (derivations). The derivation is thus just the content and form of the ideology itself. But the residues are the real underlying problem, the particular cause of the squabbles that leads to the “circulation of élites”’ (New School 2003).

Such views appear to challenge the rationalist basis of management thinking of the time (and now). However, and perhaps in the same way that Pareto’s ideas were seized upon by the Italian Fascist movement, it seems that the main message taken from Pareto was ‘...that elites could manage better if they understood the irrationalities of ordinary human beings. As a result, for human relations theory, the concept of group values was almost exclusively restricted to the shop floor, not management’ (Parker 2000: p. 32). Hence, Brown says the Human Relations movement ‘reduced social and organizational issues to personal troubles’ (1978: p. 367; cited in Trice and Beyer 1993: p. 69), and Collins (1998) says: ‘Human relations ...did not replace scientific management. Instead, it merely revised it to some degree. Management thought and practice, [sic] therefore did not move from Taylorism to human relations. Instead what we get is Taylorism with a human relations topping!’ (p. 18).

If the novelty of the Human Relations movement is open to question, however, one thing that does not seem to be contested is its recognition that organisations are more than the sum of the individuals who comprise them, and that the social environment has to be understood, as well as the individual actor. This, whilst not contradicting the Managerialism at the heart of Scientific Management, the movement was nevertheless a significant extension to it, and played into a third issue that continues to exercise our thinking about organisations today – the nature of the relationship of the individual and

the collective. Some of its founders also went on to elaborate theories which remain highly influential today.

2.1.2.1: Talcott Parsons (1902-1979)

The work which established the reputation of Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (1967), 'is of central importance for cultural sociology because it marks a sustained attack on **rational actor models** of human agency' (Smith 2001: p. 23, emphasis in original). Furthermore, '...it demonstrated that models of "economic man" are deeply problematic' (pp. 23-24). In his later work Parsons worked on the development of systems theory, treating society as a holistic system of action comprising three interlocking systems: a social system 'made up of interactions between people' (p. 26); a personality system 'made up of "need dispositions"' (p. 27); and a cultural system '...which allowed people to communicate with each other and to coordinate their actions, in part by establishing role expectations' (p. 27). Parsons saw the cultural system as playing a fundamental role of 'system regulation' (p. 30).

Systems theory became closely linked with 'structural functionalism'. Structuralism explains social phenomena by reference to their interdependent relationships with other phenomena, seeing them as being linked together in a mutually sustaining network. It is closely related to functionalism, which sees phenomena in terms of their functions within a system or structure: 'A description of "how a system works" can be construed as a description of "the functions" which the elements are playing in the whole' (Bigelow 1998). Parsons can be seen to have marked out a central role for culture, both at the level of society as a whole, and of its sub-units, as a constraining factor and an integrating force within the framework of systems theory. He also 'provides the most vigorous arguments against the view that modernity has eroded meaning' (Smith 2001: p. 32), so challenging aspects of Weber's thinking on the "iron cage" of rule-based, rational control, and Durkheim's diagnosis of 'anomie' in modern society. In doing so, however, Parsons became associated with a particularly conservative – some would say complacent – view of the inevitable and desirable progress of modern society, which was challenged by the social upheavals of the late 1960's, in the aftermath of which his work became widely considered as obsolescent.

2.1.2.2: Chester Barnard (1886-1961)

Described as ‘Perhaps the most perceptive manager of the 20th century’ (Trice and Beyer 1993: p. 139), another member of the Human Relations movement was Chester Barnard. Barnard had been an executive in a telecommunications company, and his book on the practice of management, *The Functions of the Executive* (1947), could be seen as the precursor of modern management books. In evaluating his work, Parker (2000) notes that Barnard, although remaining firmly in the managerialist tradition, appears in some ways to foreshadow culturalism:

‘Barnard does not use the term ‘culture’, but he effectively formulates managers as culture heroes and shapers of destinies. ...In defining organisation as “a system of cooperative activities” (Barnard 1947: p. 75) he clearly stresses its processual and relational character. Management is a question of building common purpose or an “organisational personality” (1947: p. 88) which can be recognized by someone who has “observational feeling”’ (p. 37).

This appears to move significantly beyond the Human Relations movement assertion that attention needs to be paid to human factors in rationally managing organisations, approaching the question of the nature of the organisation itself, and whether it is best seen as a ‘thing’ or an ongoing pattern of activity, a process – of which more later.

2.1.3: Influences – Anthropology

During the 1930s, ties were established between the Harvard Business School and the University of Chicago Anthropology Department. These were largely the work of W. Lloyd Warner, a pupil of English anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (Trice and Beyer 1993: p. 24). Working closely with Elton Mayo, Warner had a significant involvement in the later stages of the famous Hawthorne experiments at the Western Electric Company, introducing some of the anthropological methodology he had already applied to his research in Australian Aboriginal societies. It seems to have been via this route that the term ‘culture’ first entered organisational studies. One of Warner’s students, Burleigh B. Gardner, taught a course in ‘applied industrial anthropology’ at the University of Chicago, and together with sociologist David G. Moore wrote a

textbook, *'Human Relations in Industry'* (1950), which took a cultural approach to work organisations (Trice and Beyer 1993). Gardner also worked on organisational structure at Sears Roebuck with James C. Worthy, a Sears executive. Immediately after World War 2, another student associated with Warner and Gardner, William Foote Whyte, carried out an ethnographic study, *'Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry'* (1948). However, these anthropological approaches did not seem to attract large numbers of either candidate organisations in which to conduct research, or researchers to do it, so over the following decade new projects of this type ceased to appear.

Trice and Beyer (1993) put this down to, on the one hand, 'the influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss [under whom] the trends in anthropology moved toward examination of exotic and distant cultures rather than those close to home' (p. 26) and, on the other hand, to the influence of the computer, which encouraged the development of quantitative rather than qualitative studies: 'The structural and psychological variables and theories that lent themselves to quantification became the dominant trends in organizational research from the 1960s to the late 1970s' (pp. 26-27). Of course, the growing importance of the computer also provided a useful source of metaphors and technologies for the development of systems theory, and so more directly helped supplant anthropological approaches over this period. This seems to reflect a broader societal fascination with the potential of information technology, which extended well beyond management studies and sociology, and can probably be regarded in its own right as being culturally derived.

Furthermore, the anthropological influence evident in these studies does not seem to have been very substantial: '...many ... explicitly drew on the ideas of social anthropologists to justify their methodology...yet ...do not actually use many anthropological concepts. Terms like culture, myth, symbolism and so on are not applied with any frequency, consistency or reflexivity' (Parker 2000: p. 34). Hence, the contribution of anthropology, at least at this time, might be seen as a support for the extension of management technology into the manipulation of groups and individuals, still within an essentially rationalist frame, rather than as challenging contemporary theories of organisation in any fundamental sense.

2.1.4: Influences – Psychology

Given the interest of the Human Relations movement in understanding both the ‘irrationalities’ of individual behaviour, and the interaction between social and individual behaviour, it was perhaps inevitable that connections would be made to social psychology. Of particular importance was the work of Kurt Lewin (1890-1947), whose three phase model of organisational change (‘unfreezing’, ‘moving’ and ‘refreezing’) remains pervasive even today.

At first sight, this sort of ‘n-step model’ (Collins 1998) might seem to merely repeat the managerialist ideas of change as management prerogative and the special status of management that have been noted in Scientific Management and the Human Relations movement. However, Lewin dealt with some other issues which suggest that this critique is not exhaustive, and fails to recognise other important innovations made in his work. In particular, Lewin pointed out that a ‘state of no change does not refer to a situation in which everything is stationary. It involves a condition of “stable quasi-stationary equilibrium” comparable to that of a river which flows with a given velocity in a given direction’ (Hayes 2002: p. 51). Most discussion of organisations treats them as objects, or even quasi-sentient entities, ‘things’ which exist ‘out there’. This view fits well with the idea that organisations are fundamentally stable, or static, and must be changed through the application of external force. In suggesting that it is more appropriate to consider the organisation as continuous action than objective thing, Lewin opened the door to a re-examination of its nature. Furthermore, Lewin proposed that quasi-stationary equilibrium is maintained by a ‘force field’ (1952), holding in balance forces that favour change and those that resist it. Change may therefore be encouraged by either increasing forces that favour it, or diminishing forces which obstruct it – or both. Although this formulation was clearly instrumental, and therefore consistent with Managerialism, its fundamentally dynamic nature was novel.

Lewin also developed an innovative methodology for social research (in parallel with the Tavistock Institute in London), which he called ‘Action Research’. Action Research proposed understanding social systems by taking action in the world and observing the effects. In particular, it proposed (somewhat radically) that the aim of research into social problems should be to fix them, and that such research should involve members of the social groups concerned and equip them to resolve their own problems. Such an

approach moved away from the idea that the researcher can somehow remain detached from the social context which she is researching, and empowered the members of organisations themselves, rather than treating the organisation as a passive patient in need of external intervention to adapt or ‘cure’ it. For these reasons, I believe it is not correct to treat the entirety of Lewin’s work as fundamentally or uniquely Managerialist – at the very least, it presented a range of alternative ideas that coexist alongside Managerialism.

Another group, which Parker (2000: p. 38) identifies as ‘humanistic psychologists’ – McGregor, Likert, Bennis and Argyris – developed approaches to the understanding of human behaviour based on the work of the clinical psychologist Abraham Maslow, who had earlier proposed his ‘hierarchy of needs’ (1943). This challenged the assumption that individual economic rationality is the exclusive source of employee motivation, by proposing a range of human needs, culminating in ‘self-actualization’, some of which need to be filled before others come into play. Argyris (1957) was also interested in the key question of the relationship of the individual to the organisation, mentioned earlier. He was later to propose, with Schön (1978), the notion of ‘double loop learning’ – essentially describing how organisations could learn to learn and so adapt better – which became very influential in the change management literature.

2.1.5: Systems Thinking and its Development

One of the features of much early thinking on organisations was the assumption that there was ‘one best way’ to organise. Although, at various times, fashion has defined the most popular organisational forms, which are then ‘right’ because they are popular (witness the ‘virtual organisation’!), a significant stream of organisational studies aimed to more objectively investigate what sort of organisational structures worked better than others. Such approaches grew out of systems thinking, with its emphasis on ‘understanding organizations as a system of interrelated components that transact with a larger environment’ (Hayes 2002: p. 23), and rested on two seminal studies, Burns and Stalker (1961) and Lawrence and Lorsch (1967). At their heart was the concept of the ‘alignment’ of organisational configuration to environmental conditions. These so-called contingency (or structural contingency) theories took as given the systems model of the organisation, and the objective nature of the performance measures they use.

The attractions (to managers) of developing a technology for configuring system components to perform better in a given environmental context are obvious. However, although contingency theories claimed as their innovation the insight that the ‘right’ way to configure an organisation depended on its context, this can be seen as merely prefixing more absolutist approaches with the qualification ‘In such and such conditions, the right way is...’ Contingency approaches gave (and continue to give) rise to an impressive array of management ‘how to’ books in the areas of strategy and change management, including classics like Kotter and Heskett’s (1992) ‘*Corporate Culture and Performance*’, which attempts to discern connections between the ‘strength’ and ‘appropriateness’ of corporate cultures and measures of corporate performance. These have an avowedly practical intent, but tend to avoid more difficult questions, such how (and from whose viewpoint), one defines and measures alignment, or success, and over what period. Moreover, in general, contingency theory studies are based on probabilistic matching of specific dependent and independent variables, and give little insight into the causal mechanisms that link them.

Another important innovation of the same era was the introduction by Selznick (no doubt building on Barnard’s ideas) of the term ‘institution’ into organisational studies (Selznick 1957: p. 17). I have already remarked on the functionalist orientation of early systems theory, whereby parts of the system are assumed to exist because they perform some function within the system as a whole. Institutional theory focuses on organisational elements that have grown a character beyond the requirements of their function. ‘Institutional authors emphasized that bureaucratic structures were not efficient in some abstract sense but were ceremonial practices which legitimated certain ways of doing organization’ (Parker 2000: p. 48). Hence, the emergence of the concept of institutions can be seen as a fundamental shift away from functionalism, challenging the idea that it is possible to unproblematically assign purposes to organisations, or their various sub-units, which must now, therefore, be seen as not necessarily efficiently conforming to a self-evident design concept.

The central notion of systems thinking – its assertion of the need to view a system holistically, as an interrelating of component elements, which may be more than merely their sum – nevertheless remained intact, and it is probably fair to say that if any notion is more deeply established at the heart of modern management thinking than

organisational culture or ubiquitous change, it would be that of the 'system'.

Unfortunately, and not dissimilarly to culture and change, the term has also become so pervasive that its meaning has become rather vague. It is beyond the scope of this study to comprehensively review systems thinking and its development, but a number of critiques have been advanced that are relevant, most notably concerns about how to understand the boundaries of systems, the conflict between system structure and action, and the way systems theory treats conflict (Collins 1998: pp. 150-151).

On the first point, a fundamental distinction is raised in system theory between what is internal to the system, and what is external. But what criteria can be applied to making this classification? Are all subsystems either internal or external? Are there no subsystems which cross the boundaries? What about the status of sub-units – can they be treated as systems in their own right, or must they be seen in the context of the system in which they are embedded? Can the environment of a system (unlike its internal structure) remain an undifferentiated universe of possible influences, or is it in turn segmented into systems – but then what of the question already raised about the status of sub-units? The problem of defining the boundary of a system is fundamental: '...the business of setting boundaries defines both the knowledge to be considered pertinent *and* the people who generate that knowledge (and who also have a stake in the results of any attempts to improve the system)' (Flood and Fromm 1996, p. 18, italics in original). At least for social systems (probably as distinct from physical entities), boundary-setting must also be recognised as fundamentally a matter of choice, and interested choice at that, because there are no absolute standards by which boundaries may be assigned.

One way of dealing with this problem is to propose a standard to guide the boundary-setting decision. This occurs, for example, when 'common-sense' writers dismiss questioning of the nature of organisations as academic, and settle on the socially-recognised legal boundary as inherently relevant. It is also the tactic inherent in much more sophisticated, and critical, approaches to systems thinking, like that proposed by Flood and Jackson (1991), when they choose to place boundaries around elements which have many and rich interactions, as opposed to few and weak (p. 5). However apparently sensible such approaches might be, they remain based on decisions taken by outsiders who are creating a system for observation, rather than being empirically

required by the 'real world'. There is no reason to assume, for instance, that few or weak interactions need be less important than frequent or strong ones, at least in some situations – indeed any practicing manager knows that it is often the 'weak signals' which deserve more attention, because they may indicate emerging issues.

Hence, setting boundaries for systems thinking is a decision driven by the purpose of the investigation underway, whose usefulness is likely to be limited to that context, and which may even serve to obscure issues that are important in other contexts.

Recognising this has led systems thinkers to propose 'soft systems methodology' (Checkland and Scholes 1990; Midgely 2000), which acknowledges the interrelatedness of problem definition and solution, and provides an approach to dealing with it. It has also led to the admission that systems cannot be seen as 'real' in their own right, but should rather be taken as 'abstract structures for organising our thoughts about problem situations. ...by constructing various systemic metaphors which can be used to interrogate the "real world", providing insights and promoting creative decision-making and "problem solving"' (Flood and Jackson 1991, p. 4). Such approaches fit broadly into what is now called 'Critical Systems Thinking, which essentially argues for reflexive consideration of the implications of boundary decisions and their effect on who and what is considered relevant to a particular problem, and which seek methodological pluralism.

Such approaches are inherently useful, perhaps precisely because they have chosen to avoid any attempt to present universal solutions or demand coherence between methodologies, in the interests of dealing practically with local situations. As laudable as this is, and as beneficial as the results of such approaches may be, it does not serve to resolve the underlying arbitrariness of the boundary-setting operation from which all systems thinking must depart. It seems to me that this arbitrariness rests on two key foundations – the act of objectification that allows an ongoing process to be identified as a system, and the separation of analyst from system that is inherent in that same act. Critical Systems Thinking opens up these acts to review and challenge, so contributing to better practical results and an understanding of their limitations, but fails to question the fundamental validity of the separation/objectification move.

In some of its more modern extensions, systems thinking has developed ways to understand variability and the emergence of apparently novel forms in organisations,

particularly by incorporating notions of chaos and complexity theory from the physical sciences. Nevertheless, the fundamental separation of analyst/decision-maker and objectified system is maintained, with two effects. Firstly, it appears to place the free will, or agency, of those within the system at a different level than the outside analyst/decision-maker (often manager), because the outsider is able to look at the system at a design level, whereas participants operate within it. Furthermore, this suggests that understanding the system can only be fully achieved from the outside. Secondly, the objectified system is laid open to the attribution of purposes and mechanisms (perhaps called 'inputs', 'outputs' and 'processes') in 'its' own right, which may be taken as in some sense pre-eminent over the individual purposes and interactions that actually constitute the system's activity. Merely stating that systems should not be taken as representing reality, but as organising schema for investigation, does not avoid this problem, because by defining the problem and associated system as a step towards intervention, the 'systemic metaphor' is actually made real.

These effects are of concern when trying to understand the nature of organisations, as distinct from trying to control, direct, or design them, when systems thinking may be of real assistance as a technique for simplifying and clarifying situations for decision. On one hand, the selection of a particular boundary implies the denial (at least for the purposes of that analysis) of other possible boundaries, and so makes it difficult to deal with the simultaneous coexistence of multiple boundaries within and across organisational limits (noted in Chapter 1), even though it might be precisely this complexity that explains ambiguity or action occurring in the organisation. If the boundaries of interest are those which help to understand action in organisations, the possibility must at least be allowed that the relevant ones will be those defined by the members of the organisation themselves, around which they orient their action; and that, accordingly, there may be several competing ways of situating them. To the extent that boundaries are taken as existing objectively, beyond those who enact them, systems thinking raises questions about the relationship of the individual and the collective, and of structure and agency. Furthermore, it must be asked whether the structure of the system can be separated from the action which produces it, and whether one of the most fundamental actions taken by those within a system is not to give it structure.

On the other hand, placing managers outside systems is unrealistic, since managers are clearly part of the systems they design, and puts them in a highly ambiguous position. The manager is tasked with understanding the system as it is, and defining how it should be changed to achieve certain effects. However inclusively they do this, they are therefore seen as developing a privileged understanding of the organisation, and possessing special skills in guiding it. 'The system' operates in some more or less predictable fashion, its participants working within the limits defined by 'it', to achieve consequences explained by how it is set up and relates to its environment. The manager applies a higher rationality, not present in the system, to bring about modifications. Managers, even if they were able to stand outside 'their' own systems, must themselves be part of a wider system in which those systems are located – but from whence, then, comes the manager's rationality? Are managers, in fact, as bound by the system they operate in as participants in the system they purport to design? Is 'rationality', then, not subject to infinite regress beyond whatever boundaries are placed on a system?

In addition, there is a tendency in many of the strands of system thinking to favour descriptions of successful systems as being stable and harmonious, and so to treat conflict as pathological – but these concerns are probably specific manifestations of the managerialist mindset than being inherent in systems thinking. Even within the practitioner literature, attempts have been made to recognise the productive value of conflict, by introducing notions of complex adaptive systems borrowed from the natural sciences (Pascale 1990, 1999). However, it is interesting to note that this recognition is accompanied by an abandonment of the idea of efficient causality: 'Living systems are difficult to direct because of ... weak cause-effect linkages. The best laid efforts by man to intervene in a system, to do it harm, or even to replicate it artificially almost always miss the mark' (Pascale 1999, p. 93). Such views, then, place the manager firmly back within 'their' systems, without the comfort of reliable levers to pull to control it.

2.1.6: New Approaches to Rationality

Barley and Kunda (1992) see the development of management ideology over the last 140 years (in the US at least), as an alternation between a rhetoric of rationalism and a normative rhetoric – between 'design and devotion' – with changes triggered by changes in broader social and economic contexts. They detect five 'waves' across this

period – ‘industrial betterment (1870-1900)’; ‘scientific management (1900-1923)’; ‘welfare capitalism-human relations (1923-1955)’; ‘systems rationalism (1955-1980)’; and ‘organizational culture (1980 to the present)’. Scientific Management and systems rationalism are placed under the banner of rationalism, holding that ‘...productivity stemmed from carefully articulated methods and systems’ (p. 384). On the other hand, Industrial betterment, Human relations, and organisational culture are placed together as rhetorics of normative control, where ‘Control ...rested on shaping workers' identities, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs’ (p. 384).

Although this analysis is convincing and, in much the same way as this summary seeks to, contradicts popular images of the development of management thinking as a progressive movement from coercion, through rational, to cultural, it is important to recognise that Barley and Kunda themselves recognise that rationality has maintained pre-eminence even during periods of ‘normative’ rhetoric: ‘...there is considerable evidence that rational ideologies have always “dominated” the managerial community, in the sense that they are more prevalent and more tightly linked to managerial practice’ (p. 393). I would argue that this underpinning reflects what I have been calling Managerialism.

However, I have noted that the arrival of institutional theory might be seen as an emerging crack in functionalist approaches to the organisation, one which may be seen as weakening concepts of underlying rationality. One response to the challenge was to treat rationality as a goal to be strived for, a normative standard of evaluation, rather than a reliable empirical reality – an approach taken largely by those who continued to work in the structural contingency theory tradition (see for example Donaldson 1995). Another tack was to attempt to define a territory within which behaviour could still be seen as rational, the so-called ‘bounded rationality’ approach associated with Herbert Simon and the Carnegie School. The former approach effectively allows its adherents to continue to aspire to ‘Scientific Management’. At first sight, the same might be thought to apply to the ‘bounded rationality’ approaches. However, Weick (2001) proposes that:

‘Having acted towards chaos differently, people arrange that chaos in different ways and, as a result, see different things when they inspect it. These unique “things” are the raw material from which multiple realities are built ...The

existence of multiple realities is not just a byproduct of enactment; it is the major consequence of bounded rationality' (pp. 386-387).

In other words, bounded rationality demands the demolition of an over-arching rationality, as individuals act in and modify their environment according to their unique apprehended reality. Hence, the possibility arises that rationality may be something developed *post-facto*, to explain what happened – something to be negotiated with other members of the organisation as a means of making sense of events. In this way, it can be seen that placing limits on organisational rationality leads irresistibly to doubts about its usefulness as the underlying principle of organising. If members of an organisation experience multiple realities, it is hard to accept that their organisation can be seen as an instrumental object with a universally accepted purpose, which is subject to design or engineering for predictable results.

The limitation of rationality thus opens up a space for alternative visions of organisations, seen more as patterns of human interaction than as systems or things. For their basic philosophy, these approaches draw from a number of different sources, but notably the American pragmatist, George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), who took the perspective that ‘...human beings act toward other people based on meanings that are derived from social interactions and rooted in language and symbols’ (Putnam and Fairhurst 2001: p. 96). One of Mead’s pupils, and his successor at the University of Chicago, Herbert Blumer, coined the term ‘symbolic interactionism’ for these perspectives, which assume ‘...that the mind, self and society cannot be explained as separate phenomena. Their existence depends upon the way in which persons talk, interact, and communicate’ (Brittan 1998).

Another student at the University of Chicago, Erving Goffman (1922-1982), is usually listed as being amongst the most influential of the symbolic interactionists (despite the fact that he denied being one). He made particular attempts to apply symbolic interactionist views to what he called ‘total institutions’, organisations such as asylums, prisons and hospitals which aimed to more or less completely control the behaviour of their members. He used a dramaturgical metaphor for social life, where actors perform for a public. This approach emphasises the creative nature of social life, and re-establishes the human actor as an agent who in some sense exerts a free will. Goffman’s work also highlighted the intimate relationship between action, context and meaning –

the same behaviour may be interpreted in very different ways according to context, or by differing observers.

The symbolic interactionist approach has, of course, been subject to a number of criticisms. Maintaining as it does that we do not react to reality, but to our perceptions of it, it has been accused of underestimating the relevance of 'real' constraints on behaviour, particularly power relations, and so presenting a very optimistic view of social life. Some of these concerns are dealt with by Berger and Luckmann in their influential book '*The Social Construction of Reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*' (1975), in particular the chapter on Institutionalisation. Here they explain the establishment of social institutions as objective realities through a dialectical process of interaction between individuals and the social world in which they live: 'The paradox is that man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product. ...*Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product*' (p. 152, italics in original).

The symbolic interactionist approach encourages a view of organisations as patterns of human interaction which are more or less objectified, but remain fundamentally socially constructed and therefore subject to reinterpretation. Individuals act and have intentions; the pattern of their interaction creates organisation, which in turn influences the actions of individuals. These interactions are seen as building identities, which then constrain future action. This is a complex approach which addresses the relation between structure and action:

'...This linking of individual...and collective identities, as well as their respective temporal choreographies — each affecting the other over time — leads to an explicit linking also of structure and interaction. Interactions can take place between individuals, but the individuals also represent — sociologically speaking — different and often multiple collectivities who are expressing themselves through the interactions...Of course, interactions between collectivities also involve representative actors, like diplomats or infantrymen engaged in battle. Thus, social structure and interaction are intimately linked; and also reciprocally affect each other (again) over time. This is a temporal view not merely of interaction but of structure itself, the latter shaped by actors through interaction' (Strauss 1992).

Furthermore, symbolic interactionism has significant implications for the types of explanation we may expect about social behaviour:

'If society is socially constructed, then the logic behind some social investigations becomes highly questionable. For to relate one structural variable to another, for instance organizational form and economic environment, may fail to take account of the orientations of the people involved, and the meanings they attach to "efficiency", "the economy", and so on. It is out of factors like these that action is generated: to pay insufficient attention to them can involve the sociologist in an empty determinism in which things happen and processes occur apparently without the direct intervention of human purposes' (Silverman 1970: p. 135).

Symbolic interactionism, rather than rejecting rationality in social contexts, sees it as a product of social interaction, a product which is not universal, but varies according to the viewpoint of the participant, and is in many ways coterminous with the meaning derived from social action by the participant. This in no way suggests that rationality is unimportant, but that it is the result of a continuous process occurring between individuals to make sense of a constantly evolving social reality, rather than an absolute external standard.

As well as demanding a re-evaluation of rationality in organisations, symbolic interactionism challenges the notion that the organisation is a thing; tending instead to see it as a process – applying a 'becoming-realism' rather than a 'being-realism' (Chia 1996: p. 33). A primary exponent of such process approaches to the study of change is Andrew Pettigrew. In his seminal paper 'On Studying Organizational Cultures' (1979), Pettigrew, drawing on Silverman (1970), outlined an approach to studying organisations in which he speaks of '...man as a creator of symbols, languages, beliefs, visions, ideologies and myths, in effect man as a *creator and manager of meaning*' (Pettigrew 1979: p. 572, italics in original). He argues for a 'longitudinal-processual analysis' that

'is more likely to be interested in language systems of becoming than of being, of processes and structural elaboration rather than a precise description of structural form, of mechanisms that create, maintain, and dissolve systems of

power, rather than just attempt to codify distributions of power at one point in time’ (p. 570, emphasis in original).

Pettigrew insists that the organisation can only be understood in its context, and adopts a model of humanity ‘in which actors play parts in bounded social process’ (1985: p. 36), both making choices, and constrained in their options.

By focussing on process, these approaches tend to bring action and change to the forefront, rather than structure and stability, and to provide rich, complex understandings of what actually occurs in specific organisational contexts, rather than highly generalised, abstract structural descriptions devoid of human activity. This deep grounding, and acceptance of the complex reality of organisation as a practical reality, can be seen in Dawson’s (1994; 2003) approach to organisational change:

‘In the case of the processual perspective, there is a commitment to qualitative longitudinal field studies that can capture the dynamic processes of change “as they happen”. ...it is argued that the strength of the processual approach is in capturing these multiple realities and experiences of change in context and over time’ (2003: p. 6).

Dawson identifies three aspects of the change process: politics – ‘the political arenas in which decisions are made, histories recreated and strategies rationalized’; substance – ‘the enabling and constraining characteristics of change programmes and the scale and type of change’; and context – ‘the conditions under which change is taking place in relation to external elements, such as the business market environment and internal elements, including the history and culture of an organization and of change’ (2003: p. 12). Such an approach further serves to emphasise that organisations exist in a specific context, with social, economic and historical aspects, and that action is a complex and dynamic interrelating of intention and possibility.

2.1.7: Organisational Culture Reinvented

As the symbolic interactionist challenge to systems thinking developed, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz was also developing his ‘symbolic anthropology’ at the University of Chicago. Geertz – who had been a pupil of Talcott Parsons at Harvard – conducted fieldwork over many years in South East Asia and northern Africa, and

worked extensively on religion, particularly Islam. He championed an approach to fieldwork which maintained that actions can only be understood in their context, and that the anthropologist's role was not to describe the action in isolation, but practices in their context, so that they make sense to the outsider. He called this method 'thick description', a term borrowed from the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle.

Geertz proposed a concept of culture that

*'...is essentially a semiotic one. Believing with Max Weber that man [sic] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning'*³ (Geertz 1973: p. 5).

Towards the end of the 1970's, these ideas began to come together in a stream of important papers in academic journals (Pettigrew 1979; Dandridge et al. 1980; Martin 1980; Louis 1981; Pondy et al. 1983). However, the concept of organisational culture was really established with the extraordinary success of *'In Search of Excellence'* (Peters and Waterman 1982), and the three other titles usually considered to form part of the same phenomenon, *'Theory Z: How American business can meet the Japanese challenge'* (Ouchi 1981), *'The Art of Japanese Management: Applications for American executives'* (Pascale and Athos 1981), and *'Corporate Cultures: the rites and rituals of corporate life'* (Deal and Kennedy 1988). These works arose largely out of consultancy, in the context of widespread concern about the apparent loss of American business competitiveness in the face of the Japanese, and of the emergence of Reaganomics and Thatcherism. Their preoccupation was, therefore, not so much to develop new ways of understanding organisations, as was the case with the scholarly contributions of the same time, but to chart a new course for managers.

³ It is interesting to see Geertz referring to Weber here, again demonstrating that, far from being a champion of 'rationality', Weber saw it as a cultural product, and that, as Parker says 'Organization theorists are often, whether they know it or not, debating with the ghost of Max Weber' (2000: 29).

It is, however, clear that academic discussion of organisational culture was heavily influenced by the upsurge of popular interest in culture during the early 1980s. Barley *et al* (1988) compared practitioner and academic writing about organisational culture prior to and following the publication of *'In Search of Excellence'*. They concluded that, although the initial positions and perspectives of the academic and practitioner authors differed, 'Over time... academics appear to have moved toward the practitioners' point of view, while the latter appear to have been little influenced by the former' (Barley *et al*. 1988: p. 24). Compared to academics prior to the emergence of the organisational culture phenomenon, practitioners were relatively more concerned with external threats – environmental turbulence, economic hardship and Japanese management – with maintaining integration and control, and (most importantly) the notion that organisational culture could be manipulated in the interest of increasing performance (pp. 48-49). Earlier academic writing had tended to be more interested in presenting organisational culture as an 'alternative paradigm for viewing organizations', and to suggest that it was 'an impersonal system of control beyond the volition of individual actors' (p. 48). However, these distinguishing preoccupations were quite quickly dropped after the release of *'In Search of Excellence'*.

What is clear, then, is that academic views of culture became quickly more managerialist following the emergence of organisational culture as a popular phenomenon. Although functionalist approaches assuming a single, external rationality had been on the retreat in the academy from the mid 1960s, they were given new life by the outpouring of interest in improving performance through manipulating culture that flooded management journals and bookshelves from the early 1980s. While it is tempting to treat this as just another management fad, it has had very real effects on the way organisations are run, and deserves to be understood if only for that reason. Abrahamson observes that 'Management fashions satiate fashion followers' psychological desire to appear individualistic and progressive, without appearing deviant and retrogressive' (1996: p. 272). This may indeed have provided the driving force for the phenomenal scope and speed of practitioner adoption of the organisational culture concept, an enterprise in which much of academia became involved. However, and without denying the practical impact of practitioners' adoption of the concept, there

also remain a number of more fundamental questions which appear to have been washed away in the flood, the answers to which are worth searching for.

2.1.8: Edgar Schein

Edgar Schein is a social psychologist whose early work with Warren Bennis at MIT developed a more multi-faceted view of motivation than that proposed by Maslow. In 1965, he proposed a three category typology: “Social Man”, who seeks to join groups; “Self-Actualising Man” – who seeks to realise his own potential, and “Complex Man” who has many motives’ (Silverman 1970: p. 78). Although Schein and Bennis allowed that “Complex Men” may have different motives stemming from their separate experiences and may attach different meanings to the same aspects of “reality” (p. 89), Schein’s view of the organisation remained strongly Parsonian and functionalist, using an organic, almost evolutionary, metaphor, and preoccupied with the organisation’s ability to survive, adapt and maintain itself and grow (pp. 90-91). Change, according to this view, is essentially externally imposed, and a matter of adaptation and survival.

Schein went on to become arguably the most influential modern academic writer on organisational culture. In doing so, he maintained the functionalist, organic assumptions of his earlier work (Schultz 1995: p. 15). For Schein, organisational culture is essentially a ‘pattern of basic assumptions’, ‘shared among the members of a distinct group’, with its origins in ‘the institutionalization of successful responses to problems the group has experienced in external adaptation and internal integration’ (Schein 1984). Consistent with this functionalist foundation, Schein reserves a special role in the establishment of organisational culture for the founders or early leadership of an organisation, because they define solutions early in the organisation’s existence, which are preserved over time according to whether they work or not. To help study cultural assumptions, he draws on a set of logical categories proposed by the anthropologists Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961). Cultural assumptions ‘become patterned into what may be termed cultural “paradigms”’ (Schein 1984: p. 4) which, although they might not be internally consistent at all times, tend towards coherence and consistency. Schein sees culture as a multi-level phenomenon, which has *visible artifacts* (easy to see, but hard to interpret); *values* (hard to observe, and which represent only manifest explanations of behaviour – why people say they behave the way they do); and

underlying assumptions, which are typically unconscious, but actually determine how group members perceive, think, and feel. These assumptions ‘...define the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to (problems of external adaptation and internal integration)’ (p. 3). Over time, and to the extent that the behaviours associated with values bring about desired results, they come to be seen as indicative of ‘how things really are’ (p. 4), and become less and less subject to questioning or conscious re-evaluation, thus being transformed in to underlying assumptions.

Schein sees organisational culture as a fundamentally unifying force. His preoccupation with stability is reflected in his preferred research approach, which has its roots in Geertz’s thick description, whereby a researcher, working together with a willing group member, uncovers underlying assumptions and makes them visible, by asking ‘the right kinds of questions’. ‘The deciphering of a given company’s culture becomes an empirical matter of locating where the stable social units are, what cultures each of these stable units have developed, and how these separate cultures blend into a single whole’ (p. 7). Schein maintains that changing culture is easier at the level of artefacts than at the level of assumptions. However, the origin of change is external: essentially, the organisation’s environment forces it to adapt. Furthermore, the mechanism of this adaptation is evolutionary – responses will be trialled, some of which will work, others not. Only successful responses will be retained and transmitted to later generations.

Organisational culture itself is conceived of as a set of learnt parameters, which affect the processing of external stimuli, both in terms of perception of the environment and selection of possible responses. Assumptions, and their successively more overt manifestations, values and artefacts, provide a framework within which information about the environment is handled in order to ensure the continued survival of the organisation.

2.1.9: Introducing Dynamism

Schein did not propose any framework to understand exactly *how* culture changes in response to changes in environmental conditions, other than through organisations trying out solutions to problems over time and seeing what works. Mary Jo Hatch developed a more specific understanding of the mechanism of change, proposing that ‘dynamism’ be introduced ‘into organizational culture theory by reformulating Schein’s

original model in processual terms' (1993: p. 658). Hatch further argued that *symbols* should be explicitly recognised in Schein's model, as a new element standing between artefacts and assumptions, and postulated four processes by which these elements are generated: manifestation, realisation, symbolisation, and interpretation.

'In a nutshell my cultural dynamics model presents culture as two counteracting forces, one oriented around the production of artifacts (sometimes called material culture) and the other around the production of meaning. Both forces have active and reflexive modes and also accommodate both objective and subjective views' (2000: p. 253).

Hatch's goal is that the elements of culture be made 'less central, so that the relationships linking them become more focal,' to produce '...an explanation of organizational culture as the dynamic construction of cultural geography and history as contexts for taking action, making meaning, constructing images and forming identities' (1993: p. 686).

Although Hatch explicitly grounds her approach in Schein's model, at the same time she de-emphasises its functionalist roots: 'I argue(s) that Schein's model continues to have relevance, but it would be more useful if it were combined with ideas drawn from symbolic-interpretive perspectives' (1993: p. 658). Another key proponent of interpretive approaches, Linda Smircich, distinguishes between views of organisational culture according to whether it is seen as something an organisation *has* or something that it *is* – an attribute of the organisation, or a "root metaphor," an internal organisational variable. Smircich believes that supporters of the second perspective 'share a more subjective orientation to the study of organization. They have a common concern for studying the interactional dynamics that bring about organization' (1983a: p. 354). However, in her view, adopting a cultural framework of analysis is valuable regardless of the theoretical position taken within that framework:

'The idea of culture legitimates attention to the subjective, interpretive aspects of organizational life. ...A cultural framework for analysis encourages us to see that an important role for both those who study and manage organizations is not to celebrate organization as a value, but to question the needs it serves' (p. 355).

This approach starts to place the culture of the organisation in its broader societal context.

An important attempt to operationalise Schein's theory was made by Sackmann (1991), for whom culture is a collective sense-making mechanism that forms a 'cultural knowledge map.' Sackmann defined four different types of knowledge that make up such a map, their content, and four structural framing parameters. She characterised this conception of culture as 'Cognitive' – focusing on the mechanisms that organisational members use to attribute meanings to events. In addition to this perspective, Sackmann identified two others; the 'Variable' perspective, where research focuses on the visibly manifested, and the 'Holistic' perspective, where culture represents a system that is a product of action and influences further action. Sackmann rejected the latter approach, however, on the grounds of the difficulties it presents for research, rather than any fundamental disagreement with its position. Nevertheless, she did explicitly recognise that: 'The essence of culture can be conceptualised as the collective construction of social reality' (p. p 33). In later work (Sackmann et al. 1997), a more complex formulation is developed:

'The core of culture is composed of explicit and tacit assumptions or understandings commonly held by a group of people; a particular configuration of assumptions and understandings is distinctive to the group; these assumptions and understandings serve as guides to acceptable and unacceptable perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; they are learned and passed on to new members of the group through social interaction; and culture is dynamic – it changes over time, although the tacit assumptions that are the core of culture are most resistant to change' (Sackmann et al. 1997).

Rather like Smircich and Hatch, Sackmann adopts a catholic, inclusive approach to evaluating theories of organisational culture, choosing to let them stand side by side as alternative perspectives, rather than attempting to impose one particular view as superior to others in all circumstances. The 'multiple paradigm' approach has also been promoted over the last decade by Joanne Martin (2002), who identifies three complementary theoretical perspectives on organisational culture: 'the integration, differentiation and fragmentation viewpoints' (p. 93). All three can be used to study a single culture, a pluralism working to the benefit of both cultural researchers and

members of the culture. The integrated view emphasises consensus across the organisation, consistency, and clarity, and is very often the preferred perspective of management for that reason. The differentiated point of view recognises unity and clarity existing within but not between subcultures; the fragmented view essentially emphasises the pervasiveness of ambiguity. Another example of such a multiple paradigm approach is the recent proposal by Van de Ven and Poole (2005) that process and variance theory approaches to research can coexist to the benefit of organisational researchers.

As attractive as such proposals might be in terms of reducing unproductive disputes within the academy, they inevitably lead to the questioning of fundamental assumptions. For example, although Trice and Beyer (1993) accepted that ‘all (Martin’s) perspectives have some truth,’ they appeared to be much more comfortable with integration and differentiation than with fragmentation. They particularly commented on the way the fragmentation perspective

‘...so emphasizes ambiguity and confusion that it is hard to see how such a set of relationships could form the basis of a culture. If ambiguity and fragmentation are the essence of relationships, and if the feeble but transitory consensus that does form fluctuates constantly with various forces, there is no culture as most scholars define one. Such a culture, if it did exist, would do little to help people grapple with ongoing uncertainties’ (p. 14).

They go on to assert that, dynamically, such a culture would either disintegrate into a collection of individuals, or develop some mechanisms to resolve ambiguity and conflict, so becoming more recognisable as a culture. Such an analysis is based on a fundamentally functionalist position (‘helping people grapple with ongoing uncertainties’), and suggests that those espousing such views will have some difficulty in fully applying ‘multi-perspective’ approaches. By contrast, I aim to position my work clearly outside the managerialist, structural-functionalist streams, and explore the practical implications of doing so.

2.1.10: Boundaries and Identity

In her later work, Martin (2002) begins to focus on the fundamental question of cultural boundaries. These are described as ‘...a theoretical problem ... that has the potential to

make us rethink the ways culture has been defined and studied,’ and as ‘... a leverage point from which you can see how all cultural theory might be shifted and viewed in a different and useful way’ (pp. 315-316).

At issue is the concept of the group as a pre- (or externally) defined entity, with an ongoing existence independent of its members. In a similar fashion to systems thinking, even drawing a boundary at the edge of the organisation has the effect of excluding stakeholders who may be ‘outside’, but have an important influence on the functioning of the organisation. ‘Who is included or excluded will determine to a considerable extent the content of a cultural portrait’ (p. 325).

Membership of (or, perhaps better, participation in) a group is also fundamentally an issue of identity. Important links between sense-making processes and identity formation are proposed by Weick, according to whom the former are ‘... grounded in both individual and social activity, and even whether the two are separable will be a recurrent issue’ (1995: p. 6). He draws on Mead’s description of identity as ““a parliament of selves”... Identities are constituted out of the process of interaction. To shift among interactions is to shift among definitions of self” (pp. 18-20). In this way, the ongoing definition and redefinition of the identity of self and other is placed at the heart of the cultural process, and both are inextricably linked with the formation of collective groupings.

2.2: Themes and Issues

In the foregoing survey of the development of some aspects of management theory related to organisations and their cultures, I have commented on the persistence of a number of interrelated issues, which I will categorise into five cross-cutting themes of debate:

1. The centrality of the value of rationality in Western thinking about organisations, debate as to its nature, and concerns about its consequences;
2. The existence and limits of free will in organisations, the nature of the relationship between the individual and the social and the nature and source of human action and purpose. Related to this, the source of dynamics in organisations – whether change

is inherent in organisations, or externally driven, and the nature of social boundaries and the self;

3. Explaining unity and division in organisations;
4. The status of the organisation as a thing or a process, and the importance of context in understanding individual and organisational action;
5. The relationship between the development of a technology of management and the development of management power, the nature of 'useful' theory about organisations, and the possibility of maintaining multiple approaches to understanding them.

I believe that these themes can be explained in terms of three fundamental assumptions, and two different perspectives adopted by the writer. Consequently, defining an approach to my chosen subject should be done against the background of an unambiguous statement of position on these points.

2.2.1: Three Fundamental Assumptions

2.2.1.1: The Nature of Causes

Explanation, the fundamental goal of theorising, implies some shared understanding about the nature of causation. How does one event lead to another? Why do certain phenomena arise? What allows us to link purpose and action? The management theories I have discussed display fundamentally different positions on this question or, in some cases, are weakened by being vague about their answer to it. Scientific Management, for instance, assumes that organisations exist, and people participate in them, to achieve an economic end. All other goals are subordinated to this absolute standard, by which rational ways of working can be evaluated and chosen. Some systems thinkers, generally those who favour an organic metaphor for organising, would propose that human groups function in some 'natural' way, the discovery of which is the chief goal of the researcher. Evolution provides another powerful metaphor for cause, under which survival and adaptation is assumed to be an absolute value.

Stacey *et al* (2000) propose that two questions are implied in understanding causation: whether 'movement towards the future is assumed to be toward a known state or an

unknown state' (p. 14), and defining what is the reason for that movement. They suggest there are 5 causal frameworks which may be used to answer these questions: secular Natural Law Teleology (the future is 'a repetition of the past'); Rationalist Teleology (movement towards 'a goal chosen by reasoning humans'); Formative Teleology (movement towards 'a mature form implied at the start, or in the movement'); Transformative Teleology (the future is 'under perpetual construction. No mature or final state, only perpetual iteration of identity and difference'); and Adaptionist Teleology ('Movement towards a stable state adapted to an environment that may change in unknowable ways'). The first three of these presume movement towards a known (or at least knowable) future, the last two towards an unknown (or unknowable) future.

It is possible to discern a recurring complex of assumptions about causality in many of the management theories encountered in the foregoing review. Broadly speaking, 'Scientific Management' and most of its managerialist descendants share a basic belief that the future is knowable, that 'efficient cause' applies and can give us confidence that if we do one thing another *will* follow. Of course, such an assumption helps bolster claims that it is possible to learn techniques and skills which will bring success – and leads inevitably to deterministic theories of organisation which raise questions about the status of the free will of human actors in them. In Stacey *et al*'s terms, these approaches assume a 'rationalist' teleology, at the level of the manager, who is able to make rational strategy and design choices for the organisation. However, since the manager does this by understanding the 'laws' which explain the workings of organisations, a Natural Law or a Formative teleology is assumed at the level of the organisation. Both are based on the belief that we can know the future. For example, humanistic psychology views of small group behaviour, or structural contingency theories which link certain organisational structures with certain results, reflect a belief in Natural Laws; 'n-stage' models of change reflect a Formative teleology. Even when evolutionary language is used in the management literature, it is usually more indicative of a 'Natural Law' than an Adaptionist framework, because the belief in a knowable future is not being challenged; rather, an assertion is usually being made that competition is the fundamental driver of organisational activity, consistent with

prevailing liberal economic rhetoric, and that if competitiveness can be achieved, certain results will follow.

Hence, we have a rational manager separated from, but directing, an organisation that acts in predictable ways. This split between manager and organisation is essentially the same as the split already discussed between manager and system, and suffers from the same problem: if the manager is a rational actor, standing outside the organisation and manipulating it based on superior knowledge of how 'it' works, then he is at the same time a member of a broader societal context, and his decisions must either be made according to some natural law or absolute standard (such as economic rationalism) or be determined by reference to some ideal end state of the organisation. In either case, her choices are determined, rather than free. The only resolution to this problem is to place the manager in infinite regress from the boundaries of his organisation. This paradox necessarily applies to any approach which assumes a knowable future that can be manipulated for rational purpose. Furthermore, the assumption of a knowable future fundamentally denies the possibility of the unknown emerging – true novelty (as distinct from mechanistic change) is excluded under these models (Stacey et al. 2000: pp. 56-84).

The alternative of accepting the future as fundamentally unknowable, on the other hand, immediately reintroduces the manager to the organisation, as an actor at the same level as any other. Whatever power he 'possesses', or wields in action, is expressed through interaction and is a product of that interaction, the same process already discussed, which produces the self and the other. In Stacey *et al*'s terms, this implies either a Transformative or Adaptionist teleology, with the main difference being whether individual action is considered to arise fundamentally from a selfish or innate desire to survive (Adaptionist), or from the ongoing interplay of action that '...expresses the identity and difference of individuals and collectives at the same time' (p. 119).

Adopting a Transformative Teleology has far reaching effects, including placing 'severe limits on predictability in the evolution of complex organizational processes'; introducing 'self-organizing interaction as transformative cause of emergent new directions in the development of the organization'; and potential success depending on 'the paradox of stable instability', the ability to combine both stability and instability in the one organisation (pp. 123-125).

Most importantly for this discussion, however, is the potential that abandoning the idea of a knowable future has for allowing a reconciliation between the macro- and micro-levels of interaction, between the individual and collective, and the space it allows for individual will to be exercised, even as it denies the possibility that its effects might be predicted.

2.2.1.2: The Relationship of the Individual and the Collective

I have observed that, when considering organisations, a problem frequently arises as to how the individual may be seen to retain free will, and still recognise the empirically observable limitations placed on that free will by either the organisation's structure or culture, or the instrumental exertion of power by other organisational members or groups. Most theories take one perspective or the other (another cause of the apparent macro/micro distinction between theories), focussing either on the individual as an independent actor (or a subject of domination in the social world, depending on the position of the theorist), or on some defined collective 'actor' or institution.

These differing perspectives are unavoidably incompatible, since both exclude or underemphasise the other. However, both Mead and Berger & Luckmann suggest another way of looking at the individual, which avoids the schism of collective and personal. For them, the self is constructed through social interaction and is constantly being reinvented and re-evaluated in the light of experience, intention, and possibility. Mead draws the distinction between the 'I', the subjective actor in the moment, and the 'me', its objectified product, which is historically grounded and open for public evaluation. 'So instead of a unitary self, the typical self in symbolic interactionist literature is multiple and episodic' (Brittan 1998). This more complex view suggests that the same processes may be involved in producing social and personal identity (Jenkins 1996), and that more attention should therefore be paid to the dynamic evolution of projections of self as instrumental and responsive acts, rather than looking for immutable attributes of an individual, such as personality traits. This is a fundamentally interpretivist formulation, which makes the self a site of production of meaning. Although, as I have mentioned, these ideas have been criticised as being over-optimistic about the individual's freedom to construct their world – for instance, it has been pointed out that the individual in a concentration camp has very little room to

negotiate his or her identity (Brittan 1998) – I do not believe such critiques can be maintained. Instead of focussing on the content of the negotiated identity, the suggested approach looks primarily at the process of negotiation itself, at the interaction by which identity is brought about, and is therefore able (indeed required) to take into account constraints as empirical elements. Goffman provided ample examples of how identity was indeed negotiated in ‘total institutions’ in spite, and perhaps because of, extreme restrictions of freedom.

With further reference to the ability of the individual to exercise ‘free will’ in a social context, it is important to note that the process of social construction at the heart of symbolic interactionist approaches is both a choice and a constraint. It is therefore possible to present the two as different aspects of the same phenomenon – giving primacy to the act of construction, which at the same time brings the constructor and the constructed into being, rather than insisting it should be preceded by either structure or agency (which, in any case, as Strauss asserted above, can be seen as inextricably linked).

2.2.1.3: The Nature of Reality – and how we know it

By accepting the social production of self in this way, a fundamental dynamic is introduced into social life: rather than organisations existing as ‘things’ which need to be forced to act, they exist *because of* their members’ actions, and so are defined by their activity. Furthermore, rather than constraining their members as an independent or separate force, organisations are seen as being produced by their members, embodying the constraints they impose on themselves.

In rejecting reification – the assumption that socially constructed phenomena are objectively real – symbolic interactionism takes a fundamentally different position from most systems thinking and structural contingency approaches. The underlying issue being addressed has been the subject of continuing debate since at least the 5th century B.C., when Parmenides and Heraclitus put forward opposing views that reality is primarily rooted in, respectively, things or processes. In adopting a ‘becoming realism’ (Chia 1996), symbolic interpretive approaches demonstrate an ontology of the organisation as an ongoing pattern of action, not as a thing with an independent existence. They also, implicitly or explicitly, espouse a non-positivist epistemology;

they do not accept that reality is directly accessible, but see actors as being driven by their interpretations and perceptions of it. They therefore assert that it must be possible to understand the subjective experience of the individual to interpret their behaviour – an interesting throwback to Weber’s *verstehen* sociology.

Positivist approaches, generally based on ‘being’ ontologies, assert in contrast the possibility of directly accessing an objective reality, and generally offer the promise of certainty and impartiality. Claims to a generalisable understanding of the world are also made with more ease under these approaches, because the elements of theory (the social units or measures of performance) are taken for granted, and can be discerned in any situation. However, this imposes externally generated categories on an organisation (taking an ‘-etic’ approach), and an external, collective focus generally results.

‘Becoming’ ontologies, on the other hand, tend to produce views which are ‘-emic’, internal and individually focused. However, there is no reason that ‘becoming’ ontologies need be ungeneralisable, except at the level of the elements of ‘being’ theories. Rather, their generality must be sought in an understanding of the processes by which these elements are created.

While it is probably correct to say that most symbolic interactionists would not accept that reality is directly accessible, it is not correct to assume that this means they deny its existence. It is possible to hold either position, under either being or becoming ontologies. Proposing a theory about elements that are subjectively generated and inaccessible to measurement does not imply that the process by which these elements are generated cannot be taken as existing objectively and observed from the outside.

2.2.2: The Writer’s Perspective

2.2.2.1: Audience

It is possible to discern two categories of theorising about organisations, each reflecting a decision about the intended use of the theory: on the one hand, there is an empirical perspective which aims to understand what actually occurs in organisations, primarily in a descriptive, explanatory and often inductive fashion; on the other hand, there is an instrumental perspective, which establishes the links between organisational activity and some standard that is of interest to someone – such as financial performance – so that

that person can influence the future in some way. The former approaches may be described as ‘academic’, and will usually be couched in language which emphasises their neutrality and objectivity, as distinct from the latter which, because they usually aim to assist management, may be labelled ‘practitioner’ or ‘applied’ theories. Although these latter instrumental approaches must also be presented as objective and grounded, on the pain of losing their power to authorise management actions based on their conclusions, they must also be seen to explain the phenomena of interest by linking them with activities that are within the power of their intended audience to influence or initiate.

Perhaps because the distinction between descriptive and instrumental theories is so closely associated with differentiating the roles of management academics and managers, it is often treated as being of great importance. However, I believe this is somewhat misleading, and that all theorising is, in fact, in some sense instrumental. Managerialist approaches are usually unabashed in their admission that they intend to provide useful insight, or even tools, to assist practising managers to achieve certain goals. Even when academic theories eschew this intent, they are still written for an audience (albeit a non-practitioner one), and have an intended effect on that audience. Thus, they may focus on demonstrating mathematical virtuosity, or advancing a particular viewpoint at the expense of another, in order to bolster the prestige or reputation of their author in a particular disciplinary community. I therefore argue that substance must be considered in the context of purpose even for academic theories, just as we cannot (and usually do not try to) take more ‘practical’ approaches as dispassionate. In a more general sense, I would suggest this be done by examining the relationship between the theorist and her intended audience, which should throw light on the choices made in developing the position.

2.2.2.2: Temporal Perspective

Most accounts of change and organisational culture focus on the description of past events. This allows them to editorialise the narrative, isolating particular occurrences as being more important than others and developing a ‘higher level’, more general account that may stand as theory. In a sense all accounts of behaviour are historical – even the individual recounting what they are doing in the present is in a sense recounting the

past, even if it is the very near past. However, as the past being recounted becomes more and more recent, there is a stronger likelihood of preserving elements of the ‘lived experience’ of the individual which might be considered unimportant from a greater distance. The attempt to describe ‘lived experience’ is likely, therefore, to be much more ambiguous and confused than a narrative produced after some clear endpoint or completion has been reached, and the elements of the story have been selected, edited and prioritised with reference to that completion. While the latter approach produces an apparently much more robust and coherent account of ‘what occurred’, it does so at the expense of removing reference to all the other paths which might have been followed at various times during the story, with different outcomes, and so presents an account which may bear little resemblance to the experience of those participating in the events at the time. On the other hand, accounts focussing on lived experience can be ambiguous, fragmentary and disjointed, and carry little of the appearance of good, general theory.

2.3: Conclusion

In undertaking this necessarily selective and often opinionated survey of the huge span of organisational theory, I could be accused of having used a very blunt knife to hack only the bits I consider tasty off a still living beast. In dissecting my prize and reassembling it as I have, I may well have spoilt whatever was left of value in that rather poorly-cut steak. Moreover, because it ranges so widely across time and disciplinary boundaries, my analysis may seem like an attempt at a grand renovation of an enormous body of thought – an attempt which would certainly be doomed to failure, if that were the intent, which is not the case.

Instead, what has been attempted is the identification of a few orienting principles which I can use to mark out a path for my research. Managerialism, for instance, is a complex phenomenon, the study of which would be a significant undertaking in its own right. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it can now be seen as arising from the juxtaposition of i) a specific relationship that exists between the writers who produce it and their management audience, and an objective to produce timeless rules; and ii) a way of speaking that insinuates that the future is knowable; that the organisation is a thing which has priority over the individuals who comprise it; and that a rationality

exists which can be applied to it to achieve outcomes desired by those who have a right to control it. In untangling Managerialism in this way, it becomes possible to consider other possibilities: is it necessary for writers to this audience to adopt this intellectual position to satisfy them? Might there not be value in defining approaches which do not require that managers simultaneously pretend to be prophets, magicians, heroes and engineers? For instance, is it possible that managers might gain inspiration from understanding 'their' organisation as a complex interaction of people attempting to make sense of events, and be able to define a role for themselves which facilitates that meaning-making process and builds confidence and enthusiasm for action at a personal level? To consider an approach that avoids reductionism, which treats the organisation as an assembly of finely engineered components that (often) need to be put together with the assistance of external experts? Or again, having come to understand that rationality treated as an absolute value does indeed produce conceptions of organisation that resemble Weber's 'polar night of icy darkness' – even if they are not realised empirically because of our human capacity to subvert and reconstruct the social landscape in which we live – to see rationality instead as the achievement of a common understanding between people about what they have experienced and what they can do about it?

The aim of this chapter, then, has been to develop a sort of conceptual compass to help maintain a course as the project proceeds. This has been achieved by defining three key assumptions which distinguish some of the major theoretical traditions in the study of organisations and their cultures, and two choices of perspective which are made by writers in the area. In the next chapter, I will specify what I intend by the term 'organisational culture', in terms which allow me to develop a concrete research approach.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Foundations and Research Objectives

In the last Chapter, I proposed to position theories dealing with organisational culture and change by reference to five key principles and, further, that it might be fruitful to look outside the managerialist tradition even though my intention is to develop avowedly practical approaches to these phenomena. The purpose of this chapter is to establish the theoretical foundations of such an approach, and define research objectives in reference to those foundations.

3.1: Fundamental Propositions

1. The future is fundamentally unknowable.
2. The ongoing action of individuals produces society as an objective reality, relative to which individual and collective identities, including organisations, are brought into being in a constantly unfolding process.
3. Objective reality exists, but is only accessible through the subjective experience of individuals.

These propositions underpin an approach to organisational culture and change that I believe is naturally coherent and comprehensive. By their nature, it is not possible to ‘objectively’ validate or invalidate these propositions through any specific test. However, any workable theory must take a position on at least these matters, and the position taken appears to this author to be the most philosophically defensible of those possible.

3.2: Choice of Perspective

Although this research – as a thesis – is clearly subject to the evaluation of an academic audience, who must determine if it represents a significant contribution to knowledge about organisations and their cultures, and whether it meets appropriate standards of rigour, the primary intended audience for the theory it will produce is the broad population of people who work in organisations, and who wish to find new ways of dealing with problems raised by organisational change or cultural conflict. I specifically

avoid the use of the term ‘management’ in this context. Although the theory produced by this work will no doubt be largely read by a managerial audience, if only because most organisational theory is at present produced for and consumed by managers or those who intend to become managers, the propositions I have adopted are fundamentally incompatible with the idea that organisational culture is an exclusive province of management decision and understanding. It must, instead, be seen as the joint product of all those involved in the production of the organisation.

Consistent with my treatment of the organisation as emerging from ongoing social interaction the future of which cannot be known, I do not aim to uncover general laws about how all organisations work for all time, least of all such laws based on some particular story about how one or several specific organisations worked in the past. Rather, I aim to meet the needs of my ultimate audience, those involved in real problems in their own specific organisation, by providing them with means to generate insight into their unique evolving situation. Thus, the focus is on how to understand the present and influence the future, rather than using the past to predict the future.

I specifically define my area of interest as being the way organisational culture operates in conditions of radical change, particularly mergers or acquisitions, or major restructuring. I choose this particular focus partly because these are the areas where existing theory appears to me to provide the least practical insight, and partly because it is in such contexts that organisational culture appears to have the greatest effect. It also dictates that the perspective adopted will not be on organisational culture as stable or fixed – rather, the focus must be on dynamics and progression.

The position defined by my fundamental propositions is firmly situated in the symbolic interpretivist tradition, which treats culture as quintessentially about the creation of meaning. It is tempting, against such a background, to accept unchallenged Weber and Geertz’s evocative formulation of culture as ‘webs of significance’ in which ‘man is suspended’, and so avoid the need to enter into yet another discussion on definitions (remembering that Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) alone catalogued 164 of them).

However, since I am aiming to develop ways for people in organisations to understand ongoing action, it is at least necessary to specify at what they should be looking, and figurative spider-webs do not meet the need. What precisely is the substance of organisational culture, and how can it be ‘seen’?

Green (1988) argued that dominant views of organisational culture, epitomised by Schein, take what he calls the ‘The Structural Static Perspective’. Such views are supposed to present organisational culture as if it is ‘fossilized in habit, ...resists change and frustrates strategy formulation and implementation’ (p. 121). Green proposed that organisational culture should be ‘redefined as “the significant shared meanings which allow managers collectively to make sense of what they and others do”’ (p. 121). Nevertheless, it could be argued that Schein’s ‘underlying assumptions’ are also and precisely an attempt to access shared meanings, and that his and similar approaches tend towards ossification more because of their focus on the classification and comparison of ‘cultures’ than because of a fundamental fault in their view of culture’s substance.

It seems to me that Schein’s central claim is that organisational culture has to do with learned responses held in common by members of a group, by which each of them come to understand the real world in similar ways, sharing similar perceptions of what is occurring and ideas about what might be done about it. Although his preoccupation with building a ‘taxonomy’ of cultures based on cataloguing their underlying assumptions is clearly not relevant to the goals of this research, and his assumed functionalist dynamic is inconsistent with my fundamental propositions, Schein’s core focus on underlying assumptions nevertheless addresses the need to explain what culture consists of, where it resides, and how it operates. In effect, the question being asked under such an approach is a psychological one: ‘why do individuals see things, and behave, in specific ways which can be seen as definitive of the organisations to which they belong?’

3.3: Personal Construct Theory

A rigorous approach to the development of ‘assumptions’ and their relation to behaviour, is offered by Personal Construct Theory, developed by George Kelly (1955). This theory is built on one ‘Fundamental Postulate’ – that ‘a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he [sic]⁴ anticipates events’ (p. 46).

⁴ Not surprisingly for a book of its era, Kelly consistently uses the male pronoun throughout his work. In order to save the reader multiple repetitions of my recognition that this is not appropriate, I have chosen to acknowledge it once only. I trust this footnote will absolve me from any claims of sexist language based on later citations from Kelly.

According to this view, we are fundamentally and actively anticipating events, and therefore acting with reference to an expected future, rather than passively observing present events then reacting to them, as would be suggested by stimulus-response models of psychology. It is important to understand that Kelly does not intend that anticipation be necessarily an intellectual or conscious act (p. 48) – even salivation occurring when one is presented with an appetising dish might be seen as anticipation. The contention is, however, that it is the expectation of consuming the food that drives the behaviour, rather than the mere event of its presentation.

Kelly proposed eleven corollaries to extend and explain his central proposition (1955: pp. 50-103). The first two, the ‘Construction corollary’, whereby ‘a person anticipates events by construing their replications’, and the ‘Individuality corollary’, which states that ‘persons differ from each other in their construction of events’, explain that our anticipation of the future is based on an expectation that the past will repeat itself, and that, since each person’s past is unique, our anticipations must also differ (of course, there may be other reasons for differences as well). In the ‘Organization corollary’ – which states that ‘each person characteristically evolves for his convenience in anticipating events, a construct system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs’ – Kelly further proposes that over time, our expectations become organised into a system, where some constructs are more fundamental than others because they are found to be more useful in anticipating the world. In the ‘Dichotomy corollary’ – which states that ‘a person's construct system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs’ – these constructs are depicted as taking an essentially ‘either-or’ form. Kelly arrives at this conclusion because he contends that meaning must be understood through both contrast and likeness. If someone tells us that two people are alike because they are ‘hostile’, whilst they differ from a third because that person is ‘malleable’, we understand their viewpoint very differently than if they tell us that the third person is different from the others because she or he is ‘loving’. We cannot understand what the term ‘hostile’ means to this person at all until it is placed in the context of its opposite – we may understand what something *is* only by reference to something it *is not*.

The ‘Choice Corollary’, which holds that ‘A person chooses for himself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility for the elaboration of his system’, intends that humans aim to fit more and more of their

experience into their particular system of expectations, to understand progressively more and more of the world around them. In doing so, the implication is that we will try to interpret our experience in line with our construct system – thus, the system influences experience, and vice versa. With this corollary, Kelly is also again emphasising the fundamentally active nature of human existence. In addition to setting his theory apart from behaviourist psychology, as already noted, this view is also in conflict with theories of motivation (Kelly 1996), which suggest that humans are naturally inert, reacting in predictable ways to a variety of motivators which have a uniform or similar effect on everyone. Kelly's human is necessarily in motion, constantly making choices that he believes will better anticipate the world, choices which may differ dramatically from another individual's.

In the Range corollary – 'A construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only' – Kelly points out that constructs are never applicable in all circumstances; some are simply not relevant in certain contexts, like 'shiny vs. matt' when discussing the weather. Hence, in addition to understanding the contrast that constitutes a construct, we must also understand the range of situations to which it may be applied.

Constructs are not fixed and immutable, even if some of the more fundamental ones in a system can only be changed with great difficulty (these are called 'core constructs'), perhaps because so many other constructs depend on them. In the Experience corollary, Kelly asserts that 'A person's construction system varies as he successively construes the replication of events'. He then introduces a new and important term with the Modulation corollary, which states that 'The variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within which range of convenience the variants lie'. By permeability, Kelly means the ability of a construct to be applied to new events, to '... "take life in its stride". A permeable construct allows one to add new experiences to those which the system already includes. By contrast, an impermeable construct is one which rejects new events purely on the basis of their newness' (Kenny 1984).

With these two corollaries, Kelly is developing the idea that all humans may be seen as scientists (Kelly 1955: p. 4), constantly making hypotheses about how the world works, testing them against reality, and adjusting them according to the results they observe (as

well as adjusting ‘reality’ according to what they expect). Furthermore, these hypotheses are never final – they are always open to reconstruction. We are, in fact, making successive approximations of reality rather than accessing it directly. Kelly designates this ‘constructive alternativism’ as the philosophical foundation of his theory, which stands in sharp contrast to many other ‘scientific’ approaches:

“The idea that scientists are engaged in personally inventing the world contrasts sharply with the conventional idea that scientists somehow “discover” or “uncover” pieces of absolute truth that are there waiting to be found as if the world was an “abandoned monument”. Having built huge collections of these truth fragments, such scientists expect the whole truth of the universe to be ultimately revealed to them. Kelly described this latter approach as “accumulative fragmentalism” and it is against this philosophy that his position of constructive alternativism stands opposed. “While constructive alternativism does not argue against the collection of information, neither does it measure truth by the size of the collection. Indeed it leads one to regard a large accumulation of facts as an open invitation to some far-reaching reconstruction which will reduce them to a mass of trivialities (Bannister 1970: p. 19)”
(Kenny 1984).

In addition to forming a changing and evolving system, our personal constructs do not necessarily have to be consistent with each other. The Fragmentation corollary states that ‘A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other’ – we may allow contradictions to exist, particularly where the conflicting constructs are used largely in different contexts, or at different times.

Two last corollaries point to a social aspect of the theory. Firstly, the Commonality corollary states that ‘To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person’. Secondly, the Sociality corollary states that ‘To the extent that one person construes the construction of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person’. The Commonality corollary suggests that individuals who share the same construct systems will understand the world in similar ways – this lays the groundwork for relating behavioural similarities to shared construct

systems⁵. The Sociality corollary establishes that we try to anticipate the way another person thinks, including how they think about us and, to the extent that we succeed in this, we will be able to interact with them.

This does not imply that we necessarily need a deep insight into another individual's understanding of the world before we can interact with them – Kelly makes the point that we have become remarkably good at construing the constructions of others in traffic, to our considerably greater convenience and longevity (1955: p. 95). We may, therefore, interact only in specific and very limited contexts and with little or no conscious reflection – children can thus construe and participate in the social process, even if their construals are only partially shared with the adults with whom they interact, and even if they demonstrate limited reliability in construing their parents' construals.

It is important to note that Kelly's constructs are not presented as fixed, pre-existing 'things' – they do not require the adoption of a 'being-realism'. Firstly, there is no metaphysical problem about their location. They are the means or, perhaps better, the learnt choice-making routines, by which individuals make sense of their world. They are objectifications which have no 'real' existence *per se*, except as representations of a sometime occurring sequence of neurological events in a particular brain. These routines are peculiar to each person because they are founded in her unique experience and past. Secondly, although each of us organises our constructs in a systematic, hierarchical fashion, they are neither immutable nor wholly rigid; inconsistency is tolerated to some extent, and experience may bring about changes. Thirdly, and most importantly, constructs have no use beyond a given context (the 'range of convenience'), and only 'exist' when we actively (though not necessarily consciously) make choices about how we understand a specific situation, or 'construct our

⁵ It is not being suggested that it is essential for individuals to share the same construct systems to agree on what action needs to be taken: 'Often, for action to be taken, it is sufficient for meanings to be compatible in terms of action implications even though the actors do not share the same interpretations about what the action will accomplish' (Gray et al. 1985: p. 84).

experience'. This is totally consistent with a 'becoming-realism', while explaining how stability arises in perceptions of the world and related behaviour – through anticipating in similar ways at different times, based on past experience.

Adopting a Personal Construct Theory perspective suggests a particular approach to the nature of 'meaning'. In these terms, it could be seen as the connection between an anticipated future and a subjectively experienced present, where both anticipation and experience are channelled by patterns recognised from the past. The recollected past provides the base for the detection of patterns in an otherwise undifferentiated 'external' present reality; these patterns are recognised complete with their future implications for the individual. Action, taken in reference to this anticipation, modifies objective reality and is at the same time an expression of subjective experience. Thus, subjective experience alters objective reality, and objective reality influences subjective experience.

This dialectic also has a temporal aspect; representing the ongoing and evolving relation between past and future, mediated by action in the present. It unites memory, action and expectations. Meaning, in these terms, is context-dependent and proper to an individual, as well as constantly evolving and actively negotiated. Personal constructs represent recurring ways an individual has learnt to position themselves within, and to influence, the ongoing story which is their existence.

3.4: From Personal to Social

Personal Construct Theory provides a framework within which to understand patterns that arise in the way the individual makes sense of their experience, and so forms a basis for understanding why meaning-making may be similar, or may differ, between individuals. It is well in tune with both my first and third fundamental postulates, in that it makes no assumption about the direction of events with respect to the future, and it recognises the existence of the objective, but makes it only subjectively accessible. The position with regard to my second fundamental postulate – that the ongoing action of individuals produces society as an objective reality, relative to which individual and collective identities, including organisations, are brought into being in a constantly unfolding process – is a little more complex. Clearly, the underlying logic of Personal Construct Theory is based on the construction of reality. However, Kelly's work

focussed mainly on using Personal Construct Theory with individuals in clinical settings. Although he clearly saw potential for its use in social contexts – for instance, in 1960 he undertook a year long tour of Europe, including the Soviet zone, investigating differences in construing amongst national groupings of psychologists (Kelly 1996) – he never developed a formal approach to the extension of his theory into social contexts that moved much beyond the Sociality and Commonality Corollaries. How, then, might Personal Construct Theory be linked beneficially with the social construction of reality and the concurrent production of self in relation to it?

3.4.1: Intersubjective Production of Meaning

So far, my explanation of culture has been focussed on explaining how individuals create meaning in consistent ways by interacting with their world – the aspect of culture as an unconscious channelling of individual understanding *à la* Schein, which the Commonality Corollary appears to answer. However, any successful understanding of culture will also have to encompass the collective reality of culture where individuals create meaning, and collective entities, through coordinated or mutually aware action. This intersubjective nature of the creation of meaning occurs as each individual subjectively experiences the objective actions (and so construals) of both individual and collective others. This facet of culture seems to me to be quite clearly exposed in the common definition of organisational culture as ‘the way we do things around here’ (Deal and Kennedy 1988: p. 4). Although Green (1988) sees this as epitomising static approaches, I believe it can also be read as drawing attention to the overt, reflexive and collective performance by which its members (‘we’) constitute a group. As Kelly himself put it, ‘...social psychology must be a psychology of interpersonal understandings, not merely a psychology of common understandings’ (1955: p. 95). Culture is made up in part of our expectations and beliefs regarding one another. Furthermore, Kelly specifically links the distinction between interpersonal and common understanding to the concept of culture:

‘Our Fundamental postulate assumes that a person’s psychological processes are channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events. That makes the psychology of personal constructs an anticipatory theory of behavior. Some of the real events that one anticipates are the behaviors of other persons. Personal

construct theory would then understand cultural similarity, not only in terms of personal outlook rather than in terms of the impingement of social stimuli, but also in terms of what the individual anticipates others will do and, in turn, what he thinks they are expecting him to do (Kelly 1955: pp. 93-94).

Kelly is clearly alluding here to the Sociality corollary, and it does indeed seem clear that ‘A PCT analysis of social relationships, groups, or communities ... is a function of both commonality and sociality’ (Karst and Groutt 1977: p. 89). The issue is how to understand construal not only of an individual other’s construing, but of collective or stereotypical others. Balnaves *et al.* (2000) suggest an approach to this problem with their concept of ‘corporate construing’. Corporate construing is a product of joint action:

‘...corporate agency entails anticipation in joint action of the mode of representation of everyone else (sensus communis), justification of the joint action (reasons as good reasons), recognition that a personal action is corporate (the same) within a style of reasoning (a system of specialized techniques—corporate constructs)’ (p. 120).

What is being proposed here is that an individual’s personal construct system is influenced by, and participates in, the generation of a system of socially accepted constructs which are proper to no one individual, and which are not held entirely by any individual; and, further, that the individual positions themselves reflexively with regard to these ‘corporate constructs’. Balnaves *et al.*, relate this idea to some of Kelly’s early work, which proposed that there is a ‘superpattern into which the individual patterns fit’ (p. 120).

This ‘superpattern’ can be seen at work in the ability of members of a culture to recognise certain elements – for example, ways of thinking, forms of address or lines of argument – as appropriate to a given context, or perhaps as signifying membership of a certain group, and to use these ‘social objects’ as a reference point against which to position themselves. For instance, an unwillingness to reference Marx in practitioner business publications, even when he may be relevant, may well indicate an awareness of ‘permissible’ styles of argument and sources of authority for a writer speaking to a particular audience. Individual action in social contexts is purposeful, and others will

impute intention to it according to commonly understood conventions. Individuals construe and act, constantly negotiating their position relative to a changing social reality, so themselves contributing to that change. The creation of meaning is thus both a societal and an individual process, unfolding over time through the reflexive and intersubjective interaction of society's members and the social objects that have been created in the past, and which they continue to create. Balnaves *et al.* encapsulate this in a proposed twelfth corollary to Kelly's fundamental postulate: 'A person anticipates the mode of representation of everyone else by replicating its style of reasoning' (2000: p. 132).

It is important to specify the nature of the 'superpattern' being proposed in the above formulation. It is all too easy to take such a concept and treat it as an objective reality existing in some sense 'outside' of individual acts of construing, which can then be isolated, categorised and measured without further reference to the individual level, and incorporated into positivist theory. This would be contrary both to the foundations of Kelly's theory and to the fundamental propositions of this work. However, to the extent that the proposed 'superpattern' is taken as emergent from individual interaction, created and recreated by it, and at the same time influencing it, the approach is fully consistent with the foundations of the approach I am developing. Underlying Balnave's 12th corollary is an individual anticipation of the subjectively apprehended mode of reasoning of everyone else: this leaves intact the fundamental assumption that objective reality may exist, but is only subjectively accessible. The important point, it seems to me, is that we detect patterns in the actions of others and anticipate their repetition, then position ourselves vis-à-vis others by participating (or refusing to participate) in the patterned behaviour we believe we have detected. In other words, collective patterns of construing form part of the context in which individual construal takes place, and individual construal positions a person vis-à-vis those collective patterns.

3.4.2: Social 'Objects'

The focus in Personal Construct Theory is on making visible, in some way, the individual's (and often the patient's) construct system. This is normally done by asking the individual to construe some 'elements' in terms of their similarities and differences – the product of this is some form of list of constructs that are believed to give an

indication of the way the individual concerned goes about understanding their world. Frequently, particularly in a clinical setting, the elements which form the focus of construal are other individuals or role holders. Such an approach is completely understandable in such settings, where the intention is to understand how the subject relates to others in a therapeutic context. However, construal in Personal Construct theory is a universal process, applied across the full range of an individual's experience, and to an enormous range of elements. Some of these may be individuals, some may be physical objects (there may, for instance be real potential for marketers to understand how different groups of consumers construe a product). There is no limit imposed on the nature of these elements; a person may choose to construe anything they wish to – including their own constructions or the constructions of others, roles, social institutions, groups. Individuals involved in 'corporate construing' might thus be seen as performing a recognised pattern of social behaviour which at once affirms their relationship with regard to a group and brings that group into being. Instead of regarding the production of the pattern as a different form of construing, however, it is possible to see it as a form of 'social object', a pattern which members of a society have learnt to recognise, together with a certain number of implications which are assumed to be common for its members. In this sense, it becomes an 'element' which the individual may construe in the commonly accepted way, in a completely personal way, or in some mix of the two – in any case, regardless of whether the construal is the same or differs from others', it remains a personal construal.

In this way, it also becomes possible to understand how dynamic patterns, such as narrative conventions and genre rules, become part of the construction of meaning in cultures, and are used by their members to achieve certain results. Their use serves both to establish affiliation (or non-affiliation) with a group, and to signify a meaning that is taken to be generally accepted. These dynamic patterns establish the expected (or 'logical') succession of events over time, and provide models of causality as well as symbolic material for evaluating observed or proposed action. However, instead of treating them as a different category of construal, it seems to me they can be seen as a type of object, a 'social object', which is produced by individuals in the same moment as they give it meaning. 'Culture' is produced by the interaction of individuals, and at the same time channels the future course of that interaction.

The idea that individuals produce meaning in conscious interrelation both with other individuals and socially constructed objects or representations, is strongly reminiscent of Weick and Robert's (1993) notion of 'heedful interrelating', which they place at the heart of the phenomenon of 'collective mind'. For Weick and Roberts, collective mind characterises the network of relations and actions that allow a number of individuals to collectively achieve critical goals with great reliability. 'Actors in the system construct their actions (contributions), understanding that the system consists of connected actions by themselves and others (representation) and interrelate their actions within the system (subordination)' (p. 357).

Hence, personal construal can be placed at the centre of the production of social reality, but in such a way that the social institutions being created through individual action are attributed no 'objective' existence external to those who create it. Instead, they represent individual anticipations about the meanings created by participating in a certain performance with others. This is reminiscent of what Karst and Groutt suggested might be needed to establish a Personal Construct Theory social psychology: '...a system to construe not just a single role relationship, but a mutual role playing process ...*at the same time*. Such reciprocal role relationships (cross-constructions) would be an interpersonal relationship in PCT terms...' (1977: p. 90, italics in original).

3.4.3: Emergent Patterns and Autopoiesis

This is not to deny that emergent patterns arise from interaction between individuals, patterns which may be repeated at different times by completely different individuals, and which therefore take on the aura of 'independent' existence, despite being (re)created anew each time they are performed. This needs to be explained, both in terms of the apparent stability of organisational culture (as distinct from individual construal of the world), and in terms of the means by which it changes. Any theory of change should be able to explain continuity (Kolb 2002; Kolb 2003), and continuity may be an important part of successful change (Bartunek 1984).

Maturana and Varela (1992) use the term *autopoiesis* to describe systems, such as the one we have just described, which are *operationally closed* (i.e., defined as a network of processes occurring within the system). They explain how such systems operate at different levels – at the first level, as single-cell organisms, at the second as 'meta-

cellular' organisms (made up of aggregates of cells, such as human beings), and at the third as societies or networks of interaction. Furthermore, they explain how these networks of processes become self-reproducing, even as the elements which comprise them are progressively replaced.

Maturana and Varela also address the question of the autonomy of the elements of autopoietic systems. Second and third level systems are both members of the class of 'meta-systems', which consist of autonomous units made up respectively of cells or networks of processes between such autonomous units. However, the degree of autonomy displayed by their components differs. The components of a meta-cellular organism, such as a human being, 'exist for' that organism, and are restricted by their function within it. In contrast, a human social system exists 'for its elements', which are themselves autonomous, and due to their involvement in 'an on-going social learning' defined by their own interaction, which is fundamentally linguistic and communicative. Autopoietic systems anticipate the apparent stability of human societies:

'Those behavioral patterns which have been acquired ontogenetically in the communicative dynamics of a social environment and which have been stable through generations, we shall call cultural behaviors... Cultural behavior ... is not a form essentially different from other learned behaviors. It is peculiar in that it arises as a consequence of social living over many generations while its members are continuously replaced' (1992: p. 201).

Maturana and Varela see the 'self' as being produced through such social interaction, and particularly because of the reflexive properties of language, which allow us to isolate ourselves from the social context, or identify or objectify ourselves through discourse. According to them, and echoing Mead, 'the self' exists only in relationship to others and the discourse by which we produce ourselves. Furthermore, this discourse produces consciousness and mind as fundamentally social phenomena:

'We work out our lives in a mutual linguistic coupling, not because language permits us to reveal ourselves but because we are constituted in language in a continuous becoming that we bring forth with others. We find ourselves in this co-ontogenic coupling, not as a pre-existing reference nor in reference to an

origin, but as an ongoing transformation in the becoming of the linguistic world that we build with other human beings' (pp. 234-235).

This explanation of the emergence of social form is completely consistent with the 'Transformative' teleology discussed in Chapter 2, and reproduces the substance of my second fundamental postulate - that the ongoing action of individuals produces society as an objective reality, relative to which individual and collective identities, including organisations, are brought into being in a constantly unfolding process.

3.4.4: Subject, Object and Context

Personal Construct Theory holds that 'a person doesn't have a construct system but is a construct system (or process)' (Fransella 2003: p. 45). Berger and Luckmann (1975), saw the nature of this process, simultaneously generating self and society, as consisting of three not necessarily sequential phases – externalisation, objectification and internalisation (p. 149). Kelly's Personal Constructs can be seen to concern themselves with regularities in the acts of externalisation and internalisation, the way a particular acting self, or subject, participates in the social world, both in terms of acting in it and in terms of understanding it. By understanding, I intend a broad sense-making process, encompassing perception (interpretation and 'selectivity', or what I have called framing), imagination and paradigm recognition (Redding 1980: p. 129). Personal Construct Theory can be seen as consistent, then, with the social construction of reality, although it may need to be extended by a deeper understanding of the creation of objects and their treatment in a collective context.

I have referred to the temporal aspect of the construction process, linking as it does past events and present context in ongoing anticipation. However, the only objective reality which is available to us is the present, and even our experience of that is necessarily subjective. Likewise, the past is only subjectively available in the present. Thus, memory is fundamental to the process of construal, in particular what is known as 'autobiographical memory':

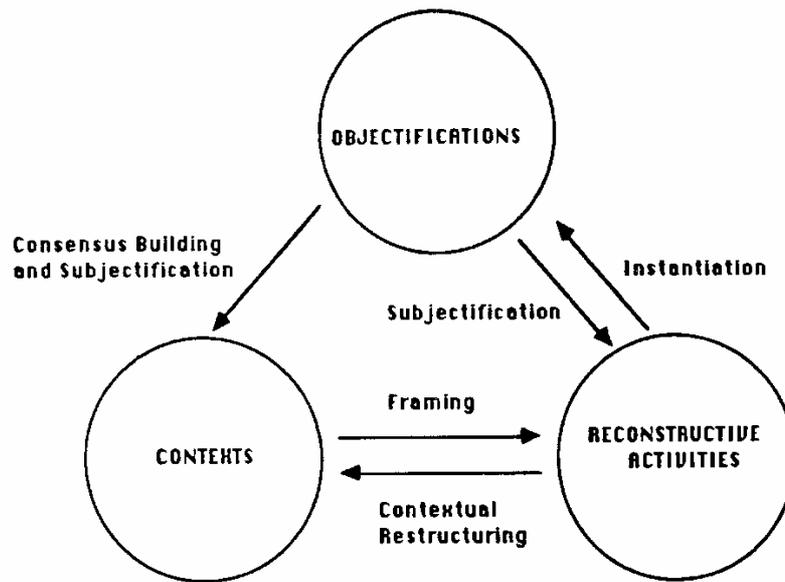
'Autobiographical memory is one important means mediating "moments of being" (Woolf 1976) with the world and others (Ryan 1991), and while alone. Under this view, autobiographical remembering is an improvisational activity

that forms emergent selves which give us a sense of comfort and a culturally related sense of personal coherence over time' (Barclay 1996: p. 95).

Barclay says that these improvisational activities produce 'protoselves' and 'protocultures' and relates them to 'contextualising structures'. In the terms I have been using, his 'emergent self' could be seen as the objectified self, and the definition of personal coherence (what is coherent behaviour) would indeed be socially (and therefore culturally) defined; the sense of 'comfort' could be seen as deriving from successful anticipation of the world and its relation to the objectified self⁶.

Barclay goes on to create 'An Idealized Ecological Model of Autobiographical Remembering' (Figure 1.) which suggests a more detailed approach to the process I am outlining. The model consists of ongoing interaction between 'reconstructive activities' – essentially personal acts of construal – 'objectifications' and 'contexts'. Objectifications are formed by 'instantiation', or 'making public and explicit' private reconstructions of past events. They, in turn, influence reconstructive activities by way of 'subjectification' – 'returning to consciousness the meanings of contextualised objectifications of public idioms or meanings that convey personal perspectives and cultural values and norms' (p. 99). Reconstructive activities also interact with contexts; firstly, by framing them so that they are available to construction, and secondly by producing action that changes the context. Finally, 'objectification' leads to activity in the context, consisting of consensus building and subjectification of the object by others.

⁶ There is no need to define emotion as a discrete phenomenon under Personal Construct Theory. Indeed, Kelly has developed quite a detailed Personal Construct Theory approach to emotions. This, however, is not the focus of this research.



**Figure 1: An Idealized Ecological Model of Autobiographical Remembering
(Barclay 1996:98)**

Barclay’s model of autobiographical memory may equally represent a plausible approach to the overall process of construing in a social context. On the one hand, it might be said that, since both past and present experience are only accessible through the mediation of subjective construal, there may be no difference in their quality⁷. On the other hand, it might be observed that if, following Personal Construct Theory, human psychology is fundamentally anticipative, the distinction between past and present is not fundamental for construal; the present is only an extension of the past, the momentary experience of which the anticipatory self attempts to use to validate the emergence of a recognised pattern that predicts the future. Such a proposal recalls Hatch’s (2000) cultural dynamics model, discussed in Chapter 2, which also deals with the continuous production of an ‘objective’ world, and its ongoing subjective interpretation as a meaning-making process.

⁷ Although great differences may arise in the way each is construed, particularly when past and present express relative positions in a narrative sequence, or when cultural attitudes to the relative value of past and present are brought to bear.

This discussion has sketched a possible approach to a social psychology based on Personal Construct Theory and consistent with my postulates on the social construction of reality and the self. The '(re)constructive activities' of Barclay's model might be explained as representing the process of construal at the level of the individual, an activity by which the acting self simultaneously frames and understands its context, instantiates its construal by producing objective social action which itself becomes part of and changes the context. The 'motor' of this activity is the understanding of context in terms of repetitions of past experience, and the simultaneous recognition of the significance of the identified pattern for the self in the future.

3.4.5: Power and Construal

I have now proposed that the emergent patterns of interaction that comprise social structures or culture can be seen as an operationally closed, or autopoietic, system, and that, further, the nature of the interaction occurring within that system consists of individual acts of construal of an objective context that in one motion frames the context and creates meaning and action, and changes that context. Objective social action is part of the context of other acting selves, and will thus become part of their construing. The dialectic linking objective reality and the construals of multiple individuals defines an intersubjective interaction which produces social reality, including social institutions or objects. As this dialectic evolves, and the social objects are recreated through action, self-reproducing patterns are generated that outlast the individuals producing them, and that are more than the sum of individual actions. While meaning for the individual is produced as an operational relationship between experience and reality mediated by active anticipation, and is constantly brought into being through individual action, it must also be constrained or channelled by the relationship of the objectified self to social objects, including past events and construals, group affiliations and authorised modes of reasoning.

This approach suggests that personal constructs may indeed be placed at the centre of 'culture' since, in line with both Kelly and Schein, they explain regularities in how the world is understood amongst individuals, and what actions are plausible in it. However, rather than establishing constructs as a separate category of cultural elements as Schein does with 'underlying assumptions', Kelly proposes that personal constructs are both

the inevitable product and the orienting force of a fundamental ongoing process of anticipation by individuals, each in terms of their unique history, in a specific context. Thus, culture is integrated into and explained by a systematic understanding of human behaviour. Furthermore, because personal constructs both produce and constrain individual acts of internalisation and externalisation, in the same process creating objectified reality for others, and modifying their own context, they may be seen as fundamental to the intersubjective creation of social reality.

Nevertheless, the constraining effect of context (both historical and social) can be seen as an operational definition of power: since contextual changes occur in ‘objective reality’ – beyond the scope of individual construal – but produce the context in which construal occurs, it might seem that there must indeed be a point beyond which personal construal must be limited, or confined, by objective, coercive relations, or authorised patterns – such as rites or narrative forms – to which the individual is subordinated. If construal is placed at the centre of the social construction of reality, and the generation of cultures, the relationship between construal and power needs to be defined.

The problem is not one of understanding physical coercion which, in its raw form, produces an objective change in the possibilities for individual action. Such changes are not, moreover, beyond the scope of construal, even if they cannot be construed away. Instead, they may be seen as changes in the context, which is still subject to construal. The fact that imprisonment may be construed as the same objective event by all concerned (to the extent that it is a recognised social object) does not give any more than a hint of its possible implications to the person experiencing it – a recidivist former prisoner who has difficulty coping with the outside world will no doubt construe the event differently from someone falsely accused of a violent crime. The threat of force, as much as its use, is also a matter of anticipation – a person who does not understand that a threat has been made, perhaps because a cultural form has been used that they do not recognise, will act without reference to that threat, no matter how objective its reality. Indeed, both examples demonstrate that force can only be presented as determinant of future behaviour where it either leaves no possibility for further action (through loss of consciousness or death, for instance), or where the way its use will be construed is known: ‘An individual obeys authority because he expects that others will

obey it' (Arrow 1974: p. 72; cited in Mintzberg 1983). Shared constructs are thus necessary to the predictable application of all except ultimate force.

If the determinant nature of construal is accepted in this way, not only is a separate theory of power is not necessary to understand movements in social reality, but *power can only be understood as a function of construal*. The application of power through the actions of others may produce changes in context, which are nevertheless still subject to construal; but power is most effectively exercised when the individual applies it to themselves:

'Power is most effective and insidious in its consequences when issues do not arise at all, when actors remain unaware of their sectional claims; that is, power is most effective when it is unnecessary, when, as Lukes (1974; 1977) and Clegg (1975; 1977) argued, power holders have constituted and institutionalized their provinces of meaning in the very structuring of organizational interactions so that assumptions, interpretations, and relevances become the generalized interpretive frame, the cognitive map, of organizational members' (Ranson et al. 1980).

The ultimate battle for power must therefore be over the common systems of construal which determine individual behaviour without the threat or use of force. Thus, when culture is treated as relating to shared constructs, it is related not only to the individual and social making of meaning, but to the inevitably political process of negotiation surrounding the establishment and authorisation of social objects, and their investment with taken-for-granted meaning: 'culture can be seen as 'a contested relation between meanings' (Parker 2000: p. p 74).

I therefore propose to treat culture as consisting of self-reproducing patterns in an indivisible but constantly evolving relationship between publicly available social objects, and shared personal constructs which give them meaning, and which always, but only partially, explain individual behaviour, because the context of their use is not determined. It is manifest in the continuing process of contestation (or negotiation, or 'consensus building'!) around the meaning of social objects, which may lead to changes in shared constructs, or new modes of objectification. Cultural differences may consist of either differing shared constructs (which can be seen to define cultural groups) being

applied to the same social objects, or the existence of a different inventory of social objects, or both – differences which will inevitably lead to some form of negotiation. One omnipresent class of social objects is the objectively recognised group; individuals may thus ‘objectively’ belong to the same groups, but apply different cultural constructs.

3.5: From Culture to Organisational Culture

Having outlined the field of culture in general, I will now consider its manifestation in organisations. Consistent with social constructionist views, and ‘becoming-realism’ ontologies (Silverman 1970; Berger and Luckmann 1975; Tsoukas and Chia 2002), and so in keeping with my fundamental propositions, I argue that the organisation should be seen as nothing more nor less than an ongoing production of the people who participate in it. It is by nature a social process, but also becomes a social object which is subject to construal both by members and non-members.

The organisational setting may limit the field of culture in at least three ways; firstly, by establishing a particular range of convenience for individual construing, in which some shared constructs may develop; secondly, by providing a specialised sub-inventory of social objects for use in construal, which may have particular significance in that setting; and, thirdly, by the fact that, whereas membership of society in general is based on ‘primary socialisation’ – ‘the first socialisation an individual undergoes in childhood’, membership of an organisation is related to ‘secondary socialisation’ – ‘any subsequent process that inducts an already socialised individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society’ (Berger and Luckmann 1975: p. 150).

‘Secondary socialisation is the internalisation of institutional or institution based ‘sub-worlds’ ... the acquisition of role specific knowledge, the roles being directly or indirectly rooted in the division of labour ... The ‘subworlds’ ... are generally partial realities in contrast to the ‘base-world’ acquired in primary socialisation. Yet they too are more or less cohesive realities, characterised by normative and affective as well as cognitive components ... they too require at least the rudiments of a legitimating apparatus, often accompanied by ritual or material symbols’ (p. 158).

The 'sub-worlds' spoken of here are another source of social variation and negotiation, both because they represent sources of unique experience which impact on individual ways of making meaning, and because they offer alternative ways of understanding the world. This means that, to the extent that an individual exists in different 'sub-worlds' – for example, based on gender, class, ethnicity, or professional training – he will be presented with choices as to how to anticipate the world, enhancing the range of possible understandings and actions available to him:

'The roles of secondary socialisation carry a high degree of anonymity; that is they are readily detached from their individual performers. ...Their most important consequence...is to bestow on the contents of what is learned in secondary socialisation much less subjective inevitability than the contents of primary socialisation possess....This makes it possible to detach a part of the self and its concomitant reality as relevant only to the role specific situation in question' (p. 162).

This suggests that individuals are able to develop more or less specialised objective selves for specific contexts – that individual identity may be relatively fragmented and shifting according to context, and indeed subject to negotiation and contention both within and across the boundaries of 'sub-worlds'. It also suggests that there will be much more intense negotiation, ambiguity and change around the creation of meaning in an organisation than at the level of society in general, where the range of possible world-views is much more broadly shared.

'... to understand organizations it is necessary to understand the subjective meanings held among the organization members as well as the processes by which these meanings are made to coincide, are reaffirmed, and lead to organized action. ... while we agree in part with Van Maanen (1979) and Smircich (1983b) that coincident meaning comprises organization, we simultaneously acknowledge the difficulties of achieving coincident meaning, the erosion of coincidence over time, and the eventual collapse and re-creation of negotiated orders. Our view of organizing, then, is essentially a dialectical one' (Gray et al. 1985: p. 84).

Because of this extra complexity, or variety, and the fact that, as I have already commented, the organisation can be seen both as a social process and a social object, it becomes a nexus of meaning production and negotiation, where individuals draw on social objects from multiple origins, including some unique to the organisation, and some external to the organisation, to construe events in a variety of different ways, and construe the organisation itself in multiple different fashions. The identity of the organisation is also, therefore, subject to negotiation, rather than being objectively ascertainable. However, in its aspect as social object, it is also relatively stable, or rather is relatively reliably reproduced by people's action. A thing becomes real if people act as if it is.

Since 'the organisation' has become an 'objective' social institution, construed according to widely shared social expectations, it may be seen to exhibit regular 'behaviours' in its own right – the detection of such patterns, after all, is the central activity of our experience of reality. It is these regular behaviours of the socially objective 'organisation' that are the focus of more positivist comparative approaches to their study or taxonomy. Positivists might thus be accused of theorising the activity of entities that they have themselves created. However, such a criticism would not be altogether justified, as long as it is understood that the theories in fact explain regularities in peoples' understanding of organisations, not anything properly appertaining to organisations as realities. Against this background, it would seem that great care should be taken when comparing the behaviour of 'organisations' across cultural boundaries. Furthermore, it is not surprising that positivist theories have difficulty in theorising mechanisms of change, because they are built precisely on the assumed stable existence of the constructions they observe. It is this weakness which suggests that any proper understanding of change in organisations will have to explicitly take into account their socially constructed nature. Finally, it must be accepted that the only 'true' realities in this system are the ongoing constructions of individuals.

When I use the term 'organisational culture', then, I take it as describing the patterned processes by which those involved in or with an organisation create it and give meaning to its actions, manifested through the actions of its members, in the organisational context. Personal constructs are ways by which an individual understands these processes. To the extent that constructs are shared, they produce a common

understanding of events; to the extent that they differ, they produce differing understandings. Furthermore, these shared construct systems may be expected to delineate collective entities within and/or external to the organisation, whose members are likely to see the world in similar ways and draw on similar repertoires of possible action in a given context, whereas differing construct systems may be expected to delineate boundaries between groups. However, because they are founded on secondary socialisation, group affiliation may be more or less a matter of choice – or self-categorisation (Turner et al. 1987) – or of negotiation, as interacting individuals negotiate the attribution of a person to a socially recognised collective entity. Shared constructs predict similar views of the world, and may coincide with socially recognised (objectified) groups, or may not. Members of socially recognised groups may or may not share constructs, but will share a certain inventory of meaning-laden social objects, with respect to which they will situate themselves and each other. Shared and differing constructs, accepted ways of explaining them, and other symbols in which meaning is grounded, may thus be seen as the substance of organisational culture and of distinctions between groupings relevant to the organisation. Furthermore, organisational culture is no longer assumed to be unitary: ‘A multicultural image of organizations leads one to consider both cohesive and divisive functions of culture and is recommended to researchers. These multiple cultures are not simply subcultures, dominated by an organizational culture, but usually cross-cut several organizations, as do occupational cultures’ (Gregory 1983: pp. 373-374). Nor is organisational culture bounded by organisations - constructs shared broadly across a society may be relevant to construing within it. Hofstede *et al* (1990), conducted a study that ‘...empirically shows shared perceptions of daily practices to be the core of an organization’s culture...employee values differed more according to the demographic criteria of nationality, age and education than according to membership in the organization per se’ (p. 311). This demonstrates the interpenetration of national and organisational cultures, at the same time as it suggests that cultural distinctions between and within organisations are more likely to relate to perceptions of organisational action, rather than ‘deeper’ values that relate more properly to primary socialisation.

By treating organisational culture as an ongoing process of meaning production, different aspects of which are manifest in different contexts, it is possible to move

beyond static, 'being-realism' models. Organisational culture becomes a dynamic effect of concrete action. Understanding it is no longer a matter of exhaustively describing or classifying hidden assumptions. Instead, the focus is on the creation of meaning through the complex interplay of action and experience. Organisational culture may now be seen as a continuous, dynamic and creative, but patterned, negotiation between people involved in an organisation and the world they inhabit. Furthermore, because understanding the organisational world, and one's place in it, occurs socially and in an historical context, the approach not only precludes a deterministic understanding of 'a particular' organisational culture as an independent reality, but also precludes the comprehensive understanding of that organisational culture at all, since it is only comprehensible and manifest in a particular context, and since the organisation is a site where numerous cultures may be enacted.

How is it possible to account for the persistence of organisational culture? It is clear that organisational cultures survive the departure of even quite large numbers of individuals. Indeed, over time, it may be possible to say that they survive the departure of all individuals, as generational change is completed (certainly, this is how Maturana and Varela saw it). How can this persistence be reconciled with organisational culture residing in individuals as a system of constructs? I contend that if everyone involved in an organisation were replaced simultaneously, its culture would indeed change; but, as long as some remain, continuous processes of interaction will continue to reproduce it or some development of it: 'Culture is preserved by the incremental adjustment of individual construct systems in line with what is already "extant"' (Atkins 2005), and the ongoing existence of meaning laden objects.

Of course, what is 'extant' also includes a multitude of institutions, or social objects, external to the organisation. As we have observed, organisational cultures exist in the context of (or are intermingled with) broader societal and national cultures and cultural differences. Moreover, every organisation 'has' a history, and each member of an organisation shares constructs with others outside of its boundaries, which affect what sort of roles exist in what sort of organisations, and how they may interact. All these 'external' constructs could be expected to constrain and direct what occurs within an organisation, to the extent that even if *all* its members were replaced, it is quite plausible that a similar culture would arise anew. The 'webs of significance' in which

organisations are entangled may severely restrict their ability to move in unexpected directions.

3.6: From Organisational Culture to Organisational Change

I have already observed that the current discourse around organisations demands a ritual repetition of the imperatives and increasing rate of change:

'Change is a notion which is drawn upon in a largely unthinking, but very significant, way, so that it takes on an almost magical character. Change is like a totem before which we must prostrate ourselves and in the face of which we are powerless. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the change fetish is the way in which it figures as the contextual, introductory and taken-for-granted. So obvious is it taken to be that it typically takes the form of rushed assertions at the outset of any particular treatment of organizations and management' (Grey 2005: p. 90)

There can be little question that 'change' has become a value in itself, a 'social object' around which a great deal of political negotiation, coercion and 'spin' occurs – all the more, because the evidence of increasing pace of change in a number of arenas is far from clear (Hirst and Thompson 1996). The scope of the term used in this way is breathtakingly (or breathlessly) broad – encompassing not only new forms of organisation, constant technological innovation, and accelerated adaptation of the organisation to its environment, but even changes in the psyche of the consumer, social and intergenerational changes and (inevitably) globalisation itself. Not surprisingly, against this background, it is probably fair to say that most managers are only interested in organisational culture by reference to change – whether it supports or impedes a desired change, or if 'it' itself needs changing to achieve some practical objective. A stable organisational culture, supporting management goals adequately, would normally be of only academic interest – perhaps, for example, for comparison or classification across organisations.

On one level, managers are predictably keen to invoke change as a battle-cry (or charm) which unifies the organisation in a life or death struggle against the dead hand of its culture. However, such iconolatry is not very helpful in understanding the nature of the actual changes which undoubtedly do occur in organisations, both under the splendid

banner of the change managers and, less dramatically, through the ongoing operation and development of the organisation – or even unobserved and uncontrolled, beyond the view of management. What is the relation of organisational culture to organisational change?

Culture, including organisational culture, has to do with how behaviour and social objects are invested with meaning, and in turn how meaning affects behaviour, rather than with the behaviour or object itself. It is semiotic in nature, involving an ongoing, reciprocal relationship between an objective behavioural signifier and a subjectively generated significance, between a publicly observable phenomenon in its context and an individual's unique experience of it. This allows for the evolution of patterns of behaviour within cultural stability – rather like the adoption of a new liturgy in a church, celebrating the same beliefs in a different way. It likewise allows that new meaning be attached to a specific pattern, so that cultural change occurs around an already recognised and continuing behaviour – such as the transition from the use of Latin in a church being seen as the general norm, to it being seen as signifying ultra-conservatism.

I have suggested that change, under a constructivist, processual view of the organisation, must be pervasive, rather than rare:

'Change, we argue, is the reweaving of actors' webs of beliefs and habits of action to accommodate new experiences obtained through interactions. Insofar as this is an ongoing process, that is to the extent actors try to make sense of and act coherently in the world, change is inherent in human action, and organizations are sites of continuously evolving human action' (Tsoukas and Chia 2002: p. 567)

I have located the fundamental mechanism of meaning-making in an ongoing exchange between individual and context, where anticipation channels and is challenged by experience, producing regular patterns over time. In organisations, we recognise an intersection of multiple possible ways of seeing the world, some of which are peculiar to the particular organisation, some of which originate beyond its boundaries. The ongoing process of meaning-making under such circumstances provides its own dynamic; but it also constrains and directs that dynamic.

Whereas Scientific Management approaches, in particular structural functionalist ones, see change as occurring to rationally adapt the organisation to its external conditions, the approach being proposed here suggests that such ‘rationality’ should be seen more as a culturally sanctioned argument, used in negotiation over the coordination of action or as a justification to impose change, than as an actual dynamic in organisations. The requirement to demonstrate ‘rationality’ is a culturally based constraint on possible action (amongst others), rather than the taken-for-granted common motivation of all organisational members – or, perhaps better, the meaning of the social object ‘rationality’ is subject to negotiation between individuals and groups with access to differing ‘sub-worlds’. In this negotiation, each may draw upon differing means of construing the world and different cultural inventories, as well as rehearsing the ones they share, the use of which is symbolic of the maintenance of the relevant organisation or groups. The negotiation may also bring about changes in patterns of action within and involving the organisation.

There would appear, under this perspective, to be a number of different ways for ‘change’ to occur. Firstly, an individual may change the way they construe their experience. This would force change on the way others construed that person, and in their interaction. Secondly, there may be change in the socially accepted meaning attached to a social object, which is partially reflected in individual construct systems, but which changes the nature and content of interaction. This might arise through contextual changes, or through intentional influence. Thirdly, new objects may be created, to which novel meaning is attached. This may lead to a reassessment of existing objects. All these types of change implicitly include cultural change, since they relate to the generation of meanings.

It may hypothetically be possible to change some artefacts or behaviours without entailing a cultural change in the way meaning is produced – changing chair styles at the office may have little significance (or it may have much...). However, to the extent that change affects social interaction, or some significant object (like an organigramme), it will challenge members’ construals and become cultural in nature. The suggestion is that very few, if any, changes can be made without some cultural impact. Furthermore, it is clear that understanding organisational change cannot be achieved by focussing

exclusively on the changes that have occurred in the social object under question, but must also involve understanding what changes are occurring in the construing of its members.

Weick and Quinn (1999) propose that one type of change can be described as ‘Continuous Change’, a cumulative and micro- level phenomenon. Their recommendation for ‘managing’ this sort of change is the ‘redirection of what is already under way’, by ‘freezing’ – making patterns visible; ‘rebalancing’ – reinterpreting or relabelling the patterns; then ‘unfreezing’ – resuming improvisation and ‘learning in ways which are more mindful’ (p. 366). Weick and Quinn contrast this type of change with ‘Episodic Change’, which they see as dramatic and macro-level, the management of which follows the more familiar ‘unfreeze’ ‘moving’ and ‘refreezing’ formulation of Lewin.

The distinction between Episodic and Continuous change needs careful attention, because it may result from several different influences. Much popular change management literature focuses on Episodic Change, perhaps because it is typical of management-led change initiatives that are seen to have transformational results. This suggests a Managerialist perspective, where change is fundamentally intentional and imposed from the ‘outside’, forming part of a discourse about planning and control within and over the organisation. Furthermore, Continuous Change (as a cumulative and micro-level phenomenon) may occur even without management attention, and may produce unexpected consequences. However, the distinction between the two types of change is not necessarily coterminous with the choice of a Managerialist or non-Managerialist perspective. Episodic Change may be externally imposed (perhaps through environmental shock), and Continuous Change may be the focus of a great deal of management attention, particularly where this is part of the discourse of the industry sector concerned. It seems to me more fruitful to consider Episodic and Continuous Change as representing particular constellations of positions on a number of more universal dimensions. Based on the features discussed by Weick and Quinn, it is possible, for instance, to discern the following features of most changes:

- Impact: the scope and scale of the change effects on the organisation;

- Origin: whether the change is externally imposed or originates internally;
- Acceptance: the extent to which the need to change is accepted by those undergoing it;
- Lead-time: the time before which the change, or its cause, were foreseen;
- Acuteness: the duration and short-term severity of the change in question;

In these terms, Episodic Change is fundamentally high on acuteness and impact, which perhaps makes a relatively higher level of management attention unsurprising.

Continuous Change, on the other hand, is low on acuteness. However, a wide range of possible types of change may still fall under either definition, depending on where they stand on the other dimensions – and it may be difficult to fit many types of change under either label.

Despite the difficulties inherent in developing such a taxonomy of types of change, it is revealing, in the context of a discussion about the relationship between organisational change and culture, to examine the distinction between the two generic strategies Weick and Quinn propose for managing each type. The ‘freezing-rebalancing-unfreezing’ approach associated with managing ‘Continuous Change’ seems to me to commence by ‘making object’ some aspect of ongoing organisational activity; followed by a process of making new meaning around it; then the relinquishing of management or organisational attention to it – a reversion to ‘normal’, but more reflexive, organisational life. The more familiar ‘unfreezing-moving-refreezing’ pattern proposed for dealing with ‘Episodic Change’ seems instead to start from an already established ‘objectification’ of the organisation, its ‘problem’, and probably an already known and desired solution; implies deliberate intervention at all three stages; and assumes that the organisation, both prior to and after the change, is in some sense immobilised or frozen. Regardless of the validity of the two classes of change with which they are associated, a fundamental difference may be discerned between these two strategies, which relates to their different perspective on meanings within the organisation. Both are recipes for management intervention; but one (freezing-rebalancing-unfreezing) focuses on

building common meaning out of ongoing action; the other (unfreezing-moving-refreezing) assumes the pre-existence of an authorised meaning, and focuses on imposing that meaning on organisational action. The first is in some sense collaborative; the second is essentially imposed and directed to a specified goal. Each approach implies a fundamentally different relationship between management and the organisation. I suspect that both are necessary in different contexts and for different purposes. For instance, industries which are defined by continuous, unpredictable change, where it is not possible to pre-define solutions, may see more of the ‘freezing-rebalancing-unfreezing’ approach. On the other hand, sharp external shocks, which either generate wide consensus on what the problem is, and on the need to act in its regard, or which allow a view to be imposed, may be more efficiently dealt with by the second type. From an organisational culture point of view, the difference seems to me to be whether negotiating that coherency starts from a position of openness to ways of understanding the situations and to possible novel solutions, or starts with a set of pre-established ways of understanding. Both approaches, nevertheless, are about ways of achieving coherent meaning manifested in organisational action.

3.7: Research Objective

I have now established a conceptual framework which links the individual construal of meaning with the social construction of reality and the objectified self in a dialectic that exhibits both stability and change, a dialectic which in a very real sense *is* culture. I have furthermore proposed that Personal Construct Theory may provide a useful tool for crystallising the fundamental patterns involved in the process. Against this background, I can now respecify the aim of the research as being to develop an explanation of how differing ways of understanding (‘cultures’) affect the interaction of individuals and groups in organisations, and how that interaction may bring about changes in the way understanding is produced. My interest is not to predict the substance of the new (or, even less, the old) meanings, which would be entirely dependent on context, but rather to understand how differences in meaning-making affect the relationships of groups, and to theorise the process by which meaning-making processes themselves shift.

Such an approach may be expected to produce a view of the organisational setting which will both divide and unite the organisation’s members according to the differing

ways they construe the situation – ways which will not necessarily fall in line with the organisation's formal structure. The observation of change in these terms focuses on the way members' construals alter over time, rather than merely the altered arrangement of social objects or formal structure. Thus, the focus must be on how conflicts arise between different ways of construing, how differing alliances and contradictions form and dissolve around them, and where future fault lines are developing. I aim to understand cultures dynamically, as they interact and through their interaction, rather than attempting to describe them as discrete, immobile units.

The framework I have proposed so far suggests looking for two categories of element in cultural interactions. One is the constructs being used by people involved in the process; the other, the social objects around which negotiation occurs. Unlike more positivist approaches to the question, I do not aim to achieve an 'objective' description of any or all of these objects, as might be the case in an attitudinal survey of a department, for instance. Instead, I focus on *understanding conflicts and changes in the way key objects are construed* – how people agree and disagree in their understanding of a department, and how they come to reconcile their views, or do not. I am not interested in the substance of what different people say about a group and whether it is 'correct', but in *what it shows about those who are talking* and how that unites or divides them. The understanding I aim to arrive at, moreover, is not achieved by categorising those people according to some pre-established system of attitudes, as being 'positive' or 'resistant', for instance, but in terms used by the person themselves to explain their situation:

'Ideally... a cultural relativist posture leads researchers to explore controversies in detail as various groups view them, rather than to evaluate positions against a standard. Instead of starting with an assumption of shared culture ..., meanings are explored systematically, preserving and explaining the bases of controversies (Werner 1981). No homogeneous units or specific characteristics of culture are defined a priori, but rather those groups and processes recognized by native participants are discovered and studied "in their terms" during the research' (Gregory 1983: p. 366).

It is possible to see significant parallels between the approach being proposed here and Spender's (1989) concept of 'industry recipes'. This influential idea proposed that 'the firm is a body of knowledge, what might now be called a 'knowledge-base', and that the

organisation is a 'set of ideas which influence individual behavior' (p. 37). It and explicitly and extensively draws on Kelly to provide a theoretical foundation for the description of shared world views that both span and divide industry groups. On the one hand, I take comfort in the fact that someone else has seen potential in applying Kelly's ideas to effectively mapping meanings across collective groups, and that the results were so revealing and practical; on the other, I see some fundamentally different orientations between my approach and Spender's, in the sense that Spender chose not to address the question of how industry recipes change or interact, but rather focused on their 'static' description. Furthermore, Spender did not deal with the question of the construction of social objects (for example, 'the industry' itself) and their interrelation with 'cultures' defined by shared constructs, nor the problems of setting boundaries. Finally, he adopted a conception of the organisation, based on 'knowledge', which in my view places it on too narrow a base. The present work can thus be seen as extending (and to some extent rebuilding) the philosophical base offered by Spender, and adopting the much more ambitious goal of exploiting the dynamic possibilities offered by the model.

My objectives can now be defined as follows:

- 1) To develop a practical means of identifying the shared construct systems which define and distinguish groups; and
- 2) To explain how they interact and change over time.

3.8: Implications

Observing and understanding a changing organisation must occur on at least two levels: the description of events, and the development of theory that places those events into some meaningful system. In terms of the framework I have just outlined, however, the primary aim is not to describe 'events' in the usual sense, an approach which would lead to the adoption of a case study or related narrative form. Instead, the 'events' are individual acts of construal, around which I need to develop two levels of theory; firstly, relating to the construal of organisational members about what occurs in the organisation; and, secondly, to develop explanations of how construct systems change over time and in relationship to social interaction. Moreover, I need to show that both these levels of theory are not trivial – that they explain something which is not self-

evident and further, given my aim to be of practical value, that their application would be useful to those involved in the process.

The role of the researcher in such a framework needs some consideration. Although it is tempting to attribute some objective status to the ‘constructs’ on which I aim to base my theory, these constructs are themselves only available to me as construals of my own experience. The research process itself is fundamentally one where the researcher produces meaning. To the extent that the meaning is novel to the members of the organisation (gives ‘insight’), the research will be valuable to them; to the extent that the process I use to create it can be applied in other contexts to generate novel meaning, it will be valuable to other practitioners or at other times; and, to the extent that the process says something about how meaning-making and interaction are related, and change, it will be useful to theorists. Nevertheless, the construed nature of the fundamental elements on which this theorising is based cannot be forgotten – nor, in line with Kelly’s ‘constructive alternativism’, can they ever be presented as more than interim hypotheses about reality.

Kelly saw the role of the psychologist in a similar fashion, as construing the construals of a patient (1955: p. 340). He recognised the essentially, and necessarily, subjective nature of these construals, but elaborated a sophisticated approach to guide the process, which aimed to achieve two goals – on the one hand, to ensure that the patient’s construal was understood as much in their own terms as possible but, on the other hand, to also allow psychologists to approach their task in a more or less systematic fashion. This latter goal was achieved through the establishment of what Kelly called ‘professional constructs’ (p. 211) – generalised ways of understanding another’s construal process. As with everything Kelly proposed, these were not advanced as the only, nor even necessarily the best, ways to approach the problem, but had an imperfect, interim status; they could be replaced at any time a better idea emerged. These professional constructs were developed for a one-on-one clinical setting, and so appear to me to be outside of the range of convenience of using construal as a window on culture and change in organisations. However, Kelly’s concern to understand construal in as near as possible the terms of the individual involved, and at the same time to develop ‘professional’ constructs to assist the researcher in the task, appear to me to be critical considerations to be taken into account in developing my methodology. In fact,

the theory I aim to develop explaining how construct systems change could easily be seen as consisting precisely of professional constructs .

What is the value of a theory based on hypotheses which can never be validated?

Constructive Alternativism does not take as its project the ‘discovery’ of some absolute or immutable ‘truth’ – it is purely instrumental, aiming to constantly improve our explanations of an ongoing and evolving experience. In like fashion, Kelly’s use of Personal Construct Theory did not involve establishing and validating a complete inventory of constructs for his patients, based upon which it could be decided what was ‘wrong’ with them. The focus was highly instrumental – hypotheses were made and tested with a patient not to establish their validity, but to assist the patient to develop new ways of construing, which allowed them to better anticipate their world (and so operate better within it). Because of this, understanding the construing of the patient was only important because, and to the extent that, this allowed patient and psychologist to work together in developing new ways of understanding.

This instrumental premise is fundamentally in tune with the approach I am proposing – to understand how organisational cultures interact and change, it is not necessary (and indeed, I maintain, it would be impossible) to undertake a valid or complete ‘diagnosis’ of the culture or cultures involved before action can be taken. Firstly, the very process by which the researcher construes the culture(s) being studied is an interaction which carries the potential to cause change in what is being observed; secondly, ‘validity’ is only necessary to the extent that it allows the researcher to produce a plausible explanation for what is occurring, an explanation which will in any case be constantly challenged by further events. Under this approach, validity is an outcome, not a pre-requisite. Finally, because culture is seen as manifest only in a specific context, and is multiple for any individual, the notion of any sort of exhaustive cataloguing of fundamental assumptions is not only unrealistically ambitious, but is also inherently impossible, and of very little interest.

3.8.1: Nature of Theory

It is possible to distinguish two types of theory (Mohr 1982). ‘Variance theory’ is of the form ‘if x then y’, where x and y are ordered events – so called efficient causality. It is usually arrived at by detecting a statistically significant co-occurrence of a particular

dependent variable of interest, and a plausible independent variable or variables which, if found, allows the researcher to say that some hypothesis has been validated (or, alternatively, disproved). Process theory, on the other hand, takes the form ‘if y, then x’ – a cause is a necessary but not sufficient condition for an outcome. Process theory is thus fundamentally non-deterministic, and focuses on explaining how an outcome occurs rather than on predicting its occurrence. Clearly, this sort of theory is more appropriate to the objectives of this research. Variance theory focuses on a precursor and a successor state, and does not address how the two are linked, effectively assuming the mechanics of causality are not relevant, and that the result is independent of the timing and order of events which produce it. Even if such theory could be shown to be meaningful in the context of the social sciences (a somewhat doubtful proposition), it would not address the purpose of this research.

Variance theory is also at a great disadvantage when dealing with the change or destruction of organisational boundaries – such as occurs in mergers, acquisitions, or restructuring. This is because such theory takes the organisation as a given within its boundaries, and has no means of explaining how they are produced in the first place. Process Theory, on the other hand, need not give any ‘pre-existing’ status to organisational boundaries, seeing them rather as products of an interaction.

The approach I am outlining has a number of implications for the epistemology of organisational culture. By accepting that action is the product of interplay between our history and our autonomy, I am accepting the existence of an objective reality, independent of the actions or perceptions of human beings. However, this objective reality is presented not as a knowable whole, but in terms of its effect on our temporally and spatially local experience. Thus, knowledge about an organisation has no meaning outside its context – it is fundamentally transient, or situated, instead of being universal and unchanging, and inseparable from the person who defines it. In effect, this means that theory about an organisation can be produced by its members, with the status of insight rather than of law – by definition useful, but ephemeral; accessible and immediate rather than hidden and distant; and more likely to be the product of experience and intuition than education and analysis. The purpose of this research, moreover, becomes exploring how to generate such insight on an ongoing basis.

3.8.2: Constructs Define Cultures

'...People belong to the same cultural group, not merely because they behave alike, nor because they expect the same things of others, but especially because they construe their experience in the same way' (Kelly 1955: p. 94).

I have proposed that cultures are founded on the existence of constructs shared between individuals, and on the effect these shared constructs have on individual and social behaviour, because members are likely to see the world and expect others to see it in similar ways, and draw on similar repertoires of possible action in a given context. This reverses the usual logic of the 'culture as an attribute' school of thinking, because it makes the shared constructs pre-eminent, effectively identifying them with the culture, and makes the 'objective' organisation a focus of difference, rather than consensus. Hence, rather than search for common constructs across a pre-defined organisational unit (such as the entire organisation), I propose to look at the constructs being used in a given context, and treat individuals who hold them in common as comprising some limited form of 'culture'. Taking the organisational unit as pre-eminent would obliterate differences that might exist between parts of the unit, and deny the influence of constructs that might originate outside, or extend beyond, its boundaries, such as those derived from national cultural or professional orientations. Such a simplification would therefore ignore a number of possible sources of dynamism and conflict within the organisation, and enforce an unrealistically static view of it.

The proposed approach does not assume that formal distinctions will correspond with cultural differences in a specific context (although it does not preclude that possibility), nor that the same cultural divisions will be salient in different contexts. Cultural complexity may be greater or less than organisational complexity; and cultural differences originating outside the organisation may well affect behaviour within it. Furthermore, because all constructs have a limited range of convenience, a cultural grouping defined in one context – for instance the merger of two organisations – may be irrelevant in another, such as the reaction to accusations of ethical misconduct by one of the organisations. Thus, organisational culture, rather than reflecting a fixed and constraining framework of rules, becomes shifting and context-dependent, seen as 'multiple, cross-cutting cultural contexts rather than as stable bounded, homogenous cultures' (Gregory 1983: p. 365). Individuals may be able to claim, or feel affiliated to,

a number of cultural groupings that are relevant in any one context, and the negotiation, both internally and externally, of which is the salient one in a given context becomes an important part of the dynamics of organisational culture.

In this Chapter, starting from three fundamental propositions which position my approach with regard to some of the main streams of the study of organisations and their cultures, I have established links with George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory. I have then extended this approach to deal with social contexts, and explored how individual acts of construing, in social contexts, might be seen to be at the heart of culture in general, and organisational culture in particular. Based on this framework, I have defined the Research Objectives of this study, and reviewed some implications of the approach adopted for its outcomes.

Chapter 4: Overview of Methodology

Observing and understanding a changing organisation must occur on at least two levels: the description of events, and the development of theory that places those events into some meaningful explanatory system. In terms of the framework I have just described, however, my primary aim is not to describe ‘events’ in the usual sense. Instead, the ‘events’ I am observing are individual acts of construal: these have been taken as an operationalisation of ‘culture’ in the context of organisations. I have questioned the status of ‘organisational culture’ as an entity or property which can be grasped in its own right, seeing it rather as a phenomenon only the effects of which we label as such. Construing, on the other hand, is a process which appears to be both central to the range of these effects we observe as ‘culture’, and which is sufficiently identifiable to allow investigation. Like any operationalisation, however, I accept that it is only one out of several which might have been chosen, and therefore have no expectation of producing a theory which is in any sense a ‘complete’ or uniquely valid approach to ‘organisational culture’. I hope for something much less ambitious – to provide some insight into how the differing ways in which we see the world interact to produce social effects. The problem to be addressed in this chapter is how to generate theory which is a credible explanation of the events observed, and which has sufficient generality to give insight in other contexts. I will first outline the Grounded Theory methodology that I have chosen to use because of its focus on theory generation, together with some comments on the various issues which arose in applying it in this context, and then describe a pilot implementation and its results. In the following two chapters, I will then present the results of the fieldwork.

4.1: Grounded Theory

4.1.1: Background

4.1.1.1: The Discovery of Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory was first proposed by Glaser and Strauss in their book, ‘*The Discovery of Grounded Theory*’ (1967), and further developed by Glaser in a second

book, *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978). 'Discovery' sets out a comprehensive argument for the development of a new methodology to generate theory in the social sciences, rather than what Glaser and Strauss identified as the dominant mode of sociology at the time, the verification of theory. Grounded Theory was an attempt to move away from the assumption that sociology should occupy itself with the proof or disproof of 'Grand Theory' proposed by "great men" (Glaser and Strauss 1967: p. 10), towards the creative generation of theory that: '...fits empirical situations and is understandable to sociologists and the layman alike. Most important, it works – provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications' (Glaser and Strauss 1967: p. 1). Furthermore, Grounded Theory transcends arguments over the pre-eminence of qualitative or quantitative methods:

'...there is no fundamental clash between the purposes and capacities of qualitative and quantitative methods or data. What clash there is concerns the primacy of emphasis on verification or generation of theory-to which heated discussions on qualitative versus quantitative data have been linked historically. We believe that each form of data is useful for both verification and generation of theory, whatever the primacy of emphasis' (pp. 17-18).

The heart of the Grounded Theory methodology is the use of comparative analysis of data to generate 'conceptual categories' or 'conceptual properties' of those categories (p. 23), and 'generalized relations among them' (p. 39). Although this technique also has the effect of replicating data and so improving (never guaranteeing) its accuracy, its primary purpose is to establish the centrality of a category in explaining some social phenomena, and to elaborate its different aspects (p. 23). Moreover, it produces generalisations that

'not only help delimit a grounded theory's boundaries of applicability; more important, they help us broaden the theory so that it is more generally applicable and has greater explanatory and predictive power' (p. 24).

As the hypothesised categories and properties 'develop in abstraction, and become related, their accumulating interrelations form an integrated central theoretical framework – *the core of the emerging theory*' (p. 40, italics in original). This emerging core category provides a focus for the collection of further data – 'theoretical sampling',

by which it is elaborated, extended, or modified. Comparative analysis, between data to generate categories, and between emerging categories and new data, continues until ‘theoretical saturation’ is achieved – the point at which ‘no additional data are being found that can develop properties of the category’ (p. 61). The theory which explains the phenomenon of interest develops as a succession of ‘Theoretical Memos’, which record the emerging integration and elaboration of the core category and its properties.

Core categories, always present in Grounded Theory, may also be ‘Basic Social Processes’, which are defined as core categories that have ‘...at minimum two clear, emergent stages... that...*differentiate and account for variations in the problematic pattern of behavior*’ (Glaser 1978: p. 97, italics in original). These are ‘...*pervasive* since they are fundamental, patterned processes in the organization of social behaviors which occur over time and go on irrespective of the conditional variation of place’ (p. 100).

The theory produced may be ‘substantive’, or linked to the empirical area of its inquiry – ‘such as patient care, race relations, professional education, delinquency, or research organizations’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967: p. 32) – or ‘formal’, that is ‘developed for a formal, or conceptual, area of sociological inquiry, such as stigma, deviant behavior, formal organization, socialization, status congruency, authority and power...’ (p. 32). Substantive theory can be generated by ‘a comparative analysis between or among groups within the same substantive area’ or by comparing a phenomenon with other substantive cases within the same formal area, whereas generating formal theory demands comparative analysis ‘among different kinds of substantive cases which fall within the formal area, without relating them to any one substantive area’ (p. 33). This ‘is a design for the cumulative nature of knowledge and theory’ that encourages the emergence of ‘multiple theories ...in contrast to the directly monopolistic implications of logico-deductive theories, whose formulators claim there is only one theory for an area, or perhaps even one sociological theory for all areas’ (p. 35). Furthermore, since the production of theory is itself a process, which has no necessary or inherent start or finish, its outcome is necessarily always provisional, and never a ‘perfected product’ (p. 32).

4.1.1.2: Strauss and Corbin

The development of Grounded Theory methodology has been marked (or marred) by a split in the views of its two originators. In 1990, Strauss, together with Corbin, published *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Strauss and Corbin 1990). This work proposed a highly structured and systematic approach to coding, in particular developing the notion of ‘axial coding’, a means to develop ‘...a category by specifying the conditions that give rise to it, the context in which it is embedded, and the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled, managed and carried out’ (Goulding 2002: p. 78).

In a stinging response, Glaser claimed that: ‘...Strauss’ logic...thwarts and frustrates the discovery of what is truly going on in the substantive area under study, and undermines grounded theory at every turn by preconceived forcing of the data’ (Glaser 1992: p. 3). Glaser further, and perhaps more importantly, maintained that the outcome of Strauss and Corbin’s proposal is ‘full, preconceived conceptual description which is an entirely different goal than generating a theory that explains how a basic social problem is processed in an action system’ (p. 43). By conceptual description, Glaser meant ‘describing the full range of behavior of what is occurring in the substantive area irrespective of relevance and accounting for variation in behavior’ (p. 19). His critique has continued along these lines over the ensuing years to the present (see, for example, Glaser 2001; 2002).

The debate, for all its heat, essentially demonstrates the existence of a consensus on the defining features of Grounded Theory:

- 1) The generation of categories from constant comparison of data and emerging categories;
- 2) The use of the emerging core category to direct further collection of data (‘Theoretical Sampling’);
- 3) The generation of theory, rather than its verification, achieved by lifting the conceptual level, and recorded by the writing of Theoretical Memos which allow

the analyst to harvest emerging theoretical insight and develop it in harmony with the data; and,

- 4) The cessation of data collection when no new properties emerge to elaborate the core category (Theoretical Saturation).

Furthermore, and despite Glaser's accusations that their approach was overly rigid, Strauss and Corbin remained cautious about any tendency towards mechanical application:

'It is entirely possible to complete a grounded theory study, or any study, yet not to produce findings that are significant. If the researcher merely follows the grounded theory procedures/canons without imagination or insight into what the data are reflecting – because he or she fails to see what they are really saying, except in terms of trivial or well known phenomena – then the published findings fail on this criterion' (Strauss and Corbin 1990: p. 256).

For this reason, I do not see the debate around these issues as raising fundamental concerns about the foundations of Grounded Theory methodology *per se*, but rather as a controversy – albeit a rather important one – over its elaboration, or the development of its 'technology'. This study has adopted the Glaserian 'version' of Grounded Theory, as expounded in *'The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research'* (Glaser and Strauss 1967); *'Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory'* (Glaser 1978); and *'The Grounded Theory Perspective: Conceptualization Contrasted with Description'* (Glaser 2001). This decision reflects the priority I placed on the generation of theory rather than 'full description' and my belief, after a preliminary review, that the Glaserian method would be more open and flexible than the Straussian, which I felt was an important consideration for a project which was relatively exploratory, and undertaken in an area which has evidently in the past been subject to much 'forcing' of data into preconceived assumptive frameworks. I also profess a fundamental agreement with Glaser's arguments concerning the nature of the difficulties inherent in the Straussian approach.

4.1.2: Choosing Grounded Theory

Choosing Grounded Theory methodology carries with it a number of risks. I have already outlined the dispute between groups of researchers with quite different approaches, both of whom claim to be using Grounded Theory, and both of whom will rather severely evaluate the work of anyone using the other side's approach. Then, there are the various accusations levelled against the methodology by the unquestionably larger numbers of researchers who focus on theory verification, usually in the positivist tradition. Leaving aside those criticisms which originate in a failure to recognise that Grounded Theory focuses on theory generation rather than verification, and noting that the ontological and epistemological foundations of this research place it irreconcilably outside 'logico-deductive' territory in any case, there are still some key points which need to be made about what can be expected from the methodology, and how it is to be evaluated.

Firstly, and completely in keeping with the fundamental assumptions of this research and Kelly's constructive alternativism, the research product of Grounded Theory has the status of '...interpretations made from given perspectives. Consequently, it is important to recognise that interpretations are temporally constrained. They should always be seen as provisional and subject to future elaboration...' (Goulding 2002: p. 43). Secondly, Grounded Theory cannot be evaluated by positivist criteria. Glaser and Strauss used the standards of 'credibility, plausibility and trustworthiness' to

'...controvert the frequent discrediting of the generation of grounded theory ...[which] stems from sociologists taking as their guide to credibility the canons of rigorous quantitative verification on such issues as sampling, coding, reliability, validity, indicators, frequency distributions, conceptual formulation, hypothesis construction, and presentation of evidence' (1967: pp. 223-224).

On the same theme, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that 'qualitative insights' need to be assessed differently: credibility substituting for internal validity, transferability for external validity, dependability for reliability, confirmability for objectivity (p. 300). I would certainly argue that there is a case for evaluating Grounded Theory with reference to standards like these, since they are appropriate to the purpose and claims of the methodology.

An important issue also arises around the premise from which this research departs. One of the most quoted, and perhaps controversial, tenets of Grounded Theory as proposed by Glaser is that the researcher should enter the field without a pre-established theoretical position. Leaving aside the question of whether it is actually possible to avoid having a starting position, and the related question of whether this is what Glaser intended in the first place, it is nevertheless important to clarify the status of the focus of analysis this research has chosen to use – the ‘construct’ – and show how it relates to this maxim. This is only partly because I wish to show that I have consistently followed Grounded Theory methodology – rather than, as Suddaby asserts occurs from time to time, interpreted it ‘to mean “anything goes”’ (2006: p. 640). It is also because being clear about what is being theorised helps ensure that expectations about the resulting theory are reasonably in line with what will be produced.

As is demonstrated in the foregoing chapters, my proposal to use the construct as focus of analysis arose from an investigation that aimed to make explicit my assumptions as to what the term ‘culture’ means, and fit them into a coherent statement of the research context, so that my orientations (not to say preconceptions and biases) were clearly evident to those evaluating the outcome. This is in line with the exhortation that Grounded Theory researchers should ‘account for their positions in the research process’ (Suddaby 2006: p. 640). In the absence of such an exploration of the epistemological and ontological landscape in which this research takes place, answering any question using the term ‘culture’ risks exploring the researcher’s own position and presenting it as a result, rather than as a starting point.

Furthermore, as has been pointed out, the term ‘culture’ is value-laden and ambiguous, to the extent that going into the field with a more ‘normal’ (for Grounded Theory) research focus such as ‘the way in which organisational cultures interact and influence each other’ would not have indicated the phenomenon of interest. In this sense, the construct of interest needed to be defined:

‘A priori specification of constructs can also help to shape the initial design of theory-building research. Although this type of specification has not been common in theory-building studies to date, it is valuable because it helps researchers to measure constructs more accurately. If constructs prove

important as the study progresses, then researchers have a firmer empirical grounding for emergent theory' (Eisenstadt 1995: pp. 69-70).

Glaser and Strauss originally chose to use Grounded Theory methodology to explore patterns of behaviour surrounding dying patients in American hospitals. In framing their question in this way, they both defined the phenomenon they were attempting to theorise (patterns of behaviour), and an unambiguous context in which it occurred (surrounding dying patients). This would not have been the case had I focussed on 'organisational culture', without specifying what I was to look at.

Adopting the 'construct' as the focus of analysis did not, therefore, indicate a theoretical predisposition or assumption – it merely defined a focus for observation. Furthermore, as is appropriate for Grounded Theory, there was no assumption that this focus could not be changed. If, as the research progressed, a better way was found of revealing the underlying level of meaning, Grounded Theory allows (indeed demands) that the focus be changed.

I believe, in taking this approach, that I am consistent with Glaser:

'Other researchers, usually those with training of some duration, find it more comfortable to enter the field with some combination of a clear question or problem area in mind, a general perspective, and a supply of beginning concepts and field research strategies. This is less than being completely open, but still quite receptive to the emergent. The perspectives that many analysts prefer to use are limiting, but are still quite general.Seldom do they constrain or derail the emerging analysis, but if they do, they must be discarded' (1978: p. 45).

On a positive level, the choice of Grounded Theory methodology as the over-arching method for this research reflects a fundamental coherence between its assumptions and those underlying the research framework outlined. At the level of epistemology, Grounded Theory is compatible with symbolic interpretive views: 'In this pragmatic approach to social science research, empirical "reality" is seen as the ongoing interpretation of meaning produced by individuals engaged in a common project of observation' (Suddaby 2006: p. 633). Furthermore, it '...is most suited to efforts to understand the process by which actors construct meaning out of intersubjective

experience' (p. 634). Finally, Grounded Theory methodology, with its constant passing back and forth between data and analysis, and the emerging yet provisional nature of its insights, appeared to me to have 'face credibility' in a real organisational context, reflecting the way practicing managers frequently have to approach their work environment.

4.2: Eliciting Constructs

Since the Grounded Theory investigation of construing is based on 'detecting' the constructs in use in a given organisational context, the first step in defining the research method was to establish how they might be 'revealed'. Personal Construct Theory is often associated with a particular method of eliciting constructs, the Repertory Grid (see Bannister and Mair 1968; Fransella et al. 1977; Jankowicz 2003). This is a well developed technique, which usually involves analysing the similarities and differences elicited when a respondent compares triads of 'elements' – most frequently roles that are important to him or her. The method has been widely applied, and lends itself to sophisticated quantitative analysis. Nevertheless, for practical reasons, I decided that it would not be the most appropriate tool for this research. The procedure is highly structured, and I was concerned it might seem repetitive, pedantic or artificial, particularly in an organisational setting where practitioner/respondents were short on time or high in status, and so not willing to adapt to someone else's process. Moreover, since it was intended that the research take place in an organisation undergoing radical change, it was vital that the method did not exacerbate respondents' concerns, or create suspicion or hostility towards either the researcher or the organisation. I felt that introducing an unfamiliar technique like the Repertory Grid, particularly when it was easily identifiable as a psychological instrument, potentially did both. Kelly himself had always considered Repertory Grids to be means to an end, and allowed that other approaches should be used if they worked better. Indeed, on his European tour, he adopted a method of drawing data directly from ordinary conversations, which he initiated by asking certain carefully prepared questions. I therefore set out to develop an alternative method of eliciting personal constructs that was appropriate to the research context.

Kelly once proposed a ‘golden rule for clinical psychologists. *If you don’t know what’s wrong with a client, ask him; he may tell you!*’ (1955: p. 201, italics in original). He suggested that the personal-construct psychologist ‘start by taking what he sees and hears at face value. He even takes at face value what he sees and hears about his subject’s constructs’ (p. 174). He called this *the credulous attitude*. This does not mean that Kelly expected his clients to be personal construct psychologists:

‘What the personal construct psychologist does is first attempt to describe accurately the highest levels of abstraction in his subject’s system at the lowest possible levels of abstraction in his own...Data, when considered as such by the psychologist, are relatively concrete elements awaiting some sort of construction’ (p. 174).

Thus, for the psychologist, understanding the client is a process of construing their constructions. Similarly, ‘...for any of us, the sharing of personal experience is a matter of *construing* the other person’s experience, and not merely a matter of having him hand it intact across the desk’ (p. 200). Further,

‘...it is common practice to name or identify constructs after one or more of their elements. ...We understand what another person means when he says “dog” ...by using what he has said as an element...upon which we also form a construct. If we utilize what our friend has meant, as well as what he has said, as an element...then our personal construct can be considered a version of his personal construct’ (p. 200, emphasis in original).

Thus, the essence of the approach adopted in this research was to attempt to isolate the elements of construing as it was carried out by people talking about the specific changes occurring in and around the subject organisation, in particular the construal of the various groups who were believed to be involved. Construal was taken to be a process that involves specifying an object (almost always a ‘social object’) by attributing some property to it (henceforth a ‘quality’). This quality was to be understood as one pole of a bipolar construct, with the duality forming the basis of distinction from other groups⁸.

⁸ The discipline of treating each construct as bipolar was also critically important for two other reasons: it minimised the extent to which the researcher’s understanding of a term might

An underlying assumption in this approach, which appeared to be reasonable in the context of social behaviour, was that construal is made visible through language. Language itself is a semiotic process, a dynamic but patterned relating of significance and signifier. Thus, meaning created at one level may itself become a signifier to which new significance is attached at another level, symbol nesting in symbol; until at some point the patterns of meaning emerge that we identify as culture. I use the word language in a broad sense: 'Language, to a semiotician, goes beyond spoken words to include objects, behaviors, practices, images, symbols, etc.' (Brannen 2004: p. 595).

What is required from the data, then, can be summarised in the following four questions:

1. What '*social objects*' can be identified?
2. What *attributions* are being made to them?
3. Is it possible to see an opposition between any of these attributions that defines a perceived *similarity* or a *difference* between social objects?
4. What is the *context* of the data? For the purposes of this research, does the data relate to the changes occurring in the organisation?

4.2.1: Site

I sought an organisation undergoing radical change as the research site. In such a setting, I expected shifts in ways of making meaning to occur relatively frequently. Furthermore, I expected that understanding the way such shifts occurred would be particularly useful. As it happened, organisations in this state (and it is surprising how many self-identified as being so) proved difficult to access – quite understandably, managers who perceived the very survival of their organisations to be threatened seemed to see little attraction in introducing an unknown researcher into an already highly sensitive environment. Eventually, however, a site was found for the project, in a

submerge the speaker's, by forcing the clarification of the speaker's meaning; and it focussed attention on what was *not* being said, as well as what was (so helping to indicate subterfuge or illuminate relationships between individuals and statements).

business school (the Business School⁹) attached to a large university (the University). Over the course of the research, the Business School was merged into a newly formed Department of Management, itself forming part of a newly established Division of Commerce.

4.2.2: Interviews

Although the intention was to develop an approach that could be applied to any form of communication, it was decided to start with one-on-one interviews, then supplement the findings with other data sources, after the method had been in use for sufficient time for any issues with it to arise. By limiting initial data collection to interviews, it was also possible to control the context of the discussion to cover the change that was occurring, and to specifically prompt the respondent for one class of element that was expected to be most relevant – the groups that existed in the organisation.

Interviews were initially conducted with individuals from within the Business School, as well as some external to, but having significant interaction with it. The interviews were essentially open-ended; starting from the statement of a theme (‘Thinking about the groups who are important to the Business School in this ongoing change, both internally and externally, what would you say were the main differences and similarities between them?’). Responses were to be divided into two fundamental categories of content – ‘Identities’ (social objects, so called because they were usually individual or collective actors) and ‘qualities’ (some property or attribute attached to the social objects). These qualities were taken to indicate single poles of bipolar constructs – the ‘Emergent’ poles. As the research progressed, and the organisational context changed, particularly after the Business School was absorbed into the Department, the theme statement had to be slightly modified (since the Business School no longer existed); however, it was always phrased to focus attention on the changes ongoing in the

⁹ I will henceforth refer to the various organisational units relevant to this story by using their generic description capitalised (thus, ‘the University’, ‘the Business School’). References to other units which do not need to be specifically identified will be in lower case (‘the other departments’, ‘universities’).

Business School or the Department, and to encourage responses in terms of the groups involved.

The interviews aimed to elicit the maximum possible number of constructs from each individual, within the given range of convenience. The basic mechanic used was to interrogate an initial response in the interview, either by taking up a distinction made (e.g., ‘They are a very loose group’) and asking for more precision (‘When you say “loose”, what do you mean? As opposed to what?’), or by working through the various identities evoked (‘Lets talk about group B now – how do they differ from group A? How are they similar?’). The objective of these questions was, respectively, to achieve a clearer specification of qualities (preferably by completing a polar opposition – revealing the ‘Implicit’ pole – to produce a construct), or to increase the number of qualities and constructs attached to each Identity. In addition, where appropriate, the well established Personal Construct Theory technique of Laddering (Jankowicz 2003) was used, either once or recursively (e.g., Upward laddering: Asking “Why is X important?”; Downward laddering: Asking “How do you know that X is important? Can you give me some examples of X?”). This helped establish the relationships between some of the constructs, and in particular to identify those on which a number of others depended, and so could be considered more central. If, in the course of an interview, the researcher came to the conclusion that a construct had been elicited, he would try to test it by asking whether it applied to a different, but already elicited Identity (e.g., for a construct ‘fragmented/coherent’ elicited with regard to group Y, ‘Would you say that group X is fragmented or coherent?’). This helped not only to ‘validate’ the construct, and establish limits on its range of convenience, but also to enrich the description of each of the Identities.

In this way, each interrogation provided material for further questioning, and the interview might be regarded as consisting of successive iterations of the same basic process. Interviews were not subject to any time restriction, but continued until the respondent had exhausted their ability to comment – in most cases this was between about 30 and 60 minutes, although some interviews extended significantly longer. In practice, most respondents required little intervention from the interviewer to keep going – and some were quite hard to stop! Respondents generally spoke uninterrupted for anywhere between 2 and 10 minutes in response to any one question, without input

or encouragement. In order to maximise the spontaneity of the response, and to minimise any introduction of material by the interviewer, no attempt was made to interrupt or control the discussion, beyond applying the basic method described. Because, as near as possible, the same framework was applied identically in all interviews, differences and similarities in perspective quickly became apparent. It was, furthermore, not only possible to see what was important to an interviewee by analysing what they said, but also by observing how they chose to interpret the initial question, and what they chose not to say. Wherever possible, interviews were recorded into a digital audio file (.wav). After completing each interview, the recording was uploaded onto a PC for analysis, using Atlas.ti software (version 5.0 in the pilot phase). In six cases it was not possible to record a one-on-one interview, due either to respondent wishes or to a difficult physical context (usually background noise). In five of these cases, it was possible for the interviewer to keep quite exhaustive notes; in those cases, the notes were scanned and then subjected to the same analytical process as the audio files.

All one-on-one interviews were conducted under protocols approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Australian National University, and with the written consent of the individuals concerned. Guarantees were given that no individually identifiable information would be made available to anyone but the researcher, nor would the participation or non-participation of any individual be known to anyone but the researcher. The identity of the organisation has been disguised.

As the project progressed, the types of material used for data collection were extended to include notes taken of proceedings in meetings and written documents (agendas, minutes of meetings, memos, emails, public announcements). In the end, a total of 38 interviews and notes of meeting proceedings and 23 written documents (Reports, official Minutes, detailed agendas, etc.) were utilised in the research. 42 individuals were involved, ranging across all academic levels, from Chancellery, Faculty, Division and Department, as well as a small number of senior general staff. Some were interviewed twice, at different stages of the research. In addition to recordings and documents formally included and analysed, a large number of informal conversations were used to 'sense-check' conclusions as they emerged. These numbers appear to be broadly consistent with other studies in similar areas: Isabella's classic 1990 paper was

based on 40 interviews (p. 10); Chreim recently published two studies of change in Canadian banks (Chreim 2006a; Chreim 2006b) based on a total of 46 interviews over a four year period. Brannen and Salk's (2000) study of cultural interaction in a German-Japanese joint venture was based on interviews with 17 individuals. All used other sources and forms of material to provide context and check data.

4.2.3: Analysis

I will first describe the method developed for handling one-on-one interviews in the pilot phase, and then describe the evolution of the method in the later stages of the research, and the handling of non-interview materials, which follows essentially the same process.

4.2.3.1: Segmentation

The recorded interviews were first segmented into passages called 'quotations', which involved notionally placing start and finish markers onto the audio track. These quotations became the units to be coded and analysed for meaning. Initially, the smallest possible logical unit was delineated – often a sentence or a phrase. However, as experience with the method grew, it became clear that this was extremely time-consuming and added little value, compared to simply breaking the interview into segments corresponding to complete passages of speech from the respondent (i.e., together making up the interview excluding the interviewer's questions).

4.2.3.2: First Stage Coding

Following the segmentation of the data, a first pass was made across the quotations that had been established, with the aim of marking them with labels, or 'codes'. Codes could later be used to retrieve the quotations they marked, or be linked with other codes to build relationships.

4.2.3.2.1 Conventions

To facilitate treatment of the codes attached to each segment, standard naming conventions were used. Codes indicating a qualifier without the opposing pole necessary to define a construct commenced with 'CE'; codes incorporating both poles

commenced with ‘C’; and an ‘Identity’ or social object commenced with ‘I’¹⁰. As far as possible, the remainder of the code label was a *verbatim* transcription of the respondent’s words. Where passages were too long for this, they were paraphrased, whilst still maintaining the respondent’s choice of words to the extent possible. Methods for consolidating codes across segments and, later, across participants are discussed below.

Thus, the sentence ‘Staff became very concerned, because Management were entrepreneurial rather than professional’ would be linked to codes ‘CE concerned’, ‘C entrepreneurial/professional’, ‘I Staff’ and ‘I Management’.

4.2.3.3: Second Stage Coding – Relationship Building

The next step aimed to record the links that the respondent made explicitly or implicitly between the various constructs. Where these had not already been made clear by the use of laddering, the most productive way of establishing them was to review constructs or qualifiers together with the social objects with which they had been elicited. For instance, social object ‘I Management’ might have occurred in a quotation together with constructs ‘C competent/unsure’, and qualifiers ‘CE in control’, and ‘CE taking orders’, with the latter two being clearly opposed. A new code would have been created at this stage: ‘C in control/taking orders’, in addition to the two CE codes. All constructs/qualities would then have been linked to the Identity as being ‘associated with’¹¹.

When this was done, a second pass was made, looking for opposing qualities that were separated across the interview (i.e., appearing in different quotations). To maintain the integrity of the data and allow later checking, constructs formed in this second phase

¹⁰ The ‘Identity’ category included the respondent’s references to him or herself. The reason for this was the researcher’s belief that Identities evoked during an interview should be regarded as presentations of someone, not as comprising a ‘fact’ – even the respondent could be assumed to be trying to present themselves in a specific way. In this sense, the speaker talks about her or his objectified self.

¹¹ As the project developed, the nature of the links between codes was more precisely established. This change will be discussed below.

were labelled ‘CD’ (derived constructs). These were most easily made visible when all constructs and qualifiers associated with a specific Identity across the interview were viewed together (e.g., discussion about ‘I Management’ might occur twice during the interview, in one case with ‘CE new to the organisation’, in the other with ‘CE understanding how we work’. A new construct ‘CD new to the organisation/understanding how we work’ would be created, and the two ‘CE’ codes linked to it, as well as to ‘I Management’). Another technique used at this stage was to group qualifiers and constructs into themes emerging from the data (such as ‘Values and feelings’ – theme names supplied by the researcher), and look for clearly opposed qualifiers which could be united as a single construct (CD). Constructs were formed using either technique only to the extent that their context made it possible to be reasonably sure they were being used in the same way¹².

By the end of the research, an average of approximately 100 codes of all types had been generated for each interview, usually made up of about 30 complete bipolar constructs (C or CD), 55 qualities (CE), or single poles of constructs which had not been able to be matched with opposing poles, and about 25 Identities (I).

4.2.3.4: Third Stage Coding

As analysis proceeded, it usually became clear that a number of qualities and constructs were aspects of some particular way of looking at things. For instance, a discussion about funding for different units of the University might have led to a group of qualities and constructs ‘CE dependent on fee paying students’, ‘CE supported by government funded places’, ‘CE little variation in funding’ and ‘C sharing/winning the cake’ (the distinction between an organisational unit having to concern itself with attracting funding, as opposed to focussing on allocating funding internally). ‘CE supported by government funded places’ and ‘CE little variation in funding’ might have been clearly opposed in their context to ‘CE dependent on fee paying students’, and a construct ‘CD secure/insecure funding’ introduced during the second phase to reflect this derived construct. Furthermore, from the context, it might have been clear that a construct ‘C sharing the cake/winning the cake’ was related to the security of funding, and that the

¹² Recognising, of course, that no absolute certainty can attach to such a judgement.

three qualities (CE) elicited always occurred together with either it or the derived construct ‘CD secure/insecure funding’. In this situation, the third stage of coding would have involved 1) relabelling ‘C sharing the cake/winning the cake’ as ‘CC sharing the cake/winning the cake’, indicating that this construct has logically central role in the system of this respondent; 2) relabelling the construct ‘CD secure/insecure funding’ to ‘CCD secure/insecure funding’ indicating that this is also a core construct, but one which was not directly enunciated in the data; and 3) establishing links (‘is associated with’) between the two CC constructs and the qualities (the three CE codes) with which they occur.

It is important to note that, instead of taking a quantitative approach to evaluating the importance of constructs in the organisation, by for instance counting the number of occurrences of a given construct in a given passage of speech, constructs were evaluated essentially in terms of their consistency and centrality with the rest of the system. The importance of a construct is thus not assumed to rest on the number of times it is brought to bear: instead, it is drawn from its ability to subsume or represent other constructs.

Typically, by the end of this stage, about 10 core constructs had been identified for each interview, of which about three were ‘derived’ (CCD) rather than explicitly present in the raw data. Output was primarily presented in the form of a network representing the structure of the respondent’s construct system (Figure 2).

Finally, the ‘Identities’ elicited from the interview were reviewed together with the constructs with which they occurred. Typically, of the average 25 Identities evoked in any one interview, 21 were mentioned only once, and had very few qualities or constructs attached to them. About four of them, however, had dense networks of qualities and constructs attached: these were identified as ‘Core’, bringing the total number of ‘Core’ codes (Constructs and Identities) elicited from the average interview to approximately 14. These were then output in a simple text listing for analysis at the consolidated level. This was the end of analysis at the individual level. It would have been possible to go a good deal further for other purposes (e.g., individual counselling or development), but such was not the purpose of this research (nor appropriate to the researcher’s expertise!).

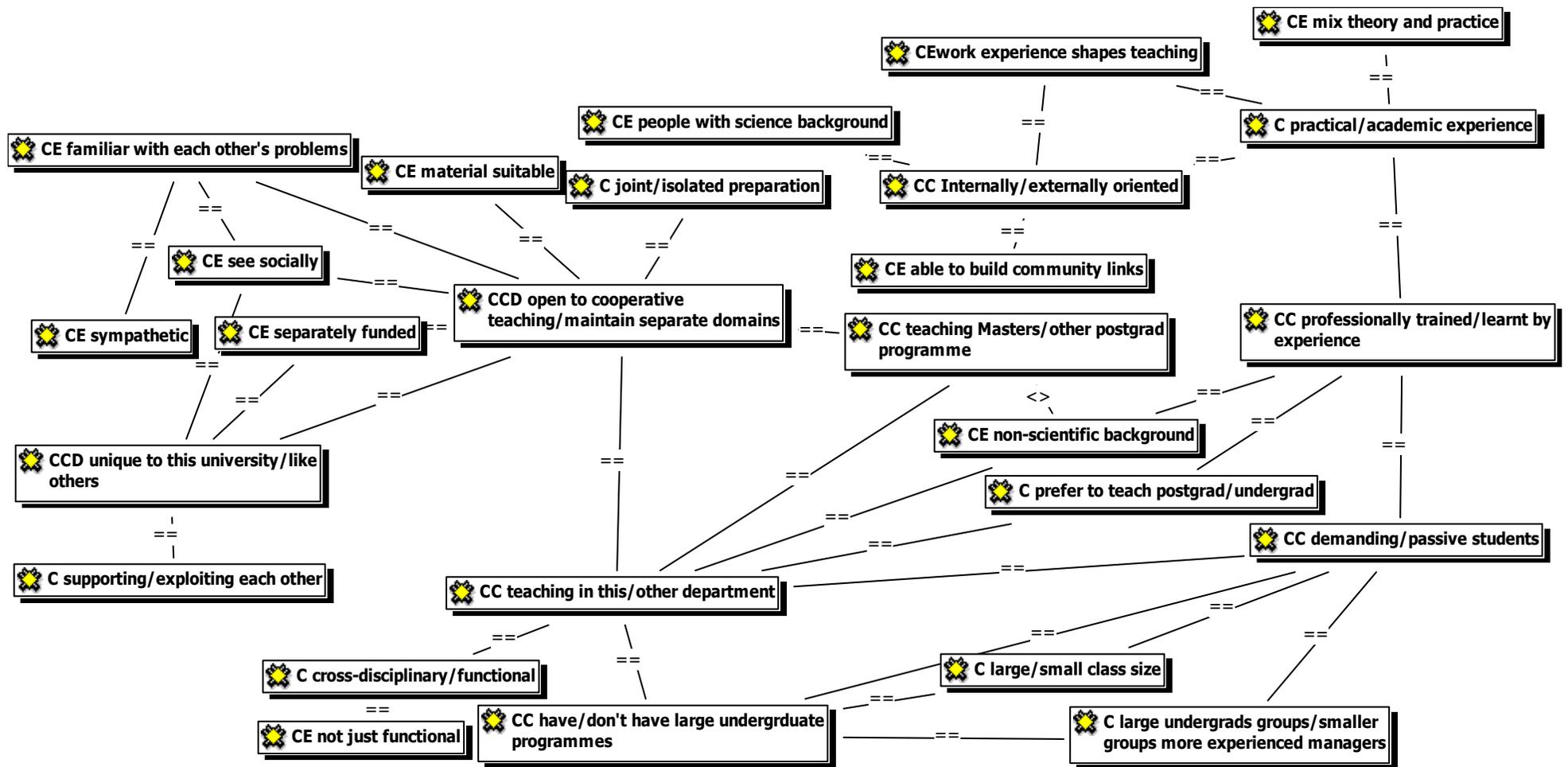


Figure 2: Simplified and fictionalised example of individual construct system

4.2.3.5: Treatment of non-recorded interviews

I have mentioned that in six cases, it was not possible to record interviews. In five cases, comprehensive notes could be kept. Analysis of these yielded results that were broadly comparable with the recorded interviews in terms of number of constructs and core constructs¹³. The note-taking procedures used in these non-recorded interviews were further developed to allow recording of meeting proceedings later in the research¹⁴, until the methods were essentially interchangeable.

4.2.3.6: Focus: the speaker

Before discussing how the different analyses were consolidated, it is important to understand their nature.

The system of constructs produced by the analytical process described above can be seen from two perspectives: the first, as revealing something about the respondent and how they interpreted a part of their world at a particular moment in time; the second, as a record of how they represented certain social objects (including themselves) to the interviewer. The second perspective is revealed by looking at a given Identity together with all the different qualities and constructs a respondent associated with it. This is the ‘normal’ perspective of everyday speech – my analysis merely provides a more structured and exhaustive method of recording what was said, recognising that it was unlikely to be disinterested, and might even have been deliberately evasive or distorted.

¹³ In one case, the note-taking process interfered too much with the flow of the interview, which was quite tense, and exhaustive recording of the discussion was abandoned in favour of noting only clearly identified constructs and recurring qualities, which could then be linked through successive interrogations and clarifications. This yielded four core codes, consisting of 2 constructs and 2 identities – suggesting that even in such cases useful information (if rather limited in quantity) can be gained.

¹⁴ I did not consider it permissible to tape meetings, since individual consent from all speakers had not been received, and it would potentially have been extremely intrusive and disruptive to do so.

However, the first perspective, which involves looking at the system of constructs produced by the analysis across a number of Identities, is of more interest for the purposes of this research, and is much less evident in the raw communication. By focussing on the constructs used by a respondent, particularly in comparison with those used by others, the choices they have made in constructing what they see as a 'plausible' explanation may be at least partially uncovered. Thus, even if deliberate attempts have been made to conceal 'real' opinions, or to conform to other people's evaluation of a situation, insight into the respondent's underlying orientations can be achieved. Our focus is not on the truth of what they are saying, but on what we can come to understand about how they evaluate the world.

4.2.3.7: Focus: collective processes

As can be seen from the sample network above (which is itself significantly simplified), the individual level analyses were very rich. However, because the method produced a list of core constructs, each underlying (or subsuming) a number of more limited constructs, it was possible to characterise the individual system quite parsimoniously. The next task was to relate a number of different systems to each other, in a way that represented the unifying and dividing roles of the constructs.

One option was to simply continue to add interviews to the analysis¹⁵, working up from interview to core construct system for each, then coding across systems to develop successively 'deeper' levels of coding. However, because of the technical structure of the software at the beginning of the research, such an approach made it much harder to detect and preserve the differences in the construct systems of any one individual or group of individuals over time. For this reason, it was initially decided to take the core construct system developed for an individual in a single interview as the primary unit of analysis at a new and separate level¹⁶. This allowed the integrity of the individual

¹⁵ In terms of the Atlas.ti software used, treating them as new 'primary documents' in a single 'hermeneutic unit'.

¹⁶ In Atlas.ti terms, to treat the core code lists as primary documents in a separate hermeneutic unit. Due to the technical structure of the analysis software at the time, proceeding this way allowed commonalities and differences to be easily established across different slices of data,

construct system, as elicited at a specific time, to be maintained, whilst allowing it to be compared to another, either of a different individual, or of the same individual at a different time.

4.2.4: Consolidation

The next step was to code the new ‘quotations’ (actually, in the pilot phase, core constructs imported from the analysis of individual interviews) for common themes. Thus, three respondents might respectively have utilised the constructs ‘CC stable/unstable funding’ ‘CC financially secure/exposed’ and ‘CC precarious/reliable funding’; these might now all be coded ‘Financially stable/precarious’. This latter code represented a hypothesis by the researcher that the underlying constructs were similar, and could be treated as a shared construct for the purpose of further analysis (such codes will henceforth be referred to as ‘Constructs’). In order to preserve the distinction between a construct that was grounded in a specific interview and a code hypothesised by the researcher to represent a shared Construct, it was decided in consolidation not to apply the naming convention (‘C - construct’) used in the one-on-one interviews. Identities, on the other hand, retained the ‘I’ naming convention, in order to preserve the distinction between construct and social object.

During the consolidation process, it was noted that multiple aspects could be discerned in some individual core constructs, which therefore attracted more than one code. For instance ‘CC practical-concrete/theoretical-useless’ might have been coded with both ‘Practice/theory’ and ‘Concrete/useless’. It could have been argued that the individual level analysis should have produced ‘elemental’ constructs like the latter, rather than

either for a number of individuals at a given time, or for some individual or group of individuals at different times, which would have been difficult in the first alternative. At the time, the only apparent disadvantage of proceeding in this way seemed to be that it was not possible to directly connect a given group level code to specific quotations in the raw data for later reference. While this might have been desirable, it was considered more important to reinforce the distinction between a system of constructs held by an individual and the relationships between a number of such systems. This decision was reversed later in the research, due to changes in the capabilities of the software, and because of some difficulties that emerged as the project scale grew, which will be discussed.

compound ones (that is, that it should have produced ‘CC Practice/theory’ and ‘CC Concrete/useless’ directly as inputs to the consolidation process). However, it was decided that forcing such a reduction onto the data at the individual level would not be faithful to it, because the two aspects could not be assumed to be easily dissociated in the individual respondent’s mind. At the consolidated level, though, it was considered necessary to decompose them in this way, since each aspect represented a distinct possible basis for attributing similarity or difference in reference to other systems.

One effect of this decision was that, compared to the number of individual level core constructs, consolidation did not lead to as much of a reduction in numbers of Constructs as might otherwise have occurred – for example, 177 core constructs were imported for consolidation in the pilot phase, giving rise to 103 Constructs. However, it was clear that a number of these were related to each other. For example, three Constructs, ‘Process/object focus’, ‘Open to new ideas/restrictive disciplinary focus’ and ‘Collaborative-outcome-value focussed/political’, might have been produced in consolidation, all of which were considered to have an aspect of ‘ends/means focus’. In such a case, a new ‘Abstract’¹⁷ Construct ‘Ends/Means focus’ would be formed and linked to the three which gave rise to it, as well as to the respondents who used them.

The next step in consolidation was to examine who used the various Abstract Codes and who did not, as a means to discern groups within the organisation. Initially, the grouping process commenced by ranking Abstract Constructs by the number of respondents exhibiting each. It was expected that some would be shared by nearly all respondents. However, at least in this initial phase, this proved not to be the case – no Abstract Constructs were found to be shared across all, or even the majority of, the interviews. This might be seen as indicating, in some objective sense, a lack of shared culture across the University, or it might indicate that only salient points, that is those which were operational in the context of the ongoing change, were elicited, and that these reflected the divisions the change was causing.

A few Abstract Constructs (14 at the end of the first round) were shared by significant groups of the respondents, but not by others. Moreover, in some cases, a group defined

¹⁷ Also a technical term in Atlas.ti, meaning a code which is not directly attached to a quotation.

by sharing one Abstract Construct also shared a number of others, and so could be seen to form around a cluster of shared constructs. Construct-based groupings were then considered alongside the formal structure of the University and the Business School. As expected, in some cases these ‘cultural’ groups crossed formal boundaries, in some cases coincided with them, and in some cases divided formal units. The representation¹⁸ of the situation at the end of the pilot phase is given in Figure 3.

It is worthwhile understanding Figure 3 in more depth. Following analysis, one group of respondents could be distinguished from the rest by their use of the Abstract Constructs ‘Practical vs. Theoretical’ (distinguishing between practice and theory), ‘Professional vs. Academic education’ (differentiating between educational approaches appropriate for training managers or academics – later to be known as the Management Education construct), and ‘Precarious/certain funding’. This group included all, and only, academic staff interviewed at the Business School. Of these, some evaluated ‘Theory’ negatively, and some positively¹⁹. The former group, who identified themselves as ‘Practitioners’, shared a number of other evaluations of themselves in distinction from ‘Academics’ (their term), as being willing to take risks; being action oriented; valuing results, not status; being able to operate in unstructured ‘real world’ conditions; and putting the organisation ahead of the individual.

¹⁸ This form of representation was an early attempt to summarise the outcome of the analysis. Later procedural changes clarified some relationships, and format changes were made to simplify the presentation. The revised approach is seen in Chapter 6.

¹⁹ Interestingly, none evaluated practice negatively.

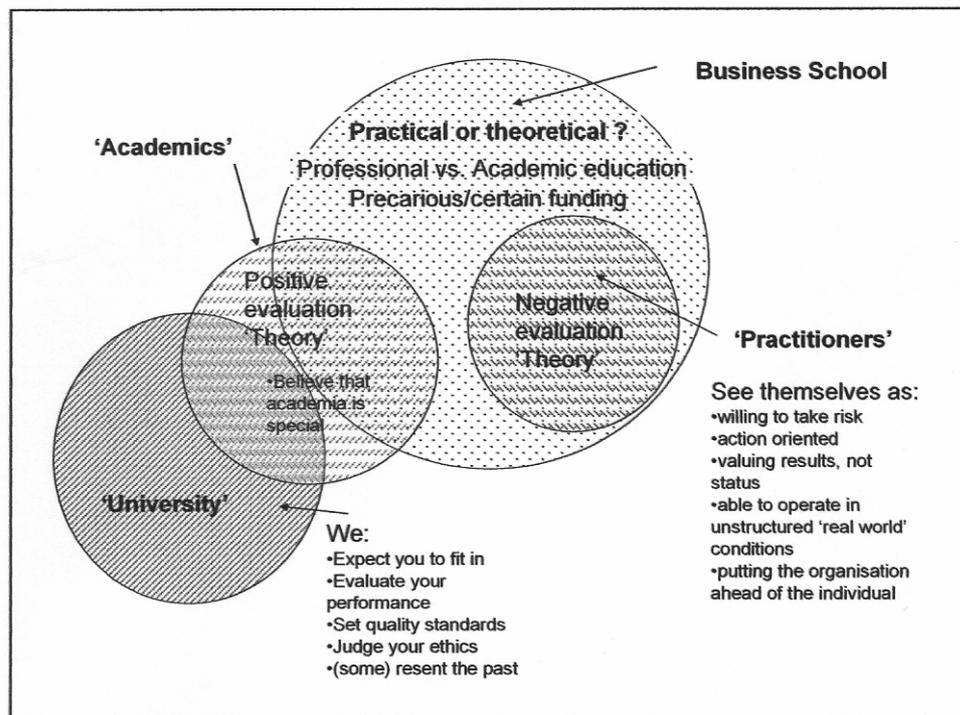


Figure 3: Schematic representation of shared and distinguishing constructs derived from pilot phase

Another group was united around a positive evaluation of theory, and also exhibited a belief that academia was a special group, with its own imperatives and values. Some of this group were within the Business School, whilst some others were not. Finally, respondents outside the Business School consistently demonstrated the use of a number of normative constructs (e.g., Integrated/not, Perform well/poorly, Good/bad quality; ethical/not) particularly with regard to the Business School and its staff, and so appeared to consider that their role was to evaluate the Business School and its ‘problems’ and ensure it conformed to the University’s standards.

A distinct culture could thus be seen as existing in the Business School, centring on its practical orientation and special role in educating professional managers, as distinct from training academics. This ‘mission’ was considered by the Business School members to distinguish it from the rest of the University, and to explain a number of differences in the way things were done. Members of the University outside of the Business School, on the other hand, did not recognise any important difference in the

educational demands of Professional Managers and Academics, and were much more interested in conformity, evaluation and control. The group of 'Practitioners' within the Business School saw themselves as very different from other academics, both within the Business School and in the broader University, and identified strongly with the mission of the Business School. Non-practitioners ('Pure' academics) shared beliefs about the special nature of academia, and the value of theory, in contradiction with the Practitioner group, but were divided by whether they recognised or not any need for difference in educational approach between the University and the Business School, a distinction which was congruent with their membership of the Business School or not.

It is important to note that this analysis did not aim to evaluate which groups are more 'important' in some sense, for instance by counting the numbers of people 'belonging' to each. This was not only because, in this pilot stage of the research, the intention was to show that a picture could be produced, rather than producing the definitive result, and numbers of interviews were relatively small (13). More fundamentally, I did not wish to assume that the impact of a certain construct could be measured by the frequency with which it occurred. It seemed at least plausible that a construct used by even a small number of people could have a significant effect on behaviour if it were particularly disputed. Furthermore, I did not wish to miss the opportunity of detecting what might be emerging constructs, appearing infrequently at first, but which came to be more widely held later on. Finally, it was not possible to ensure that everyone involved in the organisational action had been interviewed, or that the sample of those who had been was 'random' or representative of the broader population. Hence, quantitative evaluation was both invalid and potentially misleading. In larger implementations of this method in the future, the same arguments will hold: even a few occurrences of a particularly impactful construct might indicate the existence of a group with significant effect on organisational action. Even if this group is numerically small, it cannot be ignored because the conflict around its construct may be particularly intense, and also because there may be others who have not been interviewed who share, or may come to share, it.

4.2.5: Evolution of the method

This preliminary sketch of the ‘construct geography’ of the organisational context was interesting, particularly because it appeared to give some insight into the potential sources of conflicting views of the world and of the other groups involved in the changes. However, it must be realised that it was NOT the Grounded Theory that the research aimed to produce – it was ‘merely’ a description of the shared and differing constructs used by participants involved in the change. It might have been useful at an intuitive level at the time of the events, but any broader value to come out of it had to come from a proper generation of theory, which allowed the processes by which these constructs interacted and how they related to social activity to be understood.

Furthermore, as the investigation continued, significant refinement occurred in the coding, analysis and consolidation processes used to generate this description, which both reduced the amount of time taken to process individual interviews, and improved the clarity of the picture it developed.

Firstly, as the scale of the data expanded, it became more and more difficult to validate the similarities between CC constructs imported from the individual level analysis to the consolidated level, without referring back to the raw quotations on which they were based. Furthermore, as data collection expanded to include the proceedings of meetings, where a number of speakers needed to be separately identified, it became impossible to maintain the procedure of generating a single set of Core Constructs out of each event for separate consolidation. As well (and completely fortuitously) a modification was made to the Atlas.ti software²⁰ which made it unnecessary to conduct the consolidation separately from the individual interview level. Thus, the decision was taken to regroup all the individual level data into one file and perform the consolidation phase of analysis in the same place. Although this regrouping took several weeks to achieve, it greatly facilitated checking and accuracy in the later stages of the project. It also removed the need to rank Constructs in the consolidation phase (which had been necessary because

²⁰ Technically, this was the ability to filter codes by selected quotations, a functionality which had not been available in the software when the project commenced.

of the numbers of elements which had to be processed)²¹. After this stage, it became possible to consolidate each new piece of data progressively into the cumulated picture.

Secondly, and somewhat later, it became clear that coding for two different classes of element (C and I) was largely redundant, that it increased the difficulty of looking at Identities together with their associated constructs, and of comparing constructs with each other to establish whether they were related. This may be taken as indicative of a general point, that there is a unity between an object and the construct which brings it forth, which should be maintained whenever undertaking this sort of analysis. In any case, the decision was taken to modify the coding format to put Identity and construct together in a single coding unit. Thus, what in the first round would have been coded 'I University', 'CE Elite' and 'I Other Universities', 'CE Mass', would have been recoded 'C University: elite/mass' and 'C Universities-other: mass/elite'. This preserves the duality of the construct Elite/Mass, used to distinguish the University from other universities, and records the attribution to the relevant identity by placing the relevant Emergent pole first. To ensure consistent handling of data in the later stages of the process, all earlier coding was also converted to this format (at the cost of another several weeks work!).

Thirdly, as coding proceeded, and the number of interviews and other sources of data expanded, fewer and fewer Abstract Constructs emerged as each new piece of data was added²². This made it possible to greatly simplify coding of later material by coding

²¹ This is an important point because it allows me to remove any impression which might arise that I am conducting some form of content analysis, which is typically based on quantitative rankings.

²² This is very reminiscent of the idea of theoretical saturation, and raises the question as to whether the process of achieving a description of the shared constructs in use is not, in fact, in some sense a form of Grounded Theory. Certainly, the process of consolidating codes can be seen as a form of comparative analysis, carried out by comparing each new piece of data with the categorisation developed to that point; and it is also important to note that a large number of memos were generated describing this process and recording the emergence of the main shared constructs. However, despite these similarities and although this approach is completely compatible with the later application of Grounded Theory, I maintain that since the purpose up

directly with pre-existing Abstract Constructs, only generating new C codes where a new construct emerged²³. In a sense, this also provided some comfort against the possibility that the unstructured interview form was generating a wide variety of constructs because of some sort of randomness in the response – since, over time, a great deal of commonality emerged in responses, it is probably reasonable to assume that the constructs derived from the fieldwork are not ephemeral. Although the concept of retest reliability has already been specifically excluded from the evaluation of this type of research, in one sense the emergence of these patterns can be seen to address a similar concern. In Lincoln and Guba's (1985) terms, this would be seen as an indication of 'dependability', which is also closely related to 'credibility' (pp. 301-307), the naturalistic inquiry equivalent of internal validity.

As has been mentioned, these modifications led to a significant decrease in the time required for processing data, and linking them to the emerging construct description of the organisation. The first few interviews took up to 13 hours to process for each hour of material. By the end of the pilot phase, this had been reduced to less than five hours, largely through experience and development of standardised processes. By the end of the research, coding and integrating a new one hour interview would take approximately three hours, one third of this occupied in the marking out of quotations (segmentation). Since segmentation in fact adds no value at all to the analysis, but is purely a mechanical activity, there is clearly potential remaining to further reduce processing time.

Another level of evolution of the descriptive method occurred as non-interview materials began to be used. The flexibility of the software allowed this to be done with little difficulty – MS Word documents or emails were simply converted to .rtf file format; handwritten notes (as from meeting proceedings or unrecorded interviews) were

to now was essentially descriptive rather than theory generation, it should not be seen as Grounded Theory but as conceptual description – which may have its own value in this case.

²³ This led to further technical adjustments, taking advantage of the capabilities of the software. Suffice it to say that, after this point, what I refer to as 'Abstract Construct's are, in fact, no longer 'Abstract' in the terminology of the software. In order not to create confusion, and because it is totally immaterial to the results, no change in terminology will be made.

scanned and converted to .jpg format; both of these file formats can be coded directly in exactly the same way as a .wav recorded interview. The only innovation necessary was an extension of the procedures to adapt them for recording meeting proceedings. A meeting was treated as a single event, but the individuals who spoke were identified in the same way as if they had been directly interviewed – this allowed all the constructs used by a given individual, whether in a one-on-one interview or in a public meeting, to be looked at together. In addition, a decision was made to code an individual who held a specific formal position in the organisation differently when they were speaking in a public meeting than when they were interviewed face to face, in order to allow any differences between public and private representations to be detected.

A final development occurred around the types of ‘links’ used between Constructs. Initially, all links had been (in the terms of the software) ‘associated with’, a simple recognition of a general relationship. Over time, and particularly between higher level Constructs, it became possible to identify another type of relationships – which I christened ‘conflicts with’ and ‘contradicts’. These relationships turned out to be extremely important in generating the theory I present in Chapter 6. Furthermore, a specific relationship – ‘is a’ – was used to record a subsidiary relationship in a hierarchy, which allowed me to access all raw quotes from even high level Constructs. An example (altered to maintain anonymity) showing how a top-level code is built up from raw data is given in Appendix 1.

Clearly, the techniques of data collection and analysis evolved very significantly over the period of the fieldwork. In part, this represents the development of a ‘technology’ which was not available at the start of the study, an approach which would now be much easier to bring into field, and use on much larger projects²⁴. However, at another level, the process of improving the method also indicated the emergence of a progressively closer and clearer understanding of the data, the foundations of which

²⁴ Over the entire research, 3461 codes were developed, 226 of them Abstract codes representing various groups of shared constructs, some of which could be subsumed into others. 80 memos recorded the emergence of key groups of shared constructs, and later emergence of theory, together with some 40 pages of handwritten notes, dealing mainly with emerging theory, and journal entries recording various decisions on the treatment of data.

allowed the generation of the theoretical model which I present in Chapter 6. Any future applications of the method should probably bear in mind the value of this process of developing familiarity, and not place too high a priority on generating quick, or final, results.

4.3: Generating Theory

Thus far, I have described the method used to arrive at a representation of the shared constructs being used within the organisation. In Chapter 5 and 6, I will provide a full account of what occurred during the period of the research, making use of this method. However, it is important to note here that, as the analysis matured, certain higher level patterns began to emerge, and with them a higher or more general level of conceptualisation. The comparison of high level constructs²⁵ with each other began to reveal differences and similarities between them that went beyond their substance (that is, the construct they represented), and patterns began to emerge in the relationships between them.

This emergence began with the observation that the constructs that seemed to be most important for defining organisational units, and explaining the differences between them, might be different from other classes of construct, which crossed organisational boundaries, and did not appear to define any particular organisational level negotiation or conflict (except, on occasions, at an individual level). It was also noticed that some constructs defined differences between groups, whereas others asserted power or authority vis-à-vis those groups – this seemed to be a fundamental difference in type which needed to be explored. This led to a first categorisation of constructs as being either ‘Boundary Marking’ or ‘Police Work’, and of those representing Boundary Marking as either ‘Defining Constructs’ or ‘Latent Distinctions’. Furthermore, as the events which occurred were examined, it was possible to see that some Latent Distinctions became Defining Constructs, and that some were modified. The data was then re-examined to look for differences which might explain this variation, and it was observed that the changes appeared to be linked with both the initial relationships

²⁵ From this point, in the interests of readability, I will not capitalise ‘Construct’ to indicate a high level construct, since the distinction is only relevant in the context of raw data analysis.

between the constructs concerned and to changes in the organisational boundaries. A categorisation was then made of the types of relationship that could be observed between the various constructs, the configuration of the organisational boundaries, and the occurrence of 'Police Work' constructs, which suggested that there was a dynamic relationship between these factors – and that the initial categorisation did not fit the data as well as other possibilities. Following Grounded Theory methodology, this iterative process continued, with a continuously growing stock of Theoretical memos, until an emergent theory could be documented. This theory will be presented and evaluated in Chapter 6, and related to other existing theoretical approaches in Chapter 7.

In this way, it appears that applying the Grounded Theory methodology to data gathered in the field and analysed for patterns of construction may generate useful theory.

However, there are two more general comments to make on methodological issues before presenting that theory. The first relates to the extensive use of software in this research. Glaser has in the past strongly cautioned against this, being concerned that it encourages the analyst to focus on manipulating large quantities of data rather than detecting broad patterns through the discipline of constant comparison and theoretical sampling with a focus on generating theory (Glaser 1998: pp. 185-186). The ability to incorporate so much data into an analysis carries with it the risk that 'full conceptual description' will be produced, instead of theory. Furthermore, it allows the analyst to be tempted to undertake quantitative tests for the 'validity' and 'representativeness' of the data gathered, which would completely subvert the foundations of the Grounded Theory methodology.²⁶

²⁶ It must be said that I found that a very significant portion of the time taken to produce this analysis was, indeed, taken up with exploring options and making decisions for the handling of data in the context of the capabilities of the software (I estimate up to 30% of the total analysis time), and that the several revisions of procedure that were made took many additional weeks – very little of which contributed directly to the ultimate findings of this research. This in no way indicates any dissatisfaction with the software, which was remarkably flexible and powerful, once I developed the necessary skills. However, it does tend to support Glaser's concerns about potential loss of focus when using technology.

Against that, however, must be placed two considerations. Firstly, I believe that the ability to take many different forms of raw data into the analysis (recorded interviews, handwritten notes, emails, documents) without transcription or standardisation saved an enormous amount of time, and allowed much of the rich contextual detail to be maintained, improving the accuracy of comparisons. Secondly, many of the problems faced in determining how to process the data within the software were unrelated to the application of Grounded Theory *sensu stricto*. Rather, they related to the handling of the descriptive phase of the process, and should therefore be seen as procedural development rather than an attempt to develop theory²⁷. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, having undertaken this procedural development has led me to the point where I can now imagine standardising the process, perhaps with the support of software specially adapted for the purpose, which would be much more efficient than my initial fumbling attempts – and also much more effective and efficient than non-electronic methods (particularly when the possibilities of networked cooperation are considered). Thus, on the whole, I consider the use of the software to have been a positive influence on the project, and certainly see a role for it in any future application of this method.

Finally, the procedure developed for eliciting constructs is undoubtedly a first approach to the problem, and would likely benefit from further development, particularly with input from psychologists trained in Personal Construct Theory. If my treatment of Personal Construct Psychology is sub-optimal, it would mean that the understanding of a particular individual's construal might not be as accurate as possible. On the other hand, the main focus of this study is not on developing an in depth understanding at the individual level, but rather building a picture of how shared ways of seeing the world unite and divide groups. In establishing this picture, similarities and differences are investigated across a number of individuals. This not only reduces the potential effect of error with regard to any particular individual; more importantly, it means individual level data is challenged against other data, giving the analyst the opportunity to question

²⁷ This also avoids another issue: Glaser also recommended against the use of recordings, which he believed also distracted the analyst from looking for broader patterns and emerging theory. In the descriptive phase of this research, however, I would argue this concern is not relevant.

and improve the precision of the distinctions and similarities noted as the research progresses.

In this chapter, I have introduced the Grounded Theory methodology that directs this research. I have explained the specifics of the approach I used in field to elicit individual constructs, and how these were analysed to arrive at an understanding of shared constructs at a collective level. I have illustrated this by presenting the results of a pilot phase of the research, and discussed how the method evolved during the course of the research. I have also distinguished between the descriptive level of the method, which aims to arrive at a useful understanding of a specific organisational situation, and the generation of theory based on analysis of that description. Having now outlined the methodological basis of the research, I will describe the events covered by the research, and present the results of the fieldwork.

Chapter 5: Results – the Descriptive Level

Having given an overview of the methodology used in the research, I will now present a consolidated account of the events it covers, enriched by the insights produced from the construct elicitation process. I would stress again that this *is not grounded theory* – it might be seen as a form of ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973), but remains at the level of data that might still be explained by theory, which will be the focus of Chapter 6. Nevertheless, the descriptive level outcome of the research is rich and, as will be seen, helps at least intuitively to understand the dynamics of the events as they unfolded.

5.1: Research Context

As has been mentioned, the research was conducted initially in a Business School attached to a large University, and later in its ‘successor’ organisation, the Department. The changes which occurred over the research period can reasonably be described as radical, but I was given free access (after an initial period, when the situation was particularly sensitive) to all staff, as well as a number of meetings and documents. However, it should be noted that I experienced considerable difficulty in getting consent of general staff to participate (some reasons might be inferred from what follows) and, thus, this is essentially a description of what occurred amongst the academic and senior management staff involved in the changes.

Furthermore, as I was not a member of staff, I was not directly informed of events or the existence of documents, but had to rely on invitations, and on the willingness of staff to provide me with copies of material, which they frequently did. I do not believe this represented a fundamental difficulty. My methodology does not conform to a fixed sampling scheme, but rather demands that I use Theoretical Sampling – where, as a theory emerges, I search for new data to which to compare it on the basis of its relevance. This approach was perfectly well adapted to an interview/follow-up process. Additional data might have shed light on the perspectives of other groups – for instance general staff – but since I am not making any claim that the findings of the research are either complete or ‘correct’, except as my understanding of the perspectives of those I did talk to, this is also not a fatal flaw. However, I would expect that in a relatively less

constrained context, such as an application of this method as a management-sanctioned element of a change process, even richer data would have been accessible and, because of the lessons learnt in the practical implementation of the methodology, could also have been available more quickly.

I am extremely grateful to the organisations and people who participated in this research. They gave freely of their time, and placed a great deal of trust in me by openly discussing matters which could quite plausibly have put them at personal risk. The account which follows is, necessarily, not the account of any one individual. This is not only because I have disguised it to maintain confidentiality, but also (and mainly) because it has been built up from many different accounts, each with its own different perspective. It will, therefore, disagree at some point with the accounts of just about everyone who gave input. This in no sense indicates that I believe my account is 'better' or more 'correct'. Rather, it reflects my particular purpose – to describe the differences I saw between perspectives, as a prelude to understanding their consequences. I make no claim to having made a particularly insightful discovery in doing this – in fact, my hope would be that my description of these differences would ring true to any participant in the research, as representing something they saw in action every day.

That being said, because the method used focuses on the major debates and concerns of the people involved in this change, and places them together in one narrative, it will inevitably be challenging to read for anyone who was involved. This is not because I have deliberately sought to be controversial, but because I aim to present controversy, whereas much of the concern of those involved was to overcome or deny it in one way or another. I can only state categorically that, in what follows, I make no attempt to validate any of the perspectives described, assign blame or responsibility for any events, or express support for or disapproval of any particular group. Not only would it have been beyond the scope of this research to look for validation of any information received, even if that had been possible, it would have been beside the point – if people's belief that something is true affects their actions, it is relevant regardless of the validity of that belief. I also recognise, from personal experience, that people participating in processes such as these must often make judgements of individuals and groups, and that this is a heavy responsibility which should not be second guessed by anyone who does not themselves have to face the consequences. I have no intention of

making judgements from the comfort of my observation post, but rather aim to provide insight which might help people who are involved in future changes to deal more easily with this responsibility.

The events which unfolded at the Business School are complex. In order to facilitate understanding, and also separate different types of data of relevance to the later analysis, I will tell it at three levels. The first, which I will call the ‘Structural’ level, will explain the ‘objective’ events – changes in formal organisation, verifiable (but unverified) facts, and the like. The second, which I will call the ‘Political’ level, records the evolving background to these events in terms of the perceived ascendancy of different groups, and the conflicts which occurred between them. The third level, which I will call the ‘Constructural’ level describes the output of the descriptive phase of this research, and will establish the links between both the Structural and Political levels in terms of the differing constructs in play, and the changing relationships between all of these elements.

5.2: The Story – Structural

Fieldwork commenced in March 2005, a few weeks after the sudden and unexpected departure of the Director of the Business School, and shortly after the announcement that the Head of the Commerce Faculty²⁸ (‘the Faculty’) was to take over that role in addition to his current position. Until this announcement, the Business School had the status of a stand-alone entity reporting directly to the University President, and had conducted its affairs quite separately from the University’s central functions and other academic units. It operated from a recently constructed building quite distant from the central buildings of the campus, and from the Faculty.

The period of parallel management, with the same person leading both the Faculty and the Business School, was known to be transitional. There was no public position taken by the University as to where this transition would lead – all options were (at least formally) left open, from the continuation of the Business School as an independent

²⁸ In order to better disguise the identity of the organisation involved in this study, I have slightly altered the names of units, and the titles of formal positions, as they appear in this narrative, whilst preserving the relationships between them.

entity under new management, to its closure and the abandonment of its programmes. The Head of Faculty was tasked with determining which path to follow, recommending this to the President by a specific date, and putting the necessary measures in place before the end of 2005.

The Business School had been established in the first half of the 1990's, under a different University President, and had existed under its founding management for eight or nine years before the recently departed Director was appointed. The operating model it used initially involved employing a bare minimum of permanent academic staff, who were nevertheless highly respected and well known. Through their contacts, leading academics from around the world were engaged to teach specific units in the core programme, an MBA. In order for this to work, course units had to be delivered intensively – usually full time over a period of two weeks. This delivery mode was fundamentally different from practice in the rest of the University, where full-time academic staff delivered full semester units, generally following a traditional lecture/tutorial format. Because of its reliance on visiting academic staff, who were only on-site during the actual teaching of the units, and fully occupied during that period, the Business School had a higher proportion of administrative ('general') staff than was found elsewhere in the University. Moreover, general staff had a central role in liaising with students and administering courses whereas, elsewhere in the University, general staff were much less involved in course administration or supporting students, these functions being mainly performed by the academics who actually ran the course. Consequently, elsewhere in the University, academics performed much of their own administrative work (photocopying, preparation of course outlines, ordering of books, etc.), whereas in the Business School these tasks were performed by general staff.

The success of this model is disputed, but it does seem to be agreed that, from its foundation to the first change of management, the Business School was at least relatively stable, and the longevity of the founding management suggests that its financial performance was at least acceptable to the University over this period. No operational reasons are advanced for the occurrence of the first management transition, and neither is any mention made of any concern having existed at that time for the viability of the Business School, which might have explained the change – it seems to have been motivated purely by the personal considerations of those involved.

For the first 3 or 4 years the Business School offered a restricted range of programmes, centring on the MBA. There was some expansion in the late 1990's, including the institution (with an industry partner) of an offshore course, and the offering of a specialised master's degree for a government department. A few additional permanent academic staff were employed at this stage, some of whom came from practitioner backgrounds, rather than the academic career path more usual in the rest of the University.

In 2003 a new Director of the Business School was appointed from overseas. One of the two founding professorial members of the Business School had resigned shortly before this; the other remained, though he moved to the Commerce Faculty some eighteen months later. With the arrival of the new Director, expansion was accelerated: the student base diversified significantly, with the addition of large numbers of part-time as well as full-time students, and numbers of administrative staff also expanded quickly. The numbers of visiting academics teaching at the Business School declined, perhaps in part reflecting the loss of the network of contacts of the founders, but also reflecting its increasing internal staff resources, and a desire to reduce the cost of external staff. The Business School also aggressively expanded its PhD programme.

At the time this project commenced, there were several competing explanations as to the origins and causes of the crisis which brought an end to this phase of the Business School's existence. The public explanation usually centred around unspecified 'financial difficulties'. However, it was widely reported privately that student satisfaction with the Business School had been deteriorating, and enrolments were generally said to be in steep decline. Coursework students at the Business School were all paying full fees, and were considered quite demanding, relative to students in the rest of the University. In addition, a majority were of international origin, and had to comply with immigration regulations which demanded that they attain acceptable standards if they were to remain in the country. For many of the students, therefore, there was significant risk attached to enrolling at the Business School. It seems likely that increasing fixed costs inherent in the change of business model, coupled with declining enrolments, were at the root of the financial issues reported.

Following the departure of the Director in February 2005, and the arrival of the Head of the Faculty at the Business School, further major changes were made. Some academic

staff left virtually immediately, particularly those seen to be closely associated with the outgoing Director. There were also a few departures amongst the general staff, particularly at more senior levels. Staff meetings, previously attended by both academic and general staff, were restricted to academic attendance. A sweeping review of course offerings and operational practices was made, and outstanding complaints from groups of students were dealt with. A number of services previously offered independently by the Business School, such as career advice, were transferred back to the University's central services, and other administrative practices were harmonised with the University's standard procedures. To facilitate this, the senior administrative staff member at the Faculty was seconded to the Business School. Most courses being delivered overseas were closed, and the services of most of the remaining visiting academics were dispensed with. Finally, the Business School's marketing arrangements were consolidated into the Faculty's. It seems that by the end of 2005 financial equilibrium had been restored, and the problems which caused the crisis resolved.

These changes took place against the background of a developing dialogue concerning organisational changes within the University itself. At the commencement of the research, the University consisted of a number of (some would say fiercely) independent academic units, some carrying out mainly teaching activities, some focussing on research. Most academic units encompassed a specific academic discipline or group of related disciplines, but some of them were cross disciplinary. As a result, some disciplines (notably economics and some of the social sciences) had academics spread all over the University. This dispersion had long been of concern to the University management, mainly because similar research and project proposals could be developed in a number of different locations in the University, sometimes involving different external partners, and all competing for the same external funding. It was also perceived to have led to a proliferation of course offerings, with the same subjects being taught in different (or, worse, the same) way in different parts of the University. This was seen as a significant source of inefficiency and discord.

Attempts had been made in the past to establish over-arching coordination structures which operated collaboratively, but they were widely seen as relatively unsuccessful and irrelevant to the core business of those participating in them. The option of formally unifying disciplines in the same broad areas under larger structures, which I will call

‘Divisions’, was being canvassed at the start of the research, and discussions around how the concept would work continued throughout the period from March to August 2005. At the end of this period, it became clear that a new Division of Commerce would be formed, incorporating the three component departments of the Faculty, and the Business School. This was to be achieved by uniting the Management sections of one of the existing departments within the Faculty with the Business School activities, to form a new Department of Management (‘the Department’), whilst maintaining the other activities of the Faculty in three otherwise unchanged departments. The Business School was to be maintained as a ‘virtual’ entity, existing in name only, mainly to ensure that continuing students were not disturbed, and the Faculty was meant to have the same status. Thus, by September 2005, it was clear that the Business School, in operational terms, was to be merged with related disciplines from the Faculty into a new entity.

The change was to take place with effect on 1 January, 2006. In the intervening period, a new Head of Department was appointed, a distinguished academic with a long career in the Faculty, and with excellent connections around the University, but not from the Department’s core disciplines. This announcement was made at the end of September, 2005. Operations in the last three months of 2005, then, were conducted in the full knowledge of the future organisational configuration, but with no concrete structural change having been imposed.

During this time, Business School staff were encouraged to teach into courses operated by the Faculty, and Faculty staff were invited to teach into some of the Business School courses. A number of decisions were also made about the location of the various staff of the new Department. Academic staff were to be consolidated in offices in the Faculty building. However, courses offered by the Business School were to be taught in the Business School building, and a specific student administration unit was to be maintained there to service the students involved. Business School general staff not involved in this student administration unit were to be absorbed into the new Division-level administration, or the administrative units attached to any of its four component departments, all of which were some distance away from the Business School, in the Faculty buildings. Furthermore, it was decided that most of the Intensive mode courses would be either incorporated into the normal full semester delivery mode of the University, or into a new format delivered over a half-semester.

At the beginning of December 2005, a new building opened adjacent to the Faculty building, and the Department of Economics was relocated there, leaving a large number of offices in the Faculty building vacant. In the New Year, staff from the Business School relocated to the Faculty building and offices were redistributed between the three departments now occupying it. These moves were to continue within the Faculty building for the next 10 months, as old offices were progressively renovated, and as staff of each department coalesced with their colleagues in their new 'territories'. Postgraduate and undergraduate courses continued to be reallocated amongst academic staff, with a strong push to ensure that those from the Business School, who had previously only taught postgraduate courses, also took on some undergraduate courses. Conversely staff from the 'old' Faculty took on some postgraduate teaching, as well as maintaining some undergraduate courses.

By the end of the fieldwork, in late October 2006, the new Department was settled in its offices (although some renovations were still continuing), and the new Division structure had been established as planned. It also seemed, at that stage, that no further structural changes (at least of internal origin) were likely in the near future.

5.3: The Story – Political

The second aspect of this story deals with what might be called the political aspects of the changes which occurred – the changing relationships and positions of ascendancy of the various groups against the background of the structural changes.

As has been mentioned, the research commenced in a period of crisis. Although the public explanation of what was occurring focussed on financial concerns, private explanations were much more diverse²⁹. Within the Business School, these tended to focus on judgements of the performance or approach of the recently departed Director

²⁹ I reiterate here, that the purpose of this research was not to ascertain the truth or otherwise of the reported views, even if that were possible. They are presented merely as observations of the currents of thinking with which I came into contact over time. No evaluation of these ideas is made, nor any verification of their substance. Furthermore, disguising sources has obliged me to be somewhat general in the language I use, despite my best efforts to catch the 'tone' of what was occurring.

(and those associated with him). There was also a good deal of tension between academic colleagues. Some accused others (at least privately) of having pursued their own self-interest rather than dealing with the issues faced by the Business School. Some saw the problem in terms of their colleagues' limited capabilities – in particular, what was seen as a relatively meagre production of research by some and, conversely, the lack of attention given to teaching by others. Most, however, did not question the fundamental viability of the Business School, or the value of its mission. Its problems, according to Business School insiders, arose from management failings and faults of certain individuals, as well as a hostile environment for Management Education (both within the University and in the market in general), rather than being inherent in the organisation.

This perspective was in many ways diametrically opposed to views of the situation at the Business School that were held elsewhere in the University. While there was some wider agreement that the immediate causes of the crisis might have been due to specific management failings, this was often presented as merely a footnote to a story of inevitable failure – an outcome which, furthermore, had been predictable for a very long time to anyone who knew the situation. It is impossible now to know if the perceived inescapability of the Business School's demise was merely the product of very clear hindsight, or whether there had indeed been a long-standing expectation of trouble. Moreover, it was quite clear by the time this research started that no-one had anything to gain politically by apologising for the Business School, so any positive period which might have existed in its past was not evinced in current discussion. Nevertheless, a number of those espousing 'I told you so' positions on the crisis professed long-standing grievances against aspects of the past conduct of the Business School³⁰, in some cases extending back to its very founding.

It does seem accepted that the establishment of the Business School had been strongly opposed by some Faculties, particularly those in the Sciences, on the grounds that management was not a 'proper' discipline to be taught in an élite university – that its fundamental orientation towards practice made it incompatible with a focus on cutting

³⁰ Which might or might not have been well-founded – I make no judgement.

edge research in ‘hard’ disciplines. Furthermore, it seems that the independence of the Business School, and the disregard it was claimed to have had for procedures and structures that applied to the rest of the University, had not been widely interpreted as merely reflecting the specific demands of the market it served. The Business School had been widely personified as something of a ‘cowboy’. Perhaps the most aggressive accusations were that the Business School had allowed fundamental academic standards to be breached. Such views were frequently linked with comments on the incapacity of the Business School to produce worthwhile research – also presented as proof that its staff were not up to standard, in this University at least. Negative comments were also strongly associated with the overseas courses, quite unique within the University, where it was seen as ‘impossible’ to maintain quality control. Finally, accusations of incompetence and unethical conduct directed towards some members and supporters of the Business School were not difficult to come by.

The preoccupation with research performance seems to have been fairly long-standing, since it was reported that one of the main concerns of the outgoing Director following his employment had been to increase the research reputation of the Business School, a priority which some say was established at the expense of its teaching standards. Whatever the opinions about the inevitability of the Business School’s problems, it does seem to be generally accepted that the two years between the appointment of the outgoing Director and his departure had been marked by instability and conflict, in contrast to relative stability prior to that.

In addition, it is important to note that this research started in an environment where the Business School clearly had no more options left – no political or resource power remained, and it had now to submit to whatever the University prescribed. From a political point of view, the period between March 2005 and the announcement of the absorption of the Business School into the new Division structure at the end of August (a period I will henceforth call ‘Regularisation’), was essentially focussed on reasserting the control of the University over the Business School, and ensuring that it conformed in all material respects to the University’s ways of doing things – with the University the sole arbiter of what was material.

During this period, controversy started to develop about forcing courses previously taught in intensive mode into a format more acceptable to the University and compatible

with its timetable. There was particular frustration amongst some Business School academics with what they saw as a lack of recognition by others that management education had to impact on practice, that teaching theory was not its fundamental objective, and that it required much more interactive and diverse types of teaching than was the case even for the teaching of management as an academic discipline. The tendency was, however, to regard the expression of such concerns as evidence of resistance to change, rather than as presenting issues to be dealt with.

Furthermore, particular concern had been expressed by the University about the extensive use of group work in the Business School, and its implication for the fair assessment of individuals. It was feared that this might allow poor performers to ‘hide behind’ other members of the group, and pass without necessarily ‘meeting standards’ – a key concern for an élite institution. Significant pressure was applied to put much heavier weights on individual assessment, in line with approaches elsewhere in the Faculty, which conflicted with the traditional MBA ethos of learning to work in teams of disparate (and sometimes difficult) individuals, and with the belief that teaching managers was more about teaching judgement in ambiguous contexts than it was about imparting knowledge (least of all theory) to individuals.

Of particular symbolic importance during this period was the remodelling of the reception area of the Business School building. As an independent unit, and reflecting its interpretation of what a top management school should ‘look like’, the Business School building was purpose built, architectural award winning and impressive. Entry was via a large central foyer, with its own separate reception desk. Access to any areas in the building other than the reception area and lecture theatres required a swipe card, so visitors had to be announced and met. Students had cards which allowed access to certain common student areas, but usually not directly to faculty members.

Immediately following the arrival of the Head of Faculty, these ‘security’ measures were dropped, and unimpeded access was allowed for all, to any part of the building. The reception area, previously attended full time, was left unattended for increasingly long periods. Eventually, the desk and equipment were removed completely, to be replaced by a window on an opposing wall of the foyer, which looked into an administrative office shared by several general staff. Interpretations of the change ranged from ‘cost cutting’ to the abandonment of ‘corporate pretensions’. Certainly, the

new arrangement bore a remarkable resemblance to the way administrative offices looked in the Faculty building, complete with a roll-down shutter and counter, and it seemed to send a very strong message to both staff and students that things were changing. Another example of symbolically laden change was the decision taken to exclude general staff from staff meetings, which they had previously attended. The Business School was going to conform.

Following the announcement of the intended new organisational structure, absorbing the Business School into the new Department, and the subsequent identification of its Head, but prior to enacting these changes (a period I will henceforth call the 'Interregnum') a new political dynamic became evident, both within the Faculty and the Business School. Increasingly, the 'old practices' of the Business School were characterised as 'luxury' and 'unsustainable'. Attention focussed particularly on the tea trolley which used to be brought to students attending classes at the Business School. This service, seen by the Business School as a basic convenience for students who were mainly experienced middle and sometimes senior managers, paying high fees, and who were involved in intensive format classes where wasted time had to be kept to a minimum, was seen in the Faculty as symbolic of the waste and poor practice that had prevailed at the Business School. No student at the Faculty, regardless of their post-graduate status, benefited from such convenience (indeed, it would have been difficult to organise, since students in the Faculty followed a lecture/tutorial model which meant their attendance was far from continuous, and they changed locations frequently). A range of evaluations became attached to this trolley; Business School students had been 'over serviced', and would have to 'face reality' when they 'came over here'; all sorts of unnecessary costs for frivolous extras had been accepted by the Business School ('it's no wonder they had financial problems'); Business School academic staff had asked their general staff to do far too much for them, and would have to get used to doing their own 'dirty work'.³¹

Another key resource for the developing image that the Business School had 'had it too easy for too long' was its focus on postgraduate course work. On the Faculty side,

³¹ Interestingly, this last theme turned on its head what had been seen by some at the Business School as respecting and fully involving the general staff – being 'more democratic' than usual at the University.

postgraduate courses were generally seen as being much easier to teach, because of their much lower student numbers and consequently lighter marking load, course administration demands (which the Business School academics had done for them anyway!) and student enquiries. The idea that Business School academics taught *only* postgraduates therefore translated with ease into the conclusion that they had very light teaching loads, and to an expectation that they would have to ‘pitch in’ when they ‘came over’. Furthermore, visiting academics had been very highly paid (at least compared to permanent University academics), and a number of Business School academics had been given comparatively attractive salaries and ranks, which seemed out of line with practice in the Faculty, in particular where they had come from practitioner backgrounds.

These issues continued to develop and become more obvious after the formal integration of the Business School into the Department. Furthermore, the emerging beliefs about how easy life had been at the Business School were taken as indicative of why it had failed, with the implication that any Business School academic who showed reluctance to conform, or gave any sign of ‘fighting the inevitable’, was demonstrating a personal flaw. Increasingly, the failure of the Business School was not to be visited at the door of its founders, nor its recent management, but laid at the feet of the individuals who were now its only identifiable successors³², to the extent that they attempted to maintain its memory.

A potent symbol for this period, interestingly in the light of the earlier significance of the tea-trolley, was the tea-room in the Faculty building. The Faculty provided free coffee and biscuits during the morning to staff and graduate students in a large common room. This had become a popular gathering point, and venue for conversations between members of all the departments in the Division. Nevertheless, and perhaps predictably, the groups that formed and the conversations that started in the tea-room tended to be

³² Again, I stress that this account has not been written as a defence of the Business School academics, or as a criticism of the Faculty or its staff. No attempt has been made to judge the appropriateness of the decisions taken. No opinion is passed or implied about the validity of the views of the various groups, nor of the ‘real’ causes of what happened. That is a management judgement, not a research question.

between members of the same department. Some felt that Business School academics seldom came to coffee and, when they did, often talked only to each other. This was taken as a sign of unwillingness to engage or integrate, regardless of any concrete reasons (such as classes being in ‘the other’ building) that might have impeded their presence, and was put down to ‘them’ feeling they were superior to the other Department staff, or being unwilling to accept change. This attribution of blame was maintained even by people who accepted that the Department academics had also stayed in their original groups (close to their parent department) and had not necessarily been very welcoming.

It is important to note that there were continuous and, I am sure, sincere expressions of intent by academics on both ‘sides’ to ‘make things work’ – in no sense do I wish to reflect negatively on the conduct of anyone involved. However, it is interesting to note that as the integration proceeded, the initial statements of intent seemed to be interpreted in a different light. In the early stages, the intention to make things work seemed to express openness. However, with the gradual emergence of a negative evaluation of the Business School and (at least some of) its personnel, ‘making things work’ started to take on slightly defensive tones. By the end, the statement could have been seen as almost implying an intention to ‘get through’ *despite* (and perhaps by confronting) the behaviour of the ‘others’. This is an interesting example of how context changes meaning.

At the time of writing, with a few exceptions noted below, most of the academic staff from the Business School had either left, were leaving, or were involved in significant conflict with the other academic staff in the Department. It was, unfortunately, not possible to systematically interview those who left, as interesting as it would have been to have some insight into what was their motivation, and what were the main perceived differences they felt with the organisation. But this is not only the story of the Business School; it also concerns the establishment of the new Department. Following integration, tensions started to arise between the disciplines which make it up, and between the Department itself and the other departments in the Division. As well as ongoing conflicts about the allocation of teaching loads within the Department, these disputes centred around two main processes; the allocation of offices between the departments; and the implementation of a new approach within the Division to

evaluating and rewarding research, together with a foreseen significant increase in funds available for that purpose.

The first of these issues appears to have been fundamentally about establishing separate identities for the Department and the remaining part of the other department from which it had drawn some of its personnel. This was mainly played out as a fight over resources and physical territory. Its main long lasting effect seems to have been the establishment of a fund of anecdotes concerning the individual conflicts and personalities that divide the departments.

The second area of conflict, the revised approach to evaluating and rewarding research, although also occurring in the context of competition for resources, reveals deeper conflicts concerning the value of management as a discipline relative to other academic disciplines, particularly highly quantitative ones. As has been explained, the Faculty initially consisted of three departments. Two of these remain intact in the newly formed Division, are built on sophisticated quantitative foundations, and have strongly established reputations in 'pure' research. The third component department of the Faculty was split, one part merging with the Business School to form the Department, and the other establishing itself as a new entity under the Division. Both of these latter departments have a more 'applied' focus in both teaching and research. However, the Department centralises all the Management disciplines, including 'soft' subjects like Organisational Behaviour, and relies much more on qualitative research, whereas the other awards highly valued professional qualifications, and has strong links to external professional organisations, so having clear standards against which its performance may be judged (and a very stable financial situation). There has been significant dispute between the Department and the other departments over how to value publications in management journals, as part of the new research funding and reward arrangements, both relative to other disciplines, and between its sub-disciplines, all of which contributes to an impression that the status of Management is not nearly as well established as other disciplines within the Division (let alone around the University). It is probably not necessary to remind the reader that this issue has also been raised in relation to historical disputes surrounding the establishment of the Business School some 15 years ago. It seems that new arguments don't necessarily deal with new subjects.

Finally, there is a tendency across the Division to present teaching as a ‘necessary evil’, and an associated understanding that research is what produces reputations and promotions. Increased competition for increased research funds only highlights this – and there is widespread concern to ensure the ‘fair’ allocation of teaching loads to allow time for research (which might alternatively be seen as competition to reduce them). Academics who prioritise or take particular pleasure in teaching are, under these circumstances, well-tolerated – which may be one reason that a few of the Business School academics, who place high value on teaching, have been able to establish themselves in the Department, against the general tide. However, academics who ‘just teach’ are widely seen across the University as having inherently lower status than good researchers (even if the latter are poor teachers). This issue is particularly relevant to the specific environment of the Department, because its academic profile is relatively young, and there are fewer established research reputations than in the other departments. Not only does this seem to increase pressure to produce research, but it plays into the already mentioned questions concerning the status of management disciplines – and so the Department itself.

Thus, the apparent structural stability that has been achieved with the establishment of the Department within the Division, and the dissolution of the Business School, appears to carry within it the seeds of future conflict. Far from emerging anew from what is now a fundamentally altered structural landscape, and one populated with substantially different individuals, these potential conflicts are hauntingly reminiscent of the same disputes that were observed at the start of the research – the status of Management as a discipline; the primacy of research over teaching, and theory over practice; and the security of finances remain causes of division, despite all the events of the past 18 months.

5.4: The Story – Constructural

5.4.1: Regularisation

Based on the interviews conducted during this period, analysed according to the final form of the method described in Chapter 4, two key groups of constructs could be identified (See Figure 4) :

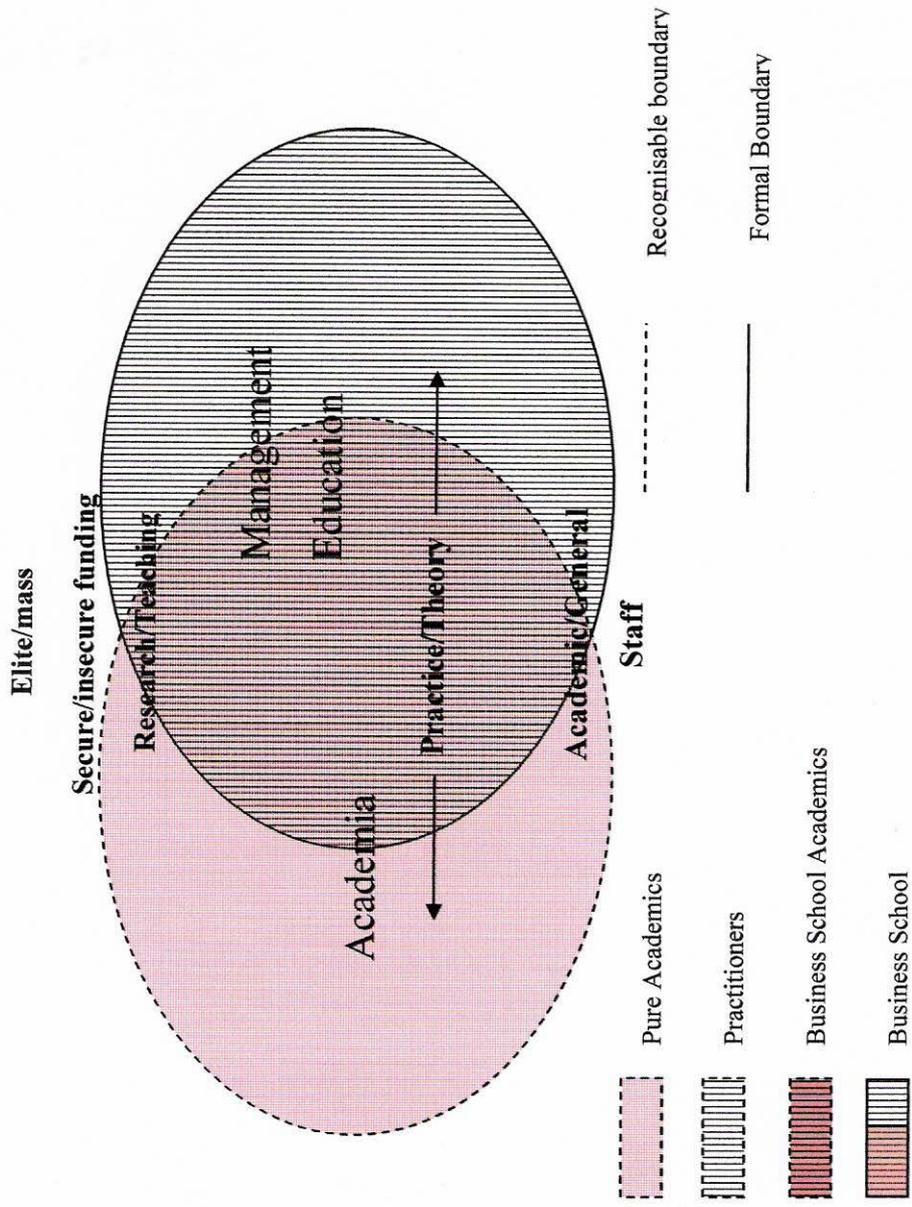


Figure 4: Construct Map - Regularisation

- 1) **‘Academia’**³³: these constructs established a unique world, whose members’ constant quest to extend the frontiers of knowledge is ‘vital to civilisation’, and where particular ‘standards’ apply, around which an extraordinary ‘community’ forms. The University is a special case of this – it is ‘élite’, ‘unique’ and ‘outstanding’, compared to other universities, who are generally characterised as ‘mass’ educators, with less concern for ‘quality’, or with a focus on ‘vocational’ education, which does not address the deeper, absolute value of ‘learning’;
- 2) **‘Management Education’**: constructs establishing a special type of graduate education, which demands a different style of teaching, involves experienced, mid-career students, and has different objectives from educating undergraduates or postgraduates aiming at an academic career.

The ‘Management Education’ group of constructs was used by members of the Business School only³⁴ – and all of them used it. Some academics within, and all outside, the Business School used the ‘Academia’ construct. Those who were members of the Business School (and so used the ‘Management Education’ construct) and also used the ‘Academia’ construct, tended to be known as ‘Pure’ academics by the other members of the Business School, who identified themselves as ‘Practitioners’.

These constructs were used to explain what members of the reference organisational unit – in the first case, the University, in the second the Business School – did, and what made the unit special. They were presented as axioms and defined insider and outsider status, and might therefore be called ‘defining constructs’.

In addition to these constructs, which were associated with identifiable and, in the case of Management Education, formal organisational boundaries, there were four important distinctions used that crossed group boundaries:

³³ In discussing these constructs, I will utilise language drawn from raw data, as far as possible while maintaining confidentiality, to paint an overall impression of the substance and implications revealed by the research. Where I use terms which occurred in the raw data, I will enclose them with single inverted commas.

³⁴ With two exceptions - individuals outside the Business School who did use the Management Education construct – both of whom have since left the University.

- Practice/Theory³⁵ – although this distinction was widely drawn amongst all the groups, it had different implications for each of them. To non-Business School academics, ‘practice’ tended to mean ‘applied’ or ‘derivative’, as distinct from ‘theory’ which represented ‘original’, ‘pure’ or ‘valuable’ – this construct seemed to be interpreted in the light of the ‘Academia’ construct. To Practitioners within the Business School, ‘practice’ implied ‘valuable’, ‘useful’ or worthwhile, whereas ‘theory’ implied ‘trivial’, ‘abstract’ or ‘useless’. Business School Pure academics tended to try and use the distinction neutrally, while (in some cases explicitly) recognising that the University valued theory, not practice and, closely associated, did not much value Management as a discipline.

- Teaching/Research – success in research was one of the main supports for the University’s claim to elite status. Outside the Business School, teaching was recognised as something which had to be done, but which had relatively low status (‘transmitting’ knowledge), and which distracted from research (‘generating’ knowledge), which was how careers were made. Within the Business School, however, teaching tended to be more highly regarded, particularly by Practitioners, who tended to see it as ‘useful’ or ‘practical’, and associated it closely with the Business School’s central mission.

- Academic/general staff – perhaps as a consequence of the application of the Academia construct, the assumption of the dominant role of academic staff was widespread, particularly outside the Business School. It was seen as inevitable that academics should be the leaders of the university, and have the primary authority and the higher prestige, although this caused unease amongst some academics – one even referred to this as a ‘class difference’

³⁵ In technical terms, this distinction can be seen as the juxtaposition of two constructs for each group – for non-Business School academics, one construct is Practice: applied-derivative/original-valuable, another is Theory: original-valuable/ applied-derivative; for Practitioners, the relevant constructs are Practice: valuable-useful/trivial-abstract and Theory: trivial-abstract/ valuable-useful. In the interests of economy, I have not fully specified this for each distinction. However, it is necessary to understand the formal distinction, as will be seen in the next Chapter.

- Secure/insecure funding – this distinction revealed the widespread concern to ensure that funding was available, and the belief that organisations which had security of funding exhibited different behaviours than ones that had precarious funding. In a related vein, it also covered belief that the University would not tolerate long lasting deficits, and that this underpinned its élite performance.

There was, finally, one distinction which appeared to be universal: doing something for self-interest vs. doing it in the interests of the employing organisation. This distinction had two separate and conflicting uses. On the one hand, it represented the primary ethical standard, across all groups – behaving unethically was almost always accompanied by a reference to placing self-interest ahead of the organisation. On the other hand, it was clearly recognised that it was legitimate (and, perhaps, ultimately inevitable) that self-interest would determine individual actions. The tension between these two uses of the construct (on occasions, both used by the same individual in the same interview) was noticeable, but the data is not clear as to whether it reflects a difference in time horizon (self-interest takes priority longer term, organisational interest shorter term, perhaps) or whether it reflects a truly unresolved contradiction – perhaps differing ranges of convenience. Importantly for this study, however, the first (standard of ethics) usage was almost always accompanied by some expression of coercive intent (where the speaker had formal power), or of negative evaluation of the person concerned where the speaker did not hold formal power – for example, an appeal to concepts like ‘fair/unfair’, or expressions of moral outrage.

This raises the question of how to handle coercion and authority in the description. In the first round of interviews, I had treated coercive and evaluative expressions the same as any other construct (e.g., ‘has/not authority’ – this approach was used in Figure 3, Chapter 4). However, as data collection progressed, this became increasingly unwieldy, and when the Grounded Theory process commenced, it became clear that these expressions were of a different nature than constructs which express distinctions. Without anticipating the account of theory generation which will be the subject of the next Chapter, in the end it seemed that the data demanded that these statements of judgemental or coercive intent be treated as a separate class. Proceeding in this way, the data included the following:

- Expressions of judgement or coercive intent by non-Business School members directed at the Business School, arising from claimed
 - breaches of academic or quality standards;
 - refusal to conform to University orthodoxy (policies, knowledge, authority, relationships to general staff);
 - lack of competence (and refusal to admit such); and
 - breaches of ethical standards (self-interest ahead of organisation);
- Judgemental expressions by Business School Pure academics directed at Practitioners, arising from their perceived lack of research competence;
- Judgemental expressions by Practitioners directed at Business School Pure Academics arising from their lack of interest in teaching, and in some cases supposed breaches of ethical standards (self-interest ahead of organisational) as a cause of the crisis;
- Judgemental expressions by Practitioners of Academics in general, arising from their disconnectedness from the outside world, the low value of what they do, and their inability to operate in ‘real world’ conditions of ambiguity and lack of structure.

These statements can be seen as expressions of actual or potential conflict, and need therefore to be integrated with the political level of description. The chief political feature of this period was the enforcement of conformity on the Business School by the University. This is consistent with the range of judgemental statements found in the data, and the relative power positions already discussed (i.e., the completely submissive position of the Business School). Disputes between Business School academics were also noted, along the lines mentioned. Conflict over the Management Education construct was chiefly evident around concrete issues like the ‘harmonisation’ of modes of delivery between the Business Schools intensive courses and the University’s standard modes of delivery, rather than being directly addressed.

We can thus look at the situation which obtained at the start of the research as a dynamic configuration of a recognised structural boundary (in this case between the University and the Business School); power relations between the organisations they defined (the University held dominant resource power and recognised authority over the

Business School) and incompatible constructs which defined (for insiders) what was unique about the Business School in context of the University, and the University in a broader societal context. In addition, other distinctions were used across organisational boundaries, with their specific value depending on their relationship to the defining construct, and some were used by groups within the organisational boundary to distinguish themselves from others without the support of formal structural divisions. As long as the University was willing to tolerate the existence of the organisational boundary with the Business School, the acts of constructing it by reference to the Management Education construct continued, causing relationship conflict.

However, the time arrived when the University was no longer willing to tolerate the maintenance of the differences, at about the time of the departure of the Director of the Business School. The causes of this change lie outside the timeframe of the research, but it seems reasonable to speculate that it might have been due to an unacceptable financial outlook, a perceived failure to meet quality standards (perhaps related to declining student satisfaction), or some combination of both. Any and all of these concerns would have represented a threat to the University's reputation in the academic world (alternatively, as conflicting with its construction of itself as elite and high-performing). The University justified taking action vis-à-vis the Business School by reference to academic standards, and socially recognised values of rational economic performance and ethical conduct, and used authority to enforce conformity. In doing so, it suppressed the operational expression of the Management Education construct, which nevertheless survived as an explanation of the uniqueness of the Business School, and a reference point by which Business School academics could question the University's rationale, and make competing use of their particular interpretations of the Research/Teaching and Practice/Theory constructs. Differing interpretations of these distinctions also defined internal conflict.

5.4.2: Interregnum

This brief period was characterised by the continued existence of a formal structure which was known to be obsolescent. Two new groups of constructs were observed, both used by Faculty academics, and both clearly linked with judgmental expressions (asserting authority where power relations allowed):

- ‘Unsustainable-luxury Business School’: This group, used both in public and private settings, explained how the Business school had had ‘luxury administrative support’ (and, *soto voce*, took advantage of general staff), ‘looked after their students too well’ and how the Business School academics ‘expected to be looked after’ or ‘served’ instead of ‘looking after themselves’ as ‘equals’. Associated with these constructs were assessments of the fundamental non-viability of the Business School, its failure to ‘satisfy the market’, the need to face financial reality and live within a budget (assumed to be something new). Furthermore, specialisation in postgraduate teaching was considered ‘unfair’, and direct contradiction of the Management Education construct group appeared, with a denial that the MBA was any different from other Masters degrees.
- Business School academics were classed as either willing to ‘accept change and get on with it’ or ‘fighting it’, ‘unwilling to integrate’. Thus, individuals started to be identified, apparently in anticipation of integration, when there would be no more formal boundary between the groups.

These constructs seem to have been produced by reinterpreting observed differences between the Business School and the Faculty (uniquely post-graduate students, different relationship with general staff, intensive teaching mode) without reference to the Management Education construct by which insiders made sense of them, and in the context of a forthcoming integration, with the intent of justifying the assertion of authority to ensure conformity when it took place. As might be expected under these circumstances, most of the judgemental expressions observed in this period were directed by Faculty academics towards the Business School (with assertion of authority, reflecting the relative power positions), and by the Practitioners towards the Faculty academics (without being backed by authority).

Despite no formal integration having taken place, by the end of this period the expectation was well established amongst Faculty academics that the Business School academics (with the exception of a couple who had transferred to the Faculty prior to this period) thought themselves superior, and were lazy and unrealistic about how things ‘had to be’.

5.4.3: Integration

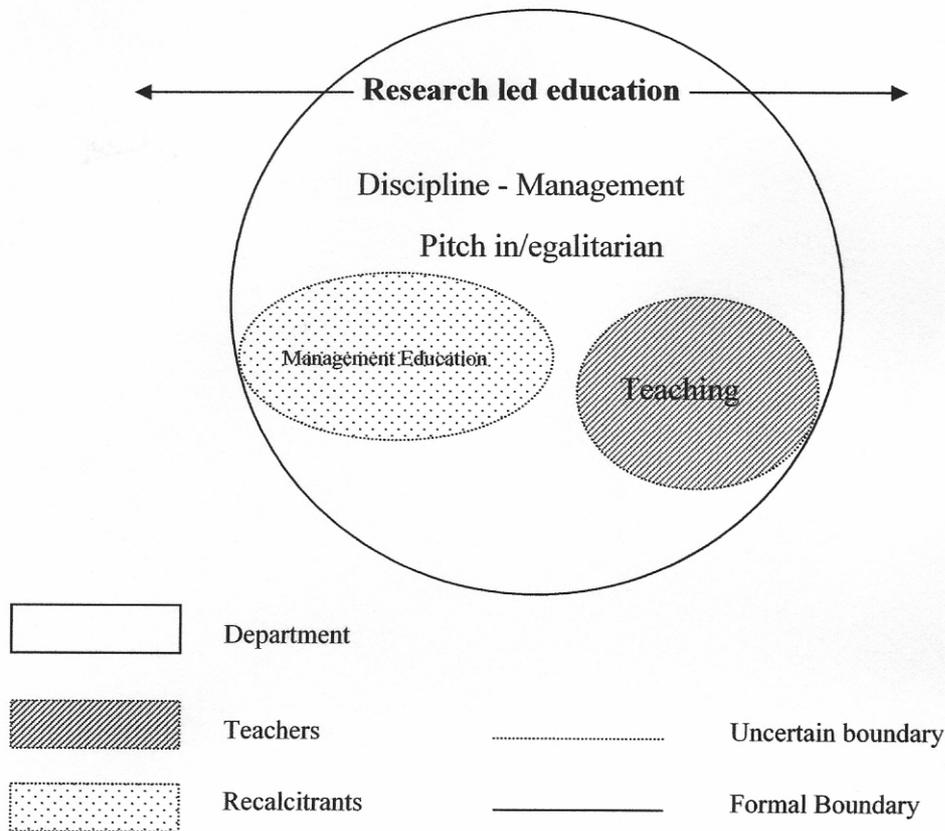


Figure 5: Construct Map – Post-integration

The post-integration period is notable for two things: firstly, to the time of writing, no defining construct (one which is in use across the Department but not outside it) has appeared for the Department; and, secondly, new lines of conflict have emerged within the Department and between it and the other departments in the Division *around the same issues*:

- Ex-Business School academics are ‘unwilling to accept change’, ‘in denial’: in fact, this (usually overtly coercive) depiction is increasingly directed at a few ex-Business School academics (whom I have christened ‘recalcitrants’) who maintain a public commitment to the Management Education construct, and do not accept the standardisation of teaching around academic rather than practical objectives. These

people belonged to the Practitioners group in the Business School (a point of purely historical interest, since the group no longer has any recognition).

- Some of the ex-Business School academics have shifted focus from the Management Education construct and practice vs. theory towards valuing teaching (consistent with both, but not a threat to other academics or the Academia construct).
- In some sense, the ‘ex-Business School’ group may be adopting a ‘survivor’ persona. By contrast to those that have left, these people represent a physical embodiment of the past existence of the Business School to other players within the Department. This is may also become a basis for discerning a group – a shared history, as seen by either its participants or by observers who ‘know’ that history.
- Calls to ‘pitch in’ and ‘work together’ are frequent, although they mainly arise in the context of perceived examples of staff having failed to do so.
- Management as an academic discipline is a focus of attention, particularly as the basis of the distinction between the Department and other departments within the Division, and the other academic units of the University. This cannot be seen as a defining construct, though, largely because there is general recognition that the Management discipline is not a highly regarded within the University, and the teaching of it even less so. To this extent, it has become a problem for the Department rather than a unifying force. This is exacerbated by the fact that there are three sub-disciplines of Management represented within the Department, only one of which is called ‘Management’ – and the sub-disciplines are broadly competitive.

This is occurring in the context of a Division- (and indeed University-) wide debate around the application of a construct which has become increasingly visible as 2006 has progressed – ‘Research led education’³⁶. Its emergence appears to reflect an attempt to

³⁶ Late in the research, an attempt has been made to alter this to ‘education-intensive research’. This suggests that management is concerned about some of the implications of ‘research-led education’, but most discussions about the new formulation express some confusion as to what has changed. Furthermore, it is worth noting that making research the noun rather than the adjective in this phrase (the ‘object’ or identity), could be argued to strengthen rather than weaken it relative to education, confirming its pre-eminence. At the time

find a more positive role for teaching, which would add uniqueness to the University's claims and emphasise its élite standing, whilst at the same time recognising the pre-eminent place of research as the truly distinguishing feature of the University, and the way academics build careers. However, at least within the Department, few seem to be clear on how to make the proposed connection between research and teaching, and the effect seems mainly to have been to emphasise the need to make sure that all academics have sufficient time for research.

Furthermore, in the context of the discussion about the status of Management as a discipline, the promotion of 'Research-led education' serves to highlight the relatively meagre production of research in the Department, which adds to discomfort about the Department's position within the Division and the University. It has also had the effect of increasing pressure to establish the value of what research has been done, in an environment where additional funds are being made available based on such evaluations, leading to competition within the Department, and between it and other departments in the Division. The need to continue to be economically successful is particularly emphasised under these conditions, with the implication that that is the only reason the University has to maintain the Department.

It is perhaps also worth noting that there is no sign in the data of any defining construct having emerged for the Division, as well as the Department, whereas the other three component departments have clearly defined identities. This may be related to the fact that, although 'disciplines' are the organising principle of the Division:

- Particularly for the economics discipline, academics remain spread across the University;
- There is no natural cohesion between the Division's component disciplines, except perhaps that they share a common field of application (business and economics) – but application is not a widely-used standard in the University;
- The three pre-existing departments (excluding the Department of Management, which is a new unit) already had identities well-defined around their own disciplines,

of writing it is unclear whether the new formulation will 'take' or, if it does, if any of the implications of 'research-led education' will be superseded.

with few cross-connections between them. The formation of the Division has created no impetus for this to change.

Judgemental or authority-asserting expressions occur quite frequently in recent data, and show diverse lines of conflict. They are directed by members of the Department at individuals in the 'recalcitrants' group; between sub-disciplines within the Department (often with coercive overtones towards any identifiable leader), and towards other departments in the Division. Positive judgments are directed towards members of the 'Teachers' group: this seems to be because of their role in absorbing teaching load, and allowing others opportunities to engage in research. There are also positive judgmental expressions towards authorities who enforce compliance on 'recalcitrants' (with some questions as to why the latter remain at all). However, there are significant expressions of Judging and Policing from younger academics, who see their teaching loads as hindering their ability to generate research and move ahead, towards older ones who are perceived as not taking sufficient teaching load, selfishly focussing on their research production.

This completes the descriptive phase of the research. It provides the base for the generation of theory, with which I will deal in the next Chapter.

Chapter 6: Explaining the cultural aspects of interaction

I start this Chapter with two cautionary notes. Firstly, I follow Glaser's (1978) recommendation that, instead of trying to demonstrate the grounding of every hypothesis, so that they take on the form of 'findings', data be used for illustration, so that theory may speak for itself:

'The assumption of the reader, he [sic] should be advised, is that all concepts are grounded and that this massive grounding effort could not be shown in a writing. Also that as grounded theory they are not proven; they are only suggested. The theory is an integrated set of hypotheses, not of findings. Proofs are not the point. Illustrations are only to establish imagery and understanding as vividly as possible when needed' (p. 134, emphasis in original).

Secondly, it will be observed that, in this Chapter, I make a leap from the substantive level, building a theory of what happened at the University, to a formal level, attempting to draw out a general framework which might apply to other situations where two organisations are being integrated. I do this conscious of the fact that the data I am using is only drawn from one substantive field, that of the University, which might appear to contradict the requirements for building formal theory by sampling beyond a single substantive case. However, I believe that this is justifiable from two points of view: firstly, although all data are drawn from a single (albeit large and complex) organisation, there is no reason to believe that the processes observed are particularly specific to that context. Indeed, I found that my own experience³⁷ in completely different contexts, the general management of significant commercial organisations in a number of national cultural environments, resonated with the theory that emerged. Furthermore, the events covered concern not only the integration of one organisation into another, but the formation of a new organisation, and thus represent more than one type of event, albeit in the same 'organisation', which allows the necessary comparisons

³⁷ Such reference to one's own experience is perfectly acceptable in Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967: p. 252)

to take place. Finally, as noted, the status of Grounded Theory is suggestive. Although the data to which I have access afford me no further categories or properties, and I have therefore achieved saturation, the status of Grounded Theory as suggestion rather than proof assumes that further comparisons can be made if new data becomes available, which may give greater insight. Data from organisations undergoing changes such as this are very hard to come by, particularly, as is the case for this research, in ‘real time’ rather than retrospectively, with all the risks of editing and reconstruction that would imply. I believe that it is worthwhile putting forward even such a relatively narrowly-based theory, in the hope that it might form a useful foundation for future development.

The preceding chapter provided an account of what transpired at the University, from the time the Head of Faculty took over as Director of the Business School in crisis, to a stage where the Business School no longer existed, and those of its personnel who remained had been integrated (more or less comfortably) into a new Department, which formed part of a new Division. The description included a dimension that focussed on the differences and similarities between the ‘constructs’ of individual actors involved in the change, which gave a different perspective on the relationships between the various groups, and the sources of the various conflicts that arose between them. Regularities were also discerned in the nature of perceptions and debate within the organisation, which suggested that some underlying pattern existed and was surprisingly stable over time. However, these intuitive insights do not constitute an explanation of what occurred. That there is intuitive resonance in the description suggests that there are some basic processes at work which we, as human beings who live in a familiar world, recognise; but it does not say what those processes are. This is the theory that I need to generate.

6.1: Cultural Configurations

Glaser suggests that the key element of a sociological monograph, or of any chapter within it, is a “‘little logic’...the main building idea’, which, in Grounded Theory, ‘...states that the core variable explains a large amount of the variation in a behavior or set of behaviors’ (Glaser 1978: p. 129). This core category is supposed to emerge from the data over time as it is subjected to constant comparison – and so it happened with this project, albeit after sufficient false starts and difficulties to at times make it seem a

very optimistic assumption. In the end, it became clear from the data that the core category, the one implicated in almost all of the interactions described in the last chapter, was the relationship between two constructs, each associated with a different group – what I will call a Cultural Configuration.

An example of this concept is the Cultural Configuration which existed between the University and the Business School at the start of the research. At this time, the University (in the context of its relationship to the Business School) was intent on reaffirming the precedence of Academia; simultaneously, the Business School was intent on establishing the unique requirements of Management Education. To the University, Academia was an integrating construct, which was to be applied to the Business School to emphasise that it formed part of the University; to the Business School, Management Education was a differentiating construct, explaining why it acted, and should be treated, differently from the rest of the University. These constructs, then, were configured as a competition over how to represent the Business School – as part of Academia, or as a Management Education specialist. Both purported to explain the specific reality of their organisation, and were supported by historical ‘facts’ relating to the way they had developed, broader claims concerning their value to society, and both justified or explained the situation which had arisen, at least for the relevant insiders.

6.1.1: Nature of the Cultural Configuration

The category ‘Cultural Configuration’ is conceived of as *a relationship which brings its component elements into being*, at least in a specific context. The University, as it operates in this particular configuration, cannot be shown to be the same University that may operate in a different configuration – it is at least partially defined by the constructs it uses to represent itself. Although the same name may be used for it in a later configuration, this use is itself an objectification, and associated with a new attribution (even though that may be constrained by a need to be consistent with past attributions). The constructs, and the entities they produce, then, are inextricable from their interrelationship and the context in which the relationship occurs; they form a whole, an irreducible dialectic – a dynamic configuration. Furthermore, since the core category evident in the data is a relationship, rather than a fixed property of the entities concerned, it becomes clear that the problem addressed by this emerging theory is *what*

occurs between groups – it does not assume that interactions are more or less pre-determined functions of pre-existing ‘cultures’ or some other ‘properties’ of the groups involved, or, indeed that those groups have a prior independent or objective existence at all.

6.1.2: Types of Cultural Configuration

Three types of configuration can be seen in the data:

Conflicting: Constructing the same object, with the same constructs, but with different ‘evaluations’ – for example, Practitioners’ evaluation of ‘theory’, was diametrically opposed to the non-Business School academics’ evaluation of it. The Practitioners group within the Business School assessed ‘theory’ as ‘trivial-abstract-useless’ as distinct from ‘valuable-useful’ (see page 139). The non-Business School Academics, on the other hand, assessed it as ‘original-pure-valuable’, as distinct from ‘derivative’ (with a good measure of the sense of ‘trivial’).

Competing: Constructing the same object, with different constructs – for example, Business School academics’ explanation of the Business School in terms of Management Education, juxtaposed with non-Business School academics’ explanation of it in terms of Academia (and how the Business School had departed from it). Later on, non-Business School academics’ representation of the ‘experienced, mid-career MBA student’ of the Management Education construct as ‘over serviced’.

Extending: Same constructs applying to different objects – for example, Practitioners tended to present Pure Academics as only being comfortable in a structured environment, sheltered from reality. Some Pure Academics asserted the same of General Staff. Both attributions would be disputed by the other parties (and, in this case, their targets!). This relationship bears an interesting resemblance to the Personal Construct Psychology concept of ‘ranges of convenience’.

It is important to note, with regard to these types, that identity of constructs and identity of objects is manifested functionally. There is no ‘objective’ standard by which the researcher can determine whether two different expressions represent identity or difference. For example, if there is suspicion that two elicited objects are so similar that they may represent the ‘same’ underlying object, and the same constructs are applied to

each by the same groups, they should be considered identical; likewise, constructs should be considered identical if they are applied to the same objects by the same groups.

6.1.3: Dimensions of Cultural Configurations

The differences between these types of configuration can be seen as arising from variations along two dimensions: Object compatibility (whether the construction in a particular context occupies itself with the same or different objects) and Construct compatibility (whether it utilises the same or different constructs). Differing positions on these dimensions set up negotiations of different types over what meaning is to be made of a given situation.

In addition to the four theoretically possible configurations generated along these two dimensions, where both Object and Construct are compatible, the bipolar nature of constructs themselves sets up another possibility – that one or other pole may be attributed to the object. Inverse attribution to the same object on the same construct by different groups is a formal definition of the ‘differing evaluation’ seen in the Conflicting configuration. ‘Evaluation’ cannot be considered a dimension in its own right, however, since it has no meaning unless both object and construct are compatible.

Where Construct and Object are compatible, and evaluation is the same, this produces a formal definition of ‘shared assumptions’, and is definitive of a group. This configuration might be called a Conforming configuration.

The dimensions listed, then, together with the bipolar nature of the construct, suggest 5 conceivable generic Cultural configurations (Figure 6):

		Constructs		
		<i>Equal</i>		<i>Different</i>
Objects	<i>Equal</i>	Conflicting: Opposing evaluation	Conforming: Consonant evaluation	Competing
	<i>Different</i>	Extending		(Uncomprehending)

Figure 6: Typology of Cultural Configurations

The formal possibility of an ‘Uncomprehending’ category is interesting to contemplate. No occurrence of this category was observed in the data, and Glaser does state that ‘...not every cell has to have a meaningful type in it...the analyst often finds ungrounded cells. It becomes a mere logical elaboration of no worth to the theory to develop a type for such non-empirical cells’ (Glaser 1978: 67). However, I find the Uncomprehending category plausible, because it is highly reminiscent of my own experience³⁸ of the initial stages of integrating an acquired company into another – a sort of ‘dialogue des sourds (conversation of deaf-mutes)’, where neither side understands what the names of the others’ reports mean; why something is a problem (or why it is not) for the other side; or how ‘they’ could speak ‘like that’ to their people (to give but three common manifestations). The configuration was, perhaps, not seen at the University because it implies a fundamental unfamiliarity between the organisations involved, whereas the University and the Business School had a long ‘shared history’. Where it exists, one might expect such a configuration be quite unstable. For instance, as shared experience causes at least some common objects to be identified over time, but as different constructs drawn from past experience are applied to them, Competitive

³⁸ Note again that introducing personal experience into this is acceptable in Grounded Theory – see pg 148, note 37.

configurations might arise. Hence, mutual incomprehension might fairly quickly crystallise into some more specific conflict. Confirming the possibility of this configuration, and its implications, requires further empirical work.

6.1.4: Properties of Cultural Configurations

In order to explain the various types of interaction resulting from differing Cultural Configurations, it is necessary to consider three properties.

6.1.4.1: Power Differences

What power does each entity in the configuration have over the other? It is important to note here that a wide variety of different sources of power exist, and I do not assume that formal (hierarchical) power will always be the most important. In this research, power was asserted around control of resources, application of legal or moral standards (which might themselves be seen as constructs authorised by wider society that must be upheld for membership to be maintained), and situational power (where someone in a formally much more powerful position needs someone of much less formal power to gain an opportunistic advantage). In the case of the University and the Business School, as has been observed, the power difference was almost absolute. This was not at all the case, however, between the three sub-disciplines in the Department.

6.1.4.2: Centrality

How fundamentally a construct is linked to the identity of the entities concerned. A central construct like Academia is intimately tied up with the group who promotes it. It provides legitimation for the University's existence; standards of behaviour, and ranks and social infrastructure, for its members; as well as justifications for claims of superiority over other groups. It also subsumes a relatively large number of other constructs, like Research/Teaching, in a system of mutually reinforcing ways of seeing the world and evaluating it.

6.1.4.3: Boundary Definition

How clear are the boundaries of the component entities? Organisational boundaries may be formal and understood by all, as was the case with the Business School, or diffuse or unrecognised, like those of the post-integration Teachers group. A readily identifiable

feature of group members (such as, for academics, the possession of a Doctorate), which makes it possible for both insiders and outsiders to identify themselves, also provides a well-defined boundary.

6.2: Resolution Work

Cultural Configurations, with the exception of ‘Conforming’, are by nature **unresolved** – they all express some form of contradiction, and define some sort of a negotiating relationship. It seems that the relevance of the category arises from the work which goes on around Cultural Configurations to ‘deal with’ or negotiate these contradictions, as if sense must be made of the world. This work, which I will call ‘Resolution Work’, can be seen as the main product of cultural interactions, and Cultural Configurations their central problem. Furthermore, Resolution Work can be seen to be more or less ‘intense’ depending on the properties of the Cultural Configuration and its elements: the greater the power differences, centrality, and the clearer the boundary definitions respectively, the more intense is resolution work seen to be. ‘Intensity’ implies higher levels of emotional commitment (on both sides), likelihood of coercive activity, and widely noticed division between groups.

6.2.1: Types of Resolution Work

6.2.1.1: Reframing

An important type of Resolution Work was observed around competing configurations, which I will call ‘Reframing’. During the Interregnum, Faculty academics started to subvert the Management Education construct (which competed with the Academia construct) by taking material from it (e.g., post-graduate education, intensive teaching mode, closer involvement of general staff) and linking that with ideas of luxury and unsustainability to develop a new construct (Unsustainable-luxury Business School). This new construct formed a Competing configuration with Management Education with regard to the Business School, but one which, because of the ‘factual evidence’ of its failure (and perhaps because of the power differences), could not be easily refuted by the Business School academics. This had three consequences: the establishment of the ‘failure’ of the Business School as fact; the silencing (in most cases) of the expression

of the Management Education construct; and the effective neutering of the group that held it, in terms of their relations with the new Department and Division.

Whether deliberate or not³⁹ this reframing seems to have been aimed at removing any pretext for non-conformity or non-integration when the Business School was eventually absorbed into the Department. However, and more importantly from a theoretical point of view, it provides evidence of how change can occur in the way meanings are made, and how such changes may lead to the suppression (or probably emergence, in other contexts) of the groups involved in them. The process did not directly contradict the Management Education construct, which would have created a Conflicting configuration. Instead, it built something new on the same foundations – effectively destroying it by stealth.

6.2.1.2: Judging and Policing

As noted in Chapter 5, the data also demonstrated another category, which I labelled ‘Judging and Policing’. Most of the constructs elicited concerned themselves with bringing an object into being by attributing a certain quality to it. However, some were concerned with passing a value judgement on an object (usually a group or an individual), or asserting authority or power over it (this might have been ‘real’ power or, in its absence, moral authority). Either by threat of force or by devaluing the person or group concerned, this category demonstrated attempts to influence which voices would be heard (or listened to).

6.2.1.3: Modelling and Influencing

In addition to ‘Judging and Policing’, I observed a behaviour which I will label ‘Modelling and Influencing’. This involved ‘setting an example’ – acting in a way

³⁹ I have no way of knowing what level of self-awareness attaches to actions like the one described, but suspect that the description of subversion would not be accepted by a participant looking at these events retrospectively. Reviewing the data, it seems more likely that the juxtaposition of the failure of the Business School with its obvious differences from the Faculty was both inevitable and went unquestioned – all the more since it served to develop a story which was no doubt more attractive to the staff of the Faculty than the alternative (admitting the difference had a valid cause). Nevertheless, it was effectively subversive.

desired of everyone else – for instance, senior academics accepting relatively heavy undergraduate teaching loads, when their seniority could have been used to avoid this, or being personally involved in moving furniture during the room changes. I interpret this behaviour, in the terms of this theory, as an alternative means of silencing possible dissenting voices, an indirect use of power – in the given examples, restricting anyone’s ability to claim that the desired behaviour was too much to ask of them, because that would contradict a recognised hierarchy. Indeed, the phrase ‘this way, they can’t say....’ was heard on some occasions. The behaviour might also be associated with denying the relevance of an organisational boundary around which a cultural configuration could form, in particular a status or hierarchy difference – if the boss is willing to pitch in, it is much harder to recognise hierarchical status differences, at least in that particular context. It also provides concrete evidence denying ‘undesirable’ constructions – the boss ‘pitching in’ is effectively enacting evidence against any attempt to construe her as aloof or interested in her privileges. This suggests that people do indeed anticipate others’ construing, and actively attempt to influence it.

6.3: Relationships

Competing and Conflicting configurations seem to encourage different types of Resolution Work. Resolving a Conflicting configuration seems to be mostly accompanied by Judging and Policing, which can be more or less intense, particularly where power differences are large. Judging and Policing might also take the form of ‘rational’ argument which ‘proves’ one evaluation correct, and the other false – which is perhaps itself a form of coercion!

It is interesting to note that, in the Conflicting configuration, both parties implicitly accept the underlying construct, albeit making opposing evaluations on it. For example, in arguing for the priority of research over teaching rather than the converse, a fundamental opposition is established between the two, *regardless of which evaluation is made*. The data clearly demonstrates that this opposition is, indeed, widely drawn around the University – but it is usually implicit, argued, for example, by asserting the importance of research, not by denying the importance of teaching. Indeed, such a position would be largely untenable in an educational institution.

On the other hand, although Competing configurations may be associated with the exercise of power, as we have seen, their resolution does not necessarily demand the defeat of one side⁴⁰ (useful, perhaps, if your side happens to be relatively weak). I also observed that Judging and Policing behaviour was not nearly as frequent or intense around Competing configurations as it was around Conflicting configurations. Instead, Competing configurations were often accompanied by Reframing or Modelling and Influencing behaviours.

It seems, then, that establishing a Competing configuration may represent an alternative to bringing a difference into sharp relief, as a Conflicting configuration does – a useful feature in tactical terms. In the case in question, during the Interregnum, the Faculty academics had no direct power over the Business School (and only limited interaction with it). Furthermore, they were aware that the Business School academics would be joining them to form the new Department before very long, and frequent protestations were made (which I have no doubt were sincere) about the desire of the Faculty academics that the integration proceed smoothly, and that the Business School academics would be comfortable in the new organisation. However, rather than directly contradicting the Management Education construct, forming a Conflicting configuration, the Faculty academics formed a Competing configuration with a reframed version of the construct. The objective was not to get rid of the incoming Business School academics, but to avoid contaminating the new Department with the baggage of the old Business School – and in any case, during the Interregnum, the Faculty academics had no power over the Business School academics. This suggests, moreover, and very importantly from a theoretical point of view, that there is at least measure of tactical choice in the establishment of a Cultural Configuration.

It also suggests the possibility that configurations may be organised hierarchically. The Competing configuration around Academia and Management Education, because each construct was central to each group, because each of the groups were formally defined, and because power differences were great, in some sense defined the relationship of the

⁴⁰ Indeed, with reframing, it is possible to imagine that resolution might be brought about by both groups adopting a new construct which subsumes the competing ones – even though this was not seen in the data.

University and the Business School during the Regularisation period. The ‘Research-Theory’ distinction was highly supportive of Academia, ‘Teaching-Practice’ of Management Education. Hence, the Conflicting configuration set up by both these between the two groups can be seen in some sense as subsidiary to the Academia/Management Education configuration, extending or elaborating on its implications.

The Extending configuration was observed in the data, but did not appear to give rise to any Resolution Work. Rather than seeing this as an indication that there is some fundamental difference between Extending configurations and the others, in that they do not lead to Resolution Work, I tend to see this as resulting from a much lower position in the hierarchy of configurations, taking on more the character of evidence of a known issue than something needing resolution in its own right. The fact that Practitioners tended to see Academics as needing a tightly structured environment would have been seen by the latter as merely a proof that the former didn’t understand Academia; and Practitioners who saw that some Pure Academics had the same opinion of General Staff would have seen this as supporting their views about the arrogance and lack of practical sense of Academics. Furthermore, both Practitioners and General Staff had such relatively lower power that Academics could quite easily simply ignore any discussion of the issue. However, the exact nature of Extending configurations in conditions of less power differences warrants further investigation.

6.3.1: Considerations around Coercion

If Resolution Work is about resolving contradictions between Cultural Configurations, and therefore represents a drive towards integration, Judging and Policing behaviour may be seen as inherently putting this goal at risk, particularly when it involves applying direct coercion. As long as the parties involved need to continue to work together, such behaviour would appear to be an impediment to integration, unless it is used to definitively exclude one of the parties – a sort of integration by obliteration. There also appears to be some form of social sanction against the overt use of force, as if a respectable institution should not be seen to act in such a way – this may represent a behavioural norm located in the broader societal context. In any case, the existence of

alternative behaviours such as Reframing and Modelling and Influencing seem to offer an important source of flexibility.

To specify the relationships observed more fully;

- *Judging and Policing was a potential consequence of Conflicting or Competing configurations.* For example, the mutual behaviours of the Practitioners and Pure (and, later, Department) academics towards each other, and the University's imposition of conformity on the Business School demonstrated 'Judging and Policing'.
- *The stronger a group's relative power was vis-à-vis another, the more likely Judging and Policing was to occur. It was also more likely to be intense, in either direction.* It seemed as if a power imbalance impeded the weaker party making judgements of the stronger. On the other hand, when a weaker party did make a judgement of a stronger, it was likely to be particularly emotional (e.g., terms like 'shame', demands for 'accountability', assertions of the existence of 'cabals').
- *The more central a construct in a configuration, the stronger the assertion of 'Judging and Policing' was likely to be.* Thus, the Academia construct was central to the University, and its imposition was accompanied by strong behaviours. There was a construct, 'Department: egalitarian-inclusive/hierarchical-selective', which was applied to the Department regularly. However, it was less central, and behaviours around it tended to be of the Modelling and Influencing type (again, Judging and Policing might have been incompatible with the desired evaluation).
- *Between each other, members of the same group seemed to prefer Modelling and Influencing behaviour to Judging and Policing – this may be another example of avoiding the potentially divisive effects of direct coercion. It may also reflect specific preferences of the individuals involved in this particular situation.*

6.3.2: 'Defining Constructs'

At this point, it is useful to look at a categorisation which did not survive the comparison process. Early in the research, as has been mentioned, it seemed to me that a core category with regard to interaction between groups was the 'defining construct' – a construct which was seen to be absolutely central to the entity concerned. However, this category did not prove out, for two reasons:

- By comparing the early stages of the research, when the Business School was in conflict with the University, and Academia was widely elicited, and the later stages, where the Department found itself opposed to the other Departments, and Academia was no longer raised, the sensitivity of this category to context was clearly demonstrated. This is not to say that Academia was no longer important to the University, but that it was no longer the salient construct in this particular context. This, in line with the observations on the nature of the Cultural Configuration, may be seen as a demonstration of the way a configuration defines the elements that participate in it; the University was the relevant opposition to the Business School at the start of the research; within the Division, at the end of the research, it is not the relevant reference point.
- Comparing the different cases, it seemed difficult to demonstrate the impact of the ‘defining construct’ without postulating another category between two defining constructs, which at the time I christened ‘Salient tension’ – but this category could not survive without the presence of both the defining constructs between which it was placed. It seemed, therefore, to make more sense to see the fundamental unit as being the relationship between constructs (Cultural Configuration), and centrality as a property of its component constructs. This also conferred the advantage of being more general; it dealt in the same way with configurations of central constructs (such as Academia and Management Education), and of non-central constructs (such as research/teaching and practice/theory).
- I did, however, maintain the idea of the converse to ‘salient tension’ – latent conflict, to describe constructs which existed and would potentially compete or conflict, but which had not yet been opposed to each other. This seems to have been because organisational boundaries cut across them, or because another opposition was already the focus of Resolution Work. In this case, the latent conflict could be seen as being between constructs of low centrality.

Defining Constructs, then, can be seen simply as highly central constructs; it is their relationship in a Cultural Configuration which drives Resolution Work.

However, while the category of Defining Construct did not ‘prove out’, it is worthwhile to compare cases where a highly central construct does exist with cases of where one

does not. This latter was the case of the Department at the end of the study, which could have also been described as being somewhat divided, particularly over the question of how to achieve a positive evaluation for Management as a discipline. The Business School was also divided between Pure academics and Practitioners at the start of the study – but that was in the context of a unifying contrast with the exterior, of a Defining Construct, and the differences were relatively submerged. It may be, then, that the lack of a Defining Construct, justifying the boundary with the ‘outside’, implies that members of a given formally defined unit focus more on the divisions within it than on what distinguishes it from ‘external’ units. The failure of a socially recognised object (the Department) to be united by a shared construct, as I have suggested, is not particularly surprising, since there is no reason that any formal organisational boundary should necessarily also share a particular defining construct. However, from the point of view of the management and membership of the Department, this failure to find a unifying construct is meaningful, because it draws the unity of the organisation (and arguably the justification for its existence) into question. The Department exists within a formal organisational boundary – *from the perspective of its boundary* the Department may therefore be seen as a theatre for several Competing configurations, and its internal divisions as arising from competition between insiders to construct it. Thus, the existence of a Defining Construct can be seen as demonstrating high levels of integration for a specified organisational unit, and integration might be seen as a process of reducing the competition to construct the organisational unit concerned (a process which bears an interesting resemblance to top down attempts to build ‘strong’ corporate cultures).

6.3.3: Reframing and Centrality

Identifying the process of Reframing helps understand another difference in the data. The architecture of the system for describing constructs used in this research is multi-layered – it builds up from constructs elicited in individual cases, to hypothesise shared constructions across groups, to groups of clearly related concepts which approximate to something of a ‘universe of discourse’. Comparison of constructs categorised by their

different levels did not yield much in the way of differences, to the extent that it seems possible to treat them to all intents and purposes as the same type of element⁴¹.

However, in the context of the Reframing process, a different sort of hierarchy is revealed. Reframing consists essentially of ‘pilfering’ lower level material, which does not have a completely fixed significance, for use in building an alternative higher level construct. Hence, the levels implied in this hierarchy are not to do with the scope of the constructs; rather, they are organised by the extent to which the constructs are malleable, or carry significance which is open to reinterpretation. It is not surprising, seen this way, that highly central constructs like Academia, which form part of a competing or conflicting configuration, will be relatively difficult to change (if only because there is likely to be a good deal of power focussed on ensuring they are maintained in their authorised form). However, these are complex constructs which draw on a wide range of material, not all of which is consistent or has a fixed significance. Reframing, then, consists of ‘mining’ these materials and putting them together in new ways, without directly challenging the construct at the heart of the action. It seems to rely on the existence of less central constructs which are sufficiently flexible (or unguarded) to be used differently – but in the process, they can subvert the higher order, more central, construct. Seen in this way, a highly central construct becomes a sort of template or guiding principle, which may subsume other constructs that are less central, and that may rely on them for content, but which does not completely determine them – and is open to change through them.

One implication of this is that the reframing process may not, at least at its origin, necessarily be the strict preserve of powerful participants, since it seems to start with ‘uncontrolled’ material. Indeed, the establishment of the Teachers group around the ‘value of teaching’ construct can be seen as a sort of reframing carried out by those with relatively limited power (ex-Business School academics). In this case, the reframing

⁴¹ Interestingly, this suggests that it would be possible for Cultural Configurations to emerge between different levels – perhaps addressing the issue of the relationship of individuals to collective discourses. It is, furthermore, not inconsistent with Kelly’s view of Personal Constructs – as existing in hierarchical systems, without any difference in the fundamental nature of the different levels.

was based on material which had supported the suppressed Management Education construct, and the lesser valued (by the University) pole of the Research/Teaching opposition. Furthermore, it seems to survive, despite being technically in a Competing configuration with other constructs applying within the Department, partly because it has low centrality for the more powerful groups, partly because the group's boundaries are not well-defined, and partly because the power differences are so great that it represents no challenge. The suggestion of this research is that Resolution Work would become more intense if any of these conditions changed, for instance by the establishment of a formally recognised group of 'Teaching Academics', or perhaps even 'awards for excellence in Teaching'.

6.3.4: Reframing and Ambiguity

While exploring rigidity and flexibility, it was observed that there is a significant difference in the value of the two poles of a construct, which plays into the Reframing process. A construct is considered as a unity of opposites that expresses a meaning through contrast. However, in practice, an opposition is seldom supplied in its entirety in one utterance⁴². Instead, an assertion of one pole is made (what I have called in Chapter 4 the 'Emergent' pole) and the speaker must either be requested to supply the contrast (the 'Implicit' pole), or it must be sought in the rest of the data, by implication or association. This can be seen in the data, for example, in the case of two constructs used by different parties – 'General Staff: Do their job-support (academic) morale/get in the way' and 'General Staff: Support academics/contribute directly to university goals', which essentially share the same Emergent Pole, but have quite different Implicit Poles (and therefore quite different implications). Of course, outside the research context, it is likely that the Implicit pole is simply assumed by the listener. Not only is this a potential source of miscomprehension (or Competing configurations); it is a source of flexibility for the future – and an opportunity for Reframing, because if the 'unexpected'

⁴² In fact, where it is, the meaning concerned usually contradicts a 'normal' or expected meaning in some way, and so needs explanation – 'I mean "smart", not "intellectual" – lets say "cunning"'.

implied pole is promoted in competition to the previously assumed one, the meaning of the construct will change.

6.3.5: Reframing and History

A final manifestation of the Reframing process is what might be called the ‘rewriting of history’. The Reframing which led to the emergence of the ‘Unsustainable-luxury Business School’ construct has already been outlined. Whereas its initial appearance (at least to the researcher’s view) consisted of only one short comment about the Business School as ‘having had some luxuries’, the ensuing few weeks saw increasing numbers of Faculty academics finding more and more examples that supported this view, and the construct becoming very widespread. The emerging construct introduced a strong selection bias into the stories that could be told about the Business School⁴³, accompanied by examples of Judgement and Policing when information was presented that seemed to contradict the reframing. Such behaviour usually took the form of an angry reminder along the lines of ‘whatever the case, we can’t forget that the (Business School) operations were unsustainable’. The suggestion is that reframing may initially appear relatively limited in scope and importance, but that it may quite quickly lead to attempts to assert hegemony over a wide range of material that could be used by either side, including available ‘facts’. It also suggests that, even though reframing may originate in an individual act, the establishment of a reframed construct depends on a process of adoption by relevant groups.

6.4: Change

The theory which has been outlined explains the behaviours which occurred (Resolution Work) around Cultural Configurations and their properties. Resolution Work consists of three categories of processes, which occur more or less frequently and intensely in different circumstances. The focus of this explanation has been the regular patterns of

⁴³ I ignore, for the purposes of this work, the possibility that deliberate falsification took place, because I saw no examples of it. My experience tells me, however, that in situations like this ‘mistakes’ can be made in the reading of historical records, because the conclusion seems already to be accepted.

behaviours by members of different groups. Is it possible, however, to use the theory to explain changes observed at the organisational level?

The organisational level perspective is essentially structural and political. The changes occurring at the structural level were quite simple, consisting of the absorption of the Business School into the Department, and the formation of the new Department as a component of the Division. The political phenomena needing explanation are also relatively few; the observed 'resistance' of the Business School academics, and particularly the Practitioners, to integration, the internal divisions this caused within the Department, and the other divisions that have arisen between the academics grouped around the sub-disciplines of the Department, and between members of the Department and of the other departments in the Division.

The theory provides an explanation for the timing of decision by the University authorities to intervene in the Business School in early 2005; its members faced a threat to the ongoing construction of the University as élite and successful (a threat to its reputation and a financial issue), as well as a significant change in their power position relative to the Business School because of the departure of the Director, and invoked the Academia construct as a justification to reassert control. The apparent initial resistance by the Business School academics may be seen as an attempt to differentiate the Business School by proposing the Management Education construct, in a Competing configuration; and the relatively stronger resistance to this integration by members of the Practitioners group, who fell into a Conflicting configuration with the Academia construct that united the University. Very large power differences, however, allowed and encouraged the simple assertion of authority by members of the University to impose the organisational change. Ex-Business School academics have either left, experience conflict when they use the Management Education construct (which has been reframed as explaining the failure of the Business School), or have avoided conflict by focussing on teaching. Meanwhile, the Department (and indeed the Division) was established without a strong central construct, and so continues to experience significant levels of internal conflict and conflict with other departments. These largely centre on the relationship of research and teaching in the context of the 'Research-led education' construct promulgated by the University authorities, and the related question of the content and implications of the 'Discipline – Management' construct.

The changes which have occurred, then, are structural, and have been accompanied by a great deal of Resolution Work. However, as has been noted, a certain number of constructs seem to have notable longevity. Research/teaching, Practice/theory, Elite/mass and Secure/insecure funding all endured throughout the study, and provided material that helped support ‘defining constructs’ in their hotly contested configurations. On the other hand, Cultural Configurations seem to have had relatively limited life spans, defined by centrality and power relationships (in both cases, mediated by changes in structure).

Nevertheless, under certain circumstances, a Cultural Configuration may have a longer life. Although the study did not start until after the crisis, as has been mentioned, it seems that the Business School had been relatively stable for a period of some years after its founding, despite what seems likely to have been the existence of some sort of Competing configuration with the University throughout most of its existence – probably initially around conforming to the University, then around Research/Teaching during the second management period. Although power differences were clearly still very much in the University’s favour throughout this period, the Business School was not in crisis, and does seem to have had some allies around campus. Furthermore, it seems that the financial situation and reputation of the school were acceptable to the University, so there was no trigger for asserting authority. Thus, it seems that a Cultural Configuration may endure to the extent that it does not become too central to a powerful party in a given context, and/or to the extent that power differences remain small, or there is no identifiable turning point that one party can use to justify change.

The theory is summarised in Figure 7.

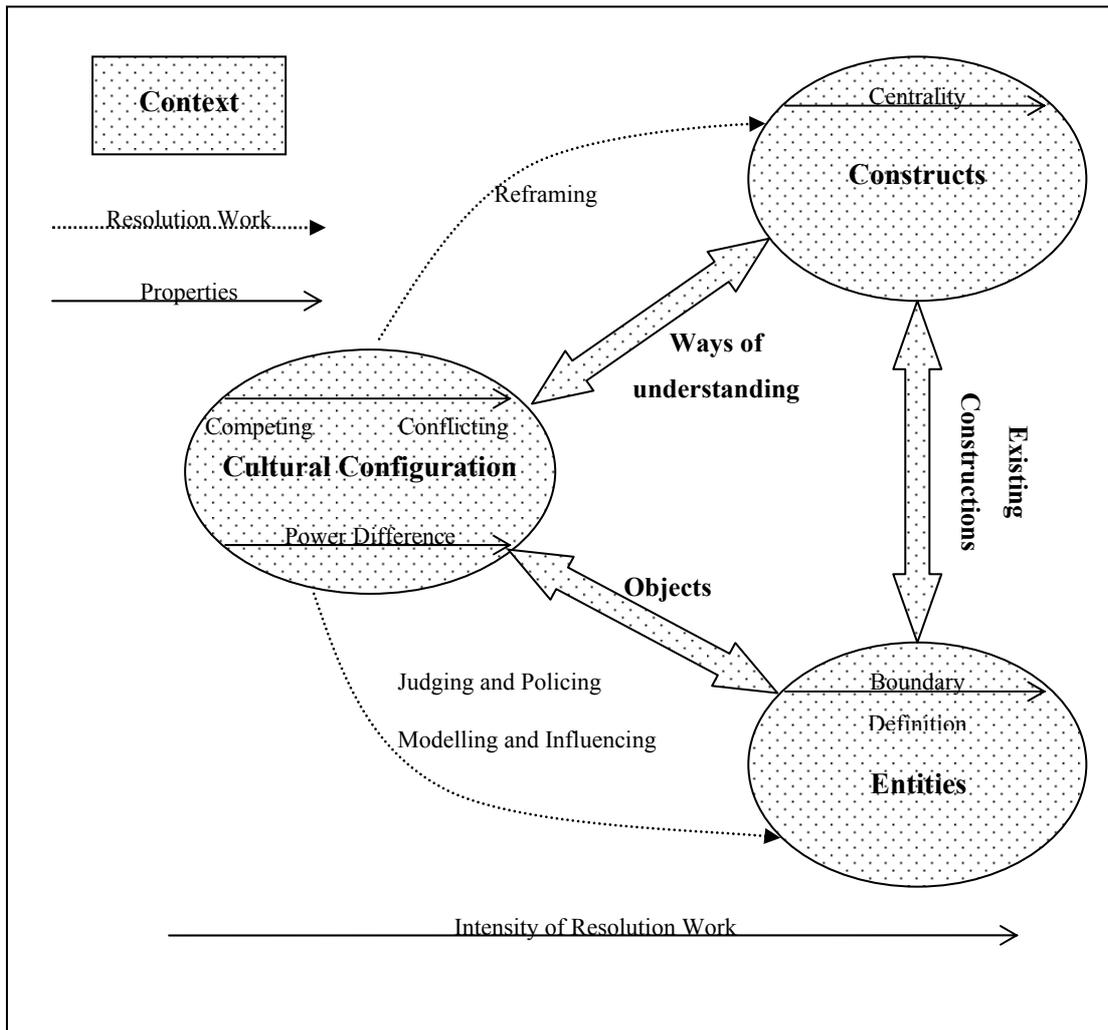


Figure 7: Model of Cultural Interactions

This model sees any context in terms of three interrelated elements: the range of available constructs, the entities created by those constructs, and the Cultural Configurations which describe the relationship of those construct/entity dialectics. This is a dynamic system, where ways of looking at things, and the things that are looked at, are interdependent and in constant interaction. People involved in a Cultural Configuration undertake Resolution Work to resolve it; this may take two main forms. The first, reframing, generates new ways of seeing things, new constructs. The second attempts to act on entities that have been created in the social world (groups or individuals) to exclude them from the Resolution Work, or force them to accept a particular solution, either directly or by silencing them. This latter type of Resolution Work may take the form of either Judging and Policing, with direct coercion, or

Modelling and Influencing, forms of indirect coercion. Which type of Resolution Work occurs, and its intensity (the emotional affect and likelihood of direct coercion – represented by the direction of the dashed arrows), depends on the type of Cultural Configuration, and on three properties of the context. A Conflicting configuration will give rise to more intense Resolution Work than a Competing configuration; additionally, the greater the power differences between the entities involved in the configuration, the greater the centrality of the constructs involved, and the more clearly defined the boundaries of the entities, the more intense that Resolution Work will be.

If it is to be useful, this theory should also give some insight into what might occur in the future. Using it, it is possible to speculate that the situation might evolve in one of three ways:

- Members of the Department might come to prioritise research at the expense of teaching (conforming to the rest of the University). This would imply significant effort to build a case for the value of Management as an academic field, in particular arguing for the status of Management journals relative to others – and so establishing a Conflicting configuration with the other departments in the Division, around Discipline-Management. The Department would have little chance of success in adopting this position, however, due to the relative power positions between the departments in the Division. Furthermore, the approach would probably lead to the marginalisation or exclusion of staff who prioritise teaching, with the associated risk that student satisfaction would decline, and eventually funding issues would arise. Any response by the University would be likely to reframe Discipline-Management, using material produced by declining enrolments, and argue that it was not of much interest to the market.
- Members of the Department might prioritise teaching. This, together with the status issues related to Management as an academic field, would mean accepting a lower status within the University, and the more ambitious academics might leave. However, to the extent that this led to positive financial results, it would likely be tolerated by the other Departments in the Division, and the University. They would likely continue to criticise the Department for its poor research performance (Conflicting configuration on Research/Teaching), but be willing to live with this as

long as funds and student numbers allowed the University's Élite construct to be supported. This situation might also lead to the resurrection of the Management Education construct.

- In the absence of a definite direction on these issues, groups may form Cultural Configurations with each other within the Department, leading to ongoing internal coercive/alliance behaviour as boundaries are affirmed at this level. Such activity might itself lead to changes in conditions which in turn crystallise a configuration at the Department level.

6.5: Evaluation

It is now appropriate to consider whether the form of description, and the theory I have developed to explain it, have in some sense succeeded. The descriptive phase of the research produced a picture of the organisation which was specific to it, and which gave insight into what divided and what united its various groups. It allowed that specific individuals belong to one group in one context, and another in a different one. It provided quite a rich insight into the nature and relationship of both formal groups and ones which crossed acknowledged boundaries. It seemed, therefore, to meet the objective of finding a way to define shared construct systems and the groups that they distinguish. By applying Grounded Theory methodology to it, a general conceptual framework has been developed, which proposes an underlying dynamic (the Cultural Configuration) and its effects (Resolution Work), specifies processes which link the two, and explains how changes occur (and fail to occur) in construct systems. This appears to meet the stated research objectives. But, given the avowedly practical intent of this research, did it do so in a useful fashion?

Thomas and Tymon (1982) set out five criteria for evaluating the relevance of research: Descriptive Relevance, Goal Relevance, Operational Validity, Nonobviousness and Timeliness. These standards are expressed mainly in terms of dependent and independent variables, and so reflect a variance theory perspective, which could be seen as invalid with regard to this research. However, recognising the dominance of variance theory perspectives in both practitioner and academic perceptions of what is worthwhile and useful, the theory proposed here will certainly make a greater contribution if it can

be shown to perform even in those terms. The Thomas and Tymon criteria therefore still represent useful reference points against which to evaluate this research.

6.5.1: Descriptive Relevance

In terms of Descriptive Relevance – ‘the accuracy of research findings in capturing phenomena encountered by the practitioner’ (p. 346) – the descriptive approach I propose appears to have much in its favour, particularly at the level of the individual, because it explicitly grounds its conclusions in the respondent’s language. At least two criticisms might be raised, however; first, that the imposition on the data of the concept of ‘construct’ is artificial and might not adequately reflect the respondent’s meanings; and, secondly, that the researcher has too much influence on the outcomes, particularly in the consolidation stage of the analysis, where they have to use their own judgment in isolating Constructs and Abstract Constructs. Such concerns might lead, for instance, to recommendations that some sort of back-checking be performed with respondents, to ensure the internal validity of individual level descriptions; or that several analysts should replicate the coding and consolidation processes, in order to ensure external validity at the organisational level.

The objectives of the proposed descriptive approach are, in the first instance, to allow the researcher to construe the construals of a respondent; and, in the second instance, to allow hypotheses to be developed as to which respondents share similar ways of construing and how they relate to the formation of groups and collective behaviour. By its very nature, the output of the process is a tentative approximation to reality, an approximation that will be constantly confronted with experience which will either validate or invalidate it. Moreover, it attempts to portray a reality that existed only at a specific moment in time. If this portrayal is later proven ‘wrong’, it cannot be known if it was incorrect in the first place, or whether the reality it purported to explain has altered. In particular, this uncertainty comes about not only because it is *practically* impossible to achieve ‘completeness’ – to reach every member of an organisation at the same time, or to fully understand any one individual in that organisation at a given moment – but because it is *categorically* impossible to do so – there is no way of differentiating between data that completes a description, and data that describes a new phenomenon. Failing the ability to exhaustively list the constructs shared within an

organisation, however, there is always a risk that something remains unknown which might invalidate the researcher's hypotheses, or whose knowledge would have resulted in a different hypothesis⁴⁴.

The theory which has emerged from analysing the data underlines the fleeting and provisional nature of the Cultural Configurations which give rise to Resolution Work. However, it does so whilst at the same time recording the relative longevity of some constructs, and proposing that participants in Resolution Work pay mindful attention to the way different constructs are related, and the type of Work they do, as a means of managing its implications for future relationships. This suggests that the constructs most implicated in action will be those which are most easily visible, because they are precisely those which are the most attended to, but that the constructs most implicated in change will frequently not be recognised as important prior to the change occurring. Whereas the goal of description is essentially to 'freeze' reality, which denies its fundamentally processual nature, the theory allows us to observe the process of forming Cultural Configurations and working to resolve them as long-lived, regardless of the ephemeral nature of their content.

Against this background, how much attention is paid to ensuring validity becomes a matter of choice; too little risks avoidable error; too much risks describing the obsolete past with less error. Validity can be improved not only by understanding data in as rigorous and systematic fashion as possible, but also by confronting working ideas about what it means with new data, which may not, however, refer to the same phenomenon. By passing to and fro between the collection of new data, and analysis of data already collected, iteratively shuffling from analysis to synthesis and back again, knowing that neither is, or can be, 'correct', it may nevertheless be possible to detect the relatively stable underlying patterns and relationships that explain interaction, regardless of inevitable imprecision in our understanding of 'visible' data.

⁴⁴ At the risk of unnecessarily extending the argument, these criticisms are arguably valid of all research in social contexts, and are not peculiar to the approach chosen. It is, nevertheless, possible (indeed necessary) to admit these limitations for my research because they flow from my underlying assumptions on the nature of the organisation, social reality, and individual behaviour.

These considerations relate largely to the internal validity of the description. They suggest that duplicate processing of individual interviews, or parallel consolidation, would not be of much value, since the resources devoted to replication would be better allocated to taking in new data that might supersede previous analyses. Rather than using 20 interviewers to code each of 10 interviews in duplicate, for instance, it might be better to collect 20 different interviews. Benefits would accrue from such an extension of the process, not so much because it would reduce the risk of one particular researcher imposing a personal view on the data, but because it would challenge emerging understanding with a broader range of data. Thus, the approach I used was not to duplicate the analysis of data in the interests of making it more precise, but to maximise the amount of data which could be collected with the available resources (me!), even at the risk of imprecision in its analysis.

Similar considerations would attach to the idea of back-checking individual level analyses with the respondent – to the extent that the time taken could be used to collect new data, it should be. In any case, the research context is constantly evolving, and no respondent can be expected to see things the same way at two different times, so back-checking might not improve accuracy at all, but merely record an attempt to explain the past from a different vantage point. Finally, it cannot be assumed that respondents are primarily interested in accuracy. It is quite likely (particularly in the sort of conditions under which this research was conducted) that respondents are more interested in whether the description matches the picture they wish to put on display, rather than whether it faithfully presents what they painted.

At the level of the descriptive approach, the applicability of any standard of external validity is, likewise, extremely uncertain. It makes no attempt to conform to any ‘-etic’ categories, and cannot be evaluated in any terms other than the categories used by the respondents themselves. Neither is the aim to fit the description into a taxonomy or typology together with similar descriptions of other organisations. The description of the organisation is inevitably imperfect – if, it should be said, extensively and systematically grounded and so, hopefully, ‘credible’ – and only useful in its specific context. However, it can be said that the theory that has been developed appears to go some way to providing a ‘transferable’ explanation of what occurred (Lincoln and Guba

1985), in that the core category developed and its properties, and the typology of related behaviours, have face validity in other, similar circumstances.

It is certainly possible, with regard to the descriptive approach, to ask whether it would have been preferable to use some sort of more codified (and probably statistical) technique to establish groupings in the consolidation stage. There are two reasons to consider such an approach: one, that it might achieve more 'objective' results; the other, that it might lead to faster processing, particularly if it could be automated. Based on the foregoing discussion, I would clearly argue against the first position, as representing a triumph of sophistication over transparency – given the nature of the inputs in question, and the transience of the results produced, any such claim to improved 'objectivity' would be at best overblown, and at worst deceptive. It seems to me much more effective to encourage the use of the researcher's judgement, and then submit the results to the discipline of emerging reality. On the other hand, to the extent that an algorithm could be developed to speed up the generation of hypothesised groups, it would be valuable. This represents a possible direction for development of the methodology.

Mention must also be made of the implications for the generalisability of this research, that it was conducted in a University environment. There are clear differences between Universities and other forms of organisation, none the least that University managers exert relatively little overt power compared to their corporate counterparts. This difference is acknowledged – in a commercial organisation, there may well have been many more opportunities for management to directly intervene in the cultural development of the Department, for example through the device of reward systems, which are not practically available in a university. Hence, behaviours around changes such as the ones observed may have been different. However, I do not believe that they would have been so different as to invalidate the framework proposed by, for example, revealing completely new categories. The generality of this theory lies in its focus on relationships between ways of construing, and there is no reason to think those need be fundamentally different in commercial organisations. If, indeed, power differences are larger in commercial organisations, the theory predicts an increase in Judging and Policing; but whether that is observed is an empirical question, and open to further investigation.

At the level of the theory generated by this work, it does seem that the formulation is closely related to the phenomena of interest. Although, in itself, the concept of a Cultural Configuration is new and may not be easily recognised by the practitioner, it represents little more than a conceptual frame within which to understand the salient aspects of groups in relationship to each other in a given context, and to provide a more detailed language than has hitherto been available to categorise and explain different types of behaviour. Thus, from a Descriptive Relevance viewpoint, the theory proposed seems to have few problems.

6.5.2: Goal Relevance

Thomas and Tymon's second criterion of relevance is Goal Relevance – 'the correspondence of outcome (or dependent) variables in a theory to the things a practitioner wishes to influence' (1982: p. 347). In the theory that has been proposed, the 'outcome' variables are approximated by Resolution Work. There are two reasons this is likely to be of interest to the practitioner. Firstly, the behaviours comprising Resolution Work encompass most of the conflictual and, by contrast, cooperative behaviours arising from the interface of two groups. It thus focuses specifically on the activity which is usually considered to evidence difficulties in cultural interaction – conflict and resistance, as well as integration and cooperation. Secondly, the theory explicitly predicts that Resolution Work impacts not only a specific selected context, but that it creates novel contexts that affect future cultural interaction, through reframing. Thus, not only is Resolution Work of interest to the present, but understanding it offers the potential to understand the implications of today's activity for tomorrow's problems.

It is worth discussing briefly here the apparent potential for political and ethical issues to arise from the sort of understanding this theory offers. The risk is that such knowledge might allow management to manipulate people and the change process to their own ends (some managers, of course, might see that as little more than doing their job). This might be true if the insights generated by the research were in some way 'privileged' information, which gave its holders some form of advantage over those who do not know about it. Such concerns as these, however, reflect a misunderstanding of the nature of the insight produced. For instance, the analysis showed that the

management group in the University failed to recognise (more or less deliberately, I cannot know) the core construct that defined the Business School – the Management Education construct. In no sense, however, was this construct ever hidden from their view – it was, in fact, constantly on display, and in multiple contexts. Any value a group might take from the outcomes of this process, then, is not due to the secrets it reveals, but because of the better understanding it allows of differing viewpoints, which in turn might present different options for action.

What of the potential that the approach might lead to deliberate use of tools such as reframing to serve sectional interests? Again, the suggestion of this research is that the practice of reframing is already well-established in organisational life and that, far from favouring some particular group, its wider understanding might allow better detection and more effective responses, particularly with regard to the tendency to rewrite history. This is all the more so when it is remembered that reframing does not appear to be specifically the preserve of the powerful.

Far from providing differential advantage to one group, then, this work might be seen to promote mutual understanding, and to encourage the development of mutually acceptable ways forward. The description is not only empowering in the true sense of the word, it is forward looking and creative; but it does not provide a recipe for cultural change, merely its ingredients.

‘...providing management with a tool for exploring organizational participants’ perspectives in their own terms ...would facilitate upward communication and culture-conflict resolution. Further, holding a posture of cultural relativity during the exploration process would express "respect" for employees in the fullest sense of the term’ (Gregory 1983: p. 374).

6.5.2.1: Intentional/Planned Change

Although the change which is the subject of this research was deliberate, it was not planned – or, at least, no plan was available or known to participants in it. This raises the question of how to relate this study to the existing literature on Organisational Change, much of which relates to planned change.

The first point to make in this regard is that it is not *per se* the absence of a visible plan which distinguishes this change from many quoted in the literature – it is the lack of apparent attempts to get consent or support for the changes, which were essentially imposed. This is not to say that cooperative activity did not occur with regard to specific implementation details of the changes, such as decisions relating to curricula; but these were, in any case, normal consultation processes in both organisations. However, changes described in the literature normally reflect some concern for convincing those involved of their value, and enlisting their support, which was not a preoccupation in this story.

It does not seem likely, however, that the theory proposed would require much modification to handle a more typical ‘Episodic’ change process. Essentially what is absent is a managerial discourse, establishing some form of ‘vision’ of where the change would lead, and attempting to encourage participants to adopt it as valid:

‘At times of change, organizational members will construct an interpretation of events and of the implications for them (sensemaking). The senior management of an organization cannot prevent this process occurring, but they can seek to have a major influence on the interpretations that are arrived at by presenting their own construction of events (sensegiving)’ (Dunford and Jones 2000: p. 1208)

In my theory, such a sense-giving discourse would be represented as a construct, and would form Cultural Configurations in the normal way. In practical terms, such changes are usually accompanied by a great deal of communicative activity – presentations, fora, task force investigations and reports, milestone-setting and benchmarking – which was absent in this case. Such activity would have presented a goldmine of material for analysis, had it existed, but its absence or presence causes no obvious problem to the method.

It is interesting to consider how the change process observed might have differed had such a positive communication process been engaged. Ford and Ford (1995) make a case for ‘considering change as a communication-based and communication driven phenomenon’. Their approach starts from familiar philosophical foundations – change ‘occurs in the context of human social interactions’ which ‘produce and reproduce

social structures and actions people know as reality'. It is 'a recursive process in which new realities are created, sustained and modified in the process of communication', and intentional change is therefore the deliberate bringing into being 'through communication, [of] a new reality or set of social structures' (p. 542). The implication is that communication is much more than a supporting tool for implementing change – it *is* in a very real sense the change itself.

In the context of intentional change, Ford and Ford introduce the notion of different kinds of conversations: *initiative* conversations which start a change; conversations for *understanding*, which aim to explain it and develop a common understanding of what is occurring, including a vision of an end-point, and involvement and support for the change; conversations for *performance*, leading to action; and conversations for *closure*, declaring an end to a change enterprise.

What can be learnt from comparing the changes observed in this research to the framework developed by Ford and Ford? Evident differences are the absence of clearly stated goals, apart from 'givens' like re-establishing financial equilibrium and conformity with the way things were done at the University; and the absence of any visible attempt to 'manage' change – virtually all communications observed between those involved in the change focussed on operational matters, and were free of references to the process which was to be undertaken. In this sense, there was a virtually complete absence of deliberate sense-giving, unless one considers the suppression of the Management Education construct as sense-giving. Perhaps the only exception to this visible in the data (and that on a very limited basis) has to do with broader normative conceptions of how an organisation should be; 'a community' at the start of the regularisation period (as distinct from a competitive arena for cliques), and 'pitching in together' after the integration. Ford and Ford maintain that 'communication matters'; it should therefore be that its absence also matters.

There can be no dispute as to the primacy of communication, although, as already noted, this need not be purely linguistic – indeed, communication by example, falling into the category of Modelling and Influencing, may be extremely powerful. What Ford proposes is essentially that management in change situations attempt to influence the construction of reality during the change process, and that they attempt to do so in different ways at different times. They appear, as well, to make a fairly strong

assumption that the necessary changes will be easier implemented if only there is sufficient conversation to establish their rationality and deal with the interests of those involved (although whose rationality and definition of interests applies is not discussed). In this sense, the changes at the Business School and the Department can be seen to conform to the model – the first stage was a series of conversations which established how things were to be; understanding was assumed, and completion occurred when the structural changes were implemented. What the theory arising from my study provides, which is absent from Ford and Fords’ proposal, is a suggestion of other tools being available to management – sheer imposition of authority, as seen at the Business School, Modelling and Influencing, as seen at the Department, and reframing (although it was not used for this purpose in the study). The study also reinforces that, even in the absence of sense-giving, organisational members will undertake their own sense-making.

It is also important to recognise that the ‘change conversations’ which occurred at the Business School and the Department were ‘operational change conversations, rather than being externally directed to other stakeholders, and so possibly “supportive”’ (Maines et al. 1983). The differences involved in this distinction, particularly to the extent that externally directed conversations occur contemporaneously with the change, rather than as a post facto account of it, would definitely be a fruitful area for future investigation.

6.5.3: Operational Validity and Nonobviousness

If there is cause for optimism with regard to Goal Relevance, concerns might be raised in the same breath about Operational Validity – ‘the ability of the practitioner to implement action implications of a theory by manipulating its causal (or independent) variables’ (1982: p. 348). If what is revealed by the description is already clearly visible, it may be that it is simply not possible to act upon. Furthermore, describing the self-evident would represent a failure on Thomas and Tymon’s fourth criterion of relevance, nonobviousness: ‘the degree to which a theory meets or exceeds the complexity of common-sense theory already used by a practitioner’ (p. 348).

It is important, first of all, to address the instrumentalist assumption underlying this formulation of ‘Operational Validity’. The idea that ‘usefulness’ equates to providing management with levers by which they can manipulate ‘their’ organisation has deep

roots, as the previous chapters have shown. Since this research is attempting to establish itself as useful within a different tradition, it is important to understand what sort of ‘usefulness’ it might offer.

The fundamental issue, again, is *who* stands to benefit from the theory produced. On the one hand, the proposed approach can be seen in some ways as ‘subversive’, because it effectively deconstructs management discourse and places it at the same level as other voices in the organisation. It also refuses to accept any normative assumption as to how the organisation should be understood, which groups comprise it, or how they should relate to each other. It even goes so far as to refuse to take the overt purposes of the organisation at face value – it sees them, instead, as the ongoing product of interactions within and across its boundaries. In this sense, the approach might be seen to appeal at least as much to less powerful groups in the organisation as it would to more powerful ones.

Although these properties might be seen as inherently morally or politically attractive, it seems to me that their real benefit may be through encouraging the emergence of novel ways to see the organisation, both in terms of its internal functioning and in terms of its future direction. To the extent that the process is able to challenge the fixed world-views of all organisational members, it holds out the possibility of encouraging the development of new ones – and so translating imperfect description into productive action. Whilst such a process may not be (completely) manipulable by any one player, and so fail the managerialist formulation of Operational Validity, by giving a voice and therefore influence to all groups in the organisation, it might be seen as meeting a higher standard of utility. Furthermore, to the extent that the description leads to comprehension across group boundaries of previously visible but inaccessible ways of understanding the world, it must by definition be nonobvious.

On the question of Operational Validity, it is also important to note that the data suggests that deliberate choices are made as to whether to adopt a Conflicting or a Competing configuration as the basis for interaction, and that choices are made as to what type of Resolution Work to undertake, in anticipation of future conditions. Thus, it would appear not only that the sort of information produced by a study such as this *might* be useful to participants, but that, in fact, they are already using it.

What, then, of nonobviousness, particularly if participants in the process are already using similar ideas? I would argue that, even though a picture might be produced by the approach suggested that makes immediate sense to those involved – indeed, this is one of the criteria, credibility, by which its validity is judged – this does not mean that producing the picture is superfluous. In the same way that a map represents a reality which is self-evidently available for anyone who visits the places on it, but provides vital information about which way to go and what problems might arise on the way, the understanding developed by the approach proposed places the immediately observable in a systematic framework that predicts consequences of moving in different directions. Furthermore, although it produces an apparently simple depiction of what is occurring within the organisation, that depiction is a distillation from a highly complex reality, and is valuable precisely because it simplifies. The contention must be that participants are aware of the complexity, but not necessarily of the possibilities of simplification that this carefully structured and strongly grounded process allows.

6.5.4: Timeliness

The final criterion of relevance is timeliness – ‘the requirement that a theory be available to practitioners in time to use it to deal with problems’ (p. 349). By the end of the pilot phase, it took approximately 4 ¼ hours to process one hour of interview. This was further reduced to approximately 3 hours by the time of completion. Leaving aside the question of whether this is ‘fast enough’, it is potentially important to note that the process allows for individual interviews and analysis to be undertaken in parallel. This means a number of interviews might be conducted simultaneously by different interviewers, then processed and made available over a network for consolidation. In this way, analysis could be performed for quite large organisations in a matter of hours, subject mainly to the availability of trained interviewers. In addition to accelerating the process, this would introduce multiple viewpoints into it, and so, as we have discussed, improve its quality. It is also quite conceivable that members of an organisation could undertake analysis of their own organisation (an approach which would lead to some intriguing discussions that might require facilitation!), again subject to proper training. The proposal also offers advantages in terms of timeliness at a different level. Although it was initially specified around a series of one-on-one interviews and a specific use of

software and coding, which is rigorous and systematic, none of these procedures are essential to the process. The Personal Construct lens could be applied to any form of communication, as indeed was the case in the later stages of the research, and the process of validating imperfect hypotheses against emerging reality does not rely on the collection of large quantities of data, but rather on seeking information which is relevant to the emerging theory (theoretical sampling). Furthermore, the framework provided by the concept of Cultural Configuration, its associated properties, and the different types of Resolution Work, are to some extent visible directly in ongoing interaction, allowing practitioners (where necessary) to make quick first approximations for immediate action and later verification. The iterative nature of this process and its grounding in organisational activity is reminiscent of action research – taking action in the world and observing the effects. Such an approach is ideally suited to information- and time-poor contexts; the priority is on acting and evaluating the results, rather than on analysing and planning.

To the extent that the parallel with action research holds, it may offer another form of practical value:

‘(Action Research) facilitates the development of techniques which we will call “practices.” (They)...would provide the action researcher with know-how such as how to create settings for organizational learning, how to act in unprescribed, nonprogrammed situations, how to generate organizational self help, how to establish action guides where none exist, how to review, revise, redefine, the system of which we are a part, how to formulate fruitful metaphors, constructs and images for articulating a more desirable future. Such know-how is difficult to develop or even consider within the positivist framework’ (Susman and Evered 1978: p. 599).

Such benefits go beyond organisational levers that offer one-off advantage to managers in a particular context. The suggestion is that capabilities might be developed that have long-term value both to the individuals who acquire them and the organisations in which they will work in the future. Indeed, ‘practices’ might be seen as a list of skills that is definitive of a good manager. It may be that this reflects the true interest of the approach.

In this chapter, I have introduced the core category of the theory arising out of this research, the Cultural Configuration, a relationship between constructs, each associated with a specific group, which gives rise to action, or Resolution Work. I have discussed the different types of Cultural Configuration, and proposed that these, and three contextual properties of the Cultural Configuration, may be related to the type and intensity of Resolution Work. I have also proposed three types of Resolution Work, one of which, reframing, is involved in the generation of new constructs, whilst the others focus on controlling the actions of those involved in the Resolution Work. I have explored the integration of this model, and evaluated it against some well-known criteria of relevance, to establish whether it might be useful in practice.

Chapter 7: Three Critiques

The theory generated in the previous chapter does not claim to reveal a previously concealed reality, or propose some deeply hidden law of social behaviour. In some senses, it might be seen less as a theory than as a framework for interpreting social interaction, a different way of looking at what has always been there. To the extent that this framework can be seen as constituting a theory at all, that theory is not Grand Theory, but rather a ‘theory of the middle-range’ (Merton 1957: p. 39), providing a set of conceptual tools that allow us to make working hypotheses about how to understand a particular type of social context. Furthermore, the theory does not claim to be the ‘right’ way to approach these situations, merely one which may help develop insight. Other, much more developed, theories abound, and the focus of this Chapter will be to explore some of the links between them and this research, by reviewing it through three critical lenses.

My intention is not so much to validate or invalidate this theory, but to determine what contributions it makes, and perhaps to extend it. In this sense, my approach is still very much in keeping with the Grounded Theory notion of Theoretical Sampling, deliberately seeking data that is most likely to improve understanding of what we already have. I certainly do not claim to have exhaustively covered all possible critiques of my research by doing this. To undertake such an exercise merely for the sake of completeness might or might not be justified; but it would certainly be beyond the scope of this dissertation, and probably beyond the patience of the reader.

Each of the three critiques has been chosen to focus attention on particular aspects of the theory, both to clarify it, and also to draw on different perspectives to strengthen it. In several cases this suggests directions for further research.

7.1: Critique 1 – Macro and Micro

One possible critical direction with regard to this theory might challenge the way it bridges individual and collective, short and long term, and utterance and narrative. It could be summarised as follows:

The proposed theory moves too easily backwards and forwards between micro- and macro- levels, blurring the boundaries between individual construing and collective discourse. Furthermore, it risks confusing its fundamental unit of analysis, the construct, elicited as an individual event, with other possible units of analysis that have a temporal dimension, such as discourse or narratives.

Three questions underlie this critique: what relationship does the emerging theory propose between the individual and the collective; how does it handle time; and, finally, how does it compare to, and how might it be clarified by, comparison with other theoretical traditions such as discourse theory.

7.1.1: The Nature of the Cultural Configuration

The central concept of the proposed theory is the Cultural Configuration. It is a juxtaposition of ‘constructs’, each of which represents a grouping of related ways of construing⁴⁵. Each construct has been inferred by comparing observations of a number of individual acts of construing, and each is associated with and, to a greater or lesser extent, defines a group of individuals. A given Cultural Configuration is not definitive of ‘the’ relationship between groups, firstly, because no Configuration exhaustively characterises the possible interrelationships between the ways of construing of the groups concerned; and, secondly, because any Configuration itself plays a role in establishing the groups of interest. Hence, context plays a fundamental role in determining both the substance of the relationship between groups (which constructs are juxtaposed), and which of many possible ways of grouping individuals is relevant to the interaction (which groups are defined by those constructs). The type of relationship proposed is similar to that described by Chia:

‘Organization should not be thought of as something performed by pre-existing ‘agents’. Instead the agents themselves, as legitimized objects of knowledge, must be understood as effects in themselves. The identity of the individual agent is constructed in the very act of organizing’ (2000: p. 517).

⁴⁵ I use this term interchangeably with ‘acts of construction’, in keeping with the constructivist assumptions of this work.

The main interest of a given Cultural Configuration, then, is its *salience*, its implication in an observed pattern of relationships between collective entities, and behaviour related to them. The approach is also reminiscent of Brannen and Salk's view of national culture interactions in a joint venture: 'These findings, coupled with the additional observation that only those cultural attributes that become salient in the course of doing business become docket items for cultural negotiation, make it difficult to predict the path of negotiated outcomes' (2000: p. 480). The Configuration is an analytical concept which allows observers (who, by the fact of their presence, are also participants) to holistically characterise both the substance and the form of a relationship and the boundaries of the entities which are producing it, at a particular time. It aims to grasp an ongoing interaction *as a whole*, rather than forcing its dismantling into component parts that have little meaning outside of their relationship with each other. It is not an attempt to deal with cultural interaction at a sociological level, but rather to understand how the effects we know as cultural interaction arise, and how their substance in specific situations lead to characteristic behaviours in a social context.

The Cultural Configuration has emerged from examining a particular passage of events over a particular time in a particular organisational context. The process that produced it started with the investigation of individual events – speech acts, written documents or correspondence. However, the interactions of interest to the analyst occurred at a collective level, and over a relatively extended period of time. Hence, inferring shared constructs was, in good part, a matter of reconciling the individual construing events that comprised the data with the collective phenomena of interest. The concept of Cultural Configuration may be seen formally as an opposition of ideas. In this, the concept appears to reflect a basic form:

'Structural anthropologists have long maintained that cultures revolve around core ideas that are oppositional or dualistic in structure. These dualisms are said to define the ontological dilemmas that undergird everyday life. They suffuse the culture's dominant symbols, validate cleavages in social structure, and fuel the semantics of everyday speech (Eisenstadt 1989)' (Barley and Kunda 1992: p. 385)

However, I would argue that this concept of 'antinomy' only fully describes the Cultural Configuration to the extent that it is seen at once as a juxtaposition of ideas and, in the

same moment, as defining the entities which hold those ideas and concretise their opposition through interaction. Furthermore, this implies that the concept of Cultural Configuration may not be bound to any particular level of interaction; its precise mode of construction in this study reflects the specific preoccupations of the study being done. As an analytical construct, it might just as easily be applied to phenomena at other levels – for instance, relationships between individuals; between smaller or larger groups, such as the University and its competitors; or even between the University and the political institutions with which it interacts. The decision on what level of consolidation is appropriate is not a property of the analytical concept of the Cultural Configuration, but pragmatically determined by the phenomena that interests the observer. Indeed, because the choice of a Cultural Configuration implies the entities that are relating, and influences the nature of their interaction, it is also a matter of interest for the participant. The definition of a Cultural Configuration is thus a motivated, and to some extent creative act; no exhaustive listing of possible Cultural Configurations between particular groups may be made and, as I have stated, no Cultural Configuration can be taken to exhaustively describe the relationship between particular groups. If this were the case, the theory would imply that a social relationship can be characterised as existing between only two entities, which is obviously not correct. This theory asserts, however, that observing salient bipolar distinctions between a number of entities created by making those distinctions, may provide explanatory insight in a specific context.

7.1.2: Identity, or the Construction of the Self

Accepting that the Cultural Configuration can be applied at different levels of consolidation appears to assume that acts of individual and collective construing are sufficiently similar in form to be compared in the same way. This assumption might be challenged on two grounds: first, to the extent that we can see collective construal as discourse, that it implies that individual construal has a discursive nature; and, secondly, that it ignores the apparent unity of individual identity, as compared to the multiple identities involved in collective construal.

This brings me back to the foundations of this research. In Chapter 3, I argued that the same processes may be involved in producing social and personal identity, and suggested that individual identity may thus be a relatively fragmented and shifting

phenomenon, because it is socially constructed and affected by both history and context, and therefore subject to constant re-evaluation and reinvention. There is also ample support for the idea that organisational identities are ‘relatively fluid and unstable’ – an instability that may, indeed, be adaptive (Gioia et al. 2000: p. 63). Many of the ramifications of such constructivist views are developed by social identity theory and self-categorisation theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner 1982; Ashforth and Mael 1989), which place ‘the construction of prototypical and stereotypical images’ (Vaara et al. 2003: p. 420) at the core of the production of ‘self’. However, Haslam *et al* (2003), maintain that personal and social identities are fundamentally different, because the former focuses on ‘conceptions of self as a unique individual’ whereas ‘social identification of any form reflects *depersonalized* self-categorization, whereby an individual perceives his or her perspective, motivations and interests to be psychologically interchangeable with those of others who share the same social identity’ (p. 362, italics in original). In this system, identity varies between extreme poles of individual and social, along a continuum between personalisation and depersonalisation.

However, it is also possible to see ‘personalisation’ and ‘depersonalisation’ as reflecting the adoption of either a subjective or objective perspective, rather than being tied to qualitatively different categories of identity. This would allow the argument for ‘...a unitary model of selfhood, [where] unity is a dialectical synthesis of internal and external definitions’ (Jenkins 1996: pp. 20-21). It can also be noted that ‘Mead (1948) argued that individuals define themselves and make behavioral decisions relative to the social world by engaging in internalized conversations between self and others’ (Harris 1994: p. 315). This suggests a single elemental process by which identity, whether individual or collective, is continuously constructed, with the acceptance, furthermore, that it is fundamentally and unavoidably social – that an individual sees him or herself in the same socially grounded ways they see others (Ryle 1949). Hence, allowing that multiple identities may exist at the level of the individual makes it possible to seek a unified explanation of personal and social construction processes. Although this possibility is incompatible with the assumption of a unified individual, it holds out the hope of a more parsimonious theory, a possibility which should not be lightly abandoned.

This research explicitly holds that both the individual and the group are ongoing constructions; that these constructions are fluid and ambiguous, rather than objectively accessible and enduring; and that their construction occurs through interaction, rather than inhering in any single previously existing or objective 'person'. The Cultural Configuration focuses on the establishment of 'us' and 'them' groups (or selves) brought about by the juxtaposition of different ways of construing. It highlights the importance of context in such boundary-setting but, by recognising the influence of pre-existing boundaries or 'objectively' identifiable collateral features of the groups so defined (the property of Boundary Definition), goes some way to explaining the interaction between social institutions and opportunistic, or interested, conjunctions of perceptual and behavioural distinctions⁴⁶. Jenkins proposes that 'The interplay of similarity and difference is the logic of all identification, whether 'individual' or 'collective' (1996: p. 53). In this way, identity is inextricably related to the fundamental cognitive process of categorisation (Hogg and Tindale 2001: p. 58) and to boundary maintenance processes, which define in- and out-groups, and lead to the formation of stereotypes. The Cultural Configuration focuses on this interplay, and so is implicated in these core processes of identity building.

At the heart of this process, particularly if we accept the identity of personal and social identity building processes, is the human capability to act reflexively; that is, to objectify and assess the self. I have already observed that the process of construction can be seen as an alternation between subjective and objective, and that this process is also implicated in the constant (re)construction of memory (Brewer 1996). Furthermore, I have stressed the social nature of the construction of the individual self, following Mead and Jenkins, raising the question as to whether preserving the distinction between

⁴⁶ It is important to note here that the constitution of a group around a shared construct might coincide with a socially recognised boundary, or it might not. This work suggests that where a social institution coincides with a group formed around a shared construct, the social institution takes on that specific meaning in that context, and the group at the same time draws authority or 'concreteness' from the institution. Where no institutionalised boundary exists, a recognised group may form around some other observable shared feature, such as professional background or ethnicity, or the distinction may remain latent, and so not become directly involved in Resolution Work.

personal and social identity is worthwhile, as long as this is admitted. The reflexive capacity, the ability to objectify the self at the same level as other social entities, can be seen as the enabling factor for construing the self in a social context, and speaks directly to Kelly's Sociality Corollary. I thus propose that we can expand our understanding of what this research has called Resolution Work, to encompass the construction of identities *in relation to each other* at both the personal and social level and, by the same token, the establishment of boundaries between them. The process can be seen as an ongoing attempt to cohesively explain the part of the world which individuals confront at a particular time, a world which is always social and always changing. The contribution of the concept of Cultural Configuration to this discussion is its insistence that our focus should be *on the interfaces between the elements* being constructed, on the 'moment of interplay' as the act of creation, rather than on the properties of these elements treated as if they were *a priori*, graspable realities about which we can learn something. The suggestion is that all that we can learn about these elements must be learnt from their use, and that they have no existence outside that use.

7.1.3: Concepts of Time

In investigating the relationship between macro- and micro levels, I have proposed that the choice of the level at which the elements of the theory are used is in fact pragmatic, but that the Cultural Configuration is intimately involved in the creation of identity at whatever level it is applied, and that behaviour arising around it (Resolution Work) may be seen as constructing (or deconstructing) identities in the same moment as it seeks to resolve contradictions that give rise to boundaries between and around groups. This is an integration of substance in a dialectic. Another integration is also carried out: the aggregation of constructs over time since, inevitably, the events which generate the data for research occur sequentially. It is essential to address this, since the 'moment of interplay' which I seek to establish for the Cultural Configuration is fundamentally situated in time, as well as in social structure.

Maines *et al* (1983) assert that Mead's views on time have received too little attention, and have a significant contribution to make to sociological investigation. Mead proposes that understanding the present, past and future is an inherently social process, which relates the individual to the world. The past and future are envisaged as only being

experienced in the ‘knife-edge present’; and the experience of being is seen as the passing from one present to another. Furthermore, this continuity of experience is only available because of the inherent discontinuity of passing from one present to another, since it would not be possible to detect the movement if there were no discontinuity between the moments.

‘What Mead is saying is that neither the past nor the future have existence in and of themselves, but that they are important components of the present. ...The emergent and time dependent nature of the present is what provides the present with its social nature. This is so because novel and emergent events create new situations to which the person must adjust. It is in this adjustment process that previous presents are socially aligned with current presents, and thus adjustment by its very nature belongs to both earlier and later perspectives. This interpretation is inherent in Mead’s conceptualization of sociality- “the capacity of being several things at once” (Mead 1932: p. 49) – and it leads us to envision both continuity and change as involved in the present as social phenomena’ (Maines et al. 1983: p. 162).

Mead proposed three dimensions of the past: the *symbolically reconstructed* past, the *social structural* past, and the *implied objective* past (Maines et al. 1983: pp. 163-164). The first addresses an aspect of the past that has already been discussed – the reinterpretation of past events so that they have meaning in the present. The second deals with changes that occur beyond this act of reconstruction. In particular, these are ‘conditions of the continuities of space-time’ – activities which occur sequentially, and those sequences themselves, taken as being distinct from that which is being sequenced. The *implied objective* past refers to the existence of previous events that ‘had to have taken place in order to exist in present experience as a past event’ (p. 164) (‘I must have left the car in that car park, because I’m at this shop!’).

Maines *et al* also maintain that a fourth dimension of the past is implied in Mead’s work – the *mythical* past. The mythical past refers to symbolic creations that are used to manipulate social relationships, and which are not ‘empirically grounded’. The proposal of this fourth dimension serves to highlight that reconstructions of the past in the present necessarily have effect. Hence, the discovery by a Department academic of a newspaper article dating from shortly after the inception of the Business School, which

describes it as a ‘white elephant’ might be used to validate the belief that the Business School was always doomed to failure, regardless of the meaning which might have been applied to it at the time, or whether that description is in any way valid.

I am not convinced, however, of the necessity of proposing the mythical past as a separate dimension, based merely on its lack of empirical grounding. This would seem to be inconsistent with the claim that the past, like any other aspect of reality, can *only* be known through our construction of it, and therefore that ‘empirical reality’ is indeterminable. In fact, the very process of ‘proving’ or ‘discovering’ the empirical reality of the past, involving the collection and evaluation of evidence, is inevitably tied up with present projects and aims, and cannot be understood outside of those frames⁴⁷.

Nevertheless, while I am not convinced of the necessity of postulating a distinct, dimension of ‘mythical’ past in the way proposed, focussing on this aspect of its purposeful use brings about an important, and apparently general, observation:

‘The creation of a legitimate mythical past depends on its “processual validity.” This validity indicates the congruence between verifiable action on the one hand and projections of future lines of action on the other. Mythical pasts are validated through their acceptance and use as grounds for creating forthcoming action. A mythical past is made real through a complex interactive process that links assumed courses of previous acts to an anticipated and apparently continuous direction’ (Maines et al. 1983: p. 165).

Hence, elements of the past are being reinterpreted as part of a ‘new’ story with forward-oriented meaning – a process highly reminiscent of the ‘reframing’ observed in my fieldwork; and the anticipatory nature of meaning-making, in keeping with Kelly’s Fundamental Postulate.

These considerations emphasise the importance of understanding the social context of acts of construction *in their temporal aspect*; or, alternatively formulated, of treating the Cultural Configuration not just as a *structural* organising concept, but as organising

⁴⁷ I am not making a case for not attempting *at all* to determine empirical reality of either the past or the present; merely recognising the interested and manipulated nature of all such attempts, even when they are most influenced by a desire to be ‘neutral’.

over time. What has gone before matters to what we do now, not so much because of any universal laws of history, but because it affects the juxtaposition of our acts of construction in the present as we attempt to anticipate the future – in other words, because it opens up and closes off opportunities to create meaning. This view suggests that, in understanding Cultural Configurations, particular attention should be paid to two points; firstly, that the Configuration takes place in ‘the knife-edge present’, and secondly that the constructs which, for the sake of convenience, are labelled with a few words, are in their own right constructions that continue and develop over time.

7.1.4: Narrative

Focussing on the temporal nature of both the Cultural Configuration and of constructs highlights the importance of sequence and, by extension, narrative, in understanding social action. Inferring constructs, in this research, was driven by the observation of repeated acts of attributing qualities to social objects. The method specifically allowed a very broad interpretive flexibility in the identification of these constructs, allowing links to be made between different parts of an interview, between different individuals, and across events over time. It also allowed stories themselves to be identified as constructs, through the device of labelling them with a representative phrase – thus, the narrative of the ‘Unsustainable-luxury Business School’ which resulted from reframing a variety of previously occurring material, was encapsulated in a single phrase. This not only assumes that a narrative can itself become a social object (a phenomenon well known in the political sphere – ‘the Cultural Revolution’ or ‘the fall of the Berlin Wall’ for example have become ‘objects’ to which a variety of attributions may be made), but also that there exist intersubjective forms which guide meaning-making, where a simple, limited reference may evoke a rich variety of constellatory associations. In line with the postulation of internalised conversations between the self and others mentioned above, it even seems possible that such narrative forms are rehearsed not only between individuals, but in dialogues with the self:

‘It is interesting to speculate on the effect of strategic narratives on the managers themselves. In doing the interviews, there were several instances where the managers concerned seemed to be involved in a dialogue with themselves. This idea that the ‘audience’ for such accounts includes the speakers

themselves is also noted by (Watson 1995) and is consistent with the idea that the sensegiver is 'giving sense' not just to some 'other' but also to him or herself (Weick 1995)' (Dunford and Jones 2000: p. 1223).

This observation speaks to the central role of narrative forms in shaping social discourse as a phenomenon which crosses levels, and their centrality in the process of meaning-making, as well as suggesting that the nature of individual construing may indeed be discursive. Furthermore, it highlights the constantly constructed nature of narratives, which may appear as complete units, or as recurrent themes (p. 1211). Although it is possible to study such themes in their own right, the approach developed in this research treats them from 'a holistic perspective in which a theme is interpreted in the context of other parts of the text' (Chreim 2005: p. 572).

There is an extensive literature on the use of narrative approaches in organisational studies (Barclay 1993; Aaltio-Marjosola 1994; Czarniawska-Joerges 1994; Phillips 1995; Czarniawska-Joerges 1998; Pentland 1999; Beech 2000; Dunford and Jones 2000; O'Connor 2000; Tsoukas and Hatch 2001; Demers et al. 2003; Chreim 2005; Ospina and Dodge 2005). Much of this work is retrospective – it focuses on narratives of completed events, which are much easier to collect than reports of ongoing change. These accounts, in addition to standing as some form of account of the past, may also be seen in their current context, as revealing something about the ways the interviewed individuals are constructing their world in the present.

An example of this sort of narrative can be seen in Isabella (1990), a classic Grounded Theory investigation of 'how managers construe organisational effects as change unfolds,' which is, nevertheless, based on interviews of managers about events which occurred over the previous 5 years. Isabella identifies four interpretive stages through which participants in these events passed – anticipation, confirmation, culmination and aftermath. Without questioning the validity of these proposed stages, it is important to note that they are postulated from the perspective of a completed state of affairs, built around recollections of what occurred before. Narrative conventions in this sort of situation seem to enforce an underlying message that the events unfolded in some (ultimately) comprehensible fashion towards a defined and stable end state. They are reminiscent of an underlying 'journey' form, where a safe place is left, adventures occur and threats are dealt with, as a result of which a more or less 'safe' destination is

reached. Furthermore, there is usually something learnt along the way. Such a perspective is only accessible (or constructible) through recollection; it would have been extremely difficult to identify these stages as they occurred, if the ‘ultimate’ end of the process were not already known, unless they were proposed as a normative ‘sense-giving’ by those leading the change.

Of course, such a study can and does help us understand the rules managers use to build a coherent story of the past – a matter of no small interest. In relation to the current research context, for example, it would suggest that official versions (when they are established) of what occurred in the Business School are likely to focus on the rumours and uncertainty which preceded the appointment of the Head of the Faculty to the Business School; on the way the changes being implemented there during the regularisation and interregnum stages built on knowledge and experience from the past, and so were demonstrably rational; and on how the organisation was reconstructed after the integration, together with an evaluation of what occurred, in particular in terms of winners and losers. To such an approach, my research would add the reminder that these stories will be influenced by preoccupations that are active when they are told – by the need to designate some people as winners (or losers), to emphasise some ‘moral’ of the story – and that they will themselves therefore form part of ongoing work at that time to resolve contemporaneous Cultural Configurations.

7.1.4.1: Context and Constructs

Similar comments apply to Chreim’s (2006a) paper, which investigates narratives collected in 2000 and 2001, relating to two changes introduced into Canadian Banks in the 1990’s. This study focuses on differing reactions to the changes amongst both managers and employees, notes differing perspectives with regard to them, and groups participants according to the extent and speed of their adoption of the changes (‘Willing appropriation’, ‘Reluctant Appropriation’, ‘Late Appropriation’, ‘Partial Appropriation’). While the *post facto* nature of the narratives collected must be recognised, it is possible in this case to reinterpret them in their current context, and find clear examples of competing constructs and reframing occurring *in the present*. For instance, there are examples of participants constructing activities like ‘cold calling’ as a ‘service to the customer’ (p. 1276), and of the reconstruction of the past in negative

terms, as a justification for the changes which occurred. If the focus is switched from the explanations of past events in their own right, to the implications of the stories being told in the present, it is possible to see the differences between the groups as Cultural Configurations – for instance juxtaposing a ‘sales is equal to service’ construct (promoted by management) with another ‘service is not equal to sales’. This is clearly a Conflicting configuration, which can also be assessed in terms of the Boundary Definition and Power Difference property. My research would suggest, to be specific, that the emergence of any clear boundary around the group that is in contradiction with management, to the extent that the ‘sales is service’ construct remained central, would likely attract intense Judging and Policing action towards it. However, it seems from the paper that no such formal boundary exists, and that some people who are in conflict with management on this construct are quite influential account managers, so the level of Judging and Policing around the configuration is at present lower than it might be (p. 1281).

Reassessing Chreim (2006a) in this way thus provides a clear example of how the Cultural Configuration concept might be applied, even in the context of retrospective accounts, to give insight into current conditions and, even more interesting, to assess the likely behavioural effects of possible changes in the organisation. It also suggests that the approach proposed here might, at least, not be incompatible with narrative theory investigations.

O’Connor uses the term ‘embedded narrative’ to describe texts that are ‘richly indicative of the cultural circumstances of their telling’ (2000: p. 175). The embedded narrative in this case, called the ‘Vitatech narrative’, was a story of the origins of the organisation, widely referred to within that organisation, and replete with connections to values and ‘ways of doing things around here’. The story carried great authority, drawn, in O’Connor’s view, from its adherence to the general form of origin stories – providing a creation myth, the description of a fall, and calls to rebirth. O’Connor is chiefly interested in demonstrating that narratives of this sort are embedded in differing levels of context, or form part of ‘progressively larger story lines’(p. 189), in relation with which it may create different meanings:

‘Linguists have emphasized that narratives, because they demand an unusual amount of a listener’s time, must have a point (Labov 1972). And understanding

the point requires an understanding of the context in which the narrative is told: “Relevance is...ultimately, the perception of a relationship between story discourse and story situation” (Chambers 1984: p. 20) (O'Connor 2000: p. 175).

O'Connor also remarks on the fact that, although one of the central points of the Vitatech story was that its founders were people who 'really wanted to make a difference', an opportunity was taken by some to associate 'difference' with 'differentiation'. Whereas 'making a difference' was connected to a larger story about social activism in the 70's, 'differentiation' was connected to a larger story about 'really adding value' in the present. This subversion of an organisational narrative seems to have the same formal nature as the 'reframing' process described in my work; the fixing of a narrative as an institution, to the extent that it may even be labelled, then the alteration of meanings attached to it by reference to contextual material, leading to a shift in the meaning attached to the fixed element.

The Cultural Configuration concept approaches the question of context in two ways. Firstly, by taking each individual event of construing as primary data, but interpreting and consolidating it over the wider organisation and over time, it integrates context into the process of inference of the constructs⁴⁸. Secondly, through the specification of the properties of Boundary Definition, Power Differences (itself context-dependent because of the different sources of power recognised) and Centrality, it is placed in a context.

O'Connor claims that '...organizational change is an act of sense-making (Weick 1995) that dialogues across large expanses of time (linking the past, present, and future) and space (linking the organization, its parent company, its workers, and its competitors)' (2000: p. 176). I suggest that my research also shows how meaning is created by linking narratives with contexts. Furthermore, it suggests that stability and change not only coexist but are interdependent.

Finally, while my study did not investigate the narrative forms that might be applied to the events described after they were deemed to be 'completed', my sense is that survivors are likely to encapsulate the events which transpired in a narrative of the form

⁴⁸ This is one reason that mechanisation of the analysis is unlikely ever to be possible, as interpretation in context will always remain a process of human judgment.

‘justice done’ (which may equate to the ‘rebirth’ section of an origin story), as a sort of ‘moral’ for later use. Making a follow-up study to review this would also be an interesting extension of the current work, if time were available.

7.1.5: Discourse Theory

Narrative theory can be treated as part of a broader tradition, discourse analysis, which ‘is emerging as one of the primary means of analysing complex organizational phenomena and engaging with the dynamic, and often illusive, features of organizing’ (Oswick et al. 2000: p. 1115). Discourse analysis can be seen as ‘... the study of words and signifiers, including the form or structure of these words, the use of language in context and the meanings and interpretations of discursive practices’ (Putnam and Fairhurst 2001: p. 79). Because of its flexibility, and the potential scope of its application, it is hard to exhaustively list all its variants, but the approaches of most relevance to this study stress the role of discourse in the social construction of reality, and define the task of the discourse analyst as being ‘...to explore the relationship between discourse and reality’ (Phillips and Hardy 2002: p. 3), which can in many ways be seen as the central question of this research. As well as treatments of narrative, mentioned above, discourse analysis includes approaches focussing on metaphor (Morgan 1980; Morgan 1983; Morgan 1986; Tsoukas 1991; Palmer and Dunford 1996a; Grant and Oswick 1998; Oswick and Montgomery 1999), ‘language games’ (Mauws and Phillips 1995), rhetoric (Watson 1994; Watson 1995); texts (Czarniawska-Joerges 1992; O’Connor 1995); dialogue (Bakhtin 1986); conversations (Ford and Ford 1995); drama (Goffman 1958; Mangham 1986); identity (Phillips and Hardy 1997); and sense-making (Feldman 1989; Weick 1995). Like this research, it achieves its descriptions of the social construction of reality by adopting a perspective of ‘intertextuality’, analysing links across texts, moving from the micro- to the macro level (Grant et al. 2001: p. 8).

Discourse analysis has cross-disciplinary origins, and can be seen as a fundamental break with ‘traditional’ organisation and management theory, particularly in the context of the development of the organisational culture concept, challenging it ‘...on the grounds that it sought to privilege rationality by highlighting patterns, logics, and causes in a social-organizational domain where complexity and unpredictability were claimed to be the order of the day’ (Grant and Iedema 2005: p. 40). In all these respects,

discourse analysis shares common ontological and epistemological foundations to this work.

Although the fundamental unit used in this research, the construct, has not been called a discourse, it is clearly related to notions of discourse, particularly at higher levels of consolidation. It is useful to clarify how the terms may be linked before looking more closely at the implications of discourse theory for this work.

Phillips and Hardy state that ‘...three kinds of entities are created in discourse: concepts; objects; subjects’ (1997: p. 167; cited in Oswick et al. 2000: p. 1117). Concepts and objects can be equated broadly to the fundamental analytical elements of this study – attributes/qualifiers and objects. Discursive concepts are ‘theories through which we understand the world and relate to one another’. The close relationship between concept and object (the recognition of which caused a readjustment of the methodology in this study!) is noted, but the two are distinguished because the former ‘exists in the realm of ideas’, whereas the latter ‘are part of the practical order’. Importantly, the point is made that objects are not only not necessarily inanimate, but may apply to social institutions (for instance, Academia can be taken as a discursive object – and was by Practitioners). I would further argue that ideas can become objects; indeed, as we have seen, narratives or discourses themselves can be taken as objects, and attributed with various meanings in an attempt to influence action (Grant and Hardy 2004: p. 8). Lastly, the relationship between subject and object has already been identified as one of context and actor, and as one of mutual co-creation. Concepts, objects and subjects ‘not only presuppose each other, but are mutually implicated in each other’ (Oswick et al. 2000: p. 1118). Hence, the ‘components’ of a construct are conceptually identical to the products of discourse. A construct, in the terms of this research, may be seen as labelling the process by which these products are produced – effectively labelling a discourse. The discourse represented by a construct may become largely truncated or assumed, until its label is taken as representative of the entire discourse; and it may be peculiar to an individual, or be produced across smaller or larger groups.

7.1.5.1: Positioning the Research

Alvesson and Kärreman (2000: p. 1129) identify two key dimensions by which varieties of discourse analysis can be categorised, and which raise two issues in its regard: the relationship between discourse and meaning ('discourse autonomy' vs. 'discourse determination'), in particular whether discourse 'precedes and incorporates' meaning, or whether it relates to 'the level of talk...loosely coupled to the level of meaning'; and whether the focus is on detailed, local examination of discourse, or whether it is at a broader level of 'structuring the social world' ('Close range' vs. 'long range interest').

Grant and Iedema (2005) raise concerns that this approach is too restrictive, both because other dimensions might exist, and also because '...there is limited value to categorizing ODS⁴⁹ authors in ways that appear to limit the possibility of their straddling a number of dimensions simultaneously' (p. 43). They instead propose five dimensions to tease out the key orientations of discourse analysis approaches:

'Theoretical/empirical research' – the extent to which the study 'privileges theoretical discussions' or 'draws on empirical data for its arguments' (p. 44);

'Monomodal/multimodal' discourse – 'whether researchers limit their attention to language in organizations, or whether they focus on other kinds of meaning-making as well' (p. 46); 'Discourse as pattern/change' – 'whether researchers aim to unearth patterns of discourse in organizational settings, or whether they are concerned to create a space for people to go beyond patterned and predictable conduct' (p. 48);

'Cognition/practice views of discourse' – 'contrasts discourse as the effect of thinking to discourse as a manifestation of social practice' (p. 51); and 'Critique/pragmatic analysis' – 'differentiates critical research from pragmatic research' (p. 55).

These differing ways of categorising discourse analysis raise some issues as to the positioning of the method I propose, and the analysis it has produced. Firstly, in terms of the relationship of discourse and meaning, a case has been made to see meaning as arising from the relationship (or relating) of discourse to context. Furthermore, this work, with its focus on detecting some broader pattern of discourse in individual acts of construing, would hold that the act of relating discourse and context is performed by

⁴⁹ Organisational Discourse Studies

motivated individuals, constantly co-creating themselves and their world. Such a formulation makes it futile to consider ‘meaning’ as something which could exist sufficiently separate from discourse to allow it to be ‘loosely coupled’ (what Alvesson and Kärreman call ‘transient’ views of meaning); however, at the same time, it does not allow that discourse is all or determining of meaning (a ‘muscular’ view). The approach is much more a processual one, where meaning is richly emergent from the complexity of individuals interacting intentionally, but unpredictably, with their worlds. This issue is in many ways related to the Structure/agency debate which forms the subject of Critique 2 below.

Likewise, it would seem to miss some of the point of this work to classify it by its evident focus on social patterns beyond the individual, if only because this study aims to ground the macro-patterns perceived in empirically observed micro-level discourse. One of the recognised benefits of discourse studies is their ability to be applied ‘at several levels’, which might be labelled ‘microlevel’, ‘interpersonal, mesolevel’, and ‘macrolevel’ (Grant et al. 2001: pp. 10, 11) or ‘micro-discourse’, ‘meso-discourse’, ‘Grand Discourse’ and ‘Mega-Discourse’ (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000: p. 1133), but which must always recognise the embeddedness of one level within another (O'Connor 2000; Grant and Hardy 2004: p. 7). The main concern with focusing too much on the ‘micro-discourse’ level appears to be what Alvesson and Kärreman call ‘myopia’ – the failure to recognize broader patterns; and the major risk with focusing too much towards the ‘Mega-Discourse’ level appears to be a lack of connection with local richness and significance and something akin to Glaser’s concern to avoid ‘forcing’ the data – what Alvesson and Kärreman called ‘Grandiose’ views. By adopting the Grounded Theory method, and deliberately seeking to bridge the levels, I hope this work goes some way to meet Alvesson and Kärreman’s call that ‘Grandiosation and muscularization of discourse should be grounded and shown – rather than, as in some Foucauldian and poststructuralist writings, be postulated’ (2000: p. 1147). Such was my intent, however successful I may have been.

7.1.5.1.1 ‘Theoretical/empirical research’

With regard to the first of Grant and Iedema’s dimensions, it is hard to see how a Grounded Theory study could be treated as anything other than empirical. That being

said, however, it is important to note that nothing in the study would detract from the contributions of Chia and Cooper as ‘major proponents’ of the theoretical approach. In fact, the ‘theoretical’ orientation relates to this study through the fundamental assumptions as to the nature and knowing of social reality, and its processual nature. Where Grant and Iedema note that Chia and Cooper ‘...regard empirical evidence per se as no more than a rhetorical convention: it feigns realness by “mimicking reality”’ (2005: p. 45), I would suggest that this work, focussing as it does on theory generation rather than evidence-based theory validation, should be read as a necessarily personal narrative of discovery rather than a scientific proof of any ‘reality’. Further, to the extent that it is correct to say that, for ‘...Chia and Cooper, ... discourse represents an abstract set of structuring principles or relationships that lie beyond what people do and say’ (p. 46), I would reiterate my position that intersubjectivity and emergence make this both necessarily true, and somewhat misleading. What people do and say is (self-evidently) done and said by (and between) them; but is constrained by, and helps create, realities which are far beyond their understanding or control.

7.1.5.1.2 ‘Discourse as pattern/change’

Related comments would apply to the distinction between ‘Discourse as pattern/change’, in the sense that the theory developed by this research relates pattern and change; and, indeed, suggests that both are intertwined. Furthermore, the specification that individuals act through construing, and in the process co-create social reality, both defines a space for change, and constrains it within a web of interactions. While this approach relies on detecting patterns in interrelationships, it also describes the reframing process, which involves the subversion of meanings, and so leaves scope for, and makes a contribution towards understanding, change. The study also investigates the circumstances under which such ‘marginal’ meanings are most likely to be tolerated. The suggestion is that, by focusing on the ‘moment of interplay’, on the relationship between elements, even when these are recognised as being fluid and ambiguous, it is possible to transcend some of the dilemmas presented by focusing on the elements themselves outside of their relationships.

7.1.5.1.3 ‘Monomodal/multimodal’ discourse and ‘Cognition/practice views of discourse’

Some significant questions are raised by considering this research with regard to the ‘monomodal/multimodal discourse’ and ‘Cognitive/practice’ dimensions. At first sight, it would appear that the approach I have used is fundamentally and exclusively language-based and cognitive. This, although not out of step with a number of other treatments of discourse, would open the assumptions of the work to some question. For instance, Grant and Iedema refer to critiques being made of monomodal, linguistic approaches on the grounds that they fail to give priority to the effects of discourse, in favour of focusing on the act of representation. Furthermore, it can be taken as self-evident that material artefacts, and motives, as well as non-linguistic behaviour, are implicated in social interaction, and these aspects do not appear to be formally recognized in the research method I have utilised.

On the one hand, I take these observations as indicating a potential improvement in future applications of the research method. It might well be valuable to expand the scope of the data collected to include non-linguistic or behavioural data. Such an extension need not necessarily involve abandoning the ‘Object/attribute’ form adopted for the construct, since neither object nor attribute need be verbal. Indeed, as has been pointed out, Kelly always maintained that there was no need for construal to be conscious at all. However, such an extension would represent a challenge to the interpreter in assessing what is being objectified, and what attribution is being made to it, as well as how to record it, since construct must be verbalised to be visible to a reader. This problem is not insurmountable – after all, even in the current research, the constructs are necessarily hypotheses of the analyst. Moreover, as is the case with linguistically expressed constructs, it needs to be recognised that the ‘accuracy’ of interpretation of any one act of construing is not of primary importance – the main focus is on the detection of shared approaches to construing across people and time, and in relation to each other, and this is always assisted by confronting data with more data, rather than by limiting it to what can be considered ‘accurate’.

On the other hand, it is important to recognise that the focus of this theory is on explaining the behaviour produced by a particular conjunction of constructs and entities, not on providing a comprehensive description of all the nooks and crannies of culture production at a given site. It is an open question as to whether any element of meaning-

making which is salient in such situations will remain completely non-verbal. I would argue that it is likely that the most important differences in a given situation will give rise to some verbal tag, which could be picked up in the method proposed. Furthermore, although the definition of the formal data unit is fundamentally linguistic – it will be recalled, in the semioticians sense: ‘...beyond spoken words to include objects, behaviors, practices, images, symbols, etc.’ (Brannen 2004: p. 595) – the interpretation of the data was made by a human analyst who was acutely aware of the importance of symbolic use of artefacts, non-verbal behaviour, and the results of construing. For instance, I found it advantageous to work from recordings rather than transcriptions, due to the greater richness of recorded data; and the description of the events which transpired over the research period included reference to symbolic acts, such as the removal of the front desk at the Business School, and symbolically laden artefacts, such as the tea trolley. The analysis of the data therefore allowed these forms of meaning to modify and moderate the outcome. Thus, it is hoped that some of the worst potential effects of a purely linguistic focus have been avoided.

Finally, I would maintain that care must be taken, when acknowledging the importance of non-linguistic behaviour and material constraints and interests, not to fall into the trap of underestimating language, or of slipping into a ‘realist’ ontology. Speech can be seen as “‘speech acts”, which are not idle: They bring into existence a social reality which did not exist before their utterance’ (Ford and Ford 1995: p. 544), and what ‘...managers must do...can only be put into effect via discourse’ (Grant et al. 2001: p. 14). ‘Mere’ language should not be underestimated. Also, while the importance of material interests is fully recognised, it should be recalled that no object has meaning inherent to itself. The assumption that material interests somehow have priority over other purposes is a cultural assumption, and should be treated as such.

As for the apparently exclusively ‘cognitive’ foundation of the research, such an assessment would probably stem from the classification of Kelly’s Personal Construct Theory as fundamentally or exclusively ‘cognitive’, a classification which, as I have mentioned, he resisted. On the contrary, I would argue that this research should be placed within the traditions of Weick or Wenger, which respectively ‘centers on social-interactive definitions of “mind” (Weick and Roberts 1993), (and) locates the logic of

organization in people's shared meaning-making practices' (Grant and Iedema 2005: pp. 52, 53).

7.1.5.1.4 'Critique/pragmatic analysis'

With regard to the Critical/pragmatic distinction, this research is somewhat difficult to classify. Its intention is clearly pragmatic, although this is not to say that the aim is to 'improve organisational performance' or some other managerialist goal. However, it does, unashamedly, aim to provide perspectives on organisational action which might be useful to participants, including managers. It also clearly and explicitly recognises, and aims to make visible, the exercise of power. More will be said on the treatment of power under the next critical theme, but I hope to have gone some way towards achieving the claim made for Boje (1994), that he 'straddles the critical-theoretical as well as the pragmatic-analytic camps and therefore exemplifies an intriguing confluence of postmodern, critical, and pragmatic change perspectives' (Grant and Iedema 2005: p. 56)

By considering what are the implications of bridging levels of analysis in this research, I hope to have demonstrated that this is, in fact, an important strength of the approach, since it allows individual and collective levels to be related to each other, both structurally and across time; because this is one important way that context is integrated with construction; and because it allows collective level, consolidated analyses to be systematically grounded in specific observations of empirical events. Furthermore, I hope to have established productive links between my approach and narrative and discourse traditions, which both extend this work, and demonstrate the utility of the Cultural Configuration and its associated properties as an analytical concept that maintains focus on the 'moment of interplay', which lies at the heart of the social construction of reality and the self.

7.2: Critique 2 – Structure, Agency and Power

A second critical direction might be established around the assumptions of the proposed theory with regard to the possibility of individual choice. It could be summarised as follows:

The proposed theory fails to take a position on the pre-eminence of structure or agency, and so fails to address the fundamental role of power during organisational change, or to clarify the limits of individual choice.

7.2.1: Empirical Observations

The empirical results of this research demonstrate varying degrees of individual refusal to accept a dominant discourse as, for instance, in the case of the Practitioners' maintenance of a Conflicting configuration over Academia. At the same time, it demonstrates the imposition of a dominant discourse, and the exclusion or silencing of dissenting voices (perhaps, more accurately, their decision in most cases to keep silent or leave, without observable compulsion), effectively overcoming such resistance. However, I believe that it also says something about how power may be exercised, and about the mechanics by which dissent may be maintained, despite the existence of a dominant discourse.

It has already been observed that the establishment of a Conflicting configuration actually, in the same moment as it establishes dissent, recognises the very distinction that defines it. A Conflicting configuration can therefore be seen as a dispute over which party has the authority to evaluate the distinction in question, and so impose their view of the world. This suggests why the incidence of coercive behaviour may be higher in Conflicting configurations, particularly where power differences are great and it is therefore practical to resolve the configuration quickly by silencing the opposing voices. In the data, however, coercion was accompanied by resistance, sometimes quite long-lasting and overt. The implication has been drawn that the application of coercion, particularly of the Judging and Policing variety, cannot be carried out without a range of costs to the powerful party. This may reflect, as has been suggested, a need to maintain some narrative of integration, or façade of unity. It might also reflect the existence of

such broader social constraints as giving everyone ‘a fair go’, or concern not to draw into question other elements of the dominant discourse, such as ‘maintaining academic freedom’.

If even large power differences do not always allow the unbridled use of coercion, how is control maintained, and what does this suggest about possible mechanics of resistance? The research suggested that using Modelling and Influencing behaviour was one means of avoiding the costs of coercion, although it was used more in Competing than Conflicting configurations. It has been suggested, moreover, that one of the reasons for this may be that such behaviours in effect remove the possibility of maintaining a different meaning (‘management are only interested in their privileges’) by providing enacted evidence to the contrary, and, more subtly, raising the stakes of maintaining resistance by making it a direct personal challenge (‘If it’s good enough for management, why isn’t it good enough for him?’). Thus, Modelling and Influencing behaviour is a powerful way of silencing resistance because it denies conflict and raises its cost. At the same time, it can be seen as reinforcing the institutional authority in place, because it draws directly on status differences for its force.

There are, however, cases where Judgement and Policing occur, and it must be assumed that it is used, despite its apparent risks, in pursuit of some result which is unattainable through the use of Modelling and Policing. The answer as to why this happens may lie in the preferred mode of operation of the individual in question⁵⁰, or it may lie in the fact that Judging and Policing can be used to achieve exclusion, which seems difficult to imagine as a direct effect of Modelling and Influencing. Finally, Judging and Policing also reminds others that the threat of force still ultimately underpins existing arrangements.

In this study, then, power is seen to act by the silencing of voices, either by imposing a specific discourse, or excluding a person. It is only infrequently enacted directly; even Judging and Policing seems to operate because the subordinate anticipates that resistance will be futile, or accepts authority (which may be the same thing). This is

⁵⁰ Some would put this down to ‘personality’, others to background, but I do not wish to get into the nature vs. nurture argument here!

consistent with the discussion about the relationship between construction and power in Chapter 3. However, the use of power seems to be moderated by three limitations: the risk that using coercion will lead to divisions in the organisation that may result in future conflict, leading to deliberate under-application of power by the superordinate; the indirect application of power, which brings less than maximal force to bear on the subordinate; and the limited reach of power – the inability to entirely control a discourse, either in all its detail, or over longer periods of time – which leaves room for the subordinate to escape its full effect or develop a resistance strategy. Thus, the exertion of power is neither absolute nor complete.

The limitations on the exercise of power can be related to the reframing process, since power may be used to ‘fix’ some part of a discourse, or impose or obstruct its use. For instance, ‘Academia’, as imposed, dealt with the special mission of academics, their special status, and the existence of ‘Academic standards’ by which its members should be judged. These elements were not open to contradiction (or, if they were contradicted, attracted a coercive response). However, no discourse, particularly at such a broad level as this one, can be completely specified. Uncontrolled material may be found, material which might be used to reinterpret the discourse through reframing.

For instance, side by side with the idea of ‘Academia as community’, I frequently observed a construct of the ‘fiercely independent academic’. The ‘Academia as community’ construct is closely linked with a broader discourse which attempts to develop a ‘common vision’ for the University, as part of a ‘strategic planning’ orientation more frequently seen in corporations, and in the context of external political demands for accountability at universities. It appears to be quite central to a group I might call ‘University Management’, those with senior executive responsibilities for the University (and, frequently, its overall funding). It is, therefore, tightly controlled, and widely rehearsed in ‘corporate’ documentation – a ‘fixed’ element of the overall Academia construct. The ‘fiercely independent academic’ construct, on the other hand, did not seem to be of much concern to anyone, nor to be much questioned, although it was quite widespread. It therefore represents a potential source of material for reframing the Academia construct (and indeed, might be involved in some division I did not observe, because of my focus on the Business School and its successor organisations). At issue seems to be what some might say is an historic debate around the

understanding of the nature of the Academic community – as a supportive environment for individuals going about their own research, in the direction and conduct of which no-one else has a right to intervene, or as a group of employees with an obligation to produce specific results, and subject to evaluation and control – like, for instance, middle management in commercial organisations. In a different context, and given certain boundaries and conjunctions of political or material interests, this could easily be seen as a specific configuration in its own right. It is also worthwhile noting again that, because my approach focuses on a specific interface rather than describing a culture in its entirety, the absence of a construct from its analysis does not mean that the construct does not exist, or would not be important in other contexts. Organisations and broader society are deeply interpenetrated by competing and conflicting ways of making meaning (see pg. 73), and the debate over academic identity is doubtless a critical one. It is visible only tangentially in this study because it was not germane to the interface of interest. However, had my focus been, for instance, the cultural interaction between the University and its regulating government department (Education, Science and Technology), this may well have been of central importance.

Reframing might be started by those in power, to suppress or subvert a competing construct (as seems to have been the case with the conversion of the Management Education construct into the Unrealistic-luxury business school), or by those subject to power, to carve out a space for themselves (such as the Teachers, who built a position within the Department based on their positive attitude to teaching, in conflict with the dominant evaluation of Research/Teaching). The possibilities for subverting a dominant discourse would seem to be increased where the discourse is rich or broad, providing extensive material, and where the individual is skilled in developing contradictions between uncontrolled but accepted material and the authorised meaning of the discourse. Put another way, because a discourse is inseparable from its context, and because contexts keep changing, the context is a significant source of material to bring about change in the discourse. Furthermore, by ‘fixing’ a discourse, the superordinate group effectively defines what material is available to subvert it.

A final point that emerges from the research is the possibility that a discourse may survive its repression, to the extent that it can be recreated from unsuppressed material. For instance, I have already mentioned the possibility that the juxtaposition of the

‘Discipline-Management’ construct with the Teachers’ positive evaluation of teaching might lead to a resurrection of something recognisable as the Management Education construct. To the extent that material that forms part of a suppressed discourse also forms part of other, permitted, discourses, it then seems possible that suppression may not be entirely effective, or permanent.

This review of the empirical data suggests that power may be exercised through discourse but that the very fact of its exercise creates space for resistance. Space for resistance seems to exist, in part, because of the costs and the indirect application of coercion and, in part, because it is possible to manipulate material in the discursive context, ‘under the radar’ as it were, of the powerful. However, the material which is available, and the skills and experience of the individuals concerned, must place limits on the initiation and the effectiveness of resistance. In terms of this critique, structure seems to influence the resources available for discourse, and the positions of power which obtain; but the individual also seems to have considerable flexibility in manipulating those resources, and avoiding coercion to at least some extent, which means their action cannot be seen as determined wholly by these considerations.

7.2.2: Theoretical Connections

As I have already intimated, this issue is partly implicit in the previous discussion of micro- and macro- levels of analysis, and of discourse, particularly the question of how much collective discourse constrains or limits individual constructions – the potential for the individual to generate novel meanings beyond dominant discourses. In essence, I answered this concern by asserting that meaning should be seen as arising from the active and ongoing relating, by motivated individuals, of discourse to context, in a process of constant co-creation of self and world. I propose, first, to examine how agency may be integrated into social action; and, second, to consider the relationship of agency and structure; then, third, to consider how power is exerted, and what are its limits.

7.2.2.1: Making Space for Agency

Hardy *et al* (2000) make a direct observation of the use of discourse as a ‘strategic resource’ in the case of an NGO operating in Palestine, which encountered problems

with a process of ‘localisation’, and was able to retrieve its status as an ‘international’ organisation by engaging in deliberate discursive activity. They propose a model consisting of three ‘circuits’: a ‘circuit of activity’, in which individuals intentionally make discursive statements, create and distribute texts using a wide variety of narrative and rhetorical devices, and so link concepts and ‘referents’ to create objects; a ‘circuit of performativity’, where these concepts are recognised as having meaning by, and resonate with, individuals towards whom they are directed, and these individuals recognise the right of the speaker ‘subject’ to speak; and a ‘circuit of connectivity’, where the new discursive statements successfully link concepts and objects for other people, create new discursive responses, and so influence the context of future discursive activity (pp. 1235-1236). Hardy *et al* ‘...suggest that it is possible for individuals to engage in discursive activity and to access different discourses to generate new meanings that help – or hinder – the enactment of particular strategies. However, such use of discourse is not infinitely pliable’. The limits of flexibility are due to the actors’ location in a specific discursive context (with its temporal dimension), from which concepts and objects must be drawn, and in which action is interpreted. Thus, ‘...a complex relationship emerges as the activities of actors shape discourses, while those discourses also shape the actions of those actors’(p. 1228).

As Hardy *et al* note, their study ‘focuses on the impact of discursive activity on outsiders’ (p. 1245), and they suggest that future studies could focus on how it affects members inside the organisation. In some ways, my research can be seen as addressing this question – with the proviso that I do not recognise the primacy of the organisational boundary in identifying insiders and outsiders, as Hardy *et al.* implicitly do in making this distinction. The Hardy *et al.* model would provide a useful tool to track the ‘infiltration’ of new (or competitive) discourses, and could be integrated into future applications of my methodology. It also serves to highlight the importance of understanding the ‘subject position of the enunciator’ of discursive statements, which would form part of the ‘power differences’ property of my model, and suggests closer attention could be paid to the way discursive activity is ‘received’, a perspective which is dealt with in my research by comparing data across different individuals and looking for similarities or differences. However, the extent to which direct observation could be made of some particular stages of the process, such as ‘resonance’, rather than simply

seeing its result – the apparent adoption of a similar construct – would need to be established.

It is also important to note that what Hardy *et al* call ‘new’ discursive statements are, in fact, constituted from already existing discursive resources (cultural material, in my terms), and so would be treated in my work as reframing existing constructs. As Hardy *et al* observe: ‘Sometimes, individuals may be sufficiently creative and powerful to invent totally new concepts but, as this case suggests, they are more likely to draw on other discourses – interdiscursivity – to ‘borrow’ concepts from elsewhere’ (p. 1245). Approaching the phenomenon from Hardy *et al*’s perspective has the advantage of highlighting discursive innovation; approaching it from the direction of this research emphasises the continuity of the discursive activity and its involvement in interaction; in either case, it is clear that a wide range of actions occur around reconfigurations of well-recognised contextual material.

The two terms which seem to be most important in understanding these phenomena are ‘interdiscursivity’ – the use of material from one discourse in another – and ‘intertextuality’ (Bakhtin 1986) – the appearance of discursive material across different texts (not necessarily written). It seems to be that individual agency is involved in making the links between different materials and contexts, and that these links are neither determined, nor have predictable effects. Thus, there seems to be a space carved out for the individual at the heart of the machine. Furthermore, since many individuals are involved in making such links, the process is both competitive and constitutive of common interests. Nevertheless, while it is possible to observe discursive activity, and recognise it as intentional, the nature of that intention always remains uncertain (and subject to construal, in line with Kelly’s Sociality corollary):

‘...the range of meanings and values that any author may draw on in the formulation of the microdiscourse is wide. ... Human agency is reflected in the authorial elements of the narrative: the choice of events to report, the selection of labels, the assignment of meanings to those labels, the positioning of the arguments within the broader text that help create specific interpretations or impressions, and the focus on specific criteria for the evaluation of the narrative. However, the intentions of the authors remain unknown’ (Chreim 2005: p. 589).

7.2.2.2: Relating Agency and Structure

If this research suggests that individuals are able to carve out a space for themselves as thinking, creative beings in the interdiscursive cracks of ongoing interaction, it must also be said that the story it tells appears at times to exhibit a certain inevitability, which might be seen as reflecting the imperatives of structure that no individual can escape. Was any outcome ever really possible other than the marginalisation of the Business School staff within the new Department? How is it that, despite the enormous weight of individual effort surrounding the ‘Research/Teaching’, and ‘Discipline-Management’ constructs in their various configurations, resolution still seems far enough away to suggest that they may yet become part of a reborn Management Education discourse, itself yet again a potential source of friction within the University? Why, if such an outcome appears to be a mere repetition of past problems, has it not been possible for a more definitive resolution to be produced, even with the full advantages of power available to management?

A first approach to such questions must observe that they all display the benefit of perfect hindsight, which makes it possible to confidently identify the current situation as a repetition of the past, or makes it possible to give such a convincing explanation of its causes that it seems incredible that any other outcome might ever have been considered possible. As pleasing as it would be, though, for this account to be credited with such persuasive power, this would be a completely illusory conclusion, since it fails to recognise all of the possibilities that were discarded, the roads not travelled and the choices not made, in producing the result that emerged. This illusion might arise because a narrative of change like this must, if it is to be manageable and comprehensible, occupy itself with what happened, rather than the much larger field of what did not. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that what has occurred is certainly only one of a multitude of other outcomes which were once possible, but are no longer; that each step along a particular path closes off a thousand others, but also opens up a multitude of new, previously inconceivable, possibilities. I have already, in line with Mohr (1982), distinguished process theory, where a precursor condition is *necessary* for an outcome to occur, but not *sufficient* from variance theory, which seeks efficient causality, where independent variables are both necessary and sufficient to produce a given outcome. Despite the fact that variance theory seems to form the template for the overwhelming

majority of modern scientific discourse, I would argue that explaining social behaviour must be seen in process, not variance, terms. In a process theory, how a necessary condition produces a particular outcome may be convincingly explained – but that explanation can never be used to suggest inevitability.

That being said, it is clear that there is a strong relationship between the choices available to those who participated in the events I have described, and the historical and cultural context in which they made them. I have proposed that meaning should be seen as arising from the active and ongoing relating of discourse to context, by motivated individuals, in a process of constant co-creation of self and world. I have already sketched some of the origins of such an idea, from constructivist thought, to sense-making, with a good deal of Personal Construct Psychology and a little complexity theory thrown in for good measure. A coherent and highly developed example of where such ideas might lead is available in structuration theory (Giddens 1979; 1984; 1987; 1993), which sees social systems as being produced and reproduced by ‘Structuration’, or the formation of structures. These are ‘...the rules and resources people use in interaction, and they are analyzed as dualities: they are both the medium and the outcome of the interaction’. They are carried as knowledge about interaction, and knowledge about a context, which ‘can be drawn upon strategically by individuals to achieve their own goals in that context’ but ‘...exist only through being applied and acknowledged in interaction’ (Riley 1983: p. 415). Structures are formed through ongoing interaction, which also, over time, forms social institutions. In this way, individual action may be linked to social reality, change to continuity, and agency to structure.

Structuration theory encourages a focus on ‘deep structures’, which are seen as ‘...relatively stable, largely implicit and continually recurring processes and patterns that underlie and guide surface, observable events and actions’ (Heracleous and Barrett 2001: p. 758), but which are brought into being by those surface actions. Heracleous and Hendry apply structuration theory in the domain of discourse to suggest that discursive structures may be linked with communicative action by the modality of ‘interpretive schemes’ (2000: pp. 1263-1264). Deep structures, in these terms, can be seen ‘...as persistent features which transcend individual texts, speakers or authors, situational contexts and communicative actions, and pervade bodies of communicative

action as a whole and in the long term' (p. 1266). According to Ranson *et al* , interpretive schemes are '...the indispensable cognitive schema that map our experience of the world, identifying its constituents and relevances and how we are to know and understand them' (1980: p. 5).

Bartunek (1984) has commented on the similarity of the term 'interpretive schemes' to a number of other concepts, including shared meanings, world views, myths, schemata, and even organisational culture, all linked by '...the underlying assumption that any given experience can be understood in multiple ways' (p. 355). Personal constructs might also be seen as an extension of 'Interpretive Schemes' (Schutz 1967), or "Frames" (Goffman 1975). Interpretive schemes also suggest a link between sociology and psychology, as Heracleous and Hendry observe (2000: p. 1268). They detect a 'fairly fundamental, if fruitful contradiction' between the way interpretive researchers draw on 'agent-centred cognitive psychology' to understand how meaning is produced and, at the same time, on social constructionist ideas that 'would appear to support a discursive psychology completely at odds with the cognitivist position' (p. 1255). This 'contradiction', if such it is, lies at the heart of this thesis, and further exploration of the theoretical links between structuration theory (or its various alternatives) and the various related psychological approaches – 'discourse psychology' (Harré and Gillett 1994) and 'schema' (Taylor and Crocker 1981), to which I would add Personal Construct Psychology – would seem to hold significant potential. The project would echo DiMaggio's (1997) call to explore links between cognitive psychology and social cognition with sociology of culture

'...not to psychologize the study of culture, but to lay a foundation for a view of culture as working through the interaction of shared cognitive structures and supra-individual cultural phenomena (material culture, media messages, or conversation, for example) that activate those structures to varying degrees' (p. 264)

One contribution of this work to such an investigation is an empirical demonstration of the linkage between individual and collective meaning-making processes, and their interpenetration with social action. It also suggests that there is value in focussing on the dynamic interface of discourses or interpretive schemes, rather than attempting to

exhaustively define them in isolation. Ranson *et al* (1980) comment that ‘...the continual counterposing of framework and interaction is unhelpful because of its implicit and inaccurate opposition of “constraint” to “agency”’, and favour ‘ a more fruitful perspective, focusing upon the interpenetration of framework and interaction as expressing a relationship that is often mutually constituting and constitutive’ (p. 2).

Structuration theory also suggests, in line with the comments made on monomodal views of discourse, that attention must be paid in any future extension of this method to the material and non-linguistic contexts of interaction, and material and economic relations. That being said, this work is essentially in agreement with a structural view of organisations that

‘...entails the following: a focus on both observable action and the deeper structures that guide action, and a recognition of their dynamic interrelation; a view of social structures as rules and resources drawn on in everyday interaction, shaping but not deterministic of human agency; an understanding that structures can thus be reproduced or potentially changed through interaction and over time; and a treatment of people as active, knowledgeable agents who reflexively monitor their situation as opposed to being ‘structural dopes’ determined by social structures’ (Heracleous and Hendry 2000: p. 1260).

7.2.2.3: Power

Having asserted that individual agency exists, and can have effect, but that it is in constant interrelationship with structure, there is a need to account for power, extending the discussion of power and construal in Chapter 2. How is it exercised, why is it effective, and what are the limits on it?

The initial analysis of the empirical section of this study provided examples of coercive behaviour of two main kinds; exertion of hierarchical authority to impose certain courses of action or exclude individuals from or include them in discussions; and the silencing of voices brought about by discrediting speaker positions and taking control of discourse (in particular the reframing of Management Education as Unsustainable-luxury Business School). Looking more closely at this, two observations can be made; firstly, that there appear to be different types of power, and secondly, that power has

been equated with coercion, and coercion of a particular kind, an assumption which needs to be challenged.

Clegg (1989) suggested that three interconnected 'circuits of power' can be defined, each connecting to the other. These comprise (1) episodic power relationships, which are concrete acts of social agents, (2) rules of practice at the level of social integration that fix relations of meaning and membership, and (3) structures of domination at the level of system integration which are brought about by social practices that empower or disempower individuals. Both the levels of social and system integration are open to 'exogenous external influences', such as technology, which can bring about changes, and may then lead to adjustment at other levels. Vaara *et al* (2005) make an interesting empirical application of Clegg's ideas in the context of the choice of official language in a Finno-Swedish bank merger, with the aim of linking observable interaction and deep identity, and seeing '...how a fixing of the social relationships and related practices and techniques creates more permanent structures in social life in general and organizations in particular' (p. 601). The implication for this study is that power relationships are unavoidably involved in, and so modified by, ongoing social interaction and identity processes.

Another interesting framework is offered by Hardy (1994). This relates individuals, their organisational context, and the societal context of the organisation, and proposes four dimensions of power: decision-making, 'nondecision-making', symbolic, and systemic. Decision-making power rests on recognised authority and/or control over resources. 'Nondecision-making power' refers to the ability to control the decision-making process to exclude the consideration of alternatives or issues, or ensure that particular decisions are made, without direct intervention. Symbolic power involves the management of meaning, the ability to generate taken-for-granted understandings that privilege or prohibit a course of action, or advantage or disadvantage an individual or group. This is an active dimension of power. In contrast, the systemic dimension represents the taken-for-granted context, the societal institutions and practices that advantage or disadvantage actors without any intervention occurring.

Examining these frameworks reminds us of the importance of context, and the variety of forms it may take. Furthermore, it argues against one-dimensional views which suggest that power is fundamentally about the domination of one agency by the wilful acts of

another. Although this is possible, power can be vested in structures that position actors in ways that predispose towards certain outcomes, and require no intentional act by anyone. In terms of this study, the establishment of a Cultural Configuration, which involves defining an interrelationship between discourses, and in the same moment constituting and relating groups and boundaries around those discourses, also establishes power positions. Furthermore, these relationships must be understood in the context of broader systemic features, which both determine the possibilities available to actors attempting to resolve a given configuration, and act as a frame for individual action, which may in turn challenge or modify relationships or context. Such ideas add significantly to the richness of the Cultural Configuration concept, and could be further developed to both improve the research method and the analytical framework used.

This discussion also helps enrich the concept of Resolution Work. Essentially, this was born from the observation of activity around a given Cultural Configuration, activity which aimed to promote one construct or discourse over another. Positions of power were used to advantage a particular construct, and the nature of the Resolution Work itself was affected by the relative power positions of the groups concerned. Moreover, it should be noted that, because the groups involved in a configuration are in some sense defined by the construct they share, the process of promoting one or the other construct must be seen as affecting the integrity of the groups involved, and so as being inherently political. Attempts to gain control of discourse might involve coercive behaviours by individuals (Judging and Policing, or Modelling and Influencing), or might involve the creation or promotion of reframed constructs, which need not be coercive, but is necessarily a political action, because it affects the range of possibilities available to actors and their relative positions. Hence, the exercise of power is not merely or solely a question of coercion, or of silencing of voices; acts of reinterpretation or argument are also political acts, because they have the potential to change subject/object positions, and modify the very groups involved. Such interrelatedness is noted by Vaara:

‘...political divisions can be seen as products of the actors’ identification processes in the context of specific issues’ (1999: p. 23).

It is also important to recognise that most of the exercise of power observed in this study was not of the ‘decision-making’ variety, nor even of the ‘nondecision-making’ variety. In many cases, participants in the organisation effectively policed themselves.

This observation brings to mind the concept of the Panopticon, a prison in which an unseen observer in the centre is able to observe the inmates, which was promoted by Bentham (1748-1832), and famously analysed by Foucault (1975). The Panopticon relies for its effectiveness on the assumption that the possibility (if not necessarily the fact) of being observed, together with the credible threat of punishment, is often sufficient to bring about a desired behaviour. The concept has been used, amongst other things, to question the role of information systems in organisations – see, for example, Jacobs and Heracleous (2001), an analysis of Management Control systems in German organisations, which neatly demonstrates the links between organisational practice, historically-situated ideologies such as Scientific Management, and broader societal discourse.

Even if, as Giddens (1984) has argued, it is possible to overstate the power of the Panopticon as a ‘total’ institution, the concept still has purchase when we consider the very limited range of behaviours generally considered appropriate by actors in any particular organisational situation. It is possible to see organisational culture, particularly as promoted by managerialist writers, as attempting to use ‘culture’ to establish a form of Panopticon, by which not just the behaviour, but even the goals, of individuals can be controlled. But how does the Panopticon operate if the prisoner’s understandings of expected behaviour and threat of punishment differ from those of the gaoler? For this could be seen to be the case, when power is exercised across cultural boundaries, and expectations and beliefs about appropriate behaviour therefore differ. If, as we have suggested, organisations reflect ‘multiple cross-cutting contexts’ (Gregory 1983), the way unseen control affects behaviour is likely to be at best somewhat unpredictable.

A final observation is also necessary. It was noted in the fieldwork that Judging and Policing and Modelling and Influencing were not only directed by the superordinate towards the subordinate. On occasions, Judging and Policing was also directed at superordinate figures, although its expression was usually different – for instance, calling on broader societal standards such as ‘fairness’ or ‘ethics’. Likewise, and although no instances of this were seen, it is perfectly plausible to imagine subordinates attempting to influence a superordinate figure by using Modelling and Influencing behaviour – ‘setting a good example’ (‘If they can do it, surely he should be able to’

works in both directions!). Furthermore, the exercise of the symbolic dimension of power, the making of meaning, ‘...is not limited to the elite. All social actors have some ability to manage meanings and the question of who is most successful in the application of symbolic power is an empirical one that depends on the context and on the actors involved’ (Phillips 1997: p. 44). Hence, power should not be seen as being uniquely about subjugation – it is also about resistance. This is even more the case when we consider the inherently political nature of identity formation, which is implicit in the approach that I have proposed to organisational culture. The very process of establishing and maintaining an identity and, by extension, interacting with other groups, unavoidably involves the use of power. Without entering an ‘ends-means’ argument, it seems reasonable to conclude that ‘power is not necessarily negative, but is often positive (Knights and Morgan 1991) depending on the societal practices that it creates or sustains, in other words its pragmatic effects’ (Riad 2005: p. 177).

In responding to this second critical theme, I have proposed links to bodies of theory that not only suggest how some space for individual agency may be maintained, while the powerful influence of structures is also recognised. Furthermore, the concept of the Cultural Configuration has been enriched by establishing a clearer understanding of the diverse nature of power. A number of improvements to any future application of the research method have emerged, in particular the need to ensure that material and non-linguistic aspects of events are properly taken into account.

The discussion also suggests that the concept of the Cultural Configuration is not alien to the theory considered, although it does encourage a focus on the interface of discourses and groups at a particular time, rather than seeking to treat a situation as if it could be exhaustively described, without reference to its social or temporal context.

7.3: Two Clarifications

Before continuing to consider the third critical theme, it is important to clarify two points arising from the discussion of the first two.

7.3.1: Reframing

This study has, perhaps rather rashly, attached the name ‘reframing’ to an important process identified in the fieldwork – rashly because there is already an extensive

literature on ‘frames’, ‘framing’ and reframing, and has been for some time (see, for instance, Goffman 1975; Shrivastava and Schneider 1984; Morgan 1986; Weick 1995; Bolman and Deal 1997: p. 1265). Without entering into a discussion over whether one or other usage is appropriate or not, it is necessary to specify what I intend in this context.

According to Chreim (2006a) ‘*Frames* are generally seen as templates that guide understanding of events, and *reframing* is typically viewed as a managerial activity aimed at changing the meanings associated with organizational situations in an attempt to influence organizational members’ interpretations’ (p. 1261, italics in original). There is thus a link to be made between both the patterned ways in which individuals understand their world, along the lines of the ‘interpretive schemes’ discussed in the previous section, and the manipulation of meaning in order to achieve certain ends – symbolic power in Hardy’s (1994) terms. As such, reframing can be seen both as a demonstration of agency, in a domain where, as we have discussed, there is potential for both the powerful and the disempowered to influence events; and as a representation of the ability of broader discourses to contain individual action. For this reason, although managerialist literature tends to emphasise the use of reframing as a management activity, I maintain that it should be seen as available to any participant, within the constraints of their subject positions, skills, and available discursive resources. Palmer and Dunford (1996b) comment that reframing is frequently associated with a ‘voluntarist’ perspective. They identify four constraints on its operation – cognitive limits to the individual’s ability to deal with the complexity of the organisational world; ‘frame dominance’ and the limits of language, where individuals are trapped within dominant frames that have become embedded in organisational practice; ‘conceptions of action and their limits on reframing’ which refers to the various ways in which reframing might occur, but not result in ‘action’; and ‘Knowledge and power’ where they question the potential for reframing to transcend power relations which have become accepted as natural (which might be related to Hardy’s (1994) ‘systemic’ dimension of power). According to Palmer and Dunford, ‘...if reframing theory is to be of value to the management of change, it needs to provide greater clarification of the processes through which reinterpretation and analysis and subsequent action and can undo sedimented thought processes and practices, and the limits to this’ (1996b: p. 20).

Formally, as I have already proposed, reframing consists of a change in the signification of an existing discourse, brought about by re-evaluating some of its component material, perhaps accompanied by, or made possible by, the addition of new material which contradicts the original significance. This involves the definition of two elements; the recognised, to some extent objectified, discourse, and the meaning 'it' creates in a given context; and contextual material which either is, or can be, incorporated into it. Hence, a discourse affected by reframing is an objectified entity with a familiar meaning, made up of contextual material which is organised according to recognised rules of logic and/or narrative to support that meaning, but whose overall symbolic value may be changed by modifying or re-evaluating the contextual material which supports it.⁵¹

This conceptualisation recognises both a fixed element (the objectified discourse) and elements that are open to change (the material that constitutes the discourse in its context) together with a set of rules about how they may be related. It links the discourse to context, since the material which constitutes it forms part of the context, and so to broader discourses, and to social institutions, such as accepted logic, or rhetoric and narrative conventions: '...frames (individual and organizational) are intertwined with wider discourses that surpass the individual and the organizational meanings'(Chreim 2006a: p. 1265). It is not instrumental or 'voluntarist', in the managerialist tradition, since it is not advanced as a problem-solving device or competitive advantage for the individual who can 'do' it, in the style of Bolman and Deal: 'The ability to see new possibilities and to create new opportunities enables leaders to discover alternatives when options seem severely constrained' (1997: p. 433). Rather, its domain is that of the management of meaning in social interaction, and its effect is not (at least directly) seen in the 'performance' of an organisation, but in the legitimisation of 'common' knowledge, the authorisation of subject positions (and, conversely, the denial of voice), and the formation of new commonalities or distinctions between groups.

⁵¹ It would be interesting to investigate possible links with humour, some forms of which might be seen to be similar to this description.

The phenomenon of fixed and shifting levels of discourse is dealt with by Heracleous (2006) and Barrett (Heracleous and Barrett 2001). Drawing on studies of rhetoric and hermeneutics, they propose to look at discourses in terms of ‘enthymemes’ or ‘arguments-in-use’.

‘Enthymemes are rhetorical structures of argumentation. In contrast to syllogisms in logic, enthymemes are usually not fully expressed, with one or more of their premises being taken for granted or assumed by the audience. The premises in enthymemes are only generally or probably true in a particular social context; their truth or rationality is not universal, but is conditioned by and arises from the sociocultural features in that context’ (Heracleous and Barrett 2001: p. 762)’

Their research identifies recurring themes within and between texts, and relates them to each other as patterns of argumentation or enthymeme structures. Consistent with structurationist approaches, some themes are ‘persistent deep structures’, which have normative functions that ‘...support or rebuke action-oriented argumentations which are more explicitly articulated in communicative actions’ (Heracleous 2006: p. 1066). Quite different communicative actions are shown to develop around the same deep structures. However, shifts may also be observed in deep structures: ‘Explicit central themes in communicative actions related to particular contextual factors...can over the longer term influence the structural features that underlie subsequent communicative actions in a continuous structurational process’ (2001: p. 775).

Whilst Heracleous and Barrett’s work resonates with my research, and might provide a useful formal framework for further exploring the reframing process, I do not see the distinction between deep structure and communicative action as operating in the same way. Certainly, parts of particular discourses in my work can be seen as fixed, generally because they have been specifically authorised by powerful individuals or institutions, and others as more flexible. However, there are other discourses which are clearly ‘deep’ in the sense that they recur frequently and widely across the organisation, and are very durable, but which do not appear to be particularly inflexible (such as the Research/Teaching distinction). My work suggests that another important influence on the flexibility of a discourse might be whether it is implicated in establishing a distinction with another group, and so has an important role in political and cultural

interaction. It is also possible to see some forms of apparent inflexibility as having more to do with the phenomenon already noted, the attachment of fixed ‘labels’ to discourses, than with revealing a particularly ‘deep’ structure. Whilst some discourses may, indeed, be inviolate, it is debatable whether they are necessarily deep, because they may lead to an extremely wide range of possibly conflicting behaviours. In similar, and related, fashion, the persistence of identity-defining labels does not necessarily imply stability in the meanings the labels convey (Gioia et al. 2000; Chreim 2005). The flexibility which can be achieved in generating meaning while not contradicting a ‘dominant discourse’ is also clearly demonstrated in Mueller *et al* (2004), a study of the negotiation of change in a UK Hospital trust.

Other ways in which reframing could proceed might include the manipulation of tropes. The importance of metaphor in organisational language – and to a much lesser extent, the main other forms of trope (metonymy, synecdoche, irony) – has been widely investigated (Gioia et al. 1994; Boje 1995; Burrell 1996; Palmer and Dunford 1996a; Oswick and Montgomery 1999; Akin and Palmer 2000; Putnam and Fairhurst 2001; Heracleous 2003; Vaara et al. 2003). All tropes involve using a word or phrase in a way which is different from its usual sense: they exhibit a similar formal relationship between fixed and flexible elements, through which meaning is created. Hence, by shifting or extending a trope, shifts in meaning can be accomplished. A specific example of the flexibility in meaning afforded by tropes, and the way they interact with organisational texts and may be implicated in negotiations, can be seen in Putnam (2004). It is interesting to note that the formal nature defined for these processes is essentially semiotic. Future theoretical development may well worthwhile on this point, perhaps to see whether there is evidence of what Glaser would call a Basic Social Process – ‘fundamental, patterned processes in the organization of social behaviors which occur over time and go on irrespective of the conditional variation of place’ (1978: p. 100).

7.3.2: Competing and Conflicting Configurations

One of the key proposals of this research has been that the establishment of a Cultural Configuration leads to Resolution Work, which attempts to achieve conformity between the constructions of the groups involved. I have already commented on some conditions

under which a configuration might become quite long-lived – when, for example, the constructs involved are not too central to the more powerful party and/or to the extent that power differences are small. The implication might be made that a Cultural Configuration is always in some sense a negative relationship. However, I would argue strongly that this need not be the case. In the first place, given the inescapability of Cultural Configurations forming between groups and, in addition, the central role I have defined for them in constituting and giving unity to those groups, as well as distinguishing them from each other, it seems to me they must be treated as facts of life and dealt with as such. Furthermore, my own experience suggests that (sometimes heated) interaction between groups is frequently an important source of creativity and progress in organizations, and of learning for individuals. This may be seen, for example, between professional groups such as marketers and technical or finance personnel, or between national groups in cross-cultural contexts, where differing perspectives, and a certain amount of contention, may lead to novel solutions. It is, on the other hand, also quite possible for damaging conflict to arise around such divisions. I would suggest that, rather like power, a Cultural Configuration should not be seen as either inherently positive or negative, but rather judged by the pragmatic outcomes it produces.

Palmer and Dunford (2002) provide an interesting example, in the Flight Centre organisation, of two competing discourses coexisting, apparently in a state of creative tension. The juxtaposition of these two discourses, labelled respectively ‘competitive individual’ and ‘collaborative teamwork’, would establish a Competing Configuration in terms of this research, to the extent that each became identified with a different group. In this case, however, this does not seem to have happened: ‘...while the company has inscribed these discourses into its organizational practices as resources to achieve success, the discourses are not necessarily separate to subjects or actors who utilize them’ (p. 1066). The research identifies a set of ‘interpretative routines and practices’ which were used to maintain the discourses in coexistence, and repair damage when coexistence was disrupted. These routines and practices were habitually performed, so, in a sense, institutionalising the coexistence of the discourses.

The Flight Centre study demonstrates that it is possible, and potentially beneficial, to maintain competing discourses in an organisation. It would be interesting to look for

examples of shifts in the content of both discourses over time. My discussion on reframing suggests that, while the two discourses may continue to be recognised side by side, and perhaps even as distinct within the organisation, their meanings may not necessarily remain quite as distinct. Palmer and Dunford observe that it might have been possible for another researcher to read the situation at Flight Centre as involving a single discourse synthesising the two discourses (p. 1067). It is not inconceivable that organisational members may achieve the same reconciliation.

Bearing in mind these comments on the Flight Centre study, it seems that there may still be significant difficulties in maintaining a Competing configuration where it becomes associated with observable boundaries, and/or where power differences are great. This is certainly borne out by my own experience. Even when acquisitions with which I have been involved were carried out with the intention that the acquired organisation be kept separate, maintaining its own identity, practices and expertise, it is difficult for me to identify a single example where independence could be said to have been maintained for any length of time, particularly as ‘independence’ would be defined by the acquired party. There seems to be an inexorable pressure to deal with difference when it can be associated with identifiable groups.

Because a Competing configuration is more likely to be dealt with by non-coercive activity like reframing, it might seem that it is likely to be easier to resolve than a Conflicting Configuration. However, this need not necessarily be the case. Welcomer *et al* (2000) examine the story of a developer who wished to establish a waste dump in a small community, and the resistance mounted by that community against the project. The developer attempted to deal with the community’s objections on a rational level. However, rather than meeting rationality with rationality, the community

‘...soon discovered the benefits of emotion as a weapon in the rhetorical war... Ultimately, they used the supposed irrationality of emotion as a rational means to provoke disagreement and achieve their end of foiling the developer’s attempts to achieve consensus’ (pp. 1198,1199).

Welcomer describes this as a ‘dismaying tactic of steadfast non-participation’, and makes a case for not assuming that rational discussion is the only way to resolve a difference (or even the best, from the viewpoint of some participants). The path to

resolution may not pass through consensus – and a dispute that becomes irreconcilable may in fact be easily resolved because one party has to absent themselves from the field. In the terms of my research this suggests that another form of coercive behaviour might exist – a refusal to participate in Resolution.

7.4: Critique 3 – Misunderstanding the Nature of Culture

A third theme of possible criticism of the theory I propose might choose to challenge the nature it proposes for culture, contrasting as it does with most mainstream presentations. This might be summarised as follows:

The proposed theory focuses on ephemeral relationships which fail to capture the longevity of cultural effects. Furthermore, it treats culture too much as a cognitive, linguistic phenomenon, instead of dealing with the hidden, taken for granted assumptions that really constitute the heart of cultural phenomena. Whatever it deals with, therefore, it is not culture.

I have proposed a method for generating initial hypotheses about the personal constructs used by individuals in organisations that are undergoing change, and relating them with each other. I have, furthermore, generated a theory that explains how, in relating these to each other, different behaviours are produced, and how constructs change over time. The approach seems to be at least potentially useful, measured against a well-known set of criteria for relevant research. Its admitted imperfections are in fact inseparable from its value as a practical tool, because of the demand they make that theory be constantly confronted with action. But does it, in fact, address ‘culture’? Might this framework not be seen as merely a subjectively influenced distillation of some key elements of discourse taking place within a specific organisation at a specific time? By focussing on such visible phenomena, might I not have caught politics or some other beast in my sights, leaving culture lurking unseen in the jungle, waiting to leap on me when I turn my back on it to head back to camp?

The approach I have chosen specifically precludes any attempt to build a ‘comprehensive’ description of ‘a culture’, because this would represent an attempt to immobilise ‘it’. On the one hand, pinning culture down at a certain moment would be inconsistent with my goal of understanding its dynamics; and, on the other hand, it would be impossible to achieve, both for practical reasons and because the phenomenon

being described is a moving target. Culture, instead, is seen as revealing itself in, and being inseparable from, interaction – and specifically communication. In this sense, I have swapped exhaustiveness for salience. The approach responds to the same sort of problem identified by Adler and Graham (1989), in which the international organisational behaviour tradition has ‘Unfortunately...focused on single-culture descriptive studies and multiculture comparative studies, rather than studies investigating cross-cultural interaction’ (p. 516), and responds to Shenkar’s recommendation, in studying cross-cultural joint ventures, that we should be ‘...focusing on the interface between transacting entities, rather than the void between them’ (p. 523).

This perspective is consistently carried through in the theory – as has been stated, it is a theory of how groups relate, and in the process are brought into being, not of what properties the groups may have, and how their behaviour might be predicted by knowing them. The focus is on explaining cultural interaction as it occurs. It is not necessary to assume that each ‘culture’ must be understood in its entirety in order to do so, any more than we need to understand the entirety of the state of the atmosphere at a given moment to explain the emergence and behaviour of a cold front over time. This suggests that, as the context changes, different aspects of the cultures concerned will become more relevant, and others less so – indeed, this is precisely the nature of the Cultural Configuration concept. Hence, not only will the nature of interaction between cultures change over time, but the very groups involved may be redefined. Cultural interaction seen this way is an unfolding story, an ongoing discussion about who are ‘we’ and, in the same moment, who are ‘they’.

It is true, then, that this theory fails to provide a means for measuring, or describing, the culture of any group or organisation. Fortunately, it did not set out to do this. I have argued that what is often called ‘organisational culture’ is, in any case, a construct designed to meet a certain technological purpose, which serves mainly as a language by which managers can immobilise and evaluate ‘their’ organisations, and assert their prerogative to impose changes on ‘it’. As such, it says little about what really happens in and between organisations, serving more to maintain management pre-eminence.

In the light of this assertion that representationalist, managerialist approaches to organisational culture only have tenuous links to organisational reality, and certainly do

not constitute a firm base for evaluating or planning proposed organisational changes, it is interesting to consider how they have become so deeply entrenched in modern management practice. It is, after all, possible to see the popularity of such approaches amongst organisational researchers as reflecting the long standing quest to invest social sciences with the aura of certainty that attaches to the physical sciences. But how is it that practicing managers, so famously obsessed by results rather than explanations, would accept approaches which are not only theoretically weak, but potentially give the wrong answers?

In Chapter 2, I observed that managers may not expect the same from theory as academics. Theory is for use, not an end in itself. If no academically endorsed theory is available, this will not lead to inaction – there are plenty of ‘common-sense’ theories available. Indeed, it is possible that management surreptitiously adhere to these even when appearing to use the ‘latest thinking’. However, there may be more to it than this. In 1996, Dunbar *et al* examined the concept of ‘frames’ and their effect on the quality of strategic decision making, particularly in the context of entry to then emerging markets like Russia. They proposed, drawing support from Morgan (1986), that ‘...we need to cultivate the art of critical inquiry in our students, or an ability to ask questions based on an inductive exploration of socio-cognitively created worlds’ (Dunbar et al. 1996: p. 32), and suggested that this was lacking in the MBA courses of the time. In response, in an essay endearingly entitled ‘In Praise of Managerial Narrow-Mindedness’, Porac and Rosa stated that

‘...managerial frames are neither accurate nor inaccurate and ...a frame's fit with the external environment is largely irrelevant. Instead, we suggest that a firm's success is a function of its ability to impose frames on the environment and that consistency of purpose and a focused mindset are the keys to competitive advantage’ (1996: p. 35).

Hence, instead of ‘...help(ing) managers to periodically destroy old beliefs and create new ones,... business education's primary task is to teach managers how to develop strategies that are based upon their firm's unique skills and to pursue these strategies relentlessly’(p. 35). This response not only challenges central notions like alignment or adaptation in strategy; it also asserts that the environment is not a given, but is modified by our actions, even as it shapes those actions. Of course, there is no shortage of

examples of the failure of ‘Managerial Narrow-Mindedness’, least of all in Russia, and this dispute therefore also underlines the dangers of taking unqualified positions. However, it is particularly relevant when trying to understand practitioner interest in ‘organisational culture’ to observe this assertion, that in practical application the ‘correctness’ of a model may be much less important than its ability to crystallise clear programmes which can then be imposed. This may be a valid example of Weick’s ‘any old plan will do’ adage (2001: p. 347).

What contribution does this theory make, then, to the practical problems of managers? Dealing only with the general aspect of this question, since Chapter 8 will cover specific implications for practice, it is important to surface an underlying assumption in the ‘any solution will do, as long as we can impose it’ position. Implicit in this argument is an episodic approach to change and cultural change. It may well be correct that it is possible to compel an organisation to conform to a certain programme, as evidenced by the achievement of concrete objectives at the end of the change period. However, this implies imposing temporal boundaries, by establishing starting and finishing points. What is not recognised in such approaches are the trade-offs that need to be made to impose the solution, which may create undefined new issues, either for the future, or in domains outside of those under surveillance. The phenomena of ‘unintended consequences’ has been examined by Harris, Ogbonna and Wilkinson, who determine that they are ‘...both pervasive and profound’ (Harris and Ogbonna 2002: p. 47) and conclude that the enterprise of planned culture change is ‘unlikely’ (Ogbonna and Wilkinson 2003: p. 1174). Adopting an overly planned approach to change, then, might bring to mind the old aphorism that we should be careful what we wish for, as we may just get it!

The approach that I have taken owes its general value to practitioners *not* to its claims to facilitate the manipulation of culture, nor even its description, but to its ability to generate insight into how groups form and interact around aspects of cultures. Because of its focus on interaction, this approach may be able to integrate phenomena that are closely related (and crucially important) to change management and cultural change, such as identity and politics.

The same clarification needs to be made in response to the critique that the proposed theory does not deal with phenomena that are usually considered to be central to culture;

the deeply hidden, taken-for-granted underlying assumptions that are supposed to constitute culture, and the unspoken, non-linguistic artefacts around which cultural activity must be organised, and to which it gives meaning. For example, Orlikowski and Yates (1994: p. 542) ask us to consider as an example of ‘different organizing processes’ the case of two firms, in one of which decisions are made by discussing and voting in open, participative meetings, in the other of which decisions are taken by a leader and communicated by memo. My research, by contrast, would only consider such a difference between two organisations under two conditions; that the organisations came together, as for instance in the case of a merger; and that the different decision-making styles became recognised as relevant to participants’ understandings of organisational action. Because the preoccupation of this theory is salience, to the extent that any element is not implicated in a given situation, it is not dealt with. To the extent that this difference is salient, it will become an element of interaction, and will be recognised and examined. It is also correct to observe that salience is unavoidably ephemeral, and that culture has an aspect which appears to demonstrate a level of stability and longevity which at times verges on exasperating. The theory proposed does not deny the longevity of cultural, or discursive, material and resources; it does, however, assert that they are employed for pragmatic effect by intelligent actors in specific contexts, which themselves evolve due both to the actions of those actors and external influences. This linkage of past and future, context and action, in the emerging present has already been noted (pp 189-192).

In this chapter, I have positioned the theory generated from my fieldwork in the context of some important related areas of existing theory, to extend and clarify it, and to identify areas for further research and improvement. I have explored the implications of the theory for the relating of macro- and micro-levels of analysis and the structure/agency question, and established links with narrative theory, discourse analysis and structuration theory. I have suggested that the reframing process detected in my fieldwork may represent an important general phenomenon. I have also explored some of the differences the approach proposed implies in the way organisational culture is viewed, and what might be expected from it in practice.

The process of comparing the theory I have generated with other existing theories is an integral part of the Grounded Theory process of constant comparison, which serves to

identify issues with the emerging theory and understand its implications more fully. Whilst this may not (with the benefit of hindsight) be seen as the most efficient way to have generated the resulting theory, that is not the concern of the methodology. Instead, the focus is on enriching and clarifying the emerging approach, and positioning it with reference to existing ways of dealing with similar questions.

Chapter 8: Practical Implications

I started this work asserting an avowedly practical intent, and must now explain what implications it has for practice. I can think of no better way to present that explanation than as a series of recommendations. These are not intended to be taken as general rules, which can be applied in order to achieve or avoid certain organisational effects. I have argued against the idea that organisations can be ‘mastered’ by applying a ‘technology of management’ in this way. I am also wary of the dangers of trying to reduce such a complex subject into a few aphorisms that are subject to misinterpretation when repeated in a different context. I therefore intend these comments to be taken as challenges to existing practice, or pointers on the road to insight, rather than as being particularly valuable in their own right. Furthermore, they cannot fully reflect all the implications of the study, if only because those will be different in different contexts. However, they may offer some hints on to how to use these ideas, and establish what makes them different from more traditional approaches.

8.1: Influencing Culture

This research suggests that cultural conflict is both omnipresent and inevitable – and not necessarily negative. Because each individual understands the world in unique ways, and because organisations are sites of constant interaction situated in ever-changing physical and social contexts, shared understanding must always be limited in scope and duration. Apparent stability and longevity resides in physical objects and technologies, and social practices and institutions that are treated as objectively real. Some, but not all, of these are either so well-established that they are not questioned, or are protected by powerful interests – but the meaning of most of them is subject to negotiation, and shifts as contexts change. These shifting meanings both resolve old conflicts and create new ones.

Most ‘practical’ approaches attempt to deal with this flux by applying some set of pre-established descriptors to organisational culture, which are assumed to have some form of general validity, but which, in fact, mainly reflect the dominant discourse of the organisation or theoretical orientation that produced them. Nevertheless, such

approaches may have effect: to the extent that they are used to focus attention on specific matters and so create shared understandings amongst the groups whose consent is needed for change, they may well catalyse it. However, their results will depend not so much on their validity as on the way they are used, something that has more to do with prevailing structural and material conditions, and subjective interests and capabilities, than on anything inherent in the approaches themselves.

This study approaches the issue from a different direction. Instead of focussing on ‘culture’ as an empirical unit which can be objectively described or directly addressed, it looks for its manifestation in particular contexts, and specifically in the interrelations of groups and the different ways they see their world at a given place and time. It proposes that the form of these relationships can be categorised, and that the groups involved in, and defined by, their interrelation attempt to resolve the differences in the way they see the world. Because their activity to this end is conditioned both by the type of relationship involved, and by certain structural and political factors, and because the sense-making process is never entirely controlled, it is possible to influence both the activity and the relationship itself. Hence, understanding the specifics of what is occurring in terms of this framework may help generate insight into the effects of certain actions on the interaction between the groups concerned, and suggest ways in which sense-making is being or may be altered.

8.1.1: Focus on building the future rather than diagnosing the past

The first implication of this framework is that influencing cultural behaviour is more a question of moving forward than knowing where we’ve come from – ‘creat(ing) new forms of management and organization that transcend the individual cultures of their members’ (Sackmann et al. 1997: p. 26). Although culture surveys and instruments might provide a useful focal point for starting conversations about change, it is the management of those conversations that matters in terms of outcomes – including the interpretation of whatever ‘objective’ material is available. Furthermore, the implication is that influencing cultural interaction should focus much less on what is *not* possible, and more on what *can* be done (Adler 2002: p. 258).

Such a conclusion will come as little surprise to many practicing managers – but this research goes further, in providing an analytical tool to understand the central issues in a given situation, and assess the implications of action.

It is also important to recognise that this research suggests that focussing too much on ‘defining target cultures’, or writing mission statements, is at best unlikely to add much value to change processes, and may, at worst, result in the same practices being maintained, after much disruption, with changed language used to describe them. Instead of focussing on ‘culture’ as an objective reality, this approach suggests that it is more important to look at the level of concrete practice and action, and develop new ways of interpreting them, as a prelude and a framework for practical change (consistent with the intervention model proposed by Weick and Quinn (1999) for Continuous Change). The theory I have produced, and my own experience, seems to me to suggest that it would be futile, and counterproductive, to separate the levels of ‘managing culture change’ and managing day-to-day activities. Vaara (1999) comments on this phenomenon:

‘...most of the decisions affecting operational integration are made in the normal decision-making arenas along with other issues to be dealt with, which provides a contrast to most studies in this field implying that integration issues form specific managerial agenda, somehow detached from other decision-making activities (p. 20).

This reflects one of the dangers of treating ‘Episodic change’ as a separate class of change; the focus on control may have the effect of separating the change dialogue from the daily life of the organisation, as a separate discourse carried out by project teams and top managers, to the universal disinterest of the rest of the organisation. Whatever the scale of a change, and the management approach to its implementation, it is daily practices and actions that matter.

8.1.2: Focus on the specifics of the situation, and don’t be driven by general theory.

The concept of ‘cultural distance’ is frequently encountered in the literature, particularly that related to international business (Brannen and Salk 2000; Shenkar 2001).

Essentially this concept has it that cultures can be located relative to each other in some way, and that some are ‘closer’ together than others. It is usually assumed that as

cultural distance increases, so will the difficulties of merging or getting two organisations to work together. These ideas have led to suggestions that managers should take cultural distance into account when considering acquisitions, alliances or joint ventures, possibly even arriving at the conclusion that some cultures may never fully understand each other (Adler and Graham 1989: p. 517).

A similar concern is raised by Heracleous and Barrett in the context of organisational change: ‘...deep structures may be as important determinants of the success of a change program as, for example, whether a change leader adapts [sic] a directive or participative style’ (2001: p. 774). This seems to assume that deep structures are the main determinant of the ability of different groups to develop common perspectives. Since deep structures are inherently hard and slow to change, it also implies that conflicting deep structures may represent quasi-insurmountable obstacles to groups cooperating in change processes.

A different perspective is suggested by this research. I have already commented that it seems that a wide variety of communicative action can be reconciled with any particular deep structure, and that elements that are ‘fixed’ in a given context are not necessarily particularly ‘deep’. Indeed, Heracleous and Barrett themselves note that synthesis can occur between the perspectives of two groups at the level of communicative action, even though their deep structures appear to remain unchanged. Although they also suggest that change of this sort might not be persistent, I would argue that this is not necessarily an impediment. In any case, no ‘end state’ will last for ever – how long, after all, before the next reorganisation? – so, if it is possible for the groups concerned to reconcile themselves at any level for the time necessary to a specific purpose, why does it matter that their deep structures are in conflict? Moreover, deep structures should not be treated as unitary, indivisible elements which may come into conflict – conflict will develop around specific aspects of the deep structures of both groups, and should therefore be dealt with in its specifics.

The same is even more true for the concept of ‘cultural distance’. I have argued against treating culture as an indivisible unity, in favour of looking at its manifestation in a relational context. This makes it meaningless to speak of cultures being ‘closer to’ or ‘more distant from’ each other, particularly when one is dealing with organisational contexts where internal variation may be just as important as generalised cultural

differences between nations (Brannen and Salk 2000: p. 480). Cultures may also be similar in some ways and different in others – and there is no point trying to understand how they relate in any terms other than those specific similarities and differences. Furthermore, there is no reason to assume that cultural distance necessarily leads to conflict – what Shenkar (2001) calls the ‘illusion of discordance’ (p. 524), or that discord is necessarily a bad thing. Coming to a situation with a vague general concept like cultural distance in mind may create problems in its own right. Vaara (1999), in his work on organisational politics in cross-cultural mergers, found what he called the ‘paradox of cultural proximity’ – ‘the problem of disregarding actual cultural differences in the context of assumed cultural proximity’ (p. 21). Conversely, a context of assumed cultural remoteness might just as easily encourage over-sensitivity to cultural differences – a phenomenon that my experience suggests is wide spread amongst new expatriates!

The Cultural Configuration approach avoids such issues because it is specific and focuses on empirical detail, and because it does not attempt to project broad general rules onto complex, ambiguous contexts. It would support Brannen and Salk’s’ (2000) conclusion that:

‘...aggregate models of cultural difference are useful only to the extent that they serve as latent conceptual anchors guiding individuals’ cultural responses to events. ... structural/contextual influences together with individuals’ culturally determined sense-making with regard to specific organizational events are more useful determinants of negotiated outcomes’ (p. 451).

8.1.3: Don’t assume which boundaries matter – find out

This study also encourages us not to focus solely on the division between two organisations around their formal boundaries, but to start by discovering the unifying and dividing constructs across a context of interest, then relate them to formal or observable boundaries. This makes it possible to develop a much richer, more dynamic, and more useable picture of how cultural interaction occurs. Perhaps there is a significant conflict between the technical divisions of two merging companies, while the rest of the two organisations function well; or perhaps between the marketing group of one and the finance function of the other. It is even possible that alliances against a

group in one organisation have formed across organisational boundaries, creating internal division where none existed before. In such circumstances, it is pointless to try to consider the situation at an organisational level – it must be understood in its specifics. Alternatively, formal boundaries might not be the relevant focus at all – concerns might arise around professional or national culture differences which would never be considered at all if only formal boundaries were considered. It is surely much better to treat boundary relevance as an empirical question, and focus on what is actually happening, than to go into the field with a preconceived picture.

Vaara identified ‘...a need to go to the details of particular settings and situations and not to contend with vague cultural rhetoric and simple mental models’ (1999: p. 23). This is completely consistent with the direction of this discussion, and underlines the danger of substituting judgment and concrete involvement for rules and abstractions that may not be relevant, and might distract attention from what is actually important in the ongoing action.

My intention here is not to assert that traditional culture change models should not be applied; rather that we should be less tied down to putatively ‘objective’ assessments of culture and general models of change, and more focussed on creating a viable future in a given situation. Dealing with cultural differences may be more a matter of forging new understandings in the context of ongoing operations than of ‘discovering’ that the differences exist, then potentially crystallising them by acting as if they do.

8.1.4: On reframing

This study has paid much attention to the phenomenon of reframing. It appears to exhibit a particular general form that relies on an underlying semiotic understanding of the social construction of reality, which suggests a Basic Social Process, and should be the subject of further research. It seems to be an important way to exert influence and subvert either the powerful or the less powerful. It is, accordingly, tempting to try and develop it as a ‘tool’, which could be taught to managers, and become part of their change management ‘repertoire’.

However, I do not believe this is the best way to approach the issue. Certainly, managers – and others – would benefit from a better understanding of the ways reframing might be accomplished, and is occurring. Reframing also certainly has

political effects. However, to approach its use as if it were merely a technology to achieve some specific end seems to me to significantly underestimate the promise of the concept. I see reframing as a potentially central creative capability in organisations, not just in strategy development, but in producing or maintaining productive Cultural Configurations or dissolving negative ones.

Bohm (1996) proposes a central role for ‘dialogue’ in generating shared meaning within groups, together with a particular practical method of achieving it in groups of between 20 and 40. The idea is not, however, to apply rational discussion or debate to ‘objective’ or perceived differences. Dialogue is seen as quintessentially creative and processual, and does not attempt to determine if one perspective is ‘better’ than another. Bohm is therefore using the term in a way which is much more specific and defined than its general usage, where it might be taken as a simile for ‘discussion’ – which Bohm describes as ‘analyzing and breaking up’ (p. 7). Divisions between people and groups are seen to arise from their attempts to defend their assumptions. These attempts are usually accompanied by heated behaviour, because people identify themselves with their assumptions. Bohm also points out that in defining a ‘problem’ we actually create that problem. Dialogue, for Bohm, is not instrumental – ‘In a dialogue group we are not going to decide what to do about anything’ (p. 17) – but is about going behind each others’ assumptions by suspending (but not suppressing) one’s own, so that ‘...the whole group becomes a mirror for each person’ (p. 20). By focusing not just on content, but on process, and being sensitive to both one’s own and other peoples’ assumptions, Bohm suggests that new, shared, meanings may be formed. On all these grounds, it is possible to draw parallels with the ideas advanced in this work, concerning the production of identity and the social construction of reality. Using ‘reflective dialogue as a crucial process in encouraging shifts in mental maps’ to enable strategic innovation, is also proposed by Jacobs and Heracleous (2005: p. 348). Another form of approach to the same possibility is presented by the Search Conference, arising out of F. Emery’s Open Systems Theory (Bion 1952; Emery, F. and Trist 1965; Emery, F. 1997; Emery, M. 1982, 1989, 2000). Emery, although firmly situated in the stream of systems thinking, and holding to the primacy of the lawful functioning of systems, recognised early that systems are created by those who operate them – and not just the managers putatively ‘responsible for’ them. He was, accordingly, heavily involved in the

establishment of the Tavistock Institute, the development of Action Research techniques, and experiments in worker participation, particularly in Norway.

Simpson *et al* (2004) detect a 'remarkable similarity' between Bohm's view of dialogue and Kelly's Personal Construct Theory, based on their common constructivist foundations, and their systemic view of thought and meaning-making. Based upon these similarities, they see potential for bridging cultural differences: 'By eliciting bipolar constructs that reflect the shared meanings within a cultural group, and laddering to expose more superordinate constructs, within-group assumptions may become more explicit, creating greater potential for between-group dialogue' (p. 52). They decided to try these ideas out in a workshop with 52 clinicians and senior hospital managers, groups that had a long tradition of cultural conflict. They followed a dialogue related process, using Personal Construct Psychology techniques of laddering and pyramiding. This resulted in participants being able to reconceptualise their perceived differences in terms of commonalities – a process which is highly reminiscent of what I have called reframing – and to recognise that they needed to engage to '...co-construct organizational goals and objectives that are held in common' (Simpson et al. 2004: p. 58).

Interestingly, structural changes followed the workshop, which led to a senior group of clinicians becoming directly involved in corporate strategising, and apparently improved common understanding at the top level. However, the structural changes have reportedly led to the senior clinicians who have become involved with management being 'sometimes regarded from below with suspicion' (Simpson et al. 2004: p. 58), so there is now a need to develop commonalities between senior clinicians and middle management. Such developments are completely consistent with the predictions of this research: in resolving one configuration, boundaries shift, and new divisions form, becoming the focus of new activity. Not only does this appear to strongly support the theoretical conclusions of my research, but it demonstrates the viability and value of the practical application of its foundational elements. Perhaps more importantly, it argues that 'reframing' should not be valued for the political advantage it might produce for its user, but as a powerful source of innovation for organisations as a whole.

8.2: Planning and Control

8.2.1: Change isn't planning

Much of the current management discourse celebrates ever better measurement and control. This discourse is buttressed by a highly institutionalised structure of governance and reporting requirements, accounting and budgeting practices, project management norms, and education and training systems, which have created a remarkably standardised language and repertoire of practices related to change. The 'organisational culture' concept interacts with this in two ways: firstly, because the attempt to impose a common 'culture' on an organisation can itself be seen as establishing a control mechanism; and, secondly, because it means that culture and change initiatives must be placed in the 'planning and measuring' frame. In order to achieve this, 'the' change must become a project; clear objectives, often split out at multiple levels, must be set; measurement systems must be defined and established, and milestones set to ensure progress is maintained over time; and specific implementation responsibilities must be assigned, and associated with rewards or, sometimes, sanctions.

My study, on the other hand, says nothing about planning, control, phases, or outcomes, and would therefore seem to be completely outside the dominant frame. It would be pointless, and not a little risky, to question the need for all this apparatus, and that is not the intention. However, I do suggest that, in spite of all the good reasons that support modern project management and control, these practices should be seen more as safeguards against failure, or focii of organising, than as guarantors of success: '...While planning is often an integral part of major change programmes, it is not, nor should it be seen to be, a solution to the management of change' (Dawson 2003: p. 144). Indeed, the suggestion of this study is that, unless some flexibility and opportunism is allowed, over-reliance on institutionalised change management arrangements is likely to produce unintended consequences and set the stage for unanticipated future difficulties.

What, then, *should* be the focus of attention? The Cultural Configuration concept emphasises the way specific discourses relate to each other, and become implicated in the formation of groups and their interrelationships. In these terms, the planning paradigm can be seen as producing its own discourse, the effects of which will depend on its relationship to what else is occurring around it. Likewise, planned change usually

involves management promoting a discourse about the future (sense-giving), which will (hopefully) be distinct from the planning discourse. Both discourses occur in the context of others, and of a structure of physical, technological and social institutions and practices. My approach suggests that those involved in change should develop their awareness of the relationship between these various discourses and objects, as a means of understanding the sources of behaviour surrounding the change, and the implications of their own possible actions. Hence, ‘planning and measuring’ should and will go on; this approach can be used to assist in understanding its impact on organisational activity, what is its involvement in producing desirable (or less desirable) interactions, and how those interactions might be influenced. For instance, performance enhancement systems, linked to remuneration effects, are universally recognised as an important conjunction between organisational goals and individual behaviours. The approach being proposed here would afford those involved in establishing such systems with some means to envisage the nature and sources of likely responses to possible design decisions (whatever the underlying methodology being used), and to the various processes by which the systems are implemented, and adapt their actions accordingly.

8.2.2: Alignment has costs

A frequent goal of change management approaches is to ‘align’ the organisation around the change plan. Organisational cultures also need to be aligned around strategies, and strategies need to be aligned with the demands of the environment. Organisation is, of course, fundamentally concerned with the coordination of actions towards some common goal – alignment is necessary. However, it can become an end in itself, with the underlying assumption that no amount of alignment is too much. Taken in this way, it becomes less an organising principle, and more a control ideology, founded in rationalist, pseudo-evolutionary ideas about survival of the fittest, and assumptions that efficiency is the heart of competitiveness – that any activity not connected with the goal is waste, and waste is bad. However, for reframing to occur, there is a need for ‘uncontrolled’ material to exist in the organisation – unanswered questions, dissenting ideas, different ways of seeing things – and there is no way of knowing which uncontrolled material is necessary, because its involvement in changing meanings is quintessentially unplanned. Furthermore, in maintaining that cultural interaction is fundamentally undetermined, arising from ephemeral juxtapositions of contextual

material and structures, this study suggests that success in a change process may rely at least in part on opportunism, on making small, immediate steps in the right general direction, as distinct from absolute commitment to a single way of getting to some tightly defined but remote objective – although this study allows that imposing just such a direction may also, at times, be appropriate.

I am therefore, I repeat, not arguing against alignment, merely its use as a totalising principle. Dissent and uncontrolled experimentation need to be evaluated pragmatically – attempting to eradicate them is not only vain, but may cost more than it saves. Indeed, as we have seen, institutionalising some discursive tension may be productive (Palmer and Dunford 2002).

8.2.3: Paradoxes and Leadership

‘The assumption is that every company with a problem needs new leadership, more leadership. But I think many have had too much leadership. They need less leadership, maybe even an older kind of leadership; just enough leadership’
(Mintzberg 2004)

Mintzberg challenges the cult of leadership as a panacæa for organisational ills. He makes an appeal for leaders to be engaged and focused on what their organisations are actually *doing*, rather than on what leaders might be able to do *with* their organisations – ‘...to bring management and leadership back together and down to earth.’ This study has made a similar case – that management has as much to do with attention to specifics, opportunism and small steps forward as with grand visions and general theories.

This would appear to place managers in a fundamentally ambiguous position. On the one hand, societal expectations make them accountable for delivering on what they have said, as guarantors of the future, or hostages against failure. They are subordinated to their objectives and plans. In sharp contrast, this study suggests that the reality of management is the constant and opportunistic negotiation of compromises; the promotion of meanings that are consistent with broader objectives, but very seldom the possibility to impose them; the attempt to influence outcomes, but the impossibility of guaranteeing them.

Nevertheless, I would argue that this second view has much more to do with the day-to-day life of the manager than the first, and that one of the tensions inherent in the job is the constant need to reconcile the competing demands of these discourses. I believe that the concerns voiced by Mintzberg arise because the first discourse, which is closely related to ‘planning and measuring’ and economic rationalism, shifts the focus of management away from the concrete action of the organisation, in favour of focusing on a few limited types of outputs. My work argues for a redressment of that situation. It suggests that, by accepting that the role of the manager is not that of supreme technocrat, or engineer to the organizational machine, but simply that of one participant amongst many in a complex organisational process, not only might the manager achieve better results, but she might enable other members of the organisation to achieve much more. The conflicting imperative of delivering results will not disappear – but it cannot be allowed to distort the reality of the manager’s actual activity.

If the manager’s role is ambiguous, so is the Board’s – this view might seem to challenge modern concepts of governance. Recalling what has been said about alignment, though, I would argue against attempting to resolve every paradox. Resolution Work, the activity that develops around Conflicting or Competing configurations, demonstrates a potent drive to reconcile ambiguity, to bridge difference – but I have noted that it may produce constructive or destructive behaviour. Moreover, achieving resolution only defines the boundaries for new contradictions. In a very real sense, harmony is barren; what matters is what we do to resolve dissonance.

I argue, on this basis, that the fundamental tension between the demands of governance and the indeterminate nature of organisational action can only be evaluated by what it produces. The same principle applies to what may be the central question of organisational power – the judgement of when to impose on reality and when to adapt to it. This question is central because it crystallises the ethical dimension of coercive action.

It is not desirable to resolve any of these contradictions, either because resolution is not possible, or because the result would be disastrous. Proposing ‘balance’ does not solve the problem, either, because mere compromise may give the best, or the worst, of both worlds. These contradictions are productive; we can influence their outcomes, for better or worse; and the measure of our success or failure is what we produce from them, in

the broadest sense – the ‘societal practices’ that we create or maintain, as Riad put it (2005: p. 177). Power is neither bad nor good in itself; neither is conflict – it is their effects that matter.

8.2.3.1: Reintroducing leadership (and managers) to organisations

So far, all my comments have concerned ‘management’. This is despite strenuous efforts throughout the writing of this thesis (which are probably not even visible to the reader) to break out of the managerialist paradigm, or at least not to exclude other classes of employee. The ‘Management’ construct divides managers from other employees, and attributes to them the central role in guiding the organisation, in the same moment silencing other employees and ignoring their contribution. It is easy, but unconvincing, to treat this as a device of convenience – ‘Of course, I don’t mean to exclude the others, but managers do have the greatest influence’ does nothing to bring the ‘others’ back into the discussion. It is ironic that the very construct that empowers the manager seems to deny the people with whom he works, and on whose efforts he must rely. It is also counterproductive to think this way, because the manager only exists in relation to, and because of, her colleagues – the leader only exists because of the followers. Instead of depersonalising and marginalising his colleagues, the manager should instead be primarily concerned with them. This seems to be one of Mintzberg’s concerns, when he says: ‘Instead of isolating leadership we need to diffuse it throughout the organization, into the ranks of managers and beyond. Anyone with an idea and some initiative can be a leader’ (2004).

Some popular conceptions of leadership, particularly those within the Human Relations tradition, tend to equate it with specific behaviours – setting an example, displaying courage, enunciating a vision, supporting and guiding, for instance. Such models might conclude that, in my terms, most leadership behaviours would fall under the ‘Modelling and Influencing’ heading. That would be, however, an unrealistic and very restricted view of what it means to lead. In terms of this study, I suggest instead that leadership is demonstrated by taking on board some of the paradoxes I have identified; to accept, and perhaps even maintain, contradiction, and focus on what comes out of it. This is an inherently uncomfortable position, and one that is no more reserved to managers than is ambiguity and uncertainty. It involves personal and moral risk, but is focused on results,

rather than merely inputs – a muscular form of accountability. But its conceptualisation of results is not narrowly economic or strategic – it is an holistic assessment of the human value of the leader’s actions, open to include such notions as sustainability and corporate responsibility, as well as personal ethical standards. It suggests that leadership is fundamentally about getting on top of differences, and making them work, not just for the benefit of one side, but both. It admits that Judging and Policing may be the appropriate form of coercion in a given situation, and in no sense implies that it should be an option of last resort when it is used. It recognises the value of Modelling and Influencing, but reminds those who use those behaviours that they are still a form of coercion – just because Modelling and Influencing avoids conflict does not make it ‘better’ or ‘right’ (or the reverse!). Finally, such a view binds those with power to those who are subject to it, tying leader to follower, competitor to competitor, in a relationship of mutual responsibility for what they create.

8.3: Education and Development

The foregoing clearly asks for a new way of looking at participating in organisations. It establishes both individual and shared responsibility for what we build through our interactions. Leadership can no longer be seen as manipulating others in pursuit of one’s own objectives, in such a way that they are happy about it, or don’t realise that it has happened. Complex judgments, which will always be contestable, must be made not just in their organisational context, but in their broader social setting. Decisions need to be faced about when to force change on others, and when to adapt to them. These ideas, then, have significant implications for the education and development of anyone who works in organisations, which go far beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, some directional comments may be made on the practice of management education, and some potentially fruitful avenues for future research identified.

It is clear that no individual is born with the capabilities discussed above, and few acquire even some of them without a great deal of experience of both failure and success. Their acquisition is therefore not a matter of the transfer of any particular skill set, or of identifying ‘high potential’ individuals and assuming they have them already. Furthermore, these are holistic capabilities, which cross the boundaries of organisational and private life, of technique and philosophy, and may even enter the realm of

spirituality. This suggests the potential for extensive further research in the developmental psychology literature, to understand how such capabilities are developed (or obstructed).

A good starting point might be the work of Basseches (1984). Basseches challenged the developmental psychology of Piaget, which assumed that psychological development stopped at the end of childhood, and instead proposed that development could continue throughout adulthood. He saw this development as occurring through the application of dialectical thinking:

'...dialectical thinking is an organized approach to analyzing and making sense of the world one experiences that differs fundamentally from formal analysis. Whereas the latter involves the effort to find fundamental fixed realities – basic elements and immutable laws – the former attempts to describe fundamental processes of change and dynamic relationships through which this change occurs' (p. 24).

Dialectical thinking 'is associated with increasing inclusiveness, differentiation, and integration', a 'developmental transformational movement to constitutive⁵² and interactive relationships'(p. 23). In this way, Basseches' work addresses the central problem I have raised, the development of the ability to surmount contradiction and deal with process as well as structure – which Basseches sees as mutually constitutive – 'both contradictory and complementary' (p. 50).

Such thinking relates to the ability to deliberately develop and shift from one perspective to another, being able to 'stand-outside' or 'objectify' an interaction between ways of constructing the world, which is in a sense precisely what is demanded by theory I have developed. Investigations of perspective-taking have been undertaken by Torbert (Torbert *et al* 2004; Rooke and Torbert 2005) and Kegan (Kegan and Lahey 2001; Kegan 2002). Research in this area is likely to help provide a finer-grained picture of the ways the sort of capabilities I have described are manifested and may be developed, which would have significant potential for practical application.

⁵² Constitutive relationships are relationships which bring what they are relating into existence.

8.3.1: Critical Thinking and Managers

This study suggests that it is essential for managers to learn how to handle ambiguity, both in its ethical and judgmental dimensions, and by equipping them with self-management skills to deal with the personal and emotional challenges it presents. Moreover, possessing the ability to see the world in terms of shifting patterns of sense-making; to detect and understand the differences in the ways different individuals perceive the world; to deal with dialectical formations like Cultural Configurations; and to influence the production of new ways of seeing things which subsume the old, implies highly developed critical thinking capabilities.

I have mentioned the debate between Dunbar *et al* (1996) and Porac and Rosa (1996) which, if nothing else, serves to support the contention that critical thinking is not (or was not in 1996) considered a core management skill, and that its inclusion in management education syllabi is potentially contentious. I have also supported the view that both types of skills being debated – critical thinking and the ability to impose a view on the world – are needed in organisations. I would now add that it seems to me that the opposition drawn by Porac and Rosa between these two skills is a false one. It rests on the assumption that, if developing a clear strategy and imposing it in the market does not require critical thinking skills, these are therefore not necessary, and might even be an impediment. But to assert that just because a skill is not necessary for strategy formulation it is not necessary at all, is either a terrible over-extension of the ‘alignment’ concept, or reflects a very naïve and restricted view of what a manager actually does. Moreover, to assert that if managers know how to think critically they will somehow lose their determination, and therefore should not be exposed to such ideas, suggests an underlying view of human nature and ethics that was certainly not intended by the authors.

It is also important to recognise that the capabilities being discussed go far beyond the set of cognitive ‘skills’ usually associated with critical thinking, and place significant demands on the maturity and emotional strength and control of whole person. Hence, the always artificial divide between personal and professional development needs to come under real challenge – and with it, the structure and scope of much ‘executive education’.

8.3.2: Experiential learning and coaching

Such skills as these are not well-adapted to classroom teaching or short course formats. It could be quite convincingly argued that some of them are only developed with ‘hands-on’ experience of actually facing and dealing with such issues in all their complexity and ambiguity. Furthermore, acquiring such skills is probably not a solitary pursuit – the challenge and support of others, preferably including some who have already trodden the same path, are likely to make this sort of learning not only much faster and more effective, but also much less risky for the person concerned and the organisation in which they are learning. To the extent that the workplace has not become completely virtual, and that organisations recognise management development as being essential, if not measurable, such growth and support might be provided in the workplace, by senior management. However, as career paths become more fragmented and more and more employees turn into ‘independent service providers’, this delivery mode seems to be under threat. The phenomenal growth of executive coaching may reflect the demand for such support, and there is clearly significant potential to integrate that into longer term development programmes that accompany and challenge managers as they grow. The need is clear, however, for more experiential forms of training and development, covering areas that have traditionally been little represented in the management education, such as critical thinking and self management, and delivered over extended periods, instead of relying only on short, intensive bursts.

Another area that is often not dealt with at all in the MBA syllabus, or is treated as a peripheral add-on to core disciplines, is communication skills, in their broadest sense. However, in the light of the absolutely central role that communication plays in causing and influencing behaviour in organizations, this seems to be a dangerous omission. This study suggests that particular attention might be given to understanding narrative forms and the use of tropes, as well as encouraging the development of creative abilities. In addition, it might be worthwhile to consider the relevance of an understanding of semantics and semiotics to management education. Further research would be necessary to define the best focus and approach to such subject matter, but they would seem to be potentially useful to managers, both in their own right, and to assist in dealing with contradiction and shifting meaning.

8.3.3: Closer integration of research and practice

If, as this study suggests, managers involved in change need to focus on the interface between groups rather than on the groups themselves, it is quite plausible that boundaries that are found to be relevant in specific circumstances will extend beyond the limits of a particular organisation. This research has encouraged us to look beyond structural features, and consider the broader context of interaction.

One boundary that has not been mentioned so far, however, is the one surrounding the research community. Researchers are often considered, and consider themselves, as being removed from the fray and the minutiae of everyday action, looking for grand principles. This deep division might well represent a lost opportunity, not only for researchers, but also for practitioners. If interdiscursive activity is a source of new ways of looking at things, it seems a waste not to engage the intense interest and skills of the research community in questioning specific, ongoing practice. This might imply the long-term placement of researchers into organisations, or encouraging members of organisations to develop their research skills, but in either case I would suggest examining the value of integrating a research capability into organisations, directed not at technology, but at the development of the organisation itself. Similar comments certainly apply to the role of consultants – there would seem to be a real potential to move beyond project focussed models of engagement, to long term associations which would allow consultants to develop real understanding of the organisation they are working with, and to challenge, question and accompany it in its development, and the development of its personnel.

Considering the possible closer integration of research and practice raises the vexed question of the nature and desirability of relevance in management research. Parker maintains that ‘...most of the managerial culturalist literature is less about what organizations are like than about what they should be like’ (Parker 2000: p. 25), and that they fail to demonstrate any link between their prescriptions and the performance of the organisations they studied. Whilst such criticism is valid as far as it goes, it makes two questionable assumptions; firstly, that managers, for whom these books were clearly intended, expect the same types of explanation and theory as academics do, and therefore that it is valid to judge them by the same standards; and, secondly (somewhat

in contradiction), that managers see the books as ‘how to’ manuals, and will implement them as such.

Academic evaluations of popular management writing are, predictably, often disparaging. They usually convincingly demonstrate that populist management literature does not meet acceptable academic standards, or contribute significantly to theoretical understanding of the problems it purports to address. However, the possibility must at least be admitted that managers do not *expect* to get definitive theories of organisation, or universal solutions to their specific problems, from reading management books. Instead, it is quite possible that they use this sort of material for provocation, in order to generate ideas or insight and – without necessarily confronting the weaknesses of the managerialist doctrine which makes of them such heroic and central figures – that they are more than a little realistically aware of the limits on a manager’s ability to impose their will on a supine organisation.

The assumption is usually made by academics that they have a role to produce knowledge, which may or may not be useful to practitioners. Most of these ideas about scientific research and its application conform to an ‘aqueduct model’ (Nicolai 2004), where knowledge is discovered by scientists, then flows (in one direction only) to applied scientists and technologists, who find ways to use it. Even if the physical sciences work in this way, management studies clearly do not – but academics are nevertheless sometimes still amazed that managers can act without, or even with erroneous, analysis – and get away with it (Das 2003). Mintzberg says, ‘Management isn’t a science; it isn’t about finding truth. Management isn’t even an *applied science*, because that’s still a science. Management is the *application* of science, among many other things. Managers use whatever they can in a practical way to get things done or to encourage other people to get things done’ (Vogl 2004: p. 19, italics in original).

In writing theories of and for management, then, it should be borne in mind that managers apply science creatively to their particular situation, to develop insight or ideas for action. If science isn’t available, or they choose to use something else, they still act, and often successfully. It is the ideas, the insight, and ultimately the action that matter – even if they are based on erroneous theory or produced by unscientific processes like intuition. Perhaps this is why well-written ‘pseudo-science’ is so popular – regardless of its validity, it stimulates ideas and action.

8.4: A Concrete Example

Perhaps the ultimate test of practicality for this research would be to understand what implications has for the Department at the time of writing. I have already sketched out two directions I believe it is possible for it to take. One of them, attempting to conform to the Research-driven agenda of the University, implies competition with the other departments in the Division to establish the value of research in the Management area, and also perpetuation of the internally divisive debate over the priority of research over teaching, which pitches junior against senior academics, and risks being an impediment to the Department fulfilling its teaching obligations. In terms of the theoretical framework advanced by this research, this approach involves setting up a Conflicting configuration with the other departments, and probably others within the University, around Discipline-Management, with power differences very much in favour of the other departments, although this is counterbalanced by the fact that Discipline-Management is not highly central to the other departments.

Another direction that the Department might follow would be to form a Conflicting configuration with the University by increasing its emphasis on teaching. This approach would have the effect of reducing the status of the Department, at least for a time, within the University, and possibly meaning the Department was not seen to win in terms of its share of newly available research funding. However, to the extent that market demand remains reasonably healthy, it might lead to increased student satisfaction, and increased funding through that activity. The risk with this approach is that it might reproduce the Management Education construct, particularly to the extent that effective teaching of Management is, in fact, different from that required for other disciplines. This, as we have seen, is a potentially highly divisive issue, both within the Department, and between it and the University. On the other hand, moving in this direction may reduce the risk that a ‘survivor’ group emerges around the remaining Business School academics, in opposition to and conflict with the rest of the Department, and would have the effect of (finally) integrating them and the Department around a common ‘defining construct’.

This analysis demonstrates that one product of the proposed approach is a relatively concise sketch of some key issues facing the Department, and some indication of the

risks and implications of possible forward actions. I do not claim, however, that these are the only two possible directions available to the Department, only that they are ones which seem plausible in the current situation. Nevertheless, they form a starting point for opening up discussions, not with the aim of choosing between ‘decision alternatives’ but as an essentially creative process of envisaging a future. An immediate recommendation from this research, then, would be to establish a series of workshops involving at least the academic staff, using a dialogue- or search conference-based approach, to consider ways of dealing with the current situation, ways that might supersede the constructs involved with more inclusive ones that subsume them. Although many existing approaches to change management could quite plausibly reach a similar recommendation – that the staff of the Department convene to determine a common view of a way forward – the approach developed in this work provides highly relevant material to focus such a gathering, and stimulate forward-looking engagement. It also gives some insight into *how* the desired effect might be achieved (subsuming existing constructs into new ones). Rather than suggesting radically different actions, then, it aims to make relatively common-sense action more likely to succeed.

As an alternative, management of the Department might ‘decide’ for themselves which of the two directions to choose, then implement that plan, perhaps supported by a ‘communication’ programme to explain the decisions. I would argue against such an approach, however, for two reasons. Firstly, it implies that the formulation of the constructs discussed is in some way factual or fixed, and can be dealt with by rational decision, an assumption fundamentally at odds with the claimed status of the constructs in this research. Secondly, by adopting this formulation of the constructs and configurations, management objectifies them and so, in a very real sense, brings them into being, together with the divisions that are inherent in them. The option proposed, of using them as a starting point for dialogue, is much more open and likely to produce novel solutions which surmount the issues inherent with either formulation. By starting with dialogue, a common way of constructing the future can be agreed, effectively fusing ‘initiative’ and ‘understanding’ conversations in Ford and Ford’s (1995) terms, and shifting the focus to performance conversations, to action. Because of the importance of framing in decision-making, or in the process of constructing social reality, I believe it might be argued that the distinction between initiating and explaining

is, in any case, somewhat artificial, and may have more to do with management taking control than representing any inherent distinction between types.

If my first recommendation were followed, it would thus become possible to understand practical decisions in the light of a coherent shared understanding of the future (in itself not a trivial achievement!). Amongst the key decisions which are visible now, and which need to be understood in such a framework, are recruitment and marketing concerns.

The Department, in part because of the departure of Business School academics, is faced with a significant need for new academic staff. The profile of these staff would best be decided in the context of some common view of where the Department is going. The fundamental assumptions of the University can be seen to favour the recruitment of élite researchers. However, to the extent that these are senior career appointments, such a profile risks exacerbating the dissatisfaction of early career academics in the Department and, in any case, the Department may not be well enough recognised to attract such staff without offering conditions well outside of University norms, and so stoking the discussion over the value of Discipline-Management. Another approach, consistent with the second direction presented, might be to focus on academics who are recognised for their teaching ability – perhaps at an earlier stage of their careers, to better manage the budget implications of meeting the staffing requirements. This approach is likely to raise questions about the seriousness of the Department's commitment to research, which might be dealt with, for example, by encouraging research activity at the junior level, where staff are also keen to establish a reputation. This would involve reviewing the profiles and workloads of existing staff.

The discussion also has fundamental implications for the marketing direction of the Department. If the research route is followed, for instance, it would be necessary to significantly increase emphasis on recruitment to PhD programmes, and adjust the coursework offering to emphasise research skills and the development of academic skills in Discipline-Management. If, on the other hand, a teaching orientation were to be adopted, it would seem to be more important to develop undergraduate and executive coursework programmes. In both cases, a much more systematic understanding of market trends and demand than currently seems to exist is necessary. The research provides some hints as to the cultural basis for this relatively inward-looking nature of

discussion in the Department, which suggest that introducing such marketing data will need to be in some way reconciled with the Academia construct.

I would argue, then, that understanding both the recruitment and marketing challenges faced by the Department, is made considerably more concrete and actionable when placed in the framework proposed by this research.

Another important implication of the approach is that the establishment of a defining construct, by following either of the routes suggested, or others which might emerge from interactions within the Department, will establish configurations with other groups in the University. There are, for example, two issues which I would call 'strategic' in the current situation. The first is the distinction between research and teaching.

Particularly with its objectification as 'Research led education' (or 'Education-intensive research') what I have seen in this research as a single opposition might develop into a Competing configuration around the University identity. Research/Teaching is also a fundamental concern, as we have seen, for the evolution of the Department. It seems to me that one implication of my work is that the Department should attempt to influence this discourse at the level of the University, and perhaps beyond, by developing better constructs around Research/Teaching, which unify rather than divide. It may be that this involves a reframing using the 'Academia as community' construct, which can be seen as particularly difficult to maintain if priority is given to elite research. Another key area on which the management of the Department should focus is the potential re-emergence of the Management Education construct. Avoiding renewed conflict around this old construct might involve reframing it, perhaps drawing on the widespread discourse of 'sensitivity to the market', in the context of whatever direction the Department takes.

In either case, management attention to the configurations that form around these constructs will have a fundamental effect on relationships between the Department and other groups within the Division and around the University. This research suggests that dealing with these relationships will involve not so much looking at the substance of the divisions and trying to resolve them through argument, but on looking for commonalities across the divisions, and attempting to form groups around them that do not crystallise negative behaviour.

This discussion of the potential role of management in the Department would not be complete without a reminder that the view of change and culture that is espoused in this work does not include any neat start and finish points. Planning is useful and necessary as an orienting and action-generating tool, without doubt; but I would suggest that much of what management can bring to situations such as the one I have analysed is, by definition, outside of the scope of planning. Each resolution will give rise to new contradictions; no solution holds forever; the manager is constantly operating out of ambiguity and fluidity, attempting to influence them for the best. Any attempt to hide or overcome this contradiction at the core of organisation is not only doomed to failure, but actually distracts from what can be done to influence it:

'People who surf do not command the waves to appear, or to have particular spacing, or to be of a special height. Instead, surfers do their best with what they get. They can control inputs to the process, but they can't control outcomes. To ride a wave as if one were in control is to act and have faith. The message of newer perspectives often boils down to that' (Weick 1985: p. 133).

I now come to the end of this particular journey. It is tempting to impose some form of closure, to complete a satisfying and familiar narrative form – but instead I would like to draw attention to the fact that what started as a journey of exploration seems to have brought me mainly more possibilities for investigation. There is significant potential for improvement to the methodology used, both in terms of making replications of such studies more efficient, and allowing them to handle larger scale projects, and in terms of integrating the insights I have gained by confronting the emergent theory with existing literature. Furthermore, I find the possible links between the model developed here and psychologies of perspective-taking and adult development intensely promising, in both practical and theoretical terms. In particular, there appears to be a real paucity of work on achieving a better integration of Personal Construct Theory and these approaches – but that is a separate project, and one which would require a much deeper understanding of both areas. In terms of developing new practices in the management of change and cultural conflict, I would want to examine the foundations and techniques of dialogue, search conferences and related methods, such as social problem solving, and to gain a better insight into the practical application of Personal Construct Psychology in social

settings, to the extent that such applications have been developed. There is also quite a high likelihood that the approach defined in this research could be applied across national cultures, and so have value in dealing with cross-cultural management and integration. Finally, there is much to be done in developing ways to engage managers and management students in understanding the Cultural Configuration concept and its potential in an educational context. It will not be possible for me, personally, to develop even a small fraction of these possibilities – but, given what I believe to be their potential to bring about transformation in organisational practice, I hope, as an initial step, to develop a dialogue between others working in the area and with adventurous practitioners, in the hope that some others might come to share my enthusiasm.

In Chapter 2, I asked the question ‘Might there not be value in defining approaches that do not require managers to simultaneously pretend to be prophets, magicians, heroes and engineers? For instance, is it possible that managers might gain inspiration from understanding their organisation as a complex interaction of people attempting to make sense of events, and be able to define a role for themselves which facilitates that meaning-making process and builds confidence and enthusiasm for action at a personal level?’ I hope that this study has gone some way to achieving that goal.

.....

Bibliography

Aaltio-Marjosola, I.

1994 'From a "Grand Story" to Multiple Narratives?' *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 7/5: 56.

Abrahamson, E.

1996 'Management Fashion'. *Academy of Management Review* 21/1: 254-285.

Adler, N. J.

2002 'Global Companies, Global Society - There is a better way'. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 11/3: 255-260.

Adler, N. J. and J. L. Graham

1989 'Cross-Cultural Interaction - The international comparison fallacy'. *Journal of International Business Studies* 20/3: 515-537.

Akin, G. and I. Palmer

2000 'Putting Metaphors to Work for Change in Organizations'. *Organizational Dynamics* 28/3: 67-79.

Alvesson, M. and D. Kärreman

2000 'Varieties of discourse: On the study of organizations through discourse analysis'. *Human Relations* 53/9: 1125-1149.

Alvesson, M. and H. Willmott

1992 'On the Idea of Emancipation in Management and Organization Studies'. *Academy of Management Review* 17/3: 432-464.

Anderson, N., P. Herriot and G. P. Hodgkinson

2001 'The practitioner-researcher divide in Industrial, Work and Organizational (IWO) psychology: Where are we now, and where do we go from here?' *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 74: 391.

Argyris, C.

1957 *Personality and Organization; The conflict between system and the individual.*

Argyris, C. and D. A. Schoen

1978 *Organizational Learning : A theory of action perspective*, Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.

Arrow, K. J.

1974 *The Limits of Organization*, New York Norton.

Ashforth, B. E. and F. Mael

1989 'Social Identity Theory and the Organization'. *Academy of Management Review* 14/1: 20-39.

Ashkanasy, N. M., C. P. M. Wilderom and M. F. Peterson, editors

2000 *Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate*. Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Atkins, P.

2005 Personal Correspondence.

Bakhtin, M. M.

1986 *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Austin : University of Texas Press.

Balnaves, M., P. Caputi and L. Oades

2000 'A Theory of Social Action: Why personal construct theory needs a superpattern corollary'. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 13: 117-134.

Bannister, D., editor

1970 *Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory*. London ; New York, Academic Press.

Bannister, D., editor

1977 *New Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory*. London, Academic Press.

Bannister, D. and J. M. M. Mair

1968 *The Evaluation of Personal Constructs*, London, Academic Press.

Barclay, C.

1993 'Composing Protoselves through Improvisation' in *The Remembering Self : Construction and accuracy in the self-narrative*. U. Neisser and R. Fivush (eds.). Cambridge ; New York Cambridge University Press.

Barclay, C.

1996 'Autobiographical Remembering: Narrative constraints on objectified selves' in *Remembering Our Past: studies in Autobiographical Memory*. D. Rubin (ed). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Barley, S. R. and G. Kunda

1992 'Design and Devotion - Surges of rational and normative ideologies of control in managerial discourse'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 37/3: 363-399.

Barley, S. R., G. W. Meyer and D. C. Gash

1988 'Cultures of Culture: Academics, practitioners and the pragmatics of normative control'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 33/1: 24-60.

Barnard, C. I.

1947 *The Functions of the Executive*, Cambridge : Harvard University Press.

Bartunek, J. M.

1984 'Changing Interpretive Schemes and Organizational Restructuring: The example of a religious order'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 29/3: 355-372.

Basseches, M.

1984 *Dialectical Thinking and Adult Development*, Norwood, N.J., Ablex Pub. Corp.

Beech, N.

2000 'Narrative Styles of Managers and Workers: A tale of star-crossed lovers'. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 36/2.

Bennis, W., J. Van Maanen, E. H. Schein and F. Stelle, editors

1979 *Essays in Interpersonal Dynamics*. Homewood IL, Dorsey Press.

Berger, P. L. and T. Luckmann

1975 *The Social Construction of Reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.

Bigelow, J. C.

1998 'Functionalism in Social Science' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. E. Craig (ed). London, Routledge.

Bion, W. R.

1952 'Group Dynamics: A review'. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 33, 235-247

Bohm, D.

1996 *On Dialogue*, London Routledge.

Boje, D. M.

1994 'Organizational Storytelling - the struggles of premodern, modern and postmodern organizational learning discourses'. *Management Learning* 25/3: 433-461.

Boje, D. M.

1995 'Stories of the Storytelling Organization: A postmodern analysis of Disney as "Tamara-Land"'. *Academy of Management Journal* 38/4: 997.

Bolman, L. G. and T. E. Deal

1997 *Reframing Organizations : Artistry, choice, and leadership*, San Francisco : Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Borzak, L., editor

1981 *Field Study : A sourcebook for experiential learning*. Beverly Hills, Sage Publications.

Brannen, M. Y.

2004 'When Mickey Loses Face: Recontextualization, semantic fit, and the semiotics of foreignness'. *Academy of Management Review* 29/4: 593-616.

Brannen, M. Y. and J. E. Salk

2000 'Partnering Across Borders: Negotiating organizational culture in a German-Japanese joint venture'. *Human Relations* 53/4: 451-487.

Brewer, W.

1996 'What is Recollective Memory' in *Remembering Our Past: Studies in autobiographical memory*. D. Rubin (ed). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Brittan, A.

1998 'Symbolic Interactionism' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. E. Craig (ed). London Routledge.

Brown, R. H.

1978 'Bureaucracy as Praxis - Toward a political phenomenology of formal organizations'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 23/3: 365-382.

Burnes, B.

2001 *Managing Change : A strategic approach to organisational dynamics*, Harlowe, England ; New York : Financial Times/Prentice Hall.

Burns, T. and G. M. Stalker

1961 *The Management of Innovation*, London, : Tavistock Pub.

Burrell, G.

1996 'Normal Science, Paradigms, Metaphors, Discourses and Genealogies of Analysis' in *Handbook of Organization Studies*. S. Clegg, C. Hardy and W. R. Nord (eds.). London; Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Chambers, R.

1984 *Story and Situation : Narrative seduction and the power of fiction*, Manchester : Manchester University Press.

Checkland, P. and J. Scholes

1990 *Soft Systems Methodology : a 30-year retrospective*, New York, Wiley.

Chia, R.

1996 'The Problem of Reflexivity in Organizational Research: Towards a postmodern science of organization'. *Organization* 3/1: 31-59.

Chia, R.

2000 'Discourse Analysis as Organizational Analysis'. *Organization* 7/3: 513-518.

Chreim, S.

2005 'The Continuity-Change Duality in Narrative Texts of Organizational Identity'. *Journal of Management Studies* 42/3: 567-593.

Chreim, S.

2006a 'Managerial Frames and Institutional Discourses of Change: Employee appropriation and resistance'. *Organization Studies* 27/9: 1261-1287.

Chreim, S.

2006b 'Postscript to Change: Survivors' retrospective views of organizational changes'. *Personnel Review* 35/3: 315-335.

Clegg, S.

1975 *Power, Rule and Domination*, London Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Clegg, S.

1977 'Power, Organization Theory, Marx and Critique' in *Critical Issues in Organizations*. S. Clegg and D. Dunkerley (eds.), 21-40. London ; Boston : Routledge & K. Paul.

Clegg, S.

1989 *Frameworks of Power*, London : Sage.

Clegg, S. and D. Dunkerley, editors

1977 *Critical Issues in Organizations*. London ; Boston, Routledge & K. Paul.

Clegg, S., C. Hardy and W. R. Nord, editors

1996 *Handbook of Organization Studies*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.

Collins, D.

1998 *Organizational Change : Sociological perspectives*, London ; New York : Routledge.

Czarniawska-Joerges, B.

1992 *Exploring Complex Organizations : A cultural perspective*, Newbury Park, California, Sage Publications.

Czarniawska-Joerges, B.

1994 'Narratives of Individual and Organizational Identities'. *Communication Yearbook* 17: 193-221.

Czarniawska-Joerges, B.

1998 *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies*, Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage Publications.

Daft, R. L.

1989 *Organization Theory and Design*, St. Paul West Pub. Co.

Dandridge, T. C., I. Mitroff and W. F. Joyce

1980 'Organizational Symbolism: A topic to expand organizational analysis'. *Academy of Management Review* 5/1: 77.

Das, T. K.

2003 'Managerial Perceptions and the Essence of the Managerial World: What is an interloper business executive to make of the academic-researcher perceptions of managers?' *British Journal of Management* 14/1: 23-32.

Dawson, P.

1994 *Organizational Change : A processual approach*, London : P. Chapman.

Dawson, P.

2003 *Reshaping Change: A processual perspective*, London Routledge.

Deal, T. E. and A. Kennedy

1988 *Corporate Cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life*, London ; Ringwood, Vic., Penguin Books.

Demers, C., N. Giroux and S. Chreim

2003 'Merger and Acquisition Announcements as Corporate Wedding Narratives'. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 16/2: 223-242.

DiMaggio, P.

1997 'Culture and Cognition'. *Annual Review of Sociology* 23: 263-287.

Donaldson, L.

1995 *American Anti-management Theories of Organization : A critique of paradigm proliferation*, Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press.

Dunbar, R. L. M., R. Garud and S. Raghuram

1996 'A Frame for Deframing in Strategic Analysis'. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 5/1: 23-34.

Dunford, R. W. and D. Jones

2000 'Narrative in Strategic Change'. *Human Relations* 53/9: pp. 1207-1226(1220).

Eisenstadt, K. M.

1995 'Building Theories from Case Study Research' in *Longitudinal Field Research Methods: Studying processes of organisational change*. G. P. Huber and A. H. Van de Ven (eds). Thousand Oaks Sage.

Eisenstadt, S. N.

1989 'Dual Organizations and Sociological Theory' in *The Attraction of Opposites : Thought and society in the dualistic mode*. D. Maybury-Lewis and U. Almagor (eds.), 345-354. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.

Emery, F. E.

1997 'The Next Thirty Years: Concepts, methods and anticipations'. *Human Relations* 50/8: 885-935.

Emery, F. E. and E. L. Trist

1965 'The Causal Texture of Organizational Environments' *Human Relations* 18, 21-32

Emery, M.

1982 *Searching - for new directions - in new ways - for new times*, Canberra : Centre for Continuing Education, ANU.

Emery, M., editor

1989 *Participative Design for Participative Democracy*. Canberra :, Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University.

Emery, M.

2000 'The Current Version of Emery's Open Systems Theory'. *Systemic Practice and Action Research* 13/5: 623-643.

Feldman, M. S.

1989 *Order without Design : Information production and policy making*, Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press.

Flood, R. L. and M. C. Jackson

1991 *Creative Problem Solving : Total systems intervention*, Chichester, New York, Wiley.

Flood, R. L. and N. R. A. Romm

1996 *Critical Systems Thinking : Current research and practice*, New York, Plenum Press.

Ford, J. D. and L. Ford

1995 'The Role of Conversations in Producing Intentional Change in Organizations'. *Academy of Management Review* 20/3: 541.

Foucault, M.

1975 *Surveiller et Punir : Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard.

Fransella, F., editor

2003 *International Handbook of Personal Construct Psychology*. Chichester, John Wiley & Sons.

Fransella, F., R. Bell and D. Bannister

1977 *A Manual for Repertory Grid Technique*, Hoboken, N.J. Wiley.

Gardner, B. B. and D. G. Moore

1950 *Human Relations in Industry*, Chicago, R.D. Irwin

Geertz, C. J.

1973 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture from The Interpretation of Cultures, Basic Books, New York' in *Cross Cultural Management*. S. G. Redding and B. W. Stening (eds.), 3-30. Cheltenham, U.K. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Ghoshal, S.

2005 'Bad Management Theories are Destroying Good Management Practices'. *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 4/1: 75-91.

Giddens, A.

1979 *Central Problems in Social Theory : Action, structure and contradiction in social analysis*, London, Macmillan.

Giddens, A.

1984 *The Constitution of Society : Outline of the theory of structuration*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Giddens, A.

1987 *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press.

Giddens, A.

1993 *New Rules of Sociological Method : A positive critique of interpretative sociologies*, Cambridge, England, Polity Press.

Gioia, D. A., M. Schultz and K. G. Corley

2000 'Organizational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability'. *Academy of Management Review* 25/1: 63.

Gioia, D. A., J. B. Thomas, S. M. Clark and K. Chittipeddi

1994 'Symbolism and Strategic Change in Academia: The dynamics of sensemaking and influence'. *Organization Science* 5/3: 363-383.

Glaser, B. G.

1978 *Theoretical Sensitivity : Advances in the methodology of Grounded Theory*, Mill Valley, Calif., Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G.

1992 *Emergence vs. Forcing: Basics of Grounded Theory analysis*, Mill Valley, CA, Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G.

1998 *Doing Grounded Theory : Issues and discussions*, Mill Valley CA, Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G.

2001 *The Grounded Theory Perspective: Conceptualization contrasted with description*, Mill Valley, CA, Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G.

2002 'Conceptualization: On theory and theorizing using grounded theory'. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1/2.

Glaser, B. G. and A. L. Strauss

1967 *The Discovery of Grounded Theory : Strategies for qualitative research*, Chicago Aldine.

Goffman, E.

1958 *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Univ.

Goffman, E.

1975 *Frame Analysis : An essay on the organization of experience*, Harmondsworth Penguin.

Goulding, C.

2002 *Grounded Theory : A practical guide for management, business and market researchers*, London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage.

Grant, D. and C. Hardy

2004 'Introduction: Struggles with Organizational Discourse'. *Organization Studies* 25/1.

Grant, D. and R. Iedema

2005 'Discourse Analysis and the Study of Organizations'. *Text* 25/1: 37-66.

Grant, D., T. Keenoy and C. Oswick

2001 'Organizational Discourse: Key contributions and challenges'. *International Studies of Management & Organization* 31/3.

Grant, D. and C. Oswick

1998 'Of Believers, Atheists and Agnostics: Practitioner views on HRM'. *Industrial Relations Journal* 29/3: 178-193.

Gray, B., M. G. Bougon and A. Donnellon

1985 'Organizations as Constructions and Destructions of Meaning'. *Journal of Management* 11/2: 83-98.

Green, S.

1988 'Strategy, Organizational Culture and Symbolism'. *Long Range Planning* 21/4: 121-129.

Gregory, K. L.

1983 'Native-View Paradigms: Multiple cultures and culture conflicts in organizations'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28/3, Organizational Culture: 359-376.

Grey, C.

2005 *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Studying Organizations*, London, Sage.

Hardy, C.

1994 *Managing Strategic Action: Mobilizing change : concepts, readings, and cases*, London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage.

Hardy, C., I. Palmer and N. Phillips

2000 'Discourse as a Strategic Resource'. *Human Relations* 53/9: 1227-1248.

Harré, R. and G. Gillett

1994 *The Discursive Mind*, Thousand Oaks, Calif. : Sage Publications.

Harris, L. C. and E. Ogbonna

2002 'The Unintended Consequences of Culture Interventions: A Study of Unexpected Outcomes'. *British Journal of Management* 13: 31-49.

Harris, S. G.

1994 'Organizational Culture and Individual Sensemaking - A schema-based perspective'. *Organization Science* 5/3: 309-321.

Haslam, S. A., T. Postmes and N. Ellemers

2003 'More than a Metaphor: Organizational identity makes organizational life possible'. *British Journal of Management* 14/4: 357-369.

Hastorf, A. H. and A. M. Isen, editors

1982 *Cognitive Social Psychology*. New York, Elsevier North Holland.

Hatch, M. J.

1993 'The Dynamics of Organizational Culture'. *Academy of Management Review* 18/4.

Hatch, M. J.

2000 'The Cultural Dynamics of Organizing and Change' in *Handbook of Organizational Culture and Change*. N. M. Ashkanasy, C. P. M. Wilderom and M. F. Peterson (eds.), 245-260. Thousand Oaks, California Sage Publications, Inc.

Hayes, J.

2002 *The Theory and Practice of Change Management*, New York, Palgrave.

Heracleous, L.

2003 'A Comment on the Role of Metaphor in Knowledge Generation'. *Academy of Management Review* 28/2: 190-191.

Heracleous, L.

2006 'A Tale of Three Discourses: The dominant, the strategic and the marginalized'. *Journal of Management Studies* 43/5: 1059-1087.

Heracleous, L. and M. Barrett

2001 'Organizational Change as Discourse: Communicative actions and deep structures in the context of information technology implementation'. *Academy of Management Journal* 44/4: 755-778.

Heracleous, L. and J. Hendry

2000 'Discourse and the Study of Organization: Toward a structural perspective'. *Human Relations* 53/10: 1251-1286.

Higgins, E. T., C. P. Herman and M. P. Zanna, editors

1981 *Social Cognition*. Hillsdale, N.J., L. Erlbaum Associates.

Hirst, P. Q. and G. Thompson

1996 *Globalization in Question : The international economy and the possibilities of governance*, Cambridge, UK : Oxford, OX, UK ; Cambridge, MA, Polity Press ; Blackwell Publishers.

Hofstede, G. H., B. Neuijen, D. D. Ohayv and G. Sanders

1990 'Measuring Organizational Cultures: A Qualitative and Quantitative Study Across Twenty Cases'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 35/2: 286-316.

Hogg, M. A. and R. S. Tindale, editors

2001 *Group Processes*. Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers.

Homans, G. C. and C. P. Curtis

1934 *An Introduction to Pareto : his sociology*, New York, Knopf.

Huber, G. P. and A. H. Van de Ven

1995 *Longitudinal Field Research Methods: Studying processes of organisational change*, Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Isabella, L. A.

1990 'Evolving Interpretations As A Change Unfolds: How managers construe key organizational events'. *Academy of Management Journal* 33/1: 7.

Jablin, F. M. and L. L. Putnam, editors

2001 *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication : Advances in theory, research, and methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage Publications.

Jacobs, C. and L. Heracleous

2001 "'Seeing Without Being Seen": Toward an archaeology of controlling science'. *International Studies of Management & Organization* 31/3: 113.

Jacobs, C. D. and L. T. Heracleous

2005 'Answers for Questions to Come: Reflective dialogue as an enabler of strategic innovation'. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 18/4: 338-352.

Jankowicz, D.

2003 *The Easy Guide to Repertory Grids* John Wiley & Sons.

Jaques, E.

1976 *A General Theory of Bureaucracy*, London, Heinemann.

Jenkins, R.

1996 *Social Identity*, London ; New York, Routledge.

Kalekin-Fishman, D. and B. M. Walker, editors

1996 *The Construction of Group Realities : Culture, society, and personal construct theory*. Malabar, Fla., Krieger Pub. Co.

Karst, T. O. and J. W. Groutt

1977 'Inside Mythical Heads: shared and personal constructs in a commune with some implications for a Personal Construct Theory social psychology' in *New Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory*. D. Bannister (ed). London, Academic Press.

Kegan, R.

2002 *In Over our Heads : The mental demands of modern life*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press

Kegan, R. and L. L. Lahey

2001 'The Real Reason People Won't Change'. *Harvard Business Review* 79/10: 85-92.

Kelly, G. A.

1955 *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, New York, W.W. Norton.

Kelly, G. A.

1996 'Europe's Matrix of Decision' in *The Construction of Group Realities*. D. Kalekin-Fishman and B. M. Walker (eds.). Malabar, Florida Krieger.

Kenny, V.

1984 'An Introduction to the Personal Construct Psychology of George A. Kelly'. *Irish Journal of Psychotherapy* 3/1.

Kluckhohn, F. R. and F. L. Strodtbeck

1961 *Variations in Value Orientations*, Evanston, Illinois, Row, Peterson,.

Knights, D. and G. Morgan

1991 'Corporate-Strategy, Organizations, and Subjectivity - A critique'. *Organization Studies* 12/2: 251-273.

Kolb, D. G.

2002 'Continuity not Change: The next organisational challenge'. *University of Auckland Business Review* 4/2.

Kolb, D. G.

2003 'Seeking Continuity Amidst Organizational Change: a storytelling approach'. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 12/2: 180.

Kotter, J. P. and J. L. Heskett

1992 *Corporate Culture and Performance*, New York, Free Press.

Kroeber, A. L. and C. Kluckhohn

1952 *Culture: A critical review of concepts and definitions*, Cambridge, Ma., Harvard University Press.

Labov, W.

1972 *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English vernacular.*, Philadelphia, Pa., Univ. of Pennsylvania Press.

Lawrence, P. R. and J. W. Lorsch

1967 *Organization and Environment: Managing differentiation and integration*, Boston Harvard Univ., Graduate School of Business Administration.

Lewin, K.

1952 *Field Theory in Social Science : Selected theoretical papers*, London, Tavistock Publications.

Lincoln, Y. S., editor

1985 *Organizational Theory and Inquiry : The paradigm revolution*. Beverly Hills, Sage Publications.

Lincoln, Y. S. and E. G. Guba

1985 *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Beverly Hills, Calif, Sage Publications.

Louis, M. R.

1981 'A Cultural Perspective on Organizations: The need for and consequences of viewing organizations as culture-bearing milieux'. *Human Systems Management* 2/4: 246.

Lukes, S.

1974 *Power, A radical view*, London, Macmillan.

Lukes, S.

1977 *Essays in Social Theory*, London : Macmillan.

Maines, D. R., N. M. Sugrue and M. A. Katovich

1983 'The Sociological Import of G. H. Mead's Theory of the Past'. *American Sociological Review* 48/2: 161-173.

Mangham, I. L.

1986 *Power and Performance in Organizations : An exploration of executive process*, Oxford, New York, Blackwell.

Martin, J.

1980 'Stories and Scripts in Organizational Settings' in *Cognitive Social Psychology*. A. H. Hastorf and A. M. Isen (eds.), 255-303. New York, Elsevier North Holland.

Martin, J.

2002 *Organizational Culture: Mapping the terrain*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

Maslow, A. H.

1943 'A Theory of Human Motivation'. *Psychological Review* 50: 370-396.

Maturana, H. R. and F. J. Varela

1992 *The Tree of Knowledge: The biological roots of human understanding*, Boston; New York, Shambhala.

Mauws, M. K. and N. Phillips

1995 'Understanding Language Games'. *Organization Science* 6/3: 322-334.

Maybury-Lewis, D. and U. Almagor, editors

1989 *The Attraction of Opposites : Thought and society in the dualistic mode*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.

Mead, G. H.

1932 *The Philosophy of the Present*, London, Open Court, Co.

Mead, G. H.

1948 *Mind, Self and Society*.

Merton, R. K.

1957 *Social Theory and Social Structure : Toward the codification of theory and research*, Glencoe, Ill. Free Press of Glencoe.

Midgley, G.

2000 *Systemic Intervention : Philosophy, methodology, and practice*, New York, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

Mintzberg, H.

1983 *Power in and around Organizations*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice Hall.

Mintzberg, H.

2004 'Enough Leadership'. *Harvard Business Review* 82/11: 22.

Mohr, L. B.

1982 *Explaining Organizational Behavior: The limits and possibilities of theory and research*, San Francisco Jossey Bass.

Morgan, G.

1980 'Paradigms, Metaphors, and Puzzle Solving in Organization Theory'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 25/4: 605-622.

Morgan, G.

1983 'More on Metaphor: Why we cannot control tropes in administrative science'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28/4: 601-607.

Morgan, G.

1986 *Images of Organization*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications,.

Mueller, F., J. Sillince, C. Harvey and C. Howorth

2004 'A Rounded Picture is What We Need': Rhetorical strategies, arguments, and the negotiation of change in a UK Hospital Trust'. *Organization Studies* 25/1: 75-93.

Neisser, U. and R. Fivush, editors

1994 *The Remembering Self: Construction and accuracy in the self-narrative*. Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press.

New School

2003 'Vilfredo Pareto', History of Economic Thought web site. **2006**.

Nicolai, A. T.

2004 'The Bridge to the 'Real World': Applied science or a 'schizophrenic tour de force'?' *Journal of Management Studies* 41/6: 951-976.

O'Connor, E. S.

1995 'Paradoxes of Participation - Textual analysis and organizational-change'. *Organization Studies* 16/5: 769-803.

O'Connor, E. S.

2000 'Plotting the Organization: The embedded narrative as a construct for studying change'. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 36, no. 2.

Ogbonna, E. and B. Wilkinson

2003 'The False Promise of Organizational Culture Change: A case study of middle managers in grocery retailing.' *Journal of Management Studies* 40/5: 1151.

Orlikowski, W. J. and J. Yates

1994 'Genre Repertoire: The structuring of communicative practices in organizations'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 39/4: 541.

Ospina, S. M. and J. Dodge

2005 'Narrative Inquiry and the Search for Connectedness: Practitioners and academics developing public administration scholarship'. *Public Administration Review* 65/4: 409.

Oswick, C., T. Keenoy and D. Grant

2000 'Discourse, Organizations and Organizing: Concepts, objects and subjects'. *Human Relations* 53/9.

Oswick, C. and J. Montgomery

1999 'Images of an Organisation: The use of metaphor in a multinational company'. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 12/6: 501-523.

Ouchi, W. G.

1981 *Theory Z: How American business can meet the Japanese challenge*, Reading, Mass, Addison-Wesley.

Palmer, I. and R. Dunford

1996a 'Conflicting Uses of Metaphors: Reconceptualizing their use in the field of organizational change'. *Academy of Management Review* 21/3: 691-717.

Palmer, I. and R. Dunford

1996b 'Reframing and Organizational Action: The unexplored link'. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 9/6: 12-&.

Palmer, I. and R. W. Dunford

2002 'Managing Discursive Tension: The co-existence of individualist and collaborative discourses in flight centre'. *Journal of Management Studies* 39/8: 1045-1069.

Parker, M.

2000 *Organizational Culture and Identity*, London, Sage.

Parsons, T.

1967 *The Structure Of Social Action : A study in social theory with special reference to a group of recent European writers*, N.Y., Free Press.

Pascale, R. T.

1990 *Managing on the Edge : How the smartest companies use conflict to stay ahead*, New York, Simon and Schuster.

Pascale, R. T.

1999 'Surfing the Edge of Chaos'. *Sloan Management Review* 40/3: 83-94

Pascale, R. T. and A. G. Athos

1981 *The Art of Japanese Management: Applications for American executives*, New York, Simon And Schuster.

Pentland, B. T.

1999 'Building Process Theory with Narrative: From description to explanation'. *Academy of Management Review* 24/4: 711.

Peters, T.

2001 'Tom Peters's True Confessions'. *Fast Company* 53: 78.

Peters, T. J. and R. H. Waterman

1982 *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's best run companies*, New York, Harper & Row.

Pettigrew, A. M.

1979 'On Studying Organizational Cultures'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24/4, Qualitative Methodology: 570-581.

Pettigrew, A. M.

1985 *The Awakening Giant : Continuity and change in Imperial Chemical Industries*, Oxford [Oxfordshire] ; New York, NY, : Blackwell.

Pfeffer, J.

1981 *Power in Organizations*, Marshfield, Mass., Pitman Pub.

Pfeffer, J.

1997 *New Directions for Organization Theory : Problems and prospects*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Phillips, N.

1995 'Telling Organizational Tales - On the role of narrative fiction in the study of organizations'. *Organization Studies* 16/4: 625-649.

Phillips, N.

1997 'Bringing the Organization back in: A comment on conceptualizations of power in upward influence research'. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 18/1: 43-47.

Phillips, N. and C. Hardy

1997 'Managing Multiple Identities: Discourse, legitimacy and resources in the UK refugee system'. *Organization* 4/2: 159-185.

Phillips, N. and C. Hardy

2002 *Discourse Analysis : Investigating processes of social construction*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.

Pondy, L. R., P. Frost, G. Morgan and T. Dandridge

1983 *Organizational Symbolism*, Greenwich, Conn, JAI Press.

Porac, J. and J. A. Rosa

1996 'In Praise of Managerial Narrow-Mindedness'. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 5/1: 35-42.

Putnam, L. L.

2004 'Dialectical Tensions and Rhetorical Tropes in Negotiations'. *Organization Studies* 25/1: 35-53.

Putnam, L. L. and G. T. Fairhurst

2001 'Discourse Analysis in Organizations' in *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication*. F. M. Jablin and L. L. Putnam (eds.). Thousand Oaks Sage.

Ranson, S., B. Hinings and R. Greenwood

1980 'Structuring of Organizational Structures'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 25/1: 1-17.

Redding, S. G.

1980 'Cognition as an Aspect of Culture and Its Relation to Management Processes - an exploratory view of the Chinese case'. *Journal of Management Studies* 17/2: 127-148.

Redding, S. G. and B. W. Stening, editors

2003 *Cross Cultural Management The International Library of Critical Writings on Business and Management*. Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Riad, S.

2005 'The Power of 'Organizational Culture' as a Discursive Formation in Merger Integration'. *Organization Studies* 26/10: 1529-1554.

Riley, P.

1983 'A Structurationist Account of Political Culture'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28/3, Organizational Culture: 414-437.

Rooke, D. and W. R. Torbert

2005 'Transformations of Leadership'. *Harvard Business Review* 83/4: 66-+.

Rubin, D., editor

1996 *Remembering Our Past: Studies in autobiographical memory*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Ryan, R.

1991 'The Nature of the Self in Autonomy and Relatedness' in *The Self: Interdisciplinary approaches*. J. Strauss and G. R. Goethals (eds.), 208-238. New York, Springer Verlag.

Ryle, G.

1949 *The Concept of Mind*, London, Hutchinson's University Library.

Sackmann, S. A.

1991 *Cultural Knowledge in Organizations : Exploring the collective mind*, Newbury Park, CA, Sage Club.

Sackmann, S. A., editor

1997 *Cultural Complexity in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Sackmann, S. A., M. E. Phillips, M. J. Kleinberg and N. Boyacigiller

1997 'Single and Multiple Cultures in International Cross-Cultural Management Research' in *Cultural Complexity in Organizations*. S. A. Sackmann (ed) 14-48. Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Schein, E. H.

1984 'Coming to a New Awareness of Organizational Culture'. *Sloan Management Review* 25/2: 3-17.

Schultz, M.

1995 *On Studying Organizational Cultures : Diagnosis and understanding*, Berlin ; New York, W. de Gruyter.

Schutz, A.

1967 *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press.

Selznick, P.

1957 *Leadership in Administration : A sociological interpretation*, Evanston, Row, Peterson.

Shenkar, O.

2001 'Cultural Distance Revisited: Towards a more rigorous conceptualization and measurement of cultural differences'. *Journal of International Business Studies* 32/3: 519-535.

Shrivastava, P. and S. Schneider

1984 'Organizational Frames of Reference'. *Human Relations* 37/10: 795-809.

Silverman, D.

1970 *The Theory Of Organisations: A sociological framework*, London, Heinemann.

Simpson, B., B. Large and M. O'Brien

2004 'Bridging Difference Through Dialogue: A constructivist perspective'. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 17: 45-59.

Smircich, L.

1983a 'Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28/3, Organizational Culture: 339-358.

Smircich, L.

1983b 'Organizations as Shared Meaning' in *Organizational Symbolism*. L. R. Pondy, P. Frost, G. Morgan and T. Dandridge (eds.), 55-65. Greenwich, Conn, JAI Press.

Smith, P.

2001 *Cultural Theory : An introduction*, Malden, Mass., Blackwell.

Spender, J. C.

1989 *Industry Recipes : An enquiry into the nature and sources of managerial judgement*, Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA, Blackwell.

Stacey, R. D., D. Griffin and P. Shaw

2000 *Complexity and Management*, London, Routledge.

Strauss, A. L.

1992 'Introduction' in *Mirrors and Masks: The search for identity (French Translation)*. Paris Editions Metailie.

Strauss, A. L. and J. Corbin

1990 *Basics of Qualitative Research : Grounded Theory procedures and techniques*, Newbury Park, Calif., Sage Publications.

Strauss, J. and G. R. Goethals, editors

1991 *The Self : Interdisciplinary approaches*. New York, Springer Verlag.

Suddaby, R.

2006 'What Grounded Theory is not'. *Academy of Management Journal* 49/4: 633-642.

Susman, G. I. and R. D. Evered

1978 'An Assessment of the Scientific Merits of Action Research'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 23/4: 582-603.

Tajfel, H., editor

1982 *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Tajfel, H. and J. C. Turner

1979 'An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict' in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. S. Worchel and W. G. Austin (eds.), 7–24. Chicago : Nelson-Hall Publishers.

Taylor, F. W.

1911 *The Principles of Scientific Management*, New York, Harper.

Taylor, S. E. and J. Crocker

1981 'Schematic Bases of Social Information Processing' in *Social Cognition*. E. T. Higgins, C. P. Herman and M. P. Zanna (eds.), 89–134. Hillsdale, NJ, Erlbaum.

Thomas, K. W. and W. G. Tymon

1982 'Necessary Properties of Relevant Research: Lessons from recent criticisms of the organizational sciences'. *The Academy of Management Review* 7/3: 345-352.

Torbert et al

2004 '*Action Inquiry: The secret of timely and transforming leadership*' San Francisco CA, Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Trice, H. M. and J. M. Beyer

1993 *The Cultures of Work Organizations*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Tsoukas, H.

1991 'The Missing Link: A transformational view of metaphors in organizational science'. *The Academy of Management Review* 16/3: 566-585.

Tsoukas, H. and R. Chia

2002 'On Organizational Becoming: Rethinking organizational change'. *Organization Science* 13/5.

Tsoukas, H. and M. J. Hatch

2001 'Complex Thinking, Complex Practice: The case for a narrative approach to organizational complexity.' *Human Relations* 54/8: 979.

Turner, J. C.

1982 'Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group' in *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*. H. Tajfel (ed) 15–40. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Turner, J. C., M. A. Hogg, P. J. Oakes, S. D. Reicher and M. S. Wetherell

1987 *Rediscovering the Social Group : A self-categorization theory*, Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, B. Blackwell.

Turner, S. P. and R. A. Factor

1998 'Weber, Max'. Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy. E. Craig. London, Routledge. 2006.

University of Melbourne

2002 'Vilfredo Pareto Guide'. Melbourne, University of Melbourne - Department of Economics. 2006.

Vaara, E.

1999 'Towards a Rediscovery of Organizational Politics: Essays on organizational integration following mergers and acquisitions'. Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration. Helsinki, University of Helsinki.

Vaara, E., J. Tienari, R. Piekkari and R. Santti

2005 'Language and the Circuits of Power in a Merging Multinational Corporation'. *Journal of Management Studies* 42/3: 595-623.

Vaara, E., J. Tienari and R. Santti

2003 'The International Match: Metaphors as vehicles of social identity-building in cross-border mergers'. *Human Relations* 56/4: 419-451.

Van de Ven, A. H. and M. S. Poole

2005 'Alternative Approaches for Studying Organizational Change'. *Organization Studies* 26/9: 1377-1404.

Van Maanen, J.

1979 'On the Understanding of Interpersonal Relations' in *Essays in Interpersonal Dynamics*. W. Bennis, J. Van Maanen, E. H. Schein and F. Stelle (eds.), 13-42. Homewood IL, Dorsey Press.

Vogl, A. J.

2004 'Managerial Correctness'. *Across the Board* 41/4: 19.

Watson, T. J.

1994 *In Search of Management : Culture, chaos and control in managerial work*, London; New York Routledge.

Watson, T. J.

1995 'Rhetoric, Discourse and Argument in Organizational Sense Making - A reflexive tale'. *Organization Studies* 16/5: 805-821.

Weber, M.

1947 *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, New York, O.U.P.

Weber, M.

1968a *Basic Concepts in Sociology*, London, P. Owen.

Weber, M.

1968b *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London, Allen & Unwin.

Weick, K. E.

1985 'Sources of Order in Underorganized Systems: Themes in recent organizational theory' in *Organizational Theory and Inquiry: The paradigm revolution*. Y. S. Lincoln (ed) 106-136. Beverly Hills, Sage Publications.

Weick, K. E.

1995 *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Thousand Oaks Sage.

Weick, K. E.

2001 *Making Sense of the Organization*, Malden, MA Blackwell.

Weick, K. E. and R. E. Quinn

1999 'Organizational Change and Development'. *Annual Review of Psychology* 50: 361-386.

Weick, K. E. and K. H. Roberts

1993 'Collective Mind in Organizations: Heedful interrelating on flight decks'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38/3: 357.

Welcomer, S., D. Gioia and M. Kilduff

2000 'Resisting the Discourse of Modernity: Rationality versus emotion in hazardous waste siting'. *Human Relations* 53/9: 1175-1205.

Werner, O.

1981 'An Anthropological Approach to Fieldwork: Ethnoscience' in *Field Study : A sourcebook for experiential learning*. L. Borzak (ed) 177-206. Beverley Hills Sage Publications.

Whyte, W. F.

1948 *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry*, New York McGraw-Hill,.

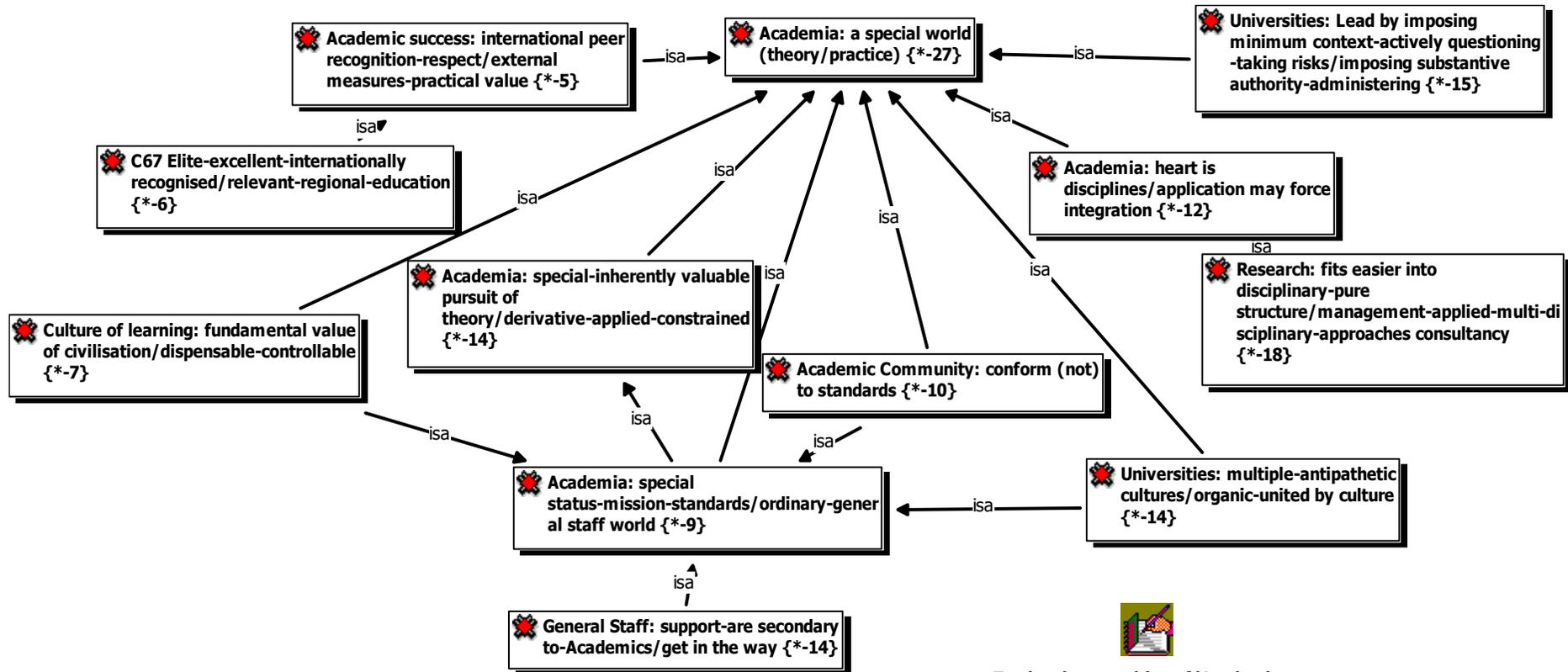
Woolf, V.

1976 *Moments of Being: Unpublished autobiographical writings*, London Sussex Univ. Press, Chatto & Windus.

Worchel, S. and W. G. Austin, editors

1986 *Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago :, Nelson-Hall Publishers.

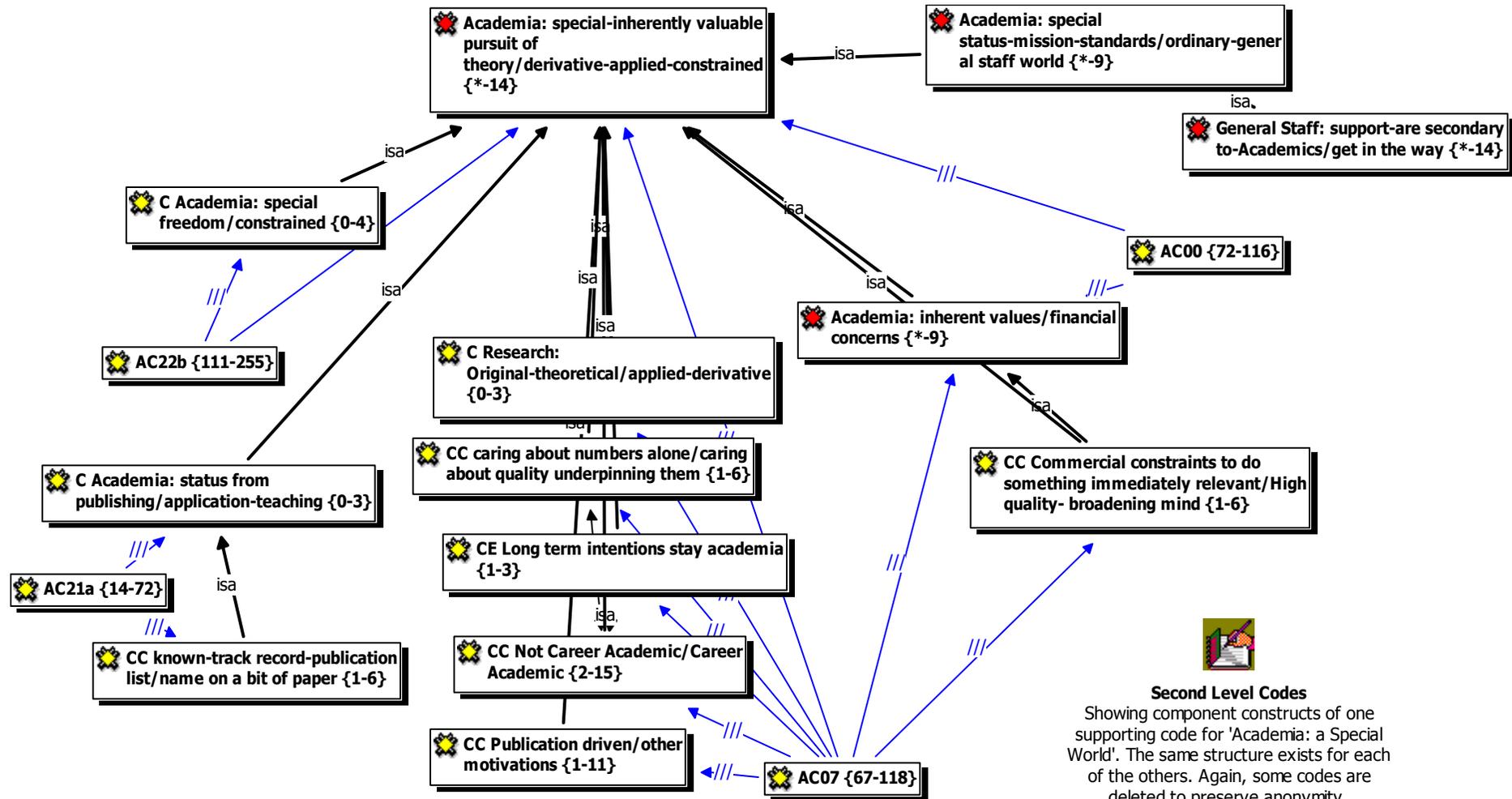
Appendix 1: Example of Build-up of Codes



Top level composition of 'Academia: a Special World'

'Academia: A special world' with its component constructs. Numbers indicate numbers of links.
 NB: Some nodes have been deleted to preserve anonymity

Appendix 1: Example of Build-up of Codes



Second Level Codes

Showing component constructs of one supporting code for 'Academia: a Special World'. The same structure exists for each of the others. Again, some codes are deleted to preserve anonymity.

Codes of the form 'CC.....' or 'C.....' represent constructs of an individual. The form 'CE.....' represents a single pole of a bipolar construct. Codes of the form 'AC....' record the identity of the speaker

Appendix 1: Example of Build-up of Codes

